
Juan Carlos Mazariegos

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2020
Abstract

A War of Proper Names: The Politics of Naming, Indigenous Insurrection, and Genocidal Violence During Guatemala’s Civil War

During the Guatemalan civil war (1962-1996), different forms of anonymity enabled members of the organizations of the social movement, revolutionary militants, and guerrilla combatants to address the popular classes and rural majorities, against the backdrop of generalized militarization and state repression. Pseudonyms and anonymous collective action, likewise, acquired political centrality for revolutionary politics against a state that sustained and was symbolically co-constituted by forms of proper naming that signify class and racial position, patriarchy, and ethnic difference. Between 1979 and 1981, at the highest peak of mass mobilizations and insurgent military actions, the symbolic constitution of the Guatemalan state was radically challenged and contested. From the perspective of the state’s elites and military high command, that situation was perceived as one of crisis; and between 1981 and 1983, it led to a relatively brief period of massacres against indigenous communities of the central and western highlands, where the guerrillas had been operating since 1973. Despite its long duration, by 1983 the fate of the civil war was sealed with massive violence.

Although others have recognized, albeit marginally, the relevance of the politics of naming during Guatemala’s civil war, few have paid attention to the relationship between the state’s symbolic structure of signification and desire, its historical formation, and the dynamics of anonymous collective action and revolutionary pseudonymity during the war. Even less attention has received the affective and psychic dynamics between proper naming, state violence,
and the symbolic formation of the Guatemalan state. This dissertation addresses that relationship and dynamic. Following a historical-anthropological perspective, I argue that, from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s decade, prior to the beginning of the civil war, the Guatemalan state took the form of a finca-state. The Guatemalan finca-state functioned by inscribing, in the form of proper names, lineages and inheritance of colonial and post-colonial origin that came to signify wealth, whiteness, renown, and surplus of pleasure or jouissance, in the form of White-European patronymics, by virtue of which, indigenous proper names were forced to occupy the position of loss. This form of inscription, I argue, produced the foreclosure of the indigenous other. For the indigenous pueblos, nonetheless, state enforced inscription established forms of interpellation that de-subjectivize the conditions of their own institutions of proper naming by turning them into mere objects of identification. The politics of pseudonymity and anonymity that proliferated between 1979 and 1981, especially among indigenous people of the Guatemalan highlands, was a refusal of a form of state that excluded the possibility of their recognition beyond identification. In a deep sense, anonymity and pseudonymity enabled revolutionary militants to become truly others, a condition that disorganized previous forms of state identification. In their inability to respond to a sense of crisis under conditions of anonymous collective action and revolutionary pseudonymity, the Guatemalan army responded with massive violence as an attempt at eliminating their sense of threat.

I pay particular attention to the Ixil region, where the UN sponsored Guatemalan truth commission concluded that the Guatemalan army perpetrated acts of genocide against indigenous communities of Ixil descent. This dissertation is based on extensive archival research conducted between the months of October 2014 and May 2015, extensive collective and
individual interviews carried out between 2004 and 2007, and ethnographic observation in the Ixil region between May and October of 2015. Its methodology follows the routes of collaborative research, archival reading, and ethnographic participant observation.
# Table of Contents

List of Illustrations.............................................................................................................v

Acknowledgments..................................................................................................................vi

Dedication.............................................................................................................................. x

Introduction............................................................................................................................1

*Contextualizing Antecedents and First Problematizations: From Indigenous Peasant Unrest to a Historical trial* .......................................................... 3

Towards the Elaboration of an Argument and its Hypothesis................................. 12

*Theoretical Considerations: Survival, Proper Naming, Rhetorical Figures, Foreclosure* ..... 16

*Theoretical Antecedents: Anthropologies of War, Violence, and Revolution in Guatemala* .............................................................................................................. 30

Methodology: Between Archives, Collaborative Research, and Participant Observation..... 38

Overview of Contents............................................................................................................45

Chapter 1: Ancestral Lands, Originary Accumulation, and the Excess of the Archive: 

Politics and Predicaments of Dispossession and Debt..................................................51

*Introduction* ....................................................................................................................... 51

*When the Finqueros Arrived in the Ixil Region* ............................................................... 55

*Ancestrality and the Power of the Archive: “These Lands are Ours Since Times Immemorial”* ........................................................................................................ 58
Chapter 2: On Ixil Proper Naming. Ancestrality, Patronymics, Traces

Introduction

The Politics of a Signature or What Makes an Ixil Laugh

The Economy of a Proper Name: Ch’xel, Ancestrality, and the Trace of a Trace

Indigenous Patronymics and the Names-of-the-Father

Of (Not) Knowing One’s Sins: the Unknown, the Inscrutable, and the Real of the Name

Conclusions

Chapter 3: On the Subject of Finca Labor and the Madness of the Finca Economy

Introduction

Double Displacements, Labor Subjection, and Super-Exploitation

The Violence of the Letter: of Workbooks, Certificates, Payrolls, and Finca Receipts

Name, Number, Disavowal: Contar or the Jornalero’s Pharmakon
Racializing Currencies: White Patronymics, Finca Numismatics and its Libidinal Economy................................................................. 162

Conclusions.....................................................................................177

Chapter 4: The Politics of Anonymity and the Insurrection Against the Master Signifier……..180

Introduction....................................................................................180

Tactile Readings: When the Many See Themselves Returning the Gaze......................... 183

A Little History of Indigenous Pseudonyms or How Not to Respond to the Law’s Interpellation............................................................. 195

Of Being Possessed by Other Names......................................................................197

The Aporias of Anonymity and the Apparition of the Specter................................. 208

Conclusions.....................................................................................215

Chapter 5: In the Name of the Poor. Of Dreams, Miracles, and Revolutionary Futures.......217

Introduction....................................................................................217

From Mis-Recognition to Incorporation.....................................................................221

Catholic Action Comes to the Ixil Region.............................................................228

From the Ixil Region to the Ixcán, Back and Forth.................................................231

Dreams that Allow to Speak of Miracles..................................................................233

The Future, the Prescriptive, and the Caesura of a Revolution................................. 237

The Past and Futures of Poverty: Reading as an(other) Mediation, Interpellation, and
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the Promise of the Poor</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the Name of “the Poor:” Naming the Event and a Disruptive Real</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antinomies of Not-Knowing: Ur-Faith, Iterability, and “the People of God”</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter 6. On Violence: Selective Violence, Massacres, Sacrificial Logics ........................................... 257

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Militarization, Crisis, Ghostly Apparitions: Revolutionary Aspirations and Counterinsurgent Responses (1979-1981)</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dialectics of Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence in a Finca-State: the Ixil Region Before 1982</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undoing the Symbolic Structures of Local Power: Insurgent Dramaturgy or the EGP Arrives in Nebaj</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General Conclusions: The Secret of a Revolution-to-come ........................................... 303

Bibliography ..................................................................................................................... 312
List of Illustrations

Map 1. Guatemala showing the most important municipalities………………………………… xi
Map 2. Guatemala showing the three Ixil municipalities……………………………………54
Map 3. EGP’s areas of operation by 1982.................................................................182
Figure 1. Diagram of Ch’exel system in Chajul..........................................................117
Figure 2. Finca workbook.........................................................................................141
Figure 3. Mozo Certification......................................................................................147
Figure 4. Jornalero Payroll, Finca “El Quetzal”.........................................................152
Figure 5. Coin used in Richard Sapper’s fincas ......................................................166
Figure 6. Coins used in E.P. Dieseldorff’s fincas......................................................172
Figure 7. Occupation of sugar mill Santa Ana, February 1980.................................189
Figure 8. Irregular Local Forces (FIL) Huehuetenango 1981.................................213
Acknowledgements

This work has been long in the making, and during its multiple stages, I benefited from the generosity of multiple persons and institutions. In Guatemala City, my friends and colleagues of the Association for the Social Sciences Advance in Guatemala (AVANCSO), provided a unique and invaluable intellectual community. My gratitude is to Clara Arenas Bianchi, Gustavo Palma Murga, Juan Vandeveire, Eugenio Incer, Karen Ponciano, Ligia Peláez, Alejandro Flores, and the late Rodolfo Kepfer, for a decade full of thinking about relevant political and theoretical questions. Those long conversations have shaped my intellectual interests. I want to specially express my gratitude to Clara Arenas for being a friend, colleague, and mentor throughout these formative years and those that have followed. To my friend Alejandro Flores, for patiently reading multiple chapters of this dissertation, and for all our stimulating discussions since we were college students, too long ago. To Gustavo Palma, for helping me navigate the intricacies of the Guatemalan archives and for all his support, passion, and love for the history of Guatemala.

Although the list of names is too long to mention, I want to thank all the leaders of the Agrarian Platform for the years (2004-2007) they allowed me to follow, document, and witness their political hopes, struggles, victories, and defeats, specially to Alberto Hernández, his family, and his revolutionary compañeros and compañeras. To all those who found the time and patience to answer my questions about a moment in history that is not easy to remember, to Gustavo Meoño, Megan Thomas, Luis Gurriarán, Clara Arenas and, specially, to father Ricardo Falla from whom I’ve learned ethnographic lessons he wasn’t even trying to teach. Juan Vandeveire was a formidable and challenging interlocutor, and thanks to him I met others whose
recollections now inform my work. During my time in Antigua Guatemala, Mariel Aguilar kindly received me as a guest and an extra-member of her family. Without her hospitality, my stay in Antigua would have been less productive and, certainly, less gratifying. While in Antigua Guatemala, I spent long hours consulting CIRMA’s historical archive and photographic collection, where its archive team contributed enormously to the historical documentation that inform my dissertation. Thelma Porres and Reyna Perez helped me to find archival registers I didn’t know that I needed. My gratitude is also extensive to the staff of the General Archive of Central America (AGCA) and the Historical Archive of the National Police.

In the Ixil region, Alberto Hernandez and his family always offered me their support, wisdom, and knowledge about a time that tragically changed their lives for ever. I want to express my gratitude to all the professors, students, friends, authorities, and interlocutors I met at the Universidad Ixil, for sharing with me the gift of their words and that of their hospitality. Among many others, I want to thank Magdalena Terraza Brito, Maria Terraza Brito, Martina Terraza Brito, Feliciiana Herrera Ceto, Tixh Viy’om (Baltazar de la Cruz Rodriguez), Pedro Raymundo, Gaspar Cobo, Juan Luis de la Cruz Rodriguez, Roselia de León Calel, Juan Carlos Terraza; and to all their friends and families. To the ancestral authorities of the village of Ilom, among which I would like to mention Francisco Caba, Pedro del Barrio, Bernal Asicona, the late don Esteban, don Bartolo, Francisco Guzmán, and don Juan Laynez. In the Alcaldía Indígena of Nebaj, I want to express my gratitude to doña María Sajic, for her patience and her willingness to share with me her courageous and painful memories. And to the Alcaldía Indígena of Cotzal and its ancestral authorities, to Tixh Viy’om and his family, and specially to don Concepción Santay, for allowing me to learn from him the history of San Felipe and the importance of having a
proper name. I also want to thank don Pablo Ceto for all his support during my stay in Nebaj. My fieldwork in the Ixil region wouldn’t have been possible without the support, knowledge, and friendship of my colleague Giovanni Batz. His long relationship, ethnographic work, and political engagement with the Ixil ancestral authorities, their communities, and the Universidad Ixil opened up for me many doors I couldn’t have even knock on without his help. While conducting fieldwork in the region, Giovanni Batz and Alejandro Flores were also the best interlocutors one could have asked for.

Conducting graduate studies away from a sense familiarity is at once exhilarating and challenging. In the United States I’ve benefited from the hospitality and friendship of people who have shown me the value of solidarity and of human decency. I want to express my sincere gratitude to Carol Edelstein and Robin Barber, not only for being the best neighbors one could have asked for, but also for the gift of their friendship. The years my family and I spent in Northampton were happier because of their proximity and existence. In Columbia University, I was part of a cohort of colleagues and partners in crime without which the academic demands of graduate school would have been heavier. Samantha Fox, Peter Lagerqvist, Yuliya Grinberg, Deniz Duruiz, and my dear friend Julia Fierman, all of them have been the best companions in this journey and a constant reminder that some of the most important joys of life are beyond the classroom. The department of Anthropology proved to be the ideal place to develop my academic interests; and many of my professors and their teachings were, without a doubt, a source of intellectual growth. I want to thank Val Daniel, Mick Taussig, David Scott, Ellen Marakowitz, Beth Povinelli, and specially Marylin Ivy, from whom I learned how to navigate a reality and a world full of ghosts and specters. My special gratitude is to the members of my committee, to
Claudio Lomnitz for all his support, his sharp readings, and for not letting me forget my audience. I have a debt of gratitude with Ze de Abreu not only for her brilliant comments and dedicated readings, but also for accepting the invitation of being in my committee under circumstances that made me vacillate about the possibility of completing my dissertation. Above all, I want to thank Roz Morris for all the care, rigor, and dedication that she has shown through all these years as my advisor, teacher, and mentor. If there is intellectual value in this dissertation, it is thanks to her, and her insistence that critical thinking is, fundamentally, an act of caring for the words. I keep learning how to read and listen to the voice of others thanks to her teachings. I want to extend my gratitude to Rafael Sanchez and Diane Nelson, my external readers, for their patient engagement and their careful readings and comments. I was fortunate to have them in my dissertation defense.

Last but no least, I want to thank my family for all their material and affectionate support. To my mama Sheny, for all her love, sacrifice, and sleepless nights. To my sister Ana Lucía, my cousins Claudia and Giovanni, my nieces and nephews, and my aunts Flori and Mabi, for always being there and for keeping me hoping for a better future. To Quique Gómez and Eric Prokesh, for their permanent support and for turning my own foreignness and displacement into belonging and familiarity. And to my mother-in-law Patricia Gómez de Muñoz and sister-in-law Ana Lucía Muñoz Gómez, for helping out at a moment when it felt impossible to conclude the writing of my dissertation. And specially to my son Mattias for being my inexhaustible source of joy and wonder, and to Sigridh, my brilliant and beautiful wife, who is the reason why I keep pushing my boundaries and I keep expanding my mind and heart. She made all this possible.
Dedication

In loving memory of my grandmother, Graciela Bonilla, for being there when I most needed it; and of my friend and mentor Rodolfo Kepfer, whose living memory always comes before the book.

To all the victims of the Guatemalan genocide. May this be a small tribute to those who lost their lives for believing in a better future and the promise of a justice-to-come.
Introduction

By the end of the 1970s, three different civil wars were taking place in Central America: in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala. In these three countries, similar political and historical processes occurred during the second half of the twentieth century, against the backdrop of class and racist social formations of colonial origin. Radical social movements were calling for the installation of revolutionary governments, and liberation theology and a radicalized Catholic Church had been instrumental in the organization of unprecedented mass mobilizations. At the same time, social reforms and participation in political parties had been severely restricted, and the army and local oligarchic families retained much of their power.\(^1\) With no exception, Cold War politics contributed to the radicalization of rightwing and leftist discourses throughout the region. But only in one of these countries, in Nicaragua, did the war lead to the triumph of revolutionary guerrillas: in July 1979, a multi-class political coalition and a situation of popular insurrection enabled the Sandinista Front for Nacional Liberation (FSLN) to overthrow Somoza’s regime. In spite of the Sandinista victory and its deep impact in the development of the civil wars of El Salvador and Guatemala, where a sense of possibility and triumphalism came to define the projection of a revolutionary future among organized segments of the population, an armed victory of the Central American revolutionaries did not repeat itself.

Even though the Salvadoran Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN)

---

came to be the largest guerrilla army in the continent at the time,\(^2\) to the extent that in 1981 they were able to sustain a national offensive for more than 10 days, the FMLN would never be able to defeat the US backed Salvadoran army. In Guatemala, where the guerrillas had not developed sufficient military strength to dispute territory held by the army, a large proportion of the indigenous population of the central and western highlands supported them. There, the fate of the civil war was sealed within a relatively short period of time, during which massive violence was perpetrated by the army against unarmed indigenous communities of the countryside, from late 1981 to the second half of 1983. The UN-sponsored Guatemalan truth commission estimated that of the 626 massacres documented throughout Guatemala’s long civil war (1962-1996), 601 occurred between the end of 1981 and the second half of 1983.\(^3\) During this period, more than 200,000 people were killed, 45,000 people were disappeared, and over a million were internally displaced or crossed the frontier with Mexico to become refugees. More than 85% of all killings in 36 years of the civil war occurred between 1981 and 1983.\(^4\) Based on the United Nations’ Convention for the Prevention and Sanction of Genocide and subsequent jurisprudence (especially the sentence of the International Tribunal of the Ex-Yugoslavia) the CEH concluded that the Guatemalan army had committed acts of genocide against four indigenous pueblos, the Ixiles of Chajul, Nebaj, and Cotzal; the K’iche’ of Zacualpa; the Achi of Rabinal, Baja Verapáz;


\(^3\) See CEH [Commission for Historical Clarification], *Guatemala memoria del silencio*, 12 vols., (Guatemala: UNOPS, 1999), 5:42-43.

\(^4\) According to the CEH 93% of the total killings were perpetrated by the army, 4% by unidentified organizations (provably paramilitary or private security forces), and 3% by the Guerrillas. CEH, *Guatemala memoria del silencio*, 5:25
and the Q’anjob’al and Chuj of northern Huehuetenengo.5

In Latin America, no other civil war of the second half of the twentieth century would have such a violent outcome or take the form of genocide. But why? If similar social formations and political and historical processes can be observed in Latin America for this period, why did the violent resolution of Guatemala’s civil war take this form of massive violence? Why, if the military force of the Guatemalan guerrillas did not constitute a real threat to the state by 1981, did the army respond in such an unparalleled manner, when compared to other civil wars in the continent? And why at this precise moment (1981-1983)? This dissertation provides answers to these questions in order to produce, if the metaphor is permitted, a variation of the same theme, that is, a different reading of a well-documented civil war. Before elaborating on my approach, let me reconstruct the context in which these questions emerged.

Contextual Antecedents and First Problematizations: From Indigenous Peasant Unrest to a Historical Trial

In April 28, 2004, thousands of indigenous families from the highlands marched in the streets of Guatemala City, demanding that the newly elected government address the rural crisis that had deepened after the fall of international coffee prices in 2001.6 Less than three months had passed since Oscar Berger Perdomo—a member of a family of coffee producers of Belgian descent and married to Wendy Widmann, also a member of a very powerful family of sugar and

5 CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 3: 314-423.

6 According to the Agrarian Platform, between 2002 and 2004 more than 65,000 permanent workers were fired and more than 100,000 temporal workers were not hired. These workers did not received any form of compensation and their labor rights were denied. See: Plataforma Agraria, Ante la crisis económica, la pobreza y mayor hambre en el campo Reforma Cafetalera, (Guatemala: Plataforma Agraria, 2003), manuscript, 4.
coffee producers of German descent—was sworn in as president of Guatemala. That April 28, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) held a general meeting in the city, which the Agrarian Platform (PA)—the rally’s organizers—attended to deliver a political message and to put pressure on Berger’s government. In fact, their demands had been elaborated with the language of “food insecurity” (FAO’s terminology) and were based on a “Plan of Social Attention” approved by the previous government, in 2002. As a social researcher working for the Association for the Advancement of Social Sciences in Guatemala (AVANCSO), a member of the Agrarian Platform, I documented the rally. It was the biggest demonstration I had seen or knew of since the signing of the peace agreements that put an end to the civil war in 1996.

Despite the clear links between the government and some of the most powerful families of Guatemala, it was presumed that Eduardo Stein, then vice-president and a man many people saw as a moderate politician, would handle the “social agenda” of Berger’s government, opening up the possibilities for a favorable negotiation for the indigenous peasants’ demands. The negotiations, however, did nothing to advance a plan of action; less than a year after the demonstration I documented, the “Plan for Social Attention” had been reneged upon. In a piece for the newspaper El Periódico entitled “Puppeteers,” Alvaro Aguilar, Berger’s Minister of

---

7 The Agrarian Platform was an organization that evolved from being a multi-class trans-cultural alliance designed to elaborate technical and political proposals around rural development, to a social movement with political demands and strategies of social mobilization to put pressure on the government around the approval of state policies in favor of the rural poor. By 2004 it included national and regional indigenous peasant organizations, human rights organization, an institute of social research, and a part of the Catholic church. These organizations were the National Indigenous and Peasant Coordinator (CONIC), the Movement of Christian Workers of San Marcos (MTC), the Madre Tierra Marquense Coordinator, the Association of United Sololatecos for Integral Development (ASUDI), the Association Kumool (ADIK), the Coordinator of Organizations for Development of Colomba (CODECO), the Communities of Population in Resistance of the Sierra (CPR de la sierra), the Center for Legal Action and Human Rights (CALDH) and the Association for the Advancement of Social Sciences in Guatemala (AVANCSO).

8 This plan was known as Governmental Agreement 475-2002 and was based on a document elaborated by the Agrarian Platform known as “Reforma Cafetalera” or “Coffee Reform.” The Coffee Reform was not, by any measure, a radical proposal demanding land redistribution or land expropriation. It was rather a short-term proposal to attend to “food insecurity” among poor peasant families affected by the fall of coffee prices.
Agriculture, wrote that “just a few months into Berger’s government, indigenous peasant organizations unleashed a strategy of harassment that included public demonstrations; they called us liars, and they demanded that I resign, just because we were not willing to give them 100 million Quetzales to be used [as if they were in electoral campaign].” While Aguilar and other conservative columnists portrayed Berger’s government as the victim of political harassment, accusing in passing the Agrarian Platform of manipulating poor indigenous families for spurious interests (hence the title of his column), dozens of violent evictions—some of which I also documented—were carried out against indigenous and peasant families that were occupying coffee fincas of Guatemala’s piedmont and the region of the Verapáces since 2002, after months of unsuccessfully fighting in the courts for the restitution of their labor rights. Even though these indigenous organizations framed their demands in a moderate political language and were based on a discourse of human rights, they were accused of being anti-nationalist groups with whom no dialogue was possible. The response of Berger’s government was exemplary: in less than 2 years, the cycle of protests opened by the “coffee crisis” was violently closed: indigenous and peasant leaders were arrested, and evictions were violently carried out, during which the police burned down crops and provisional houses, beat up demonstrators, and killed over a dozen people between 2004 and 2005.

I was well acquainted with the notion of the “oligarchic state” and, after witnessing these events, it certainly resonated with me. However, I decided to explore in more detail what

---


10 According to the newspaper el Periódico, just during the evictions carried out in finca “Nueva Linda” and finca “La Cuchilla,” in the department of Retalhuleu, in late August 2004, 25 peasants were arrested and 6 killed. See: el Periódico, September 1, 2004.

11 Edelberto Torres-Rivas, Interpretación del desarrollo Centroamericano, (San José: FLACSO, 1971).
some of those families I saw marching in the city thought about the response—or the lack thereof—of the Guatemalan state. From 2005 to 2007 I attended the Agrarian Platform’s meetings and spent relatively long periods of time with its regional indigenous leaders and their communities. It was during these years that I met some of my most enduring interlocutors, those whose stories inform my dissertation. Indeed, Alberto, a K’akchiquel organizer from the central highlands who joined the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) in 1981, at the age of 17, was one of the leading regional figures behind the event I documented in April 2004. I regularly visited him in Nebaj, Quiche—where his family resided—from 2005 to 2008, and through the months I conducted fieldwork for my dissertation in 2015.

When I met Alberto, I thought he was an indigenous organizer of Ixil descent. Only later, after many conversations, would I come to know that he was originally recruited in Chimaltenango, and was part of a front that operated in the central highlands called Frente Augusto Cesar Sandino or FACS. This front was forced to retreat to the western highlands, in the Ixil region, after the army’s scorched earth campaign began in the villages of Chimaltenango, Totonicapán, and southern Quiché, in November 1981. Alberto remained in the Sierra as a combatant of the Ho Chi Minh front until 1994, two years before the ending of the civil war. That year he asked for his discharge to join his wife—an ex-combatant herself and survivor of one of the massacres perpetrated by the army—and their first son, in the Communities of Population in Resistance of the Sierra [CPR de la Sierra],¹² where he continued to collaborate with the guerrillas until the signing of the peace agreements. What was peculiar about Alberto’s

¹² The CPRs were communities of internally displaced population that were forced to leave their communities after the army’s scorched earth campaign and genocidal violence, from 1981 to 1983. These communities remained for more than a decade resisting and hiding from the army in the mountains of the Ixil region and the jungle of Ixcán.
stories—and those of other ex-combatants I met thanks to him—is that, when the Guerrilla Army of the Poor held its last meeting to formalize its own dissolution, in Tzalbal, Nebaj, in 1997, Alberto and others like him did not receive the ID that recognized them as desmovilizados [former guerrilla combatants] and members of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). That recognition was denied to them, despite all the years they remained in the fronts. More than 200 former guerrilla combatants in his situation decided to create an organization, in order to demand that the URNG recognize their status as ex-combatants. “We were fighters who suffered for many years, and they didn’t want to recognize that,” he told me, “not even a paper, something that I could show to my children and say, look, this paper says that I was a brave guerrilla combatant, a revolutionary.”

The fact that a group of indigenous people were fighting to be openly recognized as revolutionaries, however small that group may have been, struck me as unusual. In the early 2000s, the dominant discourses about Guatemala’s civil war portrayed indigenous communities either as victims of the army, or as people who only joined the guerrillas because of the army’s violence. Here, nonetheless, was Alberto and others like him, claiming for themselves an identity that many others rejected, hid, or were forced to disavow in order to be heard, precisely, as victims of the civil war. How often, I thought, does one fight to be recognized as a revolutionary after the dramatic defeat of the revolution one claimed allegiance to? And how often does one organize that kind of struggle against the very same people who consider the word “revolutionary” to be their political name? When I started to interview Alberto and his

13 The URNG was formed in 1982 as an attempt to unify the three different guerrilla armies that operated in Guatemala—the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), the Revolutionary Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA) and the Armed Rebel Forces (FAR)—and the Guatemalan Communist Party, the Guatemalan Labor’s Party (PGT). After the signing of the peace agreements, the URNG became a legalized political party.
companeros and companeras, in part driven by these questions, but also because of my interest
in their participation in the events I documented from 2004 to 2007, they invariably shared with
me their stories by saying “my name is such and such, and when I was a combatant I used the
names such and such.” After this gesture, not only did they recall how they joined the guerrillas
and their time in the fronts, but they also referred to memories of a childhood working alongside
their parents for coffee, sugar cane, and cotton fincas in the southern coast. They told me about
the poverty they experienced prior to taking up arms, and how “the rich people” had denied their
rights. They also told me the stories of how the Guatemalan army had massacred members of
their families and burned down their communities. I wanted to know more about the force of
political names like “revolutionary” and the effects and affects these names elicit under the
specific historical conditions of post-genocide Guatemala. But Alberto’s and his companeros/as’
gesture—the reiteration of their personal legal names together with their pseudonyms—was
something I only came to appreciate gradually, right before leaving Guatemala to conduct
graduate studies in New York in 2009, and through my years as a Masters and PhD student at
Columbia University. Why the reiteration of the name and the pseudonyms? What is the
significance and signification of these names and their political effects and affects? What is the
relationship between the violence of civil war and their names and pseudonyms? And what about
the names of Alberto and his companeros/as in relation to the names “Oscar Berger” and “Wendy
Widmann,” Guatemala’s president and first lady in 2004? Let me now relate these questions to
another story that occurred nine years after the political rally where I met Alberto.

Between March and May of 2013, retired General and former president of Guatemala,
Efraín Ríos Montt, and his chief of Military Intelligence, José Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez
faced a trial in Guatemala City, where they were charged with crimes against humanity and genocide against the Ixil population.\textsuperscript{14} During the trial, Hector Rosada Granados, an expert witness and author of many studies about the Guatemalan army, submitted a \textit{peritaje histórico} [historical study] to be used to determine their responsibility. In his statement, and after a long revision of the army’s history and its “Doctrine of National Security,” of how it was implemented, and how the army came to define the Ixil population as the state’s internal enemy, Rosada Granados elaborated a remarkably strange conclusion for a trial of this nature: “the ideological author of what happened was the \textit{gran capital} [big capital]; the owners of the land are [responsible for] the historical dispossession of the indigenous people. Those who inherited [the capital] from that historical dispossession, they came to see the Ixil population with suspicion and fear. They saw that they did not obey the army, that they didn’t want to go to work on their \textit{fincas} [plantations]. They saw that they were rebel people and, logically, they informed the military commissioners, they informed the S-2 [military intelligence officers] and all the way up to the \textit{Estado Mayor del Ejército} [Army’s General Command].”\textsuperscript{15}

After patiently describing how the army’s chain of command functioned and how it structured the counterinsurgent campaign that led to the massacres against the Ixil communities, Hector Rosada linked the owners of the land and capital (\textit{finca} or plantation owners) to that

\textsuperscript{14} The vast majority of the Ixil population lives in the towns of San Gaspar Chajul, Santa María Nebaj, and San Juan Cotzal, in the western highlands of the department of El Quiché. Although in these towns ladinos and K’iche’ groups settled by the end of the nineteenth century, the vast majority of their population are Ixil speakers who claim ancestral roots to this region. In 1999, the Guatemalan truth commission concluded that the Guatemalan army had perpetrated acts of genocide against the Ixil \textit{pueblo}, estimating that up to 90% of Ixil villages had been burned down during the army’s scorched earth campaign, forcing up to 50% of its population to become internally displaced. It was also estimated that 13% of all the people killed in massacres during the civil war were of Ixil descent. The truth commission documented other three cases of acts of genocide against the Achi \textit{pueblo} of Rabinal, Vaja Verapáz; the K’iche’ \textit{pueblo} of Zacualpa, El Quiché; and the Chuj and Q’anjob’al of Nentón, San Mateo Ixtatán, and Barillas, Huehuetenango. See CEH, \textit{Guatemala memoria del silencio}, 3: 249-423.

\textsuperscript{15} Sentence C-01076-2011-00015, Of.2º, 159.
chain, as informants for the army. However, the responsibility he speaks of is one that is not reducible to the army’s chain of command: technically and in the logic of the trial, that “responsibility” cannot be singled out to impute intent to any specific person: in fact, the ideological perpetrator is “big capital.” In other words, in speaking with the language of economy and dispossession, Rosada Granados was addressing something other than the law, albeit in legal terms, in order to explicate why the Ixiles were conceived of as being the state’s internal enemy. To be sure, Rosada Granados’ statement does not deny Ríos Montt and Rodríguez Sanchez’s responsibility; on the contrary, he puts them at the very top of the army’s chain of command. But he also points to a form of historical truth that makes references to structural violence, which exceeds the trial itself. Whether the nature of this instance beyond the law is fundamentally economic, as Rosada Granados suggests, is something I would dispute; however, his statement brings together the agrarian conflicts and struggles I documented from 2004 to 2007 and the trial itself. Indeed, many of the Ixiles who shared with me long hours of conversation before and during my fieldwork—including Alberto’s family and his compañeros—followed, supported, or gave their testimonies in the trial against Ríos Montt and Rodríguez Sánchez.

In May 10, 2013, Ríos Montt was found guilty of charges of genocide and crimes against humanity. In the court, the audience exploded in applause; some celebrated, others found some relief, or at least that is what I felt, from a distance, and hoped for all the Ixiles I had met before the trial. But two days after the sentence, the powerful Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial, and Financial Associations (CACIF)—big capital, as Rosada Granados put it—demanded the sentence be annulled, on the basis of what they believed was a lack of due
process, international pressure, the inapplicability of the figure of genocide to a war where “no group had been killed because of their ethnicity,” and more important, because “the tribunal’s sentence divides the country and leaves the clear perception that justice is trapped in an ideological conflict.”16 Eight days later, in a highly polemical and divided decision, Guatemala’s Constitutional Court returned the trial to a previous stage, alleging procedural faults.17

Ríos Montt died before facing another trial, in April 2018, and the sentence of May 10, 2013, remains as a symbolic recognition of the victims; but it was CACIF’s position that instantiated what I have referred to as the other of the law that was addressed in the trial. In their statement, the fact that a form of legal justice is on the side of the Ixiles is signified as that which elicits Guatemala’s division and, as such, is the cause of the country’s split. To put it differently, in claiming justice and the recognition of the law, the Ixiles appear as that which does not allow the emergence of the image and representation of the country as an undivided whole. That very same statement was issued in 2004 by members of Berger’s government when I was documenting a new cycle of indigenous and peasant protest, and continues to be reiterated to this day, especially in relation to conflicts between indigenous communities and transnational mining and energy companies. Not incidentally, my interlocutors have been involved in struggles against these transnational companies and their national allies—“the owners of the land and capital”—based on their rights of prior consultation and ancestral lands. This, I believe, is what brings together the events I documented between 2005 and 2007 and the trial where Ríos Montt was found guilty of Genocide.

16 "CACIF pide anular fallo por genocidio contra Ríos Montt," Prensa Libre, May 12, 2013, (My italics).

17 For a full chronology of the this trial, see Sonja Perkic, “Un largo camino para desterrar la impunidad. Cronología del juicio por genocidio y crímenes de guerra en contra de José Efraín Ríos Montt y José Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez,” Revista de estudios sobre genocidio, no.10, (November 2015): 94-112.
Towards the Elaboration of an Argument and its Hypothesis

Like in other legal proceedings where massive violence in the form of genocide is addressed, during Ríos Montt’s trial Guatemalan law was challenged to deal with the causes and consequences of a historical and collective trauma. It was expected that the trial itself delivered justice and resolution, and thus, a symbolic exit from the violence that inflicted the injuries of the historical trauma. This form of closure, however, entails the re-inscription of the causes and consequences of the traumatic violence—in the form of testimonies, evidence, or peritajes such as Hector Rosada’s for instance—within the trial itself. The law re-inscribes that which it is deemed to resolve. Shoshana Felman has convincingly argued that, in historical and political trials, a form of otherness of the law is addressed in the forms of repetition compulsion and trauma, constituting thus a blind spot which the law tries to assimilate to its own legal procedures. In this regard, the violence that lies at the scene of trauma is both lawmaking, insofar as it institutes new prescriptive standards (as was the case of the tribunal’s sentence where Ríos Montt is declared guilty) but it is also law-preserving, in as much as it legitimizes pre-existing prescriptive standards (as was the case of CC’s resolution). Indeed, for Felman, the traumatic blind spot that the law re-inscribes in its own legal procedures and, by the same token, denies as the law’s other, constitutes a juridical unconscious. I’m persuaded by Felman’s elegant argument, although I’m not particularly interested in historic trials or what is generically

---


called transitional justice. What I am interested in, however, is in the reiteration of a discourse that refers to the impossibility of the nation’s self-representation, which simultaneously forces indigenous people—Ixil people in particular—to bear the mark of that impossibility. As I understand it, this is what the law of the Guatemalan state addresses as its own excess and re-inscribes as its unconscious other. The reiteration of the discourse I’m interested in is thus indicative of the foreclosure of an indigenous other, putatively included by virtue of its constitutive exclusion or repudiation.\(^{21}\) In a fundamental way, the very possibility that the cultural forms of the indigenous \textit{pueblos} become generalizable referents, and thus elements that provide recognition and identification for all the members of the Guatemalan polity, is denied. In doing so, indigenous \textit{pueblos} are putatively included as mere supplements of the nation state (say, as objects of folkloric authenticity, cheap \textit{finca} labor, docile domestic servitude, or “heroic” immigrants, i.e., as senders of remittances via Guatemala’s financial institutions). By virtue of this putative inclusion, the fantasy of an undivided nation becomes the instance of representation and identification for the Guatemalan state. Whenever indigenous communities articulate political demands that challenge their positions as mere supplements, they are forced to appear as the state's indigenous other that bears the mark of the nation’s impossibility. One cannot understand this discourse without making reference to the state-enforced processes of historical indigenous dispossession that have accompanied capitalist accumulation in Guatemala, as Hector

\(^{21}\) I use the term foreclosure in its Lacanian sense, as that which resist Symbolization. Lacan develops the notion of foreclosure in order to identify the unconscious mechanism that differentiates neurosis (repression) and psychosis (foreclosure), the former being the repudiation of the symbolic, i.e., of castration as an effect of oedipalization and thus, the split of the subject. If one follows Lacan’s understanding of the unconscious as structured like a language, we may say that a signifier is repressed by virtue of first being recognized at the level of the symbolic, whereas a signifier that is foreclosed is not symbolically recognized. It consists in not symbolizing what ought to be symbolized. Strictly speaking, in psychosis, it is the name-of-the-father, as the fundamental signifier that quilts the signifier with the signified, that is foreclosed. See: Jacques Lacan, “On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis,” in \textit{Écrits}, trans., Bruce Fink, (New York: Norton, 2006[2002]), 445-488. See also J. Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, \textit{The Language of Psychoanalysis}, trans., Donald Nicholson-Smith, (New York: Norton, 1973), 166-168.
Rosada Granados argues, but the logic of the disavowal I have referred to above is irreducible to its economic dimension.

In an attempt to understand the violence of repudiation—putting under erasure a discourse expressed in the form of economism—I will argue in this dissertation that, from the late nineteenth century until the early 1960s, the Guatemalan state developed a specific symbolic structure of signification and desire by virtue of which the figure of “indios” that characterizes what I have referred to as an indigenous other is forced to occupy a position of non-generalizability within the Guatemalan state, in order to sustain the state’s symbolic constitution, i.e., it is foreclosed. In other words, the very symbolic formation of the state relies on the repudiation of the indigenous other. As I will argue in chapters 1 and 3, through a multiplicity of instruments of inscription, identification, and control, designed to dispossess indigenous communities and to force them to work for coffee, sugar cane, and cotton fincas, the Guatemalan state enforced this form of symbolic repudiation. In this historical process, the Guatemala’s nation-state took the form of a finca-state which, racialized and libidinized the nation’s social field and its subjects. This is the state that the Guatemalan guerrillas confronted and in the name of which the army perpetrated massacres against the Ixil communities, between 1981 and 1983.

In my dissertation I develop this argument by focusing on—and making it its guiding thread—the gesture with which my interlocutors opened and shared their own stories, that is, with reference to their proper names and pseudonyms. I pay attention, primarily, to my Ixil interlocutors, as the Ixil region is the place where I conducted most of my interviews, and my archival and ethnographic research. In this regard my main questions have been: what does it mean to the re-create the history of Guatemala’s past through my interlocutors’ references to
their proper names and pseudonyms, in order to explicate how they came to call themselves revolutionaries? What does it mean to reconstruct the conditions that made possible the symbolic formation of the Guatemalan finca-state and the foreclosure of the indigenous other, through their proper names and pseudonyms? And what does it mean to explicate the army’s scorched earth campaign and its massacres through a history of proper naming and pseudonymity that involves my interlocutors’ stories in relation to the Guatemalan state?

I will argue that the Guatemalan finca-state functioned, primarily, by inscribing, in the form of proper names, lineages and inheritance of colonial and post-colonial origin that came to signify wealth, whiteness, and surplus of enjoyment or jouissance in the form of White-European patronymics, by virtue of which, indigenous proper names were forced to occupy the position of loss and castration. Finca inscription and naming established a form of address and interpellation that de-subjectivized the conditions of indigenous and Ixil proper naming, turning them into mere objects of identification. The politics of anonymity and pseudonymity that proliferated in Guatemala during the revolutionary struggle in the late 1970s and early 1980s, especially among indigenous people, was in itself a refusal to a system within which indigeneity was excluded from the possibility of recognition and address beyond mere identification. This exteriorization of the indigenous other seemed to realize the foreclosure of the system; and with no capacity to respond to the experience of its own exteriority becoming truly other, as in pseudonymity and anonymity, the state responded with murderous efforts at eliminating the source of their sense of being threatened.

In answering the aforementioned questions I have tried to corroborate the following hypothesis: when the symbolic structures of signification and desire of the Guatemalan finca-
state were experienced as in a crisis during the civil war, at a time when the army and
Guatemala’s economic elites felt threatened by the impossibility of sustaining the state’s
symbolic constitution, that sense of crisis led to a regressive and symptomatic reading whereby
those Ixil and indigenous communities suspected of supporting the guerrillas, were absolutized
and targeted by the army as enemies of the state. From the perspective of the army’s general
command, the support of the indigenous communities for the guerrillas functioned as “proof”
that the indigenous other is the point of excess and dissolution of the nation-state. The presence
of the guerrillas, especially in the regions where the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) operated
and was massively supported by indigenous communities, functioned as a sign of
“corroboration”—rather than the cause—of a historic fear to lose the capacity to keep the
indigenous other in its putative place and, thus, to lose the means for the nation’s self-
representation. Then the violence of the army took the form of genocidal violence.

Theoretical Considerations: Survival, Proper Naming, Rhetorical Figures, Foreclosure

Like in many other political struggles organized under conditions of clandestinity—in
Latin America and elsewhere—revolutionary politics in Guatemala (late 1970s to early 1980s)
entailed forms of militancy and mass mobilization that relied on practices of anonymity and
pseudonymity. For revolutionary militants and guerrilla combatants, keeping their names and
legal identities in secret was a matter of life and death. Yet, anonymity was also a condition that

---

22 This may be called a symptomatic reading insofar as what I am calling a sign of corroboration indicates an
incompatibility between knowledge and truth, in the sense that, in spite of “knowing” that these indigenous
communities were unarmed, the army acted as if they were, indeed, the armed enemy. In other words, they received
from the other their own message.
allowed them to speak of a revolutionary future at the margins of and against the repressive constraints of the Guatemalan state. It was, as it were, a political act aimed at keeping the name safe; but also, it aimed to deliver a political message by virtue of which militants presumably said everything they needed to say...except the name. This form of address by virtue of which one is deemed to be heard speaking not in one’s name, but in the name of an other, is crucial to the argument I will develop in my dissertation. But what are the implications of revolutionary anonymity if, as Judith Butler argues, our psychic and bodily survival depends on being called with a name, in a performative act by virtue of which we are recognized by the symbolic Other?23 How to theoretically understand the relationship between survival and the name in the context of Guatemala’s civil war and in reference to my interlocutors’ stories?

I use the word sur-vival in its (Spanish and English) etymological double sense, i.e., as that which persists, remains, and lives on; but also, as that which is super-imposed, supplements, and is added to as an extra or surplus...of life. Not simply added to living and dying, as Jacques Derrida has suggested, but rather, as a trace that one leaves and that signifies "my death, either to come or already come upon me, and the hope that this trace survives me."24 Following Derrida, I begin by arguing that among my indigenous and Ixil interlocutors, proper naming is, primarily, a form of survival, in the sense that proper names are passed on or given to others as traces that

---


carry within themselves the traces of others. The proper name retains the absence of the bearer of the name when a spatio-temporal and bodily displacement occurs as it is passed on to another. This capacity to iterate a proper name in the absence of its bearer is what Derrida calls citationality, and it constitutes the basis for a Derridean critique of a performative theory of naming (naming as a speech act), as it is proposed by J.L. Austin.

As is well known, J.L. Austin calls "performatives" those utterances that do something other than describing any referential/objective reality; rather, they bring into being or effectuate what they name. This occurs through accepted conventions, repetitive procedures, and symbolic authorizations (in what he calls a "total speech situation") which constitute the condition of possibility of the performative. In other words, to be effective as a performative, naming should occur within symbolic institutions and their rituals. Implicit in Austin's perspective is the fact that the performative is a re-iteration of such institutionalized rituality; however, for him, reiteration functions as a means for the repetition of the conditions that make the performative possible, whereas for Derrida, iterability or citationality also carries within itself the conditions of the performative’s undoing. In other words, for Jacques Derrida, every speech act re-iterates its symbolic and institutional conditions of enunciation but, in doing so, a moment of de-contextualization occurs by virtue of which the possibility of unanticipated forms of re-

25 Coming from Derrida's critique to Saussurean semiology, the notion of "trace' refers to the movement by virtue of which the absence of a linguistic sign is retained into another sign at the moment of the latter's displacement. In language (understood as a system of differences), this active displacement simultaneously produces intervals that both relate and separate out its elements: Derrida calls this spacing, the structural principle of production of language's play of differences. Each trace is, thus, the trace of another trace. See Jacques Derrida: Of Grammatology, trans., Gayatri Chakrvorty Spivak, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 61-62; and Positions, trans., Alan Bass, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 26-29.

26 He recognizes three speech acts: Locutionary (the performance of an utterance), Illocutionary (ritualized and ceremonial speech acts that perform an action right at the moment of its utterance, as in his famous example “I now pronounce you husband and wife”), and Perlocutionary (speech acts that produce an effect after being uttered, such as persuading someone to do something). See: J. L. Austin, How to do Things with Words, eds., J. O. Urmson and Marina Sbisà, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).
appropriation or citation are possible, leaving thus the meaning of the speech act open. Insofar as Austin calls these unanticipated citations infelicitous or parasitic, Derrida’s critique introduces the logic of contamination at the basis of what Austin calls a “total speech situation.” However, Derrida’s critique may also be related to what he refers to as the “hope of the survival of the trace,” as mentioned before. Hope is thus related to the iteration/citation of the name as it is open to the indeterminacy of its meaning and to its capacity to retain the absence of the bearer of the name. What survives is the name.

Judith Butler’s own theory of performativity is greatly indebted to Derrida’s critique. As she has pointed out, Austin’s “total speech situation” is always exceeded by its own condensed historicity and as such, it is never fully capturable or identifiable, and thus remains open to resignification. She is perhaps the author who has critically engaged with more consistency—albeit in a different context than my own research—the relationship between naming as a performative act, and linguistic/bodily survival. Indeed, in her discussion on hate speech and injurious language, as presented in her book *Excitable Speech*, Butler argues that, as an insult, name-calling is an injurious and violent performative act that re-iterates the conditions of its production (as Austin implicitly acknowledges), but it also contains the possibility of an unexpected and enabling response, one that may inaugurate the existence of a subject who uses language in speech to counter the offensive call.27 For Butler, in the re-iteration of the injurious performative, the possibility of an unexpected response emerges (indeed a subject is inaugurated) by virtue of which the force of the performative is opened up to the unknown and to its potential

---

But if language injures, and if its bodily and linguistically inflicted wound enables a response, it is because the addressed subject was and is recognizable by a symbolic Other (with a capital o as Butlers calls it, following Jacques Lacan). According to Judith Butler, one comes to exist by virtue of a fundamental dependency on the Other's address, but one also survives its often violent conditions of recognition in the unexpected possibilities opened up by one's response. Thus, "language sustains the body" insofar as it is through its terms that the subject is interpellated and, as a consequence, a certain form of bodily existence becomes possible. However, this bodily existence is not reducible to what a "speaking body" says: its forms of signification do not always conform to the Other's recognition; the body is never fully grasped by the Symbolic. For Judith Butler, this is the condition of our vulnerability and of our survival as bodily speaking subjects.

Even though Butler's primary aim in *Excitable Speech* is to develop a theory of the performative that gives an account of the violence exerted in and through speech—and the ways in which its performative force is exposed to failure—she also relies on the performative conditions of naming to formulate an articulation between subjective survival and name-calling, which is what I'm interested in. Following Butler, I argue that in the Ixil society (and other

---

28 This is based on Derrida's critique of Austin, where he demonstrates that iterability is both the condition of possibility of the performative and of its undoing. See Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans., Alan Bass, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 307-330.

29 The notion of "interpellation" comes from Louis Althusser, and it refers to the force of hailing and address by virtue of which individuals become socially constituted subjects. This form of address—exemplified by Althusser with a situation where a Police man says "Hey, you there" eliciting thus the turning around of an individual in response to his call—entails the Imaginary (ideological) recognition of the interpellated subjected, but also the binding force of the Symbolic or the Law upon the subject. See, in this regard, Louis Althusser, *On the Reproduction of Capitalism. Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, trans., G.M. Goshgarian, (London-New York: Verso, 2014), 171-207, 232-272.
indigenous *pueblos* that rely on similar institutions of naming, as we’ll see later), *Ixiles* become recognizable subjects, primarily, by virtue of being called with a name, a condition that is indispensable to sustain a relationship between the ancestors (who are mainly responsible for the fortune/misfortune of the living) and their living kin, and whose effects and mis-recognitions are almost always experienced in the form of bodily well-being, bodily suffering, and sickness. In its extreme, failure to respond to the ancestors’ interpellation may lead to death. Because of a form of bodily and psychic existence that is enabled by Ixil proper naming, the signification of the ancestors’ forms of address (via dreams and the symptoms of the "speaking body") is not fully known. This interpellation demands a reading.

As we will see in chapter 2, among Ixiles, names are given, first, in the form of namesakes or Ch’exel. Usually, these names are inherited from grandparents, great-uncles or great-aunts to grandchildren. It is said that having a namesake is equivalent to having a substitute who, after the passing of the older Ch’exel, will keep his/her memory alive. Namesakes, however, are primarily given according to Ixil forms of patrilocal descent and residence. Even though the names of the mother’s patrilineal descent are allowed to be inherited, priority is given to the names of the father’s patrilocal/patrilineal descent. Thus, children are primarily named after patrilineal/patrilocal grandparents and great-uncles/aunts. They are the ones who, after passing, become the ancestors of the living. It is expected that those who received the name of an ancestor will keep their (the deceased’s) memory alive in the form of prayers and offerings. Inheriting the name is thus a way to guarantee a life after death, i.e., an afterlife. Indeed, not being able to inherit one’s name in the form of Ch’exel is seen as a grave misfortune.

Parallel to namesakes, the other institution of naming that is fundamental for the *Ixiles* is
the patronymic. Patronymics were imposed onto the Ixil society during colonial times, and their generic formula is similar to Spanish patronymics, i.e., personal name + father’s first family name + mother’s first family name. Generally it is the father’s first family name that is perpetuated, and the mother’s first family name is dropped after the second generation. In the Ixil society, nonetheless, the personal name is almost always given in the form of the Ch’exel or namesake, and it is an expression of ancestrality and patrilocality, something that differs from Spanish patronymics in Guatemala.

Following Lacan, I argue that, as patronymics, proper names are expressions of a symbolic pact that enables the perpetuation or the temporal durability of the-name-of-the-father and the recognizability of the bearer of the name. However, this durability, as Judith Butler has also argued, is guaranteed insofar as proper names constitute zones of “phallic control” and “heteronormativity,” i.e., they are based on “the Law of the Father” and a form of patrilineal organization where the name’s variability and exchangeability is imputed to the position of women. In other words, the variability of women’s names supplements the patronymic’s durability, and thus, their names become a condition of possibility for the perpetuation of the name-of-the-father. On the other hand, in cases where receiving a name presupposes that the one who receives it resembles the person who passed it on, as in the case of Ixil namesakes or Ch’exel, the proper name also enables an imaginary identification based on the similarity of attitudes, bodily resemblances, affects, and moods between namesakes. The name thus

produces a form of substitution according to which the person who received it mirrors/reflects the one who named him/her, that is, in the name of other. As Lacan argues, an imaginary tie is fundamentally dyadic, whereas a symbolic tie is a form of mediation that includes a third instance or the Law. This is what both Butler and Lacan refer to as the Other, as mentioned before, as the one that interpellates us and recognizes us as subjects. Thus, if the proper name’s imaginary tie enables substitution, that is, the production of similitudes (and differences), the symbolic tie produces forms of discennment and stipulation about the social position assigned to the bearers of the name. In short, an imaginary tie produces likeness (and differentiation), and a symbolic tie produces distribution and prescription.

There is yet another instance that indicates the untying of the symbolic and the imaginary. Lacan calls this the Real or that which resists symbolization. The Real expresses the pure excess of language (the fact that signification exceeds the reality which it refers to, or that meaning is merely an effect of signification); and that which is not fully known or unconscious (a knowledge that does not fully know of itself). Lacan has also said in regard to the name-of-the-father as it expresses a relation between the signifier of the father and death, that the real is also indicative of the dissociative forces of death. As I understand it, ancestral practices of naming among the Ixiles are also expressions of this. In the case of Ixil proper naming, the real is designated as the absence of an after-life. To put it differently, the real is the absence of absence. In the plural, thus, the names-of-the-father are also the names Symbolic, Real, Imaginary; and they constitute what Lacan calls the function of the “paternal metaphor:” the capacity of the

---


names-of-the-father to subjectivize and produce effects of signification and substitution over a reality that is exceeded by language.\textsuperscript{35}

As Jean-Claude Milner has argued, a name is a knot of imaginary, symbolic, and real elements. The figural elements or properties of a name are, in fact, resemblances (likeness) that enable their grouping with others of the same kind, creating thus ties or bonds among the properties of said group or set. By the same token, resemblances operate by virtue of being different from other properties (differences). Likeness and difference are imaginary forms that a name carries with itself. It is thanks to the imaginary quality of names that proprieties can produce sets, classes, and relations. But, as Milner reminds us, these imaginary properties cannot determine the cause of their own grouping, or the demand of being part of one set and not another. Only elements of symbolic generality (elements of discernment) can produce such effect. In other words, if there is a demand for certain names to form a part of a group or class and not another, this is so because names also contain within themselves symbolic elements of discernment. Following Lacan's theory, Milner assumes that this occurs retroactively (in the contingencies of naming). Finally, one deduces from this elaboration that, despite having discernible and figural elements, names cannot fully name the subjects they stand for. This sort of impossibility indicates the incapacity of a name to fully discern and represent the properties of its bearer. In other words, if, as Milner suggests, the name is a knot of figural and discernible elements, the real of a name appears as that which threatens to dissolve the knot. In every event in which one utters a name, or calls a subject with his or her name, the real of the name threatens

\textsuperscript{35} Lacan, “Introduction to the Names-of-the-Father,” 81-95.
to un-tie (undo) the knot.\textsuperscript{36}

In this regard, I will argue that Ixil proper names are ancestral performatives that produce and reproduce symbolic and imaginary ties that are meant to guarantee the presence of the ancestors in their absence. Ixil proper names’ hope, in the logic of Derrida’s formulation of the trace and citationality, is a future oriented performative that retroactively retains the absence of the bearer of the name, but whose loss—the loss of absence—is already inscribed as a possibility (as a radical form of forgetting). This fluid relationship between the dead and the living, in the form of Ixil patronymics and namesakes, is what guarantees what Lisa Stevenson has called a-life-of-the-name,\textsuperscript{37} and that I would (mis)appropriate as a-life-and-afterlife-of-the-name.

Historically, the Guatemalan state has used indigenous patronymics, primarily, as means of identification, control, and subjection. In the context of my research, this is particularly relevant in order to understand how multiple forms of inscription—workbooks, certifications, receipts, payrolls, account books, documents of identification, and land titles—were used to subject indigenous communities to the law of what I call the \textit{finca}-state. The Other’s violent interpellation and address, as Butler suggests, was enacted through these documents of control. These were also instances in which the fantasy of a perlocutionary sovereign power, whereby the state’s performative force is deemed to be capable of producing itself the deed that it effects, is reproduced.\textsuperscript{38} As I have mentioned above, the Guatemalan \textit{finca}-state enforced indigenous dispossession and enabled colonial/post-colonial capital accumulation primarily, although not


\textsuperscript{37} Lisa Stevenson, \textit{Life Beside Itself. Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic}, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 103-126

\textsuperscript{38} Butler, \textit{Excitable Speech}, 3.
exclusively, through these means of control and identification, and in doing so, these forms of inscription functioned as ways to appropriate and expropriate Ixil and indigenous proper names and patronymics. In the language I have been employing, they enact an appropriation/expropriation of an Ixil life-and-after-life-of-the-name. As Butler and Derrida suggest, nonetheless, sovereign performatives are also subject to their iterability and to failure. Although the possibility of sovereign infelicities is constitutive to the production of sovereign performatives—at least this is clear in Derrida’s theory, since, for Butler, these infelicities are produced by the responses of the speaking subject—the fantasy of their infallibility function as a way to keep the gap between the state’s performatives and its effect closed. We shall see in chapter 3 that the names of the Guatemalan elites, names that are deemed to be the marks of wealth and whiteness, depend on the state’s perlocutionary fantasy of guaranteeing their own recognizability and subjective positions. As I will argue in chapter 3, at the level of desire, whiteness and wealth have played a fundamental role in the libidinization of the finca-state and its subjects, and in the valuation of its proper names.

Pseudonyms, in this regard, may be considered as names that subjects give to themselves in an attempt to evade the state’s designation and performatively. They function under the principle of dissimulation rather than identification; yet, pseudonymity is also an appropriation of the norms that it attempts to evade. In doing so, it leaves the gap between the utterance of a sovereign performativity and its effects open. In other words, pseudonymity constitutes a non-sovereign sovereign act of naming: it names but does not generally secure the durability and identity of a name—as patronymics do—and does not function under the patrilineal/patrilocal law of inheritance. It rather obeys the logic of imaginary identification, in the sense that it merely
produces specular semblances and differences: a pseudonym is an imaginary name par excellence.

As I see it, pseudonymity also presupposes a form of renunciation of the legal and state-sanctioned recognizable identity: it entails a form of loss, albeit partial, by virtue of which pseudonyms cannot be re-appropriated as durable genealogical identities; they vary, change, are exchangeable and, in this regard, they disseminate. In her piece on Willa Carther’s masculine names, Judith Butler has suggested that, insofar as a pseudonym functions as if it were a patronymic, it produces a subordination of the masculine position to the logic of variability—which she sees as the logic of the women’s names—feminizing thus the name-of-the-father. In the context of my own research, I argue that pseudonymity functions by way of detaching the name-of-the-father from the patronymic, opening up the position and name of the father to other forms of signification rather than inheritance, property, and patrilineal/patrilocal identities. This may enable the feminization of the name of the father, as Butler suggest, but pseudonyms may also enable its bastardization. It is in this regard that pseudonymity not only evades the state’s sovereign performativity, but also threatens to disorganize its symbolic structures of signification and desire.

As I will argue in chapter 4, revolutionary pseudonymity opens up the politics of naming to a form of future that carries with itself the potentiality of becoming other, that is, the possibility of keeping the name-of-the-father open to multiple re-significations. In the face of such productive disorganization, at a moment when the use of pseudonyms had proliferated among revolutionary militants and combatants, especially among indigenous people of the

39 Butler, Bodies that Matter, 156.
Guatemalan highlands, the historic fear of losing the ability to keep indigenous people in their place, was experienced by the army and the Guatemalan state’s elites as the dissolution of the nation-state’s self-representation. Indigenous communities that the army suspected of supporting the guerrillas, especially the EGP, were absolutized as the enemy of the state. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of ladino revolutionaries who used pseudonyms were targeted as individuals; whereas indigenous revolutionaries were fundamentally targeted collectively. This was the case of the Ixil communities. This absolutization, however, is the effect of the state’s symbolic constitution instantiated under conditions of militarization, rather than the pseudonym’s imaginary variability. As argued before, only the symbolic has the capacity to stipulate a cause of grouping and differentiation; and only the state’s performative illocutionary fantasy is deemed to be capable of producing itself the deed that it effects. Neither of these are attributable to the imaginary and pseudonymity. Paraphrasing Lacan, the army—and the Guatemalan elites for that matter—received from the Other their own message.

The sovereign performative uttered was “all the indios are guerrillas.” In this utterance, the name “indios” designates a figure that serves to identify a position of pure negativity, the mark of the nations-state’s Real, that is, a figure deemed to signify the untying of the state’s symbolic stipulations and imaginary interpellations. As a figure of negativity, “indios” do not refer to an ethnicity, a culture, or a set of moral constraints of a specific group of people. It does not have any empirical referents: “indios” is a rhetorical figure that merely signifies the dissolution of the finca-state. As I briefly mentioned above and as I will show later in this dissertation, the repudiation of the indigenous other is sustained by imposing onto indigenous

40 Here I’m following James Siegel’s brilliant Naming the Witch, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).
subjects the name “indios” whenever they attempt to evade or free themselves from the predicaments of the nation-state's foreclosure and the interpellation that co-produces it. Contrary to Judith Butler’s insistence on the politics of resignification via the responses of the subject, I argue that names that are foreclosed and racially fetishized, as the name “indios,” can only be re-signified by way of dissolving the structural conditions that determine their constitutive position. In this regard, the name “indios” is intransitive.41

Paradoxically, those who came to call themselves revolutionaries, including all of my interlocutors, did so by identifying themselves with the figure of “the poor.” As I will argue in chapter 5, as a political figure, “the poor” produced different effects to that of “indios:” even though it was politically divisive, it enabled the articulation of irreducible forms of political demands to the name “poor” without fully controlling them, albeit subsuming them in the name itself.42 In doing so, different subjects were able to speak in the name of “the poor,” that is, in the name of an other and in the name of that name.43 Whereas the name articulates, the political figure enables a characterological representation that supports a multiplicity of subjects to see themselves speaking and being heard in the form of appearance of that character.44 In this vein, the figure is divisive insofar as subalternized subjects that count as a part that has no part acquire a form of appearance that aims to transform the logic of distribution of the visible, sayable, and


43 Lazarus, Anthropology of the Name.

44 For the notion of political figure as characterological, see Rosalind C. Morris, “Dialect and Dialectic in ‘The Working Day’ of Marx’s Capital," Boundary 2 43, no.1 (February 2016).
audible in order to make them count. The figure is thus indicative of an antagonism—of oppositional politics—rather than being an expression of a political ontology, or of politics conceived of as agonistic or consensual. In my dissertation, I speak of the politics of naming as a form of antagonistic oppositional politics that produces effects of signification, relies on the figural as a means of representation, and articulates political subjectivities through the name.

*Theoretical Antecedents: Anthropologies of War, Violence, and Revolution in Guatemala*

In 1983, anthropologist and Jesuit priest Ricardo Falla published what is perhaps the first account of Guatemala's civil war's massive violence. The report was a reconstruction of the massacre of San Francisco, Nentón, Huehuetenango (perpetrated in September 1982) based on testimonies he collected among refugees in southern Mexico. Four years later, Guatemalan Anthropologist Carlos Navarrete would deliver a paper during the first Paul Kirchhoff Colloquium celebrated in México's public university, in April 1986. In it, after a historical description of the long processes of both indigenous resistance and the Guatemalan state's responses it elicited, he presented a list of some 77 massacres (together with some of their

---


testimonies) that occurred in the department of Huehuetenango, between 1981 and 1985. In Navarrete's view, his research was "outside the curriculum" or "out of school," because even if to deal with the horrors of more that 200 testimonies was repugnant and unbearable, this labor could only have a political purpose: to support the organizations that in Guatemala demanded “to know the whereabouts of thousands of disappeared, and the punishment of those who had committed torture and genocide.”

Their American counterparts would follow the same path a few years later, publishing a collection of essays whose purpose was to reach out to the American audience, in an effort to correct US policymakers' misrepresentation of the Guatemalan crisis. This collection presented a corpus of careful descriptions and testimonial accounts of the counterinsurgent violence experienced in Guatemala’s highlands. Like Navarrete’s and Falla's texts, Harvest of Violence followed a narrative that explicitly refrained from the canons of scientific writing in favor of an informative, testimonial, and descriptive style. In general, these texts were framed by a language of denunciation, political engagement, and solidarity with the victims of massive violence in Guatemala. Their theoretical propositions were sustained by the presumed transparency of their detailed description of facts, the authoritative voice of the anthropologist as a witness, and the exemplarity attributed to the events thus presented. Moreover, these anthropologists—with the notable exception of Carlos Navarrete who, although in a rather

---

50 Navarrete, “Una investigación fuera,” 207.


52 Ricardo Falla has recently published a work on the indigenous peasants of Ixcán and how they came to support the guerrillas that remained as a manuscript for security reasons, since he wrote it, in the first half of the 1980s. This is an antecedent that contradicts the tendencies of anthropologists working on Guatemala’s civil war at the time. See Ricardo Falla, Ixcán: El campesino indígena se levanta. Guatemala 1966-1982, (Guatemala: URL-AVANCSO-USAC, 2015).
disguised manner, did acknowledge the support of indigenous communities to the guerrillas—although he agreed with others that indigenous Mayan communities had been pushed to join the insurgency because of the army's violence. In the words of Shelton H. Davis, "Indians began joining with the guerrilla organizations not because of a deep ideological understanding of, or commitment to their cause but rather as means of individual and community defense against the selective killings and acts of terror by the army and death squads." In other words, insurgent ideologies did not belong to the indigenous people's own political commitment, which is to say that they joined the guerrillas only as a defensive strategy. According to Shelton Davis, indigenous people couldn't have been insurgents either by communitarian/individual predispositions or by their own political entailments: either as victims or as forced participants, the civil war had been forced onto them.

In the early 1990's, Ivon Le Bot's study *La guerra en tierras Mayas* would provide a revisionist argument about the Mayan communities' "involvement" in the civil war. Le Bot's work is a long meditation on the historical transformations that rural communities of the Guatemalan highlands underwent during the second half of the twentieth century. Of relevance for him were the processes of proletarianization and semi-proletarianization of the rural peasantry; the emergence of a new class of petty commodity producers that were able to escape from finca work; and, more importantly, the irruption of Liberation Theology and Catholic Action (AC) within communities that relied on a religious consensus based on costumbre (traditional beliefs). According to him, these historical transformations opened up the Mayan communities' perspectives.

---


"closed corporate communities," thus dividing them up both internally (costumbristas against young members of Acción Católica) and externally (proletarianized communities against those of petty merchants and producers). Out of this political divide, the re-birth of the indigenous movement would take place.\(^{55}\) For Le Bot, class consciousness had been introduced by a revolutionary theology that radically differed from a communitarian social movement. Never—Le Bot argues—was a revolution part of their political hopes, let alone a desire of becoming guerrilla combatants. These were the efforts of poor indigenous communities trying to escape from the oppressive realities of finca labor and the authoritarianism of the Guatemalan state.

When the guerrillas arrived to these communities, their revolutionary utopia collided with that of a "society despite the state," thus getting trapped by “the vengeful history” they were trying to leave behind.

Le Bot's theses, re-iterated by American anthropologist David Stoll,\(^{56}\) have become a part of the dominant historical narratives in Guatemala, despite well-sustained criticisms.\(^{57}\) For instance, Carlota McAllister has convincingly argued that Le Bot's analyses—including others published in *Harvest of Violence*—relied on the reification of a notion of community as *Gemeinschaft*—a unity of human wills preserved in spite of actual separation—outside the ladino

---


57 Political figures and scholars from left to right (mayan and ladino) share this narrative. In the context of the Constitutional Court's reversal of Ríos Montt's sentence, in November 2013, the Guatemalan weekly magazine "Contra-poder" published a relatively long analysis of David Stoll, where he reiterated the "two demons" thesis in order to deny the charges and further sentence against Ríos Montt. See also Roddy Brett, *Una Guerra sin Batallas: Del odio, la violencia y el miedo en el Ixčán y el Ixil, 1972-1983*, (Guatemala: F&G editores, 2007).
state, and radically incompatible with global socialist ideologies. For her part, Diane Nelson has argued that these anthropological readings (her criticism is particularly engaged with David Stoll's work) are based on colonial stereotypes that portray indigenous subjects as being two-faced liars, at once givers and docile noble savages. In addition, one could say that these texts now belong to a global discourse of a humanitarian governance, in which indigenous pasts and war memories are recuperable only if expressed in the form of narratives of victimhood and suffering. In this sense, in order to keep an idealized figure of indigenous innocence, Guatemala's war and its violence has been depicted as a radical interruption of indigenous communitarian politics and power, rather than a part of it.

Following the publication of the UN sponsored Guatemalan truth commission’s report, other anthropologists have demonstrated that ladino penetration in the local structures of power, and the state's militarization of indigenous communities, were the bases upon which state violence occurred. Their main focus, nevertheless, was how a "society of fear" became possible in Guatemala. These anthropologists have argued that, through the disciplined and routinized


60 The UN sponsored Guatemalan truth commission's report remained ambiguous in this respect. The Commission’s historical reading of Guatemala's recent history follows similar paths to Le Bot's (and Stoll's for that matter). Nevertheless, it also traced back the racist and segregationist constitution of Guatemala's state since colonial times. According to the Commission, therein lies the nature of the violence experienced during the armed conflict, an argument that is in opposition to the "two demons" narrative. It also drew a more complex view of Guatemala's war in terms of the actors involved in it. The US government and the Guatemalan elites, are just two of the main actors that, according to the Commission, affected the unfolding of the civil war. The atavistic racism and exclusion against the Mayan pueblos, the ancient fear of an indigenous revolt, together with a culture of militarization and authoritarianism are posited as the causes of the civil war and genocide. Notwithstanding its longue durée reading (new to a Truth Commission in Latin America), and its criticism of a manichean understanding of the war, the Commission's report relied on a vision of the Mayans as being fundamentally victims of the state. See CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio.

61 In this regard Simone Remijnse's ethnography is exemplary. Simone Remijnse, Memories of Violence: Civil Patrols and the Legacy of Conflict in Joyabaj, Guatemala, (Amsterdam: Rozemerg Publishers, 2002).
imposition of fear—and the forced inculcation of loyalty and obedience to the army—a situation of moral inhibitions was created in the early 1980s. Total fear led to the production of dehumanized "others" which were to become the targets of massive violence. Foucault's theory of subjection (as presented in his work *Discipline and Punishment*), and Hanna Arendt's reflections on totalitarianism are at the center of this argument. Parallel to these studies, other anthropologists working with survivors of massive violence have argued that, in conditions of generalized suspicion and surveillance, the victims of massive violence have learned to negotiate their survival through the shared consciousness of suffering. In this regard, "suffering" is understood as an enabling condition for agency with which they have displaced a sense of guilt or culpability, thereby opening up small social spaces in which silence becomes speech. Either as a mode of disciplinary governance, or as an enabling condition for indigenous agency, "fear" has become the structuring category in much of contemporary anthropological studies about Guatemala's civil war. In general, these studies have taken for granted many of the theoretical presumptions of the earlier works on violence and war. Again, these analyses rely on ideas of victimhood and suffering by virtue of which war and violence are understood as being imposed forms of disruption of indigenous politics. In this regard, war is posited as a military confrontation between armed forces, and defined by the fundamental distinction armed/unarmed population. Thus, a reading of the past (and its multiple memories) from the perspective of oppositional politics is foreclosed in favor of a narrative that equates indigenous politics with a

---


form of heroism in victimhood.

With the sole exception of Carlota McAllister's ethnography, conducted in the K'iche' town of Chupol, the vast majority of anthropological works about Guatemala's civil war have defined insurgency and revolution as modes of politics unavailable to indigenous peoples, insofar as these politics are conceived of as a ladino/western utopianism. Moreover, revolution has been reduced to a voluntarist event in which consciousness, commitment, and armed/political strategies coincide in a moment in which political spontaneity gives way to an organized revolutionary triumph. In this vein, revolution in Guatemala's recent history is depicted as a non-event. McAllister, nevertheless, has convincingly argued that, among Chupolenses, revolution did become a possibility. Her work demonstrates that parochial constructs of moral conduct around the notion of conciencia (which indexes a culturally specific ethical substance) emerged in Chupol out of the engagement between local knowledges and governmental practices, fundamentally during the second half of the twentieth century. According to McAllister, conciencia is contingent (and subject to failure); and, as such, sometimes even incommensurable between Chupolenses themselves, especially in ethical stances regarding the use of violence. In this regard, revolutionary politics, she argues, had become a part of Chupolences conciencia by the late 1970s.

Contrary to the dominant narrative about Guatemala's recent history, her work

---


65 From a sociological perspective, Edelberto Torres-Rivas' work is exemplary. See Edelberto Torres-Rivas, Revoluciones sin cambios.
demonstrates that, for Chupolenses, the revolution failed not because they did not consider it theirs—or because they had been manipulated—but because of the guerrilla's limited strategy as much as for the army's strength. Their understanding of revolution as failure is a performative one (eventual), rather than non-eventual and futile. McAllister's conclusions are, in this regard, instructive. She argues that, because of the revolution's failure, Chupolenses are forced to negotiate their survival in conditions in which to follow their conciencia puts them at risk of being singled out as “bad indios.” To be seen by the Guatemalan state as good, that is, as persons with conciencia, they have to refrain from their revolutionary pasts and from the obligations of their own conciencia, which does not necessarily coincide with the state's sovereignty. McAllister's argument resonates with that of Charles Hale, who has argued that under Guatemala's contemporary multicultural/Neo-liberal governance, "the specter of the insurrectionary Indian" continues to generate "a visceral receptivity to political initiatives seeking to shore up ladino power and privilege.”66 As I understand it, in her inexhaustible effort to historicize conciencia among Chupolenses, McAllister's remarkable ethnography has failed to explicate their structural double bind, as a re-iterated effect of the state's sovereignty. By this, I do not mean simply to correct a historical slip. My aim, in fact, is to recognize, and to take seriously, Charles Hale's notion of the "insurrectionary Indian" as a specter. Indeed, one could propose that this figure has been kept in Guatemala's national memory precisely in the form of a ghost: both commemorated and repudiated, the insurrectionary “indio” has been the figure of a

disavowal (included by virtue of its exclusion), re-inscribed by the state and its ruling classes.\textsuperscript{67}

Although McAllister recognizes that indigenous performativity among Chupolenses is in itself unpredictable and unstable (here McAllister follows Judith Butler\textsuperscript{68}) this form of responsibility (response) seems to be posited as the eventual limit of the state's sovereignty, thereby running the risk of being trapped in the voluntarist logic she has so brilliantly critiqued. What her work does not address—and this is my working hypothesis—is that the specter of the "insurrectionary Indian," as Hale calls it, is embedded in the foreclosure of the figure of “the indios.” In this regard, as I have mentioned before, this figure is intransitive and, as such, it is indicative of the impossibility of its re-signification (as Butler would put it) unless its structural position changes. This is, certainly, a fantasy re-iterated by the Guatemalan state that has acquired the form of a violent national myth.\textsuperscript{69} It doubtless has a historicity; and yet, in being forced to sustain the state's point of dissolution—an inexistent, non-referential and non empirical limit—it is not historicizable as such: its history is unavailable to the state and its ruling classes (and to the indigenous pueblos as well, at least if one wants to argue that indigenous communities do not constitute an outside of the Guatemalan polity) insofar as it is part of their own ideological constitution.

Methodology: Between Archives, Collaborative Research, and Participant Observation


\textsuperscript{68} Butler, \textit{Excitable Speech}.

I began to problematize the history of Guatemala’s civil war, especially its period of massive violence and acts of genocide more than ten years ago, while I was working as a social researcher for the Association for the Advancement of Social Sciences in Guatemala (AVANCSO). Defined by its focus on collaborative research, AVANCSO’s main objective has been to produce scientific knowledge in co-participation with organizations of the social movements that seek to politically influence and transform the realities of subalternized sectors of the Guatemalan society. By the mid 2000s, I was working in the Area of Studies on Social Imaginaries and our aim was to understand the sedimented imaginaries that sustain the structures of power of the Guatemalan state. As mentioned before, during those years AVANCSO had developed a relationship with the Agrarian Platform (PA), an organization that agglutinated human rights NGOs, local and regional indigenous and peasant organizations of the highlands, and the Catholic Church’s Inter-diocesan Pastoral of the Land. Its aim was to elaborate technical proposals to influence the state’s policy making around agrarian development. By 2004, the Agrarian Platform intensified its political activity and became more belligerent.

I began to document its political rallies, negotiations, and other political activities in 2004. That allowed me to witness the interactions between the state and the indigenous organizations. As time progressed, I gradually became more involved in the internal logics and dynamics of the PA. From 2004 to 2007, I participated in its Political Commission and its Commission of Political training. I attended political meetings between the PA and the governmental entities in charge of the agricultural and rural development agendas; I also attended PA’s multiple assemblies and coordination meetings with other national organizations in the broader social movement. I visited multiple indigenous communities—especially in the Ixil
region and the departments of San Marcos and Quetzaltenango, where the PA’s organizations had
developed political work; and I participated in occupations of fincas and documented some of
their violent evictions. It was during these years and in this political context that I met and
developed a political relationship with many indigenous leaders of Ixil descent who had become
adults during the worse years of the civil war. Many of them had been collaborators, militants,
and combatants of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP); others—as was the case for the
majority of indigenous men in rural Guatemala—had been forced to participate in the Self-
defense Civil Patrols (PAC), and many others had survived massacres perpetrated by the army,
where members of their families and friends were killed. As I was trying to document and
understand their histories in order to have a better sense of what I was witnessing (their
coalitions and their relation with the state), I started to recreate a longer political picture of
Guatemala’s history.

During those years I recorded hundreds of hours of formal and informal conversations,
filled out four ethnographic diaries, and published two small articles where I tried to translate
what I have been seeing into the theoretical language of social imaginaries. I recorded all of this
information in Spanish, which was a lingua franca for indigenous people of many ethnolinguistic
communities and ladino participants in the PA. I developed a longer and sustained political
relationship with former members and collaborators of the EGP of Ixil descent, as well as with
people who belonged to the Communities of Population in Resistance of the Sierra (CPR de la
Sierra), which I regularly visited from 2004 to 2007. During these visits, I was able to complete
in-depth life histories of some 20 of these Ixil leaders, and I interviewed over 30 more members
of the CPRs and former members of the EGP. Overall, I recorded and conducted more than a 100
collective and individual interviews, life-histories, and countless hours of informal conversations in Santa María Nebaj, the biggest town of the Ixil region.

The towns of Santa María Nebaj, San Juan Cotzal, and San Gaspar Chajul, in the highlands of the department of El Quiché, belong to the ancestral territory of the Ixil pueblo. According to Ixil municipalities, in 2010, there were 120,759 people residing in the towns of Cotzal, Chajul, and Nebaj. The majority of Ixiles are agricultural workers; and an average of 87% of its population live in poverty and almost 40% are illiterate. In the late 1990s almost 40% of its population were still employed as temporary workers in the fincas of the southern coast, for an average of two months each year. Although there are no statistics about religious identification, people from the Ixil municipalities I talked to said that the majority of Ixiles are Catholic, although an important number of them practice Evangelicalism (Neo-pentecostals) and costumbre (Mayan religion). National statistics have not been updated in the last twenty years, but in the late 1990s, it was estimated that over 92% of its population was of indigenous descent, and 8% were ladinos. Demographics are less reliable when it comes to describe other indigenous ethnicities in the area; however, it is recognized that a minority of Q’anjob’als and an important number of K’iche’s also reside in these municipalities. This is especially marked in the town of San Juan Cotzal, where nearly 20% of its population claim to have K’iche’ descent.

The UN sponsored Guatemalan truth commission concluded that the Guatemalan army

---

73 ASIES-FUNCEDES, Triángulo Ixil.
had perpetrated acts of genocide against the Ixil population of the municipalities of Cotzal, Chajul, and Nebaj. According to the CEH, by 1981 there were 44,784 people residing in the area, of which 87% were of Ixil descent. However, 97% of all the killings occurred against the Ixil population. Between early 1981 and late 1982 alone, the CEH reported 52 massacres perpetrated by the army, and calculated that nearly 90% of all Ixil villages were burned down, forcing over 24,000 of the region’s inhabitants to become internally displaced. Of all the victims of 36 years of civil war in the country, approximately 13% were of Ixil descent.

This is the region that, by 2009, I had chosen as the focus of my graduate studies. I used part of the information collected between 2005 to 2008 to develop a project to obtain a Masters degree, which I completed in 2011. For my PhD I decided to first conduct intensive archival research into the claims of Ixil ancestral lands, Ixil and indigenous labor in the finca economy, and the information about the civil war’s development in the region, paying special attention to the archival collections on the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) and, when available, the Guatemalan army. For this part, I conducted research from the months of October 2014 to May 2015 in the General Archive of Central America (AGCA) in Guatemala City, the Second Register of Property in the city of Quetzaltenango, the Historical Archive of the Center for Regional and Mesoamerican Research (CIRMA), in Antigua Guatemala, and in the Historical Archive of Guatemala’s National Police.

After my archival research I carried out ethnographic research in the Ixil region. My

---

75 CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 3:327.
76 CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 3:335.
77 CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 3:258. According to the 1981 National Census, there were 6,054,227 inhabitants in Guatemala; less than 1% of the national population were of Ixil descent. Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE), Censo nacional de población, (Guatemala: INE, 1981), 11.
primary activity consisted in participant observation and formal/informal interviewing, from June to October 2015. From August to October of the same year, I was invited to participate in a four months-long seminar about the history of the Ixil region at the Ixil University. The seminar met every two weeks and it gathered local leaders, Ixil ancestral authorities, Ixil students with high school to university degrees, communitarian organizers and other invited professors. This space was invaluable, for I was able to share my archival findings and to problematize them with the other’s participants’ points of view and memories. Their knowledge of the region and their history changed the way I was reading the archival documentation. Many Ixiles I met there opened up their houses and shared with me their memories and testimonies. With them, I visited their communities and came to know their closest neighbors. Thanks to them, and the invitation of the Ixil university, I was also able to interview Ixil ancestral authorities of Nebaj, Cotzal, and Chajul. Especially relevant for my research were the Ixil authorities of the village of Ilom, in Chajul; the ancestral authorities of the community of San Felipe Chenlá, in Cotzal; and the Alcaldía Indígena of Nebaj.

While I was conducting fieldwork in Nebaj, I was offered the opportunity to visit the region of Ixcán. I traveled there by the invitation of Jesuit priest and anthropologist Ricardo Falla. He was launching a long-term study on the history of Ixcán and its communities’ support for the EGP prior to the army’s scorched earth campaign and massacres. Indeed, Ixcán was the region where the EGP developed its first networks of support and established one of its fronts. Ixcán was also the place were the first contacts between the EGP and representatives of the Ixil communities took place. In addition, it has been historically identified as a zone of Ixil resistance, even though it no longer belongs to the state-recognized Ixil municipalities. With all
this in mind, I was eager to visit it and I remained there for over 10 days. The communities of Ixcán were born as cooperatives in zones of colonization, where people from different parts of the highlands settled. Here, Spanish was and has been a lingua franca, and virtually all the people I interviewed there were bilingual. This is especially the case for refugees who returned to Ixcán from Mexico, after the signing of the peace agreements in 1996.

My research suffered from the fact that, despite being able to record and make notes of more than one hundred formal and informal interviews during my fieldwork—in addition to those I had collected between 2005 and 2008—I wasn’t able to remain in the Ixil region, let alone in a particular community, long enough to learn the language. I did as much as I could to take classes and consult Ixil texts during my fieldwork and while I was working at AVANCSO, but that was insufficient. I tried to compensate with the help of translators; most of all, I benefited from the fact that virtually all of my interlocutors are bilingual (Spanish and Ixil). In addition, even though I tried to interview local finqueros [finca owners] and army officers stationed in or in charge of the military operations in the region during the late 1970s and early 1980s, all of my requests were denied. I tried to compensate for this lack of information with archival documentation and studies conducted by other researchers. Among the people I interviewed in the Ixil region, there were many ex-PAC and some former soldiers; but none of them were claiming allegiance to the Guatemalan army. Most of my interlocutors were part of the Communities of Population in Resistance (CPR), former collaborators, militants and ex-combatants of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), Ixil local and ancestral authorities, or were part of human rights and indigenous peasants organizations. The majority supports the current local/regional political struggles against transnational energy producing companies, and the legal
battles that led to the trial where Ríos Montt was charged with and found guilty of genocide and of crimes against humanity. Even though virtually all of them were open to discuss painful and sensitive events from their past, I have changed their names to protect their confidentiality. Only when they explicitly told me not to do so, have I used they real identities. Thus, in my research I’ve used formal and informal interviews, life-histories, archival research, and collaborative and participant observation; however, my work does not fit in the classic paradigm of prolonged ethnographic research conducted by an ethnographer fluent in the local indigenous language.

Overview of Contents

In Chapter 1, I reconstruct a history of how fincas and the finca economy arrived in the Ixil region, from the late nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth. I pay special attention to the political struggles carried out by Ixil ancestral authorities and communities to keep control of their rights over ancestral lands against private foreign and ladino owners that expropriated, via state legislation, Ixil ejidos [communal lands]. During these years, the Guatemalan state would intervene in some of the most important conflicts with violence, an antecedent that was relevant for my interlocutors as they recalled the 1980s massacres perpetrated by the army. Likewise, I pay attention to the imposition of state labor drafts that indebted the vast majority of Ixiles with coffee and sugar cane fincas and finca recruiters. This history is important for two main reasons: first, state enforced land privatizations and indigenous indebtedness led to a radical transformation of the power dynamics in the region, primarily, between Ixiles and finca owners, but also between Ixiles themselves. These power dynamics would play a crucial role in the development of the civil war. Without an understanding of the
political dimension of these historical process, a deeper and more substantial reading of the
events that led to the support of the Guerrillas and the violence perpetrated by the army becomes
limited. And second, this chapter provides a reading of Ixil ancestrality as a claim or a set of
claims embedded in these power dynamics and political struggles, rather than being an
encompassing unmodifiable essence of the Ixil culture.

In chapter 2, I provide an analysis of Ixil proper naming as a form of survival, expressed
in its two main institutions, Ch’exel or namesakes and Ixil patronymics. As indicated in the
theoretical section above, I elaborate on the symbolic, imaginary, and real effects of signification
of Ixil naming. This chapter is an attempt to explicate Ixil proper naming as ancestral
performatives that, according to their effects of signification and modes of subjectification,
determine what a Ixil life-and-afterlife-of-the-name signifies. This includes the question about
sexual difference as expressed in Ixil proper naming and its phallic and heteronormative
stipulations, as well as in the women’s name supplementation. This is a transitional chapter; its
objective is to provide the reader with an analysis that permits her to gauge what was at stake
when state enforced land expropriations and Ixil indebtedness, ended up expropriating Ixil
proper names and patronymics (as will be elaborated in chapter 3); and what were the
implications of the politics of anonymity for Ixil revolutionaries during the civil war (as will be
elaborated in chapter 4).

In chapter 3, I move the discussion of naming to the appropriation and expropriation of
indigenous and Ixil personal names and patronymics. I trace back these appropriations by means
of the multiple instruments of inscription and identification (workbooks, finca receipts,
certificates, payrolls, account books, and finca currencies) that the state utilized and elicited to
control and surveil the indigenous population. These documents were designed to force them to work for coffee and sugar cane fincas, and in state infrastructure. I show that these forms of inscription objectified the subjective conditions of possibility of an Ixil life-and-afterlife-of-the-name. This form of objectification, however, simultaneously enabled their constitution as subjects of finca-labor. In this regard, I pay special attention to the emergence of a super adequate indigenous subject that was capable of producing surplus value over necessary labor, in the name of finca ownership and the finca economy. The “name of finca ownership” is thematized in this chapter as a Master signifier. In doing so I develop an argument about how the finca economy racialized and libidinized both indigenous proper names and those of finca owners, the latter being the ones that came to signify whiteness, wealth, and renown; and the former those that came to occupy the position of pure loss and castration. It is here where I show how the name and the figure of “indios” was foreclosed and how the symbolic structures of signification and desire of a finca-sate were constituted.

In chapter 4, I deal with the politics of anonymity and pseudonymity that emerged during the revolutionary struggle of the second half of the 1970s and the early 1980s. I trace back how a revolutionary discourse enabled popular forms of address by virtue of which the ideological/imaginary coincidence of the “I” and the “we” of the subject of finca labor was performed. This was the fundamental condition for the appearance of forms of address, by means of which, the subjects of finca labor were presumably heard speaking, not in their name but in the name of the other. Pseudonyms are the names that better express this form of anonymity and, as mentioned in the theoretical section, they function as imaginary names. Detached from the constraints of patronymics, pseudonyms had liberating effects of signification on their bearers which are
recalled as if being possessed by the force of these names alone. Although acquiring pseudonyms implied the renunciation and put into parenthesis of what I thematized as a life-and-afterlife-of-the-name in chapter 2, the adoptions of pseudonyms were experienced as the possibility of becoming other, a conditions that, especially among women ex-combatants, enabled the re-appropriation of their bodies in ways they had not experience before. I develop the argument that, during the 1970s and early 1980s, the Master signifier of the *finca*-state (the white patronymic) no longer represented the subject to another signifier, disabling thus its capacity to identify the subject of *finca* labor. This was experienced by the Guatemalan state’s elites and the army as the untying of the state’s symbolic stipulations and its imaginary interpellations.

In chapter 5, I reconstruct the history of the emergence of the figure of the poor as it was characterized by a religious discourse, produced within a radicalized Catholic Church. Most of my interlocutors referred to this history in the form of dreams about the emancipation of the poor, and in the form of miracles that signify their survival after the army’s massacres. In their narratives about dreams and miracles, they put God in his (i.e., their) place, both in and after the civil war. Based on these narratives I show that the figure of the poor enabled the articulation of a multiplicity of subjective positions and demands around a political decision phrased as “the option of the poor.” This decision acquired a prescriptive force insofar as the “figure of the poor” came to represent the universal, and thus, it appeared as a characterological representation by virtue of which those identified “with the poor” saw themselves being heard. In other words, the figure of the poor came to represent the part that has no part and, as the name of a universal, it was the name of a new Master signifier, albeit one that was emerging from the position of the subject of *finca* labor. This chapter is an extension of and runs in parallel with chapter 4.
However, I emphasize the oppositional politics elicited by the figure of the poor and its prescriptive force.

In chapter 6, I reconstruct the development of the civil war in the Ixil region, paying special attention to the years prior to the army’s scorched earth campaign, through the relatively short period of massacres (1973-1983). My two underlying arguments are: first, prior to the period of massive violence, insurgent and counter insurgent violence was sucked up by the political struggles and power dynamics developed during the consolidation of the finca economy and finca state in the region. However, at the moment when insurrectionary politics and the politics of anonymity were at their peak, and the symbolic structures of signification and desire of the state where experienced by the army as in a crisis, the Guatemalan army’s general command performed a symptomatic and regressive reading, i.e., the indios are the mark of the state’s dissolution. In doing so, the army and the Guatemalan state’s elites, received their own message from the Other (i.e., the finca-state’s symbolic constitution). Thus, and this is my second argument, the guerrillas’ presence in the Ixil region, more than the cause of an indigenous rebellion was, for the Guatemalan finca-state, the last “proof” that the indios were the mark of the nation’s dissolution. This symbolic stipulation, which led to the militarization of the entire Ixil region, absolutized the Ixil communities as enemies of the state. The perpetration of massacres and genocidal violence became a part of the army’s counterinsurgent campaigns, whose main objective was to cut off the support to the guerrillas by virtue of generalizing the militarization of the entire region. Thus the army forced all indigenous men to become a part of the Self-defense Civil Patrols (PAC). Some of the biggest massacres in the Ixil region were perpetrated by army platoons accompanied by PACs. In order to put an end to a form of violence
that was perceived of as being endless and with no reason to be exerted against unarmed Ixil communities, in order to stop massacres perpetrated by the army, to appease the Guatemalan state’s sovereign rage, and to save their own lives, the Ixiles were forced to kill other Ixiles.

Introduction

In June 2015, after almost six months of conducting intensive archival research in Guatemala City, Antigua Guatemala, and in the city of Quetzaltenango, I was invited as a guest teacher in the Ixil University, in the town of Nebaj. They asked me to participate—together with other professors, Ixil authorities, and local leaders—in a four month-long collective seminar about the recent history of the Ixil region. At the time, I didn’t know that more than one Ixil community was involved in legal battles over indigenous territories and ancestral lands, and over lands that had been expropriated after the most violent years of the civil war (1981-1983). When some of the students and participants in the seminar learned that I had been working in the “archives,” especially in the “Lands Section,” and that I had documents that I would like to discuss with them, many doors opened up to me. Some thought that I may have a piece of archival evidence that could help them in their legal process; others asked me if I were willing to serve as an expert witness; and some others wanted nothing other than advice as to how to navigate the complicated logic of the Guatemalan archives and their documentation. To the best of my capabilities, I helped them with their requests while I was learning from their own knowledge on the matter.

Although legal battles around ancestral lands have a long history in the region, as I show in this chapter, the new pressure over regional natural resources, instigated by transnational energy and mining companies, was in the background of the renovated communitarian efforts to
secure legal rights over Ixil lands. I wasn’t surprised to hear that the most powerful finca owners of the region were in opposition to these legal battles; some of them, I was told, were making lucrative business with the energy companies. Indeed, I quickly realized that the political conjuncture I was in the middle of was an actualization of older conflicts that proved to be crucial during the development of the civil war, in the Ixil region and elsewhere.

The seminar I was invited to became a space where we all learned from the experience of the others; there I came to understand that, contrary to the vast majority of studies about land conflicts in Guatemala—that have emphasized their economic dimension—for the Ixil communities these were and are, primarily, political conflicts mediated through claims of ancestrality. What do Ixiles mean by ancestrality is a complex matter. In chapter 2, I will develop an analysis of the Ixil ways to signify what they refer to as ancestrality, as expressed in the Ixil institutions of proper naming; in this chapter, however, I address the history of conflicts over ancestral lands against ladino and foreign finqueros that arrived in the region towards the end of the nineteenth century. I also pay attention to the fundamental effects that those struggles had over intra-communitarian conflicts between the municipalities of Nebaj, Chajul, and Cotzal. As we shall see, claims over ancestral lands were—and are—in themselves, expressions of power relationships, communitarian conflict, and collective self-determination in relation to the Guatemalan state, rather than being an essential characteristic of the Ixil communities. Understanding how this conflicts occurred in their historical depth is relevant as we move toward the second chapter and, more importantly, as we move into an analysis of the dynamics and structural determinants that defined the development of the civil war, in the Ixil region in particular, and in the western highlands in general. This will be the subject matter of subsequent
chapters, especially chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Thus, I provide a historical reconstruction of the ways in which the most important conflicts around claims over ancestral lands unfolded as the emergence and irruption of the finca economy impacted and re-shaped the political landscape of the Ixil region, between the late nineteenth century and the 1950s. Land, as I will show in the pages that follow, was not the only concern of finca owners during these years; as important to land was how to guarantee a cheap or virtually free labor force to work, especially although not exclusively, in coffee fincas. I also provide a historical reconstruction of the most important political conflicts around the control of the labor force in the region. Overall, the chapter is a historical reconstruction of the conditions of originary accumulation in the Ixil region and how the Ixil communities navigated, resisted, and challenged such conditions. I hope that, as the chapter unravels, a specific political form that I’m calling a finca-state will start to emerge. This was the form of state that the guerrillas confronted during the civil war.

Archival research for this chapter was conducted at the General Archive of Central America (AGCA), the Hemeroteca Nacional [National Newspapers and Periodicals Library], Guatemala’s 2nd Registry of Property, the Center for Mesoamerican and Regional Research (CIRMA), and the National Police Archive, between November and May 2015. Most of my interviews were conducted between 2007 and 2008, and while conducting fieldwork in the Ixil region between May and October 2015.
Don Juan Laynez didn’t witness the events he was narrating that day, but his late father, Matías, did. “My father told me that Lisandro Gordillo killed 3 people,” he said with resolute conviction to a small group of us, all guests meeting at his house in the Ixil village of Ilom, of the municipality of Chajul. “In those days there was an elder, an old Alcalde [mayor], who gathered the people and said: Ahorita va a caer el Ingeniero! [the surveyor is coming now!] and everybody got their machetes, palos [woodsticks] and stones, and went to meet him.” As they came across the man, a group of women started shouting defiantly Quién va a medir la tierra? [Who’s gonna measure the land?] before giving the surveyor two punches in the head. Bernal Asicona—the old mayor—together with other Principales [traditional authorities] tied him up and conducted him to the local jail. The name of the Ingeniero, according to Don Juan, was Felipe, and his assistant was Salomón Galindo. It is unclear how Lisandro Gordillo heard about the surveyor’s imprisonment, but the next day, early in the morning, he came from his finca [plantation], La Perla, riding his horse. The Alcalde called his people and, as soon as they could, they grabbed the horse so Lisandro Gordillo couldn’t escape. “That’s when he took out his gun and shot at them,” don Juan recalled. “He hit Salvador Vi in his shoulder and leg. Miguel, one of the Principales' assistants, went to his help. Vas a soltar el caballo? [Are you going to release my horse?] said Gordillo and shot again, hitting Miguel this time. After that, “Gordillo set himself free and went out for help. That’s when the soldiers came.” “I didn’t see this,” don Juan Laynez insisted, “but my father did.” During the events, don Juan’s grandmother, together with another 14 women and 30 men, were imprisoned and sent to the department of El Quiché. We
know from what he told us that Salvador Vi and Miguel died on their way to prison. The third man, nevertheless, remained unidentified. The year was 1924.

I would later learn during my archival research that the surveyor’s full name was Felipe Izaguirre; and that he had been commissioned to demarcate land that, more than a decade before, had been granted to a group of ladino members of the Guatemalan militia of the far away town of Momostenango. I would also learn that Guatemala’s dictator Manuel Estrada Cabrera—overthrown by an urban revolt in 1920 after being in power for 22 years—had granted the land to the Momostecos as a gift for their “loyal services” in 1902. By the time Felipe Izaguirre entered into Ilom’s history, he was measuring land on behalf of army commandant Manuel de León and Colonel Virgilio Porres. Details of Izaguirre’s imprisonment and further liberation appeared on the front page of one of Guatemala’s most important newspapers at the time: “An Engineer and his Assistant Kidnapped and Beaten” was the headline of El Imparcial of July 1, 1924. Most of the facts that I heard from don Juan Laynez in 2015 coincide with the story of El Imparcial. The newspaper, however, framed the event as an “uprising of indios against ladinos.” “Dreadful drums of alarm sounded to congregate a fanatic horde, like a tribe from Africa, in order to attack Lisandro Gordillo,” the article reports, “who had come to the rescue of Felipe Izaguirre.” Miraculously—the report continues—he escaped “the horde” and returned to La Perla, his finca. From there he sent a “communication” to the jefe político of El Quiche asking for his immediate intervention. On June 8, a group of soldiers from Nebaj, accompanied by Gordillo, arrived at Ilom. Later that day, they would be joined by another group of soldiers from

78 AGCA, ST, Pqt. 17, Exp. 10. “Milicianos de Momostenango.” In fact, faithful to Guatemala’s dictatorship tradition, Estrada Cabrera himself was a landowner with properties near the village of Ilom.

79 “En Ilon, Lugar de el Quiche, se Alzaron los Indios contra Ladinos,” El Imparcial, July 1 1924, 1.
Cunén, starting thus the raiding of the Ilomenses. Although the newspaper acknowledges that a soldier may have shot somebody, nothing is said about Salvador Vi, Miguel, or any other Ilomense killed that day. The hero: Lisandro Gordillo.

News about Ixil communities’ animosity toward surveyors were not unknown in Guatemala, though rarely did they occupy the front page of a major newspaper. It seems that the events in Ilom provided an exemplary opportunity to inform a wider public about the dangers that finqueros were facing in the countryside: “this shows the grave danger that these pueblos [indigenous peoples] represent when left a la mano de Dios [at God’s will], for racial hatred and fanatical aggression against finca owners or other ladino people willing to work in agriculture may arise.” Thus concludes El Imparcial, in a tone of urgency, positing ladinos and finca owners as victims of racial violence. An urgency that projected a form of future which equated finca ownership and agriculture with ladino people. Ironically, the “hero” of this story had come from Mexico, a country in which—contrary to Guatemala—forms of political identification with a ladino type remained marginalized from the national imaginary. But from the article’s perspective, both the future of the nation and that of fincas were also the future of ladinos. Or rather, and as we’ll see in later chapters, considering the fact that the most influential finqueros in Guatemala identified themselves as whites (non-ladinos, non-indigenous) of European descent, the tone of the article should be heard in a prescriptive form: the future of fincas must be the future for ladinos.

The Ilomenses—forced to bear the name “indios”—are, on the contrary, reversed into an imputed anachronic tribalism (“Africa” signifies it) and portrayed as duplicitous figures: “The

---

80 “En Ilon.”
apparent humility of the indios sometimes hides a deep hatred against ladinos, aggravated by prejudices. They acted because of their fear that ladinos will take away all of their land," the article concludes. Thus, from the newspaper’s perspective, their appearance disguises what they are: “indios” appear to be something they may not be. As a name, “indio” does not identify any characteristic based on ethnicity, historicity, or territoriality but designates a pure negativity that threatens finca owners and the agricultural development of the nation state. And as a figure of the apparent, as an apparition, it projects a reversal in which humbleness becomes racial hatred. This is what called for governmental intervention. But the story I heard at don Juan’s house was about how the Ilomenses had lost their rights to the land. That Felipe Izaguirre and Salomón Galindo had been imprisoned by the Principales speaks of an offense and a crime that had been committed against the Ilomenses. That they attempted to imprison Lisandro Gordillo is also indicative of his complicity. El Imparcial’s article, nonetheless, turns ladinos and finqueros into victims, for otherwise they would have appeared as the truly duplicitous figures: thieves that act as honorable finqueros. Indeed, don Juan’s story, which is also his father’s, is an indictment against Lisandro Gordillo for crimes that have remained in impunity: he was a murderer.

Ancestrality and the Power of the Archive: “These Lands are Ours since Times Immemorial”

If we believe in Don Juan Laynez’ testimony, Bernal Ascona—the former Mayor that

81 “En Ilon.”

imprisoned Felipe Izaguirre—may have been old enough to witness a deep disagreement between the *Principales* of Chajul (the Ixil town of which Ilom is part) and yet another surveyor, in 1893. That year, Joaquín Fernandez (a native of Huehuetenango) claimed 30 *caballerías* as “vacant land”83 under state legislation that had targeted indigenous communal lands or *ejidos* in favor of export agriculture (fundamentally for coffee *fincas*).84 In his report, the surveyor annotated that, despite not having “modern titles,” the Chajules claimed to be the legitimate owners of the lands “since times immemorial.” As we’ll see in detail in chapter 2, the enunciation and reference to that which comes “from times immemorial” is linked to Ixil ancestrality, that is, to their forms of survival inscribed in their patrilocal forms of descent, place of residence, and fundamentally, to the Ixil institutions of proper naming that define the relationship between the dead and the living. Thus, when the *Chajules* were making such a claim to the surveyor, they were referring to the land as a constitutive part of having a life of the name defined by their own ways of survival. Accordingly, their opposition was systematic. Fernandez annotated that he was “willing not to claim all the land in order to keep the peace with the people of Chajul.” Indeed, maneuvering between the *Principales’* opposition and the state’s legislation, the surveyor left out of his mapping all the cultivated land of Sotzil, the closest neighboring village to Ilom. Of the

---

83 AGCA ST, Pqt. 11, Exp. 1, “Jesus C. Rivas. Shamac.”

84 Right after Independence (1825) the Guatemalan post-colonial state introduced legislation that promoted the privatization of all "vacant" lands, but didn't expropriate indigenous communal lands or *ejidos*. Nevertheless, these laws re-introduced the figure of *censo enfiteutico* which, even though it did not grant rights for buying and selling the land, it did allow ladinos to rent indigenous communal lands or *ejidos*. In 1836, the Guatemalan government allowed the purchasing of communal lands if the money was destined to public infrastructure, and prohibited indigenous communities from acquiring more or increasing their *ejidos*. Starting in the 1850s, the Guatemalan government increased the redistribution of lands into private hands in the Pacific Coast and the piedmont to stimulate export agriculture, intensifying this effort in de 1870s with the disappearance of *censo enfiteutico* (decree 170, approved in 1877) by virtue of which, all ladinos already renting communal lands were able to purchase them. In this vein, the government introduced an agrarian reform that allowed every person that wanted to claim "vacant lands"—which most of the times were indigenous *ejidos*—to do so via public auctions of no more than 30 *caballerías* (in 1894 it was reduced to 15 *caballerías* per person). See: Gustavo Palma Murga, Arturo Taracena Arriola, and José Aylwin Oyarzun, *Procesos Agrarios desde el Siglo XVI a los Acuerdos de Paz,* (Guatemala: FLACSO, 2002), 45-72.
initial 30 Caballerías, the surveyor measured 22. This wasn’t enough for the Chajules. The fact that they did not agree to sign with their names (or finger prints) the surveyor’s report is indicative of their total rejection of his measurements. In the end, the lands were auctioned in January 1895, when Joaquín Fernandez lost them to Jesús Rivas, who offered a better price. Thus was born Shamac, one of the closest fincas to the village of Ilom, on June 27, 1895, the date the title was authorized. Five years later, in June 1900, Lisandro Gordillo would buy Shamac, re-naming it La Perla.

No one could have imagined at the time that this name would be dramatically linked to the development of the Guatemalan civil war: on June 7, 1975—it was a Saturday—Luis Arenas Barrera, then owner of finca La Perla, would be ajusticiado [executed] by a unit of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), making this their first public action in the country. According to a report of the National Police, that day Arenas was counting the money to pay his jornaleros. Four unidentified armed individuals arrived around 17:00 hours; two of them waited outside Arenas’ office while the others walked straight towards him. “We have been looking for you. You are the one who’s been taking the lands of the people of Ixcán” they shouted before shooting at him. One of the perpetrators was a ladino of about 5’6”, the others were all of “indigenous

---

85 Land claims were made through Municipalities (Local governments) to be later revised by the Jefatura Política (Regional Government). A claimant needed to argue about “the supposed benefits” and use of the lands, which also needed to be corroborated by witnesses that knew the location and its potentialities. From here the claim was “elevated” to the Ministry of Governación (Interior Security) and later to the Ministry of Fomento (Development). Once they approved the claim, a surveyor was authorized (his honoraries were the claimant’s responsibility) and the Jefatura Política announced an open auction after the land’s measurement. It is important to recall that both Municipalities and Jefaturas Políticas were state institutions directly related to the President, and that, in the vast majority of cases, mayors and jefes políticos were appointed by the president himself. In general, the purpose was not only to create a land market, but also to privatize as much of the land as possible, most of the times against indigenous communal lands. That was especially the case in regions where soil and climate dispositions were apt for coffee cultivation. In fact, in regions like the Verapaces and the Costa Cuca, indigenous ejidos were swept away in favor of coffee fincas.

appearance." This will be the subject of chapter 6; for the moment, let me return to Gordillo Galán and the Chajules’ struggle for their ancestral lands.

Like many other foreigners at the time, Lisandro Gordillo came to Guatemala to work as an *habilitador* or *contratista*, a sort of *finca* “recruiter” who provided monetary advances or *adelantos* to indigenous laborers to work for *fincas*. Very little is known about his life in Mexico—except for the fact that he came from Oaxaca—but probably he was attracted to Guatemala by the coffee boom and the advantages that the government offered to foreigners willing to work in coffee *fincas*. Indeed, and in clear contrast to the overwhelming majority of the coffee-producing countries in Latin America, the Guatemalan state implemented a series of laws that made the indebtedness of indigenous people the fundamental mechanism of labor recruitment until the 1940s. As a result, state enforced indebtedness made some *contratistas* rich or gave them sufficient capital to buy public and "vacant" lands. Some became *finqueros*, others land-speculators, and some others—like Gordillo himself—both. From what we know,91

---

87 Dirección General de la Policía Nacional, Cuerpo de Detectives, Guatemala June 16, 1975, Of. 116703.


89 Lincoln, *Ethnological Study*, 63.

90 Starting in the early nineteenth century, the Guatemalan state approved a set of laws whose intent was to force indigenous adults to receive *anticipos* (money advances) to work for fincas. These laws and their application intensified during the 1870s with the infamous Decree 177, approved in April 1877. All *finqueros* were required to solicit to the *jefes políticos* the number of workers they considered necessary, and the *jefes políticos* transferred the solicitude to the local authorities—which included governors, municipal mayors, auxiliary mayors and *jueces de paz* (local judges). Money advances were assigned to local Municipalities which, on their part, kept a record of the number and names of the *jornaleros* compromised. These, on their part, were obliged to carry a *libreta* or workbook that included his name, place of provenance, and work "compromises" with specific *fincas* or *finqueros*. The system was called *mandamiento*, a re-iteration of colonial *habilitaciones*. In 1893, money advances were no longer given by the state but by *finqueros* themselves; this is where the figure of labor recruiter became very important. As we will see later in more detail, basically only better off indigenous people (most of the time they were the local authorities responsible for the Identification of workers or *jornaleros*) were able avoid debt-contracts or Debt Peonage. Although formally these laws were reformulated at different times, their "spirit" remained untouched since the early 1860s until the revolution of 1944.

he came quickly to understand that, in order to succeed in his plans, he needed to put local
(Municipalities) and regional (Jefaturas Políticas) state institutions to work in his favor. In fact,
by 1895, Lisandro Gordillo already held the position of Secretary of the Municipality of
Chajul.92

That same year, in the same month of the auction where Joaquín Fernandez lost
“Shamac” to Jesús Rivas, the Municipal Court of Chajul concluded that despite the insistence of
the Principales, without a title nothing could be done to support their claims to the land. "The
ignorance which still possess this pueblo [indigenous people]" the Municipal juzgado argued,
"makes them later lament these incidents: because paying careful attention to what has happened,
no other cause lies behind their state of stagnancy."93 In arguing that the Chajules were
supposedly ignorant of the Guatemalan legislation, and thus of their present situation regarding
land claims and titling, the Municipal court not only portrays them as incapable of self-reflection,
but also of being responsible for their own dispossession. “Stagnant" as they were imagined to
be, the Chajules are represented as subjects surpassed by time and, by the same token, incapable
of being in the presence of justice (which is also the present of justice). The archival
documentation about finca "Shamac" does not make direct reference to Lisandro Gordillo, but if
it is true that he was holding the position of Secretary in the Municipality of Chajul, he may have
been well informed about the claim and further auction of the lands that would soon become his.
We may even suspect that the depiction of the Chajules we read in these documents was of his

92 Stoll, Between Two Armies. In this regard, Decree No. 177, known as Reglamento de Jornaleros, stipulated that
“all Municipal Secretaries will hold a book to annotate the mandamientos [amount of workers] provided in a
nominal list, stating the time, destiny, amount of money advanced, and taxes collected for the rights of having
workers [at their disposition].” In Recopilación de Leyes de la República de Guatemala, T.2 (Guatemala: Tipografía
nacional, 1877), 69.

93 AGCA, “Jesus C. Rivas. Shamac."
own making.

By 1894, the Chajules were already engaged in the onerous and bureaucratic process of titling their ejidos.94 In fact, the Ixiles of the town of Nebaj started the process as early as 1878,95 and those of the town of Cotzal in 1895.96 To say the least, the Ixiles’ awareness and knowledge of the process of titling—evident in all the documents—discredits the argument of the Municipal Juzgado of Chajul; it also reveals the role that these institutions played in recognizing or denying their rights to the lands. The existing documentation at the General Archive of Central America (AGCA) leaves no doubt that the Chajules claimed 300 caballerías of land including 100 in favor of the villages of Ilom and Chel respectively. They would later add to the original claim 300 caballerías near Chajul together with 200 for Chel and Ilom. The claim may have included Sotzil, since this village is located between the two already mentioned. Although probable, this is a speculation. What seems to be clear is that a dispute between the Ixiles of Chajul—headed by their Principales—and foreign and ladino finqueros and contratistas was under way. And finca Shamac, renamed by Lisandro Gordillo as La Perla, was part of it. The fight wasn’t going to be easy, and it would endure for decades to come. As we’ll see later in the dissertation, the political disputes around Ixil ancestral lands would be at the core of many social and political grievances that were sucked up by the dynamics of insurgent and counterinsurgent violence during the civil war.

The ejidos of Chajul were finally adjudicated in February 1900 after a long battle, especially regarding its excesos (the 500 caballerías added later). But the jefe político of El

94 AGCA-ST, Pqt. 16 Exp. 10, “Ejidos pueblo de Chajul” 1896.
95 AGCA-ST, Pqt. 3 Exp. 6, “Ejidos pueblo de Nebaj” 1881.
96 AGCA-ST, Pqt. 3 Exp. 11, “Ejidos pueblo de Cotzal” 1885.
Quiché—a ladino member of the Guatemalan Army appointed by the President himself, and the most influential political figure in the region—remained reluctant until the very end of the process, and did not refrain from expressing his concerns to the Minister of Gobernación.

“Please allow me to state that, given the number of inhabitants of said pueblo, the lands they first claimed are more than enough,” he declared in a telegram. Following on this communication, the Fiscalía de Gobernación re-iterated the words of the jefe político in a letter to the Minister of Interior or Gobernación:

Mr. Minister: the thirst for land that consumes some pueblos [peoples], especially the indigenous ones, is insatiable, for all they want is to accumulate vast extensions of land that in their hands are completely unproductive; hurting thus the agriculture, the main source of public wealth of Guatemala. Communal lands are a grave obstacle to the agricultural industry and are against the principles of a good economy. Based on these considerations and the report of the jefe político of El Quiche against the Municipality of Chajul, I believe that the best way to proceed is to overrule the solicitude of said corporation, insofar as it is evident that the lands already granted to them are enough to cover their needs. Guatemala June 12, 1894.

The letter—and by extension the communication between the officials of Gobernación and the jefe político—is representative of a social imaginary that portrays indigenous communities as obstacles that harm the development of the nation, as other historians have long before demonstrated. It also reveals how these imaginaries were related to paradigmatic frames of reference like the legislation on private property and the economy of permanent-export-agriculture. Indeed, the vast majority of public servants and surveyors (topographers) appointed among others J.C. Cambranes, Café y campesinos. Los orígenes de la economía de plantación moderna en Guatemala, 1853-1897, (Madrid: Editorial Catriel, 1996); Edgar Barillas, El ‘problema del indio’ durante la época liberal, (Guatemala: IIHAA, 1989); Arturo Taracena, Invención criolla, sueño ladino, pesadilla indígena. Los Altos de Guatemala: de región a Estado, 1740-1840, (San José: Porvenir/CIRMA, 1997).
to re-map the new internal boundaries between fincas and indigenous communities that emerged with export agriculture, operated through these frames. More importantly, this communication displays a figuration of an anti-utilitarian and anti-productive excessiveness imputed to the indigenous pueblos. In their putative “insatiability” indigenous people are represented as the opposite to the conformity with private property and the norms of a "good economy." They know no limits. It is worth noting that, through the circulation of telegrams and official correspondences like the ones we have read, forms of (re)iteration and citationality not only enabled the formation of the rituals that gave life to official networks and bureaucratic associations, but also served as means to spread and cement social imaginaries that characterized indigenous communities as the very limit/excess of the nation-state. In line with these imaginaries, in July 10, 1984, President Reyna Barrios overruled the Chajules’ claim to the excesos.

In the field, things became more complicated for Francisco Castillo Mendez—the appointed topographer—once the measurement of the ejidos of Chajul started. Although he tried to follow the final governmental agreement, the Chajules pushed the ingeniero to measure the lands according to their known borders or mojones, which exceeded the authorized land. Again and again, the measurement was interrupted by the Chajules, who demanded that he follow different coordinates and scales. Exasperated, the surveyor wrote to the chief of the Land Section: "you are fully aware that, in their measurements, the indigenous Municipalities want to include a vast extension of land which gives them no utility; that they monopolize all the land, the wealth of our nation, and that in their selfishness they do not admit that the land should be

---

100 Stefania Gallini, *Una historia ambiental del café en Guatemala. La Costa Cuca entre 1830 y 1902*, (Guatemala city: AVANCSO, 2009), 85-125.
divided. Regarding the *excesos* I’ve already measured, the supreme government should act as it considers convenient, since the more than a thousand *caballerías* measured exceed what they need.”

The Chajules agreed to leave the rights of claim open, in case the government wanted to repossess the lands, but the surveyor followed their demands. In the mean time, a delegation from Chajul traveled several times to El Quiche and Guatemala City to negotiate and ask for the approval of all the land. The basis of their solicitude was that the Chajules had fought “together with the martyrs of freedom Justo Rufino Barrios [former president of Guatemala] and Serapio Cruz against the conservatives,” and that they needed the land to cultivate their “sacred corn.”

The case was finally revised, and after making sure that no other claims over the same lands existed, the government agreed. In his final report, the *jefe político* of El Quiche admits that approving the *excesos* would be beneficial for the people of Chajul, but he recommends the lands be divided. The Chajules had succeeded: in May 1900 they registered near 1,200 *caballerías* of land.

*Ancestrality, the Excess of the Archive, and the Internal Limits of the State*

Surveyors like Felipe Izaguirre and Francisco Castillo Mendez played a crucial role in the production of the Guatemalan state’s post-colonial topographies, especially during the coffee boom and the decades of export-led development implemented by the state (1870-1945). They were also the designers of state infrastructure, albeit precarious, necessary to put into motion this model. As others have argued, in their mappings, they also produced a social imaginary of the

---

101 AGCA, “Ejidos pueblo de Chajul.”
national space that rendered indigenous spaces and ecologies invisible. However, the case of the ejidos of Chajul—and Cotzal and Nebaj for that matter—also show that this mapping was disputed on the very basis of those indigenous topographies and ecologies. Although effective, these surveyors were not always successful. In fact, they became a condition for the register and inscription of that which the state deemed to erase. It is true that in regions like the Boca Costa [piedmont] and the Verapáces, coffee fincas radically alienated indigenous communities of their ejidos; but the Ixil region did not follow the same pattern, in part because of its ecological conditions and distance from other urban centers. Although an important proportion of their best lands were expropriated—especially in the town of Cotzal—they were able to retain a significant extension of their communal lands, as we have seen before.

Surveyors increasingly became key figures in inter-communitarian land disputes and conflicts. One case in particular (among many) occurred between the towns of Nebaj and Chajul over a border or mojón called “Scasiguan.” The Chajules claimed that they had been possessing those lands long before; and as proof, they mentioned the fact that they had rented the lands to the people of Santa Eulalia—a Q’anjobal town of Huehuetenango—in exchange for Municipal services. Based on their possession and use of the lands, the Chajules argued that Nebaj was claiming land that was not theirs. In general, these were the premises upon which the overwhelming majority of disputes occurred between indigenous towns and communities

102 With the notion of indigenous ecology I’m following social scientists and geographers that define it as the interaction between lowlands (hot and warm lands) with rich soils apt for all sorts of cultivation—specially corn, beans, and citric fruits—and the cold or highlands, used for residence, cattle farming, and the production of other products like herbs, different types of chiles and fruits, for instance. Most of the economic activities of indigenous communities in Guatemala, until the late nineteenth century, depended upon this ecology for their subsistence; and much of their lifeworlds were determined by this topography as well. See Stefania Gallini, Una historia ambiental.

103 Also in Stoll, Between Two Armies, 35.

throughout the western highlands. In the best of cases, the *Principales* of the towns involved were able to investigate the case and reach an agreement (tracing back forms of use and possession of the lands, for instance); if they couldn’t reach an agreement, state institutions intervened. In the worst of cases, witchcraft and violence on both sides were the answers. But in the case of “Sacsiguan,” the lack of an authorized title decided things against the Chajules. Here, as in other disputes that have occurred since the late nineteenth century, the authorities of Nebaj argued that never before had they heard about those *mojones*, and that they had “nothing else to say, since their title speaks for them.”

Titling did not eradicate customary forms of conflict mediation among indigenous communities, which are very much present even today; but with the irruption of the *finca* economy and its state-authorized forms of inscription, the written letter of the state increasingly became the fundamental source of power to be retained and possessed in order to settle legal disputes over land possession among Ixil communities. As exemplified by the conflict with Nebaj, when all other forms of mediation reached their limit, the Nebajenses claimed that their title had spoken on their behalf, conferring thus the last word to “that paper.” As if a voice associated with the authoritative instrument of register and inscription was speaking in their names; coming from an “elsewhere,” as it were, saying *here* and *there is* (no longer) yours.

In fact, while conducting fieldwork in 2015, I heard many stories about how the former *alcalde* [Mayor] of Nebaj had stolen the title of the *ejidos*, which, according to some, he did in order to do business with energy producing transnationals working in the region. I was constantly reminded by foreign and ladino activists and lawyers involved in territorial disputes,

---

that the people were concerned about things that do not matter, since a “title is just a piece of paper;” that what counts is the inscripción in the Property Registry of Guatemala (which cannot be altered at will). Although true from a legal point of view, this claim does not consider the fact that a paper is something more than just a paper, that this thing we call a “title” carries within itself the power of the archive. Those who possess the title—which let us not forget is symbolically invested and authorized by the state—also possess in some form, a thing which enacts a force that may be capable of speaking in one’s name. Which is also something dangerous: the title cannot freely circulate, it needs to be kept in its authorized place and guarded by authorized people, for otherwise the split between the title’s own voice and those on whose names it may or may not be speaking, becomes unmanageable and radically open.

Furthermore, these instruments of inscription, as exemplified by another conflict between the towns of Cotzal and Nebaj, also had the capacity to change the nature of the past (and by extension that of the future): when the Ixiles of Cotzal claimed and measured their ejidos, they presented to the appointed topographer “an old escritura” or old written document which referred to an agreement reached in 1623, regarding various boundaries or mojones that overlapped with the recently titled lands of Nebaj. The Nebajenses responded that “ese papel viejo [that old paper] was, without a doubt, made by the Cotzaleños alone, because we do not believe that our ancestors reached such an agreement since the mojones have always been as expressed in the title.” It did not matter, as it was confirmed by the same topographer, that the lands in question had been cultivated and used by the Cotzaleños before. Titling thus enabled

---

106 AGCA, “Ejidos pueblo de Cotzal.”
107 AGCA, “Ejidos pueblo de Cotzal.”
Nebaj—as much as the surveyor—to represent previous documents as anachronisms, regardless of the agreements’ validity those documents were the index of. The surveyor, in fact, took the time to transcribe the “old paper” for the purposes of discrediting not only its legality, but its very written form, grammar, and linguistic expression. Almost “illegible,” the “old paper” was included in his report in order to mark its putative obsolescence.

Thus, the conflicts between Nebaj, Chajul and Cotzal, as expressed in these documents, are indicative of the fact that ancestral claims over the land were embedded in the Ixil struggles of power and differentiation—spacing—rather than being an immutable essence. It also indicates that the written letter of the state was a source of power that came to be included in the enactment of such claims with an intensity not seen before the emergence of the finca economy, despite the fact that land titles were granted and utilized since colonial times. In other words, within Ixil ancestral disputes, having a title was both a matter of dealing with the power of the state’s written letter and its excess, and of keeping in place their ancestral rights to their lands, including their inter-communitarian disputes and forms of differentiation.

From the Guatemalan state’s topographic perspective, however, indigenous ejidos were represented as forms of occupation that were—and are—in contradiction with the ideals of the national space, despite the fact that these lands were putatively included within the national topography. In other words, indigenous ejidos came to represent the internal limits of the state: neither outside nor fully inside, indigenous spacing—differentiation by virtue of space occupation—was included in order to be repudiated. This form of internalization of that which is

---

108 The surveyor wrote that what “they call escritura [document] is written in the language of the Indios, its original is very badly written and it is almost illegible but has been translated into Spanish; no less confusing and badly done is this translation, although it is faithful.” AGCA-ST, “Ejidos pueblo de Cotzal.”
represented as foreign to the ideals of the nation state would have enormous psychic effects among the Guatemalan political and economic elites, as we will see in chapters 3 and 4. In short, claiming rights over ancestral lands was—and is—for Ixil communities, an expression of their forms of survival and spacial differentiations (an expression of power), whereas for the Guatemalan state, indigenous ancestral lands were—and are—an object of repudiation.

The gift of Theft

As early as 1930, the Iloomenses were fighting Lisandro Gordillo in the Guatemalan Supreme Court. As mentioned before, two years after the Chajules registered their ejidos, Estrada Cabrera had granted land to the members of Momostenango’s militia which compromised their communal lands. Traditionally, the momosteco militia was made up of rural indigenous people controlled by their local authorities; but with Barrios’ government (1873-1885) they were re-organized and turned into ladino dominated structures.109 The land granted to the Momostecos—which would be the source of many subsequent conflicts including Gordillo’s—was not an isolated case in the Ixil region; an important number of claims by ladino militia men carried out between the 1890s and 1920,110 reveal a state strategy in which appointed ladino military men would be in charge of policing and, in effect, disputing the power and control of indigenous


110 See: AGCA-ST, Pqt. 22, Exp. 2; AGCA-ST, Pqt. 22, Exp. 6; AGCA-ST, Pqt. 23, Exp. 3; AGCA-ST, Pqt. 18, Exp.3; AGCA-ST, Pqt. 17, Exp. 17; AGCA-ST, Pqt. 10, Exp. 8
authorities and communities over their lands and political spaces. We know, for instance, that captain Isaías Palacios would become the first contratista or labor contractor in Nebaj, and that the president himself granted him at least 15 caballerías of land in the village of Acúl (part of the ejidos of Nebaj) in 1903. It matters that all these lands were given in the form of "free" gifts, i.e., as possessions that passed in order to guarantee a form of recognition whose apparent generosity served to consolidate reciprocity and identification with the Guatemalan state. And it matters because land was rarely—if ever—granted as a gift to indigenous communities, not only because they always claimed to be the legitimate owners of their lands since “times immemorial,” but fundamentally because their ejidos came to signify anti-nationalism among the Guatemalan elites and the non-indigenous society in general. Moreover, given the fact that the ejidos of Nebaj had been claimed, measured, and authorized by 1900 and registered in 1903, and that the first legal desmembración or concession occurred in 1946, it is evident that Isaías Palacios’ lands were illegally granted. And the same can be said about the militia men of Momostenango. Indeed, Chajul registered its ejidos in May 1,900 and its first legal

---

111 Historian Jean Piel has shown that by 1900 the Guatemalan militias operating in El Quiché became the fundamental means to control the indigenous population. Telegraphs and roads, although precarious, had enabled and increased the speed of the army’s mobilization in the countryside. Although small and deficiently equipped, especially if compared with modern armies in the continent, the militias had enough capacity and lethal power to exert control over unarmed indigenous communities, as exemplified by the case of Ilom mentioned above. With President Jorge Ubico (1931-1944), the militarization of the countryside increased. All jefes políticos were military generals of his confidence; the 1st. and 2nd. Alcaldes [Mayors] in all Municipalities were substituted by Intendentes appointed by the jefe político; and the Comisionados Militares [Military Commissioners] became key figures of vigilance and control in all the rural communities of Guatemala. See Jean Piel, El Departamento del Quiché bajo la dictadura liberal (1880-1920), (Guatemala: FLACSO-CEMCA, 1995), esp.109-134; also, CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 12 vols., (Guatemala: UNOPS, 1999), 2:158-162.

112 According to Lincoln, Isaías Palacios—like Lisandro Gordillo—was appointed Secretary of the Municipality of Nebaj by the Guatemalan government, becoming thus the first ladino to occupy this position in the region. See Lincoln, Ethnological Study, 62; and Stoll, Between Two Armies, 32.

113 AGCA-ST, Pqt. 18, Exp. 3, “Isaías Palacios-Acúl,” 1903.

114 Finca No. 13,559, folio 75, libro 64, El Quiche, 2nd. Property Registry of Guatemala.

115 Finca No. 2,554, folio 222, libro 13, El Quiche, 2nd. Property Registry of Guatemala.
desmembración didn't occur until January 1975, in favor of the Villages of Sotzil and Ilom.\textsuperscript{116} In other words, land grants to ladino militia men in the region were the gift of theft. This would prove to be crucial—and I ask the reader no to forget the following historical fact—because, by the second half of the twentieth century, the majority of contratistas like Isaias Palacios became Military Commissioners; and they were the fundamental link between the fincas and the Guatemalan army when the civil war erupted in the Ixil region. I will elaborate on this in chapter 6, but now let me return to Gordillo.

Illegal land granting did not prevent him from buying the lands of the Momostecos: between 1923 and 1927 he purchased nearly 50 caballerías of land from the militia men of Momostenango,\textsuperscript{117} in addition to the 22 caballerías he had bought from Jesús Rivas in June 1900, which became fincas La Perla and Santa Delfina. When topographer Felipe Izaguirre was imprisoned by the Principales of Ilom in 1924, he was demarcating these lands in order to facilitate Gordillo’s purchase. By then, Gordillo was part of a network of state-appointed municipal authorities, jefes políticos, contratistas [labor recruiters], middle to high rank military men, and finqueros, that were pushing against indigenous authorities and communities for the control of their lands and labor. During this period of time, in part thanks to Brazil’s “coffee valorization schemes,” coffee prices experienced a recovery in the international market and the demand for Guatemalan coffee followed the same pattern. Gordillo, and many other finqueros at the time, were taking advantage of these circumstances. But the people of Ilom had not given up; together with the Municipality of Chajul and Nebaj, they took Gordillo to court in 1928. The

\textsuperscript{116} Fincas No. 18,479 and 18,480, folios 31-32, libro 81, El Quiche, 2nd. Property Registry of Guatemala.

\textsuperscript{117} Elliot, “History of Land,” 9.
court concluded that the lands belonged to the *ejidos* of Nebaj and Chajul, thus leaving with no
effect Gordillo’s purchase. Two years later, despite this decision and the complete absence of
legal measurements, mappings, and other legal proofs, Guatemala’s supreme court ruled in favor
of Gordillo.\(^{118}\) The Ilomenses couldn’t reverse this decision. In many ways, the story and
indictment I heard at don Juan Laynez’ house in 2015, which was also his father’s, is true:
Lisandro Gordillo was, indeed, an authorized thief passing for an honest *finquero*.

*Finca Encroachment and Land Concentration*

“After the *pleito* [fighting],” don Pedro recalled at don Juan Laynez’ house, “the people
of Ilom bewitched the *viejo* [Lisandro Gordillo], and he became sick, his leg became ill.

Everybody says that is the reason why he stopped coming to Ilom. The people performed a bad
*costumbre* against him. And because of that illness Lisandro couldn’t maintain his *finca* [La
Perla]. This is why he had to sell it.” While hearing don Pedro, I could only imagine the forces
converging to incapacitate Lisandro Gordillo, after decades of countless disputes, maneuvers,
and violence against the people of Ilom. Sickness, according to the Ixiles who practiced
*costumbre*, was, and in some respect still is, indicative of an offense, a transgression, or an
improperly performed ritual to an old ancestor or the *Dios Mundo*, for which the sick person was
being punished.\(^{119}\) But sickness could have also been, almost invariably, the doing of an enemy,
i.e., witchcraft. In both cases, the sick person needs to perform *costumbre* to get better, but death
was always on the horizon. Witchcraft names the act of *dar la muerte* [the gift of death] which is


\(^{119}\) See Benjamin N. Colby and Lore M. Colby, *The Daykeeper: The Life and Discourse of an Ixil Diviner*,
the enactment of a force foreign to the bewitched person, and thus, not in his possession. And here, the language of possession isn't accidental: for, in the case of Gordillo, it meant that he shouldn't have claimed ownership of lands that were already possessed. Perhaps Lisandro Gordillo wasn't strong enough to keep up with the contingencies of the time; perhaps he had more than one enemy. I can only speculate. But if we believe in don Pedro's words, the shamans and diviners who performed this "bad costumbre" may have been well aware of his weakness.

From what we know, while he owned La Perla, Gordillo used the land to cultivate coffee and sugar cane, and he rented plots to the people of Ilom and nearby villages. He was involved in the production of *panela* [raw sugar] and *agua ardiente* [distilled alcohol] which, as Lincoln reported, was widely used in Nebaj, Cotzal, and Chajul for the recruitment and indebtedness of Ixil workers for coffee *fincas*. In fact, according to a newspaper, he fought against other ladinos of Nebaj who “had monopolized” the *estancos* where *agua ardiente* was sold to the Ixiles. The same newspaper reported—in a very laudatory manner—that he tried to build a “mule road” to get his coffee out to Chajul, but the inclement weather and the lack of state-funding, made the task almost impossible. It took more than five years—with private loans and the unpaid labor of indigenous workers—to finally complete the road. Despite the efforts, he sold La Perla in 1934; and by 1937 the *Crédito Hipotecario* [Credit and Loans Bank] had acquired said *finca*.

120 This was reiterated in my interviews. But see Elliot, “History of Land,” 9-10.
123 “Guatemala Desconocida.”
By the time Lisandro Gordillo sold finca La Perla, the finquero landscape was rapidly changing. The Tello brothers—ladinos from Chiantla, Huehuetenango—had become the sole owners of fincas Estrella Polar, Covadonga, and San Joaquin, near the villages of Ilom, Sotzil, and Chel. By then, also, Pedro Brol—a former contratista and finca administrator of Italian descent—had bought an important number of small fincas to be added to San Francisco, the largest coffee finca in the Ixil region.125 The same can be said about the Hodgsons—a family of English decent—who owned Santa Avelina and El Pacayal;126 and the Herreras—one of the richest families of Spanish descent in Guatemala—who acquired San Felipe Chenla, the most important finca de mozos in the region,127 and Villa Hortensia, Chipal, among others.128 In the case of fincas La Perla and Santa Delfina, Luis Arenas Barrera started paying the mortgage in 1941 to the Crédito Hipotecario Bank.129 These are the names that, beginning in the late 1920s until the late 1970s, prior to the beginning of the civil war, would become recurrent in the land titling and land disputes documentation, indicating thus the end of a period of land speculation (1890-1930) that occurred parallel to the legalization of Ixil communal lands or ejidos. In other words, what we see from the late 1920s onwards is a period of time characterized by a concentration of land around family owned fincas (a majority of these families were of European

125 By 1949, the inscription of finca “San Francisco y Anexos” included 16 different transaction of land purchases. See Finca No. 7765, folio 173, libro 41, Quiché, 2nd Property Registry of Guatemala.

126 Elliot, “History of Land,” 13; also AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, Pqt. 1, Exp. 3.

127 A finca de mozos was strictly used for renting plots to indigenous permanent workers or mozos colonos in exchange for labour. Although the vast majority of fincas in Guatemala had a small number of permanent workers living on the fincas in plots assigned to them, there were fincas de mozos throughout the western highlands. In the case of “San Felipe” its mozos worked in various fincas owned be the Herrera’s in the piedmont and pacific coast.


129 Finca No. 1749, folio 210, libro 9, Quiche; finca No. 778, folio 278, libro 2E, Quiche, 2nd Property Registry of Guatemala.
decent), in permanent tension with Ixil communities that, as we will see in detail in chapter 3, had been incorporated into the circuits of finca labor either as mozos colonos [permanent workers] or as jornaleros [temporary workers] recruited via indebtedness. For its relevance in the Ixil region’s recent history I will pause for a moment to address finca debt before returning to finca ownership and the extended conflicts between them and the Ixil communities.

Predicaments of Debt and Labor: Originary Accumulation in the Ixil Region

Many people I talked to in the Ixil region recall the decades between the 1890s to 1950s as the time when “el jornal llegó” [workday arrived]. Deemed to denote a form of wage, jornal rather signified the workday via catachresis: it wasn’t something people “earned” but something they owed. To become a jornalero was to be indebted. From the late nineteenth century to 1944, all indigenous males from ages 17 to 56 were obliged via vagrancy laws to work on state infrastructure (also known as vialidad) for periods of two months (sometimes referred to as Battalion of Zapadores), during which they endured hard work and did not receive payment, food, or proper housing. Only those who were able to pay a tax of 10 to 15 pesos per year, cultivate ten thousand plants of cotton or twelve thousand of tobacco, knew how to read and write Spanish, abandoned “their primitive clothing,” or had a “contract” with any coffee or sugarcane finca for at least 30 jornales or three months of work, were exempted from vialidad.


In other words, only better-off Ixiles were able to avoid this *trabajo de regalado* [unpaid labor] in state infrastructure. The rest, either became *mozos colonos* [permanent residents in a *finca*] or looked for a *contratista*—like Lisandro Gordillo— for debt contracts or *adelantos* [advances] to work for *fincas* (these temporal workers were known as *jornaleros* or *cuadrilleros*).

There are good reasons to associate *jornal* with the kind of land struggles we have seen so far. The awareness of this relation is dramatically evident in a legal complaint against Pedro Brol carried out by Ixiles from the village of San Francisco:

Taking away our land is like taking away our existence, because in the land we are born, reproduce ourselves, and therein we live. It is our final resting place…. It is true that we cannot cultivate a vast extension of land, but it is also true that we do not stop doing it on the land we already possess. [The *finqueros*] always pursue their personal interest, since in acquiring lands like ours, with its inhabitants, they form the good concept of having *mozos colonos* to send to the coffee *fincas*. This was the plan of Sr. Brol. Today, the *finqueros* are no longer buying “vacant lands,” rather, they find out about *ejidos* to the detriment of their occupants, taking away our *pan de todos los días* [daily sustenance].

Others have long before argued that the main concern of *finqueros* in Guatemala was not the land, but the workers required to cultivate coffee. This is true to the extent that, contrary to what happened in El Salvador—where the agrarian frontier closed off rapidly, encroaching on the vast majority of indigenous communities in the process—and Costa Rica, Colombia or Brazil—where coffee plantations developed mostly in frontier zones with no population to turn into a labor force—in Guatemala the agrarian frontier kept expanding up until the early 1900s, but coffee planters faced labor shortages and the refusal of indigenous communities to work for them. The picture may have been more complex if seen from the perspective of indigenous communities.

---


communities, for something other than just their labor was at stake: as expressed in their complaint against Pedro Brol, taking away their lands—and forcing them into colonato—was an attempt at controlling and taking away their forms of existence, or what I call in chapter 2, (mis)appropriating Lisa Stevenson’s wonderful ethnographic narrative and analysis,\textsuperscript{134} a-life-and-after-life-of-the-name, that is, Ixil ways of living, dying, and being in the afterlife; in a word, Ixil ways of survival.

In a condensed form, the Ixiles from San Francisco are describing a way in which they became mozos colonos. In the case of finca San Francisco, these Ixiles-turned-into-colonos did not have any choice but to “rent” plots (assigned by the finquero or his administrator) in exchange for jornales. Since San Francisco was the biggest coffee-producing finca in the region, these colonos remained in and worked for this finca most of the time. But others, like the mozos of fincas San Felipe Chenla, Santa Avelina, Pantaleón, and Villa Hortensia—all fincas de mozos—were sent to other regions of the western highlands, the piedmont, and mostly to the pacific coast, to work for coffee and sugarcane plantations of the same owners. In general, this happened during the months of August to December. “They didn’t pay us, just checked our jornal, because we lived in the finca,” an Ixil from Santa Avelina told me. “A lot of people wanted to quit, but they couldn’t, because where do we go? We had to endure! People went to the fincas just to cumplir [comply], pero no iban a trabajar de corazón [but they didn’t go to work from the heart].” Indeed, those who did not comply were evicted. This form of colonato was used in the region, especially in the town of Cotzal, from the early twentieth century to the late 1970s, when the civil war interrupted or altered finca dynamics, as we’ll see in chapter 6. In fact, the first Ixil

\textsuperscript{134} Lisa Stvenson, \textit{Life Beside Itself. Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic}, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).
collaborators of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) were Cotzaleños.

“It was very hard,” an Ixil from Salquil told me, “because they came [the government and the Municipality] in the evening with a list of names of those who had to go to work on the road. Right there, women had to start grinding the corn and preparing the tortilla for the men. All the food we needed to take with us! It was early in the morning when women finished toasting the tortillas. 5 days we walked, and 15 days we worked on the road near San Pedro Jocopilas. Those were the shifts. One couldn’t ask for anything, one couldn’t say anything. That’s why I didn’t want to work on the roads anymore, so I went to the contratista to ask for an advance. But the administrators always added time to the contract, so one had to work more than three months in the fincas. If you didn’t do it, they put you in jail; and after serving your time [30 to 60 days], you would have to do the job anyway.” As we’ll see in detail in chapter 3, all Municipalities and Jefaturas Políticas had to keep a registry of all the men working in vialidad or with finca contracts (finqueros had to keep records of their jornaleros); and all workers had to carry with them a libretto de trabajo [workbook] which included the records of their jornales, that is, of their debts.\(^{135}\)

Ixiles were not passive recipients of state/finca control. Diego Raymundo, an Ixil from Salquil, Nebaj, told me how his grandfather escaped from vialidad, “they were walking in a line,

\(^{135}\) As we’ll see in chapter 3, this form of bookkeeping became compulsory, specially between the late nineteenth century and 1944, and it remained in effect in finca accounting until the late 1970s. I never got to see it, but I was told that finca San Francisco’s administrator kept his books (“the book of debts” as many people I talked to called it) in a basement to which only very few people had access. The story is, in itself, fascinating, given the fact that Municipalities and jefaturas políticas had their own records. For jornaleros, as well, keeping their tarjeta in check was crucial: as Pedro Cedillo recalled, “They gave us a tarjeta were they noted down our tarea [workday]. One had to be very careful with that, because if somebody lost it, he had to do the work again.” In fact, many abuses are recalled regarding administrators and caporales noting down the work done incorrectly, adding or subtracting time to the libretas at their will. I was told that people used to complain a lot about this practice, complaints that turned, almost invariably, into witchcraft against these caporales. “It’s not that we had committed an offense,” don Pedro continued, “or done something wrong and as a punishment we had to go to work. Sin falta teníamos que ir [with no offense/ excuse we had to go]. We were obligados [forced].”
guarded by the soldiers, but since it was very early in the morning, it was very dark! And on a curve, he got off the road when the soldiers couldn’t see him, and hid. They went back to look for him but he wasn’t there any more. They went to look for him at his house, but couldn’t find him.” Diego didn’t reveal the whereabouts of his grandfather while he was on the run, but he may not have been the only one who managed to escape vialidad. While visiting the village of Sumal in the 1930s, Jackson Lincoln was told that on the top of the hill Sumal there was a “whole colony of Ixiles who had not paid road-taxes,” hiding from state and Municipal agents, “and they would cut [his] throat if given a chance.”136 Whether these Ixiles exaggerated or not remains uncertain, but what was true is that the Guatemalan state criminalized indigenous people that escaped vialidad or debt-obligations (they were treated as mozos prófugos [fugitive mozos] and were sent to jail for 1 to 2 months); what was also true, at least according to many Ixiles I talked to, is that Ixiles had used the mountains as a refuge since colonial times.

Some of the most important political disputes over the control of Nebaj’s Municipality during the first decades of the twentieth century revolved around jornales and jornaleros. In general, the Guatemalan government favored Municipalidades Mixtas [indigenous and ladino Municipalities],137 delegating the position of first alcalde [mayor] to a ladino member. In those cases where the Municipality was formed by indigenous people alone, the government appointed a ladino secretary, under the presumption that the position required the knowledge of how to speak and write in Spanish (recall that Lisandro Gordillo was the Secretary of Chajul’s Municipality in 1895). Given the fact that Nebaj was the most important town of the Ixil region

136 Lincoln, Ethnological Study, 146.
—and the town where the vast majority of ladinos resided—it was expected to have a
*Municipalidad Mixta*. But in January 1917, President Estrada Cabrera passed an executive order
that recognized Nebaj as an indigenous Municipality. In response, the ladinos of Nebaj
requested permission to create a *ladino* Municipal corporation, arguing that “more than 60 ladino
families were subjected to the great ignorance of the indigenous authority.” They insisted that
“Nebaj was a center of the greatest importance to the nation because of the amount of *mozos*
required to go to work on the Pacific Coast, and the Zona Reina and Ilom where numerous new
*fincas* are being formed.” The permission was granted in 1919.

Three years later, the ladino Municipality was dissolved by president José María
Orellana. Instead, he ordered a *Municipalidad Mixta* with only one *Síndico* and one *Regidor* to
represent ladinos. That same year, 1922, the ladinos of Nebaj—which included Lisandro
Gordillo and his brother Salvador, the Tello Brothers, Isaías Palacios, Pedro Brol, Segundo
Ardavín, among others—challenged the President’s decision, insisting on the necessity of a
ladino Municipality for the benefit of the *fincas* in the region. The indigenous authorities or
*Principales* opposed the ladinos arguing that they “were all *contratistas*, *finca* owners, producers
of *aguardiente* [distilled alcohol], and *estanco* [cantina] or shop owners that were only looking
for their own benefit to the detriment of the indigenous majority, which they wanted to control so
they have all the *mozos* they want for them.” They even argued that Lisandro Gordillo had
already faced charges of fiscal fraud. In October 1923, *El Imparcial* covered the dispute, clearly

---

139 AGCA-Gobernación, Quiché, Sig. B, Leg. 29563, Exp. 17.
140 AGCA-Gobernación, Quiché, Sig. B, Leg. 29563, Exp. 11.
141 AGCA-Gobernación, Quiché, Sig. B, Leg. 29563, Exp. 11.
favoring Lisandro Gordillo and all his ladino allies; but it is interesting that, in the article, they also accuse the former jefe político of El Quiché of being an ally of the Principales of Nebaj. According to the newspaper, the indigenous authority “owns the monopoly of mozos in order to sell thousands of jornales to all the coffee barons who can pay higher prices…and agree to leave every mozo who has a contract with them in peace [not to send them anywhere else], during the rest of the year. As a consequence, all mozos want to payoff their debts with less favored finqueros as soon as possible, so they can go to work only for these other fincas.”142 If true, these allegations indicate a political alliance between the jefe político and the Principales of Nebaj for the control of jornaleros. The government finally ruled against the ladinos. This is an important historical antecedent—and I ask the reader again not to forget it—because prior to the arrival of the EGP to the region, an important number of Ixil leaders had become contratistas, which turned them into enemies of the guerrillas, as we’ll see in chapter 6.

Nebaj’s Municipality remained a Municipalidad mixta for the years that followed, until President Ubico substituted the first and second mayors for new intendentes, in 1934 (intendentes were appointed by the jefe político).143 And judging by a series of subsequent press articles published by El Imparcial, Principales of Nebaj like Pedro Cobo, Gaspar Cedillo, and Diego Brito remained in control of jornaleros—via alliances with ladino jefes políticos and contratistas like Guillermo Samayoa144—until President Jorge Ubico abolished adelantos or debt-contracts in 1935, substituting them with harsher vagrancy laws that required all but the

---

142 “La Municipalidad de Nebaj no es grata a todo el pueblo,” El Imparcial, October 30, 1923, 1.

143 See “Ley Municipal de la República de Guatemala,” Recopilación de Leyes de la República de Guatemala, V.19, 1934. Intendentes and jefes políticos disappeared after 1945, with the Revolutionary Government’s reforms.

144 “La Guatemala Desconocida,” El Imparcial, January 13, 1927, 5
wealthiest Ixiles to work on state infrastructure for 100 to 150 days. The law established that all Ixiles that couldn’t prove they owned at least 3 manzanas (1 Manzana=6,961 squared meters) of coffee, sugarcane, tobacco, corn, wheat, or other vegetables; or did not have a finca contract for a similar period of time (100 days); would be categorized as vagrants and forced to serve on vialidad or sent to jail. Under President Ubico, the parameters upon which Ixil Principales were able to negotiate with ladino and governmental authorities, radically changed. Indeed, the political tension between the Principales of Nebaj, the Jefatura Política of El Quiché, and the jornaleros of the region, came to a violent end in June 21, 1936, when work inspectors arrived in Nebaj to explain the new vagrancy laws, and how to fill out their new registers and tarjetas de trabajo [workbooks]. The Principales called the people of Nebaj to oppose these new requirements, arguing that they were not vagos [vagrants]. In anger, they disarmed the soldiers accompanying the inspectors, exchanging insults and punching them in the face. A telegram was sent to General Daniel Corado—one of Ubico’s closest officials and then jefe politico of El Quiché—who came to Nebaj the day after with a platoon of 25 soldiers and a list of names. He imprisoned all the Principales and, early in the morning, ordered their execution, which took place behind Nebaj’s Church. Seven of them were killed under no clear charges. Once again, the Guatemalan state had proven that, when it comes to indigenous open challenges to the


146 Lincoln recorded testimonies of these events in his ethnographic research. Guatemalan historian Severo Martínez Peláez, was also able to interview surviving witnesses of the execution a few decades after Lincoln’s ethnographic research. It is interesting that Guatemala’s news papers did not covered the execution. See Lincoln, Ethnological Study, 68; Severo Martínez Peláez, Motines de Indios, (Mexico: Ediciones En Marcha, 1991), 341-343.

147 In 1945, the Revolutionary government discharged General Daniel Corado with no honors (dishonorable discharge), together with Ubico’s most loyal generals. They were accused of violating the Constitution in “order to keep in place a disgraceful dictatorship,” and of having killed many innocent citizens for no other reason than their disdain for the law. See Matilde González, Territorio, Actores Armados y Formación del Estado, (Guatemala: Cara Parens-URL, 2014), 128.
national law, the state was ready to use exemplary violence in order to re-affirm its sovereignty, something that reverberated during my fieldwork, in interviews where my interlocutors spoke about the Guatemalan army’s counterinsurgent violence during the civil war.

State-enforced finca-labor remained in effect until 1944, when vagrancy laws were abolished by the Revolutionary government; but even during the second half of the twentieth century, when small-scale peasant production became insufficient in the Ixil region, Ixiles had to look for a contratista to work in coffee, cotton, and sugarcane fincas to supplement their income. For mozos colonos, the reality of jornales did not change significantly. Again, only better off Ixiles—many of whom had become contratistas, money lenders, or petty commodity producers—did not need to look for finca contracts. But even Ixil traders and small shop owners who were able to avoid finca work, depended upon the cash flows that the finca economy had introduced in the region and neighboring towns. In fact, while conducting fieldwork in the region in the 1960s, Benjamin Colby and Pierre van den Berghe came to the conclusion that as many as 40% of the “able-bodied men” were working for fincas. Had they included children and women, who oftentimes accompanied these men (women and children were rarely recorded in workbooks or any other forms of bookkeeping), the numbers would surely have been higher. Debt was no longer “forced,” that is, legally instigated; but it remained in place as a fundamental mechanism for labor recruitment, thanks to aggravated forms of dispossession.

Disavowing a Revolutionary Past or How a Historical Victory was Forgotten

148 Lincoln, Ethnological Study, 87-101; Stoll, Between Two Armies, 37.

149 Colby and Van den Berghe, Ixil Country, 131.
It is in the context of the intensification of indebtedness via dispossession that Luis Arenas Barrera enters into the history of the Ixil region in general and the village Ilom in particular. As don Pedro recalled, after Lisandro Gordillo sold his fincas “then Luis Arenas came and another conflict began, because he started taking more land.” “Luis Arenas pushed the mojones [limits],” don Juan Laynez replied, “he got people tired. He didn’t shoot at anyone, like Lisandro Gordillo did, but people were afraid of him because he was always with his seguridad [security or bodyguards].” Indeed, don Bartolo—another Principal of Ilom—recalled that they had not been “capable of [fighting against] Luis Arenas.” Lisandro Gordillo may have been somehow defeated, but Luis Arenas proved to be a stronger adversary. No witchcraft performed against Arenas was mentioned during our conversations. I was somehow intrigued by this difference, because the archival document that brought me to Ilom was about a land dispute—it occurred in a period of time of which very few Ixiles talk—headed by the Principales Pablo Ijom Pacheco and Juan Caba against Arenas and the Tello brothers. The dispute started in 1948, four years after the overthrow of Guatemala’s dictator Jorge Ubico by an urban revolutionary movement that promised a transformation of the country in favor of the Guatemalan majorities; and it was made under a Constitutional precept that assigned a social utility to property, which, under special circumstances, made land expropriations possible.

In all the letters signed by Ijom Pacheco, the dispute is carefully referred to as a “recuperación [recovery or repossession] of the lands of Ilom, Chel, and Sotzil.”150 Pablo Ijom and Juan Caba requested the Guatemalan congress expropriate via purchase 65 caballerías of land that affected fincas La Perla, Santa Delfina, Estrella Polar, and San Joaquín. In an

150 AGCA, ST, Decreto 900, Pqt. 1, Exp. 3, “Finca La Perla y Anexos.”
unprecedented decision, the parliament approved the inclusion of 25,000 quetzales into the government’s budget of 1949 to cover this transaction. But again and again, both Luis Arenas and the Tellos refused to sell their lands. They claimed that their fincas had natural resources of great value and that they were already cultivated, which made the transaction unfavorable to them. An important proportion of these fincas was rented to the people of Ilom, Chel, and Sotzil, which in effect meant that they were the ones cultivating the property. Thus, for the purposes of the expropriation, these fincas were considered unproductive. Arenas and the Tellos did not agree with or follow the Congress’ resolution. The governor of El Quiché even recommended the purchase of “Las Amelias”—a finca owned by Segundo Ardavin—instead of the lands the Ixiles wanted, in order to avoid further conflicts with Arenas and the Tello brothers; but Pablo Ijom and the other Principales refused the offer claiming that “Ardavin’s lands were too far away and of poor quality. Furthermore, these lands are the subject of a legal dispute with the Municipalities of Nebaj and Santa Eulalia.” Indeed, the dispute involving “Las Amelias” was related to the lands of Las Pilas, which were granted by Estrada Cabrera in the early twentieth century to the Militia of Momostenango.

In 1949 the Ministry of Gobernación approved the purchase after the completion of the surveyor’s measurements. Alfonso Carrillo—the topographer—corroborated the legitimacy of the purchase calling it an act of “restitution” which, in the case of Chajul, was urgent insofar as “they clearly have the legal rights to the land, even more so if one considers that this restitution would be conferred by the purchase of land that was legally theirs.” He did not directly accuse

151 AGCA, “Finca La Perla y Anexos.”
152 AGCA, “Finca La Perla y Anexos.”
153 AGCA, “Finca La Perla y Anexos.”
Luis Arenas or the Tellos, but leaves no doubt that the Chajules had been illegally dispossessed of their lands. The purchase was yet again delayed, we infer in the documents, because of the maneuvers of Luis Arenas. In June 1950, the Alcaldes of Ilom, together with the Municipality of Chajul, conducted an inspection over the limits of finca Santa Delfina, in an effort to put more pressure on their case. In their report they argued that “the fence of Mr. Arenas” was taking the lands and cultivated plots of 28 Ilomenses. It also showed how the gates of finca Santa Delfina were blocking the access to the river where women washed clothes and collected water. Matías Laynez, don Juan Laynez’ father, was among the 28 Ilomenses who had lost their houses and cultivated plots to Luis Arenas.154

The report and municipal minutes—later transcribed by the secretary of Chajul’s Municipality and added to a file sent to the Guatemalan congress—finishes as follows: “All the houses, lands, and coffee mentioned before are now inside the fences of Mr. Arenas which he has appropriated because he does not allow their owners to harvest them. There is fencing in the north and south, where he now has cattle, leaving the inhabitants of Ilom completely aorralados [trapped or cornered] and without a place to cultivate. Mister Arenas does not allow people to use the lands without paying rent for plots that, in right, belong to the denunciantes [the people claiming the lands] since times immemorial, being obliged to rent them instead.”155

It is difficult to corroborate, although not impossible to believe, that Luis Arenas’ fencing was a response to the Ilomenses land claim. What we can infer is that he was, on the one hand, targeting the material means (coffee) that may have served to finance the costly expenses of

154 AGCA, “Finca La Perla y Anexos.”
155 AGCA, “Finca La Perla y Anexos.”
topographers, lawyers, and trips to Guatemala City; and on the other, that “fencing” was, in fact, a form of capture to which the people of Ilom was being subjected, a form of subjection in which they were obliged to pay (rent) for what was already theirs (the land). This form of pure obligation resonates with the conclusions of Alfonso Carrillo—the appointed topographer—who called the expropriation of Luis Arenas’ lands a “restitution,” insofar as the state was the instance supposed to pay for the lands, not the people of Ilom. Remarkably, although I’m afraid he was not conscious of it, he was admitting that the Guatemalan state was in debt with the Ilomenses. Remarkably too, in acknowledging this, Luis Arenas Barrera emerged as the figure of the unproductive and anti-utilitarian excess that limited not only the Guatemalan state but the indigenous communities.

Too much was at stake. In spite of all this unprecedented recognition—or perhaps because of it—the expropriation was delayed. By 1953, under Arbenz’ presidency, an agrarian reform was passed opening up another possibility for the Ilomenses to re-introduce their claim. Through decree 900, the expropriation was put into motion yet again. If one believes in historical tendencies, it may have been expected that Luis Arenas’ multiple revocatorias [appeals] proved effective; but they were dismissed. In Guatemala’s political scene, specially among finqueros, Arenas had gained notoriety for his anti-Communist intransigence and opposition to the revolutionary government of Juan José Arevalo (1945-1951). In fact, in 1952, he was elected diputado (representative) for the department of Guatemala under the Party of Anti-Communist Unity (PUA), becoming thus a member of the minority opposition to Arbenz’ government. This

---

group of anti-communists *diputados* was known as the “Twelve Apostles.”

nonetheless, was not the only member of government facing land claims in favor of organized Ixiles.

At least two claims were presented against Nicolás Brol, owner of *finca* “San Francisco” and *Ministro de Agricultura* [Secretary of Agriculture] at the time. Brol was a founder of the National Integrity Party (PIN) which launched Arbenz’ candidacy in 1950. Many *finqueros* saw in Brol a politician that would protect their interests, which may explain why he and PIN remained reluctant about decree 900 during its negotiation (1952-1953).

From what we know, Carlos Manuel Pellecer—a member of the Guatemalan Communist Party and an rural organizer—threatened to expose and denounce all the “labor abuses” the Ixiles were subjected to at Brol’s finca. It is said that he even threatened a strike. One could infer that it was only after Pellecer’s pressure that PIN decided to support the agrarian reform. Indeed, in 1953, the Peasant Unity of Cotzal claimed lands under decree 900 against the Brols. Almost simultaneously, the *mozos colonos* of *finca* San Francisco started another claim. Both groups were competing for lands of the same *finca*; and, not surprisingly—since the *mozos colonos* were

---


159 Handy, *Revolution in the Countryside*, 87.


161 Handy, *Revolution in the Countryside*, 87.

162 AGCA, ST, Decreto 900, Quiche, Pqt. 1, Exp. 1 “Finca San Francisco y Anexos.”

163 AGCA, “Finca San Francisco y Anexos.”
already renting and living in San Francisco—the Brols agreed to concede lands to this second group. The Departmental Agrarian Committee approved the *mozos colonos*’ claim, overruling the Peasant Unity of Cotzal’s. Its president, Rosendo Girón, protested, arguing that the *colonos* had been mislead by the Brols, and that the *finca* had over 100 *caballerías* of unproductive lands that could be claimed by both groups. But the Agrarian Committee did not change its resolution.

Over 85 *caballerías* of land were expropriated in favor of the *mozos colonos* of *finca* San Francisco; and over 52 *caballerías* were expropriated from Luis Arenas in favor of Pablo Ijom and the people of Ilam, Stool, and Chel.

Pablo Ijom Pacheco, in fact, was the president of the Local Agrarian Committee that expropriated La Perla and Santa Delfina. This puts him in a bottom-up state-led institutional structure through which land claims were carried out, revised, and approved (or disapproved).

He and his comrades seem to have been outstanding leaders with a vast knowledge of the

---

164 AGCA, “Finca San Francisco y Anexos.”

165 “Negotiating” with the *mozos* was a better option for the Brols, insofar as *mozos* were subjected to permanent vigilance and control in the vast majority of *fincas* in Guatemala; and *finca* “San Francisco” was no exception. I didn’t find documentation about Rosendo Giron’s organization, but given the fact that it was a formally and legally constituted Peasant Unity, it must have been part of a regional—if not national—union platform. For the Brols this may have been the least desirable option, not only because they could have lost lands they did not want to lose, but also because they would have been dealing with the union movement within their own finca. It is true that they could have rejected all the expropriations against them, but the fact that they didn’t do it—like Luis Arenas Barrera did—suggests that they didn’t want to lose their influence in the Guatemalan government, and also gives credit to Rosendo Giron’s claim that *finca* “San Francisco” had enough unproductive land for both the *mozos* and the Peasant Unity of Cotzal. In other words, to give the lands that the *mozos* were already using in addition to other sections they would decide upon, was their best choice. Following Rosendo Giron’s argument, it has been suggested that the Brols manipulated the *mozos colonos* of San Francisco. To date, this argument resonates with a generalized representation of the *mozos* as being loyal to the *fingueros*, something I heard more than once during my stay in the region. The argument is complicated because it disregards the mechanisms of control and the sort of survival bind (if they are kicked out of the *finca* they have nowhere else to go) these *colonos* were subjected to. See Elliot, “History of Land,” 12.

166 There was another claim of Ixiles from Nebaj against Luis Arenas over the lands of Las Pilas, compromising 17 *caballerías* of *finca* Santa Delfina. These lands were also part of Estrada Cabrera’s gift to the militia of Momostenango. In this regard, see AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, Sig. A, Exp. 301, “La Perla y Santa Delfina.” Also, AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, Pqt. 1, Exp. 3, “Finca La Perla y Anexos;” Elliot, “History of Land,” 13.

167 Under decree 900, land claims were first presented in the Local Agrarian Committee (CAL), later transferred to a Departmental Agrarian Committee (CAD), to be finally revised and approved by the National Agrarian Department (DAN). The DAN was, on its part, advised by a National Agrarian Council (CAL). For a detailed elaboration on Decree 900, see Handy, *Revolution in the Countryside*, 78-110; Gliejeses, *Shattered Hope*, 148-170.
political and legal intricacies of Guatemala’s reality. “I do remember him,” don Bartolo recalled in 2015, “because he used to come here to give talks to the people. Pablo Ijom was a short person. We used to say in our language “Pap Xah is coming!” People cooked for him, and served him some guaro [booze], because he liked to have a drink. There was another one, Juan Caba, he was the one who ruled in town. In our language we called him Xum Cap. He was the king here!

Whether a big or small problem with justice, he always intervened. His nickname was Sr. Artículo [Mr. Article]. Juan Artículo, he was the boss, he had a beard, grey was his hair.” Don Bernal—another Prinicipal of Ilom—explained later why they nicknamed him Artículo: “It was because of his laws, ‘the book says in Article 71…’ he used to say. He was the cabecilla [leader] of the village, he was the boss, the head of the village.” Both Pablo Ijom and Juan Caba enjoyed great respect in their village; and they may have also been part of the better-off families of Ilom.

“My father used to say,” don Pedro told us, “that only those who had good money and good cattle got into the fight; those who had around 30 cows, they got into the fight.” I didn’t find documents of meetings between these Principales and other union leaders involved in the agrarian reform; but it isn’t difficult to come to the conclusion that they were part of a larger national mobilization. Thus, after almost 50 years of fighting to recuperate their lands, the people of Ilom had finally succeeded.\footnote{There were multiple land claims under decree 900 in Nebaj, Chajul, and Cotzal; and the majority involved lands that had been disputed by Ixil Municipalities since the late nineteenth century. These claims invariably involved lands granted to ladino militia men in the early twentieth century. For instance, Segundo Ardavin’s finca, Las Amelias, the same finca that Pablo Ijom and the people of Ilom rejected in 1948, was expropriated in 1953 in favor of Ixiles of Nebaj. Fincas Estrella Polar and San Joaquín—owned by the Tello Brothers; San Felipe Chenla—owned by the Herreras—; and Las Pilas—owned by the heirs of Lisandro Gordillo—were claimed and/or expropriated. There were also other claims against local ladinos and indigenous small-owners that, most of the times, were overruled. In the latter cases, it is interesting that local and familial conflicts—conflicts around inheritances, for instance—were mobilized. This is evident in the claim against the heirs of Juan Sajic and his finca Asich. In AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, Pqt.15, Exp.3, “Asich y Varias Mas.” See also AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, Pqt.4 , Exp.2, “San Joaquin y Anexos”; AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, Pqt.2 Exp.5, “Estrella Polar”; AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, Pqt.2, Exp.11, “San Felipe Chemla;” AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, Pqt.4, Exp.5, “Las Pilas;” AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, “Las Amelias.”}
But in June 27, 1954, after a CIA backed *coup d’état*, Arbenz was forced into exile and the agrarian reform was reversed. In January, Arbenz’ government had denounced the CIA’s operation (PBSUCCESS) and accused “a congressman of the opposition” of being involved in a plot against him. Even though his name was never mentioned, rumors spread that Luis Arenas was the main suspect. He denied all the accusations and, in February 25, asked for asylum at El Salvador’s embassy. Arbenz’ government offered Arenas all political guarantees but he replied that the president’s intention was to imprison him. El Salvador’s ambassador did not grant him asylum (on the basis that he wasn’t being persecuted), but Luis Arenas did receive a visa and fled to El Salvador. CIA declassified documents show that Luis Arenas had told a US embassy’s official, in November 1953, that he already had a “scheme to overthrow Arbenz.” Although not taken seriously by US officials, Arenas was seen as part of the anti-Communist and anti-governmental opposition that was conspiring against Arbenz and would support the *coup*.

The implications at the local level are easy to imagine. By 1955, as part of the process to undo Decree 900, the members of the Local Agrarian Committees of Nebaj, Cotzal, and Chajul were called to testify: some said their names had been included in land claims without their consent, others gave names and accused outside leaders, and the rest were basically left with no other option than to agree with the expropriations’ reversal. Apparently, the latter was the case of Juan Caba and Pablo Ijom. To my knowledge, no violent purges are recorded in the Ixil region.


170 “Pese a Garantías se Niega a Salir”, *La Hora*, February 27, 1954, 1.


173 AGCA, “Finca La Perla y Anexos.”
during the counter-revolution, but it isn’t difficult to conclude that Pablo Ijom Pacheco and Juan Caba had been marked as pro-communist indigenous leaders, and by extension, the people of Ilom, Sotzil, and Chel.

All the lands affected by the agrarian reform were given back to Luis Arenas; and upon the request of some “prominent people,” the counter-revolutionary government did the same with the Brols. After his return to Guatemala, Arenas worked for subsequent military governments and became a member of the anti-communist party MLN (National Liberation Movement) also known for being the sponsor of death squads during the civil war. In June 1958, Clemente Marroquín Rojas—a well known conservative journalist—indirectly suggested that Luis Arenas was trying to commit fraud against the Institute for the Promotion of Production (INFOP)—to which he owed 60,000 quetzales—requesting money to cultivate corn in lands he owned in Ixcán, El Quiché, when in fact he wanted the money to cancel multiple loans he had acquired with American Banks. Although Arenas denied the allegations, he did acknowledge his financial troubles. This is consistent with the fact that, by October 1962, finca La Perla had reverted to the Credit and Loan Bank, to be recuperated again in 1971 by Arenas’ sons. The Ilomenses kept fighting to recover the rights to their lands until the beginning of the civil war, in the early 70s, but with limited results. In 1995 they tried once again and, currently, they have appealed to Guatemala’s Constitutional Court to regain their rights.

174 Handy, Revolution in the Countryside, 200.


177 I was told that other Principales headed by a local ladino (himself a principal) called Victoriano Escobedo were able to buy lands (near 2 caballerías) from the heirs of the Tello brothers and Lisandro Gordillo, in a finca called “Berdú.” As a matter of fact, Victoriano Escobedo was detained and killed by the army in the early 1980s.
But very few Ixiles I met with during my fieldwork recalled their political victory against the most powerful *finqueros* of the region in 1953—one Ixil intellectual even told me that “the revolution did not happen in the region”—despite its subsequent reversal. Probably because of this, Ixiles do not talk about it; however, I believe this is the effect of the civil war. Indeed, as mentioned before, in its first public action, the EGP executed Luis Arenas in June 1975; other *finqueros*, including Enrique Brol, owner of *finca* San Francisco, and many other *contratistas*, would be executed by the guerrillas between 1976 and 1981. When the Guatemalan army carried out its scorched earth campaign in early 1982, it targeted Ixil communities that had been involved in political struggles against these *finqueros*. Disavowing a revolutionary past is thus indicative of how, in the present moment, when Ixiles are pursuing legal justice in cases of human rights violations during the war, Ixil communities are allowed to speak and be heard only as victims of an army that projected a revolutionary enemy as the worst of evils, “justifying” thus the perpetration of hundreds of massacres. In fact, among many others, the army perpetrated massacres in Ilom, Chel, and Sotzil, in 1982. This is, however, the subject of chapter 6.

**Conclusions**

Contrary to what happened in other regions of the country, like Guatemala’s piedmont or the Verapáces, Ixil communities of Nebaj, Cotzal, and Chajul were able to retain an important number of their communal lands. It is equally true, nonetheless, that they lost an important proportion of their ancestral *ejidos*, especially in the town of San Juan Cotzal, to ladino and foreign *finqueros*. It is this peculiarity that exacerbated the political disputes between Ixil
communities and the *finqueros* of the region, on the one hand, and between Ixil communities themselves on the other. And as I have argued in this chapter, these land disputes were all framed under the understanding that communal lands are ancestral patrimonies, not only because they represent the material bases of the Ixil culture, but because they are an integral part of their ways of survival, that is, Ixil forms of living, dying, and being in the afterlife. I have also argued—and this will become clearer in chapter 2—that Ixil ancestrality is, in itself, determined by the forms in which the Ixil society differentiates itself, including their political conflicts, struggles for power, and social stratification. In other words, and this is why their historical depth is important, land disputes in the region were political from beginning to end.

State violence was not an exception during the years when *finca* owners and the *jornal* arrived, but rather a permanent possibility. And as shown by the cases of Ilom (1924) and Nebaj (1936), it was carried out in an exemplary manner, i.e., as an expression of pure sovereignty: it was a form of violence exerted under no clear charges and as a response to events in which the state’s authority had been challenged by indigenous authorities who enjoyed the support of their communities. During our conversation about the civil war, these were important antecedents for all of my interlocutors, despite the fact that the violence the Guatemalan army perpetrated during the war exceeded its own antecedents, and cannot be equated with the forms of originary accumulation that we observed in this chapter. However, it is undeniable that, together with its own forms of violence, the *finca* economy brought to the region new figures of power—like the *contratista*—and new forms of wealth—accumulated via money lending and indebtedness—that reshaped Ixil society and some of its central political institutions—like the Municipality—in ways that would prove to be definitive during the civil war. In fact, contrary to what happened in
other regions, where finca encroachment and indigenous communal lands’ expropriation occurred during the second half of the nineteenth century, this happened in the Ixil region between the 1920s and 1930s. Coffee and sugar cane fincas, together with fincas de mozos, redefined the landscape of the region and came to instigate and amplify personal, social, and political grievances that, as I hope to show in chapter 6, were sucked up by the dynamics of insurgent and counterinsurgent violence during the civil war.
Chapter 2: On Ixil Proper Naming, Ancestrality, Patronymics, Traces

The phrase ‘proper name’ signifies a classification, an institution carrying the trace of history, into which a certain sort of sign is made to fit. Thus the proper name, as soon as it is understood as such, is no longer fully unique to the holder. The proper name is always already common by virtue of belonging to the category ‘proper.’ It is always already under erasure. Gayatri Spivak

Introduction

We have seen in the past chapter that the most important political disputes in the Ixil region occurred around claims over ancestral lands and ejidos that were expropriated by the state and acquired by private ladino and foreign finqueros that arrived in the region towards the end of the nineteenth century. These disputes also instigated inter-communitarian conflicts that increasingly and permanently recurred to the power of the written letter of the state to arbitrate and decide them. In the Ixil region, the finca economy redefined the political landscape by bringing into the scene new figures of power (finca recruiters or contratistas), new forms of accumulating wealth (money lending and indigenous indebtedness), and reshaping older forms of institutional power (municipalities). This new landscape would constitute the background upon which the conditions of possibility for the development of the civil war developed.

In this chapter, I turn to Ixil ancestrality as expressed in the Ixil institutions of proper naming. I explore in detail the signifying effects of proper naming among the Ixiles of Guatemala, which, as mentioned in the general introduction, are Ixil language speakers who live in the towns of San Juan Cotzal, San Gaspar Chajul, and Santa María Nebaj, in the department of El Quiché, where I conducted the majority of my ethnographic research. I pay special attention
to two specific but interrelated forms of Ixil proper naming, one called Ch'exel [namesake] whose function is to institute generational/ancestral relationships between older and younger kin, and more broadly, between the dead and the living; and the use of Ixil patronymics, which were imposed onto indigenous communities of Guatemala during the Colony (seventeenth through nineteenth century) but were gradually assimilated within forms of Ixil patrilocal descent. My discussion is based on my ethnographic annotations, archival documentation, and other ethnographic reports—when available—about the practices of proper naming among indigenous pueblos of the Guatemalan western highlands, focussing on Ixil proper naming.

My aim in this chapter is to provide an analysis of the fundamental effects of signification of what I call, borrowing from Lisa Stevenson’s ethnographic work, a life-and-afterlife-of-the-name among the Ixiles of Guatemala. In doing so, I hope to lay a solid ground before moving my discussion to the politics of anonymity—and the responses of the Guatemalan state—during the civil war, in order to have a better sense of what was at stake during those years (1962-1996) in the Ixil region, where, according to Guatemala's Truth Commission, genocidal acts were perpetrated by the Guatemalan army between 1981 and 1983. This will be the subject matter of subsequent chapters, specially chapters 3, 4, and 5.

*The Politics of a Signature or what Makes an Ixil Laugh*

I met don Concepción Santay in 2013, amid a long conflict with ENEL Green Power, a multinational energy corporation that, after reaching an agreement with San Juan Cotzal’s

---

Lisa Stevenson, *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic*, (Berkeley: University of California Press).
Municipality, built one of the largest hydroelectric projects in Guatemala. Don Concepción, together with other Ixil ancestral authorities, headed a struggle against ENEL from 2010 to 2014, based on their claim that their communities had not been previously consulted. Many battles have been won by Ixil authorities against multinational corporations; this one, despite its partial victories, was lost.\textsuperscript{179} I was not primarily interested in political conflicts around natural resources and indigenous territoriality when I met don Concepción—I was interested in Guatemala’s civil war and Genocide—but the way in which these indigenous ancestral authorities were portrayed by Guatemala’s media, private sector, and the Guatemalan state was so reminiscent of colonial racism (they were represented as lazy, anti-national, resentful, and prone to rebellion) that it offered a point of entry to my own research.

The first time I talked to don Concepción, in the Ixil community of Tupoj, he repeatedly referred to José Perez Chen, Cotzal’s Mayor, as the person who could have prevented the conflict but, instead, had sided with ENEL’s representatives and the Brols, a family of finqueros or plantation owners of Italian descent and owners of finca “San Francisco,” the largest and oldest coffee plantation in Cotzal. The Brols had rented lands to Enel for over US$ 3 million and had become beneficiaries with 8.5% of shares in the Palo Viejo dam project.\textsuperscript{180} There is, indeed, a relatively long history of conflicts around Cotzal’s Municipality or Alcaldía. I knew at the time that prior to the arrival of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) to the region, in 1973, a bitter conflict between Gaspar Perez or Kaxh Pi, who was elected Cotzal’s Mayor in the late 1960s,

---

\textsuperscript{179} For a detailed description and analysis of these struggles, see: Giovanni Batz, “The Fourth Invasion: Development, Ixil-Maya Resistance, and the Struggle against Mega-projects in Guatemala,” (Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2017), 103-143.

and his political adversaries, predetermined the people’s animosity against the Guatemalan army
and their support for the guerrillas. So I asked don Concepción if he and the other ancestral
authorities hadn’t thought of supporting someone for the next election. “I’ve been thinking about
that lately,” he told me, “we need to participate in the municipal elections. My father was elected
Mayor when I was 4 years old [1970],” he continued, “he didn’t even know how to read! But he
learned how to write his name and how to sign documents, because the law said that you needed
to know how to read and write in Spanish to be the Alcalde [Mayor].”

I would later discover that Gregorio Santay Ajanel, don Concepción’s father, never
learned how to read and write in Spanish; yet, he did learn how to sign. How many things could
one say about this graphematic inscription performed under circumstances of generalized rural
illiteracy? And how to listen to don Concepción’s tone and decision to share with me the story of
his father’s signature among many other events he could have chosen from? There is, of course,
a certain enjoyment behind the story of his father’s signature. After all, he challenged and, in
many ways defeated, a legal dispensation that was designed to exclude the majority of
indigenous people from electoral politics. But there is also pride. “He didn’t know how to read
but he was very smart,” don Concepción insisted, as if recognizing that the act of learning how to
sign while being illiterate was, in itself, his father’s true signature, the mark of his singularity or
his signature piece, using Peggy Kamuf’s words.181 A double signature, one could say: the
grapheme and the political act. Indeed, as I will try to show in the next chapter, this act of
doubling the proper name and its putative “guarantee” of authenticity, would accompany the
history of a war that was fought under conditions of pseudonymity and anonymity in Guatemala,

as we shall also see in chapter 4.

Let me, for the moment, return to “the signature.” In his critique of Austin’s theory of speech acts, Jacques Derrida argues that in order to function as a performative act, a signature needs to be *iterable* and, thus, to have an imitable form. This condition, which Derrida calls *citationality*, implies that a signature “must be able to detach itself from the present and singular intention of its production” and the context in which it is produced. This radical separation or *spacing* of authorship and its guarantees, both in terms of the signatory's presence and her/his intentionality, carries within itself the possibility of the disruption of the protocols of authority and code that all performativity requires. As argued in the general introduction, in Austin’s theory, citationality functions as a means for the repetition of the conditions that make the performative possible, whereas for Derrida, it also carries within itself the conditions for the performative’s undoing.

In the story of don Concepción’s father, signing appears, primarily, as a condition and prerogative of the protocols of the nation-state’s language and its demand of literacy. Only those who could read and write in Spanish were allowed to sign, to authenticate their proper names, and to perform the separation that Derrida speaks of. Illiteracy is, in this regard, equivalent to an imputed incapacity to perform a distinction between inscription and author, referent and sign, word and world. Don Concepción's story, nonetheless, is one about mastery, even if its form of expression is one of a minimal graphematic mark. By virtue of learning how to sign, his father was able to mark the documents of the state as an illiterate, giving his name and signature to be

---


read, in his absence. Moreover, for don Concepción, the signature he speaks of is both the mark of a personal tragedy and a form of survival: Gregorio Santay Ajanel, his father, was disappeared by the Guatemalan Army in 1976.

Yet, there is also laughter. "When my father won the Alcaldía," he told me when I came back to Cotzal in 2015, "a school teacher, don Tono, taught him how to sign, they met every night. But los Kaxh Pi, the Pérez [his political adversaries] denounced him; they said, 'this person is illiterate, how can he be our Alcalde?' A commission came from Guatemala City to corroborate the claim against my father:

'Are you Gregorio Santay,' they asked,

'Yes, I am,'

'Please read this paper,' and he read.

'The elected person can read, there is no lie in here,' they said and left.

But it wasn't my father the person who showed up for the test; it was my uncle, Concepción, mi Tuko or Ch’exel [namesake], and he did know how to read!" Don Concepción laughed while he recalled his father‘s signature piece.

Was this the story of a lie, as the agents of the Guatemalan government seemed to suggest? Was don Concepción laughing because his father evaded state policing? That Gregorio Santay couldn’t read and write in Spanish was not a secret to anyone in Cotzal, neither to his political allies (don Tono, the school teacher) nor to his adversaries (the Perez family, which were better off Ixiles and allies of the Brols). They all knew, they were not deceived. There was no lie in there. There was, nonetheless, stupidity in the act of state policing; sometimes that is laughable, but most of the time it is not. There is also the fact that, in a country where more than
20 languages are spoken and an overwhelming majority of indigenous people were illiterate, the electoral law don Concepción refers to was exclusionary, anti-democratic, and unjust. Certainly, his father rendered that law ineffective; and Don Concepción’s laughter may have been a form of recognition and admiration for his father’s ingenious political tactic. Yet, the real reason behind his laughter, I think, is that he imagined the embarrassment of his father’s political adversaries. They were ridiculed and doubly defeated: displaced twice from that which allowed them to guarantee the political authentication of their names—the law of the state—by someone who couldn’t read and write in Spanish. Don Concepción’s laughter was thus one of vindication: his father got the last laugh. But one knows, or at least one can imagine, that such embarrassment can easily turn into hatred.

As we’ll see in chapter 6, in the early 1970s, after the arrival of the EGP to the Ixil region, a military post was established on lands owned by the Pérezes with their consent; and a military base was built in finca “San Francisco,” owned, as mentioned in Chapter 1, by the Brol family. In June 1976, as he walked towards Santa María Nebaj, don Concepción’s father was abducted and subsequently disappeared by the army; a year before, his uncle, the person he was named after, his Tuko or Ch’exel, was also disappeared in Guatemala City. The EGP would execute 5 members of the Perez family between May and December of 1976; and in January 1979, the guerrillas killed Enrique Brol. Violence at this moment in the civil war—both the Army’s campaign of selective killings and forced disappearances, and the guerrillas’ revolutionary violence and executions—was perpetrated against specific individuals, usually

---

after the circulation of lists with the names of suspected subjects and a previous cycle of accusations. It was the prelude to massive violence, which would arise in the form of a war against anonymity and its anonymous subjects.

*The Economy of a Proper Name: Ch’exel, Ancestrality, and the Trace of a Trace*

“So you bear the name of your uncle,” I asked don Concepción in one of our conversations. “Yes, he is my Tuko,” he replied. “The word we use in Ixil is Ch’exel,” don Concepción continued, “a Ch’exel is like a *reemplazo* [replacement], it is like having an inheritance so the name remains and its history isn’t forgotten. The Ch’exel continues and keeps that history alive.” In Ixil, the noun Ch’exel (Ch’e’x in Chajul) is related to the verb Ch’ex, which means to borrow, to exchange, and to replace. The noun itself, as don Concepción mentioned, has the meaning of ‘replacement’ or ‘substitute.’ As a general rule, it is customary among Ixiles to receive the name of grandparents or great-uncles/aunts, but other respected kin may also transmit their names, as in don Concepción’s case. During my fieldwork, in virtually all interactions I could observe, namesakes addressed each other with the noun Ch’exel in a reciprocal manner. And according to anthropologists Benjamin Colby and Lore Colby, “there are often close ties between the two family members joined by the Ch’exel relationship. The older person will pay special attention to his younger namesake while he grows up. After the death of the older person the namesake is expected to remember the departed Ch’exel in prayers and

---

185 Children may also be named after patron saints and, nowadays, more “americanized” names are not rare, but the institution of namesakes and the relevance of grandparents’ names remain the general pattern.
rituals.” Other Ixiles I talked to acknowledged that namesakes share personal traits like moods, personalities, and bodily resemblances.

Don Concepción’s grandfather, nonetheless, was a K’iche’ from Momostenango who had come to the Ixil region with his family (including don Concepción’s then very young uncle) in the early 1920s to work as a permanent resident or colono for a coffee finca. So I asked him if, among the K’iche’, having a namesake was as important as it is for Ixiles. “Yes,” he emphatically replied, “in K’iche’ the word is even similar, is K’e’x (or K’axél).” In his ethnography about the K’iche’ town of San Antonio Ilotenango, Ricardo Falla reported that it is the costume for children to be named after grandparents or great-uncles/aunts, “then, the grandparent says of his grandson [or granddaughter] that he’s his C’axel or substitute.” For his part, James L. Mondloch, who conducted extensive fieldwork among the K’iche’ of Nahualá and Ixtahuacán, reports that when children are named, grandparents say “it makes no difference if I die, I now have a replacement,” or “my person will never be forgotten, I now have a replacement.” Other anthropologists have reported a similar pattern of naming among the K’ackchiquel, Tzutujil, and Q’anjob’al of Guatemala.

Let me briefly consider the implications of the act of substitution or replacement above

---


187 Ricardo Falla, Quiché Rebelde. Estudio de un movimiento de conversión religiosa, rebelde a las creencias tradicionales, en San Antonio Ilotenango, Quiché (1948-1970), (Guatemala: USAC, 1978), 104.


mentioned, by virtue of which the existence of the “I” and the “person” of the older namesake is remembered and acquires an afterlife. According to Émile Benveniste, subjectivity emerges when “I” or the speaking subject, utters the linguistic instance “I.” As he states, “ego” is he who says “ego” [Est “ego” qui dit “ego”]. In Benveniste’s theory, in the allocution or discursive instance in which the subject utters “I,” he addresses a “you” which, in return, identifies the “I” as a “you.” In this dialogical relation, the splitting of the speaking subject (the “I” who says “I”) is co-constitutive of the recognition between the “I” and “you.” For Benveniste, this is a reciprocal and self-referential situation, i.e., it does not describe or predicate any objective state of things outside the discursive instance itself. It is rather, constitutive of the emergence of intersubjectivity and, more importantly, of the pronominal person. Contrary to the I/you relation, the domain of the “third person” is one that allows objective predications that escape the condition of personhood: the “third person” is, in this regard, a non-person.

Following Benveniste I argue that, among the Ixiles (and K’iches’), the institution of naming called Che’xel or C’axel enables the “I” of the ancestor to retain his/her presence while absent, in the form of a substitution. Reciprocal allocutions where the namesake’s “I” addresses and responds to a “you” are discursive instances in which the ancestor is personified or subjectivized, in Benveniste’s sense. This is why, as mentioned before, it is expected the younger Che’xel will resemble the personality of his/her “old one:” the older Ch’exel or (not-yet) ancestor functions as a mirror in the formation of the “I” of the one who inherits the name.

---


191 This is exemplified by the allocution “I promise,” which includes both the subject of the utterance and the pronominal person “I” within the discursive situation of a promise; whereas “He promises” is rather a descriptive utterance which refers to someone promising something outside the utterance itself.
which, by the same token, will personify or subjectivize his Ch’exel after his/her passing, constituting thus what Jacques Lacan identifies as an Imaginary tie. Moreover, as an effect of this Imaginary tie, responding to and in one's name—which is always already the name of other—is equivalent to what Althusser understands as interpellation. Accordingly, the one who receives the name is expected to conform to the personality of the older Che’xel and, as a consequence, he/she learns to master an image of him/herself within a reciprocal relationship that is usually intimate and close, as the Colbys reported and I corroborated during my fieldwork and other visits to the region.

Indeed, for all the people I met during my stay in the Ixil region, the figure of and the relationship with grandparents, great-uncles/aunts, and the ancestors was fundamental. One morning I ran into Maria, the sister of a dear and brilliant Ixil student I met at the Ixil University, as she was walking and carrying her baby daughter in a rebozo [traditional shawl]. I asked her what was her daughter’s name, to which she responded “Feliciana.” “Is that the name of her grandmother?” I asked her back; “Yes,” she said, before adding with a certain ironic humbleness,

---


194 In her ethnography on the Kakchickel town of San Andrés Semetabaj, one of Kay Warren’s informants put it as follows: “So that the child might be an Indian, he is dressed like his grandfather and many [people] use the name of the grandfather or father for him so that the child will be like them, a pure Indian. They teach him only lengua [the town specific Indian dialect] and say to him, ‘We have given you the name of your grandfather because he was an excellent person. As you look like him, we want you to be the same as he was. You will be a brave Indian and you should behave well as your grandfather did.’ This is the form of transmission, telling him that he is of the race of his grandfather who was brave and correct.” Warren, Symbolism of Subordination, 57.
“here I’m also carrying the grandmother!” James Mondloch reported that, among the K’iche’ of Nahualá and Ixtahuacán, it was common for namesakes to address members of their close family with the same kinship terms (for instance, a boy who shares the name with his grandfather would call his grandmother “my wife;” and she would call the boy “my husband”), re-affirming thus the deep Imaginary bond and similitude between them. Robert Carlsen and Matin Pretchel corroborated Mondloch’s findings in their own work among the Tzutujiles of Santiago Atitlán, and Edward Fisher did the same in his work on the Kackchiquel of Tecpán. My encounter with Maria does not contradict Mondloch’s findings; although I wasn’t able to corroborate during my fieldwork, in a generalized or typical manner, Mondloch's reports about the K’iche’ of Nahualá and Ixtahuacán. Yet, what it does confirm is the bodily and psychic connection between namesakes and their close kin, not only because of the affective weight that Maria was carrying—both literally and metaphorically—but also because, as we’ll see later, failure to act according to the ancestors' ways may translate into misfortune, sickness, and at times, death.

But before moving my discussion to the Symbolic and Real effects of Ixil proper naming, let me remark that becoming a Che’xel confers a form of durability to the speaking subject's name that survives his/her bearer in the afterlife, to the extent that, not being able to remain present while absent in the form of a replacement (namesake), is tantamount to becoming a non-person after passing. In other words, a form of life and afterlife is enabled and guaranteed by the Che’xel relationship. The one who receives the name is expected to act not only in her/his

195 According to Mondloch, this “fictive kinship” form of address would prevail during all childhood, and later, it would be dropped off as the child enters into adulthood. Although not every family follows the same rules, he did elaborate a general typology of forms of address among namesakes’ families. See Mondloch, “K’e’s,” 13.


197 Fisher, Cultural Logics, 169.
name but also in the name of or in place of the one whose name she/he has inherited. This is a relationship marked by an intergenerational form of care that is primarily sustained by the namesakes’ special attention/affection with each other, and prolonged in the form of prayers to the older Che’xel after his/her death. It is understood, then, that when a child receives a name it does so in anticipation of and after the passing of a kin member. The mark of the child’s singularity retains that of the departed: it simultaneously retains the ‘having-been’ of the relative and its permanence in the form of a substitution. It names a dead kin that lives on: it names the survival of the name. James Mondloch calls K’iche’ proper naming “immortality;” the Ixiles, for their part, identify it with ancestrality or that which comes from “times immemorial.”

Indigenous Patronymics and the Names-of-the-Father

The form of durability invested in Ixil proper names, qua namesakes, is coextensive with

---

198 As Rosalind Morris has shown, the expression "in place of" connotes both a location and a substitutonal relationship in a manner that, in English and Thai languages, remains undecidable. The same is true in Spanish. The expression "in the name of" retains a similar ambiguity (in Spanish and in English) connoting also the "name" as such and the bearer of the name or the subject. In fact, I argue that this expression, in the context of my own research, should be understood as a form of Interpellation. See Rosalind Morris, In the Place of Origins. Modernity and its Mediums in Northern Thailand, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 15.

199 Lisa Stevensons' beautiful ethnography about the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic has shown that a life-of-the-name for the Inuit is a more complex, contradictory, and expansive form of life and afterlife that has been threatened, re-shaped, and also destroyed by the biopolitical forms of care that the Canadian state imposed onto them. See Stevenson, Life Besides Itself.


201 Even though "immortality" and "ancestrality" may refer to forms of politics that come before and "after finitude," an expression coined by Quentin Meillassoux and that refers to a politics of "infinity," I use the term “ancestrality” in a manner similar to what Derrida calls “teleiopoiesis,” which signals the à venir or to-come of those who are already departing. My use of the term is thus quite different from Quentin Meillassoux’s “Speculative Realism” in which “ancestrality” is indicative of a radically a-subjective event prior to any form of givenness, and whose index is the fossil-matter. In this regard, see Jacques Derrida, The Politics of Friendship, trans., George Collins, (London-New York: Verso, 2005), 42-45; Quentin Meillassoux, After Finitude. An essay on the Necessity of Contingency, trans., Ray Brassier, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), esp.1-27.
and depends on the uses of patronymics. As a general rule, Ixiles receive full names in accordance with the Spanish way of naming—imposed onto them during the Colony—in the following patronymic formula: first name + father’s first family name + mother’s first family name; alternatively, although less common, the formula may be simplified with the use of the first name + father’s first family name. In Ixil proper naming, however, first names are almost always given in the form of namesakes or Ch’exel, and patrilocality is intertwined with Ixil patronymics, something that is generally absent in the use of Spanish patronymics in Guatemala.

Indeed, similarly to what other anthropologists have reported about Mayan communities of Guatemala’s western highlands, when an Ixil young couple has entered into adulthood, and after a marriage has been consummated (either through ritual processes pertaining to Mayan religion or costumbre, Catholicism, or Evangelicalism), it is generally expected for the young wife to move into her husband’s father’s household, where she helps her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law in all domestic/household activities, while the husband works alongside his father and brothers in agricultural, pastoral, and sometimes, commercial activities. The couple remains in the elder’s residence until he divides the land among his children. If their first child is a boy, he will be named after his paternal grandfather, which in general is the head of the household where his parents reside. As expected, the boy becomes his grandfather’s remplazo or Ch’exel. If the second child is a girl, she will receive the name of her paternal grandmother. As mentioned before, other children may be named after maternal grandparents, paternal and maternal great-uncles/aunts or, as in the case of don Concepción, other respected kin. In fact, grandparents may

---


111
have more than one namesake, in which case a nickname (like “the first,” “the second,” etc.) may be added to differentiate their *replazos* or Ch’exels. There is no fundamental prohibition for women to perpetuate the names of their own patrilineal descent; but the general pattern is to privilege the paternal-patrilocal genealogies.

Some of my interlocutors are also traders, elementary and secondary school teachers, others were working in NGOs and have college degrees, and some others had been in the US as undocumented immigrants for relatively long periods of time. The vast majority of them, nevertheless, did not abandon the ideals of domestic and agricultural responsibilities according to the Ixil patrilineal and patrilocal customs. In fact, those who migrated to the US—acquiring debts and putting their own and their families’ possessions at risk as collateral for the payment of a *coyote* (smuggler)—did so with the perspective or future project of buying lands or initiating a small business upon their return. This is also done in order to guarantee the succession of their lineages and names.

I was told in this regard that, “before, women did not inherit the land, but nowadays they do.” As early as the 1930s, Ruth Bunzel reported in her ethnography of the K’iche’ of Chichicastenango that “women may inherited the land only under certain circumstances,” although she does not elaborate on that. She rather emphasizes that, as a general rule, the inheritance is divided among male children.  

In the early 1970s, Ricardo Falla reported that, among the K’iche’ of San Antonio Iloitenango, “only male children inherit the land.”

---


204 Falla, *Quiché Rebelde*, 104.
of Santa Eulalia, Shelton Davis reports two different categories to designate forms of land inheritance passed on or acquired through mothers and wives, stx’otx ’intxutx and stx’otx’yistil respectively, but qualifies them as forms of land-claims enacted by men in their positions as sons/members of their mother’s patrilineal kin, or as husbands claiming affinal rights.\textsuperscript{205} I know of cases of Kackchikel, K’iche’, and Ixil families in which the heads of the household have divided their land and other possessions to include their sons and daughters, but the land comes from ancestors that are traced though patrilineal descent.

This is consistent with the use of Ixil and K’iche’ kinship terms. Falla reports that, among the K’iches of San Antonio Iotenango, “children, both boys and girls, call their parents tát (father) and nán (mother), but while the father distinguishes the sex of his children, c’ojol (son) and mi’al (daughter), the mother doesn’t distinguish it and calls them indistinguishably ál (son-daughter). From the point of view of the mother, they are the same, for she cannot inherit to them.”\textsuperscript{206} Ray Elliot’s findings, presented in his study of Ixil kinship terminology in Nebaj, are consistent with Falla’s ethnography, something I was able to corroborate during my fieldwork. According to Elliot, the father or b’aal distinguishes the sex of his children, calling his son k’aol and his daughter me’al, whereas the mother or txutx calls them indistinguishably al (son-daughter). Children reciprocate with the terms b’aal and txutx, respectively. Sex specification for godchildren correspond with patrilineal terms. Godchildren call their godparents papwactix (godfather= father:pap before:wac god:tix) and txutxwactix (godmother); the godfather reciprocates with the terms k’aolwactix (godson) and me’alwactix (goddaughter), whereas the

\textsuperscript{205} Davis, \textit{La Tierra de nuestros}, 60.

\textsuperscript{206} Falla, \textit{Quiché Rebelde}, 105.
godmother calls both of them *alwactix*. Grandparents, on their part, call their grandchildren *ii* (according to Elliot’s notes) or *iimam* (according to my own annotations), without specifying their sex. Grandchildren reciprocate with the terms *q’eslab’al* (abuelo) and *q’eslatxutx* (abuela) respectively.

In these forms of address, it is the position of the father that functions as a fundamental principle of stipulation and recognizability according to which inheritance—in the form of land, residence, cattle, and specially name—is distributed and allocated with respect to the sex of his children. Thus, we may say that if, as mentioned before, the institution of Ch’exel or namesakes provides an Imaginary tie that is formative of the “I” or “ego,” the position of the father provides the Symbolic tie that signifies who is who in the order of descent, residence, and name. In Mondloch’s study, the full irruption or emergence of Symbolic naming occurs when the younger K’e’s or K’axel drops the use of “fictive kinship references,” as he/she enters into puberty or adulthood: boys and girls stop calling their grandparents “my wife” or “my husband” out of shame and a sense of foolishness, restricting themselves to the reciprocal use of the noun K’es or K’axel. Let me reiterate that I couldn’t corroborate Mondloch’s findings in a typical manner, but the widely spread use of namesakes among Ixiles (and K’iches’), and their acknowledged commonalities (at least according to my interlocutors), do not contradict them.

The symbolic effect of recognizability and durability expressed in Ixil (and K’iche’) kinship terminology is also coextensive with the formalization and use of Ixil patronymics. For, if the personal first name is marked by Imaginary or specular identifications in the form of a

---


namesake, the father’s first family name is the one that is perpetuated (it is inherited), carrying with it the normative traces of patrilocal/lineal descent and, thus, the guarantees for the transmissibility of first or personal names (namesakes). Accordingly, the mother’s first family name, which corresponds to and is indicative of her own patrilineal genealogy, is dropped in the next generation. The mother’s (first family) name is, thus, provisional within the dynamics of patrilineal descent: it varies and, eventually, it is lost. It must be emphasized, on the one hand, that this condition is historical (patronymics were imposed onto indigenous people during colonial times), and retrospective, according to the logics of ancestrality (“that which comes from times immemorial”); and on the other, insofar as patronymics establish “nominal zones of phallic control,” as Judith Bulter argues, the provisionality of the mother’s (first family) name is also the effect of a heteronormative interdiction: the position of the mother cannot guarantee and give a nominal durability and, as such, it is forced to occupy a site of loss. Both a condition for the constitution of the patronymic and of its loss, the mother’s (first family) name is a supplement.

Interestingly, in the use of Ixil (and K’iche’) kinship terminology, the positions of grandparents and that of the mother elicit or allow forms of address that do not distinguish the sex of their children and grandchildren; yet, this is in line with the fact that the first family name of the grandfather is already perpetuated (inherited) in the name of the father which, by the same token, means that the first family name of the grandmother has already been lost. The similarity


confirms the rule. This is consistent with what Lacan describes as an effect of the paternal metaphor, i.e., the function of substitution that is constitutive to the-name-of-the-father.\textsuperscript{212} Note, in this regard, that the relationship between Ch’exel and the patronymic belongs to a form of nomination that expresses a collective acknowledgment and a refusal of the dissociative forces of death, and it is not just the expression of a castration complex, something that Lacan discusses in his reproach to Freud’s failure to recognize the link between the signifier of the Father and death.\textsuperscript{213} By the same token, if we follow the logic of Ch’exel nomination, then, the mother’s name’s supplementarity is also the condition for the survival of her (first) name and of her becoming an ancestor herself. I will expand on the implications of becoming an ancestor in the last section; for the moment, let me linger on the economy of Ch’exel proper naming.

In his dissertation about marriage patterns among the Ixiles of Chajul, Aquiles Palomino (a doctoral student at UC Irvine in the late 60s) presents a case that exemplifies, in certain fundamental aspects, the economy of proper naming and subjectivity that I have been describing so far. In the kinship chart that Palomino reconstructed in order to show Ch’exel nomination (see figure below), the majority of subjects in ego’s generation were named after paternal ancestors (7 out of 11).\textsuperscript{214} This is an indication that both men and women in ego’s generation either resided in, inherited from, or were tracing back their ancestors, primarily, along the lines of paternal patrilocal decent. Note, however, that in ego’s generation, the name “Cipriano” wasn’t used, even though the name of his wife, “Rosa,” was passed on through generations (Cipriano and Rosa are


the maternal great-grandparents).

Indeed, with the exception of “Cipriano,” the names “Rosa,” “Mateo,” and “Ana” were given through the maternal descent. If we follow Palomino’s information, the nonappearance of the name “Cipriano” may be the evidence of the fact that Mateo (the maternal grandfather, and the son of Cipriano and Rosa) inherited lands through his maternal patrilineal descent, which, as reported by Palomino and other anthropologists studying indigenous communities of the western highlands, meant that either Cipriano did not have lands to inherit, or most likely he lived in

---

215 For instance, Oliver La Farge, who conducted fieldwork among the Q’anjob’al of Santa Eulalia in the early 1930’s, reports that one of his informants, who was the impoverished son of an already impoverished Q’anjob’al, named the majority of his children following his wife’s patrilineal genealogy. Indeed, La Farge’s informant was renting lands near his father-in-law’s household. La Farge, *La Costumbre*, 48; and Davis, *La tierra de nuestros*. 

117
lands “owned” by his wife (Rosa). This would explain why “Mateo” (the name of Cipriano’s son) was used to name at least two Ch’exel in ego’s generation. The opposite is true for the name “Antonio,” which can be traced back to the paternal’s great-grandparent’s position (his name was given 7 times through generations).

Palomino conducted his fieldwork in the late 1960s, an antecedent that allows us to speculate about the time when the conjugal union between Cipriano and Rosa (maternal great-grandparents) took place. If we assume that there is a gap of 16 to 20 years between generations (based on the average age that it is expected for Ixiles to have their first child, as reported by Palomino), then, their marriage occurred in the early twentieth century, probably in the 1920s. As we have seen in chapter 1, this is the period of time where a significant proportion of the lands in the Ixil region—both communal and individual—were lost to foreign and ladino finqueros with the support of the Guatemalan finca-state. In this sense, it is plausible to conclude that Cipriano’s case was an expression of a situation of impoverishment and dispossession—or of its intensification—that affected a large numbers of Ixiles at the time;\textsuperscript{216} and, as such, it can be extrapolated or serve as an example of how an Ixil name (in the form of a namesake) may fall into disuse and, ultimately, may be forgotten. If so, Cipriano’s case (and Antonio’s for that matter) shows that the dynamics of Ixil proper naming cannot be dissociated with the stratification of the Ixil society (expressed, primarily, in the form of possessions—tangible and intangible—such as land, residence, name, and renown), and its interactions with the Guatemalan

\textsuperscript{216} This is also consistent with La Farge’s conclusions, a situation that he witnessed firsthand. La Farge, \textit{La Costumbre}, 48.
nation-state.217

The story of Gregorio Santay's signature—don Concepción's father—mentioned above, is already indicative of those interactions; but in a more generalized manner, these are also visible in the fact that the majority of Ixiles have an Ixil and a Spanish name, the former being generally a phonetic/lexical adaptation of the latter. Usually, they reserve the use of their Ixil names for family and communitarian interactions (between Ixiles); and they use their Spanish names for formal and legal interactions with ladinos, foreigners, or representatives of the Guatemalan government. This is the name they use for birth certificates or documents of citizenship.218 For instance, Andrés is Lihx in Ixil, Marta is Taa, Martin is Tin, and a full name like Juan Caba is Xhun Ka’ba in Ixil. As a matter of fact, the folding of indigenous proper names has been relentlessly signified by the agents of the Guatemalan state and its apparatuses, as a form of “duplicit” that constitutes an obstacle to and a failure of the state’s identificatory and interpellative forms of control, at least since the seventeenth century, throughout Guatemala’s post-colonial history. This will be the topic of chapter 3; for now I would like to return to the ancestors’ afterlife in order to show that the power of their souls is fundamentally eccentric, and that their veneration institutes a form of subjectivization to the unknown that exceeds their Imaginary and Symbolic ties and, by extension, the force of the social. In other words, the

---

217 Shelton Davis’ detailed study on Q’anjob’al land tenure and inheritance shows that the intensification of individual land titling and the use of the state’s land courts to settle land conflicts, forced a change in and at times undermined the power of the elderly and heads of household regarding inheritance disputes. Davis, *La tierra de nuestros*, 55-89.

218 Ray Elliot confirms this in his own study. See Elliot, “Términos de parentesco,” 137.
ancestors’ names also partake in a relation of the Real.219

Of (Not) Knowing One's Sins: the Unknown, the Inscrutable, and the Real of the Name

Andrés told me that, on his way to the US, in Southern México, he had seen many places similar to those of Nebaj. He spent three days there on an hacienda (large estate) while waiting for fake documents to cross the country by bus, up to the state of Sonora, in northern México. The similitude of the landscapes remained in his memory, just like a dream he had one night while he was crossing the Sonora desert. In his dream, he saw his paternal grandmother, who had passed away a few years before, on the other side of a large glass (“del otro lado de un gran vidrio”). “I was sad,” he told me, recalling that, at 17 years of age, while he was alone in the desert, he cried as he remembered his village and all the friends and family he had left behind. “I hardened my heart and kept walking without food or water, until I saw the helicopters of the US Border Patrol,” he remembered. He was caught. At first, he did not reveal his real identity, but he finally told the agents of the Border Patrol that he was an unaccompanied minor from Guatemala. A few days later, Andrés was transferred to a detention center in Phoenix, where he was locked in “in a prison cell of glass” until the day of his deportation, “just like in my dream!” he emphatically told me. It was during the desert’s coldest nights, nights where Andrés heard the young and the old crying out of desperation, that, without knowing it yet, his future was revealed in the form of a dream and the apparition of his q’eslatxutx or grandmother.

219 I use the term “Real” in a Lacanian sense, as that which resists symbolization and thus is beyond the Symbolic and the Imaginary. This Real is not to be understood as “reality” insofar as it does not rely on any form of objective or empirical referentiality. Among others, see Jacques Lacan, Freud's Papers on Technique. The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book I, (New York: Norton, 1988), 12-17; see also his “Seminar on the Purloined Letter,” and “Introduction to Jean Hyppolite's Commentary of Freud's ‘Verneinung’,” in Écrits, 6-57, 309-333.
The strength he found to survive in the desert was a gift from her.

Dreams were a topic that Ixiles talked about with certain regularity during my stay in the region and, to my knowledge, their potential meanings always come after the mediation of others, either in the form of family conversations with parents or older kin, or in consultations with diviners or daykeepers. Among those who practice costumbre, for instance, dreams about the ancestors and the sacred places, or dreams about being imprisoned (the jail is associated with transgressions, punishments, and illnesses), would certainly call for the services of a daykeeper. In fact, as other anthropologists have reported, diviners receive their call through dreams that often happen during periods of debilitating illnesses. Andrés, nonetheless, is a Catholic practitioner and, as far as I know, he doesn’t visit prayer-sayers; but his ordeal in the Sonora desert and his further imprisonment is equivalent to the experience of a debilitating and painful illness—almost a liminal one—that confronted him with his possible death. There is, in this regard, a general understanding among the Ixiles that the ancestors are fundamental mediators between god—and other deities for costumbristas—and the living; and that they communicate their will or their commands in dreams that, as a general rule, are future oriented. This is of utter

---

220 This has been a topic of research in much of the Mesoamerican anthropology in the past decades. The canonical ethnography about the practice of divination and prayer-saying among the Maya of Guatemala is Barbara Tedlock’s *Time and the Highland Maya*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993). In regard to the Ixil region, see Benjamin N. Colby and Lore M. Colby, *The Daykeeper: The Life and Discourse of an Ixil Diviner*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).

221 Andrés told me that one of the main reasons why he tried to cross the border was because the majority of his friends had done so before. As an educated young Ixil (he finished high school and was studying to become a teacher) and the son of merchants (his family may be considered to be of the middle class, by rural standards), Andrés wasn’t necessarily poor; yet, his possibilities for finding a job in Guatemala were limited. He, I think, was very aware of his situation, but he also recognized that there was a lot of desire—and a sense of being a man—in his decision to cross the border to the US. In this sense, it can be said that for many young indigenous migrants, crossing the border is seen like a rite of passage towards adulthood. Other anthropologists have reported similar stories to that of Andrés; see, in this regard, David Stoll’s study on Ixil migration, *El Norte or Bust! How Migration Fever and Microcredit Produced a Financial Crash in a Latin American Town*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013); see also Manuela Camus, *La Sorpresita del Norte: Migración internacional y comunidad en Huehuetenango*, (Guatemala: Editorial Junajpu, 2008); and Ricardo Falla, *Migración Transnacional Retornada: Juventud indígena de Zacualpa, Guatemala*, (Guatemala: AVANCSO, 2008).
importance because the ancestors intervene in people’s lives (they can guarantee a good harvest, good health, or a harmonious family); and, in their role as mediators, they have the capacity to decide one’s fate in situations of life and death like sickness, witchcraft, or, in Andrés’ case, crossing the border to the US.

Anthropologists and Mayanists alike have interpreted the Mayan cult to the ancestors as being an expression of a larger indigenous rituality based on the agricultural cycle of cultivation, growth, and harvesting of maize; or, to put it otherwise, on the cycles of life, death, and regeneration of “the sacred corn.” Likewise, they have analyzed the “supernatural powers” of the dead as a force that guarantees moral and communitarian balance, equilibrium, and harmony, representing thus the ancestors as justicias (justices) or the quintessential administrators of individual and collective fortune/misfortune or destiny. This vision is shared by anthropologists who have conducted ethnographic fieldwork among the Ixiles of Guatemala. Speaking about the relationship between destiny and the Ixil ancestors, Benjamin Colby reported that, “the displeasure of departed ancestral souls is a source of misfortune, and consequently their placation is a focus of curing and other rituals [like feeding the ancestors’s souls with incense and candles, offering sacrifices, and praying for their forgiveness]. It is a tradition in which either or both elite and common members of a society are believed to acquire supernatural powers after

---

222 Recent examples can be found in Fischer, Cultural Logics; Carlsen and Prechtel, “Flowering of the Dead;” Robert S. Carlsen, War for the Heart and Soul of a Highland Maya Town, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011); and John M. Watanabe, Maya Saints and Souls in a Changing World, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 81-105.


death; and in which life and death, sickness, and other matters of human concern are partly controlled by departed ancestors known in life to individuals or to living relatives and friends.” In the same vein, Colby and van den Berghe exemplified this with the case of a young Ixil man who suffered a debilitating illness caused by the anger of his grandmother’s soul, which was the result of a past dispute between the young man’s mother and grandmother. As they reported it, “one cause of illness arises from the displeasure of the ancestral spirits. To cite one example, a young man suffered from cramps because his mother had had an argument with his grandmother ten or more years previously. In the curing ceremony the curer invoked the name of the dead grandmother. Candles were burned at the house, cemetery, and calvario [church] to placate the dead grandmother and ask for forgiveness.”

In these ethnographic references, the misconduct of the living is punished by the dead; and in the example of the young man, it is presumed that the mother’s affront against the grandmother (older kin) resulted in the punishment of her son. For these anthropologists, it is the force of the social—expressed in the power of the elderly and the departed—that explains the fluid continuity between the dead and the living, and the “supernatural power” of the ancestor’s souls.

During my fieldwork, most of my interlocutors did not contradict these interpretations, especially those who practice or know enough about costumbre. Even Andrés who as I mentioned before is Catholic, acknowledged that his grandmother’s intervention was a gift that gave him the strength to survive in the desert. Yet, one wonders, at least if one follows Colby and

---


226 Colby and van den Berghe, Ixil Country, 97.
van den Berghe’s example, why was the young man suffering for a dispute that took place ten years or so before, between his mother and grandmother, and why an invocation of the name (both in the sense of being a ritual performance worth the name, and also in the name of the grandmother’s soul) was necessary for his recovery. Unfortunately, Colby and van den Berghe’s study does not provide an adequate response. One may speculate, via metonymy, that the reason behind the young man’s suffering was that he himself was the subject of the dispute. Indeed, Lore and Benjamin Colby addressed a similar issue in a later ethnographic study conducted in the early 70s, about the life of an Ixil diviner called Jacinto de León or Shas K'ow. He was a devoted daykeeper who, according to the Colbys, suspected that the cause of his misfortunes was a bitter conflict between his mother and paternal grandfather around an inheritance that she disputed in his name, soon after Jacinto’s father passed away, when he was still a newborn.227

Among all of the misfortunes that Jacinto de León recalled—his father and paternal grandfather (his Ch'exel) died when he was very young, his mother abandoned him, he did not inherited any possessions, he was forced to work for coffee fincas and state infrastructure—his strongest lamentation was about the fact that three of his wives (he married four times) were “troubled women” who abandoned him, even though he considered himself to be a good husband

227 According to the Colbys, Jacinto de León was born in June 8, 1895, in Nebaj, and was the namesake or Ch’exel of his paternal grandfather. His father died when he was still nursing and soon after, his mother re-married another man who disliked him, forcing the mother to leave him under his paternal grandfather’s care. Jacinto told the Colbys that his grandfather owned lands, houses, horses, cows, and chickens; and that his “old one” was a Daykeeper or b’albásih and a Principal or Ancestral Authority. In other words, he was a better off Ixil, and a well known and respected political and religious figure. After his Ch'exel passed away, when he was five years old, Jacinto was entitled to inherit part of his grandfather’s patrimony; but an uncle who did not live in Nebaj, “who just traveled around wherever his trips happened to take him,” came back to claim everything, and sold it, in complete disregard of his rights. He drank all the money up in the company of his two sisters, and then left Nebaj to resume his traveling. Poor and faraway from his place of provenance, he died in Puerto Barrios. His death was interpreted by Jacinto as a punishment from the ancestors. Thus, Jacinto de León was forced to live a childhood in errancy, working for better off relatives for food and a room to stay, until he was old enough to be drafted to work on state infrastructure and coffee fincas in Guatemala’s Southern Coast. Colby and Colby, Daykeeper.
and a devoted daykeeper. This is what he told the Colbys:

It was my mother, they say. My father owned sheep, and they were left with my grandfather. My mother wanted to take the sheep away, and my grandfather wouldn’t let them go. So my mother went to complain about my grandfather at the courthouse. My grandfather was summoned to the courthouse, and he must have had to go to jail for a day or two. And that’s the trouble, they say; that’s what I’ve had to pay for, by women not staying with me…. I hunted and hunted for the one who is with me now. Ever since that time we have remained married, but only because I always paid reverent homage to the gods when each woman left. I went to complain before the souls [of the ancestors]: what is it that I do? What is my offense? I don’t steal. What is the secret of the trouble I have that women don’t stay with me? I went to ask for forgiveness and slowly my offense against the souls was erased.

The fact that Jacinto de León learned about a possible cause of his misfortune through others is reiterated by the statement "they say." But this is not his own conclusion and, insofar as there is no mention of any dream—let alone a reading of the "sacred beans"—about his offense or transgression, he implies that his ancestors did not reveal it to him. It was only because he kept asking for forgiveness—and as a daykeeper he must have prayed and made all his offerings (burning candles and incense, offering flowers, liquor, etc.)—that they finally allowed him to find and keep a "good wife," which, if we believe in the Colbys' study, as I do, was a sign of the ancestors’ ultimate generosity. It meant that he could finally settle in a household where his soul could rest and his name be remembered, in line with the ideals of Ixil patrilocal descent. This is what the ancestors had been denying to him. Yet, Jacinto de León kept

228 In fact, Jacinto de León’s first wife left him because she refused to stop working as a temporary worker or jornalera in the Southern Coast and stay in their household, taking care of their plot, animals, and children, when Jacinto asked her to do so. Jacinto de León separated from his second wife because she refused to divide her lands—she and her brother inherited lands from her mother that remained undivided—in order to establish their household in those lands. That would have granted Jacinto affinal rights on his wife's land and, thus, his soul and name would have had a place to be remembered. And he finally separated from his third wife because, apparently, she couldn’t get used to being a Daykeeper’s wife. Colby and Colby, DayKeeper, 74-75.

229 Colby and Colby, Daykeeper, 92, (My italics).

230 In another part of the text he says: "I cannot remember when I came into the world. I have only heard them say that I was unfortunate when I was growing up. They say I was only six months old when my father died." Colby and Colby, Daykeeper, 54.
insisting that “who knows what my sin is,” in spite of the souls’ forgiveness. In other words, his veneration to the ancestors grew stronger not because of his knowledge about his possible offense—his mother’s, to be precise—but in spite of it; and even if the knowledge about his mother’s affront seemed plausible enough to him, it was insufficient: he kept praying; and invocations of the names of his ancestors' remained uninterrupted. Jacinto acted according to the interpellation of his ancestors' names. One could say that “the secret of the trouble” he had with women remained undisclosed and thus his offense unconfessed.

This is not to say that Jacinto de León’s masculine complaint to the souls of the ancestors, his dreaming, and his divinations were nothing but doomed attempts in his quest to know the “truth” of his misfortunes; rather, one may say that his praying and divinations are indicative of an Ixil passion for figuring out the secrets of one’s and the others’ deeds. Sometimes, performing a ritual conjoining a name with a past deed—as in the first example provided by Colby and van den Berghe—is enough for an effective symbolic reading of those secrets (e.i., healing); however, some other times, the deferral of such conjunctions remains in place, as in

---

231 Colby and Colby, The Daykeeper, 95.

232 For many missionaries who came to Guatemala during the second half of the twentieth century—around the same time that the Colbys collected most of their ethnographic information—to “save indigenous souls” from their purely “intuitive Christian faith,” Jacinto’s form of belief was a source of deep frustration. As Maryknoll missionary Thomas Melville recalls: “I would sometimes get angry because the Indians I heard in confession told me only their sickness. ‘Don’t tell me your sickness, tell me your sins!’ I would insist. But the Indians believed that sickness was a result of sin—more often than not, some transgression of ritual propriety: perhaps a man hadn’t said a prayer and burned incense before planting; perhaps his parents had done something, known or unknown, years before, that he was being held accountable for now that his parents were dead. It was difficult to keep always in mind the manifold obligations and rituals he was supposed to carry out, and so he might not even know the sin he was being punished for.” Thomas and Marjorie Melville, Whose Heaven, Whose Earth, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), 40.

233 To put it in similar terms to Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok's theory of the "phantom," this is a passion elicited by the gaps that have been left within the psychic life of the living by the secrets of those who become their ancestors. See Nicholas Abraham & Maria Torok, "Notes on the Phantom: A compliment to Freud's Metapsychology," in The Shell and the Kernel, Vol. I, trans., Nicholas T. Rand, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 171-176.

Jacinto’s case. As a matter of fact, in his discourse, he recognizes that, at its core, the scrutiny of the ancestors' will is always limited: often times, the unknown and inscrutable remains as such. In other words, contrary to the dominant interpretations about the nature of the force of the Mayan ancestors, Jacinto de León acknowledges that there is an inscrutable kernel to their will, and that their force exceeds the Symbolic and/or the social. His position as a diviner and the role he played among Ixiles who practice *costumbre* depend on and are also threatened by that excess, not only because divination is an attempt to conjoin an event causing misfortune with a name (curing, in the case of an illness that is the effect of "bad *costumbre,*" a transgression, or the ancestors' anger), but also because—at least for the Ixiles and other indigenous *pueblos* that I know of—the knowledge of divination is almost always too close to witchcraft; and witchcraft, as James Siegel has convincingly argued in his powerful critique to the anthropological cannon, leaves that conjoining or "articulation" open.

Moreover, in spite of the patriarchal structures of power and the phallic domains of

---

235 In this regard, Jacinto de León's relationship with the unknown and inscrutable (in the form of the force of the dead and their secrets) cannot be reduced to what Pragmatists call "inference." His symptomatic reading expresses the limits of the force and meaning of Indexicality, proving thus that that which remains radically unknown—i.e., the secrets of the dead—resist the most "radical of interpretations." One may say that for Jacinto de León, this secret is that which did not happen because—if we keep in mind his reliance on future-oriented dreams and divinations—it hasn't happened yet or it is still yet-to-come, as the pure affirmation of the ancestors' surplus of existence. To put it otherwise, for him, the past of the dead hasn't happened yet because it comes from the future. Mexican anthropologists Mario Humberto Ruz has beautifully described the "a-temporal" temporality of the Mayan dead as "El Futuro del Ayer" [The Future of Times Past]. I believe this is a form of indigenous messianism that is in line with Derrida's understanding of the *á venir.* See Mario Humberto Ruz, “El Futuro del Ayer: los tiempos de los sin tiempo,” *Artes de México,* no.107, (September 2012): 66-79; for Derrida's discussion, see his *Politics of Friendship,* 42-45; and for an anthropological use of the notion of “radical interpretation” and the force of "indexicality,” see Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition. Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism,* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 71-109.

236 Jacinto de León told the Colbys that, because of his fame as a Diviner, many people envied him, and it was rumored that he also performed "bad *costumbre*" or witchcraft. For Witchcraft among the Maya, see: Maud Oakes, *The Two Crosses of Todos Santos,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969[1951]); Tedlock, *Time and the Highland,* and for a particularly interesting reading about the crisis of the role of Diviners and the violent response that followed in Southern Mexico, see June Nash, *The Eyes of the Ancestors. Belief and Behavior in a Mayan Community,* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1970), 30-268.

nominal control that sustain Jacinto’s discourse—including all the blame that he and others put on his mother—Ixil patriarchy also enables women to become ancestors, a prerogative that, as I mentioned before, is co-constituted by the Ixil institution of proper naming called Ch'exel. Jacinto de León himself told the Colbys that he believed his dead mother had granted him with the gift of a long life (he was in his seventies when the Colbys interviewed him), because he took care of her while she was dying far away from her home (an unequivocal sign that she had been also punished by the souls).\footnote{Indeed, according to Jacinto de León, dying away from one’s place of residence is a great misfortune because the soul would need to travel long distances to attend all the rituals made in its name. Colby and Colby, The Daykeeper, 85.} This is similar to what Andrés told me about his grandmother’s gift. And yet, in Colby and van den Berghe’s example, the young man’s grandmother was making him ill. To cure him or to placate his ancestor’s soul, rituals and the invocation of the grandmother’s name were performed at the house, cemetery, and the church, all of them places that the souls inhabit and, as such, the \textit{loci} of their power. Other locations where the souls, saints, and other deities live in like caves, hills, forests, and mountains—some of them forbidden to ordinary Ixiles—should be mentioned, too.\footnote{About the multiple places that the souls, saints, and other deities inhabit, see: Lincoln, Ethnological Study; Tedlock, \textit{Time and the Highland}; Watanabe, \textit{Maya Saints}; Oakes, \textit{Two Crosses}; and Richard Wilson, \textit{Maya Resurgence in Guatemala: Q’eqchi’ Experiences}, (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995).} In other words, even though Jacinto de León's discourse is expressed in phallic terms—and is the effect of the Names-of-the Father—the force and power that it describes and relies on is not phallocentric.\footnote{This is similar to what James Siegel has argued about sorcery, as being a phallic yet not phallocentric power. Siegel, Naming the Witch, 51.}

There is no intrinsic innocence in the way in which the ancestors intervene in the world of the living; likewise, even though their force may be a guarantee for individual and communitarian balance, it also threatens it. Being named after an ancestor is thus a gift that
comes from another whose force is eccentric and exceeds the social; it is a form of naming that, according to Ixil conventions, recognizes that "I" have been named after someone that is somewhere, even though its force transcends the individual whose name "I" received, and whose place of residence is, in the afterlife, elsewhere. Ixil proper names express thus a desire to contain the disruptive forces of death; and their significations are, in many ways, effects of the ancestors' surplus of existence. Thus, ancestrality names the Ixil efforts to contain the dissociative forces of death; therein lies the relevance of the invocation of the ancestors' souls and the preservation of the lands and places of residence that have been passed on to the living by the dead.

Conclusions

Most Mayanists have correctly analyzed the use of proper names—in the form of patronymics and namesakes—among the indigenous pueblos of the Guatemalan western highlands, as effects of the normative domain of culture; however, they have often confused their Imaginary and ideological ties with their Symbolic constraints. More important, these anthropologists have left un-problematized how proper names partake in a relation of a force that has no empirical referents and whose historicity is structurally irrecoverable (it comes from times immemorial, as Ixiles say), i.e., is beyond symbolization and indexicality. In this regard, I have argued that Ixil proper naming partakes in a relation of the Real, which is a condition for

---

241 Saving the differences between indigenous communities, this is notably in the work of linguistic anthropologists who restrict the analysis of indigenous proper names to pragmatics and meta-pragmatics. See, in this regard, Paul Kockelman, Language, Culture, and Mind. Natural Constructions and Social Kinds, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 14-49, 85-116.
the subjectivization of the bearer of the name to the unknown. I have also shown that names inherited within the logics of the Ixil institution called Ch’exel, enable the consolidation of Imaginary resemblances and ideological interpellations without which the personification of the ancestors fails (they become non-persons). Finally, I’ve also argued that the durability of a name relies on the use of patronymics that, in the Ixil region, are generally indicative of their patrilocal and patrilineal symbolic relationships. In this sense, Ixil proper names sustain a fundamental way in which sexual difference is constituted and how the members of the Ixil society are allocated accordingly. Often ignored by other anthropologists is the fact that Ixil patriarchy and nominal control force women’s names to occupy a position of loss and supplementarity, a condition that subordinates women but also gives them, or at least does not deny them, access to the sovereign powers of ancestrality.

Thus, Ixil proper naming enables forms of life and afterlife that depend on a fluid relationship—both intimate and menacing, both bodily and psychic—between the living and the dead. Its Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real effects sustain nominal forms of signification by virtue of which the absence of the departed remains in their ancestral presence. At stake in their interpellatory force is, paraphrasing Lisa Stevenson's ethnography, how the ancestors' absence isn't taken away.242 This is vital for the future of the living and that of the dead, a future that was profoundly restricted by the Guatemalan finca-state in the Ixil region, and that was at risk during the late 1960s, when the civil war initiated in Guatemala's western highlands. The story of don Concepción’s father, a story about how Gregorio Santay Ajanel learned how to sign while being illiterate, is in line with this temporality. It is also in line with the logic of Ixil proper naming and

242 Stevenson, Life Beside Itself, 43.
ancestrality, not only because he marked the bureaucratic texts of the Guatemalan finca-state and, in doing so, his name and its political authentication remained present in his absence, but also because the state itself had become an-other disputed locus of the name.

Indeed, having inherited the name of his uncle, don Concepción has acted in accordance with what is expected of a Ch’exel: he has been keeping the history of the name alive by becoming an ancestral authority that, among other things, headed a political struggle against those who were also his uncle’s adversaries. In honoring his father’s and uncle’s memory, don Concepción is, in fact, honoring the name: he’s making a name for himself…, in order to pass it on. Thus, the name “Concepción Santay” isn’t unique to the holder insofar as it carries the traces of a history of others and that of the institution of Ixil proper naming.243

In this regard, don Concepción's own story may be read as a continuation of his father's and uncle's; but the story of Gregorio Santay Ajanel was the prelude to a war of proper names that, as we'll see in chapters 4, 5, and 6, enabled insurrectionary forms of indigenous anonymity and pseudonymity whose political purpose was to keep the name safe, to defend a life-and-afterlife-of-the-name.

---

243 For the notion of 'trace,' see Derrida, *Of Grammatology.*
Chapter 3: On the Subject of *Finca* Labor and the Madness of the *Finca* Economy

*Introduction*

As we have seen in the past chapter, Ixil proper names are ancestral performatives enacted within the institution called Ch’exel and that of indigenous patronymics. I have argued that to inherit the name of an ancestor is to be interpellated by his/her name; by the same token, this interpellation is the condition for the ancestors’ souls to be personified and subjectivized in the allocations of the bearers of the name. We’ve also seen in the past chapter that Ch’exel naming produces an Imaginary tie between namesakes, and Ixil patronymics produce a Symbolic tie according to Ixil patrilocal and patrilineal forms of descent and residence. Moreover, the relationship with the ancestors’ names subjectifies the bearers of the name to the unknown and inscrutable actions of the ancestors in their past life and in their afterlife, which constitutes a relationship of the Real of the name. This form of life-and-after-life-of-the-name is what Ixiles signify as ancestrality. In this chapter, I want to move my discussion on Ixil and indigenous proper naming to its relationship with the Guatemalan state. To be precise, I want to retrace that relationship in the multiple forms of inscription (workbooks, receipts, certificates, payrolls, etc.) that retained the structural positions and contingent events that led to the formation of what I call the Guatemalan *finca*-state. This will prove to be relevant not only because during the civil war the guerrillas confronted a *finca*-state, but also because the revolutionary struggle relied on the politics of anonymity and pseudonymity, as I will elaborate in chapter 4.

As I hope to show below, the multiple forms of inscription of the *finca*-state objectivize the subjective conditions that enable Ixil and indigenous ancestral proper naming, de-subjectivizing thus a fluid relationship between the living and the dead, a relationship that
depends on the discursive and affective subjectivation of the ancestor’s souls. During the process of the Ixiles’ violent yet legally enforced incorporation into the finca economy, Ixil and other indigenous communities of the Guatemalan western highlands came to depend on finca labor for their survival. In this chapter, I trace back the fundamental ways in which the state’s instruments of inscription imposed and controlled indigenous survival by virtue of appropriating indigenous patronymics or what I call, paraphrasing Jacques Lacan, the appropriation of the subject of the signifier.

In the context of Guatemala’s agrarian capitalism and the emergence of its finca-state, the subject appears in the form of the subject of finca labor. Here I pay special attention to the subject of labor and his/her emergence as a subject capable of producing surplus value over necessary labor, as Gayatri Spivak argues; that is, a super adequate subject that is bonded to the conditions of his/her objectification (predication) but also to the potential negation of such conditions (as the subject of labor-power).

My main argument is that the subject of finca-labor was compulsively controlled, counted, and named (predicated) by the finca-state, but such compulsion was already the symptomatic expression of the failure to control, count, and name that subject. We shall see in the pages that follow that such failure is already inscribed in the libidinal and racial structures of the finca-economy, structures that have been conformed in the name of land ownership, capital accumulation, and colonial/postcolonial whiteness. This is what I call the madness of finca economy, the madness of a phallogocentric finca economy that disavows indigenous names in the figure of “indios.”

---

Like the preceding chapters, I relied on interviews I conducted in the Ixil region during my fieldwork (October 2014-October 2015) and during multiple visits to the region from 2005 to 2008. I also rely on archival research conducted in the General Archive of Central America (AGCA) in Guatemala City, and in the Historical Archive of the Center for Regional Research of Mesoamérica (CIRMA) in Antigua Guatemala, between the months of October 2014 and March 2015.

**Double Displacements, Labor Subjection, and Super-Exploitation**

“I became aware of my parents’ poverty since I was little, probably I was 8 years old,” Alberto, an ex-guerrilla combatant told me. “They didn’t have land, so they used to rent a plot in la costa [southern coast], to cultivate corn. There, we worked in corte de algodón [cotton picking], and when the season was over, we did coffee picking on other fincas. We went there always, each year for over three to four months, because life was there. That happened in the early 70s,” Alberto recalled.

With vast sugar cane fields and sugar mills owned by a handful of rich Guatemalan families—and year round hot and humid temperatures—la costa, as Guatemalans call it, is often represented in the national imaginary as the inverse image of the western highlands, with their colder temperatures and landscapes made out of thousands of small plots of corn, mostly cultivated by poor indigenous families with little or no land to produce for self-subsistence. During the 70s and 80s, social scientists translated this imaginary into the conceptual pair latifundio-minifundio (latifundia-smallholding), in order to explicate the relationship between
Guatemala’s oligarchy and poor peasantry, and the accumulation of wealth of the former together with the proletarianization and exploitation of the latter. In Alberto’s words, and perhaps in a fundamental way, “la costa” refers to the fact that his family’s form of life in the Highlands (he is originally from San Martín Jilotepeque, in the department of Chimaltenango) had become unlivable, and that in order to sustain their life, they had to go to work on the fincas of the southern coast.

I heard many similar stories during my fieldwork. Tomasa, another ex-combatant I met in the Ixil region, remembers that she and her family “went to la costa because we didn’t have food to eat. My father told me ‘we have to go,’ so I went with him, but only to help him. They [the finca owners] didn’t pay me. Perhaps because I was little they didn’t give me a contract, I just helped my father and my brothers.” Consider, in this regard, Rigoberta Menchú’s testimony: “although distant, the finca becomes a central part of our lives. There we go since newly born, hanging on the shoulders of our mothers, during long working days. There we dissipate our youth. There we die of diseases the rich don’t even know.” Like Alberto’s words, Tomasa’s and Menchú’s testimonies speak of an obstinacy to survive. Moreover, they speak of an affective and spacial displacement that is indicative of a form of subjection to finca-labor that was a condition for their survival (or as Alberto put it, they went to the fincas “because life was there”) but also

\[245\] I mention this in order to mark the influence of the economic textuality in this imaginary—albeit in a negative way—but also, as I’ll try to make clearer throughout this chapter, to put its “economicism” under erasure. For bibliographic references, see Edelberto Torres-Rivas, *Interpretación del desarrollo social Centroamericano*, (Costa Rica: EDUCA, 1973); Carlos Figueroa Ibarra, *El proletariado rural en el agro Guatemalteco*, (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1980); J.C. Cambranes, *Café y campesinos. Los orígenes de la plantación moderna en Guatemala, 1853-1897*, (Madrid: Editorial Catriel, 1996).

\[246\] Rigoberta Menchú and CUC [Committee of Peasant’s Unity], *Trenzando el Futuro. Luchas Campesinas en la Historia Reciente de Guatemala*, (Donostia: Tercera Presna-Hirugarren Prenta, 1992), 21.

135
of its impossibility. Let me briefly elaborate on what I am here referring to as the subject of
finca-labor.

In our conversations, Alberto recalled his long working hours in the cotton, sugar cane, and coffee fincas with more detail than the brief paragraph I quoted above: “I remember those years,” he told me, “because mi papá (my dad) took me with him; each of us used to take a surco [row], to do the work. Mi papá worked very hard. When the picking season was over, we moved to the sugar cane or coffee fincas. I remember my parents took me to la costa and to the coffee fincas in Pochuta.” Here, Alberto marked his family’s displacement with the plural noun “parents,” emphasizing that this was a collective endeavor and that he and his siblings were under their parents’ responsibility; however, Alberto’s memories of concrete finca-labor are articulated by the intimate “my dad,” signifying thus the bond between him and his father and how he learned to do the job alongside him, one beside the other, as it were, just as rows are in the coffee, cotton, and sugar fields. Nothing was mentioned about his mother’s work during our conversations, much in the same way as in my interviews with Tomasa. This absence, nonetheless, is marked as a vanished presence in Alberto’s use of the plural noun “my parents,” which simultaneously includes his mother in the position of his father’s spouse (in vertical and lateral relations), or in Tomasa’s recollection of her own non-contractual/unpaid labour as a child and as an indigenous woman. Only in Menchú’s words does the figure of the indigenous mother explicitly appear, albeit as the bearer of a double burden: that of the reproduction of the family and that of finca-labor. In other words, whereas Alberto narrativizes his position as a son and

---

247 As others have reported, and my interlocutors reiterated, this impossibility and their displacement to the fincas is often signified with the idiom of animality/bestiality, as in “they took us to la costa in trucks, like animals” or “they took us as if we were cattle.” For other reference to this discourse, see Matilde Gonzalez, Se cambió el tiempo. Conflicto y poder en territory K’iche’ (1880-1996), (Guatemala: AVANCSO, 2001), 245; Elizabeth Burgos, Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia, (Mexico: Siglo XXI editores, 1997), 42.
how he became a man in poverty working in the *finca*,\(^{248}\) the subjection of indigenous women to *finca-*labour is made to appear in the positions of daughter and mother/spouse, and as such, it is predicated by non-contractual/unpaid labour and by the double burden of family reproduction and agro-industrial production, respectively.\(^{249}\)

To be sure, indigenous women worked in *fincas* as *molenderas* (corn grinders) and as coffee and cotton pickers during the years that my interlocutors refer to (sometimes under contract but for less payment); yet, at least since the late nineteenth century, the vast majority of *finca* “contracts” were acquired by heads of households, whereas children and women worked to pay off their father’s or spouses’ debts.\(^{250}\) By the early 70s—when Alberto, Tomasa, and Rigoberta Menchú were in their youth—debt contracts with *finca* in the form of money advances provided by local *finca* contractors, were no longer legally enforced by the Guatemalan state (as was the case from the second half of the nineteenth century until the early 1940s), but widespread Ixil and indigenous dispossession had made it unnecessary, as we have seen in

\(^{248}\) This is also consistent with testimonies collected by then AVANCSO’s researcher Matilde Gonzalez, in a study on the history of San Bartolomé, Jocotenango, Quiche. As Juan, one of her informants recalled: “We used to go to the *finca* of Retahuleu, Mazatenango, La Gomera [Southern Coast]. I was very little and I remember I followed my father in one *finca* called Pangola. That’s the *finca* where I practically grew up. We went there to do cotton picking.” Gonzalez, *Se cambió el tiempo*, 241; also Burgos, *Me llamo Rigoberta*, 21-26.

\(^{249}\) Here I’m following Gayatri Spivak’s explication of the Marxist predication of the subject in the form of labor-power. It is worth noting in passing that this is what is absent in Delueze and Guattari’s effort to displace Oedipalization as a motor of capitalism, something that Spivak herself pointed out. Rosalind Morris has also highlighted in a more substantial way Delueze and Guattari’s failure to “take into account the kinds of transformative (negative) social labor that would be required to actually negate Oedipality and thus the structuration of the feminine as a naturally vertical principle.” Spivak, “Scattered Speculations;” Rosalind C. Morris, “After de Brosses: Fetishism, Translation, Comparativism, Critique,” in Rosalind C. Morris and Daniel H. Leonard, *The Returns of Fetishism. Charles de Brosses and the Afterlives of an Idea*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 133-319, 377 n.197; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

\(^{250}\) Consider, in this regard, the following testimony reported by Matilde Gonzalez and AVANCSO: “He took me to work to la Costa and my dad didn’t want me to go. But he (spouse) took me anyway. We went to the *finca* San Agustín for six months. My dad told him ‘I told you not to take her to la costa, what happens if she gets sick and we are not there to see her?’ My father scolded me, ‘you careless!’ [bruta!] you should have stayed with your mother-in-law. I told him: But what can I do? If my husband says ‘you have to come!’ I have to go with him.” Gonzalez, *Se cambió el tiempo*, 249. See also the detailed historiographic work of McCreery, in David McCreery, *Rural Guatemala, 1760-1940*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 278-280.
chapter 1. In fact, and this will be the main focus of this chapter, a contratista or money lender would keep a list and a record (a “book of debts,” as people recalled it in my interviews) with the names of those indebted to him, where, as a general rule, the names of women workers remained subordinated to the patronymics of their fathers or spouses.

Indeed, as I have argued in chapter 2, within the Ixil society (and others of the western highlands), indigenous women’s names are made to appear as performative displacements of their patronymics or names-of-the-father (and thus forced to occupy a site of loss) as a condition of their becoming ancestors (according to the logic of patrilocal descent and residence and Ch’exel proper naming); but in the fincas, their names are added to the names-of-the-father, performing thus a double displacement that doubly subsumes their names into the phallic nominal control of finca-labor and that of indigenous patriarchy. In this sense, “la costa” designates the appropriation of the subject of the signifier (in the form of indigenous patronymics), and the double displacement of the indigenous woman’s names. We may say thus that finca surplus value was produced by a double appropriation: that of the poor indigenous men’s work and patronymics (exploitation), and that of the indigenous women’s unrecognized labor or super-exploitation. What emerges from this reading is a subject that is super-adequate to finca-labor (i.e., the indigenous subject as capable of producing surplus value over necessary labour) which is irreducible to being the recipient of a shared finca-ethos, as some of the most

251 See notes 84, 85, 90, and 131.


253 It is under these conditions that, as Gayatri Spivak argues, “the subject is structurally super-adequate to itself, definitively productive of surplus-labor over necessary labor.” Spivak, “Scattered Speculations,” 222.
influential works on the history of Guatemala’s agrarian capitalism have argued.\textsuperscript{254} I will push this argument further in the pages that follow, and to do so, I’d like to return to the “book of debts” and, more generally, to what I call the Guatemalan finca-state’s instruments of inscription.

\textit{The Violence of the Letter: of Workbooks, Certificates, Payrolls, and Finca Receipts}

Recall don Concepción Santay’s story, from chapter 2, about how his father became Cotzal’s mayor and how he learned to write his name and to sign documents as an illiterate. Recall, too, that the Guatemalan army disappeared don Concepción’s father (Gregorio Santay) and uncle (his Ch’exel or namesake, Concepción Santay) in the early 70s. After their disappearances, don Concepción’s family faced great economic hardship. Having lost most of their income and capacity to produce for self-consumption, their condition as colonos (permanent finca-residents who worked in exchange for land) for a finca de mozos owned by the Herreras—one of Guatemala’s richest families of coffee and sugar producers of Spanish descent—became virtually their destiny.\textsuperscript{255} “We had to work for fincas with my mother, to survive,” don Concepción told me. “In those days, they gave you a receipt that said that you were working for the owner; those who did not have that receipt were accused of being delincuentes (outlaws or criminals).” Every finca issued its own form of receipt, but in general, these documents included a correlation number, the name of the worker or jornalero, the number of days worked or

\textsuperscript{254} Remarkably in Tischler Visquerra, \textit{Guatemala 1944}, 52-64.

\textsuperscript{255} Starting in the early twentieth century, many Plantation owners in Guatemala acquired lands in the highlands with the sole purpose of parceling the properties out and rent plots to indigenous people which, in exchange for the land, had to work in their coffee and sugar producing fincas, especially those in \textit{la costa}. These fincas were known as finca de mozos. Don Concepción and his family were mozos colonos of finca San Felipe, Chenlá, in Cotzal. For a detailed history of coffee fincas in Guatemala, see McCreery, \textit{Rural Guatemala}. 
jornales, the date on which the receipt was issued, and the signature of the finca administrator (which could have been a literate indigenous man, a ladino, or a foreigner). As don Concepción makes clear, these receipts did something more than function as records of debts, rent, or “payment;” they functioned as forms of identification, normative inscription, and ultimately, punishment. Those colonos who did not carry them were at risk of being imprisoned and evicted. Receipts were historical machinations of the finca economy, doubtless, but don Concepción’s words are also a reiteration or citation of a longer history of forms of inscription enforced by the Guatemalan state. Enforcing these laws became a priority for the liberal governments of the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth, and was carried out in a compulsory manner through local municipal authorities up to the Ministry of Fomento (Development) and Gobernación (Ministry of Security). Multiple bureaucratic registers were produced to keep control over indigenous workers and every plantation or finca kept a detailed record of debts, jornales, and its workers’ personal names.\footnote{Local authorities (indigenous or otherwise) were responsible for keeping a record of the (mostly male) finca workers their debt “contracts.” The Municipality also kept a record of indebted workers that was sent to the Jefatura Política (the regional governor’s office, usually a military officer designated directly by the Guatemalan president) which, at the same time, also reported these records to both the Ministerio de Fomento (Ministry of Development) and Gobernación (Ministry of Security). See Skinner-Kléé, Legislación indigenista, 108-119.} Let us, then, read some of these documents which, despite their archival dispersion and fragmentary state, do provide a general picture of the form and logic of the finca-state’s instruments of inscription. My aim is to elaborate on what I’ve called the appropriation of the subject to the signifier. As a part of these registers, all male finca workers between the ages 17 to 55 were obliged to carry a workbook or libreta de trabajo (workbooks) with the details of their debt “contracts.” On the page where their “commitment is declared” (see figure below) one reads:
COMMITMENT to work acquired by the mozo [worker] who expresses below: I Manuel Pocom declare not to be indebted in [the form of] labor and I voluntarily commit myself, in the concept of mozo colono to the fincas Sta. Isabel y A.C., owned by Valenzuela Girón to work on time for the term of one year at the customary price in said finca, be it for a day or tarea [assignment], being obliged to pay off the total of my debt with my labor; not to solicit habilitación [debt contract] from any other person; not to leave the finca without the owner’s permission and without having paid my debt; my wife and children, we all together and individually, remain subjected to the conditions expressed above and will fulfill the obligations determined by the Articles 23, 27, 28 and 29 of the Decree No. 486 and the Articles 1758 and 1761 of the Civil Code.

Sta. Isabel, January 1 of 1897. In request of the obligado [forced or obliged subject] who does not know how to sign.

Figure 2. Finca Workbook, page 2. Source: CIRMA.

I couldn’t consult a full workbook during my archival research, only dispersed pieces like
the contract quoted above. But French historian Jean Piel, in his brief study of the department of El Quiché (from 1880 to 1920), annexed one in which the “commitment” section corresponds to the official workbook’s second page. According to Piel, the first page showed the name of the finca, together with the worker’s full name, and the names of his wife and children. In addition, there were around 15 more pages that contained information about the worker’s debt, how much money he had received, when he had received it, from whom, and how much he had paid. It basically constituted a form of double-entry bookkeeping. All the numbers, nevertheless, were preceded by the “legal promise” in page two.

The legal formality of the aforementioned workbook—and its eloquent first person singular point of view—states that it is Manuel Pocom who speaks and is responsible for the “contract.” Yet, the handwriting through which his name is made to appear—inscribed within a mechanically reproduced document—does not easily corroborate the latter. In fact, the last sentence explicitly recognizes that those workers obliged to carry workbooks couldn’t sign, let alone read, the terms of their own subjection. That doesn’t mean that they didn’t understand those terms and what was at stake in the libretas. As historian David McCreery reports, “as the bitter joke of the time [late nineteenth century] had it, a habilitador (finca contractor/money

---

257 This is due in part to the fact that workbooks were personal documents and, as such, only in specific occasions (repositions or renewals, for instance) became a part of the state’s documentation. However, in these occasions, it was the jefatura política (Departmental government) that consigned the workbooks. Unfortunately for the case of the Ixil region (i.e., the Department of El Quiché) its documentation remains unorganized and mostly unavailable to the public. Some workbooks may have survived in personal archives, but most of these documents were burned during the civil war, in the early 1980s, in the Ixil region.


259 As shown by historian Greg Grandin, “planters often ran labor contracts collectively […]. In 1903 a group of Q’eqchi’s complained ‘that it is well known that they [finca owners] make these contracts …without the obligados being present. We don’t even know Spanish…They force these books on us that are used only to throw us in jail for fraud. They write in them as they like and sign the contracts for us.’” Greg Grandin, The Last Colonial Massacre. Latin America in the Cold War, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 26.
lender) explained to an Indian his debt in the following manner: ‘ten pesos I am giving you, ten pesos I am writing in your book, and ten pesos you owe makes a total debt of thirty pesos.’ If such sleight of tongue did not often deceive the Indians, there usually was little they could do about it. Most were illiterate, and if they protested that ‘we keep our books in our heads,’ the state privileged written documents.”  

Let me linger on McCreery’s example for a moment before returning to Manuel Pocom’s “commitment.”

To re-state the obvious, David McCreery’s archival research makes it clear that indigenous workers were aware of the terms and conditions of their debt, labor, and time expenditure (their complaint is indicative of that), even though finca-recruiters operated under the presumption that they were not or, better, that it didn’t matter. These weren’t financial transactions based on “interest rates,” so to speak, but on labor extraction; and what McCreery wants to emphasize is the “arbitrariness” of the written letter—in the form of official documents—as the means to legally enforce indigenous exploitation. This is undeniable; but if we take seriously the indigenous workers’ claim that they kept their own numbers as records of a written memory, what prevails is a radical discontinuity between the finca workbook and the “book” that indigenous workers kept in “their heads.” Upon this discontinuity or non-relation—expressed by finca recruiters in the form of linguistic equivocity, mockery, and a triple excess (in what Lacan refers to as linguisterie or linguistricks)—indigenous mozos were subjected to finca-labour through the deferral of their debt’s cancelation, a deferral that included the finca agents’ surplus

---

260 McCreery, Rural Guatemala, 230-231, (My italics).
261 Finca contractors or money lenders were no expecting to profit via money interests. Recruiters received a commission from finca owners in proportion to the workers they recruited. See McCreery, Rural Guatemala, 230-231; J.C. Cambranes, Café y campesinos.
of enjoyment or jouissance.\textsuperscript{263}

Thus, the legal promise on page two functions as a temporal stipulation, one that simultaneously conditions an indigenous future in the name of finca ownership (which is often marked by a non indigenous family name), and also in terms of a situation (fincas are the sites where the indigenous futures’ retention is situated). It basically says, “in the finca your time is ours.” The blank spots filled out by handwriting are indicative of this stipulation. On the one hand, these spaces are marks of an interdiction: those who cannot read and write in Spanish (i.e., indigenous people) are excluded from the production of the written signifiers that are meant to occupy them. On the other, blank spots are the spaces where personal names putatively received an ostensible social position: “Manuel Pocom,” for instance, is the name of a landless and indebted colono [permanent resident], working and renting lands in finca “Sta. Isabel y A.C.” owned by “Valenzuela Girón.” Whereas the workbook individualizes the mozo by virtue of making his proper name fit in the category mozo, finca ownership is signified by a Spanish family name that does not single out any individual: whether the index of a non-indigenous family or of an Agrarian Firm, the family name “Valenzuela Girón” is the one that signifies capital accumulation and, as such, it functions as a token of wealth. I will return to the names of finca-ownership in the last section of the chapter, but for the moment, a few more words on the name “Manuel Pocom” are necessary.

Under the conditions described so far, finca “contracts” or “legal promises” made it impossible for people like Manuel Pocom to sign, authenticate, authorize, and thus, re-

\textsuperscript{263} I’m referring to the fact that this form of enjoyment serves no purpose in relation to production as such; and yet, it simultaneously indicates the extensive and even insatiable demand of labor-power (what ‘lacks-in-enjoyment’ as Lacan would put it) in order to produce surplus value. It is here where excess and lack coincide. See, in this regard: Jacques Lacan, “Radiofónia,” in Otros Escritos [Autres écrits], trans., Graciela Esperanza, et.al., (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 2016), 458.
appropriate his name as a legal and speaking subject. As a matter of fact, the conditions for the reciprocal allocution in which the pronominal person “I” is co-constituted by the recognition of a “you,” as Emile Benveniste has argued, do not conform to Pocom’s “commitment.” At the level of the legal discourse it belongs to, the libreta performs a constatative allocution: it stipulates that the carrier of the document is nothing other than an object of finca debt and state legislation. In other words, his libreta functions as an objective predication that escapes the condition of personhood and subjectivity (which Benveniste attributed to the pronominal “I” and “You”) and thus, it turns Manuel Pocom into a non-person or an object of state-law, finca-labor and, if we follow McCreery’s example, an object of the finca agents’ surplus of enjoyment.

But Manuel Pocom may not have been the only one objectivized under or in his name. Little is known about the workbook’s owner, and as far as I understand, based on other archival evidence similar to my own, Pocom didn’t have a wife and children; however, had he been married, his family would have been treated as such. And if Manuel Pocom was named after one of his ancestors—which means that he acted as his dead kin’s substitute—his ancestor’s soul, too, was treated as a mere object of the finca economy and the finca-state. Even the dead did

---


265 Samo Tomsic has strongly argued that the positioning of the subject as the object that satisfies the Other’s demand for capitalist production, coincides with the Lacanian definition of perversion. Samo Tomisic, The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan, (London-New York: Verso, 2015), 103-104.

266 I’m referring to Regina Wagner’s historiographical account of coffee production in Guatemala, where she included an image of a workbook’s front page whose information coincides with the one that I consulted at CIRMA’s archives. It shows the name Manuel Pocóm, the name of finca Santa Isabel, and the year 1897. Likely, it corresponds to the same document or to a copy of the same document. In this image the slots for the names of wife and children are unmarked. Regina Wagner, The History of Coffee in Guatemala, (Guatemala-Bogotá: Villegas Editores, 2001), 93.

267 As I’ve argued in the previous chapter, among the Ixiles and other indigenous pueblos of the western highlands, being named after an ancestor produces an effect of signification by virtue of which the dead’s soul is subjectivized by the living bearer of the name.
not escape the demands of *finca*-labor and the law of the *finca*-state. Whether Manuel Pocom’s individual case fully fits these assumptions matters little, insofar as debt contracts, *finca*-labor, and the use of workbooks were generalized practices in the western highlands. What matters, nonetheless, is that *finca*-labor functioned under the condition of objectivizing the subjective conditions that sustain proper naming among indigenous communities in general, and Ixil communities in particular. It de-subjectivized a life-and-afterlife-of-the-name, as I’ve previously called it.

Don Bernal, an Ixil elder from the village of Ilom, Chajul, expressed it to me in the following manner: “I was a *patiero* (coffee dryer) at *finca* Santa Delfina. *Soleaba y secaba café* [I used to dry coffee under the sun]; but I was just working and working, that’s why I’m so tired now! I sweat a lot, my body got tired. That’s why I couldn’t keep working. Our sweat and strength got consumed there, because how many years did I work there! If there was a celebration, everybody was there, but I’m just working. We cleaned, washed, dried coffee every day. I couldn’t abandon my job, which means that I was sold to the *finca.*” In light of don Bernal’s words, Manuel Pocom’s legal “promise” and workbook reads as a generalized effort of the Guatemalan *finca*-state to possess and appropriate the “I” of the workers in order to consume their labor-power.

Take, in this regard, Decree 486 or “*Ley de Trabajadores,*” which Manuel Pocom’s

---

268 Benjamin Colby and Pierre van den Berghe estimated that, during their fieldwork among the Ixiles of Nebaj, conducted in the late 1960s, as much as 40% of the “able-bodied men may be absent from the area at any given time” considering that each man acquired “contracts” for two to three months, and others remained on the *fincas* year round. See: Benjamin N. Colby and Pierre L. van den Berghe, *Ixil Country. A Plural Society in Highland Guatemala,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969),131-132.

269 Once again, I’m borrowing from Lisa Stevenson’s wonderful ethnography *Life Beside Itself: Imagining Care in the Canadian Arctic,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 103-126.
workbook makes reference to and from which it derived its force of Law.\textsuperscript{270} It required finca owners to keep a record of their workers’ information in the form of payrolls or account books, and to extend certificates or solvencias that credited the colono or jornalero of being a legally solvent worker. In the example presented below (see figure below) one reads:

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.7\textwidth]{Fig3.png}
\caption{Mozo Certification. Source: AGCA.}
\end{figure}

MOZO CERTIFICATION

The infrascrito [undersigned] owner of finca Santa Margarita Jurisdiction of Cobán, CERTIFIES: that the individual Félix Cucul of 30 years of age Single natural [native] from Cobán Mozo Colono of this finca, has worked con puntualidad [always on time] during the period of time of One Year in accordance to his compromiso contraido [contract or acquired commitment]. And in compliance to the Labor Law I extend the present in Cobán on June 1914.

Signed by the owner or administrator

\textsuperscript{270} See Skinner-Kléé, Legislación indigenista, 34-85; and multiple references in chapter 1.
Contrary to *libretas*, the certificates’ point of view is that of *finca* ownership and, as such, it is traversed by the performative force of a signature and a double seal. The first reference to the signature appears in the form of the legal figure that invests the proprietary person with the title of *finca* ownership (“the undersigned owner of *finca* Santa Margarita”); and as its correlate, the graphematic mark corresponds, in this case, to the person (the administrator) who acts in the name of the owner, or better, in the name of the name that authorizes and engraves (twice) the Mozo Certification, i.e., “E.P. Dieseldorff.” Without the double sealing enacted by the proper name of Erwing Paul Dieseldorff, the Mozo Certification loses its capacity to function as an authenticated document: both the official mark of the Guatemalan state—placed on the certificate’s upper left corner—and the administrator’s graphematic signature are thus corroborated. In this minute gesture of authorization, reproduced thousands of times across the coffee producing regions of Guatemala, the signature and double sealing of *finca* ownership engraves and consigns the name of the individualized *mozo*, “Felix Cucul,” and gives “proof” that he has been under the *finca* jurisdiction—in its custody—in compliance with the state’s Labor Law for one year. It puts “Felix Cucul” in its place during the stipulated time.

---

271 The Dieseldorffs are a family of German descent, originally from Hamburg, who came to Guatemala as part of projects of colonization encouraged by the Guatemalan government in the nineteenth century. They had long experience and strong ties with British and German commercial firms. By the end of the century, they had become coffee producers in Guatemala. E.P Dieseldorff or Erwin Paul Dieseldorff came to the country in November, 1888, following the steps of his brother and uncle, who acquired lands in Alta Verapáz. Like them, E. P. Dieseldorff became a coffee producer and, by 1924, he owned more than a dozen coffee producing *fincas* and had his own coffee mills. *Finca* Santa Margarita was located in the city of Cobán, and was the center of his finca-complex operations. Prior to World War II, coffee producing *fincas* owned by Germans were responsible for more than 60% of all the coffee exported from Guatemalan ports, and E.P. Dieseldorff was one of the largest producers at the time. For a detailed history of Germans in Guatemala, see: Regina Wagner, *Los Alemanes en Guatemala, 1828-1944*, (Guatemala: Afines, 2007); and for E.P. Dieseldorff’s biographic history, see: Guillermo Náñez Falcón, *Erwin Paul Dieseldorff, German Entrepreneur in the Alta Verapaz of Guatemala, 1889-1937*, (Ph.D. Diss., Tulane University, 1970).

272 It is likely that Cucul was an indigenous man of Q’eqchi’ descent, given the fact that he was a *mozo colono* in Cobán, where the vast majority of indigenous communities are of Q’eqchi ethnicity. For the history of coffee *fincas* and their relationship with Q’eqchi’ communities, see Grandin, *Last Colonial.*
In the same vein, documents like finca payrolls and account books kept track of the workers’ time and mobility, quantified in terms of jornales (days worked) and qualified in terms of working activity. These books are rarely shown to the public and very few are available in national archives. The one that I consulted belonged to finca El Quetzal, in Chuvá, Quetzaltenango, in the Guatemalan piedmont. The full account book consists of two volumes, spanning from May 1937 to January 1965, and is diagrammed as follows:

FINCA “EL QUETZAL” - CHUVA

Payroll of Jornaleros No. ___ from ___ of ___ to ___ of ___ of ___ 19 ___

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workers’ Names</th>
<th>Days Accounted by Initials (Distributed in Two Weeks)</th>
<th>Total of Days Worked</th>
<th>Money Earned</th>
<th>Corn (Received as provision)</th>
<th>Money Received</th>
<th>Corn Sold</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

As shown in the account book of finca El Quetzal (see figure on page 152), its pages rarely contain explicit graphematic marks of authenticity/authentication and authorship: the payroll is more the archival expression of an impersonal writing, and thus, it provides no clear subjective point of view. Its diagrammatic pages, however, do provide a topological representation of the finca. At the level of its pure form, the account book’s pages are flat geometrical resemblances of the rows that gave shape to the fields where, as Alberto told me, he and his father used to pick cotton and coffee every year. In this sense, it may be said that finca El Quetzal’s account book is the geometrical representation of a “writing on the land,” or rather,

---


149
an over-writing that puts under erasure forms of previous indigenous occupation, use, and patrimony, inasmuch as the Guatemalan piedmont’s lands were used by and belonged to indigenous communities of Mam descent, from pre-colonial times to the first half of the nineteenth century. The payroll thus is the representation of an over-writing that renders Mam ancestral lands invisible.

Horizontally, the jornaleros’ proper names open up the account book to a reading that advances as if leaving behind the place of the name, in a stretch of time of 14 days, from July 11 to July 24, according to the example presented above (column 2). Note that the slots for each day are marked with a handwritten letter that indicates a type of working activity: for instance, the letter “L” stands for “limpia” or cleaning of coffee trees; the letter “D” stands for “desombrado” or clearing of shade trees; and letter “J” stands for jornal which was the equivalent of working a cuerda—an average of 1,700 square meters—of coffee (picking). Unfortunately, I couldn’t corroborate the meaning of the other letters; a circumstance that, in itself, is indicative of the fact that the book, as an archival document, requires a certain decoding; not because of the presence of a hidden secret in the letters themselves, but because in order to trace, re-trace, and keep the record of labor (i.e., its costs for the finca “El Quetzal”), the economy of the book maximizes the use of its topology by virtue of reducing communication to its minimum, pushing it to the point

---

274 This region is—together with the department of Alta Verapáz, where Germans like E.P. Dieseldorff settled—one of the oldest coffee producing zones of Guatemala (mid nineteenth century to date); and its lands, as mentioned above, were part of the communal patrimony of indigenous communities of Mam descent before they were expropriated by the state, during the second half of the nineteenth century. Finca “El Quetzal” or “Viejo Quetzal”—according to other references in the book—had 4 Caballerias of extension and, as far as I could determine via dispersed notes in the books, his owner, during the 1940s, was Francisco Maldonado. No relevant information about him is provided by the payroll. For a detailed historical reconstruction of the Guatemalan piedmont, see Stefania Gallini, Una historia ambiental del café en Guatemala. La Costa Cuca entre 1830 y 1902, (Guatemala: AVANCSO, 2009); and René Reeves, Ladinos with Ladinos, Indians with Indians. Land, Labor, and Regional Conflict in the Making of Guatemala, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).
where communication may no longer communicate. What I want to bring to the reader’s attention, however, is the fact that these letters link labor to the demands of finca production as such, rather than being the marks of its specialization. That the price of the jornal was the same for every working activity (by 1953, it was Q.0.50.) is indicative of the latter. In other words, the finca-state’s imperative work!, imposed onto the majority of indigenous communities of the western highlands, and of which the book gives an account to the letter, translates into “do it all!” for the same jornal.

Letters give way to the sum of working days or jornales (column 3), which are further totalized in the form of cash and corn provisions (columns 5 to 7). The latter were often included in the jornalero’s “contract” as part of his “payment.” At this point, where the worker’s totalized “payment” is consigned under the title “Money Received,” the degree of separation between name and number is the farthest. And yet, it is also the closest: the worker’s personal name guarantees a tracing back of his trajectory to the place where reading initiated, linking thus finca costs and the worker’s numbers to his name.

Indeed, the jornalero’s personal name simultaneously enables the alphabetical organization of a vertical reading that functions as a mere aggregation to be totalized.

---

275 In this sense, and as the later Lacan suggests in an undeclared deconstructive manner, “the letter” is both literal and littoral, that is to say, it is the figure of a literality that contains its own erasure, and also of a border that delimits the domain of one space and the other, by virtue of which a foreignness to knowledge itself is included in reading… to the letter. It is in this sense that the letter performs a hole in knowledge that invokes a surplus of finca enjoyment, as I mentioned before. For Lacan, as it is known, this letter is the “petit a,” or the object of jouissance. See Jacques Lacan, “Lituratrierre” [Lituraterre], in Otros Escritos. For a deconstructive reading of the relationship between the letter, spacing, and temporization, see Jaques Derrida, “Différence,” in Margins of Philosophy, trans., Alan Bass, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

276 It is worth noting that the price of the jornal wasn’t legally stipulated until the second half of the twentieth century, which means that it was settled in a customary manner for over a century of coffee production, from the second half of the nineteenth century until the 1950s or 1960s. And it wasn’t until the late 1970s that the demand for a minimum salary was formulated as such.
Figure 4. Jornalero Payroll, Finca “El Quetzal.” Source: CIRMA.

The book is thus a massive grid that produces a vertical list of (mostly) indigenous names deprived of all the traces of their singularity, i.e., social and cultural history, kinship relationships, and forms of ancestrality. Let us say in passing that, of the 35 names in the figure above, only 3 (Candelaria García, Francisca Vásquez, and Isabel Mejia, located in lines No. 9, 18, and 25 respectively) belonged to women. And as listed names of an aggregate, the finca workers’ proper names appear as mere nouns that re-present the jornal.

To be sure, the book is about numbers and accounting, but, again, one needs to start with
and follow the order of the letter, to be able to re-present the book’s totalization(s).\footnote{For a fascinating analysis about numbers and mathematics in post-genocide Guatemala, see Diane M. Nelson, \textit{Who Counts? The Mathematics of Death and Life after Genocide}, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).} It is in this regard that the account book opens up a way of seeing the \textit{finca} as a site that appears as being always already regimented and open to the inspection of its \textit{jornaleros}. More important—and the payroll’s fastidious and repetitive organization cannot sufficiently emphasize this—it’s readability and topology produces the means to putatively keep under control a form of self-representation and narrative that aspires to \textit{tell it all} in the idiom of numbers and numeric operations: not incidentally, in Spanish—the language of the account book—the meaning of the word \textit{contar} is embedded in the ambiguity between to tell and to enumerate, to narrate and to count. In short, I argue that the account book of \textit{finca} “El Quetzal”—and by extension, workbooks, receipts, and certificates too—gives an account of the propelling fantasy (and inability) to fully control the indigenous names and their potential nominal dissemination. This is what I call a \textit{finca} gaze.

By virtue of a triple register (one of the individual, one of the /finca\s, and the other of the state) proper names worked as knots that tied up sovereignty, \textit{finca} production, and personal identification. Workbooks, certificates, and payrolls show that, for the Guatemalan post-colonial state, the \textit{finca} is the site of the proper name: its multiple refractions, partitions, capitalizations, expropriations, and effacements were linked to the \textit{finca}. Indeed, one of the premises of this chapter is that the possibility of the untangling of this triple register, already included in its production, was understood by the Guatemalan government as the failure of the performative and interpellative powers of the \textit{finca}-state. It was experienced as an incapacity to keep under control the means for the nation state’s self-representation and the re-presentation of the indigenous other. This postulate requires more elaboration, to which I now turn.
One should recall that the drive for counting, scrutinizing, and observing indigenous names to the letter, did not begin with the coffee economy or the Guatemalan post-colonial state. Pedro Carrasco, in his study on how Spanish family names were introduced among the Maya of the highlands, demonstrates that the widespread use of indigenous names was a major concern for the colonial state. For the purposes of the argument, let me quote at length one of Carrasco’s archival findings:

There are many inconveniences to the counting of the indios,” [the Oidor of the Audiencia de Guatemala, Antonio de Lara Mogroviejo, insisted after his visits to the Guatemalan provinces in 1646], “because of their use of names and family names in their lenguas [dialects], which have no signs to differentiate and make them known to those who, most of the time, do not have knowledge of their lenguas [dialects] and cannot write down the names with the convenient fidelity of Castellano [Spanish]; because these names, with their characters, pronunciations, and writing, are confusing and they lack the clarity that is necessary to make [indios] pay tributo [colonial tribute]. [The indios] hiding themselves in this confusion, appear in more than one register or they claim that those who carry the same name are already dead, demanding thus the reduction of their tributes. It is urgent to put a remedy to this [situation] because, in addition to the said inconvenience, there is also the problem reported by the people at the service of God, that in the family names the indios use, there is a hidden meaning of something that may be prohibited by Christianity, be it the Nahuales (if there is such a thing, like some people say), or some other superstition or idolatry. It is just, thus, that such a thing [should no longer exist], not even in the shadows, banishing [those names] from memory. And given that names and family names are used for no other purpose than to signify the individual and the subjected man that one wants to know, Christian family names and patronymics should be used.278

According to Mogroviejo, counting and giving an account of the indigenous tributaries is subjected to failure because indigenous names do not allow differentiation. His discourse

---

proceeds by making indigenous names the indices of an imputed lack of clear signification and of a form of mimetic nomination that allows one person to pass for another. Moreover, for Mogroviejo, the indigenous names’ imputed lack of clarity and mimetism, is merely embedded in a belief of the animated existence of natural things that makes them undistinguishable, insofar as they are not the bearers of a Christian culture and its forms of phallic inscription. These names are thus the marks of deceit, secrecy, and idolatry. As a consequence—de Lara Mogroviejo suggests—colonial authorities cannot fully count their tributaries, they cannot tell it all, and thus, the means to count and tell by virtue of which they present and re-present themselves as colonial authorities fail. Such failure also receives a name, in the plural: “indios.”

He prescribes the use of Christian patronymics or Spanish names-of-the-father, as the means to make knowable and identifiable indigenous tributaries. “Make them use names like ours, so we can count them as tributaries,” one reads in Mogroviejo’s complaint and demand, originating thus an enduring and long-lasting rhetoric of cultural assimilation that basically stipulate the statement “be like us, you cannot be like us.” In doing so, indigenous proper names would be fully open to the colonial authorities’ gaze and would be accessible to their reading in a manner that brings clarity/transparency to personal names that otherwise remain undifferentiated and immediate to nature (as pure signs of Nahualism, in his view). This form of immediacy, rawness, or “pre-cultural” existence (signified by indigenous proper names) is, indeed, a figure of speech and discourse that would accompany the formation of the colonial and post-colonial Guatemalan state and its relationship with the indigenous population for the years to come, as it happened elsewhere in Latin America.

Indeed, by the end of the eighteenth century, the Economic Society of Guatemala
launched a competition to call the most “enlightened minds of Guatemala,” to propose an
effective and “nonviolent” way to “civilize” the indigenous “race.” Friar Mathias de Córdova,
the winner of the competition, argued, in a manner that resembles Mogroviejo’s discourse, that
the best way to achieve such an endeavor was to create and introduce new necessities among the
indigenous population, such as “shoes, clothes, beds, and furniture” similar to those used by
Spaniards. In doing so, indigenous people would be compelled to work beyond their “natural”
needs based, supposedly, on a desire to be like their superiors; and as a consequence,
Guatemala’s agricultural production and commerce would increase and its economy grow.279
This “solution” was thought to be so effective that indigenous people would even stop using their
own languages and names.280 Cordova’s protocapitalist proposal to commodify indigenous
cultures, for which he received a 3oz gold medal prize, came to acquire the status of a
foundational text among Guatemalan intellectuals and political elites, and was to be reiterated in
subsequent occasions throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In the 1880s, for
instance, Ignacio Solis, a top official of the House of Currency argued that “if the indigenous
[individual] consumes nothing other than the direct and immediate products of his own work, it’s
because it is cheaper and thus, attached to his deepest habits. But procure them with a cheaper
way to dress themselves with European fabrics, inculcate in them the necessity of other objects

279 Fr. Matías de Córdova, “Utilidades de que todos los indios y ladinos se vistan y calcen a la Española y medios de
conseguirlo sin violencia, coacción, ni mandato. Memoria premiada por la Real Sociedad Económica de Guatemala,
el 13 de diciembre de 1797,” [Of the Advantages that all Indios and Ladinos Dress the Spanish Way, and the Means
to Achieve it without Violence, Coercion, and Force. Memory presented to the Royal Economic Society of
Guatemala, on December 13, 1797], reprinted in Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia 14, no.2, (December
1937).

280 As I have argued in past chapters, the majority of Ixiles that I know of have two names, one Ixil that they use
mostly among Ixiles, and the other Spanish which they use for interactions with agents of the Guatemalan
government or with ladinos or foreigners. This folding of their name is indicative of the adaptation of Ixil
communities in response to their interactions with the Guatemalan state. However, as I have also indicated, these
names are given and inherited through ancestral institutions of Ixil proper naming different from Spanish
patronymics.
of the same origin, and then, we will see the indigenous race devoted to the agricultural work it is
destined to do.”281 In unison, many finca owners and jefes políticos [regional authorities] reiterated the fact that, because of their natural habits and lack of “sophisticated” necessities, the indigenous population did not want to work for the coffee fincas and didn’t comply with the labor law, as stipulated in the multiple decrees from which workbooks, receipts, certificates, and finca account books derived their force of law, as seen before.282

Take the following official communication between the jefe político [departamental authority] of Quetzaltenango and the Ministry of Gobernación [Security]: “We have in the department countless pueblos [indigenous peoples], fully capable of providing and satisfying with their brazos [arms] all the requirements that our current agriculture [coffee production] demands, and even at a larger scale; but it happens that the indigenous person is naturally lazy. Having very few necessities, he’s satisfied with very little. For this reason, he reluctantly goes to work [to the fincas], and when he goes, he does so only to comply with his commitment, but as soon as he can, he runs away from the finca.”283 Note that it is a body part (i.e., “arms”) that signifies, via metonymy, the indigenous bodies necessary to satisfy finca production. Note, too, that this body part, which the jefe político of Quetzaltenango claims exist in overabundance, is also lacking (as labor-power). That indigenous bodies are metonymically presented as a body “part-object,” to speak in Kleinian parlance, is consistent with the de-subjectivation of an indigenous life-and-after-life-of-the-name, as mentioned before. More important, to make them

281 As quoted in J.C. Cambranes, Café y campesinos, 131.
282 See, multiple references in: J.C. Cambranes, Café y campesino; McCreery, Rural Guatemala; Grandin, Last Colonial.
283 As quoted in J.C. Cambranes, Café y campesinos, 118, (My italics).
count as post-colonial finca workers, the Guatemalan finca-state identified them as a sort of “primary object,” split into an idealized object (i.e., that which would enable the prosperity of the nation’s economy by virtue of its utilization and consumption) and a bad object (i.e., that which deprives the nation of the necessary means to achieve its full image). In this regard, I argue that the name “indios” represents this “primary object” that needs to be counted/narrated to the letter, and that, by the same token, counts as an impediment to counting and narrating as such. For this reason, “indios”—the name of an aggregate that stands for the proper names of indigenous colonial tributaries and post-colonial jornaleros—does not merely appear in workbooks, receipts, certificates, and account books; it figures there as an aggregate in order to be disavowed. Putatively included by virtue of its constitutive exclusion, the name (of ) “indios” simultaneously designates that which remains in a dyadic Imaginary relationship (between the need and demand of the state) and that which is denied the position of a generalized/generalizable social value at the level of the nation state, i.e., the Nation’s Symbolic. It designates, thus, the foreclosure of the indigenous proper name.

Let me briefly remark, before moving my discussion to the names of finca ownership, that if I’m taking this long historical detour, jumping through decades and even centuries, it isn’t out of a historiographical carelessness, but as a means to show a regressive impulse constitutive

---


285 It is in this sense that the name “indio” came to signify the problem of the Guatemalan nation state. References to the use of the name “indio” as a signifier of the impediment of the nation state’s progress abound. But for a general reference and a general index, see: Edgar Barillas, El problema del Indio durante la época liberal, (Guatemala: IIHAA-USAC, 1989).

to the formation of the post-colonial Guatemalan nation-state. My aim hasn’t been to provide an exhaustive historiographical description of the instances in which the name (of) “indios” has appeared in the registers of the colonial and post-colonial state—there are many great historiographical works that have already done so—287—but rather, to highlight the structural and retrospective function that has been assigned to the name.288

Neither do I want to suggest that all the instruments of inscription of what I call the Guatemalan finca-state have been infallible. In fact, their longevity isn’t synonymous with infallibility. Many indigenous workers evaded the state’s labor law by hiding in the mountains, just as they did during colonial times.289 Others, taking advantage of the law’s intrinsic ambiguities, acquired debts from more than one finca, transferring the conflict to recruiters, finca owners, and other agents of the state (municipal and departmental authorities).290 And as historian David McCreery has already pointed out, “the libreta [workbook] was subject to a variety of abuses and frauds by both workers and the employers and was notoriously inaccurate.”291 In fact, some indigenous political leaders even came to fabricate their own certificates to release jornaleros form the burden of finca debts or vagrancy laws, for which they


288 This is also evident in the way in which the newspapers described the violent events that occurred in the Ixil village of Ilom, in the town of Chajul, in 1924 as I have shown in chapter 1.

289 Indeed, while conducting fieldwork in the Ixil region, in the late 1930s, Anthropologist Jackson Lincoln Steward was prevented from visiting the village of Sumal, because, according to his informants, there was a “whole colony of Ixiles who hadn’t paid [their debts] hiding from Municipal agents, and they would cut his throat if given the chance.” See: Jackson Steward Lincoln, An Ethnological Study of the Ixil Indians of Guatemalan Highlands, University of Chicago, 1945, Microfilm, 146.

290 McCreery, Rural Guatemala, 223-235.

291 McCreery, Rural Guatemala, 231.
were also persecuted by the state.\textsuperscript{292} Violent responses against “the book of debts” were not unusual and were often the signs that the limits of endurance had been surpassed.\textsuperscript{293} However, the “book of debts” was effective. And the vast majority of times, the \textit{jornaleros} protested against \textit{finca} authorities when they didn't note down correctly the work done (\textit{jornal}) in their workbooks or \textit{libretas}.\textsuperscript{294}

Take, for instance, the words of don Manuel Antonio as reported to Matilde Gonzalez:

“[In the finca] the \textit{caporal} [\textit{finca} inspector] shows up to look and to say: ‘This is useless! Go to \textit{repasar} [to repeat the work already done], if not I won’t note down your \textit{tarea} [work done].’ Sometimes he notes down \textit{la tarea}, but other times he doesn’t, then \textit{no sale, no sale} [it doesn’t add up]. When we receive the payment it’s incomplete. I sum up my \textit{tarea}, and \textit{no está cabal} [it’s not right], it doesn’t come out the way the \textit{caporal} says. He says he is going to charge the beans, the corn, the \textit{molendera} [tortillas and three daily meals].”\textsuperscript{295} In other words, noting down the \textit{jornal} was equivalent to keeping the record of an imposed debt; but not noting it down was equivalent to the deferral of the debt’s cancellation. This double-bind was the fundamental form of indigenous subjection to the demands of \textit{finca} labor and, as I understand it, it is indicative of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{292} See, in this regard, the extraordinary case of José Angel Icó, a Q’eqchi’ leader that, in the 1940’s, issued his own certificates to exempt indigenous people of his region from vagrancy laws and \textit{finca} labor. He was one of Erwin Paul Diesseldorff’s political adversaries. In Grandin, \textit{Last Colonial}, 42.

\textsuperscript{293} In 1894, indigenous peasants of Q’eqchi’ descent rebelled against the administrator of \textit{finca} Campur, in Alta Verapaz, owned by the German Richard Sapper. In the action, all the coffee trees were destroyed with \textit{machetes} along with the \textit{finca}’s account books, whose pages were left \textit{ensartadas} [skew, stick] in the \textit{finca} fences. See: Wagner, \textit{Los Alemanes}, 186.

\textsuperscript{294} McCreery, \textit{Rural Guatemala}, 271; Gonzalez, \textit{Se cambió el tiempo}, 254.

\textsuperscript{295} As reported to Matilde Gonzalez, in Gonzalez, \textit{Se cambió el tiempo}, 248.
\end{footnotesize}
what Gayatri Spivak refers to as the constitution of a super-adequate subject.296 Therein we see the emergence of a temporality by virtue of which “the future appears as that which must be surpassed,” as Rosalind C. Morris has argued,297 and that simultaneously forecloses Ixil and other indigenous futurities and their ancestral proper names, as explicated in the past chapter. Both poison and remedy, the “book of debts” was the jornalero’s pharmakon.298

Don Concepción Santay referred to this in the following manner: “When I was 12 years old [in 1979, five years after the Guerrilla Army of the Poor’s first public execution], my brother and I went to the finca for 45 days, and they gave us a receipt, as a sign that we had complied with the finca. On our way back,” he told me, “we stopped to rest in Patzul, we were carrying all our stuff, and out of nowhere an army platoon appeared. I thought of running, but my brother advised me not to do so.

– ‘Stand up!’ a soldier told us,
– ‘What do you have there?’ ‘our stuff,’ we replied
– ‘And where are you coming from?’
‘We come from the finca,’ we told him
– ‘Where’s the proof?’ the soldier asked, and we showed him our receipts

---

296 Guatemalan historiography has debated whether the indigenous population was segregated or assimilated to the postcolonial nation-state, which I have thematized as a finca-state. I think this debate ends up in a deadlock or aporia. For what this debate misses or leaves un-problematized is the logic of disavowal. In other words, what I argue is that indigenous populations have been putatively included in order to be disavowed from the nation-state’s politics, and not merely segregated or assimilated. For this historiographical debate, see among others: Arturo Taracena Arriola, “From Assimilation to Segregation: Guatemala, 1800-1944,” in Laura Gotkowitz, ed., Histories of Race and Racism. The Andes and Mesoamerica from Colonial Times to the Present, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); and Grandin, Blood of Guatemala.


‘It is good that you are working,’ he said and then asked us where we were heading to,

‘Chenlá, we live there,’ we replied

–‘So you live in the land of guerrilleros [guerrillas]!’

‘We don’t know anything about guerrilleros, we just went to work, that’s all…”

–‘Leave then!’ he said

And we walked away, just waiting for the tiro de gracia (coup de grace or final blow). We kept walking and walking, then we looked back and the army was gone. If we had not carried our receipts with us, they would’ve killed us.” Thus, a record of bondage, unpaid labor, exhaustion, and even death; a receipt that “certified” him as a mozo working for a finca owned by one of the richest families of Guatemala, the Herreras, had saved don Concepción’s life. His life was spared in the name of finca ownership; and yet, many others have died in the name of that name, as Rigoberta Menchú reminded us above. I now turn to that name, to the proper name of the finca proprietor, to conclude.

_Racializing Currencies: White Patronymics, Finca Numismatics and its Libidinal Economy_

Between the year when Manuel Pocom’s workbook was issued (1897), passing through the year when E.P. Dieseldorff dispensed Felix Cucul’s certificate (1914), and the year that opened up the first payroll of finca “El Quetzal’s” account book (1937), it wasn’t uncommon for fincas to “pay” their jornaleros with “finca-coins” or finca currency. As others have pointed
out, the circulation of these “free-floating currencies” in Guatemala, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and first three decades of the twentieth, was primarily the result of national monetary scarcity. During those years (specially through the 1880s until World War I), Guatemalan emissions were not controlled by the national bank and monetary transactions were still determined by a bi-metallic system (gold and silver). Guatemalan coffee producers—specially those with strong connections with European commercial houses, like E.P. Dieseldorff—would sell their coffee in Europe and the US in gold, and would simultaneously buy cheaper international silver currencies to return to Guatemala for national transactions. They would also coin their own cheaper finca currencies of brass, copper, and other “innoble” materials to pay their jornaleros. The situation did not change for the latter with the creation of the definitive national currency in 1924 (the Quetzal, linked to the gold standard and in parity with US$); and as late as 1945, the new monetary law still acknowledged that the circulation of finca currency was detrimental to the national economy, giving proof that it was still in use during those years, even if only as a supplement to the national currency. As other historians have shown, finca currency was used for transactions within the fincas, mostly in what is known as tiendas de raya or company stores, where the workers would buy corn, beans, liquor, and other necessary

---


300 Nájera, Fichas de finca, 8.

301 The Guatemalan government approved the emission of paper money in the 1880s, but this was made via private banks witch, between 1890 and the 1920s emitted more money than the amount accorded and backed up by the government. See Nájera, Fichas de finca.

302 Nájera, Fichas de finca, 24.
commodities.\textsuperscript{303} This is a standard albeit schematic historiographical description; but \textit{finca} currency may reveal something more, something that, as I show below, also had effects of signification in the process of subjectivation of \textit{finca} labor. Let me unpack this last statement.

In general, engraved on these \textit{finca} coins was the name of the \textit{finca}, its location, the proprietor’s family name, and the denomination of the coin (see figure in page 166). At the level of its surfaces, a \textit{finca} coin made an image appear or stand out, an image that conjoined \textit{finca} ownership with a patronymic of European descent; and as such, it turned its number into a denomination that designated the price of a \textit{jornal} or a day of work \textit{in the finca}. It thus produced an Imaginary tie between the proprietor’s family name, the coin’s denomination, and the \textit{finca}’s domain. But \textit{finca} currency also functioned as a replacement for national currency,\textsuperscript{304} enacting thus a Symbolic substitution that supported the commodification and circulation of \textit{finca}-labor. As a substitute, it occupied the place of a general equivalent that enabled the exchange between the \textit{tienda de raya} or company store’s commodities, the commodified \textit{jornalero}’s labor-power, and the circulation of coffee in the global market. In addition, and at the level of their materiality, Carlos Nájera has aptly called the materials used for their coinage \textit{metales ruines},\textsuperscript{305} which may be roughly translated as “ruined metals,” conveying thus the intrinsic negativity of a metal that is low, abject, bastardized, or in decay in the scale of valuation; but also that is signified as a waste, i.e., the Real of \textit{finca} currency.

Applying the Marxist notion of “originary accumulation” to this process of \textit{finca} value-

\textsuperscript{303} McCreery, \textit{Rural Guatemala}, 225, 271.

\textsuperscript{304} Again, this occurred through most of the late nineteenth century through the first three decades of the twentieth, even though \textit{finca} currency kept supplementing the jornalero’s “payment” until the 1940s and 1950s.

\textsuperscript{305} Nájera, \textit{Fichas de finca}, 25.
formation, one could say that, as a sign representing the jornal and as the jornalero’s means of exchange, finca currency is indicative of the sublation of the workers’ violently enforced alienation and loss of labor-power: it signifies what is leftover from the finca owner’s accumulation of capital or surplus value.

But finca currencies and their signifying effects also testify to the fact that it wasn’t just capital that was accumulated at the expense of the jornaleros’ labor; it was also renown.\textsuperscript{306} What accumulates in gold/capital is the finca owner’s patronymic by virtue of the appropriation of the names of the subject of finca labor, whose losses and “ruin” are represented by finca currency. In so doing, finca coins also engraved in their denominations a form of phallic nominal control that stipulated the social value of the jornalero’s name.\textsuperscript{307} In the economy of proper naming and name inscription that I have presented so far, what we begin to see here is the proprietor’s patronymic tendency towards centralization, or rather, towards the enactment of “the principle of the subjection of many to the sovereignty of one,” as Jean-Joseph Goux called it.\textsuperscript{308} This scale of valuation via engraving would never be too distant from the grave, as it were; never too distant from a certain death that made possible the existence of unmarked graves (of remains without identifiable proper names and places of provenance) and the denial of the grieving or mourning of those whose names were made to appear as mere nouns or as signs of an aggregate; this

\textsuperscript{306} In a letter sent to his mother, during one of his expeditions in Alta Verapaz, E.P. Dieseldorff wrote: “Yesterday I returned from my expedition to Senahú, via Chabon …. As always, I was very well received. The name Dieseldorff is so well known in this department [Alta Verapaz], like the name Rothschild for us. People didn’t want to take money, but I obliged them, for one has to do it in order to acquire a good name [renown], then people say: he is a fine man!” E.P. Dieseldorff, “Letter to his mother. Cobán, May 9, 1889,” in “Letters from E.P. Dieseldorff to his mother, 1888-1890, second part,” trans., ed., Regina Wagner, Anales de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, no. 78, (January-December, 2002): 115.

\textsuperscript{307} As I understand it, this is an instance in which “the signifier represents the subject for another signifier,” as Lacan would put it. See Lacan, “Radiofonía.”

engraving would never be too distant from the massive graves or fosas comunes of Guatemala’s civil war. But this will be the topic of chapter 6. For now, I’d like to linger on the name.

As Goux has pointed out, denomination also makes possible the emergence of a numismatic legislative chain of signification that links the law, name, numeracy, and nomination to a libidinal economy. It is here, I argue, where white European patronymics or names-of-the-father became exemplary in their capacity to engrave the signs of their nominal control (finca cash and finca seals), and to function as phallic equivalents in the finca libidinal economy. In order to grasp this process, let us follow the general traces of their signifying chains.

![Figure 5. Coin used in Richard Sapper’s fincas. Source: Nájera, Fichas de Finca, 48.](image)

Take, for instance, the family name in the coin showed above, “R. Sapper.” Richard Sapper was originally from Wittislingen, Bavaria, Germany, and came to Guatemala in 1884 at the age of 22 to work as a finca administrator in finca Chiacam, owned by Oskar von Nostitz and Willhem A. Dieseldorff (E.P. Dieseldorff’s brother). Like other Europeans at the time, he came to Guatemala to settle in the Verapáces, where coffee production was at its peak in the late nineteenth century. According to historian Regina Wagner, he later bought Chiacam, starting

---

309 Goux, Symbolic Economies, 38.
what would become one of the largest finca complexes of Alta Verapáz, which included over 15 properties with beneficios de café or coffee dryers only matched by Dieseldorf’s. Sapper was also involved in and worked for insurance companies, was an active agent in facilitating the buying and selling of coffee fincas in the Verapáces, worked for Guatemala’s national bank, and became a vice-consul of the German empire in the city of Cobán, Alta Verapáz, where the majority of German settlers resided. In one of his trips to Europe, he married Carlota Schilling, with whom he had three sons and a daughter. As a general rule, German settlers would establish family alliances between them, via marriages, or with other families of European descent, as was also the case for the Dieseldorffs and the Hempsteads. Rarely, although not unusual, they would marry non-European immigrants or local ladinos who occupied important political and economic positions in the country.

Driven, among other things, by a desire to overtake a leading position within a global situation of competitive imperialisms, the arrival of these German immigrants to Guatemala was actively encouraged and welcomed by local ladino national elites who saw in foreign (mostly European but also North American) migration an instrument for fomenting national

310 Wagner, Los Alemanes, 183-185.
311 Wagner, Los Alemanes, 183-185.
312 Wagner, Los Alemanes, 175.
313 For instance, Karl J. Widmann Hackhaussen, who found the Hanseatic Plantation Company of Guatemala, which included coffee and sugar plantation of more than 120 Caballerías, married Susana Luna Ospina, who belonged to a family of plantation owners of Colombian descent. And María Elisa Dorión Klee, would marry Carlos Herrera Luna, a rich coffee and sugar plantation owner whose family was of Guatemalan-Basque descent. For information of the Widmann family, see Luis Solano, “Valle del Polochic: el poder de dos familias,” in Enfoque, no.16, (May, 2011): 7-19; for Dorión Klee and Herrera Luna, see: Marta Elena Casañas Arzú, Guatemala: Linaje y Racismo, (Guatemala: F&G Editores, 2007[1992]), 131-155.
productivity and the whitening or “betterment of the depressed indigenous races.”  

Indeed, as early as 1868, the Guatemalan government promised male colonists an increase in their privileges upon land and labor, if they took an indigenous woman as a spouse. Few of these settlers—which, together with the Germans included people from the United States, England, France, Belgium, Spain, Italy, among others—took indigenous women as their legitimate spouses, but the government’s open invitation to take them as part of their possessions and privileges, was certainly taken to the letter by many. And if not sanctioned by the Guatemalan state, nineteenth century epistemes that allowed the coexistence between liberalism, social darwinism, the commodification of society and the analysis of wealth, provided the illusion of a historical progress that justified “racial improvement” via the whitening of lower class mestizos and indigenous peoples of Guatemala and elsewhere. As historian Greg Grandin has argued about the history of Alta Verapáz, “plantation [finca] life rested as much on rape and sex as it did on forced labor. The Bostonian cousins Kennett and Walter Champney, for example, arrived in Alta Verapáz at the end of the nineteenth century, and each fathered over a dozen children with

---


316 Griffith, Attitudes, 86.

317 As shown by historian Greg Grandin, “more than extracting the labor needed to grow coffee, the Champneys and other Anglo and German planters who settled in the Polochic Valley, such as the Hempsteads, Sappers, Birds, and Owens, used their resident workers to create the comforts of a colonial society in a jungle frontier. Corps of Q’eqqchi’ women worked as domestic servants in estate houses, serving as wives, wet nurses, and mistresses.” Grandin, Last Colonial, 109.

their Q’ecqhi’ cooks and corn grinders. ‘They fucked anything that moved,’ recalls a neighboring planter.”

“My father strode around like he was the marquis of Cahabón,” Champney’s son told Grandin. In spite of, or probably because of this open or widely known fact, Franz Sarg—another prominent German resident of the Verapáces—described the Champneys in his memoir of Alta Verapáz, in apologetic terms, as being dedicated hard working people who, gradually, extended their coffee production to large scale proportions. Thus, the normalized yet violently imposed sexual prerogatives of mostly European patriarchs over indigenous women, developed in parallel with the sanctioned and legitimate reproduction of their families and white European patronyms.

Regina Wagner has insisted that the preservation of German culture among the descendants of people like R. Sapper and E.P. Dieseldorff, is the result of their endogamic family linkages and alliances. Not in contradiction with Wagner, but providing a more complex view of the influence of German and other European family names in Guatemala, Marta Elena Casaús Arzú has shown that settlers who came during the expansion of coffee production and the finca economy, were gradually incorporated into older networks of oligarchic families of colonial origin. This is the case of the Klee family. Karl Rudolph Klee arrived in Guatemala in 1828

319 Grandin, Last Colonial, 32.

320 Even though these planters did not married their indigenous concubines, they were open to recognize some of their descendants, as it is the case of Benjamin champney who, according to Grandin, was uncertain about how many children his father had. Grandin, Last Colonial, 109.


322 This, I believe, speaks of the plus of enjoyment of the finca agents that accompanied finca economy in Guatemala.

323 Wagner, Los Alemanes, 3.

324 Casaús, Guatemala linaje y racismo,129.
and, in partnership with George Ure Skinner (an entrepreneur of British origin), they founded one of the largest Commercial Houses in the country, the “Klee, Skinner & CO.” According to Wagner, the son of Karl Klee inherited all of George Skinner’s possessions on the condition that he kept the name “Skinner” alive, thus giving origin to one of the most enduring names in Guatemala’s political history, “Skinner-Klee.”325 They would later establish family alliances with the Ubicos 326 (a Guatemalan-Basque family) in the second half of the nineteenth century, and with the Dorións327 (of French descent) around the same time.328 Maria Elisa Dorion Klee would marry Carlos Herrera Luna in 1886, one of the richest men in Guatemala and whose fortune was also the result of his involvement in coffee and sugar production in the Guatemalan piedmont and the “Costa Grande,” known today as la costa, where the vast majority of my interlocutors used to go to work in the 1970s.329 Carlos Herrera Luna inherited a vast patrimony from his father, Manuel María Herrera, who was part of the cabinet of ministers of President Justo Rufino Barrios (1873-1885), and one of the coffee planters and politicians behind the promulgation of

325 Wagner, Los Alemanes, 43. The Klees would be involved in coffee and sugar production, mining, lumber and gum, and they would come to own one of the largest pharmacy chains in Guatemala. The Klees would also establish family alliances with the Novellas, owners of Cementos Progreso, the largest producer of concrete in Central America. See “Guatemala’s Bourgeoisie: the Top 20 families,” in Susanne Jonas And David Tobis, eds., Guatemala, (Berkeley: NACLA, 1974), 210-249; Casaús, Guatemala linaje y racismo, 131-155.

326 The Ubicos are a family of merchants of Basque origin who established family alliances with the Urruelas beginning in the eighteenth century. They have been involved in state administration ever since. Jorge Ubico, a dictator who ruled Guatemala from 1931 to 1944 is remembered for being one of the most intransigent and ruthless dictators of Latin America’s twentieth century. His father, Arturo Ubico Urruela was a lawyer and politician-member of the liberal party. See: Casaús, Guatemala linaje y racismo.

327 The Dorions have been involved in the banking and energy sectors since the nineteenth century. They have family connections with the Bacardi family (producers of the Bacardi rum company, of Cuban origin), and have investments in hotels. See Jonas and Tobis, “Guatemala’s Bourgeoisie;” Casaús, Guatemala linaje y racismo.

328 Casaús, Guatemala linaje y racismo, 131-155.

329 The Herreras are the owners of the largest sugar mill in Central America, Ingenio Pantaleón, and today, they are the majority holders of Pantaleón Sugar Holdings. They have been involved in the banking sector since the nineteenth century and have represented transnational automobile and textiles companies in Guatemala, among others. For a detailed information on the Herreras’ patrimony, capital, and investments up to the 1970s, see Jonas and Tobis, “Guatemala’s Bourgeoisie.”
the labor law that sanctioned Manuel Pocom’s workbook, as seen before.\textsuperscript{330} In fact, the Herreras were the owners of the finca de mozos where don Concepción Santay’s family resided, and where don Concepción used to pay off his and his family’s debts. As he told me, and as seen above, he was coming back from one of the Herreras’ fincas when the army stopped him and demanded proof that he was a finca worker instead of a guerrillero or guerrilla. The receipt that saved his life was authorized and sealed by that family name.\textsuperscript{331}

This detour through family names like Sapper, Dieseldorff, Skinner-Klee, Ubico, Dorión, Herrera, among others—including references to their lateral and agnatic relations, their links to capitalism and imperialism, and their active engagement with the politics of the Guatemalan state—provides a broader view of the legislative chains to which finca currency belonged.\textsuperscript{332} It was through chains of endogamic family alliances and the accumulation of economic and political power that they made possible—as Casaús argues—that the names-of-the-father of the finca

\textsuperscript{330} Casaús, Guatemala linaje y racismo, 151; Jonas and Tobis, “Guatemala’s Bourgeoisie.”

\textsuperscript{331} Recall, too, as I have shown in the past chapter, that among Don Concepción’s father’s adversaries there was a family of Italian descent, the Brols, owners of the largest finca in the Ixil region to date. Like many other foreign emigrants who came to Guatemala in the late nineteenth century, they made their fortune via coffee and sugar production at the expense of indigenous lands and labor-power. Little is known about Italian migration to Guatemala, in general, and less is known about the Brols, unlike their German counterparts. The Brols themselves are a secluded family. I myself tried to arrange an interview with them but they declined my requests through some of their representatives. Others, including national and international journalists, haven’t been able to interview them either. This is due, in part, to their historical conflicts with multiple Ixil communities—some of which I dealt with in the first chapter—since the early twentieth century through the civil war (the guerrillas killed one of them). To date, they are behind a major hydroelectric project called “Palo Viejo” which led to confrontations with the Ixil ancestral authorities of Cotzal, including don Concepción himself, as I pointed out in the past chapter. As far as I understand, via archival research, it was Enrique Brol who acquired the lands that now conform finca San Francisco, in San Juan Cotzal, in the early 1900s. He came to Guatemala in his childhood and lived in Mazatenango, Suchitepequez (part of the southern coast), which, at the time, was one of the main coffee and sugar producing zones of Guatemala. When he was old enough, apparently in his youth, he started to work at finca Chocolá, a vast coffee producing finca owned by a German firm, where he learned everything about coffee and sugar production. Brol himself was politically active and served as Minister of Agriculture in the 1950s. By 1951, finca San Francisco was producing coffee, sugar, cattle, and around 500 mozos colonos resided there. In the 1970s, an army outpost was established in the finca. See Miguel Villegas, “En la finca San Francisco Cotzal. Una empresa agrícola en las selvas Quichelenses,” El Imparcial, March 6, 1951, 3, 9.

\textsuperscript{332} In this regard, see also the excellent analysis of Gustavo Palma Murga, “Núcleos de poder local y relaciones familiares en Guatemala,” Mesoamerica, no. 11, (1986).
owners were guaranteed and reproduced.333

Figure 6. Coins used in E.P. Dieseldorff’s fincas. Source: Alfredo Irearte, Fichas de finca y misceláneas, 1988.

In this regard—and if the phallus is the gold coin of sexual economy, as Goux and others suggest334—finca-coins show that, within the libidinal economy of fincas, the symbolic substitutes of the gold coin of sexual economy were/are part of a racialized hierarchy. If this is the case, finca currency not only functioned as a support for the commodification and circulation of finca labor power, but it also re-presented, in minute yet widespread instances, the value of indigenous labor and the foreclosure of a nominal/phallic exchange between self ascribed white

333 In her extensive study she summarizes the ideal or desired family alliances as follows: “the Ideal marriage during colonial times was between a criolla [a woman born in the Colonies but of Spanish-European descent] and a peninsular [a conquistador or encomendero born in Spain]. Later, it was between a criolla and an advenedizo [newly come from Spain] if possible with a title [nobility title]. In the nineteenth century, it was between a criolla and a German, and in the twentieth century, it was between a “white woman” and a foreigner, preferably North-American, German, or a wealthy ladino who belongs to an older family with abolengo or noble ancestry or name.” Casaús, Guatemala linaje y racismo, 216.

334 Goux, Symbolic Economies; Morris, Returns of Fetishism, 230.
patronymics and the non-white indigenous ones. What I’m arguing here is that indigenous patronymics or names-of-the-father were forced to occupy a position of pure loss, depreciation, and castration.\textsuperscript{335}

Casaús has convincingly showed that among Guatemala’s oligarchic families, exogamic marriages are rarely allowed, unless they represent the increment of wealth and capital or the “upgrade” to a putatively white racial purity.\textsuperscript{336} This explains why, at least during the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth, “racial” mixing that included the dominant classes often occurred between white North American and European men and indigenous women, the opposite (indigenous men and white European women) being the source of racial anxiety or utter prohibition.\textsuperscript{337} Unfortunately, Casaús’ analysis—and Wagner’s for that matter—of Guatemala’s family networks and racial economy, as I understand it, has left un-problematized the libidinal and psychic affects that structure these families' endogamic relations and their influence in the reproduction of Guatemala’s racism. If I’m not wrong, therein lies the madness and fear of Guatemala’s non-indigenous and self-ascribed white society of losing their patronymics, and their anxiety towards the dissemination of the indigenous patronymics. Hence, their disavowal.

\textsuperscript{335} This is what Lacan calls phallocentrism, i.e. the capacity of the phallus as a signifier to codify other objects and signs as instances of castration. Derrida, emphasizing the link between the law, the letter, and patriarchy, calls it phallogocentrism. For a detailed explication of these terms and their implications in the context of a discussion on fetishism, see: Rosalind Morris, \textit{The Returns of fetishism...}, op.cit. p.227; see also: Jacques Lacan, \textit{Feminine Sexuality. Jacques Lacan and the école freudienne}, Juliet Michell and Jacqueline Rose (eds.), (New York: Norton, 1982).

\textsuperscript{336} Casaús, \textit{Guatemala linaje y racismo}, 53.

\textsuperscript{337} Self described “white women” are thus the bearers of the responsibility of sustaining and reproducing their imputed racial/cultural purity. They are thus the objects of the patriarchal and heteronormative interdictions of self-described white Guatemalans, an objectification that nonetheless bestows onto them the prerogatives of their racialized social class. In other words, they are objects of a sexual pact but subjects of class and race. As one informant, a self described white woman in her forties, told Casaús, “I would never allow my daughter to marry an indigenous [man], because they are of a different race and they are totally apart. It’s not that it’s not well seen, because they are an inferior race genetically classified as such. And our obligation is to improve the race, not make it worse.” Casaús, \textit{Guatemala linaje y racismo}, 216.
What I’m arguing here is that this madness was propelled and intensified by the finca economy and the Guatemalan finca-state. And ladinos were not exempted from these libidinal/racial gains and losses.

Historian Arturo Taracena has argued that, since Independence (1821) and through the Republican period, the Guatemalan state used the term ladino to systematically identify all non-indigenous social groups and, as a result, identifiers such as Español [Spaniard] and Criollo [Creole, a person of Spanish origin born in Guatemala] fell into disuse. By the second half of the nineteenth century, Guatemala’s nation-state and dominant classes identified themselves as ladinos. If the Colonial society was structured as a diverse yet stratified racial pyramid of Castas (Spaniards, Criollos, Pardos, Zamarros, Ladinos, Indios Aladinados, Indios, etc.), after independence and through the nineteenth century, the nation-state codified the Guatemalan society into a racially bi-polar division of indigenous and ladinos (non-indigenous). In tension with Taracena’s thesis, Carol A. Smith has convincingly argued that, during the nineteenth

---

339 Arturo Taracena, “Contribución al estudio;” “From Assimilation.” As other historians and ethnohistorians have shown, the ladino population remained demographically and politically marginal through the colonial period; but they gradually gained access to lands and resources near to or that were part of the indigenous communities’ patrimony, specially in the Central Highlands. However, communal lands remained under indigenous control for the most part of the colony and, in the Western Highlands, indigenous communities were able to undertake legal strategies to secure royal titles on their lands against the expansion of ladino groups, especially by the end of the eighteenth century. For fiscal and tributary purposes, the Spanish crown favored indigenous communities. This tendency led to the formation of what others have called “the two republics.” Contrary to the colonial law, the republican law—after independence (1821)—was designed to instigate the privatization of public and indigenous communal lands, under the premise that private property was the foundation of national development. With the dissolution of colonial restrictions, and as the ladino society gained demographic and economic presence, their pressure over indigenous lands and resources increased. Using state legislation, through figures such as the censo enfitetico, many ladinos were able to acquire more lands and, in the process, they learned to climb the ranks of political influence in Guatemala’s nineteenth century society through administrative and military positions within the Guatemalan state. That tendency was amplified when coffee production became the focus of Guatemala’s export-led economy (1860s). Ladinos became finca recruiters, caporales [finca inspectors], jefes políticos [regional authorities], finca administrators, and small to large finca owners.
century, Guatemalan society was rather codified by the ‘white/non-white’ dichotomy. For Smith, the fact that Guatemala’s liberal dominant classes considered Rafael Carrera—the main figure of the Conservative party and the mestizo president of Guatemala from 1839 to 1865—and his followers to be “indios,” epitomized and was indicative of the prevalence of the distinction white/non-white. Only during the twentieth century the pair ‘indio/ladino’ came to be dominant; and even then, as Carol Smith carefully remarks, “the white/non-white division did not disappear; it simply became less apparent.”

To be sure, Taracena and others have provided ample historical evidence that supports the fact that ladinos gained unprecedented economic and political power through the nineteenth century; he has also convincingly shown that ladinos relentlessly disputed regions which remained relatively under the control of indigenous elites during the colony, albeit in a subordinated position in relation to the colonial elites and state. And yet, Smith’s argument cannot be easily dismissed, specially if one considers the incorporation of North American and European settlers, who identified themselves as whites, into older Guatemalan oligarchic networks. Even more, these settlers’ stereotypical vision of ladinos as being backward, untrustworthy, intellectually inferior, etc., did not fully dissipate or, in the best of cases, it remained contradictory and/or ambiguous, giving proof that a discourse on whiteness was in

---


342 See, the excellent work of Isabel Rodas Núñez, De españoles a ladinos. Cambio social y relaciones de parentesco en el Altiplano central colonial guatemalteco, (Guatemala: ICAPI, 2004).
place through the nineteenth and twentieth century.\footnote{This is evident in Dieseldorff’s correspondence to her mother, and in Franz Sarg’s memoire of Alta Verapáz. See: Erwin Dieseldorff, “Cartas de E.P. Dieseldorff a su madre, 1888-1890, Primera Parte,” trans., ed., Regina Wagner, in Anales de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, no.77, (January-December, 2001):143-161; Diesseldorff, “Cartas;” Sarg, Memorias. See also: Matilde González-Izás, Modernización capitalista, racismo y violencia, Guatemala (1750-1930), (Mexico: El Colegio de México, 2014).}

This debate hasn’t been settled yet, and Guatemala’s dominant classes are still an elusive subject for social scientists alike. However, if I’m not wrong, what came to occupy the position of a general equivalent in the process of social valuation of wealth, patronymics, and renown, was engraved with self-identified white European names. Within the finca economy, European patronymics came to be overvalued proper names that signified a surplus of renown. Indigenous patronymics, for their part, came to figure in the narrative of the post-colonial finca-state as the name (of) “indios,” and as such, they were forced to occupy the position of loss. It is not so much that whiteness is “less apparent,” as Smith suggests; rather, whiteness is unconscious: and here, surplus and lack coincide. In their desire for bleaching and “improving” Guatemala’s indigenous races via North American and European migration, ladino elites ended up racializing themselves. Whiteness, one could say, is the gold coin of the racial/phallic economy.

What I have presented so far are the general traces of a fetishistic libidinal/racial economy, whose symbols and signs are sublimations of the fact that, in reality, both the phallus and whiteness are mere signifiers.\footnote{It is because of the fetishistic nature of the finca libidinal/racial economy that one can speak of a certain sadomasochist racism in Guatemala, as anthropologist Alejandro Flores has argued. See: Alejandro Flores, “Ontología de la raza y el racismo S&M,” in AVANCSO, Sexo y Raza. Analíticas de la blancura, el deseo y la sexualidad en Guatemala, (Guatemala: Avancso, 2015).} That is to say, not even the Dieseldorffs, the Sappers, the Sikenner-Klees, the Dorions, the Herreras, and their descendants, possess them as pigmented bodily organs or as marks of a natural biological “substance,” despite their insistence on having
“pure blood” or “white genes.” What remains, nonetheless, are the symptoms, psychic affects, and the madness of the finca economy.

Conclusions

In his ethnography on ladino racial ambivalence in the town of Chimaltenango, Guatemala, anthropologist Charles R. Hale reported an illustrative conversation between himself and a group of ladinos about the events that led to the uprising of indigenous against ladinos in the town of Patzizia, in 1944. In the conversation, a man called Guillermo asked don Miguel—an octogenarian man and a political figure of the region—in an assertive manner, stated what follows: “people say that the indigenous men wanted to take the ladina women. Ah! Of course they did,” don Miguel answered, “they had a plan to finish off the ladinos, and each one of them already had a woman picked out who would stay with the men…. It turns out that the Indians were prepared…. I remember the central plaza, where the church is now, they had gathered there with rifles to wait. One ringing of the bell and they all would have risen up against the ladinos. But thank God in that time the local commander was there, gathered with his men; he took charge and confronted the problem.”

It remains unclear how many indigenous people died during the repression of Patzicia's rebellion. One of Hale’s informants believed that two ladinos and some twenty indigenous had

---

345 Indeed, as anthropologist Ramon Gonzalez Ponciano has suggested, many of the self-identifying white Guatemalan elites are viewed as being stereotypically backward by those who dominate the global social-racial structures of power. See: Jorge Ramón González Ponciano, “The Shumo Challenge. White Class Privilege and the Post-Race, Post-Genocide Alliances of Cosmopolitanism from Below,” in Carlota McAllister and Diane M. Nelson, eds., War by Other Means. Aftermath in Post-Genocide Guatemala, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 308.

346 Charles R. Hale, Mas que un Indio. Racial Ambivalence and Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Guatemala, (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 2009), 151.
died. What seems to be clear for Hale’s informants is the fact that it was a “purely racial” uprising, caused by the indigenous people’s long lasting resentment. Memories about Patzicia's rebellion became relevant for Hale because they were being remembered during a period of time (after the signing of the peace agreements in 1996) when local ladinos where dealing with their partial lost of control over municipal politics, the re-emergence of local, national, and continental expressions of indigenous movements, and the national and international notoriety of indigenous women like Rigoberta Menchú and Rosalina Tuyuc. For Charles Hale, ladino anxiety is an expression of their racial ambivalence, and is indicative of his informants’ contradictory recognition of indigenous rights and their refusal to lose ladino racial privileges. But despite Hale’s interest in psychic affects, he avoids considering the role that the discourse of whiteness has played in the structuring of racial relations in Guatemala’s libidinal economy and its effects over the ladino population. To be precise, he does not consider that among ladinos, whiteness is desired and has to be achieved, which means that ladinos also occupy the position of non-whites; whereas for those that he oddly calls “Euro-Guatemalans” whiteness is to be reproduced.

Lacan has argued that anxiety is a psychic affect that arises when dyadic imaginary relations (based on need and demand) seem to be severed or withdrawn. Moreover, as the product of imaginary relations, anxiety is also the symptomatic appearance of an inability to

---

347 According to historian Edgar Esquit, the rebellion was the result of a longer historical process in which a very small number of ladinos came to possess the majority of Patzicia’s lands, and came to be the beneficiaries of Guatemala’s labor drafts and vagrancy laws that targeted the indigenous population. The event was triggered by a political election in which General Ponce Vaides promised the indigenous of Patzicia the he would give them their lands back. Edgar Esquit, “Relaciones de poder in Patzicia, 1871-1944,” in: Jean Piel and Todd Little-Siebold, eds., “Entre comunidad y nación. La historia de Guatemala revisada desde lo local y lo regional,” (Guatemala: CIRMA-CEMCA, 1991), 38-41.

keep under control the means of self-representation and the representation of the other. One may read this symptomatic anxiety in the recurrent statement of Hale’s informants “We want the indígenas to become more like us, and yet, they cannot be like us,” a statement that is retrospectively linked to Mogroviejo’s demand to force indigenous people into the use of Spanish patronymics, and Guatemala’s political elites’ demand for commodifying indigenous cultures, as I have argued in this chapter. This is the structural disavowal that Hale’s informants discursively perform and that he himself disavows. Melanie Klein reminds us that such gratifying and frustrating fantasies—when bestowed onto objectifying relations, where the “primary object” is split into a good and bad object—easily turn into hate and violence. In this regard, this chapter provides a retrospective reading of the formation of the racialized libidinal economy of the Guatemalan finca-state and the politics of naming engraved within it. This was the form of state that the Guatemalan guerrillas confronted, primarily through a generalized anonymity and pseudonymity, and it was this form of state that responded to the revolutionary politics that included the support of a large number of indigenous communities of the western highlands, as we’ll see in the next chapter.
Chapter 4: The Politics of Anonymity and the Insurrection Against the Master Signifier

To be mistaken on war is to be mistaken on society.

Pierre Clastres

Introduction

In the past chapter I’ve argued that Ixil (indigenous) patronymics and personal names (Ch’exel of namesakes) were appropriated and de-subjectivized by the constraints and forms of control of the Guatemalan finca-state. This appropriation also enacted the double displacement of the indigenous women’s proper names as a condition of their super-exploitation. I have also shown the historical conditions by virtue of which the subject of finca labor was appropriated by the signifier (in the form of indigenous proper names) through multiple instruments of inscription like workbooks, finca receipts, solvencias, payrolls, and account books that produced a form of representation whereby fincas appeared as sites always regimented and open for the control, surveillance, scrutiny, and totalization of the subject of finca labor. These multiple instruments of inscription were diagrammed, reproduced, distributed, validated, and legitimized in and by the name of finca ownership, whose signatures primarily corresponded to the patronymics of finqueros of a self-described white European descent. Most of my interlocutors talked about these documents as variations of a generic “book of debts” that enacted their objectification (predication) and enabled their subjection (as the subjects of labor-power) to finca labor, i.e., their constitution as super-adequate subjects capable of producing surplus labor.

One of the main arguments of chapter 3 is that in the libidinal economy of proper naming that the Guatemalan finca-state instituted, the proper names of indigenous people were forced to
occupy the site of pure loss and castration, whereby their names were and are foreclosed and disavowed. The figure of such foreclosure is that of “indios.” In general terms I describe this disavowal as the effect of the madness of the Guatemalan finca economy and state. In this chapter, I want to move this discussion towards the politics of anonymity and pseudonymity that emerged during the revolutionary struggle of the late 1970s and first years of 1980.

In the pages that follow I argue that during these years the emergence of a revolutionary discourse produced the ideological coincidence of the “I” and “we” of the subject of finca-labor. This discourse enabled the appearance of the “many” as a multiple other who spoke not in or under his/her name but in the name of a future to come. During the indigenous insurrection, I argue, the Master signifier no longer represented the subject to another signifier, disabling thus its capacity to identify the subject of finca labor. This was indicative of a crisis of the symbolic structures of identification of the Guatemalan finca-state. We shall see that the enabling disorganization of the symbolic structures of the state, pushed by the insurrection against the name-of-the-father that occupied the position of the Master signifier in Guatemala, confronted the madness of the symbolic and libidinal finca economy with its own Real, something that, as I will elaborate in chapter 6, was met with massive violence.
Map 3. EGP’s areas of operation by July 1982. Source: “Un trabajo de masas para la guerrilla,” interview with Rolando Morán by Martha Harnecker, manuscript, n.d. CIRMA.
I had interviewed Alberto for over a year when I mentioned that I was thinking of presenting a paper based on his life history. I wanted to know his opinion and, if he agreed, also to discuss a draft with him. He did agree and, in June 2007, we finally sat at my desk to go over it. By the end of a productive conversation, I asked Alberto whether I should use his real name or not, given the fact that he had been a guerrilla combatant in the Guerrilla Army of Poor’s “Ho Chi Minh” front, for over 14 years. “Instead of my name,” Alberto told me, “use my pseudonym, use Jacobo.”

As I understood it, Alberto’s gesture re-affirmed the fact that speaking about his revolutionary self demanded that he keep his legal identity undisclosed. As if acknowledging that the memories of a time when he fought for a different future required that he avoided speaking in his state-recognized name. Then as much as in the present—Alberto seemed to suggest—speaking and appearing as other, as in the use of a pseudonym, was a way of keeping his proper name and his identity safe. “Say it all, except the name,” was Alberto’s stipulation. That form of appearing as other by virtue of which one is heard speaking but not in one’s name, came to be the

---

The Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) was born out of the Guatemalan first guerrillas that operated through the 1960s in the Eastern part of the country. The Guatemalan Army crushed them by 1970. First called NORC or New Organization of Combat, the EGP’s first column of combatants who slipped into Guatemalan territory from the Mexican side of the jungle of “Ixcan,” made their first contacts and structures of support with cooperativistas (members of cooperatives) that had recently colonized the jungle in search of new lands. From the Ixcán, the EGP would expand its operations to the Sierra (Chuchumatan mountains) in the departments of Huehuetenango and El Quiché, and then the central highlands, in the departments of Sololá, Chimaltenango, and Sacatepequez. The EGP would also establish fronts in the southern coast, the Verapáces, and Guatemala City. By the early 1980s, there were seven operative fronts throughout Guatemala, the “Ho Chi Minh,” that operated in the Ixil region (the Sierra), the “Comandante Che Guevara” front, that operated in Huehuetenango and the Jungle of Ixcán, the front “Otto René Castillo,” that operated in Guatemala City (and was considered the guerrillas rearguard), the “Marco Antonio Yon Sosa” front that operated in the Verapáces, the “Luis Augusto Turcios Lima” front that operated in the Southern Coast, and the “Agusto Cesar Sandino” front that operated in the central highlands, in the Departments of Chimaltenango, Sololá, and Sacatepequez. Of these fronts, only the Ho Chi Minh and the Comandante Che Guevara would remain operative after the Guatemalan army’s scorched earth campaign in the highlands (1981-1983), and the virtual annihilation of the fronts of Guatemala City and the southern coast. See: CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 12 vols., (Guatemala: UNOPS, 1999), 7: 270-300.
main subject of our conversations.

The first time we sat around a tape recorder, I asked him how he had decided to join the guerrillas. “I remember that, when I was in school, in fifth grade, a teacher who had a very ‘social mentality’ gave us a book that said, these are the poor and these are the rich, but why are there poor and rich people? We thought about this a lot; but since I experienced it in carne propia [first hand or in the flesh], everything that was happening in la costa, that’s how I was able to make the difference and I became aware of the situation.” Alberto may have been 12 years old when that happened. He did not take up arms then, but without this book and reading, perhaps he wouldn’t have done it later.

As I re-read the transcripts of our conversations, alongside of hundreds of archival documents and many other interviews I collected during my fieldwork, his reference to a book that made the difference, a book about why there are rich and poor, changed the way I was reading my own information. For Alberto did not speak of a workbook or libreta that kept the record of his family and father’s debts; neither did he speak of a book that kept that record straight in his head. I myself have spoken about those written records and their radical discontinuity in the past chapter. And yet, it seems that the book he speaks of bridges those two discontinuous records of debt and labor in a manner that allowed the emergence of a palpable difference: it touched on a difference he himself experienced first hand, in the flesh. Here, Alberto speaks of the emergence of a tactile reading by virtue of which his and his family’s displacements to la costa, their unpaid labor, and their patronymic’s ex-propriations are conjoined to a difference (rich/poor) that disabled the appearance of the “the book of debt” as a pure medium designed not to be read by people like him. To be sure, the book that Alberto
remembers isn’t about numbers in their right balance; and yet, it cannot be fully detached from a certain accountability, one that speaks of a form of theft and injustice I myself have elaborated on in chapters 1 and 3. The last word, as it were, did not belong to “the book of debts” any more.

I am assuming that a dialogue between Alberto’s recollections and the forms of inscription of the finca-state that I have presented before is possible. But if Alberto speaks of the emergence of a tactile reading that captured and made the difference, he’s making reference to a moment—perhaps an event of thought—by virtue of which he was able to affectively read the symbolic structuring of the “book of debts” and its re-iterations, and how they represented him and his family. I think that Alberto recognized himself in the book about the rich and the poor and, in doing so, he saw anew how his family appeared in the written scenes of a finca gaze, scenes where their subjectivity had been evacuated. Doubtless, the emergence of the difference rich/poor marks the advent of Alberto’s political consciousness; but the tactile reading he speaks of also brings with it the possibility that those who speak from the position of finca ownership and wealth—whose names occupy the position of the Master signifier—see themselves being seen.

I’m thinking of Foucault’s panopticon and how it functions by producing a discontinuity between the gazes of those who are surveilled and those who surveil. Alberto’s narrative, nonetheless, seems to suggest that, as he learned to read the difference in and through his flesh, this tactile reading enabled him to see himself reading—seeing—how he and his family were

---

350 As I have argued in the previous chapter, and I have also reminded the reader in the introduction to this chapter, workbooks, jornalero certificates, finca account books and payrolls, etc., represented the finca as a regimented site open to the inspection of all its jornaleros (a site of surveillance). Those records and forms of inscription were, moreover, symbolically linked to forms of economic and social valuation that correspond to what Lacan calls the Other (in the context of my research, the Symbolic order of the finca economy).

objectified by the finca-sate. He saw himself by seen how fincas were organized by the Other’s stipulations (the Symbolic) to which he and his family couldn’t say no. In our conversations, Alberto remembered this moment in which he saw himself seen the Other as an act of courage. And as with many other significative events in his life, this one was also framed by his intimate relationship with his father (recall that, as I mentioned in the chapter 3, Alberto became a man in poverty working alongside his father in the fincas of la costa). This is how he told me about the events that led to the day he decided to join the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), when he was 17 years old, in 1981:

When I was old enough, I went to la costa with mi papá [my dad] in November, to cortar caña [to work during the sugar cane harvesting]. In those days, my dad was very brave, and he did not allowed himself to be discriminated against by the owners. He always came forward, and during that time, the organized struggle began. And who did that struggle? The same mozos colonos [the finca residents]. They said, ‘what we want is the owners to pay full wages and stop stealing from the peasants.’ Then la gente [the people] went to parar toda la costa [they paralyzed la costa], all the roads in Santa Lucía were blocked…. I was there because my dad was a member of the union, I was like 16 years old. That’s when the strike happened; all the trucks were sabotaged, and the cotton and sugar cane fields were burned. We weren't able to go back to our home until our demands were heard.

Here Alberto is making reference to the general strike of jornaleros organized by the Committee of Peasant Unity (CUC) in la costa. This strike was one of a kind. It began in the finca Tehuantepec and the sugar mill La Unión on February 18, 1980. It quickly spread to other sugar cane and cotton fincas of the area. On February 26, the sugar mill Pantaleón, owned by the Herreras, was paralyzed together with sugar mills Santa Ana, Madre Tierra, and Los

---

352 For a detailed account of the events that led to the strike, see: Cindy Foster, “‘Miles de machetes en alto’, las luchas campesinos de la Costa Sur en el surgimiento de la Revolución Guatemalteca, 1970-1980,” in Manolo Vela Castañeda, ed., Guatemala, la infinita historia de las resistencias, (Guatemala: CEPAZ-Madre Tierra, 2011); and Lizeth Gramajo, Karen Ponciano, and Juan Vandeveire, Lucha campesina y trabajo pastoral en la costa sur de Guatemala, (Guatemala: Avancso-Verdad y Vida-URL, 2016), 165-196.
Tarros, including their fincas. And by February 27 the sugar mills Tierra Buena, Palo Gordo, Tululá and El Pilar came to a halt, marking thus the total paralyzation of cotton and sugar production in Guatemala. Over 75,000 workers were involved in the strike. Their demand, as Alberto recalls, was an increase of the minimum wage (from Q.1.20 to Q.5.00) which, after 15 days of strike and long negotiations between union leaders, finca owners, and the government, was settled at Q.3.20. One of the CUC’s media of propaganda and information, the newspaper *De sol a sol*, highlighted the events as follows:

> During the las week of February and first of March, we the trabajadores del campo [rural workers] have carried out the biggest and most numerous struggle ever known in the southern coast and other regions of Guatemala. This has been a very important step in the country’s revolutionary struggle …. During the days of the strike we the peasants have taken the power and control over the fincas, in the sugar mills, and in other factories that joined our struggle. We have forced them [the government, the police, the army, the finca owners and their administrators] to run. Guatemala was waiting for and expectant of the movements of our machetes …. We are descalzos [barefoot] but we are many. We are the ones who produce the wealth the rich and powerful count, enjoy, and squander …. Today we have opened up the field of struggle for better wages, tomorrow it will be for the land that belongs to us, and the day after tomorrow it will be to conquer the power to change Guatemala from its roots.

Alberto’s father participated in these events as a member of an organization with ties to the CUC, both in *la costa* and in his town of origin, San Martín Jilotepeque, Chimaltenango, where *De sol a sol* circulated among its members. The tone and point of view of *De sol a sol*, however, was very different when the newspaper first started to circulate in 1974, before the

---


354 Levenson-Estrada, *Trade Unionists*.

CUC’s first public appearance in 1978. Most of its editorials and contents were written from a pedagogical perspective, presented in the form of questions and answers (in interrogative form) and narrated from the perspective of a pronominal third person. Among other things, it examined the history of agrarian capitalism in Guatemala, the oppressive and discriminatory nature of the Guatemalan government and its elites. It denounced the Guatemalan army’s repression, and it urged indigenous and poor ladino peasants to work together in their own political organization. It presented first person interviews of presumably real indigenous peasants, who narrated their experiences of fighting for their rights and against their oppressors in an exemplary manner. However, by 1978, with the CUC’s public appearance, the plural first person started to dominate. By 1980, as presented above, the “we” or first person plural perspective fully dominated the narrative: it is “we” and “the many” who speak.

During my interviews, Alberto spoke from the perspective of a witness who experienced in the flesh, the events of la costa; and as such, he recalled his father’s courage during a moment when the “we” and the “many” were presumably heard by the whole country. In this context, the “I” of the subject of finca labor—Alberto’s, his father’s, and those figured in De sol a sol—

---

356 Framed by the notion of educación liberadora [liberating education] inspired by the work of Pablo Freire, De sol a sol’s purpose was to contribute to consciousness raising among the peasants of the western and central highlands working for fincas of the southern coast. Behind it was the work of a small group of people affiliated of the National University and other religious groups, must likely Jesuits who were working in the Department of El Quiché with cooperatives and a radicalized movement of catechists and delegates of the word of Catholic Action. They started printing and distributing the newspaper before the creation of CUC, but from the very beginning, it became one of the instruments used to push the CUC’s creation. De sol a sol circulated from 1974 until 1980 both in the central and western highlands, and in the southern coast. See Rigoberta Menchú and CUC, Trenzando el Futuro. Luchas campesinos en la historia reciente de Guatemala, (Donostia: Tercera Prensa, 1992), 46.

357 In its first editorial one reads: “The men who work the land de sol a sol [from dawn till dusk] have asked many questions, for example: why loans do not get to the peasant?[…], are the oppressors and imperialism the chain that enslaves us?” De sol a sol, no.2, August, 1974, 1.

358 For instance, in a number dedicated to the peasant’s debt, De sol a sol presented an interview with Felipe T. and Ventura L. about their struggle against BANDESA or Bank of Development and how they got indebted with the bank. The headline was “BANDESA is to the peasant as the gorgojo [plague] is to beans.” See: De sol a sol, no.26, March, August 1979, 4-5.
corresponded with the “we” of the CUC’s discourse, enabling thus a collective disclosure by virtue of which the subject’s individual identity remained publicly undisclosed. It was a politics of anonymity carried out in the form of a general strike that both Alberto and De sol a sol refer to.

![Figure 7. Occupation of sugar mill Santa Ana. Source: Prensa Libre, February 27, 1980.](image)

Indeed, De sol a sol represents the “we” and the “many” delivering a message that remarks the unprecedented nature of the event—the strike—and its binding force: this is happening for the first time in history and no one cannot see or hear what the many is doing and saying. Their message then moves towards denouncing the perverted demands of the finca-economy on the southern coast: we are the ones who produce the wealth of the few (the rich) who count, enjoy and squander, that is, we have been forced to support the Other’s enjoyment and to become the object of their exploitation. The strike of February and March 1980 was a
massive refusal of being in that position. And then, the message finishes with a promise: first the wages, next the land that is ours, and finally the country. It is within this promise that Alberto would soon decide to join the guerrillas.

The agreements between the peasants and the government, however, were not enforced and after the strike many peasant leaders were persecuted, disappeared, killed, or forced into exile. During the military repression on the southern coast, Alberto and his father returned to San Martín Jilotepeque. There, the situation wasn’t very different; but his father decided to collaborate with the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP). Locally, the EGP was organized in Clandestine Local Committees (or CCLs) and Irregular Local Forces (FIL) who were in charge of influencing the population politically and preparing them for self-defense and sabotage.

Alberto’s father was a collaborator of the CCLs.

He was just *apoyo* [support],” he told me, “people came to our house to attend meetings about the situation. Then the army started to *reprimir* [persecute and kill people]. I remember that we stayed in our house only during the day, because we didn’t sleep there. The *judicial* [secret police] was looking for people. My mom would stay in the house and I joined my father to sleep under the trees. In the early 80s, they [EGP] sent us to do sabotage, we dug up trenches and toppled trees so the trucks of the army couldn’t pass the roads and the highway [the Inter-American highway]. That’s when I joined the guerrillas and separated from my dad.

---

359 It wasn’t the first time that the government used violence against CUC leaders. In June 1978 the Guatemalan army perpetrated a massacre of dozens of Q’eqchi’ peasants in Panzos, Alta Verapaz. And in January 31, 1980, the CUC organized and directed the dramatic occupation of the embassy of Spain to denounce bombings and killings of indigenous leaders of El Quiché. With the sole exception of the Spanish ambassador, all occupants were killed after the police firebombed the building. For an account of the Massacre of Panzós, see Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre. Latin America in the Cold War*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004); a full account of the massacre of the Spanish embassy, see Máximo Cajal, *Saber quién puso el fuego ahí: Masacre en la Embajada de España*, (Madrid: Siddhartha Mehta Ediciones, 2000).

360 In San Martin, the Armed Rebel Forces (FAR) and the Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA) were also operating at the time. But the political work of the EGP through the CUC was extensive. See CEH, *Guatemala, 6:73-79*; CEH, *Guatemala memoria del silencio*, 2:270-296; Glenda García García, “Las Guerrillas y los Mayas: Una aproximación a las formas de interacción sociopolítica entre los insurgentes y los Kaqchikes de San Martín Jilotepeque (1976-1985),” in Vela Castañeda, *Guatemala, la infinita*,73-130.
Alberto joined the *Frente Augusto Cesar Sandino* (FACS), a front that was named after the Nicaraguan revolutionary leader, and their first public actions occurred during the second anniversary of the triumph of the Nicaraguan revolution, on July 19, 1981.\(^{361}\) In effect, however, this front was created by incorporating the CUC’s bases and structures.\(^{362}\) This strategic move fell within the EGP’s decision to push the armed struggle from its formative stage (what they called “implantation”) to the “generalization of guerrilla warfare,” that they conceived of as a prior step before the “dispute of territory, masses, and population,” which included the liberation of territories and, eventually, the military defeat of the army. The actions of sabotage that Alberto recalled in our conversations occurred, precisely, between July and November of 1981, about a year after the southern coast’s general strike.\(^{363}\)

Thus, he decided to join the EGP and gave himself a pseudonym, after which he would avoid speaking under and in his name, a name that he had inherited from his grandfather. As he told me, Alberto was his grandfather’s namesake or substitute and had a deep connection with him:

---


\(^{362}\) Anthropologist Megan Thomas, herself an ex-member of the EGP’s International front, argues that the creation of the FACS was precipitated and did not follow the prolonged and clandestine steps that the EGP took during their “implantation” in the jungle of Ixcan and the Sierra, from 1972 until the creation of the fronts “Che Guevara” and “Ho Chi Min” respectively in 1980. See Megan Thomas, “La gran confrontación,” 173.

I did not see my parents for the next 14 years and they didn’t know if I was still alive. What they knew is that I didn’t exist. They [the municipal authorities] were forcing my parents to erase my name, but my father didn’t do it. Many families did it, but my grandfather always had me in his thoughts and he told my parents that I wasn’t dead. My mother did believe that I was dead, but my father believed in my grandfather’s words. I remember that I had left my clothes, some beige pants, which they used to make scarecrows. They used my pants and put them on a tree, and the tree grew and they did not take my clothes down. But my pants didn’t rot or change of color. *Mi ropa estaba enterita!* [my cloths were like new!]. This is why my grandfather was convinced that I was alive. And it was true.

Indeed, Alberto was responding to his name (namesake and patronymic bond) name and was trying to keeping it safe when he decided to join the guerrillas. But that decision also entailed Alberto’s commitment to avoid using and speaking in his name among other combatants, militants, sympathizers, and revolutionaries. It is in this regard that he became an other among others—he took other names—after leaving his town and family (his affective surroundings) where he was addressed by his ancestral personal name and patronymic. “And because I saw it and experienced *in the flesh*,” he reiterated to me, “everything that had happened to my family and to other compañeros, I joined consciously the EGP.”

In our conversation, Alberto described his parents’ experience of his time as a combatant as if he did not exist. This includes his mother’s belief that he was dead, indicating thus the suffering for the loss of her first son but also her marginal position in the imaginary and symbolic relationships enabled by indigenous patronymics, as I have showed in chapter 2. Moreover, references to his non-existence during this time also speak of his father’s refusal to erase his name—by which he means the Municipal authorities’ demand for him to be declared dead—and his refusal to speak or inquire about Alberto’s whereabouts with others. This is so because, by the time Alberto left his town, the Guatemalan army had carried out the “*operación*
“peinada” (operation brushing) in the central highlands, perpetrating massacres and extrajudicial killings in San Martín Jilotepeque and other towns of the area, as part of a plan to disarticulate the FACS’ networks of support.\textsuperscript{364} In fact, by 1983, the vast majority of communities who supported the EGP in San Martín were under military control. The FACS could no longer operate in the central highlands and all of its combatants and political cadres were forced to withdraw and moved to the Ho Chi Minh front, in the Ixil region, where Alberto remained until the signing of the peace agreements (1996), and where he was living with his family when I met him, in the 2000s.

As I understand it, Alberto’s reference to his non-existence while he was a combatant cannot be interpreted to mean being dead or alive; that is, it does not correspond to having a-life-and-after-life-of-the-name, as I have suggested before. One cannot dismiss, in this regard, his mother’s sense of loss (she was coping with Alberto’s absence in her own terms) even though Alberto tends to reaffirm his father/grandfather’s belief in the signs of the patronymic’s promise, i.e., the survival of the son and Ch’exel, the survival of the name. Yet, if one follows Alberto’s passion for his pseudonym, \textit{Jacobo}, and his years of militancy, one could also say that this non-existence makes reference to a time when he did not exist as \textit{one} but as \textit{many}, much in line with the mass mobilizations and discourse he heard and experienced \textit{in the flesh}, on the southern coast. In other words, it suggests that existing as many and not-one in particular included the possibility of not returning to the patronymic (to its inheritance, renown, and survival) and, instead, it indicates a moving towards the name’s dissemination and \textit{differance}.\textsuperscript{365} This is,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{364} CEH, \textit{Guatemala memoria del silencio}, 6:73-79.
\end{flushright}
ultimately, a narrative about how Alberto became a revolutionary man; but his narrative is also marked by an insistent longing and nostalgia for a time when the “I” and the “many” coincided in the dissemination of the name or the proliferation of revolutionary pseudonyms.

And Alberto wasn’t the only one I heard speaking in those terms. During my fieldwork, Maria told me that she decided to “take up arms because of the words of my father that I heard since I was little. I decided to join the guerrillas consciously to fight and to change our reality, to look for a change.” Maria S. also told me that she joined the guerrillas because of her brother’s words, which, if we follow the ancestral logic of Ixil proper naming, were not merely her brother’s insofar as he was her father’s substitute or Ch’exel, “my dad gave his name to my brother, ‘here is my tuko [namesake or substitute] Domingo S,’ he used to say.” In our conversations both Maria and Maria S. recalled their life in the fincas alongside their families; and like Alberto, it was the example and words of their fathers that led them to become revolutionaries. This is also a narrative about how they became revolutionary women. To be sure, this becoming a revolutionary implied a form of renunciation of that which was proper to them, the mark of their singularity, their proper names; but this renunciation also opened up the possibility of becoming an-other and more than one.

As I wrote in my field notes, “The time arrived with the voice of their fathers, the time to decide on their time, a time during which they would do war as men and women. They did it

---

366 Pablo Ceto, an Ixil member and high cadre of the EGP has insisted that, prior to the arrival of the EGP to the Ixil region, the indigenous communities were organizing themselves around the “ancestral announcement of a new dawn.” Without this background or “fertile ground,” as he calls it, the ideological bases of the revolutionaries wouldn’t have resonated among the Ixiles and other indigenous pueblos. As I understand it, Maria S.’ call and decision to join the EGP through the words of her brother/father is an instance of the ancestral background that the EGP encountered at their arrival and “implantation” in the Sierra, probably without realizing that behind the reception of their message, this ancestral background was awaiting for them. See: Pablo Ceto, “Rebelión indígena, lucha campesina y movimiento revolucionario guerrillero. Reflexiones y testimonio,” in: Vela Castañeda, Guatemala, la infinita, 235.
with other names, as if with these other names they were able to say ‘my name is not my name, I am not my name; my name and I are not the same for I am many and not one in particular. Here and there, folded, multiple: a presence that is not in the presence of the Other. The other name appeared as the other of the other. As if ‘every other was [entirely] every other.’”

*A Little History of Indigenous Pseudonyms or How not to Respond to the Law’s Interpellation*

The politics of anonymity enabled by and expressed during the general strike in the southern coast was, indeed, *unprecedented* in Guatemala's history. Efforts to organize indigenous peasants in the *fincas* were invariably repressed by the Guatemalan state during the first half of the twentieth century; and all of the organization and structures that Arbenz’ agrarian reform of 1953 produced, found the same fate after the C.I.A. organized *coup d’état* against his government in 1954, and the US support of subsequent counter-revolutionary Guatemalan governments. But anonymity and the use of pseudonyms among indigenous people did not begin with the strike of *la costa* and the revolutionary struggle in Guatemala’s highlands.

Historian David Carey Jr. has shown that, in Guatemala’s judicial courts of the late nineteenth through the first half of the twentieth century, “as an example of the subtle, playful attempts to both avoid the authorities’ grasp and undermine their legitimacy, some defendants invented surnames such as Numa, which in Mayan Kaqchikel means ‘my crime’ or ‘my sin.’ Although defendants frequently used pseudonyms to hide their identities and whereabouts from

---


368 Jim Handy, *Revolution in the Countryside. Rural Conflict and Agrarian Reform in Guatemala, 1944-1954*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Cindy Foster, “Miles de Machetes.”
authorities, it must have been particularly gratifying for those few who, after having hinted a
confession with their pseudonyms, heard a ladino judicial official declare their innocence.” 369

In yet another example, historian Greg Grandin argues, regarding the life of José Angel
Icó—an exceptional Q’eqchi’ leader of the first half of the twentieth century—that

Planters’ complaints from the 1920s often described Icó ‘the Bolshevik agitator,’ in the
language of existential outrage, as if his very being blasphemed the social order. His
ability to ‘hypnotize’ as Erwin Dieseldorff [one of the most important German finqueros
in Guatemala, as we have seen before] repeatedly described Icó’s influence, conjures
supernatural powers of manipulation—powers that, it seems, could be thwarted only by
divine intercession. Government officials grew frustrated at Icó’s habit of using different
second surnames, which hampered their efforts to compile a complete legal dossier on
him. Sometimes he would go by Icó Coc, other times Icó Delgado, taking ‘at whim’ one
or the other of his mother's family names. At other times he would use Icó Xol: ‘this
results,’ complained Carcha’s mayor, in a ‘detriment to justice; we can never combine all
the accusations against him, because we can never prove that they are all the same
person’. 370

Unable to fully identify people like Icó, finqueros like Erwing Paul Dieseldorff and the
Guatemalan state’s judicial representatives reiterated a form of representation of the indigenous
people as being duplicitous and an impediment to the functioning of the law. Similar to what I
have shown in the past chapter, these reiterations were understood by the authorities as an
incapacity to count and tell it all which, in the historiographic examples presented above, are
translated into an inability to make indigenous individuals accountable for their actions. To
repeat, in being able to remain unfixed by their patronymics, these indigenous men and women
(dis)appeared not as one, but as many. Doubtless, punishment was forcibly applied to them; but
their putative offenses remained undeclared or unconfessed. And as David Carey Jr.’s example

369 David Carey Jr., I ask for Justice. Maya Women, Dictators, and Crime in Guatemala, 1898-1944, (Austin,
University of Texas Press, 2013), 7.

370 Greg Granding, The Last Colonial Massacre. Latin America in the Cold War, (Chicago: The University of
shows, their imputed responsibility was an instance of the failure and, one would dare to say, stupidity of the law of the state. Accusatory language and confessional performativity failed. Before the law, in the presence of this law, Icó and others like him did not respond to the state’s interpellation, or better, they performed a form of responsibility by virtue of which they did not respond with their proper names to the judicial interpellation of the Guatemalan finca-state.

These are important historical antecedents that cannot be overlooked; but what happened during the 1970s and early 1980s, during the apogee of revolutionary politics and massive mobilization in Guatemala, took another dimension. Indeed, under circumstances of popular insurrection (understood as a collective anonymous action) and guerrilla warfare (enabled, among other things, by the proliferation of pseudonyms), acquiring other names or identities exceeded previous individual strategies like the fabrication of different surnames and patronymics. During the revolutionary struggle, specially at the fronts, the combatants’ use of pseudonyms gave way to a play of names and naming that did not depend upon any form of family names or patronymics, fabricated or otherwise. As we’ll see below, this form of naming produced effects of signification that many ex-combatants recall as that of having acquired different selves.

Of Being Possessed by Other Names

Many ex-militants and ex-combatants I spoke to in the Ixil region and elsewhere told me that in taking different pseudonyms, they felt as if possessed by the force of those names. Some of them took Americanized ones, like Juan T., whose pseudonym was Peter. Other ladino
combatants who fought in the region would choose names commonly used by Ixiles, like Gaspar. And some others would take the names of compañeros [comrades] killed in combat. “I fought with more fuerza [strength], because I was fighting with the name of a compañero,” an Ixil ex-combatant told me. As anthropologist Diane Nelson has reported,

Many took the names of comrades killed by security forces as a way to keep history alive, and they talk now of feeling almost possessed by their dead, able to do things and take risks in their name alone they would never have had the courage to do. Many activists also played with passing. As one friend said, “Most of the ladinos from the city would choose names like Balthazar, stuff like that. They wanted to sound as campesino, peasant as possible. The indigenous compañeros tended to choose names that sounded as foreign as possible—Harvey, etc. I chose different names for different operations. It’s a different self. It inspires you to try harder."

In these memories, an affective connection to pseudonyms is remembered in the form of inspiration and strength to do things they wouldn’t have done otherwise, as if without the constraints of their patronymics, they were able to do unprecedented things. For instance, I heard ex-combatant Ixil women recalling with pride and passion the time when they were able to engage in combat wearing shirt and pants instead of traje [traditional clothing], some of them for the first time in their lives. Indeed, as the use of traditional clothing among indigenous men decreased substantially in Guatemala, women’s traje came to function as the mark of cultural origins and, as such, it put indigenous women in the positions of being the bearers of ethnic authenticity within their patriarchal society. Moreover, traje has become a trademark of “national folklore” that simultaneously differentiates indigenous women from their non-indigenous peers and represents “national unique traditions,” i.e., it has become the mark of

---

This is not to say that Ixil women do not feel pride in their *traje*. Some of the Ixil women I met during my fieldwork were avid weavers and felt passionately about the symbols and numerical intricacies required to weave their clothing. But the memories of wearing pants and shirt mentioned above refer to the liberating effects ex-combatants felt while they were not appearing as the bearers of the weight of tradition. Take, for instance, the following testimonies narrated to AVANCSO: “I felt bad wearing pants, because I’ve never dressed myself like that, I only wore *corte* [traditional clothing]. But I got used to it, and I liked it,” an ex-guerrilla recalled.

“In the guerrillas,” another ex-combatant narrated, “I used shirt and pants, and I felt good. With *corte* we couldn’t run. To me, everything was suitable, skirt, dress, pants, because I got used to it.”

And in a scene that condenses what was at stake in clothing during the revolutionary struggle, one of the participants on these interviews showed a picture of herself in her guerrilla uniform in the presence of her sons, who immediately scold her: “Those pants look ugly! they are too green, don’t you feel ashamed of wearing pants?” “I do not,” she answered, and told them how *ella se alzó* [she rose up or took up arms].

With pants and shirt, these women wore symbols that supported them in doing putatively

---

373 Diane Nelson has argued that, “The Mayan woman [mujer maya] is an important support for national, ethnic, and class identifications and for the fashioning of both ladino and Mayan masculinities. The orthopedics of the class, the labor market, and the masculine body image—men in *traje* [traditional clothing] are seen as ‘less’ masculine, serious, and competent’—make Mayan men disappear when they take off their *traje*. This process means that traditional clothing, which signifies indigenous identity in general, has become almost isomorphic with the Mayan woman who waves it and wears it far more consistently than men. And *traje* brings with it the weight of tradition in general, condensing a whole range of affect-laden meanings about spirituality, community, food, language, children, the nation, and the past onto this fantasy construct of the *mujer maya,*” in: Diane Nelson, *A Finger in the Wound. Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 170-171.


375 AVANCSO, *Memorias rebeldes,* 51.
manly things. As others recalled,

The weight of our backpack was huge, quintales [tons] of weight! In addition to our equipment and armas [arms or weapons]. We got tired a lot. While in la montaña [the mountain] I thought ‘I wish I was a man and not a woman,’ but I stopped thinking that, and I realized that our strength was igualísima [the same] as men’s.” Or, as an ex-combatant whose pseudonym was Lina recalled, “After being correo [messenger], I went to fight the soldiers. I remember the combats; if we had dead compañeros we had to pick them up. I also recovered arms. If our comrades were wounded, we had to carry them, I remember I carried wounded men. That was a heavy task. It didn’t matter if you were a woman. I felt very calmed because I had my weapon. I wasn’t alone, I was armed. When I was in la montaña I felt free."

The demands of guerrilla warfare, remembered here in terms of heavy weights and great physical effort, made these women to wish to be men. Their cultural forms of bodily intelligibility made them desire not to be women; and yet, these forms of intelligibility were soon discredited by the remarking of sameness ("igualísima") in a way that utterly dissolves any difference in strength between men and women combatants. Inhabiting and using the symbols of potency and lethality—typically assigned to men alone—made them feel free, fighting an enemy that was comprised by men alone. In fact, I heard former mandos [guerrilla officials] saying that many women combatants were braver than men during arms recovery or while carrying wounded men, as if admitting that they were manlier and more than men."

Perhaps, for Lina, her weapon was the substitute for a partner; perhaps, for her, the weapon became an extension of her body that allowed her not to fear her enemy. Her words remain inconclusive in this regard. However, I would argue that for her, as for others who spoke

376 AVANCSO, Memorias rebeldes, 53, 84.

377 Silvia Possoco reports similar cases in her ethnography among former combatants of the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR). Exemplary of references about women that were seen as manlier than men is the case of a prominent women combatant who held position of responsibility that was nicknamed Hombrote, which is the superlative of man. See: Silvia Possoco, Secrecy and Insurgency. Socialites and Knowledge Practices in Guatemala, (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2014), 98.
passionately about their *armas* [arms], the weapon was a supplement that provided Lina and others with a sense of not occupying a positions of loss, difference, and forced displacement, positions imputed to her by the heteronormative and patriarchal constraints of her culture and those of the finca-state. One may say that, in possessing and using the symbols of guerrilla combat in a manner in which they appeared to be more than men, their sense of belonging to their bodies acquired different abilities, thereby expanding their capacities in ways that many of them did not experience before and have not experienced since. Hence the invariable tone of nostalgia embedded in their recollections of fighting the Guatemalan Army. In a word, at the front, Lina and her *compañeras* were supplemented rather than being supplements themselves.

This coincides with a time when, at the fronts, Ixil and indigenous institutions of proper naming were put on hold, in parenthesis, or in suspension; it was a moment when revolutionary naming didn’t operate, as patronyms do, as a norm of kinship and genealogical reproduction. At the fronts, for instance, being a "mother" was discouraged and normatively disapproved, primarily by *mandos* who often were men. When women got pregnant, they were discharged and incorporated into the *población* [Communities of Population in Resistance or CPRs]. And when it happened, many women hid as much as they could their pregnancies in order to remain active in combat. Take, for instance, the following testimony:

When I realized that I was pregnant I didn’t say anything to my partner because I was ashamed and afraid of my *mando* [official in charge]. But after a while, my *compañeros* noticed it. I stayed in the *población* and my husband said to me, ‘I’m gonna take you to the refuge, but you know that we might not see each other again.’ In the *población* I felt bad, I was bored. I didn't have a midwife or anything. I couldn’t do anything with the belly I had. I cried and said: 'it’s too bad that I didn’t stay, I shouldn’t have taken the decision of getting pregnant.' I felt bad because I remembered how it was to carry a weapon and how the life was among my *compañeros*. I felt that pregnancy had taken
away my right to be in *la montaña*.378

Being pregnant, or being seen as such, had become a mark of shame and disobedience upon the women's bodies. And as the testimony above shows, it became an impediment to being actively absorbed in the life of a combatant; moreover, pregnancy became the cause for giving up on being armed, by virtue of which the right to fight in *la montaña* was taken away. Here, the figure of the mother is precluded and signified as a renunciation of the possibilities of possessing the symbol that structured the social life of the fronts, i.e., the phallus in the form of a weapon. But former ex-guerrillas, both men and women, also referred to the *organización* [the EGP] as the mother which, precisely, was provided with that symbol, albeit a mother that made pregnancies and reproduction undesirable in principle.

Not incidentally, the traditional role of the mother was often assumed by the *mandos* [officers in charge] who were seen as fathers. This was the case especially when a young woman got her first period. An ex-combatant told me that “When I got the period, I got scared …. But my *mando* was a very good person, he explained to me what happens to women, and he gave me towels and everything.” “I didn’t know anything about anything,” Maria S. explained to me, “the *compañeros* asked me if I had seen the women’s *costumbre* [ways]. Then they showed me how to use the towel, ‘don’t be ashamed,’ they told me. But the period always *me chingaba* [fucked me up] because I had a lot. ‘Look *jefe* [chief],’ I told him, ‘I need to get a bath because I’m *bien fregada* because of the period’ I told him. So he sent me to the river Maxán with his *seguridad* [bodyguard]. Don’t be ashamed, he told me.’

The figure of the father was important in the fronts because obedience, order, command,
and the responsibility over subordinates, were affectively attached to it. Some ex-combatants refer to that figure in conventional terms as a man who is leading and is responsible for his group.\textsuperscript{379} The father, however, was nothing but a figure, albeit one that opened up a position into which women could fit. Take, for instance, Lucía’s memories:

When I was a 12 years old patoja [young girl], I joined the guerrillas. Besides learning how to shoot, you also learn how to engage in combat, how to move forward, and how the get out and disengage. After my training, I went to fight, of course, that’s why we took up arms, to fight against the army. All that quiere ganas [it’s hard], se pasa mucha hambre [you’re starving many times]. When I arrived, they gave me boots, a shirt and pants. They gave you a bit of corn and then they told you, ‘now you go to combat.’ I was rapidly ascended to chief of escuadra [in charge of 8 combatants]. In my training I learned how to kill soldiers and how to defend myself. I was very good at it and I knew how to command. In my escuadra there were mostly men. There you command as if you are the father of your men.\textsuperscript{380}

Lucía’s voice, as the voice of a father, had to be heard, and both men and women obeyed her commands as a woman-father. To be sure, the phallus and basic kinship positions remained in place, although in an un-natural way. This, of course, was Lacan’s insistence, i.e., that the phallus is purely symbolic; but what Lucía’s words show is that, in the fronts, that was its raison d’être: and as such, it did not belong to anyone in particular. In this regard, what was signified as liberating in the testimonies I have presented so far, was a form of structuring desire whose aim was to achieve a form of discipline in which motherhood was no longer restricted to biological reproduction and supplementation, and fatherhood was displaced from the demands of

\textsuperscript{379} Two ex-combatants told Avanceso that “It is the father who puts order on things. The patojas [young girls] ask us for permission but we analyze if it is appropriate that they go. That means that a group is under the control of a man, who has under his responsibility and has to take care of his people, give them orientation, political instruction, education, prepare plans and the operative plan of the attacks. That’s how we used to say for security reasons. Because disobedience caused many deaths, the respect for orders saved many lives. They also called us “father” because all mandos had to get and arranged everything about clothes, food, shoes, ammunition, and weapons.” AVANCSO, Memorias rebeldes, 60.

\textsuperscript{380} AVANCSO, Memorias rebeldes, 82.
genealogical reproduction and inheritance: the figure of the father is detached from the patronymic and thus, the latter no longer occupies the position of the Master signifier.

Under these circumstances, I argue that the signifier (as patronymic) no longer represents the subject for another signifier, as I showed in past chapters following Lacan. This means that the subject cannot be appropriated by the one who occupies the position of the master and, as such, he/she no longer supports the master's enjoyment, which in the context of my research is the putative bearer of the white European patronymic, i.e., the finca owner. The split subject who engaged in revolutionary politics, the subject of labor, reveals that which the master does not have, disclosing thus the fact that he himself is not whole: the illusion of wholeness, and the madness inscribed in the fantasy of being total and speaking in such terms, as I have argued in chapter 3, appears as such: the foreclosure of castration that sustains the position of the master is revealed as a fantasy, instead of being the Other’s putative truth.381

I suggested above that Alberto’s reference to a book that made the difference had an

381 I believe this coincides with the displacement of what Lacan termed the Master’s Discourse, where the Master signifier (S1) represents the subject of labor (S2), the latter being the one who produces surplus value through his labor-power (a) and, in doing so, the position of the Master forecloses its own castration ($). This is how the putative truth of the Master as being whole is supported, thereby covering over the fact that he is constituted by lack. What I’m showing in this chapter, however, is the subversion of the Master’s discourse by the subject of labor, who now displaces the truth of the Master into the position of a mere illusion. The truth now appears in the position of the subject of labour. This subversion means that the Master does not receive its own image back and cannot sustain its own representation. In Lacan’s theory the subversion of the Master announces the possibility for the production of another Master signifier, albeit one that, when a revolution does happen, it comes from the position of the subject. As we’ll see in chapter 5, I argue that the new master signifier that was emerging from the subject was that of “the poor.” However, I argue that, in the case of the Guatemalan revolution, the bearers of the signifier that occupies the position of the Master were confronted with the Real and, as such, they responded with or allowed the use of massive violence to placate the possibility that those who have been forced to occupy the position of pure loss created a different social link based on a different Master signifier, i.e., that they occupied the position of a generalizable truth. For Lacan’s theory of Discourses, see Jacques Lacan, The Other Side of Psychoanalysis, trans., Russell Grigg, (New York: Norton, 2007). For general overviews of Lacan’s theory of Discourse, see Mark Bracher, “On the Psychological and Social Functions of Language: Lacan’s Theory of the Four Discourses,” in Mark Bracher et.al., Lacanian Theory of Discourse. Subject, Structure and Society, (New York: New York University Press, 1994); Bruce Fink, The Lacanian Subject. Between Language and Jouissance, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 129-137; Alenka Zupancic, “When Surplus Enjoyment Meets Surplus Value,” in Justin Clemens and Russell Grigg, eds., Jacques Lacan and the Other Side of Psychoanalysis. Reflections of Seminar XVII, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Samo Tomsic, The Capitalist Unconscious: Marx and Lacan, (London-New York: Verso, 2015),199-229.
effect on him by virtue of which he saw himself returning the gaze to the Other. In doing so the
Other was put in the position of seeing himself being seen by the other, an other that couldn’t be
fully seen, if we follow the logics of insurrectionary anonymity and revolutionary pseudonymity.
Put thus, returning the gaze to the Other, showing thus its constitutive lack, carries with it the
potential dissolution of its figuration or form of appearance: the bearer of a signifier who is in the
position of the master cannot secure the discourse that sustains the intelligibility of his own
image and identity, which in this case is an image that corresponds to the bearer of the white
European patronymic within the finca-state, as also shown in chapter 3. This is what was at stake
during the years that these Ixil and indigenous combatants took up arms, and when the subject of
labor returned the gaze to the finca owners and to the Guatemalan finca-state.

The subversion of the subject who is forced to occupy the position of loss and
displacement is expressed in the words of Margarita as follows:

The bullets of the Guatemalan army reached my brother, they killed him. Then I joined
the guerrillas and said nothing to my father. I just said to myself: I’m going to fight, I’m
going to learn how to use a weapon, I’m going to make them pay for what they did to my
brother. I was 15 years old. I’m grateful to my compañeros because I’m still alive thanks
to them, because they protected me. They taught me how to fight; nine years I stayed
with them. I learned how to defend my life. Although I knew that I might be killed, like
my brother, he didn’t know how to use a weapon, murió no ’más [he just died], just like
that. Then I said to myself: if I’m going to die, it will be defending my life.382

At the time that Margarita joined the EGP, the Guatemalan army was carrying out its
scorched earth campaign (1981-1983), perpetrating massacres throughout the western highlands,
during which Margarita’s brother died. In remarking that her brother didn’t know how to use a
weapon, Margarita unequivocally holds the Guatemalan state responsible for having killed him
for no reason whatsoever, no crime, no revenge, offense, debt, dispute or declaration of war. His

382 AVANCSO, Memorias Rebeldes, 76.
death wasn’t an accident either, nor was it a tragic mistake. For Margarita, her brother died for no other reason than the Guatemalan army’s will to kill him. “Murió no’más” are the words she uses to signify the sovereign lethal force of the Guatemalan finca-state. Doubtless, she wanted “the army of the rich” to pay for what it did. But her decision was something more than the balancing of an account or the righting of a wrong. The lethal force of the Guatemalan state targeted her brother and thousands of non-combatant Ixiles, children, pregnant women, and the elderly included. Death was the horizon that was violently imposed onto her; yet, that horizon carried the enabling force that made her take a decision over the last thing she could decide: the way she wanted to die. “If I’m going to die, it will be defending my life,” she said. She decided on the way she wanted to die because she didn’t want to die just like that, to “morir no’más.” Thus, in deciding over her own death—by defending her own life—she exerted a sovereign power that, by law, had been claimed by the postcolonial Guatemalan finca-state for decades, before the civil war. Margarita’s decision, I believe, wasn’t framed by melancholy, nor was she trying to reach a transcendental beyond: she didn’t want to become a martyr and, perhaps, she was tired of being mortified and victimized. She acted as a sovereign revolutionary subject of her own right; and even though her radical politics were framed by guerrilla warfare, guerrilla fronts, and la montaña, this form of indigenous sovereignty had already begun with the indigenous peasant struggles against the finca-state, as seen before in reference to the general strike of la costa. Let me insist, one more time, that “Margarita” is a pseudonym and a signature, the signature of a testimony narrated with a pseudonym.

This is not to say that the EGP did not commit grave strategic mistakes or that within the fronts all forms of discrimination and sexism had been eliminated. Life at the front was far from
ideal. In fact, as Alberto once told me, “in the guerrilla, life was death.” However, all the testimonies I have presented do speak of a longing for the possibilities of a more egalitarian and sovereign form of sociality, which they partially experienced as combatants. As reported by anthropologist Carlota McAllister, “one woman told me of her encounter on the streets of Antigua Guatemala, years after losing contact with the guerrillas but before peace made one contact safe, with a ladino insurgent who had spent long stretches of time in Chupol: ‘We had children the same age; we had talked a lot. I looked at him out of the side of my eye and nodded. He nodded back and we walked right on. I have never seen him again, and I don’t know his real name because all I knew was his pseudonym.’ The poignancy of the encounter nonetheless suggests the value she placed on this relationship and the fellowship it had provided.”

These are the radical politics that are recalled with longing and nostalgia by my interlocutors, politics that opened up the possibilities for an unprecedented generalized state of indigenous rebellion in Guatemala during the second half of the 1970s and the first two years of the 1980s. It was a situation of popular insurrection amid a civil war in which the military initiative was on the side of the guerrillas prior to the army’s perpetration of the scorched earth campaign and genocidal violence. In other words, the guerrillas were disputing the sovereignty of a finca-state in conditions of anonymity and pseudonymity not seen before. But is it enough to use words such as “unprecedented” or “not seen before” to refer to what was happening during this period of time? Or rather, what do those words refer to when they putatively address something that hasn’t been seen or known? What is the nature of this unknown and unseen that one—the “I” who describes it—makes reference to? Let me conclude this chapter by addressing

these questions.

*The Aporias of Anonymity and the Apparition of the Specter:*

I have emphasized the unprecedented nature of the period around which Alberto, Lina, Maria, Maria S., Margarita and others joined the guerrillas, primarily in an effort to convey its eventfulness and to try to capture what was at stake in this period of time. Others, former political cadres of the EGP who had access to the organization’s National Direction, speak of this period of time in the idiom of *surprise* and, more importantly, as if they were speaking about a political phenomenon that was uncontainable and beyond their organization’s political calculations. I first came across references to the surprise that the massive adherence to the revolutionary project caused in an article written by Megan Thomas, an anthropologist and former member of the EGP who worked as part of the International Front and who, between May and August of 1981, visited both the Ho Chi Minh and the Che Guevara fronts in the Ixil region and Huehuetenango, respectively. In her article, in a footnote, she says that,

> As a militant of the EGP, I had the chance to know the Ho Chi Minh and Comandante Ernesto Che Guevara fronts between May and August 1981. I lived the experience of being welcomed by the population because I was a member of the organization. I was the first one to be *surprised* when, after a nocturnal arrival to the Ixil region, we walked through paths and *caminos de herradura* [footpaths] used by the population, to be welcomed with hot coffee and greetings by almost every person we ran into.\(^{384}\)

The paragraph that elicited this footnote makes reference to the fact that in the Ixil region, Huehuetenango, and in the central highlands (the departments of Chimaltenango, Sololá, Sacatepequez and Totonicapán), the massive and “overflowing participation of the population in

\(^{384}\) Thomas, “La gran confrontación,” 169, n.55.
the revolutionary struggle”385 was not expected by the EGP. But why does it cause surprise to a militant that the EGP is massively supported if, in multiple documents that described the organization’s strategic principles, one gets the idea that without the masses there is no revolution?386 In an interview with Megan, I asked her why was she so surprised that the EGP was being massively supported in a region that Mario Payeras—known as commandant Benedicto—once referred to as “their obsession,” i.e., the support of the indigenous communities of the sierra?387 “First of all,” she said to me, “it had to do with the discourse of clandestinity. We had put so much emphasis on the conditions of security and clandestinity. When we arrived to Huehuetenango, we bought rubber boots in the market! A car took us up to Paquix and then we walked for over 6 hours …. As we arrived to the Ixil region, people greeted us, ‘good morning compañeros,’ I was truly surprised because I thought we were going to walk only during the nights.”

I told her that, if that was the case, how does one reconcile the fact that an organization like the EGP, conceived of as being a “revolutionary organization of masses,” also required strict procedures of compartmentalization, to the extent that the so called masses wouldn’t recognize their militants? “Well, the fronts were never conceived of as being massive,” she told me. “It happened many times to the EGP,” she continued, “that they [EGP’s cadres] talked to two or three people in the community and when they returned, the whole community was apalabrada


387 In a passage of Payera’s memoire “Days of the Jungle” that describes his first experience in the jungle, prior to their arrival to the highlands, he says: “our obsession with the sierra didn’t let us sleep, we were dreaming with ascending to the cloudy regions.” Mario Payeras, Los días de la selva, (Guatemala: Editorial Piedra Santa, 1998), 94.
[had agreed or gave their word].” For her, that was, primarily, a strategic mistake. I pressed her. But how not speak of a secret if the larger objective is to incorporate the masses in the revolution? “That was the organization’s contradiction,” she said. Her answer, however, remained undecidable, vacillating between the limits of strategy and the organization’s constitutive contradictions.

And she isn’t the only one speaking in those terms. Margarita Hurtado Paz y Paz, also a former member of the EGP and someone who was close to the organization’s National Direction, has written about the indigenous support as an “avalanche of local organization and participation that, together with the guerrillas, made the military regime shake.”

Describing the EGP’s decision to organize the communities of Huehuetenango, she recalls that in the 1970s the EGP sent in three organizers to develop the basic structures among indigenous communities of the highlands. According to Hurtado, their work was intense and patient. Upon their return to the area, after being absent for over a year, their “biggest surprise was to find an amplísima [widely extended or vast] communitarian organization. This was an eminently indigenous phenomenon for, in ladino communities, it had not happened.” Like Megan Thomas, Margarita Hurtado also describes the unexpected encounter with the uncontainable indigenous support for the guerrillas as being in contradiction with the EGP’s principles of clandestinity and secrecy.

As I understand it, they both speak of the aporia of the secret that Jacques Derrida

---


390 The majority of the EGP’s cadres old enough to remember these years, at least that I know of, speak in the same terms. In his memoir, Gustavo Porras, a founding member of the EGP also speaks of the massive support of indigenous communities for the EGP as a surprise and as uncontainable. See Gustavo Porras Castejón, Las huellas de Guatemala, (Guatemala: F&G, 2009), p.27
describes in the endless oscillation of the statement “how not to divulge the secret?” which is the enigma of the sharing out of the secret.\textsuperscript{391} The statement is one related to the politics of friendship and how, precisely, it is the secret that both permits and threatens the political fraternization of the community.\textsuperscript{392} In their words, this impossibility of friendship is phrased in the form of “an avalanche” signifying thus the support of the indigenous communities as something that, although desired, wasn’t expected or couldn’t be contained [let us not forget that “avalanche” often times names a catastrophic event]. In an interview with Pablo Ceto, one of the few high cadres of the EGP of Ixil decent, I mentioned to him that people like Thomas and Hurtado were surprised by the massive support of indigenous communities under circumstances of clandestinity. Without meditating on it too much, he immediately said to me, “no sabían a lo que se estaban metiendo” [they didn’t know what they were getting into]. Ceto’s words remained somewhat inconclusive, and he did not speak more on the matter. I think, nonetheless, that in their vacillation, both Megan Thomas and Margarita Hurtado recognize that, among certain indigenous communities of the western and central highlands, the support for the revolution was beyond calculation and, as such, subjected to the unknown. Something for which—and I believe Ceto would agree with me—the EGP wasn’t prepared.

What Thomas, Hurtado and Ceto do agree on is the fact that in the communities that massively supported the EGP, there was a fundamental agreement among their ancestral authorities about the possibility of a “new dawn” for indigenous people. Indeed, Ceto has argued


that the “elderly had said that a new time would arrive, a new reality.”\textsuperscript{393} It was an ancestral announcement that the Ixil authorities had been searching for before the arrival of the EGP to the region. For her part, Margarita Hurtado also recalls that, among Akateko communities of Huehuetenango, the Mamínes [ancestral authorities] supported the EGP under similar circumstances. In a meeting between the Mamínes and the EGP described by Hurtado, the principal Mamín “explained that they already knew that this time would come. That the ancestors had announced that men would come down from the mountains to guide them through a struggle that would end the suffering of all indigenous \textit{pueblos}. That time had arrived and they were ready to support [the revolutionary struggle] together with their families and villages.”\textsuperscript{394} The call of the ancestors, a call that as I have argued in chapter 2 is inscribed in the future of the past of an Ixil and indigenous messianism that carries the promise of a life-and-afterlife-of-the-name, had arrived.

If this is the case, one does need to recognize two different, if not mutually exclusive forms of understanding the \textit{unprecedented} nature of the indigenous rebellion—the event—of the late 1970s and early 1980s: among those indigenous communities who massively supported the EGP, the arrival of the event was expected; among the non-indigenous cadres and revolutionaries of the EGP, it was not expected yet, hence the surprise. This is not to say that \textit{all} the indigenous communities supported the EGP massively. Neither does it mean that there were not dissident views among the indigenous ancestral authorities of the Guatemalan highlands. In fact, as I have argued in chapters 1 and 2, Ixil (indigenous) ancestrality is embedded in intra and inter-

\textsuperscript{393} Ceto, “Rebelión indígena,” 235.

\textsuperscript{394} Hurtado, “Organización y lucha,” 55.
communitarian conflicts and power relationships; as much as in the communities’ struggles for self-determination and sovereignty in relation to the Guatemalan state. But if Ceto is right in saying that there was an encounter between the ancestral indigenous resistance and the revolutionary movement, something I believe to be true, that encounter happened in different temporalities. The revolution was a true possibility, even if, after the massive violence perpetrated by the army, the revolution did not finally take place.

By the summer of 1981, however, a breakdown of the Guatemalan government and its modes of identification was experienced by the army officers as something real. As reported by anthropologist Carlota McAllister, regarding her extended interviews with retired Colonel and counterinsurgency specialist Mauricio Lopez Bonilla—today serving prison time for illicit

Figure 8. Irregular Local Forces (FIL), Huehuetenango Highlands, 1981. Source: CIRMA Photographic library.
enrichment and traffic of influences—“‘during the first months of 1980 [Bonilla told her], confusion and fear prevailed within the army,’ recalling [thus] his experiences of patrolling the highlands beset by the feeling that the enemy was all around and yet invisible and unknowable.”  

In other words, the enemy could have been everywhere and nowhere in particular, like a ghost. This reminds me of what Jacques Derrida has termed the *visor effect*: a spectral asymmetry that interrupts specularity, i.e., an interruption of the forms of appearance by virtue of which one sees oneself seen by the other and thus one secures the recognition of one’s identification. The specter, however, remains invisible between apparitions without disappearing, even though we remain under its gaze. We do not see who is looking at us. Thus our capacity to recognize ourselves in our own image or self-representation is disabled.  

As we’ll see in chapter 6, it was in this context that the Guatemalan army carried out its scorched earth campaign and perpetrated massacres against Ixil and indigenous communities of the highlands suspected of supporting the EGP.

During the army’s scorched earth campaign, workbooks, *finca*-receipts, certifications, and the “book of debts,” that is, the instruments of inscription of the *finca* state, were burned. “My mother used to keep a lot of *finca*-receipts,” don Concepción Santay once told me, “but all of that was lost when the army burned down our house. Then the army turned our community into a ‘model village’ and I was forced into the army’s ‘Self-defense Civil Patrols’ [PAC].”  

---


397 Self Defense Patrols (PAC) were formally created by the end of 1982 but operated since the end of 1981. All men between the ages 15 to 60, specially in Guatemala’s highlands, were forced to become *Patrulleros*. 

214
the end of 1983, massacres gave way to a pattern of intermittent and selective violence, sealing thus the destiny of the civil war. Amalia, a former member of the EGP captured by the army in 1989, recalls that, after being “interrogated” for over two months, the army took her “with the nuns, because they were giving clothes. The army told me: ‘we want to see you like a woman not like a man, so take off those pants,’ and they gave me clothes. When I saw my mother I didn’t recognize her because I was very young when I left; I had been with the guerrillas for over 5 years then.”

The possibility of becoming other was thus violently suppressed. Amalia is a pseudonym, the name of a woman that refused to suture the law of culture together with that of the finca-state.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have argued that the subject of finca labor subverted the conditions of his/her de-subjectivation. That subversion, however, did not merely mark the recuperation of the "I" of the speaking subject but rather habilitated the putative coincidence of the voice of the “we” or the “many” with the “I” of the subject, giving way to a revolutionary politics of anonymity and pseudonymity. This was an indigenous insurrection that occurred simultaneously on the southern coast and the Guatemalan western highlands. Its main effect, from the perspective of the economy of proper naming that is the main concern of this dissertation, was the production of a revolutionary discourse by virtue of which the-name-of-the-father, as a Master signifier, no longer represented the subject of labor to another signifier.

Thus, the politics of anonymity and of pseudonymity that emerged during the apogee of

398 AVANCSO, “Memorias rebeldes,” 90.
the revolutionary struggle, produced the possibilities for the displacement of the discourse of the Master and the symbolic structures of signification of the finca-state. At a deeper level, in this chapter I have shown that the subject of labor and its insurrection returned the gaze to the finca Other, in a manner that displaced its putative truth (of being whole and undivided), and thus, its symbolic forms of signification could not support the appearance of the finca-state's own representation and self presentation: the putative bearers of the Master signifier no longer appeared as Masters. As a result, the subject of insurrection couldn’t be fully identified, a situation that I have described as one in which the subject is everywhere and nowhere in particular. Upon this insurrection, the return of the repressed or the regressive impulse of the Guatemalan finca-state, spectralized those indigenous communities that the army suspected of being the bases of the EGP: more than the cause of the indigenous insurrection, the appearance of the EGP and its wide support in rural Guatemala was the last “proof” that the indigenous people had been always ready to subvert the law of the Guatemalan state. The army and the Guatemalan elites received their own message from the Other. The response, as we will see in detail in chapter 6, was organized massive violence.
Chapter 5: In the Name of the Poor. Of Dreams, Miracles, and Revolutionary Futures.

There they were, finally, the poor of our country; but we didn’t know what their response would be.

Mario Payeras

Introduction

In 2014, when I returned to Guatemala to conduct fieldwork and archival research, everything I needed to know about religion and its relationship with the civil war had been already written. Or so it seemed to me. Thinking that I wouldn’t add any significant detail to a well known history, I remained reluctant to inquire about the relationship between revolutionary politics, religion, and the aftermaths of the army’s genocidal violence. However, in my interviews, virtually all of my interlocutors referred to their religious beliefs during the war despite my hesitations in asking. Whenever I engaged in a conversation about the civil war and the violence of the early 1980s, references to God’s interventions in the form of miracles during la violencia emerged. For many, as I show below, those miracles were possible because God was on their side during the civil war.

In a contemporary religious context in which Pentecostal Evangelicalism has eroded the Catholic Church’s hegemony in Guatemala, and whose discourse is often expressed in the language of the miraculous, it seemed to me understandable to hear these statements. As I understood them at the time, miraculous narratives were employed to frame references of personal and family renewal which constitute what some of the most important ethnographies on
post-war Evangelicalism in Guatemala call a self-regulating subjectivity, a form of “governance of the self.” But as I revisited my interviews and other biographical testimonies, the way in which my interlocutors referred to a moment of radical and revolutionary politics (1970s- early 1980s), contrasted with this anthropological perspective. My interlocutors, I argue, dispute that understanding of politics by employing a language of dreams and miracles, one in which the dream of a once possible yet interrupted revolutionary future, and the miracle of their survival and resistance after the massacres or la violencia, puts God in its place, that is, on their side. It is this “putting God in its place” that I’m interested in, in reference to Guatemala’s civil war and revolutionary politics.

In this chapter I trace back these narratives in an attempt to provide a different interpretation of a well-known history. As I show in the following pages, most anthropologists working on religion in Guatemala prior to and during the civil war, focused on a movement of religious conversion among indigenous communities of the highlands—costumbre to Catholicism (as it occurred through what was known as Catholic Action)—between the late 1940 until the end of 1970s. These are ethnographies that emphasize the material and symbolic conditions that made religious conversion possible. Broadly, religious conversion is analyzed as a liminal period or symbolic crisis that leads to a moment of aggregation of the converts to their societies, albeit one that places them in an oppositional place, i.e., in a social position opposed to

---

399 In this regard, see Kevin Lewis O’Neill, *City of God. Christian Citizenship in Postwar Guatemala*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

their former beliefs. Although I believe that paying attention to the symbolic crisis and material transformations that led to religious conversion during those years has been a fundamental contribution, here I’m interested in the forms of subjectivization that enabled the politicization of religious discourse, especially although not exclusively, during the 1970s until the early 1980s, prior to the army’s scorched earth campaign and genocidal violence (late 1981 to mid 1983).

As we shall see, I reconstruct a history of the politicization of religion that went from a situation of religious mis-recognition—in reference to the Catholic Church’s discourse in rural Guatemala—to one of religious interpellation which turned indigenous devotees from objects of piety and commiseration to subjects of salvation. I argue that it is this movement, from being objectified to being subjectivized, that enabled the politicization of religious discourse during the civil war. In this regard, I understand politics as a subjective and divisive activity rather than as a form of governance. Thus put, politics does not pertain to an institutional-objective dimension of the political, nor is it homologous with the social. Rather, politics is *prescriptive* in the sense that it expresses the articulation of a subjective political *situation* with a political *decision* that divides and mobilizes its subjects.

I argue that between the late 1960s and the early 1980s the figure of “the Poor” came to articulate a political decision phrased as “the option for the poor” and a revolutionary situation

---

401 This is especially the case of Falla’s ethnography of San Antonio Ilootenango. Falla’s work, however, came to be the canonical ethnography of religious conversion in Guatemala. Falla, *Quiché rebelde*.

402 The “prescriptive” as I use the term here, cannot be reduced to the “strategic,” in a Foucauldian sense, according to which the “prescriptive” designates a distribution of power that intervenes in a certain ordering of things, objectifications, and social practices. My understanding of the prescriptive is closer to the work of Sylvain Lazarus, that is, as an articulation between a political situation and a political decision that is discontinuous with the social. See Sylvain Lazarus, *The Anthropology of the Name*, (New York-Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2015).
with a prescriptive force. By “figure” I understand rhetorical figure, in the sense that it refers to a not-yet-existent revolutionary future (a form of empirically inexistent reality) in which multiple subjectivities (“indigenous,” “worker,” “exploited,” “peasant,” “marginalized,” “discriminated,” etc.) are imagined as being represented by a figure of the universal, i.e., “the poor.” As we shall see, the figure of the poor enabled the articulation of a political situation that was conceived of as being one of negation/objectivization (where subjectivity is nullified) with a political revolutionary decision that leads to a future in which the poor are imagined as being in command of the master’s discourse. In this regard, I will argue that the figure of “the poor” did not elicit a form of consensual, communicative, agonistic, meta-discursive, or identity politics: on the contrary, it precluded those possibilities. In fact, it went beyond what others call ‘policy’ or ‘governance.’

The chapter is based on interviews and conversations, both formal and informal, that I conducted during my fieldwork among indigenous and non-indigenous people of different

---

403 Anthropologist David Stoll, for instance, argues that the Ixiles supported the guerrillas and the revolutionary movement as a response to the Army’s violence, not because the guerrillas “represented” their aspirations. He joins other social scientists that understand the people’s motives for joining revolutionary organization as a matter of an isomorphism between their material needs (the empirical), and the revolutionary ideology. For them, there has to be an homology between the “socio-economic,” whose empirical referents they believe to be the people’s material needs, and the ideology of the guerrillas. Insofar as there is no such thing, their argument goes, one cannot speak of “representation.” On the contrary, I argue that such homology cannot be established in the sense that there is a radical discontinuity between the empirical and the ideological. If there is something we can call “representation,” that does not emerge out of a correlation between the empirical and the ideational; rather, it emerges out of their discontinuity and non-coincidence. This is, of course, the epistemological problem par excellence. In this chapter I sustain that the politics of the poor emerged out of that discontinuity—and its problematization—in the form of a prescriptive figure which articulated a disparate and even incommensurable multiplicity of subjects around a form of futurity whose referents did not have empirical correspondences, but were the product of the people’s thinking. See David Stoll, Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 18-20.

404 In this regard, I have been influenced by Lazarus’ understanding of the figure of the “worker” and by the meticulous analysis of Rosalind Morris about the figure of “the Worker” in Marx’s Capital. See Lazarus, Anthropology, 115-166; Rosalind C. Morris, “Dialect and Dialectic in ‘The Working Day’ of Marx’s Capital,” in: Boundary 2 43, no. 1, (February, 2016).

religious beliefs (Catholics, Evangelicals, costumbristas, Agnostics, etc.) but that, in one way or the other, were interpellated by the figure of “the poor.” I’ve also used, when available, the testimonies, memoirs, and published material of those who survived the army’s violence and were at the center of the history I’m interested in. For historical reasons, I pay special attention to the narratives that referred to Catholic Action and its relationship with the revolutionary movement. This chapter does not provide a historiographical or historicist reading, but a historical-anthropological reconstruction based on my interlocutors’ interpretation of their pasts and my own reading of their experiences.

*From Mis-recognition to Incorporation*

On November 27, 1940, Jackson Steward Lincoln and Gaspar Jordan—the former, an American anthropologist studying Ixil religion or costumbre, and the latter, a Spanish missionary and the only Catholic priest living in the Ixil region at the time—arrived in the village of Chel amid religious festivities that, for disparate reasons, were of great interest to both of them. “The arrival at Chel was similar to those of Sotzil and Ilom with drum and chirimía procession and marimba reception at the town hall,” Lincoln reported.\(^{406}\) The villagers welcomed father Jordan and his companion, a scholar of psychoanalysis born and raised in the Episcopal tradition, that Ixiles believed to be a true Catholic devotee. Indeed, pretending to be a Catholic proved to be Lincoln’s most important decision during his stay, for it would help him to dissipate, at least temporarily, the suspicion of a possible link with Evangelicalism, which was seen as a foreign

---

The day of their arrival, the people of Chel were celebrating the entry of the main Yearbearer, which signaled the end of the 260-day cycle in the Mayan calendar. It was a major celebration. Lincoln was fascinated by the intricacies of the calendar because of its centrality to costumbre; father Gaspar Jordan, nevertheless, preached that those rituals were nothing but superstition and paganism. But the Ixiles, in spite of Gaspar Jordan’s infantilizing harangues and Lincoln’s fascination with their “ancient religion,” saw themselves as loyal followers of “the true faith”: baptisms, Saint Brotherhoods, and Masses for the ancestors had become so deeply integrated into their religious rituals that, by 1940, they constituted ethnic markers of the Ixil culture. Thus, that day, at the moment of their encounter, everybody claimed allegiance to the Catholic Church, but no one was sure about the other’s true Catholic beliefs. Mis-recognition prevailed.

During the evening, things got confrontational. Lincoln reported that a “bad brujo” (witch) came into the Juzgado (Municipal Court) “with an exaggerated ingraining manner” looking for Jordan. The brujo engaged father Gaspar in a discussion about costumbre, inquiring whether burning candles in front of the sacred crosses was wrong or not. Jordan emphatically told him that it was idolatry. He even made fun of the reading of the “sacred

---

407 “I attended mass in the morning because our mozos (help) who had accompanied us from Nebaj were beginning to wonder whether I was of the true faith after all.” Lincoln recalls. Lincoln, Ethnological Study, 29.

408 The Yearbearers are divine Mayors on charge of the times, and their origins can be traced back to a pre-colonial conception of time as destiny whose signs people need to interpret, follow, and respect. Each Yearbearer is the main responsible for the times every four years—there are four Yearbearers—and change every time a year finishes. Among Mayans, including Ixiles, time is understood as a cosmological composite they keep track of on the basis of a long count (gregorian calendar) and a short count (mayan calendar) that is deeply related to their agricultural cycles and life. For a detailed interpretation and description, see: Benjamin N. Colby and Lore M. Colby, The Daykeeper. The Life and Discourse of an Ixil Diviner, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981); Alain Breton, “Algunas observaciones acerca del calendario ritual y el sistema de los cargadores del año en Nebaj, Guatemala,” in Pierre Becquelin, Alain Breton, and Veronique Gervais, Arqueología de la región de Nebaj, Guatemala, (Guatemala: CEMCA-USAC, 2001); and Barbara Tedlock, Time and the Highland Maya, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1993).
beans,” the divinatory method daykeepers or Baalbastix use for consultations. “The brujo tried to draw me into the discussion,” Lincoln recalls, “but I sat in a corner where I could see through the cracks outside.”\(^{409}\) Jackson Lincoln knew that religious rituals were about to happen. Through the cracks, a scene of burning candles, clouds of incense, and a group of men and women praying and performing sacrifices unfolded before his enthralled gaze. All this happened, according to Lincoln, right next to the Juzgado. In the meantime, inside the room, Gaspar Jordan continued his harangues against idolatry and his defense of the true faith. Overwhelmed by his fascination with indigenous religion, Lincoln forced his way out of the Juzgado, opening the door against the will of all the Ixiles in the room. The ritual scene was, thus, “exposed.” Someone slammed the door and, immediately, the brujo resumed his provocations and queries to father Gaspar. “They knew that once he started talking,” Lincoln says, “he would go on for hours delivering a sermon on true and false religion.”\(^{410}\) To Lincoln’s surprise, Gaspar Jordan noticed nothing of what was happening next door. Or, to put it otherwise, Lincoln’s surprise was equivalent to Jordan’s disavowal.

At different levels, this event—described in Jackson Steward Lincoln’s ethnological annotations—is exemplary of the complex relationship between the Catholic Church and the indigenous communities of the western highlands during the first half of the twentieth century, before the beginning of Guatemala’s civil war. The Ixiles, in complete disregard of the loquacious priest’s words, were fully conscious that as long as they allowed him to speak and hear his own message—presumably endlessly—he would “ignore” everything around him.


Doubtless, they needed a priest to perform baptisms for the children and masses for the owners of the cerros or saints, which is crucial for the well-being and future of the community. His arrival, in this regard, was a true celebration; but the Ixiles couldn’t care less about what he had to say. For his part, Gaspar Jordan needed to be there because, as a Catholic missionary and true practitioner of a sacramentalist and clericalist faith, he believed that the efficacy of the sacraments relied on their own divine force (*ex opere operato*). Thus, in Lincoln’s scene, religious communication between the Ixiles and Gaspar Jordan is brought to its point of vacuity: words circulate in a compulsory manner while communication fails.

By the early 1970s, nevertheless, when the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) made its first contacts with indigenous communities of the western highlands, the relationship between the Catholic Church and the indigenous population had dramatically changed. A movement of religious conversion, from *costumbre* to what was known as Catholic Action (AC), had taken place. Catholic Action was introduced in Guatemala in the late 1940s by Guatemala’s ultra-conservative archbishop Rossell y Arellano, as a mode of involving laymen people in the work of the Church. Its main concern was to counteract the ideas emanating from communism, protestantism and what was considered to be laicism. At the same time, Catholic Action was seen as a means to regain a position of control over lay people that the Catholic Church had lost after decades of governmental policies that reduced the Church’s power in Guatemala, since the late nineteenth century (these included freedom of creed as a civil right, the expropriation of the

---


Church’s lands, and the recognition of education as a free and secular right). To counteract the effects of these policies, Rossell y Arellano sponsored the arrival of foreign missionary orders to Guatemala, so they could take charge of the church’s dioceses and parishes throughout the country and push the organization of Catholic Action. In spite of Rosell y Arellano's intentions, with the initiation of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), and especially after the Second Latin American Council of Medellin, Colombia, in 1968, AC’s anti-communist origins would radically shift toward the support of revolutionary movements, as we’ll see later in the chapter.

The history of how indigenous conversion to AC occurred is well documented by social anthropologists who conducted fieldwork in Guatemala between the 1940s and 1970s. Let me, for the purposes of the argument, revisit their main conclusions. These anthropologists maintained that the material life, the religious hierarchies, and the symbolic reality of the “traditional society”—patri-gerontocracy sustained by land inheritance, religious and civil hierarchies based on services and prestige (cargo system and costumbre), a moral economy based on renown, reciprocity and gift-exchange (i.e., an economy not yet fully monetized), etc.,—were deeply impacted by the finca economy, forced labor, and land expropriation enforced by

---

413 Adams, Crucifixion by Power, 278-317.

414 By the end of 1930, there was only one Ecclesiastic Province and three dioceses in Guatemala. It is estimated that there was one priest for every 30,000 Guatemalans. According to Richard Adams, by the mid 1940s there were 120 priests, of a clergy almost entirely constituted by foreign missions; by mid 1966, however, there were 531 priest and 805 nuns, of which only 97 priest were Guatemalans. Adams, Crucifixion by Power, 284.
the Guatemalan state.\textsuperscript{415} Although some local indigenous authorities gained influence and power as intermediaries between the state and their communities, others lost it. As I have shown in chapter 1, some of the Ixil ancestral authorities challenged the power of local \textit{finqueros} [plantation owners] and agents of the Guatemalan state; but others became money lenders, \textit{finca} contractors, and municipal authorities in alliance with \textit{finca} owners. As the Guatemalan \textit{finca}-state consolidated, especially after the reversal of the agrarian reform of 1953, the former lost much of their power, and the latter became figures that impoverished and dispossessed Ixiles and indigenous people resented.

Ricardo Falla and others have convincingly argued that, when debt peonage was legally abolished in the early 1940s, enabling thus the expansion of inter-communitarian commerce in the western highlands, better-off indigenous people of a younger generation became itinerant merchants and shopkeepers.\textsuperscript{416} These merchants were the first to convert to AC in the late 1940s and early 1950s.\textsuperscript{417} In this same historical context, and as a way to minimize the impact of the reversed land reform of 1953, the counter-revolutionary government decided to expand the agrarian frontier to Guatemala’s northern rainforests and southern coast, parceling out lands that would be distributed among poor peasant families organized in cooperatives managed by the


\textsuperscript{416} Falla, \textit{Quiché rebelde}; Brintal, \textit{Revolt Against}; Warren, \textit{Symbolism of Subordination}.

\textsuperscript{417} Falla, \textit{Quiché rebelde}; Brintal, \textit{Revolt Against}; Warren, \textit{Symbolism of Subordination}.
Catholic Church, especially during the 1960s.\textsuperscript{418}

Indeed, through the 1960s, with John F. Kennedy’s “Alliance for Progress,” the introduction of fertilizers in the central and western highlands (the so called "green revolution") and the expansion of non-traditional products of agriculture (among others, garlic and onions) Guatemala’s countryside would witness the emergence of a new class of indigenous peasants that raised their living standards above the poverty line.\textsuperscript{419} This is the general context in which North American and European Catholic missions expanded their work in Guatemala, as mentioned before. Thus, with the weakening of the traditional authorities’ influence, and the emergence of a new class of young merchants, cooperativists, and small to medium land owners, the conditions for challenging the traditional hierarchies and symbolic power had emerged.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, when the first Ixiles converted to Catholic Action and became Catechists, they disputed—not without violent confrontation—the religious traditional authorities’ prerogatives. That challenge led to the conversion of hundreds of Ixil families to the Catholic Action in the following decades.\textsuperscript{420} By 1983, nonetheless, an unprecedented intensification of conversions to Evangelicalism would occur in the countryside, after the Army’s scorched earth campaign.\textsuperscript{421} As others have already pointed out, many members of AC would


\textsuperscript{420} According to Phillip Berryman, by mid 1970’s there were 400 coordinators of Catholic Action distributed in 68 communities of Nebaj alone. They rotated their position as coordinators every 6 months and were disciplined and well organized. Phillip Berryman, \textit{The Religious Roots of Rebellion. Christians in Central American Revolutions}, (New York: Orbis, 1984), 179.

support the EGP in the central and western highlands, and they would become the first targets of the Guatemalan army in the Ixil region, between 1976 and 1981, as we'll see in chapter 6.

*Catholic Action comes to the Ixil Region*

It was Gaspar Jordan, the same priest who took Jackson Stewart Lincoln to the villages of Ilom, Chel, and Sotzil, who initiated the first Catholic Action groups in the Ixil region, a few years after Lincoln's visit. Colby and Colby reported that, while Jordan was in charge of the AC, sacred crosses in the *cerros* [hills] where daykeepers and spiritual guides performed their rituals were burned. Members of AC also fiercely opposed the use of alcohol to venerate the saints, as is the custom in *costumbre*. During the town’s patron saint *fiesta* [celebration], for instance, it is customary to consume alcohol and burn offerings for days, until the celebration is over.422 This form of consumption and gift-giving is indicative of a religious practice whose relation with the sacred is based on total expenditure; and whose mediators perform their rituals on the basis that a greater power is on their side to lead them, for which self-control is not indispensable, as it was the case for Catholic Action (and the Evangelicals). As one Ixil man from Nebaj told me during my fieldwork, his father was always drunk prior to his conversion to Catholicism, and when he joined Catholic Action and became the president of his group, “he forgot completely about alcohol!”

However, it is not Gaspar Jordan who my interlocutors immediately remembered as the one who pushed AC and the cooperatives, but a former priest who came to Guatemala in the late

1960s with the Spanish order of the Sacred Heart, Javier Gurriarán. When I finally began inquiring about AC and the Catholic cooperatives, almost everyone I talked to told me that I need to meet with him. “He learned the language and for many years, riding his horse, he visited virtually all the villages of Nebaj,” someone told me. I contacted him and, after a couple of weeks waiting, we finally met at his house, in Guatemala City. “Take notes, but do not use your recorder,” he told me, while we were having breakfast. He took out a flip chart and a dozen long paper sheets and started answering my questions, writing, making graphics, and charts.

Javier Gurriarán arrived in Nebaj in the early 1970s. Despite the existing networks of AC, especially in the towns of Chajul and Cotzal, he found a wall of silence and the Ixiles’ refused to communicate with him: “I didn’t know the language,” he told me, “and the use of an interpreter did not make things easier.” Not knowing the language may have been an important impediment to fulfilling his duties, but the Ixiles’ refusal to speak with him also suggests that “traditionalists” retained much of their power and influence in Nebaj. Unable to gain the confidence of his parishioners, Javier Gurriarán asked for his transferal to another town. But, according to Gurriarán, Jesuit priest Ricardo Falla—at the time actively engaged with other Jesuits in the organization of a national peasant’s organization that would later be known as the Committee of Peasant Unity (CUC)—convinced him to stay in Nebaj to study the town in depth and to collect its oral histories. It took Gurrián 2 more years visiting villages, learning the languages, and talking to the people about their own history and problems, to finally gain their

---

423 Colby and van den Berghe reported that by 1970 Catholic Action controlled Chajul’s and Cotzal’s municipalities. Colby and van den Berghe, *Ixil Country*, 127.

424 These priests were articulated around a social research institute known as Center for Research and Social Action (CIAS) in Guatemala City. See: Karen Ponciano, “Experiencias Pastorales y Luchas Campesinas,” in: AVANCSO, *Glosas nuevas sobre la misma guerra*, (Guatemala: AVANCSO, 2009), 67-121.
“Between 1971 and 1973,” he told me, “I asked the people of different villages to respond to three basic questions: ¿Qué es lo que da pisto en la región? [What is the source of wealth in the region?] En manos de quién está ese pisto? [On whose hands is that wealth?] Por dónde caminan esas manos? [How and where does that wealth go?]. I also asked them to present their answers in the form of a drawing or a picture. Later we would choose the drawing that best represents the Ixil region. The drawing that won,” he continued, “was a pozo [well] where the sources of wealth (land, population, and commerce) are collected; the well had a pipe that sent all the money to Guatemala City.” People told Gurriarán that “because of that well we’re indebted and have to work for fincas.” After this period of talking and representing the communitarian economic and political problems in the form of images, and already enjoying the support of the people of his parish, Gurriarán pushed cooperatives and other projects of development (he helped to inaugurate credit and honey cooperatives) until his exile in 1981.

Some of the people I talked to in Nebaj recall Gurriarán as a priest who respected and looked for ways to diminish the conflicts between Catholic Action and costumbre, instead of preaching “against those brujos (witches),” as father Gaspár Jordan did. Many traditional authorities came to respect Gurriarán, as other Ixiles told me. “What the Church in the Ixil region insisted on was that no one was the owner of the word of God, it is the community who decides,” Gurriarán told me.

By the second half of the 1970s, the most powerful contratistas [finca contractors and money lenders] and finca owners became Gurriarán’s and Catholic Action’s enemies. Thus, when Catholic Action and the cooperative movement contested the traditional authorities’ prerogatives
and offered an alternative to finca labor, they disputed the control over the material and symbolic structures of power in the region. For those who converted, Catholic Action also provided a symbolic structure that guaranteed the recognition of their new forms of religious belonging in the community. Gurriarán’s style of vernacular pastoral work and developmentalist orientation contrasts with Jordan’s sacramentalism, and it shows the shift within a Catholic discourse that, as I elaborate later on the chapter, would subjectivize many rural communities around the figure of “the poor.” It is in this discursive context that the EGP arrived in the Ixil region and announced a revolution, precisely, *in the name of the Poor*.

*From the Ixil region to the Ixcán, back and forth*

When I asked Gurriarán about the EGP and its relationship with the Ixil communities, he told me the following: “it is a misconception to believe that the EGP arrived to the region and won over the Ixiles; rather, they were received and ultimately invited to stay, for the Ixiles still regarded Ixcán as being ancestrally theirs. The *Lacandón* was, indeed, a zone of Mayan resistance.” He was making reference to the fact that when the first EGP combatants slipped into Guatemala from the Mexican frontier, they establish their first networks of support among members of the cooperatives of the Ixcán in 1972, and later met with Ixil colonists of San Luis Ixcán prior to the establishment of a guerrilla front in the Ixil region. But Gurriarán was also making a deeper historical argument. In his *Recordación Florida*, a three volume description of the geography and people of seventeenth century colonial Guatemala, the *cronista* Francisco

---

425 See Falla, *Quiché Rebelde*.

426 I will elaborate in more detail this in chapter 6.
Fuentes y Guzmán mentions that the priest in charge of the Ixil region was concerned about Ixiles moving into the Lacandona jungle to avoid royal taxes or tributes.\textsuperscript{427} Even though Guzman’s account does not confirm that Ixcán was a part of Ixil ancestral lands, as Gurriarán suggest, it does acknowledge that the Ixiles knew it and even occupied it if necessary. While I visited the village of Ilom, in the town of San Gaspar Chajul, it was palpable that the elderly people I talked to knew the region very well; they used to walk to Ixcán—it was a three days journey, they told me—in the 60s and 70s, to trade corn with the parcelarios. I hadn’t thought of Ixcán as a part of the Ixil political topography, but I took Gurriarán’s words seriously.

Indeed, a couple of weeks after my conversation with Javier Gurriarán, Jesuit priest and anthropologist Ricardo Falla presented his long-term study on the Catholic cooperatives, colonization projects, and the support of indigenous communities for the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) in Ixcán, Quiché, between 1966 and 1982.\textsuperscript{428} Written in the early 1980s during his pastoral work in that region (1982-1993), the study’s complete version had remained in the form of a manuscript that only a few had seen before, in part because of the demands of clandestinity, and in part because of—as I was later informed—Rolando Moran’s (the EGP’s general commander) censorship. While reading it, I was impressed by the vividness of the information Falla’s book presented. Encouraged by my interview with Gurriarán, I decided to contact Ricardo Falla for an informal conversation. While I awaited his response, Juan Vandevieire, a former Belgian missionary I met while I was working at AVANCSO in the early 2000s, and a member of the editorial committee behind this publication, informed me that Falla would be


\textsuperscript{428} Falla, \textit{Ixcán el campesino indígena}.

232
traveling to Ixcán to devolve (to share or give back) the study. Taking this as an invitation, I joined him and two other members of his team in a relatively short trip to a region I had only read about in books and journals, including Falla’s previous publications. It would be my first visit to a place that hundreds of peasant and indigenous families—determined to escape from land scarcity and finca labor—had imagined as a “promised land.” Let me now turn to the dreams and miracles that this land elicited as they were recalled during my visit.

Dreams that Allow to Speak of Miracles

I tried to remember the testimonies of war in Ixcán that I had read years before while we drove from Guatemala City, passing through the colder highlands of Las Verapáces, into the hot and humid lowlands of El Quiché. It was a 15 hours journey through geography and memory, and I was eager to hear more about what had happened there during the war. It came as a surprise—at least for me—that one of the first stories I heard, in the town of Santa María Tzejá, began with a dream. Our host, Magdalena, who had been cooking breakfast for us early in the morning, told us that she was worried about our visit, because she dreamt that it was pouring rain for days, and the small river that runs behind her house had flooded the kitchen. “I was worried because of you,” she told us, while we were eating. It took me some time to realize that among indigenous communities, dreams are to be taken seriously and people often talk about them. Some times, dreams are so puzzling that those who believe and practice costumbre would visit a daykeeper or diviner to inquire about their meanings.429 Even Ixil and indigenous Christians who do not look

for the services of a diviner, pay careful attention to their dreams. This is so because ancestors, 
faraway relatives, or other not-yet present beings coming from the future (like visitors) may want 
to communicate something, bring into the dreamer’s attention some forgotten duty, or simply 
want to be remembered.

A potential diviner, for instance, may dream that an ancestor or an old shaman is calling 
him; or he/she may have dreams about an illness and sacred places related to the Mayan 
calendar, which could be interpreted as a sign that he/she is receiving his call. Misfortune would 
befall on him/her if this dream is unattended or is wrongly interpreted. Like these and other 
dreams I know of, Magdalena’s was primarily future-oriented, and it was related to a form of 
care and duty that came with the offering of her hospitality. I took her dream to mean that she 
was concerned about our wellbeing; I also understood that she was worried about her hosting 
strangers that had come from afar, in the company of a priest many in her community knew of 
and respected. Although Magdalena didn’t add other details to her dream (which in many ways 
was a sign of her anxiety), right after talking about it and expressing her concerns, she told us 
another story: one about her mother’s miraculous escape from the army.

Some details about Magdalena may help to put her words into perspective. She was born 
in Joyabaj, Quiché, but her parents decided to follow the steps of an aunt who, like many other 
members of Catholic cooperatives, looked for a better future in the colonization projects of 
Ixcán. She came with her family at the age of 12, just a few years before la violencia (the 
vioence) started. Indeed, the presence of the Guatemalan army intensified in the region after the 

\footnote{In a society—like those of the indigenous communities—where the relationship with the ancestors determines almost every aspect of people’s lives, listening and trying to understand that which comes in the form of a dream constitutes a crucial form of communication with those that are not there; this is why it matters.}
assassination of Luis Arenas, owner of finca La Perla, and military commissioner Guillermo Monzón, in 1975, both executed by the EGP. After those events, the army sought to win the peasants’ “hearts and minds” by carrying out projects of commercialization and development while implementing a strategy of surveillance and selective killings.\(^{431}\) When the “scorched earth campaign” started and the largest massacres occurred, in February 1982, Magdalena and her family ran away to the mountains together with other survivors of Santa María and nearby villages.\(^{432}\) “While we were hiding,” she told us, “we used to do the cooking during the night, under a tent, so the army couldn’t see the smoke and fire, and we kept our few things together during the day, ready to run away if the army came near our camp.” As massacres progressed, similar movable camps were built throughout the jungle, constituting thus the Comunidades de Población en Resistencia (Communities of Population in Resistance) or CPR.\(^{433}\) [Father Ricardo Falla would serve as a priest for the CPRs of Ixcán]. Once in the camp, as Magdalena reminded us, their main problem was to get food and supplies, and people risked themselves in going back to their plots to get whatever was left. The army also actively destroyed or burned down their crops in order to force them out. And this is how her mother’s story began.

“She went back to our plot, with another patoja (young girl),” she recalled, “but the army caught them. The patoja was able to escape and returned to the camp. She told us what had


\(^{433}\) In Guatemala there were two CPRs, the CPRs of Ixcán and the CPRs de la Sierra. The latter established their camps in the Cuchumatán Sierra, in the Ixil region. For a history of the CPRs, see Ricardo Falla, Historia de un Gran Amor, (Guatemala: USAC, 2005); Ixcán, Pastoral de Acompañamiento en Área de Guerra, Guatemala 1981-1987, Vol. 5, (Guatemala: URL-AVANCSO-USAC, 2018); Andrés Cabanas, En Sueños Perseguidos. Memoria de las Comunidades de Población en Resistencia de la Sierra, (Navarra: Gakoa Liburuak, 2000).
happened. The people decided to leave right away because there was no doubt the army would force my mother to tell the camp’s location.” Magdalena told us that she couldn’t believe her mother wouldn’t come back. “She was in the army’s hands!” she continued, “now she was in the army’s hands. ‘Where are the guerrillas?’ the army kept asking my mother [implying that she was, too, a member of the guerrillas], but she responded with signs [and gestures] that she couldn’t speak Castilla (Spanish), or knew nothing about guerrilleros [guerrillas].” According to Magdalena, the army had her mother tied neck to toe for hours. By then, the CPR's camp had been abandoned and no one dared to go back to look for her. “My mother later told me she heard gunshots and soldiers talking about how they killed another woman. It was true, because we found her body days later. My mother didn’t have doubts the army was going to kill her; all she could do was to pray. For sure she was going to die. There were many soldiers. But God made them weak and tired and all of them fell asleep. What happened is that one of the soldiers didn’t tie well one of the rope’s knots, and my mother was able to untie and drag herself out of the military post.”

I asked Magdalena how her mother found her way back to the camp, given the fact that, by then, everybody was gone. “My mother went back to our plot," she said, "my parents kept corn, some clothes, and other things hidden there. That's where my mother went. I was very sad in the camp because everybody believed the army wasn’t going to let her go. People believed the army was going to kill her. But my father kept telling me my mother wasn’t dead, that she was still alive. So he decided to go back and look for her. It was pouring rain in those days [like in her dream], so he went back to our small plot to pass the rain there; que!!! (then!!!) he found the same clothes my mother was wearing the last time we saw her, hidden in the same buzón (hidden
hole) where we used to keep corn and things. She was there! It was a miracle!” Magdalena recalled that her parents went back to the camp and later decided to cross the border to Mexico, joining hundreds of thousands of refugees in Campeche, were they remained for over 13 years. She met her husband in a refugee camp and moved back to Santa María Tzejá after the signing of the peace agreements in 1996. She came back with her mother (who was 85 years old when I heard her story) and her father (who passed in 2009). "The story of my mother deserves to be known, it deserves to be in a book" she said while we finished our breakfast in the same kitchen that was the scene of her dream. I understood later, while thinking about dreaming and futurity, that Magdalena’s main duty and concern was to pass on her mother's story: she wanted her mother's miracle to be heard and to be written, perhaps in a book, like the one we were carrying hundreds of copies with us.

The Future, the Prescriptive, and the Caesura of a Revolution

By the time we left Magdalena’s house, I wasn’t sure of what to do with or how her story could fit into my own research. I was, after all, working on a region apparently distant (the Ixil region); and dreams, miracles, and God’s interventions were far away from the issues I was primarily interested in. Nonetheless, I kept hearing about dreams and stories of miraculous survival, both in Ixcán and the Ixil region. I even noted down in my diary “people do dream in this part of Guatemala.” While we were driving back to Cantabal, Ixcán, I asked Father Ricardo Falla if he had heard this kind of narrative before, to which he responded emphatically that
“almost everybody, one way or the other, would tell you these stories of dreams and miracles.”

One may argue, as others following Michel Foucault have, that Magdalena was speaking with “fearless speech.” Certainly, like many others who have shared their testimonies in legal courts and human rights reports, she was not afraid of telling her truth. Yet, I think her mother’s story, and the way in which she decided to share it, makes reference to a more complex form of subjectivity. Magdalena does emphasize her mother’s wit, courage, and capacity for maneuvering within a situation of captivity in which she was accused of being a member of the guerrillas. Her decision to not exchange words with the soldiers is the silent signature of her refusal to remain in pure passivity. In other words, her mother’s courage lies not in what she said but in what she didn’t; but there is also a recognition that her mother’s killing was imminent: all probable courses of action would have led to her assassination. Even her own mother seemed to think that. And God intervenes at that moment; when nothing else seems to be possible the miracle occurs. “Miracle,” thus, names the moment when that which seemed impossible (to survive and escape) happened. In recognizing and naming the source of a force that came from elsewhere (God) to change the course of a certain death—something that seemed indisputable—Magdalena does not leave room for identifying the event with pure chance. In doing so, she enacts a form of speech that simultaneously gives force to her mother’s refusal to speak and

---

434 A year after I concluded my fieldwork, while watching Ryan Suffern’s powerful documentary “Finding Oscar” (2016)—a film about the Dos Erres massacre (1982) and of two little boys whose lives were spared and were raised by Guatemalan army officers because they were light skinned and had green eyes—I heard again a similar reference to a miraculous escape. Salomé Hernandez, another survivor who was 11 years old at the time, tells that God told him “that everybody was going to be killed and that [he] had to escape.” In the documentary, we are told that all women and children were taken to a well for their execution. Salomé was walking in front of a soldier, but the women started shouting that if they were going to kill them, it would have to be right there, in town, not like dogs en el monte (out in the bush). The soldier stopped and walked back, and Salomé ran away. He shot at him, but missed. “It was a miracle!” he and one prosecutor concluded. Eventually 250 people, including 66 children, would be massacred.

aligns or puts God on her side; in God’s right place, as it were. As if saying, God was at war, and he was on her mother’s side.

Perhaps it is accurate to say that God was and still is at war. Indeed—and this is why the language of the miraculous permeates contemporary discourse—the unprecedented rise of Evangelical Pentecostalism after the Army’s scorched earth campaign, emphasizes, as Virginia Gerrard-Burnett has shown, the miraculous experience of God “manifest through the ‘baptism in the Holy Spirit’ expressed in ecstatic behavior such as faith healing and speaking in tongues.”

Moreover, according to what others have written about Pentecostalism and my observations during fieldwork, “born again” evangelicals tend to espouse a discourse of forgetting, or to put it differently, of leaving the past “in God’s hands” as opposed to actively pursuing the reconstruction of historical memory and truth. To be sure, not all Evangelicos (Pentecostal Evangelicals) I met fit into this description; some of them were part of human rights organizations that were pursuing justice in Guatemala’s criminal courts while I was there. In the same vein, many conservative Catholics also support and reproduce a discourse of active forgetting and ignorance when addressing Guatemala’s civil war. But what stands as a crucial contrast in Magdalena’s story is that, for her, forgetting is equivalent to the forgetting of God. Or to put it differently, not paying attention to what has happened to the dead, to the ancestors, non-present relatives and to those who survived, is like leaving God without a proper place.

Witnessing is thus what lies behind or beneath the miraculous in Magdalena’s discourse. It matters, for this reason, that Magdalena shared with us her story after she talked about her

---

436 Gerrard-Burnett, Terror in the Land, 132.

dream. And it matters because, on the one hand, dreams are forms of communication that
primarily provide possible futures; and, on the other, as long as dreams are related to a duty and/
or a not-yet-realized destiny, the language of dreaming is binding: it cannot not be heard,
intervening, thus, in people’s social and political life. In this sense, her dream also expresses and
is mobilized by a prescriptive force. It may be argued that I am over-reading Magdalena’s
statements. Recall, however, that as a visitor, I was the object of Magdalena’s dreaming: not-yet
known and coming from the future, as it were, I was to become a witness and a bearer of
Magdalena’s duty: her mother’s story deserved to be written down and remembered, and so here
I am writing—perhaps being written by—her dreaming and miraculous story.

In being acted upon by my interlocutor’s dreams, I learned that asking questions about
language, violence, and Guatemala’s civil war—while being attentive to what I’ve heard—
suggested a path on which clues about futurity and its possible prescriptive dimensions, could
serve as guiding threads. In fact, I was reminded that Ixcán and its projects of colonization and
cooperatives were part of a disputed future that many indigenous families dreamt about, one that
allowed them not to depend upon finca labor and indebtedness. I was also reminded that it was
there, in the rainforest, that Ixil merchants from San Juan Cotzal went to meet with the guerrillas
for the first time, in November 1972, perhaps in search of a revolutionary change. Neither
Magdalena nor anybody else I talked to during my fieldwork were dreaming about a
revolutionary future; but the memory of its possibility can be heard in their speech.

Think, in this regard, of Pedro Tum's words, collected by Anthropologist Beatriz Manz
during her extensive fieldwork among the people of Santa María Tzejá, when remembering
Raisa Girón, a young teacher from Guatemala City who decided to work in Santa María in the
Manz, Paradise in Ashes, 87, (my emphasis).

In Pedro Tum’s words I think there is a space between literature and literacy that goes beyond the pedagogical as “conscious rising.” It signals, simultaneously, both the emergence of an imagined future in which everything is possible (as in literature), and the re-claiming and appropriation of reading as a right (as in literacy). My understanding of literature here is indebted to Derrida. See: Jacques Derrida, “That Strange Institution Called Literature,” in Acts of Literature, ed., Derek Attridge, (New York-London: Routledge, 1992).
“I was always with my father,” Marcelino told me, “close to him all the time. He was the one who taught me how to pray when I was very young.” Marcelino López Balan, an indigenous Kakchiquel catechist and cooperativist from San Martín Jilotepeque, came to Ixcán in April 1975, after receiving an invitation from Maryknoll priest William Woods. I was hosted by Marcelino’s family in Cantabal, Ixcán; but at the time, I didn’t know any details about his 12 years of serving as a Catechist in the CPRs, his work for the Recovery of Historical Memory Project or REMHI (the Catholic Truth Commission’s report), or his recognitions for his contribution to human rights in Guatemala. I didn’t know, then, that both his brother and father had been killed in the first two massacres perpetrated by the army in Cuarto Pueblo, in April 1981. Neither did I know that the Archbishop’s Office of Human Rights of Guatemala had published Marcelino’s testimony and memoir.

According to his memoir, Marcelino’s father—like many others of his generation—had been a beneficiary of Arbenz’ agrarian reform in 1953; but with the CIA backed counter-revolution, the Guatemalan government took back his lands and sent him to jail. This recollection of his father’s imprisonment and repression goes hand to hand with memories of a period of great poverty. “I didn’t know what a pair of jeans were. They [his parents] covered me with ‘mantabril,’ a very rough fabric,”440 he recalls. Unable to go to school in San Martín, Marcelino joined his uncle and cousins to work for sugarcane and cotton fincas on the southern coast, beginning when he was 11 years old. Illiterate and older than the other kids at school,

Marcelino did not insist in taking over his education out of shame until the early 1960s, when a local teacher told him that, word by word, he could learn to read if he followed his instructions. And he did. “I did what the teacher told me to, and letter by letter, I learnt how to read the Catechism that I already knew by heart, that I had memorized but didn’t know how to read. I learnt because I was able to put together the signs with the sounds.”

Around the same time that Marcelino began to master this other form of mediation (i.e., to read something he already knew by heart), the Catholic Church underwent a major reform (II Vatican Council, 1962-1965) that included fundamental changes in the way in which it conceived of its relationship with lay people. As it is well known, the church encouraged the active participation of people like Marcelino Lopez in the administration of the sacraments, which the Vatican Council strongly recommended to be done in the local languages, going thus against a very old tradition of using Latin as the privileged language of the sacramental and the sacred. “There was a whole year of preparations,” Marcelino recalls, “for the people to be able to respond in Spanish during Mass celebrations. Before, only the sacristan or a religious person responded, diz que (apparently) in Latin. In reality, Mass was basically an adornment, because nobody knew what was said during its celebration. People were there because of their faith, y que fé tiene la gente! (and what a faith people have!) because, in spite of not understanding anything, they were there.”

“Being there” and not knowing what was said, Marcelino seems to suggest, was the mark of a pure faith in which Latin as the language of the sacred instigated a religious belief beyond

---

441 López Balan, Testigo del morral, 35.
442 López Balan, Testigos del morral, 30.
linguistic exchange. Violence in the form of miscommunication and inaudibility is already inscribed in this form of faith, nonetheless.\textsuperscript{443} In these ritual encounters with the sacred, liturgical speech did not frame the believer’s responses: everything—or nothing at all—could have been said within and in response to these rituals.\textsuperscript{444} Thus, under circumstances that one could categorize as performative non-relations, this form of pure faith was indicative of the dispersion and dissemination of sacramental meaning. But in learning how to read in Spanish, in mastering this other form of mediation, Marcelino and the people he speaks of became a part of a new form of religious \textit{responsibility} which, by the same token, enabled their own subjectivation: Marcelino and his peers would become subjects of the Church’s interpellation.\textsuperscript{445} In other words, lay people went from being conceived of as pure \textit{objects} of the sacramental to \textit{subjects} of (their own) salvation. By virtue of this linguistic and pedagogic form of interpellation, the other mediation (reading) of the sacraments became apparent: it produced the articulation between sound and sign (or to put it slightly differently, between voice and word-scripture) and thus, it opened up the possibility of religious language’s self-effacement. The fundamental conditions for the emergence of a prophetic language and discourse among Catholic indigenous groups of the highlands (like the Ixil region) and the new zones of colonization (like Ixcán) became possible. It doesn’t come as a surprise that Marcelino—like thousands of catechists and delegates of the

\textsuperscript{443} For a reading on the relationship between language and violence, see: Rosalind C. Morris, “Mediation, the Political Task. Between Language and Violence in Contemporary South Africa,” in \textit{Current Anthropology} 58, no. 15, (February, 2017).

\textsuperscript{444} In his study of Christian conversion in the Philippines, Vincent Rafael calls this form of encounter “Fishing Out,” which is the double process of trying to identify something that seems to have no recognizable place and the attempt to construct a context to inform what was said about that place; it is a form of re-appropriating the unrecognizable within a situation of decontextualization and untranslatability. See: Vincent L. Rafael, \textit{Contracting Colonialism. Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule}, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

word—attended innumerable workshops about how to read *with* the bible while learning about cooperativism, development, and the situation of the poor in Guatemala.

In Marcelino's recollections, references to poverty are pervasive. For him, poverty was associated with memories of a childhood witnessing how his father—the person who gave him his faith—was imprisoned and his lands expropriated. These are also memories of a moment when he had to work in *fincas* instead of going to school. In line with this, in Marcelino’s *memoir*, being poor makes reference to that which prevented him from fulfilling his social obligations as a husband, as a father, and as a Catholic catechist. But it is the poverty that comes from the future, the potential poverty of his children and his children’s children, that troubles him the most. As a haunting possibility, poverty comes in the form of a recollection that is being displaced towards a potential future: rather than being a mark of the social, it signals its impossibility. As if Marcelino Lopez were saying, in poverty we won’t be able to be men and women. It is because of this deferral that a politics of the poor, of speaking in the *name* of the poor, became possible for him. His message as a catechist, both in Ixcán and in the *fincas* of the southern coast or *la costa*, where he attended Catholic peasants, was permeated by this experience and understanding. And, as we will see in the next section, the figure of the poor became the figure of a universal promise, of which he and many more catechists, nuns, and

---

446 When Marcelino met María Lorenzana—his future wife and my host in Cantabal—he couldn’t marry her because of his poverty and lack of land. They moved in together against the church’s mandates and their families’ will. But things would changed soon with cooperativism and land acquisition: Marcelino Lopez Balan and Maria Lorenzana got married two years later.

447 In Marcelino’s words, “Father William [Woods] told me that as soon as I arrived into Ixcan I would see the big project being developed *for* the poor, a project of the poor. But, sometimes I asked myself, why did I leave San Martín if I didn’t have any problems there? Perhaps the reason why I left was my children, because I was thinking in their future, and the future of their children, so they can have a piece of land. We didn’t have that in San Martín, the land there was poor. I was hoping that the land I was about to receive in Ixcán would give good results. And it did; it was a big piece of land, and one could get lost inside the plot. We were happy with my wife, we finally had our land!” López Balan, *Testigos del morral*, 53.
priests spoke prior to and during Guatemala’s civil war: the voice of the poor would putatively “coincide” with the scripture. The “I” of religious language and discourse would be identified with the “we” of the poor, much in the same way as the discourse of the Committee of Peasant Unity and its politics of anonymity, as we have seen in chapter 4.

In the Name of “the poor:” Naming the Event and a Disruptive Real.

I asked Juan Vandeveire what had made him change his mind about his missionary life and embrace “the option for the poor” in Guatemala. “To me,” he said, “la pobreza chocaba! [poverty was shocking!]. For many of us, witnessing this kind of suffering just… no puede ser, no puede ser! (it cannot be, it cannot be!). When I came to Guatemala, our mission was to administer the sacraments, which we understood as insufficient because there was no evangelization. There was a book of baptisms and Mass where we noted down how many had been done [a book of debts and obligations, we could say]. We saw that as a part of the injustice against the poor.” I knew that missionaries of European congregations like Juan’s—he was part of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary—had been working under similar, if not worse, economic conditions in China (before being expelled by Mao) prior to their arrival in Latin America.448 So I asked him about this previous experience; I was trying to problematize the fact that the economic conditions as such weren't enough, then, to push a Catholic emancipatory project like the one that happened in Latin America in the 60s and 70s. “It is true that the poor

448 For a history of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart in Guatemala, see: Lizbeth Gramajo, Karen Ponciano, and Juan Vandeveire, Lucha campestina y trabajo pastoral en la costa sur de Guatemala, (Guatemala: AMDE- AVANCOSO-URL, 2016); Mario Trinidad, Repression and Martyrdom: the Radicalization of the Missionaries of the Congregation of the Immaculate Hearth of Mary in Guatemala (1954-1996), (PhD. diss.: La Trobe University, 2015).
were not seen as subjects of their own liberation then, but the inspiration was there,” he responded.

Despite Juan’s awareness of the historical conditions that determined his missionary work, in our interviews, his emphases were put on his shocking encounter with poverty and the religious inspiration that preceded it. I found his answer somehow elusive and asked him if he didn’t believe that there was a sort of “historical a priori” or a religious discourse that enabled his generation of missionaries to “discover” Latin America's poverty as something unseen before.449 “There were things in the air, you know, the signs of the times,” he responded, but insisted on the shocking nature of his encounter with poverty in Guatemala.450 Certainly, it helped that poverty was no longer seen as an unmodifiable innate condition of the marginalized—often colonized—people they would be evangelizing, as Arturo Escobar has shown.451 Instead, by the second half of the twentieth century in Latin America, poverty had become something to be intervened in order to produce laboring populations and to prevent the dissemination of communism. In the same vein, it also helped that a significant proportion of North American and

449 While we talked, Juan was well aware of, and he understood practically and theoretically, the global context of de-colonization and the struggles for Independence in the global south occurring at the time he was a seminarist. Sufficient references to the theological and pastoral transformations elicited by the pre- and post-Second Vatican Council within the Catholic Church, were also part of our conversations. He even acknowledged that a new form of pastoral power (in the Foucauldian sense) played a fundamental role in the Christianity of Liberation he believed in.

450 Indeed, other priests and nuns have re-iterated an “eye-opening” experience in Latin America, as a turning point in their lives as missionaries. A majority of them speak of a revelation in the form of conversion, going from the idea of a mission that was aimed at administering sacraments in order to fight “atheist communism” among rural and impoverished communities of the “third world,” to a position where many of them would sympathize and even support leftist revolutionary movements. Juan’s experience wasn’t that different. In this regard, see: Carlos Santos, Guatemala, El silencio del gallo. Un misionero Español en la guerra más cruenta de América, (Barcelona: Editorial Debate, 2007); Juan Hernandez Pico, S.J., Luchar por la justicia al viento del Espíritu. Autobiografía y esbozo de historia de mi generación, (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2014); Eileen Markey, A Radical Faith. The Assassination of Sister Maura, (New York: Nation Books, 2016); Thomas and Marjorie Melville, Whose Heaven, Whose Earth?, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971).

European missionaries arriving to the continent came from Irish, Basque, and Flemish backgrounds, where nationalists and anti-monarchic/anti-dictatorial hopes and struggles were a vivid part of their recent history.\textsuperscript{452} Notwithstanding, in all my interviews—as much as in the memoirs I had access to—all of this is merely seen as historical background.

I told Juan that, even though I understood the insistence on the materiality of the poor's economic and social existence as a fundament for a theological option, people like Marcelino Lopez Balan, for instance, were not dispossessed marginalized poor persons, at least not in the cooperatives of Ixcán. "It's true that the sociological characteristics of the poor did not always coincide with the situation we denounced as unjust," he replied, “but there is also a theological poor around which a prophetic discourse was developed: it is the oppressed, the marginalized, the worker whose rights are denied, those who live in a \textit{situation of injustice}.” It is worth recalling that, on the one hand, the injustice Juan speaks of was thematized as a form of dehumanization and, consequently, as a grave "structural sin," by the 1968 II Latin American Episcopal Conference in Medellin, Colombia;\textsuperscript{453} and, on the other, that the suspension of the poor's exploitation, misery, and suffering was interpreted as a sign of the presence of God's kingdom on earth by many liberation theologists. Indeed, in his influential \textit{Liberation Theology}, Gustavo Gutiérrez theorized the coming of God’s Kingdom as a \textit{don} (gift) from the future, whose awaiting \textit{must} be enacted in the form of a negation of the poor's situation of injustice: for him, without this form of denunciation there is no annunciation. Thus, for a liberation theology, the imperative "\textit{must}" ascribed to the negation of injustice was the condition of possibility of God's

\textsuperscript{452} Markey, \textit{Radical Faith}; Hernandez Pico, \textit{Luchar por la justicia}.

promise, a conclusion that Gutiérrez phrased in the language of gift economy, i.e., as obligation, bondage, and reciprocation.454

In Juan’s words, the figure of the poor enabled an articulation between a theological situation that did not clearly correspond with its sociological referents, and a theological commandment expressed in the form of God’s promise. In other words, the figure of “the poor” functioned as a rhetorical figure, that is, as a figure that referred to a pure displacement of signs (“oppressed,” “marginalized,” “theological poor,” “worker,” “indigenous”) and that enabled the articulation of a non referential theological situation of injustice with a prescriptive commandment. This figure, however, came to be politically divisive insofar as it forced a decision over being on the side of the poor, or as Juan called it, “the preferential option for the poor.” He expressed this as follows: “God doesn't have to be on the side of anyone, but if there is a situation of injustice, God does decide and takes a position, he puts himself on the side of those suffering injustice!” It is at this point where both Juan's and Margarita's testimony coincide. Indeed, many congregations were faced with this political decision in a manner that elicited internal divisions. Discussing this partition, in his memoir, Jesuit priest Juan Hernandez Pico—a contemporary and close friend of Father Ricardo Falla—recalls a heated meeting in Nicaragua, in October 1980, where they were confronting the division among the Jesuits in Central America; he says:

[In the meeting] some paid attention to what can unite us: ‘we need to unite the Company [Company of Jesus] around an apostolic option. Here, there is a limit to pluralism and a point of reference’. But signaling the difficulty of that unification, many asked themselves about this option and what does being poor mean. Father Astorqui expressed himself like this: *The poor are the poor, period!* Those who do not have a

penny, who do not have any influence.455

In Pico’s recollection of this meeting, communication is brought to its limit; the statement “the poor are the poor, period!” points towards a figure, or rather, a name, that exhausts the possibility of metalanguage: in reiterating the name, the expression portrays a situation that did not expect an answer, a statement whose tone makes re-signification virtually impossible. It matters that the figure of the poor is also said to be both a limit to pluralism and a point of reference, and it does so because its referentiality is elusive and displaced, as we have seen before. In this regard, if we understand politics not as a matter of governance but as a matter of an antagonistic divisive activity, the internal division of the Jesuits that father Hernandez Pico speaks about, is the mark of its emergence and presence. Thus, he makes reference to the figure of a force of disruption that couldn't be signified but only named; and, insofar as it articulates a situation with a decision that comes in the form of a commandment, this name is prescriptive.

In its capacity to force an articulation between a political situation and a prescriptive decision, whose point of reference was a form of universal salvation, that rhetorical figure of the poor was starting to operate as a master signifier. The poor was becoming thus the figure of political difference. It was in the name of the poor that a revolutionary discourse was articulated, and it was against those fighting in the name of the poor that the Guatemalan finca-state responded.

_Antinomies of Not-Knowing: Ur-Faith, Iterability, and “The People of God.”_

---

455 Hernández Pico, _Luchar por la justicia_, 194.
As a political name, "the poor" needed to be re-iterated in the form of catechesis, evangelization, education, and workshops of political formation: i.e., as a political intervention. In the case of Juan's congregation, they decided to implement a pedagogical dispositive called "Family of God," inspired and used by other Catholic orders like the Maryknolls, and adapted it to the methodological tools of Freire's "Pedagogy of the Oppressed." They also worked with other congregations, like the Jesuits, who had been implementing projects of social research on the relationship between the socio-economic conditions of poor indigenous peasant families working for sugar, cotton, and coffee fincas, and the potentialities of their political organization. Family of God intended to be an Ecclesial Base Community by creating what they called Apostolado Seglar (Ministry of lay people). The purpose of this Apostolado was to actualize a different understanding of the Church, emanated from the II Vatican Council and the II Episcopal Conference of Latin America, as the People of God (as opposed to the Temple of God). Evangelizing for Juan and his contemporaries took this meaning:

If we believe that the Church is the People of God, as I do—he told me—it means that the celebration of the sacraments no longer requires the exclusiveness of the priest, but all the people need to take part in it. We used “Family of God” to discuss the real

---

456 Gramajo, Ponciano, and Vandeveire Lucha campesina; Markey, Radical Faith; Thomas and Marjorie Melville, Whose Heaven.

457 In Guatemala, as mentioned before, the Jesuits—among them Ricardo Falla and Juan Hernandez Pico—founded, in the early 70’s, the Center for Social Action and Research, CIAS, whose purpose was to understand what were the forces that trigger the peasant’s political organization, or, as they called it “los resortes de la organización campesina.” They had envisioned a dispositive of intervention that used social research as a political tool in order to help in the construction of a national peasant organization. In 1978, this organization was born under the name of CUC or Committee of Peasant’s Unity, of which many Catechist and EGP’s political collaborators became their leaders. CUC became the referent for thousands of indigenous and peasant families throughout the countryside, and, in 1981, it would call for an unprecedented general strike in all sugar and cotton fincas of the southern coast that paralyzed their production for over 3 weeks.” For general overview of the CIAS, see Hernandez Pico, Luchar, 83-350; Karen Ponciano, “Experiencias Pastorales y Lucha Campesina, 1970-1980. Una lectura a partir de historias de vida” in AVANCSCO, Glosas Nuevas de la misma Guerra. Rebelión Campesina, Poder Pastoral y Genocidio en Guatemala, (Guatemala: AVANCSCO, 2007), 69-121.

458 In this regard, see the Constitution Lumen Gentium, which was part of the Documents of the II Vatican Council. In Concilio Vaticano: Documentos Completos, (Bogotá: San Pablo, 2000), 17-80.
meaning of the celebration with lay people so they could celebrate the sacraments with others. Before, the people just wanted to baptize their kids or they wanted a Mass for the dead. It was like taking a medicine to cure an illness. But how can you be in a community where the people haven't had the opportunity to learn the true meaning of the Eucharist? When we discussed their situation of exclusion and oppression together with the word of God [reading with bible], it was like a novelty for them, they were full of happiness, it was a true celebration.

For Juan, a sacramentalist and clericalist Church was a form of injustice to the poor. He thematicizes this situation as a lack of knowledge. His words resonate with Marcelino Lopez Balan’s but with a difference. Both would agree, I think, in saying that the pedagogical process (learning how to read with the bible) that made liturgical language a form of religious recognition, was also the condition of possibility for the pastoral interventions implemented in the countryside during the 60s and 70s. In fact, when Juan arrived in Guatemala, his first task was to learn the language: Spanish served as a lingua franca for both of them (Marcelino Lopez's native language was Kaqchikel). They would also agree, I think, in that the pre-conciliar sacraments did not allow the people to respond and was performed, literally, by turning the back on them. But these commonalities end when it comes to their different understandings of what not-knowing is indicative of. As we saw above, Marcelino speaks of the pre-conciliar liturgy as a situation in which, despite not-knowing what was said, people were there as in a state of pure faith. For him, it was an expression of their faith’s excess: it existed in spite of and beyond the pre-conciliar Church’s discourse; whereas Juan believes that the people Marcelino Lopez speaks of were living a sacramentalist faith, although unknowingly. Not-knowing, in this regard, is tantamount to their innocence. Of this, Marcelino makes no reference whatsoever. In other words, for Marcelino not-knowing is indicative of an attempt to deal with an excess, whereas for Juan it is the mark of a lack of knowledge.
Perhaps this is why in my conversations with Marcelino Lopez, as much as in his memoir, it is difficult to recognize an epiphany at the heart of—or as the foundation of—his faith in the Catholic church. He does celebrate the occurrence of the II Vatican Council and all its derivatives, but does not speak of a shocking event that "opened his eyes" in a manner similar to Juan and other religious people. Rather, his faith seems to have been reinforced by a series of God's manifestations and miracles. Like the time he was gravely ill in Ixcán because of his nostalgia for San Martín—as in a state of liminality—, and wasn’t sure that moving to the jungle was the right decision: God made him feel better. Or that other time when his 7 year old daughter was dying because of measles (two of his kids died then) and he spoke to her to wake her up while everybody believed she was dead, until she woke up to make the sign of the cross—scarring everybody around—before she finally passed away. Or the time he prayed on behalf of a woman who was possessed, or as people told him, had two spirits, until she got better (Marcelino was scared to death but God was with him). But especially, Marcelino would tell me, the miracle of God was that he survived two different massacres, one in April 1980 and the other in March.

459 On the morning of April 30, 1980, the EGP launched a sustained attack against Cuarto Pueblo’s destacamento (military outpost). According to many testimonies and EGP’s accounts (the Army didn’t reveal the number of casualties), around 100 soldiers had been killed. Coincidently, Marcelino’s parents were visiting him in those days and, after the battle—which caught them by surprise—the army captured his father and took him into Cantabal’s garrison. He was tortured and killed. In fact, in retaliation for the killing of the soldiers, the army perpetrated a massacre where Marcelino’s brother, Marcos—who was the Cooperative’s treasurer—was assassinated. Not knowing that his father was dead, Marcelino went to look for him, disregarding the fact that the army was also after him. He got himself caught in the process. Here, Antonio Agustín, Marcelino’s compadre, appears out of nowhere. Apparently, he went to the garrison to inform the commander and the soldiers about the events that happened in the morning. It is unclear whether he was an informer or just someone the Army was interrogating; but what is remarkable in Marcelino’s recollection is that, while Antonio was telling them about bombs, gunshots, and the battle, the soldiers got so absorbed in his detailed narrative that they forgot about Marcelino. He ran away. He and his family decided to leave Ixcán, and went back to San Martín. On their way out, they ran into a bus full of finca workers heading to Guatemala City and asked the bus driver for a lift. Before leaving Ixcán, the army stopped the bus: “what about these people,” a soldier inquired, “they are workers of the finca,” he responded, and the soldiers let the bus go. “Why did the driver say that we were working for that finca?” Marcelino asks himself, “it was a miracle of God.” López Balan, Testigos del morral, 85-88.
both perpetrated by the army in Quarto Pueblo, Ixcán.

In other words, for Marcelino God’s miracles are events that confirm his faith and God’s positions toward people like him, whereas for Juan and all the missionaries that reiterate a discourse on poverty as the cause of an epiphany, the event is understood as an unexpected transformation. This difference is similar to what former cadres of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) expressed in regard to the support of the indigenous communities as something unexpected as opposed to references of indigenous ancestral discourse that made reference to the confirmation of the arrival of a war that would liberated them, as I have shown in chapter 4. It was this non-coincidence, I argue, that enable people like Marcelino and Juan—the people of God—to be interpellated by the figure of the poor.

Conclusions

Power dynamics and religious forms of belonging are interrelated in Ixcán and the Ixil region today, as much as they were in the 50s, 60s, and 70s. But neither Christians (Catholics and Evangelicals) nor costumbristas are struggling against each other to redefine the terms around

460 While in San Martín, after the first massacre he survived in Ixcán, he made good use of his skills as a tailor – something he learned to do in Ixcán– and many people came to make business with him. A client, who apparently knew someone who knew someone in the army, told him that the G-2 (the Army’s intelligence unit) was after him. Sometime between August and September 1981, Marcelino decided to return to Ixcán after learning that the Army had beaten up his brother, Edmundo, thinking it was him. Without his family (they stayed in San Martín for a few months), a house, food, and things, he decided to remain in his plot, living of and thanks to the help of compadres and friends who knew the Catechist was back. On March 14 1982, a Sunday and market day, Marcelino went to Cuarto Pueblo riding his horse to buy and sell things. At ten o'clock in the morning, the Army perpetrated a second Massacre. As bombs and bullets fell everywhere, he rode his horse as fast as he could. To his misfortune, he ran into the Army. In the confusion of the attack, he found himself cover with blood and thought they had finally gotten him, but the blood was his horse’s. Leaving his dead horse behind, he kept running, jumping over dead bodies, until he finally escaped. He ran into other Cooperativists and told them that the Army had wiped out the entire town, “it is the end of everything,” he told them; yet, they insisted and kept walking towards Cuarto Pueblo, “only to meet with their death.” Over 375 people were killed that day. Marcelino had survived, “miraculously,” a second Massacre. López Balan, Testigos del morral, 85-88.
which their social place and position is guaranteed and recognized within their societies. When Catholic Action came to these regions—and the Guatemalan highlands for that matter—that’s what happened. As we have seen before, profound historical transformations within the Catholic Church turned Ixil and indigenous Catholics that were conceived of as objects of sacramental language into subjects of salvation, making possible thus the emergence of a prophetic discourse. Moreover, as I’ve tried to demonstrate, “the poor” was a prescriptive figure that enabled the articulation of a multiplicity of subjects interpellated, primarily but not exclusively, by the discourse of the Catholic Church: it articulated a “situation of injustice” with a “political decision” in the form of a commandment. In this regard, it is a misconception to believe, as others have, that what was at stake during Guatemala’s civil war was an homologation between the poor’s needs and interests and the guerrillas’ representation of the poor, as if politics were a consequence of the social;

461 or that what happened during these years is reducible to a translation between indigenous cosmologies grounded in the material existence of things and a materialist conception of history preached by Guatemala’s revolutionary organizations.

This is not to say that those Ixiles who supported the EGP didn’t do it on the basis of their own cosmologies; or that they didn’t believe in a materialist conception of history. What I’m saying is that if an articulation between indigenous cosmologies and revolutionary ideologies ever happened, it was because of the figure of the poor’s prescriptive effect. However, if I’m not wrong, in its becoming the fundamental mark of political difference and differentiation (a master signifier), from a revolutionary point of view, the very nature of the figure precluded the


462 Historian Greg Grandin has suggested this in his analysis of the Q’eqchi’ experience. See: Greg Grandin, The Last Colonial Massacre. Latin America in the Cold War, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 106.
possibility for other figurations grounded in indigenous cosmologies to occupy the position of the general or the generalizable. In this regard, the figure of the poor also enacted a form of negation; a very productive one, nonetheless: it subsumed indigenous cosmologies within the universality of the poor’s promise without nullifying them. Otherwise, the massive support of many indigenous communities of the western and central highlands to the guerrillas wouldn't have ever happened.

Insofar as this figure produced similitudes or sameness, it had imaginary effects; insofar as it produced a form of bondage or a sense of obligation, the figure had symbolic effects; but what I have tried to demonstrate is that, the figure itself, was fundamentally divisive: e.i., its effects pertain to the order of the Real. In the process of reiterating the figure and its name, through a multiple and varied set of apparatuses (dispositifs) of political formation, evangelization, and pedagogical intervention those subjects who were interpellated by the figure of the poor, engaged in forms of problematization or thinking that opened up the possibility of a revolutionary future. Today, that possibility remains in the form of dreams and miracles which, by the same token, are indicative of their caesura.
Chapter 6. On Violence: Selective Violence, Massacres, Sacrificial Logics

Introduction

In this chapter I move my argument towards an analysis of the development of the civil war and the forms of violence that predominated between the years of 1973 to 1983. I do so by first contextualizing a situation of national militarization that initiated with the coup of 1963 under the National Security Doctrine and the regional (Central American) effects of the Nicaraguan revolution of July 1979. I also link these Central American and national events to the development of the civil war in the Ixil region, paying especial attention to the period of selective political violence (1976-1981) and that of massive violence (1981-1983). As part of my analysis, I trace back the affective conditions that made possible the “implantation” of the EGP in the area and the subsequent support of many Ixil communities to its revolutionary discourse. I also show how the symbolic structures of power were at the verge of being undone in the region at a moment when the Guatemalan army experienced its own situation nationally as in a crisis.

The main theses that inform this chapter are first, that prior to the months of massive violence, insurgent and counter insurgent violence were sucked up by the political struggles and power dynamics developed during the consolidation of the finca economy and finca-state in the region. However, at the moment when insurrectionary politics and the politics of anonymity where at their peak, and the symbolic structures of signification and desire where experienced by the army as in a crisis, the Guatemalan army’s general command performed a symptomatic and regressive reading, i.e., the “indios” are the mark of the state’s dissolution. And second, the guerrillas’ presence in the Ixil region, more than the cause of an indigenous rebellion was, for the
Guatemalan finca-state, the last “proof” that the “indios” were the mark of the nation’s dissolution. This symbolic stipulation, which led to the militarization of the entire Ixil region, absolutized Ixil communities as enemies of the state. The perpetration of massacres became a part of the army’s counterinsurgent campaigns, whose main objective was to cut off the support to the guerrillas by virtue of generalizing the militarization of the entire region. In order to put an end to a form of violence that was perceived of as being endless and with no reason to be exerted against unarmed Ixil communities, in order to stop massacres perpetrated by the army, to appease the Guatemalan state’s sovereign rage, and to save their own lives, Ixiles were forced to kill other Ixiles.

This chapter is based on ethnographic observations during my fieldwork, between the months of May and October 2015, and interviews conducted between the years of 2007 and 2009 and one short visit in the summer of 2013. The chapter is also based on extensive archival research conducted in the Historical Archive of the Center for Mesoamerican and Regional Research, CIRMA, in Antigua Guatemala, from the months of October 2014 to Abril 2015.

*Militarization, Crisis, Ghostly Apparitions: Revolutionary Aspirations and Counterinsurgent Responses (1979-1981)*

While revolutionary and socialists hopes seemed to be fading away in South America after the overthrow of Salvador Allende’s socialist government in Chile, in September 1973,\(^{463}\) the triumph of the Sandinistas in Nicaragua in July 1979, would spark a renovated sense of possibility among many revolutionary organizations northern to the continent, in El Salvador and

---

Guatemala. That a revolution could have succeed in overthrowing a decades-long repressive
dynasty in a period of time when the majority of Latin American countries were ruled by US
backed military dictatorships, made the Nicaraguan revolution even more relevant and urgent in
Guatemala and El Salvador.464

A friend and experienced anthropologist conducting fieldwork at the time in the northern
territory of Las Verapáces, Guatemala, near the frontier with México, told me that soon after she
and other members of her team heard the news of the Sandinistas’ triumph on the radio, the bells
of the local church rang in a celebratory mode. The local priest was welcoming the Sandinistas’
triumph. Many others would receive the news in celebration. The Committee of Peasant Unity’s
newspaper, *De sol a sol*, dedicated its September issue to the Nicaraguan revolution, “the first
revolution since Cuba, in 1959,” portraying it as the “light and hope for all the exploited people
in Latin America and the world.”465 A former high cadre of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP)
recalled that “the triumph of the Sandinistas confirmed [to us] that [an armed victory] was
possible. It created high expectations among us.”466

For the Guatemalan army, however, things ran to the opposite way. According to one
army officer, “what happened in Nicaragua wasn’t unknown to us. We were there [collaborating]
with counterinsurgency. General Lucas [then president of Guatemala] was well aware of what
was happening there. He put everything he could to the service of Somoza’s army.”467 The army,

464 Herbert S. Klein and Francisco Vidal Luna, *The Military Regimes of Latin America in the Cold War: Brazil

465 *De sol a sol*, no.29, September 1979, 4-5.


467 Manolo E. Vela Castañeda, *Los pelotones de la muerte. La construcción de los perpetradores del genocidio
in other words, saw Somoza’s defeat from the inside of their own regional context. Officer Cesar Calderón adds important information about the army’s vision of Somoza’s defeat: “there, one was fighting for Somoza,” he told Manolo Vela Castañeda, “but we used to say: here we do not fight for Lucas, or anybody: we fight for our country. That is our conviction. We despised [the Nicaraguan way]. That was a patrimonial regime; and the [Nicaraguan] National Guard was merely disguised as an army. That denigrated the military organization.” In Calderón’s words, the Guatemalan army is portrayed as a corporative institution identified with the country, rather than an institution subordinated to and identified with the will of a dictator. Let me briefly contextualize these officers’ answers.

To be sure, Guatemala’s own history of dictatorships is not exempt of patrimonial/patriarchal military figures, Jorge Ubico—overthrown by the revolution of 1944—being the last one. But this corporative sense of belonging and identification with “the country,” as expressed in Calderón’s words, is part of a history of the Guatemalan army’s modernization, during which it acquired political autonomy from other branches of the government, its cadres were professionalized, and the military career was institutionalized. Many of these changes initiated with the same revolutionary governments, in the second half of the 1940s, and deepened after the counter revolution of 1954. But perhaps the most relevant change in the armed institution occurred in the 1960s, with the military coup of 1963 and the subsequent reform of the Guatemalan constitution in 1965. This period of time is important because, as others have

---

468 Vela Castañeda, Los Pelotones, 206.

469 Jennifer Schirmer, Intimidad del proyecto politico de los militares, (Guatemala: FLACSO, 1999), 37.
shown, the military virtually took control of the state apparatus. Among other things, the new constitution of 1965 severely restricted political participation at the level of electoral politics, and proscribed all forms of organizations—political parties, unions, committees, etc.,—identified with the “communist ideology throughout the national territory.” It is in this context that the Ambulatory Military Police (PMA)—referred to by General Alejandro Gramajo, one of the architects of the counterinsurgent campaigns of the early 1980s, as “the Guerrilla Army of the Rich,” in an sardonic comparison with the EGP—was transformed into a semi-private security force that protected the properties and business of the Guatemalan rich; and the Military Commissioners—who were the local/rural links for the army since the 1930s—were given definitive military status and military intelligence/counterinsurgent responsibilities. More important, with the support and training of the US government, the Guatemalan army also reinforced and modernized its apparatus of intelligence (known in Guatemala as G-2 and S-2) and repression (secret police and deaths quads) in a manner that, in 1966, made possible what

---


472 The Ambulatory Military Police (PMA) was created in 1958, to persecute anti-narcotic crimes in urban areas. However, in 1965, it was stipulated that the PMA would act throughout the rural areas in order to prevent and persecute activities that “exacerbated the rural peasant masses.” It basically became a security apparatus that protected private fincas and private industries, for which finca owners paid the army a monthly amount. During the civil war, specially in the 70s and 80s, it served purposes of counter-insurgency intelligence and was linked to the army’s section of intelligence or G-2. See: CEH, *Guatemala memoria del silencio*, 2:62-64; see also: Michael McClintock, *The American Connection. State Terror and Popular Resistance in Guatemala*, (London: Zed Books, 1985), 64-69, 167.

473 The figure of Military Commissioner was created by Jorge Ubico in 1938. Commissioners were on charge of the organization of militias, whenever they were needed, but they also served for the purposes of policing rural communities. During the 1950s they were administratively incorporated into the Military Reserves and, by mid 1960s, they started to perform the function of military intelligence and policing against the government’s political opponents. It was mandatory that each municipality had a military commissioner, and one auxiliary commissioner for all communities with more than 500 inhabitants. According to Guatemala’s Truth Commission, by 1974 there were over 7,000 military commissioners in Guatemala. Michael McClintock, on his part, argues that by the same year, there were more than 9,000 commissioners. See: CEH, *Guatemala memoria del silencio*, 2:158-181; McClintock, *American Connection*, 167-169; Rosada-Granados, *Soldados en el poder*, 62-64.
historian Greg Grandin calls “the first systematic wave of collective counterinsurgent ‘disappearances’ in Latin America,” against the entire leadership of the Guatemalan Communist Party and suspected members of other communist organizations (like unions and peasant leagues).

These events were in part the effect of the Cuban revolution of 1959, and the creation of the first guerrillas in Guatemala in 1961; but the coup and the new constitution were, primarily, the result of the Doctrine of National Security (DSN) elaborated within the frame of the Central American Defense Council (CONDECA), an instance supported by the US government and designed to establish counterinsurgent collaboration among the Central American armies in line with the anticommunist US foreign policy for the region.

Indeed, during the inauguration of the Constitutional National Assembly that gave way to the constitution of 1965, then chief of government Colonel Enrique Peralta Azurdia stated that, “The army was forced to take control of the government in order to re-establish public order, seriously threatened by the possibility of a civil war. It is important to remember that the country

---


475 Following the CIA counterrevolutionary coup against Jacobo Arbenz' government, in 1954, a group army loyalists would rose up against the counter revolutionary government in various unsuccessful attempts. Some of these army officers, together with radicalized university students, trade unionists, members of the Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT) and other urban organizers formed the first guerrillas in Guatemala, the November 13 Revolutionary Movement (MR-13), in 1961. They would later join other radicalized union leaders, university students, and loyalists of the revolution of 1944 to conform the Revolutionary Armed Forces, in 1963. These guerrillas established their first fronts in eastern Guatemala, in what is known as la Sierra de las Minas, in the departments of Zacapa, Izabal, Alta and Baja Verapaz. These guerrillas were defeated by the army in less than 7 years. Former members of the FAR, among them Rolando Morán, who would become EGP's general commandant, came out of this first guerrillas. For a detailed history of the MR-13 and the FAR, see: Carlos Figueroa Ibarra, Guillermo Paz Cárcamo, and Arturo Taracena, "El primer ciclo de la insurgencia revolucionaria en Guatemala (1954-1972),” in Virgilio Álvarez Aragón et.al., eds., Guatemala: historia reciente (1954-1996), T.II, La dimensión revolucionaria, (Guatemala: FLACSO, 2013).

was suffering from the consequences of a dysfunctional public administration that put the legislative work in a halt. The armed institution organized this [new] government in order to re-establish the moral integrity of the public administration, to restructure the national economy, and to defeat the forces of dissolution.”

Not only did the army take control of the political and economic functioning of the state’s apparatuses but it did so under the National Security Doctrine’s prescriptions.

Thus, much of the sense of moral conviction and corporative belonging that officer Cesar Calderón makes reference to is a distillation of a decades-long counterinsurgent military intervention in the national economy and politics, as much as a reiteration of an image that the army created for itself along the way. For instance, references to the army as the last moral stance of Guatemala were widely mobilized to justify Ríos Montt’s coup in March of 1982, in a context where the army itself portrayed the government of Gral. Lucas García (1979-1981) as one that put Guatemala into a crisis due to its corrupt nature, and that had deviated from the principles of the armed institution. In fact, the coup—which marked the beginning of the most violent period of the civil war, as we shall see later—would be framed in a discourse of military and national regeneration. But let me for the moment return to the late 1970s and the effects of

---


478 According to Jennifer Schirmer, members of the Guatemalan army’s General Command took control of over 43 public institutions that permitted them to create a vast financial and business network of more than 120 million dollars, just in 1981. The control of the state by the army also enabled the emergence of a new landowning military elite among the army’s high command. See: Shirmer, *Intimidades*, 46; from a regional perspective, see also: Gill, *School of the Americas*, 90-109.

479 In fact, a new constitution would only be approved until 1984, and in spite of celebrating “democratic” elections from 1966 to 1979, the DSN would remain in place until 1986, when it was reshaped into the National Stability Doctrine, which gave the army new parameters to keep fighting the guerrillas—already severely impacted by the effects of the army’s massive violence against indigenous communities of the highlands and the annihilation of their urban fronts—under conditions of “free” democratic elections, that initiated in 1985.

the Sandinista revolution in Guatemala.

As we have seen in chapters 4 and 5, by the late 1970s peasant leagues, unions, and cooperatives—many of them influenced by Catholic Action—had been accumulating forces, despite the repressive nature of the Guatemalan state. Efforts in creating a peasant’s national organization came to fruition when the Committee of Peasant Unity (CUC) made its public appearance during the labor day rally held in Guatemala City, in 1978. One event that emboldened the CUC to come to light was the 250 mile march of the mining workers of San Idelfonso Ixtahuacan, in November 1977, demanding the reopening of the tungsten mine they were working in, called Mines of Guatemala (it closed after futile negotiation for a new labor pact at the end of 1976) and better wages and working conditions.\footnote{Deborah Levenson-Estrada, \textit{Trade Unionists Against Terror: Guatemala City, 1954-1985}, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 168.} The march caught public attention and many unions throughout the country united in solidarity with their demands.\footnote{Levenson-Estrada, \textit{Trade Unionists}, 168.} Indeed, labour unions had been reorganizing and, by 1978, their influence in Guatemala’s industry (among others, in textile, tobacco, shoes, and soft drinks factories) and public sector had grown sufficiently to call for strikes and new labor pacts.\footnote{In February, for instance, over 150,000 state workers went on strike and, after a short period of negotiations, the state approved a wage increase; and in July, a series of bus drivers’ strikes paralyzed the city for weeks. See: Levenson-Estrada, \textit{Trade Unionists}, 144-145.} By 1979, especially after the Sandinista triumph, these organization were calling for the installation of a revolutionary government.

Yet, as seen in chapter 4, it was the general strike and total paralyzation of sugar cane and cotton \textit{fincas} of the southern coast organized by the CUC, from February 18 to March 3, 1980, that became the unprecedented political event of this conjuncture. The Guatemalan newspapers
widely covered the strike, showing pictures of thousands of indigenous peasants occupying different sugar mills and blocking the Pacific Highway, holding up their machetes. Never before had a national organization of indigenous and poor peasants been able to carry out a general strike of this magnitude, and even more surprising was the fact that it had occurred at the heart of the finquero economy. It is worth recalling that all of these events took place in a situation of national militarization, political persecution, and state repression; and as argued in chapter 4, they also occurred under conditions of popular anonymity and revolutionary pseudonymity, that is, in conditions where fincas and the Guatemalan state’s forms of control were losing their capacity to identify the subject of finca-labor.

By 1980, three different guerrilla armies were operating in the country, the Armed Rebel Forces (FAR), with their main fronts in the northern department of El Petén; the Revolutionary Organization of People in Arms (ORPA), with fronts in the southern coast and Guatemala’s piedmont, including the departments of San Marcos, Quetzaltenango, Sololá, and Chimaltenango; and the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), with fronts in the southern coast, and the western and central highlands of the departments of El Quiché, Huehuetenango, Sololá, Chimaltenango, and Totonicapan. These guerrilla armies also had operational urban fronts in

---

484 In 1978, for instance, the army perpetrated the massacre of Panzos, in the Verapaces, killing hundreds of indigenous peasants of K’eqchi’ descent who were protesting their eviction from lands that were a part of their ancestral territory. Throughout 1979, the army killed dozens of indigenous leaders associated to the Catholic Action, in the western highlands; and, in January 1980, the army also perpetrated the massacre of the Spanish Embassy, where indigenous local leaders from the department of El Quiché and members of the CUC—including Vicente Menchú, father of Nobel laureate Rigoberta Menchú—had occupied the embassy to demand the government to stop rural repression and to call the attention of the international community about rampant political violence in the countryside. The National Police, in coordination with the Guatemalan army, firebombed the embassy, killing all the occupants—including the embassy’s staff—with the sole exemption of the Spanish ambassador, who was able to escape the fire. For a deep study about the Panzos massacre, see Grandin, Last Colonial,133-167; and for a testimonial account, see: Máximo Cajal, Saber quién puso el fuego ahí! Masacre de la embajada de España, (Madrid: Siddharth Mehta, 2000).
Guatemala City, which they came to consider their rearguard.\textsuperscript{485} In fact, as also mentioned in chapter 4, in commemoration of the second year of the Sandinistas’ triumph, in July 1981, the EGP’s front Augusto Cesar Sandino (FACS) made its first public appearance with more than 17 coordinated acts of sabotage, including attacks on National Police stations, the occupation of different towns and villages, and ambushes of military convoys in the central highlands, in the departments of Chimaltenango, Sacatepequez, Totonicapán, and Sololá.\textsuperscript{486} That day, various stretches of the Pan-American highway were blocked with hundreds of toppled trees. Between the months of October and November of 1981, the FACS extended its actions of sabotage and propaganda into towns of southern Quiché and Sololá.\textsuperscript{487} A former member of the EGP’s urban front who was sent to the FACS that year recalls that, “in July 19, 1981, when the FACS came to public light, the national TV showed scenes of the Pan-American highway blocked with hundreds or thousands of toppled trees, from Chimaltenango to Cuatro Caminos [a 70 miles stretch]. It was evident that only \textit{un hormiguero humano} [a multitude of people] could do this kind of action from one day to the other.”\textsuperscript{488} Many people from villages of Chimaltenango and Totonicapán, who supported the FACS, would help to carry out this task.\textsuperscript{489}

All these events—the massive mobilizations of the southern coast, the re-articulation of the social movement and its call for the installation of a revolutionary government like

\textsuperscript{485} All of these revolutionary organization emerged out of the defeated first guerrillas. For a full description of these guerrilla armies, CEH,\textit{ Guatemala memoria del silencio}, 2: 235-300.


\textsuperscript{487} Thomas, “La gran confrontación.”

\textsuperscript{488} Gustavo Porras Castejón,\textit{ Las huellas de Guatemala}, (Guatemala: F&G, 2009), 11.

\textsuperscript{489} Porras,\textit{ Las huellas}. For an account of how the K’iche’ community of Chupol, in the department of Totonicapán, supported the FACS, see Carlota McAllister, “Good People: Revolution, Community, and Conciencia in a Maya-K’iche’ Village in Guatemala,” (PhD. Diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2003).
Nicaragua’s, the expansion of the guerrilla fronts and their armed actions near Guatemala City—occurring in a regional context defined by the Nicaraguan revolution—were read by the Guatemalan army as an imminent insurrection.\textsuperscript{490} Take, for instance, what an army officer told Manolo Vela Castañeda: "the growing of [the EGP’s] social base in Chimaltenango was reaching the department of El Quiché. [The EGP] was already in Santa Cruz, and [they] had a solid structure in Joyabaj, Zacualpa, Lemoa, and Santa María Chiquimula. In the area of Chichicastenango, the guerrillas had created all the logistic support for their big offensive against Guatemala City.”\textsuperscript{491} Officer Hector Andráde reaffirmed this last statement as follows: “\textit{all} the Panamerican highway was blocked. Our [military patrols] could not transit by land. \textit{All} the mountains of Chimaltenango and Quiché were fortified. The guerrillas were two to three months from taking the city.”\textsuperscript{492} I will return to this discourse of “totalization” in the last section of this chapter, but let me linger on this specific conjuncture, as it is the prelude of the army’s perpetration of massive violence.

On more than one occasion, army officers have recalled this period of time (1979-1981) as one of pure anxiety and fear of an enemy that seemed to be all around but was unknown and invisible. As shown in chapter 4, Colonel Mauricio Lopez Bonilla recalled that in 1980, confusion and fear prevailed among army officers who, during patrols in the highlands, felt

\textsuperscript{490} Another major event that occurred in this regional conjuncture was the Salvadorian guerrillas’ “final offensive.” In January 10, 1981, the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN), launched a ten days long national offensive whose objective was to take control of the government. Much in the style of the Sandinistas’ triumph, the FMLN expected that during the offensive a situation of popular insurrection would lead to their victory. However, despite a general strike, the insurrection did not occur, and the US intervention made it impossible for the Salvadorian guerrillas to defeat the army. It is not difficult to conclude that the Guatemalan army also saw this offensive from “the inside” of CONDECA’s counterinsurgent collaborations and context. See: Edelberto Torres-Rivas, \textit{Revolutiones sin cambios revolucionarios. Ensayos sobre la crisis en Centroamérica}, (Guatemala: F&G, 2013), 406-410.

\textsuperscript{491} Vela Castañeda, \textit{Los pelotones}, 211.

\textsuperscript{492} Vela Castañeda, \textit{Los pelotones}, 211, (My emphasis).
besieged by an enemy that seemed to everywhere and nowhere in particular. Indeed, one of Vela Castañeda’s informants told him: “[When patrolling] we arrived to a village and the people were there, working the land with their laboring tools, cutting wood, things like that; then we asked them, have you seen the guerrillas? “No” they said. Yet they themselves were the guerrillas.”

But take the words of officer Victor Aguilar, “The guerrillas used to tell the people to evacuate their village [before the army’s arrival]. When we arrived we found everything as if [the village] was inhabited, except that nobody was there. That is when some said, all of this has to be destroyed, because if they are hiding it is because they are supporting the guerrillas.”

In the first statement, not responding with information about the guerrillas’ location was interpreted as an unequivocal sign that the villagers were merely appearing as doing their own business, when the “truth” was that they were guerrillas. In Aguilar’s words, however, the nonappearance of the villagers, at a moment when everything else seemed to be an unequivocal sign that they had been in their usual business, revealed the “truth” about their support to the guerrillas. In other words, if we believe Vela’s informants, for the communities of the highlands where the army patrolled, to appear as doing what one usually does could have been as good as its opposite; the suspicion of being with the guerrillas could not be displaced. Officer Guillermo Mendez put it in a manner that epitomizes how things were read by the army under conditions of national militarization and crisis: “every time I saw a man [during patrols] I paid attention to him. Because he might have been a guerrilla collaborator and could have caused harm. [That is how] the sensation that the people could be part of the enemy emerges. That is when the feeling

---

that either you are with me or against me despierta [awakens].”

In these army officers’ statements, references to indigenous forms of appearing (as what they are not) and of not appearing (as what they are), are a reiteration of a social imaginary of colonial origin that represents indigenous people as being duplicitous; and their statements also suggest that, under conditions of counterinsurgency, anxiety, and fear, forms of appearance that secured the army’s recognition and identification failed. In other words, they speak of a logic of spectrality rather than one mere dissimulation. By this I mean that, under conditions of radical suspicion, a subject that is already seen as duplicitous, is deemed to be incapable to dissimulate that he/she is dissimulating. In other words, more than determining whether the villagers the army encountered (or not) knew something (or not) about the guerrillas’ location, these members of the army were expecting acts of confession and denunciation. What I am arguing here is that in not responding in terms that the army wanted to see and hear—and here “seeing” and “hearing” operates in complete disregard of the villagers’ knowledge of the guerrillas’ locations, i.e., not knowing was no longer a possibility—and in not appearing in their villages at the moment when the army wanted them to appear—and here “appearing” is already predetermined

495 Vela Castañeda, Los pelotones, 202. Mendez’ statement could be easily translated into “either you are my friend of my enemy” as in Carl Schmitt’s sovereign distinction/decision, and as such, the allocation “they were guerrillas” is, in fact, a reiteration of the state’s illocutionary/performative fantasy of its own infallibility, i.e., the sovereign brings into existence that which it says. Whether these army officers were instructed or not under Schmititian notions of war, politics, and sovereignty is something I cannot corroborate; however, officer Mendez’ words do show that the distinction friend/enemy was an effect of and emerged under conditions of national militarization which, likewise, were already determined by specific ideological discourses and predispositions, like anti-communism, counterinsurgency and, as we’ll see later, racist ideologies inscribed in the formation of the Guatemalan state. It is in this sense that Mendez’ words illuminate Schmitt’s theory of sovereignty. See: Carl Schmitt, The Concept of the Political, trans., George Schwab, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007[1995]); on the perlocutionary fantasy of sovereignty, see Judith Butler, Excitable Speech. A Politics of the Performative, (London-New York: Routledge, 1997), 1-41.

496 This is, of course, a discourse on animality as much as of the non-human humanity, as Jacques Derrida has brilliantly argued in his critique to Lacan, which conceived of the animal as incapable of feigning that it feigns. For Derrida, however, the Other is as non-human as the animal. See Jacques Derrida, The Animal that Therefore I am, trans., David Wills, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 119-140.
by what the army wanted to hear and see—the army’s self-image and self-representation was not secured. Its own image as the carriers of sovereignty, as being one with the Guatemalan state, is not recognized. As I understand it, and as I have indicated in chapter 4, this is what Jacques Derrida calls the *visor effect*, a spectral asymmetry that interrupts specularity and representation. Indeed, for Derrida, the specter remains invisible between apparitions without disappearing, even though we remain under its gaze. We do not see the specter, we only see ourselves being seen by something that is invisible and appears whenever and wherever it wants.

Thus, in the allocutions of the members of the army that I have been commenting on, the name “guerrillas” functions as a sign that both indicates the army’s incapacity to fully identify its enemy as much as an incompatibility between the knowledge—or the lack thereof—about the guerrillas’ actual location or place of provenance, and the army’s “truth.” This is, indeed, the prelude of the army’s scorched earth campaign and massive violence. Before elaborating on the period of massive violence I would like to show how the civil war developed in the Ixil region during these years, in order to provide a specific and more localized view of a situation that included a regional (Central American) and national dimensions.

*The Dialectics of Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence in a finca-state: the Ixil Region Before 1982.*

Prior to the guerrillas’ implantation in the Ixil region, in 1973, a growing political opposition to finca owners and finca contractors, in the form of cooperatives, Catholic Action groups, and peasant leagues was reshaping the dynamics of local politics. For instance, as I have

---

mentioned in chapter 2, don Encarnación Santay’s father and uncle—disappeared by the army in 1976—won the election of San Juan Cotzal’s municipality against the Brol family—owners of finca San Francisco and the most powerful finqueros of the region—and their local ally, Gaspar Perez or Kaxh Pi, a powerful Ixil money lender and finca contractor who had been elected mayor of Cotzal between 1962 and 1969. Many people I talked to in the region recalled that Gaspar Perez was an army informant; they also told me that one of the first army posts in Cotzal was established on one of Perez’ properties.

In the town of Santa María Nebaj, the situation was similar. According to Luisa Frank and Phillip Weathon, in 1973 Sebastián Guzmán—an indigenous authority and one of the most powerful Ixil finca contractors and money lenders of Nebaj—together with other contratistas, asked then president, Colonel Manuel Arana Osorio, to intervene in the region because of the presence of “communists.” They sent him a letter stating that “the seed of communism” had been planted in the region through cooperatives and other organizations, a situation that demanded the presence of the army. While conducting fieldwork I was told that Guzmán was one of the Brols’ most powerful Ixil allies and was known for being an army informant. By the early 1970s, however, it was Santiago López Villatoro—a ladino who came from Joyabaj in the 1960s to work as a store dependent and soon became a finca contractor—the region’s most powerful contratista and the chief of Military Commissioners. Many people in Nebaj still recall


\[499\] It is unclear to me how Frank and Wheaton had access to this letter, but it seems to have been sent in January 1973 with the following message: “ January 1973, Mr. President: We, the signees, Principales of Nebaj, campesinos …wish to manifest that…we, the Ixiles, are humble people and we don't want any trouble. Nevertheless, the bad see has come among us, it is the communists, they are fighting us with cooperatives and other nonsense…We ask you to send the army here to stop this fighting so we can live in peace.” Frank and Wheaton, \textit{Indian Guatemala}. 271
that he had a private prison in his house, where indebted Ixiles who did not comply with finca “contracts” were locked up illegally.

In fact, most finca contractors were also Military Commissioners, whose responsibilities, as I have shown above, were no longer merely to recruit young indigenous men for military service, but had been fully incorporated into the army’s networks of intelligence and counterinsurgent activities by 1965, under the paradigm of the National Security Doctrine. Moreover, Guzmán, the Perez family of Cotzal, and the Villatoros, in alliance with the Brols and other finqueros of the region, were elected Mayors of the municipalities of Nebaj, Chajul and Cotzal several times.500 By the early 1970, they would run their campaigns under the auspices of political parties like PID (Democratic Institutional Party) or the MLN (National Liberation Movement), which were considered the anti-communist parties of the army.501 In short, they were the ones who sustained the fundamental structures of power and indigenous subjection in the Ixil region, and whose power had been contested locally prior to the EGP’s “implantation.”

Indeed, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor’s “implantation” in the Ixil region started in 1973 with the relatively quiet and secret establishment of the guerrillas’ first camp in the mountains of


501 By 1973, the main parties in Guatemala were the PID, MLN, the DC or Christian Democracy and the PR or the Party of the Revolution, the last two remained in the opposition, and saw themselves as more progressive and the inheritors of ideals of Guatemala revolutionary period (1944-1953). However, under Guatemala’s constitution of 1965, the majority of political parties had to be “approved” by the Guatemalan army or, as in the case of the Christian Democracy, its members had to maneuver as to no appear as radicals, leftists, let alone communists. In general, electoral politics in Guatemala remained heavily constrained for indigenous participation, which remained under the control of finca authorities and Military Commissioners. Oppositional politics occurred under conditions of military and finca control, but they became possible thanks to the creation of cooperatives, peasant’s leagues and Catholic Action groups. See: IIPS, “Los Partidos Políticos y el Estado Guatemalteco hasta nuestros días;” in *Política y Sociedad*, Número extraordinario, (April, 1978). For the dynamics of these political parties at the local level, see: Benjamin N. Colby and Pierre L. van den Berghe, *Ixil Country. A Plural Society in Highland Guatemala*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 123-128; Stoll, *Between Two Armies*, 68-84.
Xolchiché, in San Gaspar Chajul. Yet the first contacts between the Ixil population and the guerrillas did not occur in Ixil villages, but in the more distant jungle of Ixcán. In his memoir, “Days of the Jungle,” Mario Payeras recalls that Ixil merchants from San Juan Cotzal made contact with the EGP in Ixcán, where the guerrillas established their first networks of support after slipping into Guatemala from Mexico in 1972, among colonists and members of cooperatives organized by Mariknoll priests. Jesuit priest and anthropologist Ricardo Falla corroborated the encounter described by Payeras in his detailed study of the indigenous insurrection in the zone of Ixcán. According to Falla—who was able to interview the Ixiles who first looked for the guerrillas, while he was doing pastoral work among refugees and internally displaced communities in the Mexican frontier in the early 80s—the first Ixiles to make contact with the guerrillas were colonists who had arrived in San Luis Ixcán in the late 1960s, after fleeing for reasons of land scarcity in Cotzal. They were the ones who told the Ixil merchants about the guerrillas and who later arranged the meeting that Payeras describes in his memoir. These Ixiles told Falla about their conflicts with the Brols and their most powerful local ally, Gaspar Perez or Kaxh Pi. It was during one of Perez’ many terms that unionized

502 CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 7: 199.


505 Kaxh Pi was Cotzal’s major during the first half of the 1960s, but he lost the municipal elections in 1968 and 1970 to his opponents, among which was don Concepción Santay’s father, but he regained control in 1972. See Stoll, Between Two Armies, 71.
jornaleros of the finca San Francisco were evicted by the Brols. The workers installed a provisional camp outside the finca, on the side of the street, but the Brols burned down their tents with the support of Gaspar Perez. “They went to destroy the nylons [plastic tents] and to burn down the palitos [wooden supports]…. We lost the strength, we went down. But teníamos una cólera como la chingada [we were infuriated],” these Ixiles told Ricardo Falla. When the merchants finally met with the guerrillas, a meeting that took place in their camp and lasted for over three days, they “denounced Gaspar Pérez, who is a cabrón [son of a bitch] that is in Cotzal.”

Former priest of Nebaj’s parish and cooperative organizer, Javier Gurriarán, told me that it was after a meeting of Catholic Action (AC) that, collectively, communities of San Juan Cotzal decided to send the merchants to find out about the guerrillas in Ixcán. For his part, Pablo Ceto told me that ancestral authorities were the ones who, also collectively, had decided to send the merchants to meet with the guerrillas. Probably, both Ixil costumbristas and members of Catholic Action were present in those meetings. As I understand it, by the early 1970s, conflicts between

According to David Stoll, “After 1968, new administrators at San Francisco set off labor trouble: they prohibited quinceneros (literally, “fifteen-dayers” who worked for the finca half the month and tended their own crops the other half) from planting coffee on the finca parcels they cultivated for themselves. In 1972 quinceneros refusing to sell their improvements back to the finca were hauled off to jail. Coinciding with the expulsion, a government commission came to investigate abuses and a union was organized, only to be broken when the finca expelled hundreds more workers.” Stoll, Between Two Armies, 70.

Falla, Ixcan el campesino indigena, 240.

Falla, Ixcan el campesino indigena, 240.

In an interview with the Ecumenical Program for Inter-American Communication and Action (EPICA), Javier Gurriarán recalled the events as follows: “The people have a long trajectory of struggle, from way back, and it was more like rivers coming together into a common struggle. There were many mistaken ideas about how the Ixiles became involved with the guerrillas. Most people think that the guerrillas won over the Ixiles. But the story I know is that the Ixiles themselves sought out the guerrillas, who were still in the Ixcán looking for ways to penetrate Ixil territory. Two merchants from Cotzal were sent from their community, following a Catholic Action meeting, to talk to the guerrillas.” Frank and Wheaton, Indian Guatemala, 42.
Ixil *costumbre* and Catholic Action had diminished.\(^{510}\) This was in part because of the less militant and more conciliatory style of Gurriarán, but also because of the political opposition that the Brols, Gaspar Perez, and other *contratistas* (like Santiago Lopez Villatoro) had triggered among traditionalists and catechists alike. Under these circumstances, an alliance between them was plausible. What seems to be beyond doubt, at least according to my interviews and all of the sources I have consulted, is that during their first exploratory incursion in Cotzal, in 1973, the guerrillas were warmly received.\(^{511}\) *Cotzaleños* were the first EGP’s collaborators; other Ixiles from Nebaj would join the guerrillas later, to be followed, finally, by Ixiles from Chajul, between the years of 1976 and 1978. In fact, it was in the *Sierra*, in the mountains of the Ixil region, where the guerrillas decided to carry out their first *conferencia guerrillera* [guerrilla conference] in 1974: there, they would finally take the name of *Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* [Guerrilla Army of the Poor] or EGP.\(^{512}\) The front of the Ixil region would be later called, in 1981, Ho Chi Minh.

As it is well known, the first widely publicized and first public action of the EGP occurred in June 6, 1975, when the guerrillas killed Luis Arenas, an anti-communist political

---

\(^{510}\) As mentioned in chapter 5, father Gaspar Jordan was responsible for bringing Catholic Action (AC) into the Ixil region in the 1950s. The AC was a conservative initiative of the Catholic Church whose purpose was to organize lay population against communism. During Jordan’s time, AC frontally opposed to *costumbristas* or traditional religious hierarchies, accusing them of paganism and superstition. Traditional shrines were burned down under Jordan’s auspices. But during the second half of the twentieth century, within and through the development of the Second Vatican Council, AC took a different turn, one that “opted for the poor” and preached in favor of their liberation. It is in this period of time, by the end of the 1960s that Javier Gurriarán, then a member of the Sacred Heart Order, became the priest of Nebaj’s parish.


\(^{512}\) CEH, *Guatemala memoria del silencio*, 7:198. The founding members of the EGP first called their organization NORC or New Organization of Combat. Their firs column of guerrilla combatants was called “Edgar Ibarra.”
figure and owner of finca La Perla, located in the town of San Gaspar Chajul.\textsuperscript{513} Arenas also owned lands in Ixcán and, as we have seen in chapter 1, he had a long history of conflicts with the Ixil communities of Chajul, specially with the villages of Ilom, Chel, and Sotzil. In a less well-known event, in May 28, 1975, the EGP executed Guillermo Monzón, a ladino military commissioner from Huehuetenango who had arrived in the jungle of Ixcán with the cooperative movement initiated by the Maryknolls in Xalbal.\textsuperscript{514} According to Ricardo Falla’s interviews, people saw him as someone who did not want to participate in the cooperative’s meetings and did not like its indigenous leaders. All of Falla’s interlocutors, including some of Monzón’s friends, recalled that “he accused many [people] and kept an archive with his own annotations about those he believed had contacts with the guerrillas.”\textsuperscript{515} Soon after Monzón’s and Arenas’ executions, the army’s repression initiated in Ixcán. Between the months of June and July, the military targeted the cooperatives of Xalbal. According to Falla, over 13 members were disappeared.\textsuperscript{516} In the Ixil region, it was in February 1976, after the capture of a young Ixil combatant and organizer called Fonseca, that the army’s repression escalated. Mario Payeras attributes Fonseca’s capture to a drinking problem;\textsuperscript{517} don Concepción Santay, whose father and uncle were disappeared after this young combatant’s capture, corroborated Payeras’ account. 

\textsuperscript{513} Arenas was elected congressman with the Party of Anti-Communist Unity in 1952. He was one of the main opponents of president Jacobo Arbenz’ agrarian reform of 1953 and, after the overthrown of Arbez, he worked for subsequent counter-revolutionary military governments. He later became a member of the National Liberation Movement (MLN) which was known for having ties with dead squads and the army. See: CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 7.

\textsuperscript{514} For a detailed account of Monzón’s execution, see Falla, Ixcán el campesino indígena, 242-245; and CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 7: 205-208.

\textsuperscript{515} Falla, Ixcán el campesino indígena, 243.

\textsuperscript{516} Falla, Ixcán el campesino indígena, 250.

\textsuperscript{517} Payeras, Los días de la selva, 149-169; see also, Stoll, Between Two Armies, 76-77.
was tortured for days and, although he was able to escape, Fonseca was later executed by the guerrillas. From there, accusations and black lists grew.

Between the years 1976 and 1978 dozens of members of cooperatives, political opponents, and Catechists, were killed throughout the region. It was estimated that over 350 leaders who belonged to the Catholic Church had been kidnapped in the municipalities of Nebaj, Cotzal, and Chajul. Other political leaders who were part of the political party *Democracia Cristiano* [Christian Democrats] or had been in the political opposition to the main contratistas and finca owners of the region suffered the same fate. “The region was a free zone for the judicial and the G-2 (the army’s section of intelligence)” one document described it. And as a sealing gesture of this wave of political violence, in January 29, 1978, the Army occupied Nebaj, remaining there for three days. During the occupation, they registered and imprisoned many Ixiles; some of them were sent to the Santa Cruz garrison never to be seen again. On June 12, various organizations of the social movement published a press statement denouncing the

\[518\] According to Shelton H. Davis, “in a swift attack on the towns of Chajul, Cotzal, and Nebaj, several people were killed, including the head of the local Catholic Action committee, five sacristans in the local Catholic churches, and four bilingual schoolteachers. Members of the cooperative movement especially felt the blows of the government’s terror campaign in the Quiche area. Between February 1976 and the end of 1977, sixty-eight cooperative members were killed in the Ixcan region, forty in Chajul, twenty eight in Cotzal, and thirty two in Nebaj.” Shelton H. Davis, “State Violence and Agrarian Crisis in Guatemala. The Roots of the Indian-Peasant Rebellion,” in Martin Diskin, ed., *Trouble in our Backyard. Central America and the United States in the Eighties*, (New York: Pantheon, 1983),164; see also Shelton H. Davis and Julie Hodson, *Witnesses to Political Violence in Guatemala. The Suppression of a Rural Development Movement*, (Washington: Oxfam America, 1982), 15; and McClintock, *American Connection*,137.


\[520\] Stoll, *Between Two Armies*, 75.


\[522\] “Acontecimientos.”
kidnappings of at least 30 leaders in the Ixil area. According to Payeras and Yolanda Colom (who were members of the guerrilla unit operating in the Ixil region at the time) their contacts and communication with the población were severed during the army’s siege. “In the 70s, the army came for the Catholic Action,” Javier Gurriarán told me, “but the communities did not feel threatened yet.”

To be sure, state violence did not begin in the Ixil region in the 1970s. As seen in chapter 1, during my fieldwork, people spoke of the collective executions in Ilom and Nebaj, perpetrated by the Guatemalan army in 1924 and 1936 respectively, as antecedents of the violence experienced in the 1970s and early 80s. Collective grievances, family disputes, and personal confrontations were also mentioned during my interviews as possible reasons behind the killings of Luis Arenas and other acts of political violence prior to the massacres. For instance, the disappearance of don Encarnación Santay’s father and uncle were related to disputes they had had with Gaspar Perez and the Brol family. Maria S’s father, too, was disappeared amid political conflicts with Gaspar Perez and the Brol family. “Why don’t you come back to Cotzal? Don’t be afraid,” the Perez told Maria S. a few years after the signing of the peace agreements in 1996, “I’m not afraid, but I don’t have anything to do in Cotzal,” she replied to them. “They were envious of my father” she told me. However, the people’s grievances and violent events of the past, were sucked up by the dialectics of insurgent and counter-insurgent violence in the region.

———


524 Payeras, Los días de la selva, 156-159; Yolanda Colom, Mujeres en la Alborada, (Guatemala: Ediciones del Pensativo, 2007), 177-190.
in the 1970s. And that dynamic, I argue, was both the effect of the finca-state’s forms of control and subjection as much as of their failure, in the context of a growing popular insurrection and civil war in Guatemala, and broadly, in the Central American region.

Indeed, the EGP resumed its actions in February 1978, as they gradually regained their communication and position among the population. Among others, in a series of executions, they first killed Santiago Lopez Villatoro—the chief of the military commissioners in the area—and his brother in law, Edmundo Alvarado López, in February 11. It is believed that those who killed him danced around his body, saying “ya murió el chucho de los indios, el sacador de pisto de los indios,” [the dog of, or the one that bites the Indians, the one who appropriates the Indian’s money, is now dead]. Two days later, the guerrillas executed three members of the Perez family, including Gaspar Pérez’ son, Diego Perez Gómez in finca Santa Avelina. The last major figure among the finca contractors of Nebaj, Sebastian Guzmán, would be ajusticiado or


527 The EGP would later execute Otomero Galindo, a ladino commissioner that the EGP accused of being responsible for capturing the first guerrilla combatant in Chajul, provably Fonseca.“La toma,” 38; “Acontecimientos,” 3,4.

528 In June 19, they killed Gaspar Pérez’ nephew, Juan Perez Toma, in Guatemala city. “Acontecimientos.”
executed in December 1981.529

_undoing the symbolic structures of local power: insurgent dramaturgy or the egp arrives in nebaj._

On January 21, 1979—it was a Sunday early in the morning—the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) took the town of Nebaj, the biggest town in the Ixil region. It was a market day and merchants from K’iche’, Mam, and Aguacateko villages, among others, were expected. All the major lines of communication had been cut off to prevent any contact with the army. According to one account of the events,530 over 100 uniformed combatants were involved in the occupation; they were divided strategically into groups of 10 to 12. While part of the unit remained at Nebaj’s points of entry, two other groups attacked the National Police station and the Guardia de

529 Sebastian Guzmán’s history is, in itself, expression of the political dynamics of the Ixil region prior to and during the civil war. According to French sociologist Yvon Le Bot, Guzmán led efforts against vagrancy laws during Ubico’s presidency, in the 1930s. In Le Bot’s account, based on an EGP document, it is said that Guzmán survived the execution of indigenous leaders that followed their protest against Ubico’s law, in June 1936. In his study of the events, historian Severo Martínez mentions the name of Miguel Brito as the only survivor, but others were sent to Quiché, which may have been the case of Guzmán. According to Le Bot, he also headed a struggle against the Militia of Chiantla, who were illegally granted lands that belonged to the Village of ACLU. If that is the case, that happened during the 1920s, according to my own research. Paradoxically, Sebastián Guzmán gained power by acting as a _contratista_ during the years that followed the execution of Ixil authorities during Ubico’s presidency. By the 1970s he owned the only corn mill in Nebaj, had acquired a store, owned trucks that he used to transport indebted Ixiles to the _fincas_ of the southern coast, and came to own many lands in the region. David Stoll argues that he himself was involved in land conflicts against the villages of Xoloché and Tzalbal, which would become two of the EGP’s strongholds prior to the army’s massacres. He also became a strong opponent to Catholic Action and Nebaj’s cooperatives. In 1976, his son was elected Nebaj’s mayor with the MLN party. After his execution, the Guatemalan army used Guzmán’s case as propagandistic tool against the guerrillas. In Le Bot’s view, close to the Guatemalan army’s accounts, Guzmán’s execution is indicative of the excess of the EGP’s so called revolutionary justice and their orthodox vision of class struggle. Stoll, on his part, puts into question the fact that Guzmán was an informant. What I can tell, based on archival documents that look more like EGP’s counterintelligence, is that Guzmán was present in at least two meetings between _contratistas_ and the Ambulatory Military Police in late February 1979, where the PMA came out with lists that they used to search on houses in Nebaj. See: Frank and Wheaton, _Indian Guatemala_, 43; Stoll, _Between_, 325-326, n.68; Yvon Le Bot, _La guerra en tierras mayas_. _Comunidad, violencia y modernidad en Guatemala (1970-1992)_ (Mexico: FCE, 1997[1995]), 242-245; Severo Martínez Pelaez, _Motines de Indios_, (Mexico: Ediciones En Marcha, 1991), 341-344; “Acontecimientos,” 7-8.

530 “La toma,” 37-43.
Hacienda [Treasury Police]. With the sole exception of the chief of police—who resisted the attack and was able to escape—and a police guard killed in the action, the rest surrendered and handed over their arms. Other units were in charge of capturing Nebaj’s main ladino contratistas (finca contractors and money lenders) and the owner of finca San Francisco, Enrique Brol, the largest and one of the oldest coffee producing fincas of the area, as we have seen in chapter 1.

“Don Enrique, the army is asking for you,” Enrique Brol's domestic employee told him, mistaking the guerrillas for the Guatemalan army."That’s when my father came out to see what was going on,” Brol’s older son later told the media. One combatant entered the house and tried to hold him to check if he was armed, but he resisted; Enrique Brol was screaming to his younger son, Rafael, for help, while he was trying to escape. As he wrestled his way out, a woman combatant shot and killed him. Rafael came out and was captured. Wearing nothing but his underwear, he was taken to the market together with the contratistas and all the policemen captured, where the guerrillas had gathered what, according to one source, was a crowd of two to three thousand people. Brol’s older son told the press that over 400 villagers were present in the market, although he had not witnessed the events.

The EGP had cordoned off the market and, around 8:15am, they addressed the crowd.

---

531 The Guardia de Hacienda or Treasury Police was originally created in 1954 to persecute contraband and fiscal crimes, specially in rural areas were the production of illegal alcoholic beverages or moonshine became its primary target. By 1978, it became an apparatus of intelligence linked to the Guatemalan army’s counter-insurgency plans under the facade of investigating anti-narcotics activity. In 1977, for instance, it was linked to the disappearance of three community leaders of the village Xoncá in Nebaj. During the 1980s, members of the Guardia de Hacienda were involved in “paramilitary” and clandestine apparatuses in Guatemala City responsible for kidnappings and disappearances, known as la Panel Blanca. See: CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 2:155-157.

532 Prensa Libre, January 25, 1979, 8.


534 “La toma,” 39.

One ladino combatant gave the first speech in Spanish, telling the people that the EGP was operating throughout the country and that their objective was “to liberate Guatemala one day.” He proceeded to explain that they didn’t want to kill Enrique Brol but that he had resisted. The fact that a fully armed unit came to knock on his door—as they did with other contratistas—is indicative that killing him wasn’t their primary goal. The next speaker was a Nebajeño, a local combatant who, before joining the EGP, had been involved in the organization of Cooperatives and a Peasants league that the contratistas fought and tried to dismantled. Indeed, in 1976, the Guatemalan secret police or judicial had been looking for him and kidnapped his uncle, who was a member of Catholic Action, together with his father-in-law. People believed him to be dead, but that day he showed up in uniform alongside his wife, who had become a guerrilla combatant herself. Speaking in Ixil, he reminded everyone that

The elderly know that, before, we owned the land. People had food to eat when there were no contratistas. You know how we have been losing our lands to powerful families, like that of don Enrique, that is here. You know how we live here, sometimes we have tortillas to eat, some other times we don’t even have tortillas; while others, here in town, not because of their work, but because of their fuerza de robar [willingness or ability to steal], live and eat everything they want, squandering all the money, and once they are rich they leave the town.

A third speaker was a young Ixil woman who reminded the crowd how the ladinos had abused indigenous women. According to one source, “she mentioned the names of many [of the

---

536 “La toma,” 39.
537 Noé Palacios, a former public school teacher of Nebaj who witnessed the occupation, told to Guatemalan-American journalist Victor Perera, a few years after the fact, that he recognized a couple of his former students among the EGP combatants. He also recalled that nearly two to three thousand people had gathered in the market and central plaza to hear the EGP’s message. See, Victor Pereira, Unfinished Conquest. The Guatemalan Tragedy, (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1993), 69; see also “La toma.”
538 See Stoll, Between Two Armies, 62.
539 “La toma,” 40; Stoll, Between Two Armies, 62.
ladinos], like Enrique Brol, who bought women and had many children with them, which later he did not support.” A second woman combatant harangued the people under the same terms. One newspaper reported that the “neighbors of Nebaj said that among the guerrillas there were many young women combatants, one of whom stood out because of her strong character and attractive appearance.” Asked about the events, the four agents of the Guardia de Hacienda told the press that, “among the guerrillas, there were many young women in full uniform and pony tails. The women were holding megaphones and they were calling the people to the market. They spoke in Ixil language, in the dialect of the region, and people gathered little by little. They spoke in grandes voces [big or loud voices] but we did not understand what they were saying. The people were listening and everybody kept still.” The agents of the Guardia de Hacienda also recalled that, from the place the guerrillas were keeping them, they saw one combatant raising a black and red flag with the initials EGP, at the highest point of Nebaj. Before leaving the town, the combatants told the people that “the army is saying that we are ladrones del monte [thieves from the bushes]. That isn’t true. We are among you, we know what is happening to

540 “La toma,” 40. Another source corroborated the latter in the following terms: “In front of several of the ladino buildings surrounding the Plaza Mayor, the group shouted accusations of acts of brutality and injustice at the occupants, with warnings not to continue these acts against the Indian community. The alleged misdeeds ranged from land-grabbing and underpayment of wages to usury and sexual abuse. The latter accusation was directed at certain prominent ladinos who boasted widely of having fathered more than 100 Indian children. Indian ‘breeding stock’ was obtained as collateral for emergency loans such as money for medicine. The loans were made only on the provision of a young female member of the borrower’s family who would be returned upon becoming pregnant.” See: Donald. T. Fox, “Nebaj and the Future of Guatemala,” The Christian Century, (June 2, 1982), 661.

541 “Ironically,” anthropologist David Stoll states in reference to the killing of Brol, “Enrique was one of the finca owners known for numerous liaisons and offspring. Now he had died at the hands of a young woman about the same age as his concubines.” See Stoll, Between Two Armies, 61.


After that, the crowd dispersed; Rafael Brol, the contratistas and the police guards were released, and the combatants took a truck and picked the others up to later disappear into the mountains. “The relevance of the event,” the author of La toma de Nebaj insisted, “is that it was the clearest manifestation, to date, of the organization of indigenous people, men and women, in the armed struggle.”

As mentioned before, the EGP had been operating in the region since 1973, but they were seen as “esos escondidos” [those hidden], as one document giving a detailed account of the events in the Ixil region between January 1978 to August 1979 described the guerrillas. In this regard, the occupation of Nebaj marks a shift in their strategy, moving from what the EGP called “implantation” to a more open “armed propaganda” that was conceived of as being primarily intended to gain the people’s confidence—the masses’ confidence, in the language of the EGP—and to reverse the army’s discourse about the guerrillas, which represented them as thieves and foreign communists. But at the heart of the occupation was a “symbolic dramatization that undoes the structures of power” in Nebaj, to be regained by the guerrillas. In doing so the EGP performed a public trial where they accused finca owners and contratistas—most of them rich and better off local ladinos—of long-lasting grievances. It was a display of a revolutionary judgment and a dramatized instance that provided the spectators with a referent and a representation of the inversion and substitution of the actual positions of power in the Ixil region. In doing so, the EGP dramatized a not-yet existent reality that could be imagined and represented

---

545 “La toma,” 40.
546 “La toma,” 40.
547 “La toma,” 37.
548 “Acontecimientos.”
nonetheless. Contrary to the state’s sovereign fantasy and presumption of bringing into existence what it says in the moment, i.e., with illocutionary force, the EGP’s occupation was performed with and conveyed a perlocutionary force, like in a promise, whose effects are future oriented and directed to an audience, and are only proven after the fact.\footnote{Butler, \textit{Excitable Speech}, 1-41. See also McAllister, \textquotedblleft Good People,	extquotedblright\ 35.} This was an action displayed primarily for the indigenous people of the area—performed also by a majority of indigenous combatants—but merchants from other towns, present in the market, were part of the public the guerrillas wanted to address, in order to “spread the word.”

After the events, it took hours for the army to arrive in Nebaj. Around 4:00pm over 100 soldiers, together with the \textit{judiciales} or secret police, were dispatched from Santa Cruz del Quiché’s garrison to re-occupy the town. They arrived around 6:00pm.\footnote{“La toma,” 40.} The next morning, they gathered the people and delivered a message against the guerrillas and their supporters. That same day, the EGP launched an attack on \textit{finca} San Francisco, where an Ambulatory Army Police (PMA) post had been established years before. Three soldiers and two guerrillas died in the battle.\footnote{“La toma,” 40.} By the beginning of February, the Guatemalan army decided to establish a permanent PMA garrison in Nebaj, and selective killings and disappearances that had been happening since 1976 resumed.\footnote{“La toma,” 41; \textquotedblleft Acontecimientos.	extquotedblright} 

\textit{From Selective to Massive Violence: Sovereignty and Sacrificial Logics (1981-1983)}

\footnote{For this distinction between perlocutionary and illocutionary speech acts, I’m following here Judith Butler. See Butler, \textit{Excitable Speech}, 1-41. See also McAllister, \textquotedblleft Good People,	extquotedblright\ 35.}
The EGP’s fronts were not numerous, but their units were effective in traditional guerrilla warfare tactics, like ambushing the army, recuperating armament, and carrying out sustained attacks on military posts. According to Guatemala’s Truth Commission, the EGP operated in the Ixil region and Ixcán with two columns of 200 combatants each, in 1983.\textsuperscript{553} An ex-official of the Ho Chi Minh front told me that, by 1982, there were 5 platoons of approximately 20 guerrilla combatants each, in addition to other military units of support of over 50 more armed guerrillas. Others have estimated that between the three guerrilla armies operating in Guatemala, there were a total of 6,000 combatants in 1982.\textsuperscript{554}

In one of the longest military actions that took place in the Ixil region, in January 19, 1982, for instance, the EGP attacked the army’s post in Cotzal, in an assault that lasted over 2 hours and where, according to their \textit{partes de guerra} [combat reports], the EGP corroborated 29 soldiers killed and many others wounded.\textsuperscript{555} Their objective, however, was to annihilate the post, something that the guerrillas couldn’t do and which they were never able to achieve throughout the civil war.\textsuperscript{556} This is indicative of the fact that, by then, the EGP’s military capacity was not quantitatively or qualitatively ready to dispute territory from the army, let alone to defend

\textsuperscript{553} CEH, \textit{Guatemala memoria del silencio}, 2: 272.


\textsuperscript{555} “EGP, Parte de Guerra, January 1982.”

\textsuperscript{556} CEH, \textit{Guatemala memoria del silencio}, 7: 89. The EGP had attacked the same post in 1980, but that time their aim wasn’t to annihilate it. The first time they tried to annihilate an army post was in April 1981, in Cuarto Pueblo, Ixcán. The EGP decided to concentrate forces in the jungle of Ixcán, mobilizing combatants from the \textit{sierra}, in a move that some of my interlocutors criticized “because they left the \textit{sierra} unprotected.” Their aim was to annihilate the post in Cuarto Pueblo. Despite a sustained attack and the many casualties caused to the army, they couldn’t. This shows that although effective in regular guerrilla actions, by 1982 the EGP wasn’t yet strong enough to dispute territory to the army. For a detailed account of the attack to Cuarto Pueblo, see Falla, \textit{Ixcán el campesino indígena}, 422-434.
positions and population. Accounts and the numbers of guerrilla combatants as being over 6,000 do not match with this attack.

As we have seen before, nonetheless, by 1981 the vision of the army was one of a crisis. Manolo Vela Castañeda reports that an army officer told him that, in the municipalities of Chajul, Nebaj, and Cotzal, the “army was experiencing a critical situation. We went out from our post, 10 or 12 kilometers away, and when we arrived at a town, it was full of trampas personales [booby-traps]. Not even 10 minutes had passed when the patrol received the first radio contact: we heard machine-gun fire, then they requested back up, they had many wounded, they wanted re-enforcement.”

For his part, officer Hector Andrade, in reference to the attack to Cotzal in 1982, told Vela Castañeda that “they [EGP] killed 26 of our soldiers and 4 officers: all the officers of the destacamento! (military post).” “They killed 26 soldiers because those were permanent posts,” another army officer recalled. According to Vela, “in 1982 alone the number of army casualties, without counting the wounded, was above 500 soldiers and 90 officers killed. That represents almost a full battalion of soldiers, and a number of officers sufficient to command three battalions.”

It is in this context that the army launched a new counterinsurgent campaign that would culminate in its scorched earth campaign and massacres throughout Guatemala’s highlands, reversing thus the course of the civil war, and most important, of an indigenous and popular

557 Vela Castañeda, Los pelotones, 218.
558 Vela Castañeda, Los pelotones, 218.
559 Vela Castañeda, Los pelotones, 218.
560 Vela Castañeda, Los pelotones, 216.
insurrection that the army’s command believed was about to take control of Guatemala City. Indeed, based on work of intelligence, between June and August of 1981, the army first located and then “swept the urban units like a tornado,” as Mario Payeras, a.k.a. commandant Benedicto wrote in his account of the events leading to the dismantling of EGP’s Otto René Castillo front.\footnote{Mario Payeras, \textit{El trueno en la ciudad}, (México: editorial Práxis, 1996 [1987]), 114.} With the fall of the guerrillas’ security houses in Guatemala City, the army was able to gather information about the the Turcios Lima front, operating on the southern coast since 1975. In less than six months, the army annihilated these two fronts and forced their few survivors to retreat to the FACS, in the central highlands.\footnote{Payeras, \textit{El trueno}.}

For the rural areas, however, the army increased its infrastructure, personnel, and reorganized its mode of operation. As the occupation of Nebaj and the response of the Guatemalan army show, until 1981, the army operated from permanent posts and garrisons distributed on the basis of territorial zones. Indeed, since 1961, there were six military zones for all the 22 departments of Guatemala. Military zone No.6, for instance, included the departments of Huehuetenango, Quiché, and Tototnicapán, with its main garrison in Santa Cruz del Quiché. It was from this garrison that the army deployed its units to respond to the EGP’s occupation of Nebaj, in 1979. By 1983, these zones were increased to 23, including the number of military effectives and personnel, one for each department plus one for Guatemala City.\footnote{According to Raúl Benítez, the Guatemalan army increased the number of effectives in 360% between the years of 1977 and 1985, including paramilitary forces and Civil Self-Defense Patrols, going from 14,300 to 51,600 effectives. By 1980, however, the number was still 14,900, which means that between that year and 1985, the increment happened. See: Raúl Benítez, “La Militarización de Centroamérica. Problemas de Interpretación,” \textit{Polémica}, no.21, (1985), 63.} But the main modification was the creation of “Task Forces.” These were flexible forces formed by different
battalions of different Military Zones and garrisons; they included the support of the Air Force and of Artillery Battery units. These forces were designed to be deployed in shorter periods of time, and they were able to remain in a territory as long as needed. In other words, with these task forces, the army went from being a garrisoned military force to a flexible counterinsurgent one.

The first task force to be formed was the Iximché TF, on November of 1981. Its main objective was to dismantle the FACS’ bases of support in the central highlands. “The garrisons were practically emptied. Only the musicians, the cooks, and administrative personnel remained there,” one army officer recalled. “The task force Iximché mobilized more than two thousand effectives, with a super secret plan, elaborated by the same officers. There, no specialists participated, that is why no information was infiltrated.” According to Guatemala’s Truth Commission, by March 1982, in San Martín Jilotepeque—a stronghold of the CUC and the FACS—terror reigned. Massacres were perpetrated by the army in the finca Catalán and the Village of Choatalum. Many displaced people looked for refuge to the north of San Martín, in the village of Estancia de la Virgen. There the Army perpetrated a massacre where an estimated 300 to 400 people were killed. An army officer told Vela Castañeda that “the Augusto Cesar

564 Rosada-Granados, Soldados en el poder, 163; Schirmer, Intimidades del proyecto, 89-92; CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 2:48-51
565 Vela Castañeda, Los pelotones, 237.
566 Vela Castañeda, Los pelotones, 237.
567 CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 6:74.
568 CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 6:74.
569 CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 6:76-77.
Sandino Front [FACS] lost three escuadras [units]. They were taken by surprise. That forced the EGP to retreat, to protect themselves. Then, what happened?: the entire popular organization was left without a military structure. They were left a merced [at our mercy].” The Truth Commission estimated that 25 massacres were perpetrated in San Martín alone between September 1981 and October 1982.

In the months that followed its arrival in Chimaltenango, the task force Iximché would expand its operations to the northern territory of the department of Sololá, Totonicapán, and the southern territory of El Quiché, with similar results to those of San Martín. As a result, the FACS was forced to retreat to the area of operation of the Ho Chi Minh front, in the Ixil region and, by the end of 1982, the zone (central highlands) was under military control. That same year, under a new counter-insurgency plan called Victoria 82 [Victory 82], the army would form two more task forces, the “Gumarcaj”—to operate in the Ixil region against the Ho Chi Minh front and its popular bases—and the “Tiger” task force—to operate in the jungle of Ixcán and the department of Huehuetenango, in the Commandant Che Guevara front’s territory. Victoria 82’s general purpose was to cut off the population’s support of the EGP, and to force its fronts to retreat to the northern territory of the department of Huehuetenango, pushing them towards the

570 Vela Castañeda, Los pelotones, 238.
572 Plan Victoria 82 is not a public document, but a copy of the full document can be found in: Centro de Análisis Forense y Ciencias Aplicadas, “Plan de campaña ‘Victoria 82,’” (Guatemala: Área de Justicia, s.f.). A summary is available at www.plazapublica.com.gt/sites/default/files/resumen_del_plan_de_campana_victoria_82.pdf; for an overview of Victoria 82, CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 2: 18-23.
frontier with Mexico.\(^{574}\) As one informant told Michael Richards, in his study of counterinsurgent ideologies among army members, the objective was to “dry up the human sea in which the guerrilla fish swim.”\(^{575}\)

Between July 16 and August 19, 1982, the Guatemalan army launched a counterinsurgency operation in the Ixil region called “Sofía,” whose mission was to “exterminate subversive elements in the area.”\(^{576}\) “Sofía” was a specific psychological and counter-subversive operation designed to re-enforce those already taking place under the command of the task force Gumarcaj. It was carried out by the First Battalion of Paratroopers from the Military Base “Gral. Felipe Cruz” located in the Port of San José, in the department of Escuintla. It involved three companies of paratroopers (around 400 soldiers and at least 6 officers) and one battalion of Artillery Battery. No other operation carried out by the task force Gumarcaj or under its command, has left documental traces, with the exception of “Sofía,” whose “Periodical Operation Reports” and “Patrol Reports” were smuggled out from the army in a dossier of 359 pages. One of the most significant paragraphs of the dossier—redacted in the form of a conclusion—that corresponds to the “Periodic Report of Operations” from July 16 to July 31, in the Miscelánea [Miscellany] section, reads:

For more than 10 years, the subversive groups that have operated in the Ixil triangle [Chajul, Cotzal, Nebaj], were able to carry out a total work of concientización ideológica [ideological consciousness-raising] among all the population, having achieved one hundred per cent of support; which gives a different nature to the struggle that our army

---


\(^{575}\) Michael Richards, “Cosmopolitan World View and Counterinsurgency in Guatemala,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 58, no.3 (July, 1985), 95.

\(^{576}\) “Plan de operaciones Sofía,” 2. The full dossier is available at the National Security Archive, nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB297/Operation_Sofia_hi.pdf
is carrying out, because in order to win, not only *armas* [arms] are necessary. The government needs to intervene decidedly with infrastructure but, fundamentally, ideological work is required so the population understands how wrong and *engañada* [deceived] it is, and thus to accept the alternative of peace and freedom we are offering to them.577

The report totalizes the population, concluding that no one has been left outside of the ideological transformation enacted by the guerrillas. *All* Ixiles are actual and potential enemies. It means that no difference is to be made; it makes no difference to differentiate: the Ixiles are all the same. They are treated as One, as an absolute conglomerate, with no cracks, no fissures, and no distinctions insofar as they are total and totalized. In fact, according to Jennifer Schirmer, prior to Sofia, “On the army’s chessboard, every village was assigned with a pin of different colors …. *All* the villages of the Ixil area were considered red, an army colonel pragmatically affirmed in an interview.”578 This form of totalitarian counting is the opposite expression of the imaginary logics of anonymity and pseudonymity which, as I have argued in chapter 4, enabled revolutionary subjects to become many and more than one. And as such, it marks and is defined as total obliteration of the possibility of becoming other. Not incidentally, as I mentioned in chapter 4, when this totalization occurred, giving way to genocidal violence and the burning down of Ixil villages, all the receipts, certifications, and other forms of *finca* instruments of inscription, were destroyed, as don Encarnación Santay told me about all the *finca* receipts that his mother kept in their house.

Indeed, this form of stipulation and totalization cannot be attributed to the presence of the

577 “Plan de operaciones Sofía,” 123, (my emphasis).

guerrillas alone, as others have suggested. Let me elaborate. As seen before, prior to Plan Victoria 82 and operation “Sofía,” insurgent and counterinsurgent violence manifested in and followed a pattern of selective violence, where enmity was predetermined by the dynamics of the asymmetrical local structures of power and conflict in the Ixil region. Under these circumstances, accusations proliferated; and as their correlate, the circulation of “black lists” of individual suspects preceded the violent acts of the army, and often times, of the guerrillas as well. However, as seen in the dossier of operation “Sofia”—confirmed by one of Shirmer’s informants—one single version about the war is unified under one stipulation: all the Ixil population has been convinced by the guerrillas. This is what gives unanimity to the violent response of the army and what forecloses the possibility of displacing the accusation of being a member of the guerrillas for those Ixiles who were not combatants or militants, i.e., the Ixil unarmed population. In other words, the “truth” of the army functioned in complete disregard of knowing who was a guerrilla (or not). This truth, which attributes an unanimous cause can only be effective if performed from the position of the law, the state, and its symbolic constitution. In fact, the performative force of this totalization presupposes the illocutionary phantasy of the state’s sovereignty. And this form of totalization of the indigenous population as mere conglomerates with no differences was not new to the Guatemalan state, as I have suggested in chapter 3. The Guatemalan finca-state reiterated it in their interactions and forms of control of indigenous populations forcibly incorporated into the finca economy. On could say that, in conditions of counterinsurgency and radical suspicion, those forms of inscription were expressed in a radical way.

579 Stoll, Between Two Armies, 20.
It is at this moment when the words of officer Guillermo Mendez quoted above, i.e., “either you are with me or against me” acquire their full significance. Indeed, as massacres unfolded, from the late 1981 to the first half of 1983, the army forced all indigenous males of the rural areas to conform the Self-Defense Patrols (PAC). According to the UN sponsored Guatemalan truth commission, of all the human rights violations documented during the civil war, the PACs committed 18%, 85% of which were carried out together with army platoons, and 15% were committed by civil patrollers alone. But it was between 1981 and 1983 when 94% of all the human rights violations perpetrated by civil patrollers occurred. If one follows the words of officer Guillermo Mendez, for the civil patrollers, being with the army or against it was translated into killing in the name of the army or being killed by the army. In fact, according to the Truth Commission, one military unit called Tchakaben, formed by soldiers of Ixil descent alone, was created to track down people who were running away from the army’s violence in Ixil region. “What the army wanted,” one Ixil man told me, “was to make Ixiles kill themselves.”

Killing in the name of the army became “proof” that Ixil people were not guerrillas, and thus, it became the response that granted full recognition to the Guatemalan army’s sovereign authority. Take, for instance the massacre in the village of Chisis, of the town of San Juan Cotzal. On February 13, 1982, 200 soldiers coming from Cotzal arrived at Chisis, together with 100 PACs. They started gathering the people together but many did not come out of their houses, thinking that the army did not have problems with them, since they were already organized in PACs. “The patrols were already organized in the community,” one survivor recalled, “so the

---

580 CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 2: 227.
581 CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 2: 229.
582 CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 3: 335.
people were confident. Some people even invited the soldiers into their houses.”  

But the soldiers opened fire against the population and started to burn down their houses. Many women were raped and many men tortured. The majority of people were killed in their own houses, including women, children, and the elderly. The PAC killed everyone they ran into, including 20 young men from Chisis who were patrolling at the time. As the PACs and the soldiers approached them, the chief of Chisis’ patrol, who was a former soldier, ordered the young patrollers not to move “because the soldiers are friends. Then the soldiers asked them, What are you doing? We are patrolling, they responded. But the soldiers ordered them to stand in line, and after that, they started to kill them with machetes and machine guns.”  

Over 200 people were killed in one of the largest massacres to be perpetrated in the Ixil region. According to the CEH, the army committed this massacre in retaliation for the EGP’s attack against Cotzal’s army post, which had taken place in January 19.

Similar events occurred not only in the Ixil region but throughout the department of El Quiché. As one witness of the massacre of Cucabj, a village of Santa Cruz del Quiche said, “Everyone had some family and they killed their own family, their own brothers, but we know that they were forced to do it. At that time, we knew that we had to do as the army said because if we didn’t, we all would be dead.”  

To put a stop to a form of violence that seemed at once indiscriminate and unstoppable, a form of violence that, as expressed by Margarita—an ex-

---

583 CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 3: 90.
584 CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 3: 91.
585 CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 3: 90-91.
586 CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 3:135.
combatant who joined the guerrillas after the army killed her brother, quoted in chapter 4—the army killed “people no’más,” for no reason whatsoever, no crime, no revenge, offense, debt, or dispute; a form of violence exerted by the force of the state’s sovereignty alone. In order to put a stop to that form of violence, Ixiles and other indigenous people had to kill their own.\(^{587}\)

In the Ixil region alone, the Guatemalan truth commission reports that between March 1980 and November 1982, at least 52 massacres were perpetrated against the Ixil population.\(^{588}\)

The CEH also estimates that up to 90% of all Ixil villages were burned down,\(^{589}\) and over 24,000 people were internally displaced.\(^{590}\)

At the time, in 1981, there were over 82,000 inhabitants in the Ixil region.\(^{591}\)

After the massacres and the army’s scorched earth campaign, thousands of Ixiles were relocated in “Model Villages” under military control,\(^{592}\) and thousands more hid in the mountains in mobile camps, resisting military persecution under extreme circumstances in what came to be known as the Communities of Population in Resistance or CPR.\(^{593}\)

---

\(^{587}\) It may be said in this regard that the Guatemalan state decided that all Ixiles could be killed if needed, without necessarily enacting a form of sacrifice, as Giorgio Agamben argues. However, this misses the fact that the logic of sacrifice was precisely forced upon the Ixiles themselves. In this regard, René Girard’s theory provides a better ground to analyze massive violence in Guatemala, insofar as we understand that the lost of difference between who is and who is not a guerrilla, was instigated by the Guatemalan army and its own counterinsurgent plans in the context of a generalized militarization. In other words, the sacrificial logic was self-sacrificial for the Ixiles, even though the army enacted it as part of the sovereignty of the Guatemalan state. See: Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Daniel Heller-Roazen trans., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); and René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, Patrick Gregory trans., (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

\(^{588}\) CEH, *Guatemala memoria del silencio*, 3:335.

\(^{589}\) CEH, *Guatemala memoria del silencio*, 3:345.

\(^{590}\) CEH, *Guatemala memoria del silencio*, 3:347.

\(^{591}\) Stoll, *Between Two Armies*, 49.


\(^{593}\) For an account of the CPRs of the sierra, see Andrés Cabanas, *Los Sueños Perseguidos. Memorias de las Comunidades de Población en Resistencia de la Sierra*, (Navarra: Gakoa, 2000 [1999]).
numbers led the CEH to conclude that the Guatemalan army had committed acts of genocide against the Ixil population.⁵⁹⁴ According to the Commission, even though by 1981 more than 10% of the region’s population were ladinos, 96% of all the victims of the army’s violence perpetrated against Ixil population, and virtually all of the victims of indiscriminate massacres were Ixiles.⁵⁹⁵ This distinction between ladinos and Ixiles as victims of massive violence was, in fact, a generalized pattern for this period of time throughout Guatemala. Even though poor ladinos of the southern coast and ladino leaders of the social movement were also victims of the army, massive violence occurred almost exclusively in the highlands, among indigenous towns and villages, whereas ladino victims were almost always individually targeted.⁵⁹⁶ In other words, there is a totalization of Ixil communities under a general distinction and grouping that leaves ladino population outside of that totalization. This operation, as I understand it, cannot be performed outside the symbolic distributions and stipulations of the Guatemalan state and, thus it is irreducible and cannot be attributed to the imaginary effects of the politics of revolutionary anonymity and pseudonymity.

General Alejandro Gramajo, one of the architects of Plan Victoria 82, told Jennifer Schirmer the following: “At four o’clock in the mourning they woke me up to receive the bodies of nine dead soldiers coming from the western highlands. The officers from the western side of the country trusted only ladino soldiers from the eastern part [of Guatemala] to fight against the indios. That’s how I detected that the EGP was using an ethnic strategy and I said: this is very

⁵⁹⁴ CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 3: 358-359.
⁵⁹⁵ CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 3:335.
⁵⁹⁶ CEH, Guatemala memoria del silencio, 3:257.
dangerous because this is becoming an ethnic conflict.” That is to say, it is very dangerous because “indios” are killing ladinos. However, neither the EGP nor any other guerrilla group in Guatemala framed their strategies and ideological bases in terms of an “ethnic conflict.” Gramajo’s words are exemplary in this regard, not for their accuracy in describing the EGP’s ideology but because they represent what was at the core of the army officers and the Guatemalan elites’ ideological stance: a regressive fear of a rebellion of indios against the non-indigenous Guatemalan society.

The historical innovation of the Guatemalan army consisted in forcing indigenous people to kill their own in order to placate the fear and anger of the Guatemalan finca-state and its elites. As far as I can tell, that had never previously occurred in Guatemala’s history. “Indios” as I have argued in chapters 1 and 3, is a figure that does not describe any form of ethnicity but came to signify a pure negativity within the formation of the Guatemalan finca-state. This figure, nonetheless, was forced upon indigenous people; and as such, it came out of processes of the racialization of the finca-state’s elites and their national imaginaries. This is the state that the Guatemalan army identified with, as a corporative counterinsurgent institution, as I have argued before. In fact, as one of Manolo Vela Castañeda’s informants recalled, “If you go to the Escuela Politécnica [the school for the formation of army officers], there you will not find [people with] surnames like Pirir, you will not find family names of indios. There you will only hear surnames like Prera or Mazariegos…It brings shame to your classrooms when you hear family names like Popsoc. In the Escuela Politecnica they inculcate that one is studying to become an officer with class, not “indios,” only ladinos. The officers have the word indio in their heads, so they treat all

597 Schirmer, Intimidades del proyecto, 81.
the soldiers as *indios*"\textsuperscript{598} Thus, the army was made up of ladino officers—many of them of wealthy families—and a base of indigenous soldiers that, as Vela argues, were trained under the premise that “those indigenous people who let themselves be convinced by the guerrillas must die.”\textsuperscript{599} Here, as well, killing in the name of the army became the response to fully recognize and be recognized by the sovereignty of the Guatemalan state, for the majority of soldiers of indigenous descent. And in 1981, as one army officer told Manolo Vela Castañeda, “There was a demand from the private sector to the president. That demand put a stronger pressure on the president than the one coming from the army itself, and it came from the *empresiarado* [entrepreneurs], to do something. They were saying, what is going to happen with us? What is going to happen to Guatemala? What is going to happen to our properties? They were thinking about how not to lose their properties and how not to run away from the country.”\textsuperscript{600} In other words, as I have argued in chapter 3, they were thinking about how not to lose their names and renown, that is, how not to lose their putative position of the bearers of the Master signifier.

**Conclusions**

Jacinto Lupumac Gómez, in his testimony in the trial against the former president of Guatemala, retired General Efraín Ríos Montt (March 1982-August 1983), and former chief of Military Intelligence José Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez, recalled that in 1982, while he, his siblings, and his mother were returning from their plot at Tucalamá, they saw the army burning

\textsuperscript{598} Vela Castañeda, *Los pelotones*, 408.

\textsuperscript{599} Vela Castañeda, *Los pelotones*, 408.

\textsuperscript{600} Vela Castañeda, *Los pelotones*, 415.
down their village, Vijolón, in Salquil Grande, in the municipality of Nebaj. Even though they didn’t know about Jacinto’s father’s whereabouts, his mother decided they should return to Tucalamá and find a place to hide. The army was already looking for people who had run away to the surrounding mountains. After a while, his little brother, Pedro, started crying and soon after that, he recalls the burst of machine-gun fire. Jacinto’s older sister told him to throw himself on the floor while his brother was crying even harder. Then he saw both his mother and sister lying on a pool of blood; the army had killed them. The surviving brothers—three boys, according to his testimony—ran away towards a small waterfall where the army surrounded them. “Don’t shoot,” an interpreter accompanying the soldiers told them, “they are just kids.” One of them grabbed Jacinto’s little brother and put him in a backpack; another soldier picked his other brother up and carried him on his back. Jacinto couldn’t do anything but to follow the soldiers and leave behind his dead mother and sister. “Stop crying,” the interpreter told Jacinto, “or you’ll be dead too.”

Thus began Jacinto and his brothers’ journey of survival. Indeed, after a day or two walking with the soldiers—witnessing other atrocities against people the army suspected of being guerrilla supporters—they were finally sent to Huehuetenango in a helicopter. A Colonel called Castellanos Gongora was awaiting for them. Jacinto recalls that the Colonel tried to give all of them (three boys) in adoption to a group of local señoras but, because they were crying all the time, nobody wanted them. Gongora finally took them to the city, to his own house, where he tried to give them in adoption one more time but he didn’t succeed. After that, Jacinto and his

brothers were sent to various convents, until they finally ended up in a “home for the children” in the city, also run by nuns, until they finished their primary school. They were later sent to another “home for children,” this one run by priests, until they finished their high school. As they approached their age of majority (18 years old in Guatemala) Jacinto’s older brother made arrangement to get his ID, which he didn’t get because he was told in the Municipality that his papers were false. As kids, Gongora had provided them with false identities to make things less complicated for the religious people; but for an ID of citizenship these documents were insufficient. After some leverage was exercised by the director of the institute where they were studying, his older brother was able to get his ID in the Municipality of Mixco. In 1996, with the signing of the peace agreements, Jacinto got his own ID from Guatemala City, as the law now enabled people who had been displaced by the war to legalize their identities. Jacinto’s full name, and those of his brothers, nonetheless, remained unknown to them.

It was during these proceedings and applications that Jacinto decided to look for his father, whose whereabouts were unknown to him. With the help of friends in the city and human rights organizations, he found out that people from Vicalamá—which turned out to be his aunts and uncles—were looking for him and his brothers. Arrangements were made and Jacinto was taken to Vicalamá where his surviving relatives told him that his father had been killed by the army; “he was hiding,” they told him, “and the army threw a grenade at him, that’s how he was killed.” It was there, at Vicalamá, that Jacinto finally learned about his surnames: his father’s full name was Jacinto Raymundo Raymundo and his mother’s Juana Rivera Corio. Jacinto’s real name was Jacinto Raymundo Rivera and not Jacinto Lupamac Gómez, as his ID stated. During the trial, when asked about how he got his now legal family names, he surmised that because the
name of his little brother, Pedro, in Ixil is Lu, and the diminutive of Pedro is Talu, this is where Lupamac probably came from. He didn’t know where Gómez came from.

Jacinto couldn’t recall his surnames, but in some form of homonymic resemblance, he was able to retain, unconsciously, some form of link between the name of his little brother and that of his own genealogy. Genocidal violence, in this regard, may be said to be an act that attempts to radically obliterate the names of those who were considered the enemies of the state, an act that is primarily directed towards the erasure of a life-and-after-life-of-the-name. Indeed, as I have argued in this chapter, while the war remained in the dialectics of insurgent and counterinsurgent violence, the name was the fundamental signifier upon which suspicion of enmity and putative corroboration of the name’s bearer was conjoined. However, in the Ixil region, when the support for the guerrillas increased, at a moment when the Guatemalan army saw the development of the war as in a crisis, the army totalized Ixil communities as enemies of the state. At this moment, killing in the name of the army or dying at its hands became the way to demarcate who was on the side of the army and who wasn’t.
General Conclusions: The Secret of a Revolution-to-Come

On April 10, 2013, during the trial against former president Efraín Ríos Montt and his chief of Military Intelligence José Mauricio Rodríguez Sánchez, retired military officer and expert witness Benjamin Francisco Godoy Burbano ratified a technical study where he provided a historical explanation of the Guatemalan guerrilla’s organization. Emphasizing on the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), he reiterated the army’s point of view according to which, prior to 1982, the guerrillas had achieved an operational superiority and were planning to liberate territory in the northwestern region of the countryside. This territory, Godoy Burbano said, “was under absolute control of the guerrillas, specifically the region of Ixcán Grande, the hills of Chamá, and the Valley of Polochic; the region where the Ho Chi Minh front operated. It was a territory under total control of the insurgency.” Again and again, he insists on the “absolute” and “total” control of the guerrillas over a population that was “instrumentalized” under the premises of Catholic Action and Liberation Theology. “Luis Gurriarán was responsible for the evangelization of the different Cooperatives of [Ixcán], Cotzal, Chajul, and Nebaj. Ricardo Falla alias Marcos, alias Ramón [together] with Fernando Hoyos [a Jesuit priest who joined the EGP in the late 1970s] and Emeterio Toj [a former Catechist of Kich’e descent and founding member of the Committee of Peasant Unity, CUC] learned how to entusiasmar [excite or agitate] the indigenous peasant population, and began to captivate them.”

At this point, Godoy Burbano’s words resonate with a dominant discourse in Guatemala that represents indigenous participation in the revolutionary struggle as being the result of

---

602 Sentence C-01076-2011-00015 Of. 2, 362.

603 Sentence C-01076-2011-00015 Of. 2, 363.
guerrilla manipulation. In doing so, Burbano makes both the EGP and the Ixil communities responsible for the suffering of the victims of the civil war. Indeed, he believes that even though the guerrillas sized or “kidnapped entire indigenous communities,” they came to develop a relation of complicity and affection with their captors based on the manipulating powers of the EGP. He calls this the “Helsinki syndrome” [known, as a matter of fact, as the Stockholm syndrome]. “Between the years 1979 and 1982,” he argued,

“all the municipalities from the Mesilla [northern Huehuetenango, near the Mexican frontier] to Tecpán [in the department of Chimaltenango, 60 miles from Guatemala City] were destroyed. [The guerrillas] destroyed all the civil registers and [they] started to perform civil ceremonies and to issue all forms of documentation, births, marriages, and death certificates, because they had incorporated all the population into the organization. The people lost their documents of identification, they had lost their own identity, because they were no longer called Pedro Pérez but alias Juan. This is when they started to depend on the insurgents. The EGP recruited women and children, but the perverse thing of the guerrilla’s recruitment was that they spoke of the masses, not of groups of people in particular but of masses. This is so because the human person was merely an instrument for their strategy.”

For Burbano, the EGP enacted sovereign prerogatives belonging to the Guatemalan state that, in their most intimate and minute details, registered the population by virtue of consigning their proper names—the names of the living and the dead—and the alliances these names were the indexes of. In the context of his explanation, one that correlates territorial display with municipal registers of inscriptions and guerrilla manipulation, the names he makes reference to are, in their totality, indigenous names. To be sure, the totalization of populations is a function of state bureaucracies and their modes of accounting; and, in this regard, Godoy Burbano speaks as a bureaucrat. But during the Guatemalan civil war, only indigenous populations were totalized in a manner similar to Burbano’s account. As I have argued in previous chapters, this was the effect

---

604 Sentence C-01076-2011-00015 Of. 2, 364. (My emphasis).
of the development of a *finca*-state. Indeed, by virtue of producing and enabling forms of inscription that served the purpose of controlling and forcing indigenous communities into *finca* debt and labor, the Guatemalan state articulated two interdependent yet mutually exclusive regimes of proper naming: one that depends upon the logics of indigenous ancestrality, and the other on the presumption of a white European descent, land ownership, and capital accumulation. This was the condition of possibility for a master signifier to putatively occupy a position of generality (a white European patronymic) in order to represent the subject (of *finca* labor) to another signifier. To put it differently, starting in the late nineteenth century towards the early 1980s, when the state’s symbolic structures of signification entered into a crisis, the fundamental site of state sovereignty, interpellation, and proper naming came to be the *finca*. The instruments of inscription of the Guatemalan state made indigenous proper names to appear as mere aggregates to be totalized and controlled *in the name of finca* ownership and capital accumulation. No other social group was subjected to this form of accounting in relation to Guatemala’s *fincas*. Thus, one is led to conclude that, according to Burbano’s technical report, at stake was the sovereign control of the forms of register that enabled the identification of indigenous people, and the symbolic consistency of the Guatemalan state’s regimes of proper naming.

Like many other Guatemalan military officers who were trained in counter-insurgency and military intelligence, especially those who graduated from the School of the Americas (SOA), Godoy Burbano presumes that guerrilla warfare depends, fundamentally, on clandestinity. As a matter of fact, in a SOA manual entitled “Revolutionary War, Guerrilla Warfare, and Communist Ideology,” declassified in the early 1990s, one reads: “the most
important element in a guerrilla campaign is its clandestine political infrastructure, rooted in the population itself, and coordinated by middle-rank cadres. Such infrastructure is the necessary condition for the growth [of the guerrillas] and it provides the necessary recruits, intelligence, and local logistics.”

In this manual, as in many others I consulted, clandestinity is understood as the condition of possibility for the guerrillas’ survival, growth, and its popular support. In other words, the risk of not knowing who the enemy is, is constitutive to counterinsurgency. However, it is also against this risk that it is developed: not knowing is, precisely, counterinsurgency’s limit. Burbano shares this logic, I believe. But he also speaks of something more than clandestinity. As noted above, he argues that pseudonymity—in his words “having an alias”—is indicative of the absence of an indigenous “identity,” which he irrevocably links to having a patronymic. His generic reference (“Pedro Perez”), nevertheless, confirms that he is not interested in the institutions of indigenous proper naming and their cultural or ontological specificities (he does not mention namesakes, genealogies, toponyms, or any other form of indigenous proper naming) but merely in their form of appearance. And this is his main concern.

As I have shown in this dissertation, pseudonymity cannot be reduced to clandestinity, i.e., to an insurgent strategy for hiding one’s legal identity: rather, it needs to be understood as

---


607 Long ago, Franz Fanon showed that, in Algeria, one of French counterinsurgency’s main focus was the forms of appearing of Algerian revolutionaries, especially regarding Algerian women and their veiling and unveiling. See Franz Fanon, “Algeria Unveiled,” in A Dying Colonialism, trans., Haakon Chevalier, (New York: Grove Press, 1965).
the assumption of other forms of appearing, and by extension, of disappearing. Playing with many names was, in itself, a play of differences by virtue of which, revolutionary subjects inhabited a political space whereby they were able to be, simultaneously, one and many, singular and general: therein lies the liberating effects of pseudonymity. In the case of the Guatemalan civil war, specially during late 1970s and early 1980s, at the highest peak of popular mobilizations and guerrilla warfare, the effect of this play of difference was that indigenous patronymics no longer functioned to represent the subject to another signifier, and thus, those who claimed to be the bearers of the name who occupied the position of a master signifier (generality), could no longer appear as such. The fear and anger of losing one’s name was internal to this group, i.e., to the elites of the Guatemalan finca-state and the high command of the Guatemalan army. Hence Burbano’s insistence on the control of the forms of register of indigenous patronymics: they have to appear as such in the state’s instruments of inscription in order to sustain the symbolic constitution of the finca-sate.

Although not an innovation of the revolutionary struggle, pseudonymity became a generalizable possibility in the western highlands for the first time in Guatemala’s history within a period of time when the “I” and the “we” of the subject of finca labor coincided. This occurred, as I have also shown in previous chapters, under the premises of a popular discourse that, in a deep sense, was a refusal to a system within which indigeneity was both excluded from the possibility of recognition and address beyond mere identification, and included as a mere object

---


of the finca owners’ jouissance. Moreover, the coincidence of the “I” and the “we” was enabled by the emergence of a characterological figure represented by the name “the poor.”

“Representation” here means that the subject of finca labor saw him/herself being heard speaking not in his/her name but in the name of other; and this name was the carrier of the promise of the universal. It is in this regard that the politics of anonymity that we observe in Guatemala during the late 1970s and early 1980s were radically modern, as many theorists of the “public sphere” have suggested. To be sure, other political names such as “worker,” “peasant,” and “student,” to mention a few, belonged to the political articulations that occurred during the revolutionary struggle; however, none of them characterized or represented a form of revolutionary universality. Indeed, without the figure of “the poor” those names would have remained in the form of a heterogenous multiplicity without the cohesive force of interpellation. Instead, the figure of “the poor” carried with itself a prescriptive force that made possible the articulation of a revolutionary homogenous multiplicity that interpellated workers, peasants, students, indigenous, ladinos, religious and secular militants, and that produced the radical political difference ‘rich/poor.’ One may conclude that this articulation and differentiation was a fundamental threat to the Guatemalan finca-state.

And the emergence of that multiplicity marked the moment when many indigenous communities and their ancestral leaders spoke of an “ancestral call to” or “an ancestral

---


announcement of” a struggle that would put an end to the suffering of all indigenous *pueblos*. As seen in this dissertation, indigenous ancestrality has been intertwined with and has been the effect of political events that demanded a future oriented reading of the signs—and the secrets—of the ancestors. Secrecy, in this regard, is not merely clandestinity, as many former EGP cadres suggested during my fieldwork. The secret of ancestrality makes reference to a fraternity-to-come of which one cannot say anything, because it does not exist or has not happened, yet: it is that which cannot (yet) be known.612 Thus, from the perspective of indigenous ancestrality, the secret of a revolution—and not merely of clandestinity—couldn’t be told. For the Guatemalan army, and perhaps for many ladino cadres of the guerrillas, this was unassimilable. And yet, this secret was central to those indigenous subjects who responded to the call of the revolutionary struggle. This is not to say that indigenous communities who supported or believed in the revolutionary project did not share its ideological foundation; rather, it means that the prescriptive force of ancestrality was beyond that ideology. In this regard, the performative force of revolution and ancestrality is perlocutionary: its effects can be corroborated only after the fact. Although possible, the revolution itself did not happen, or better, it hasn’t happened yet. The insistence of the Guatemalan state and of its military officers and political elites, like Godoy Burbano, in putting the past to rest, is rather an effort at exorcizing Guatemala’s past’s capacity to haunt the present, in the form of a revolutionary possibility.613 This haunting possibility was re-inscribed by my interlocutors in the language of dreams and miracles, thereby reaffirming the


subjective positions that, in spite of the failure of the Guatemalan revolution, were not eliminated.

In their incapacity to be registered by an unsayable/unknown secret, under circumstances in which the forms of register and control of indigenous proper names and the symbolic consistency of the finca-state were experienced as in a crisis, the army absolutized indigenous communities they suspected of being guerrilla collaborators. Then the Guatemalan army responded with genocidal violence as an attempt at eliminating their sense of threat. As seen in this dissertation, that form of absolutization was an effect of a Symbolic instance that stipulates the cause of totalization of social groups who respond to certain proper names, and not by the Imaginary effects that are intrinsic to pseudonymity. Even though Guatemala is not the first place in history where massive violence has been exerted in order to keep subalternized groups in their putative place, to my knowledge, it is a unique historical case of genocidal violence perpetrated at a moment when the state’s regimes of proper naming and its symbolic constitution was perceived as in a crisis. There is no evidence, I believe, to sustain that the army perpetrated massive violence against indigenous communities out of a fear of contamination or because of the historical production of specific ethnic identities; the acts of genocide observed in Guatemala differ from forms of massive violence against groups accused of possessing an unlocalizable contaminating power that puts at risk the existence of the society as a whole, or between ethnic groups at war. In fact, the fear an anger that we observe during the months of genocidal violence was, let me insist, internal to those who were faced with the possibility of losing their racialized names, renown, and symbolic position. At its core, the violence perpetrated against indigenous communities of the western and central highlands was the effect of a regressive and symptomatic
reading of the army command and the Guatemalan elites that imposed the dynamics of self-
sacrifice to indigenous communities of the western and central highlands: i.e., indigenous people
were forced to kill their own. Putting the blame on Ixil and other indigenous groups, as Godoy
Burbano and other military officers do, for a revolution that although possible did not happen,
and whose secrets were unknown, is an act of perversion. And yet, to argue that a revolution was
fundamentally foreign to Ixil and indigenous politics, in order to preserve a form innocence that
resonates more with the ethnocentric stereotype of the “noble savage,” is politically and
historically misleading. As the UN sponsored Guatemalan truth commission and other
international and national courts have demonstrated, there is enough evidence to sustain that the
army perpetrated acts of genocide against Ixil and other indigenous people. That, however,
should not foreclose the history of an indigenous revolutionary past.
Bibliography

Archival Documents

AGCA-ST, Pqt. 3 Exp. 6, “Ejidos pueblo de Nebaj.”
AGCA-ST, Pqt. 16, Exp. 8, “Ejidos pueblo de Nebaj.”
AGCA-ST, Pqt. 3 Exp. 11, “Ejidos pueblo de Cotzal.”
AGCA-ST, Pqt. 16 Exp. 10, “Ejidos pueblo de Chajul.”
AGCA ST, Pqt. 17, Exp. 10. “Milicianos de Momostenango.”
AGCA ST, Pqt. 11, Exp. 1, “Jesus C. Rivas. Shamac.”
AGCA-ST, Pqt. 22, Exp. 2.
AGCA-ST, Pqt. 22, Exp. 6.
AGCA-ST, Pqt. 23, Exp. 3.
AGCA-ST, Pqt. 18, Exp.3.
AGCA-ST, Pqt. 17, Exp. 17.
AGCA-ST, Pqt. 10, Exp. 8.
AGCA-ST, Pqt. 18, Exp. 3, “Isaías Palacios-Acúl.”
AGCA-Ministerio de Gobernación, Sig. B, Leg. 29116, Exp.2, Quiché-Cotzal, 1906.
AGCA-ST, Pqt. 29, Exp. 2, "Herrera & Compañía Ltd-San Felipe Chemla," Cotzal-Quiché 1924.
AGCA-Gobernación, Quiché, Sig. B, Leg. 29563, Exp. 17.
AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, Pqt. 1, Exp. 3.
AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, Pqt. 1, Exp. 3, “Finca La Perla y Anexos.”
AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, Quiche, Pqt. 1, Exp. 1 “Finca San Francisco y Anexos.”
AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, Sig. A, Exp. 301, “La Perla y Santa Delfina.”
AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, Pqt.15, Exp.3, “Asich y Varias Mas.”
AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, Pqt.4, Exp.2, “San Joaquín y Anexos.”
AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, Pqt.2 Exp.5, “Estrella Polar.”
AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, Pqt.2, Exp.11, “San Felipe Chemla”
AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, Pqt.4, Exp.5, “Las Pilas.”
AGCA-ST, Decreto 900, “Las Amelias.”
AGCA-Gobernación, Quiché, Sig. B, Leg. 29563, Exp. 11.
Finca No. 13,559, folio 75, libro 64, El Quiche, 2nd. Property Registry of Guatemala.
Finca No. 2,554, folio 222, libro 13, El Quiche, 2nd. Property Registry of Guatemala.
Finca No. 1749, folio 210, libro 9, Quiche; finca No. 778, folio 278, libro 2E, Quiche, 2nd Property Registry of Guatemala.
Fincas No. 18,479 and 18,480, folios 31-32, libro 81, El Quiche, 2nd. Property Registry of Guatemala.
Finca No. 7765, folio 173, libro 41, Quiché, 2nd Property Registry of Guatemala.

General Direction of the National Police, Body of Detectives, Guatemala June 16, 1975, Of. 116703.

Recopilación de Leyes de la República de Guatemala, T.2 (Guatemala city: 1877), p. 69.


“EGP, Parte de Guerra, January 1982”.

Newspapers

El Imparcial, “En Ilon, Lugar de el Quiche, se Alzaron los Indios contra Ladinos”, Guatemala, July 1 1924, p. 1.


El Imparcial, La Municipalidad de Nebaj no es Grata a todo el Pueblo, October 30, 1923.


La Hora, “Pese a Garantías se Niega a Salir”, February 27, 1954.


De sol a sol, No.26, March, August 1979.

De sol a sol, No.29, Guatemala, September 1979.

De sol a sol, No.2, Peasant’s news paper, August, 1974.

“EGP ajustició a Comisionado Militar,” Diario EL Gráfico, February 17, 1978


References and Works Cited


ASIES-FUNCEDES. *Triángulo Ixil. Un breve diagnóstico.* Guatemala: URL, n.d..


Centro Rolando Morán, Construyendo caminos. Tres documentos históricos de la guerrilla Guatemalteca, (Guatemala: Centro Rolando Morán, 2008).


Davis, Shelton H. "Introduction: Sowing the Seeds of Violence.” In Carmack, Harvest of


———. Dissemination. Translated by Barbara Johnson. Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
1981.


———. “Plato’s Pharmacy.” In *Dissemination*, 61-156.


———. “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, 278-293


Flores, Alejandro. “Ontologia de la raza y el racismo S&M.” In AVANCSO, Sexo y Raza.


———. Empires in the Wilderness. Foreign Colonization and Development in Guatemala,


———. “On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis.” In *Écrits,* 445-488.


Lindo Fuentes, Héctor. “La introducción del café en El Salvador,” in: Héctor Pérez Brignoli and Mario Samper (Eds.), Tierra, cafés sociedad. Ensayos sobre la historia agraria


________."Rural Markets, Revolutionary Souls, and Rebellious Women in Cold War Guatemala.” In Joseph and Spencer, In From the Cold, 350-377.


——-. Arturo Taracea Arriola, José Aylwin Oyarzu. Procesos Agrarios desde el Siglo XVI a los Acuerdos de Paz. Guatemala: FLACS0, 2002.


Philpot-Munson, J. Jailey. “Peace under Fire: Understanding Evangelical Resistance to the


———. “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value.” In In Other Worlds, 212-242.


Taber, Robert. La guerra de la pulga [War of the Flea], (Mexico: Era, 1977).


Zupancic, Alenka. “When Surplus Enjoyment Meets Surplus Value.” In Jacques Lacan and the