

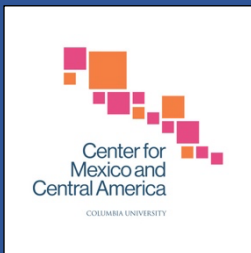
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*Any of Those Things  
Can Be True: Layers of  
Identity and Risk Factors  
for Social Violence in  
Guatemala*

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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In an age of neoliberalization, rapid urbanization, spreading crime, impunity, and lawlessness, social violence has reached crisis levels in postwar Guatemala. Drawing on new research on social identity, this piece explores understudied demographic sectors denigrated with a variety of slurs, whose members run an outsized risk of suffering violence, including: forced childhood labor, gang recruitment, extortion; forced child marriage and abduction; and human trafficking and sexual exploitation of all kinds. Marked by new kinds of social identities overlaid upon older ones, they are among the least powerful and most vulnerable people in Guatemalan society. This essay argues that only by considering layers of relational identity, built up over time, can we begin to accurately understand individuals' positionality in Guatemalan society, and thus make cogent analyses of the forms of discrimination and/or persecution they confront.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

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Berta Yac and her husband were a new-millennium success story. Despite being the children of impoverished Maya peasants and having grown up in a remote, war-torn region of Guatemala, they bootstrapped business after business in their twenties and thirties: a seed and fertilizer dispensary, a building supply outlet, and a neighborhood package store. They built a two-story house and sent their children to private schools. There were hardships along the way—small ones, petty jealousies and resentments, and big ones, like an extortion attempt they dared to resist. But in the mid-2010s, a gang kidnapped and beat their eldest son in the opening salvo of a series of threats they could not ignore. Atypically, they were able to press their case to the point where they testified against the criminals in court, but, typically, the judge threw out the case, as is common in Guatemala. The perpetrators sought revenge, unleashing a barrage of terror on the Yac family. The couple left behind all that they had built over the years and ran for their lives.<sup>1</sup>

The Yacs joined a growing number of Guatemalans displaced by violence.<sup>2</sup> As I trace in my research, even if the government were willing to provide protection to victims like the Yacs, it would be unable to do so. Common and organized crime were already exploding by the signing of Peace Accords in 1996 that ended a 36-year-long war. The years since have seen the proliferation of narco-trafficking cartels that work in alliances with extortion rings, street gangs, and other mafias, as well as with members of the military, the police, and the government. These criminal and corrupt organizations operate in the context of spreading social violence in which perpetrators commit their depredations with impunity.

While social violence in Guatemala is widespread, its victims are not by and large random. What factors lead some people, like the Yacs, to be targeted while others are not? Building on studies of the structural causes of violence, new research on nuances of social identity can help to answer this question.<sup>3</sup> Social identities, which we understand as fluid and relational, have evolved and morphed remarkably rapidly in postwar Guatemala.<sup>4</sup> They have done so in the context of a nation undergoing an extremely rapid process of rural urbanization, neoliberalization that occasioned new modalities of poverty and exploitation, and a cultural sea-change related to “Mayanization” and multiculturalism.<sup>5</sup>

Many of the changes in the way that people identify themselves and others have been positive. My own recent work has argued that the working-class majority of brown-skinned mestizo (mixed-race) and Indigenous Guatemalans have spearheaded a Mayan cultural renaissance, that they have given rise to a new and more inclusive popular discourse of nationalism, and that they have challenged hierarchies characteristic of the social structure since the time of Spanish colonization.<sup>6</sup> The very fact that new generations have been challenging hierarchical structures, however, speaks to very real differences and frictions that still exist and that continue to evolve in Guatemalan society.

Social identities related to caste, class, and race have evolved in dialogue with contemporary modalities of poverty and never-before-seen dangers in an age of spreading crime. New layers of group belonging are overlaid upon older identities alluded to by words such as *indígena* (Indigenous), *campesino/a*, *pobre* (poor), *mozo* (landless agricultural worker), and *moreno/a* (brown-skinned). A wide range of people are located in the lowest echelons of what Guatemalans still refer to as *castas*, or castes, deploying a word rooted in colonial racial categories. Guatemalans often refer to the poor, rural masses as a whole as *castas*—an epithet that encapsulates both poor non-Indigenous and Indigenous citizens in a single slur. On one hand, the creative cultural assertiveness of working-class Guatemalans, the so-called *castas*, has driven tremendously positive historical change. On the other hand, notions of caste and status relate to social violence, helping to explain why some people have a higher probability of being discriminated against, victimized, or targeted for harm than others. This is especially true in the face of global economic inequity and in the context of a state that fails to provide a social safety net, social services, or any effective access to security or justice in the absence of the rule of law.

This essay argues that only by considering layers of relational identity, built up over time, can we begin to accurately understand individuals’ positionality in Guatemalan society, and thus make cogent analyses of the forms of discrimination and/or persecution they confront. The layers of identity to which I refer can be envisioned as *pentimento*, a conceptualization I borrow from Laura Briggs’s *Taking Children*. A term from art history, *pentimento* describes the effect when “old paint on canvas becomes transparent, allowing a glimpse of another sketch or image underneath,” in Briggs’s words. “History can be *pentimento*,” she writes, “something beneath the surface but

giving shading and form to things happening decades, even centuries later.”<sup>7</sup> The Guatemalan notions of identity that relate to escalating social violence meld age-old yet evolving structures of racism, patriarchy, and social hierarchy with more recent striations that range from political affiliation to perceived decency to economic status and one’s place in a changing society. Ideas of identity are also locally and situationally articulated, and understanding their complexities requires deep familiarity with the nation, its regions, and its history.

### **3. WARTIME VIOLENCE AND CONTEMPORARY IDENTITY**

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Like many contemporary cases of violence, the Yac’s story is striated by Guatemala’s history of war. It is also marked by the residue of older social hierarchies that the wartime revolutionaries fought against: racism, classism, patriarchy, and a history of exploited labor and disposable laborers working in an extractive economic system that benefits a small elite. In the 1970s, before Berta Yac was born, her parents migrated to the Ixcán region of Quiché department—a remote, riverine area of jungle in and around the municipality of Playa Grande Ixcán, on the Mexican bordering a region known as the Northern Transversal Strip (Franja Transversal del Norte, FTN). Berta’s K’iche’-Maya parents joined peasant farmers from many other language groups in this settlement, which had been a center of the cooperativist movement and internal colonization efforts since the 1960s. Soon after their arrival, war engulfed the area. The Ixcán was the site of multiple atrocities; the army conducted counterinsurgency campaigns to exterminate people suspected of supporting or simply sympathizing with the guerrillas, driving many of them across the Mexican border.<sup>8</sup> Berta was born in 1982 in a refugee camp in Mexico, where she lived in horrific conditions for six years until finally her parents were able to find work in a Mexican town and send her to school. She was eleven years old in 1993 when her family was repatriated and returned to Ixcán.

As a little girl, Berta was already marked by layers of identity that would statistically increase her risk of harm over a quarter century later. She was K’iche’ Maya in a nation notorious for racism and a victim of state-led military violence later deemed genocidal by the United Nations. She was stateless (until her paperwork was regularized years later), a status that can be said effectively to apply to a daily growing number of Guatemalans who live in “zonas rojas,” “red zones” where the state has lost its sovereignty to criminals, including, arguably, present-day Ixcán. She was a female in a society that since the time of the Spanish conquest had patriarchal and highly delineated gender norms. At eleven years old, she was newly returned to an area infamous for the state’s use of rape as a tool of war and soon, like the nation as a whole, to be notorious for rates of gender-based violence so extreme they would be called femicide. As the member of a family perceived to be left-wing for having fled the army,

she was marked with an assumed political ideology that tied her first to the guerrilla insurgency and later to oppositional social movements. She was the child of poor farmers and thus a member of a racialized social class called *mozos*, a term increasingly used as an insult as society urbanized into and through the postwar period. Finally, she was a returned war refugee, a socio-political group that for years has been particularly vulnerable to land conflicts, problems with state paperwork, and politically-based discrimination and violence.

In the intimate worlds of Guatemalan society, war-tinged identities often take on ground-level, local configurations. The Yacs (along with other sources) report on conflicts in postwar Ixcán between people referred to in the area as *originarios*, who had remained in place during the scorched-earth campaigns of the early 1980s, and the *retornados*, or “returned ones” who came back from Mexican refugee camps. To generalize a complex political landscape, the people known in the local vernacular as *originarios* are perceived to have a more positive attitude toward the military than *retornados* do; the two groups are also seen on the opposite sides of land conflicts, as is common in areas of the nation where war refugees returned from exile. While many Ixcán *retornados*, such as Berta’s family, moved to the municipal center or otherwise dispersed throughout the area, some created landed settlements that remain at the center of local and protected legal conflicts.<sup>9</sup>

Wartime identities have a concrete socio-political existence in and of themselves, but they take on new valences and levels of significance as society changes over time. Diverse political activities among the *retornados* in the Ixcán have reflected not just organized wartime resistance but also the intensive grassroots effervescence of the postwar Mayan Movement.<sup>10</sup> In one group of towns in the region, for example, returned settlers organized a parallel organization to city hall to give residents a more democratic voice in local governance. This *alcaldía comunitaria* (community mayoralty) was modeled in part on the revitalized *alcaldías indígenas* (Indigenous mayoralties) that Maya community leaders were forming around the highlands. In the Ixcán, however—a multilingual area whose settlers included mestizos—it also drew on communitarian notions of governance forged in the region’s origins as a center of cooperatives and in years of resistance to military rule.<sup>11</sup> Here we see a very local iteration of the historic push of Maya activists around the nation to gain political power and to reassert and revitalize their languages, cultures, and systems of local governance.

These victories are shadowed by dangers that are at once new and infused with a history of racism and war. Maya activists have remained at the vanguard of social movements, most notably those that assert campesino rights and that oppose mining and hydroelectric projects.<sup>12</sup> Activists and members of social movements—particularly but not exclusively those who are Indigenous—have been and continue to be regularly criminalized by the state and the private sector.<sup>13</sup> In the Ixcán, the Los Copones villagers—already in peril as Indigenous *retornados*, imputed ex-guerrillas, and Maya cultural activists—joined a new iteration of social-movement protesters in 2007 when

they voted to block a hydroelectric project.<sup>14</sup> Such pentimento is seen around the nation; as in the Ixcán, the state has encouraged the settlement of uncultivated areas and then persecuted and criminalized the settlers in other regions as well. One of the most notable recent cases erupted on land later designated as the Maya Biosphere national park in the northern department of Petén, which borders Belize and Mexico on the Yucatán Peninsula. In the Biosphere, state-sanctioned settlers over time came to interfere with an array of interests ranging from narcotraffickers to petrochemical companies to agribusiness concerns to environmental interests cashing in on payments for carbon-capturing conservation. In June 2017—after having falsely painted them as terrorists and drug-runners—the state forcibly evicted the settlers of Laguna Larga, burning their farms, killing their animals, and driving them into a refugee camp in Mexico.<sup>15</sup> While this event made world headlines and prompted a response from the Organization of American States’ Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), it was only one of dozens of forced evictions in the new millennium that continue to the present day, as does the criminalization and active persecution of campesino activists.<sup>16</sup>

Patriarchy and sexism can figure into such political violence as well. For instance, Dominga Vasquez, a Kaqchikel woman elected to be the city of Sololá’s first and only *alcaldesa indígena* (female head of the Maya mayoralty) at the time, was driven out of politics and terrorized by death threats after the community staged an anti-mining protest in late 2004 to early 2005.<sup>17</sup> In the K’iche’ town of San Bartolo Jocotenango, the anthropologist Matilde González-Izás has documented how Indigenous agents of the military won development contracts and maintained local power by repackaging themselves as a merchants’ association in the transition to peace. The military agents complemented their corruption and clientelism with depraved violence. Since development funding was contingent upon the political participation of women, they forced the war widows whose husbands they themselves had killed to join local committees and enforced their compliance by routinely raping them.<sup>18</sup> This is one of myriad examples of how the long-lasting structures of patriarchy were warped by a war in which violence against women including rape, abduction and sexual and domestic slavery.<sup>19</sup>

Berta Yac’s life story bears evidence to women’s many victories in contemporary Guatemalan history. At 18, she married Víctor, a man fully committed to the kind of gender equity preached (if not always practiced) in guerrilla camps and refugee communities.<sup>20</sup> Two years later, thanks to a micro-development loan she won, the couple began opening businesses, in her name, that propelled them into a new middle class. She was a successful businesswoman. Children of army-affiliated originarios bullied Berta and Víctor’s children in school, and the couple suspected that originarios might also have been behind the first extortion threats, delivered in text messages that called her a “guerrilla bitch” and a “*marimacha*” (a slur for lesbian and an aspersion against her business ownership). Berta and Víctor were afraid, but they decided to risk ignoring the extortionists. Surrounded by family and fellow retornados in their



neighborhood, they had sufficient social fabric to resist, for the time being. Many others did not.

#### **4. STRUCTURES OF GENDER, CLASS, AND SERVITUDE**

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The gendered nature of the threats directed against Berta Yac speak to the fact that Guatemala has some of the highest indices in the hemisphere and the world of violence against women, as well as a patriarchal socio-political structure that dates to its colonial era. In general, gender roles and norms are strictly proscribed. While there are exceptions, as seen in the case of Berta and Víctor, women are generally expected to labor in the domestic sphere or in economic activities considered appropriate to their gender, despite the centrality of their labor to the grassroots economy.<sup>21</sup> Women, but in particular rural women and especially rural Maya women, suffer circumscribed access to education, employment, health care, housing, and the judicial system; they are also underrepresented in politics.<sup>22</sup> This basic background helps to explain why, as USAID phrases it, “the judiciary and police continue to rely on social beliefs and attitudes regarding women’s inferiority as justification of GBV [gender-based violence].”<sup>23</sup> GBV has reached proportions so epidemic that it is called femicide and/or feminicide.<sup>24</sup> The failure of the Guatemalan state to investigate, prosecute, and prevent these crimes—despite its increasing body of unenforced legislation and unfunded mandates—makes it a party to their proliferation.<sup>25</sup>

“Work it out,” the police told María Chonel when she reported in the mid-2000s that her de-facto husband was stealing her wages and beating and raping her in front of their children. A K’iche’ girl from a poor neighborhood in the outskirts of Santa Cruz del Quiché who grew up helping her parents sell used clothes in the city’s sprawling central street market, María had convinced her mother to “make” her father send her to primary school when she turned eight. She did so well that at fourteen, she found a live-in job in the city center and began to work her own way through junior high school. She met her first boyfriend, a twenty-one-year-old, in night school; she thought they would hold hands, get ice cream, perhaps go to dances together. Instead, he raped her, imprisoned her in his home, and told her she belonged to him. When she finally managed to escape and ran to her father for protection, he sent her back. “You’re a ruined woman,” he told her. “You’re his wife now.” No state authority ever treated her any differently.<sup>26</sup>

Forced child marriage, as seen in María’s case and many others, has been and remains a devastating social phenomenon in Guatemala, one intimately related to structural poverty and inequality produced and reproduced by the logic of the global and national economy. Forced child marriage deprives girls and young women of the chance of getting an education, results in their pregnancy early in life, and ties them in domestic and sexual servitude to their husband. Severe consequences to victims are

noted in the realms of health, education, food security, poverty eradication, HIV/AIDS, and gender equality. Additionally, forced child marriage often constitutes a form of human trafficking, forcing or defrauding women into sexual or domestic slavery.<sup>27</sup>

While the abduction, rape, and forced de facto marriage of girls has been widely documented in the Mayan highlands, especially during the war, such cases are seen around the country. Sociologist Cecilia Menjívar researches ladina (non-Indigenous) women from eastern Guatemala whom she categorizes as “*robadas*,” meaning “robbed” or “stolen.”<sup>28</sup> We see this dynamic in the life story of Flor Ordóñez, a ladina from eastern Guatemala born in 1990 into an impoverished agrarian family. At the age of twelve, Flor was lured away from the grandparents who were raising her by a man three times her age who promised a money-making opportunity. He brought her to a camp for itinerant workers where he raped her and claimed her as his “wife.” Not a single adult or state official intervened. Besides being the victim of unspeakable abuse, Flor, like María, took on the status of a “ruined woman,” the kind of woman viewed as “*callejera*”—an insult derived from “*calle*,” meaning street, and one her captor used against her regularly. The fact that she was seen as a “street” woman—low-class, sexually promiscuous, and unworthy of respect—was compounded by her status as a teenage mother, first at thirteen years old, and again at fifteen, and yet a third time at seventeen.

What happened to Flor was not random but was rooted in factors that increased her risk of harm. She was a poor rural child who began working twelve-hour days when she was only nine years old. Making corn tortillas in a neighborhood store was only one of Flor’s jobs; she hauled water from a river to her village, which in the late 1990s still had no electricity or infrastructure. She laundered clothes in that same river, chopped firewood, and hiked miles to work in the fields. She never studied and remains illiterate, having been denied a right to education guaranteed by the 1985 constitution but never enforced by the state. While Flor’s childhood labor may not have been borne of malevolence—her parents and grandparents had likely been raised the same way—it has still been characterized in instances of abuse as a form of quasi-slavery, one that in many cases is linked to human trafficking, as seen in her enslavement after she was abducted.<sup>29</sup> Child laborers are left with a greatly enhanced risk of being victimized by criminals and abusers of all types (as in Flor’s case), and typically grow up with a socio-economic status that denies them access to decent housing, work, health care, and education.<sup>30</sup> That status, though, has changed over time, as slurs such as “*callejera*” took on new meaning and added to the pentimento of identities that make life in Guatemala so risky.

## 5. SECURITIZATION, DECENTRALIZATION, CORRUPTION

Gangs are the best known example of both social breakdown and contemporary identity-creation, encapsulating not only the *marero* or *muco* (gang-banger) but also sets of related identities: the “thug” (*cholo/cholero*); the ghetto-coded break dancer (*breik*) and later, rapper (*rapero*); the women called *callejera* and perceived as sexually wanton and deserving of abuse. Deborah Levenson has traced the evolution of the small gangs that first appeared in the mid-1980s into the lethal iterations of Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) and Calle 18 over the course of a decade, mapping this transformation against the military’s atomization of working-class solidarity and the popular movement through terror and trauma.<sup>31</sup> Youth culture in the capital city took deadly turns over the ‘80s and into the ‘90s. “Anti-break” youth gangs from the middle and upper-middle classes, many with family ties to the military, unleashed waves of deadly street wars against the *breiks* (break-dancers)—supposedly gang members but really any youth with Indigenous-looking features who dressed in the styles popular in poor urban neighborhoods.<sup>32</sup> Racialized class battles on the street formed part of a greater pattern of “social cleansing” campaigns that can be arrayed on an arc with anti-insurgent death squads on one end and the torture and murder of supposed delinquents on the other. In one instance, the press recorded that Guatemala City police were dousing the hands of street children, many of them likely war orphans, with the flammable glue they were sniffing and setting them on fire.<sup>33</sup> A visible tattoo became a death sentence, as could any number of style choices in an era when global youth culture was spreading. No sooner did new social groups arise than they were criminalized.

In the capital city and the urbanizing hinterlands alike, identity became a national obsession at a time when social identities were in rapid flux. Events in the provinces, which were still in the heat of war and under various degrees of military occupation through the 1980s and until the late 1990s, show related patterns of identity-formation. Panic over youths’ “foreign ways”—that is, their adoption of fashion and music from other lands, their embrace of Spanish as a lingua franca, and the like—horrified elder generations in agro-urbanizing towns. An outbreak of small street gangs around provincial Guatemala and notably in the Mayan highlands ranged from sinister offshoots of larger gangs and crime rings to more mischievous and sometimes politically satirical local affairs.<sup>34</sup> Waves of moral panic in Guatemala City and the provinces bore evidence to rapid social change: over child abduction, child pornography, and organ-stealing, for example, as well as over HIV/AIDS and feared social phenomena such as “transvestite” prostitution and open homosexuality.<sup>35</sup> These panics speak to the history of patriarchy and social conservatism that figure prominently in the well-documented persecution of LGBTQ+ individuals in Guatemala.<sup>36</sup>

The popular panicked and often violent reaction to socio-cultural changes was bound up with the reaction to the spread of crime. Guatemalan society underwent a profound process of securitization in the years around the Peace Accords. Neighbors formed “security committees” that patrolled against alleged gang members, extortionists, and other criminals.<sup>37</sup> Many of these committees were reconfigured versions of the military’s counterinsurgent civil patrols; others arose out of community governance structures, were formed by mayors, or arose in town hall meetings. In 1999, the government gave them a legal existence as *Juntas Locales de Seguridad* (Local Safety Boards), which continue operating to the present day.<sup>38</sup> Given the spotty police presence in the provinces, caused both by underfunding and by popular resistance to an arm of the state seen as corrupt and abusive, juntas can provide communities with their only sense of safety. The juntas are also, however, closely associated with the phenomenon of lynching, in which a mob typically burns an alleged criminal or criminals alive, but sometime beats or stones them to death.<sup>39</sup> Juntas have power, and they have abused it—violently adjudicating personal vendettas, for example. They can also be deeply moralistic, enforcing “traditional” social norms in general and killing or terrorizing LGBTQ+ people in specific.<sup>40</sup> Juntas have also imposed curfews and criminalized offenses ranging from public drunkenness to wearing long hair and earrings (for males), having tattoos, playing basketball late at night, and failing to respect one’s elders.<sup>41</sup> In the absence of a functioning police force or judicial system, juntas may take “justice” into their own hands. Such groups merit careful attention. On one hand, they are a legalized arm of the state that violates people’s civil and human rights; on the other, inasmuch as they overlap with other polities—ranging from Maya community systems of governance and conflict resolution to the new social movements, such as those that oppose mining projects, for example—they and their members can also be criminalized by the state, suffering persecution for their ethnic and/or political identity. Every town in every municipality has its own particular history, and each of those histories is inflected by the wartime past and is embedded in the complex and byzantine world of Guatemalan politics.

Legalized security squads and the politics around them fit into a greater history of postwar political decentralization that shrank the central state, generalized corruption around the body politic, and contributed to the lawlessness that underpins the crisis of social violence in Guatemala. Municipal decentralization, codified in law in 2002, was spearheaded by the Inter-American Development Bank and the IMF, World Bank, and donor nations; it devolved decision-making and funding to the municipal level. After years of redistricting, a process called “micro-regionalization,” local volunteer development groups became *Consejos Comunitarios de Desarrollo Urbano y Rural* (COCODES, Urban and Rural Community Development Committees).<sup>42</sup> COCODES sometimes figure prominently in outbreaks of violence. This is occasionally seen in instances in which the state misuses COCODES by giving them a policing and quasi-judicial function, which can cause their members to run afoul of dangerous criminals such as narcotraffickers. More frequently, COCODES are involved in conflicts that

involve political parties and mayors intent on embezzling development funds, because COCODE approval is needed for municipal projects. New research indicates that COCODE members—who are legally inscribed agents of the state—often become entangled in the increasingly corrupt world of municipal governance.<sup>43</sup>

The political status of COCODE membership can also figure indirectly into the pentimento of identities at play in cases of violence, showing how structures of government and organized crime can play a role in incidents that at first glance appear to be simply personal or familial. For example, consider the case of a woman fleeing her murderous half-brother Maco, who had been sexually abused by the man who was her father and his stepfather throughout his childhood. Maco grew up to be an abuser himself, as well as a drug-runner for a local narco nicknamed Cabro (Goat). Maco blamed his step-siblings for never rescuing him from their father's depredations, and enlisted Cabro and his henchmen to terrorize them. Upon investigation, Cabro turned out to be the leader of a COCODE tied to a mayor who was later prosecuted for criminal conspiracy, meaning that the young woman in this story was targeted not just by a disturbed relative, but also by an organized crime group and by corrupt agents of the state. Additionally, the pentimento relating the persecutor, Maco, in this family-related case included layers of identity as an abuse survivor, a man with a status as an imputed homosexual, and a "narco" identity, which were then overlaid by ties to a cartel as well as to local government, a political party, and an acquisitive mayor. The point here is that the "state" and/or public sphere is not properly conceived as analytically separate from the "personal" or private sphere; the two overlap and interpenetrate each other. The state often bears a degree of culpability in what appear to be personal cases of violence not just because of its negligence in providing citizens with protection or justice, but also because the status of being an agent or quasi-agent of the state seeps into the pentimento of identity of many historical actors—a situation exacerbated by political decentralization, spreading criminality, and the corruption of the body politic.

Corrupt mayors and their related security juntas and COCODES operate in the same lawless atmosphere in which extortion rings, street gangs, and drug-dealers ranging from cartel members to local distributors fester, not to mention any number of other mafias. Berta and Víctor Yac experienced this first-hand when men shoved "Lenin," their thirteen-year-old first-born, into a van and delivered a ransom note, releasing him for unknown reasons and leaving him mauled and bleeding at the side of the road. At first, they suspected the originarios, who were tied to local politics and whom they were sure had extorted them before, but Lenin swore that it was a gang; he recognized two of the abductors. Almost incredibly, the police, who are generally useless if not part of the problem, located and arrested the alleged perpetrators, and the family traveled to Cobán, Alta Verapaz to testify against them.<sup>44</sup> The family's luck ended there, however. The judge quickly dismissed the case. This, along with the sophisticated nature of the threats that followed and the history of criminality in the region all strongly suggest that the kidnappers were either members or affiliates of a narcotraffic cartel. Most likely they were Zetas, a Mexican cartel that had territorialized this region

of Guatemala by the time these events occurred. Ironically, the Zetas had been born in the same area of southern Mexico where Berta spent her early childhood, being formed by an alliance of Mexican military special forces who were fighting the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) guerrillas and the Guatemalan Kaibiles, special forces who had driven families like Berta's away.<sup>45</sup> The Zetas first arrived in the Ixcán around 2003, paying "Guatemalan recruits \$1,700 a month to fight rival organized crime groups and engage in drug trafficking, extortion, kidnapping, homicide, and other crimes," according to U.S. Southern Command.<sup>46</sup> With the help of a disaffected and acquisitive Guatemalan narco located in Cobán—the city where the Yacs later testified—the Zetas displaced rival homegrown clans and turned the departments of El Quiché, Petén, and Alta Verapaz into an operations center over the years ahead.<sup>47</sup> The results of their expansion burst into public view in May 2011, when they tortured and beheaded 28 campesinos who worked for a rival drug lord.<sup>48</sup>

The growth and evolution of the cartels has been an integral part of the construction of complex webs of criminality in Guatemala that penetrate the entire political economy.<sup>49</sup> These webs consist of such diverse constituent parts that before its sudden 2019 ejection from the country, CICIG—a UN-backed anti-corruption/anti-impunity commission formed in 2007—dubbed them "Illicit Political Economic Networks," or RPEI (*redes político-económicas ilícitas*). Noting their "profoundly local" articulations, InSight Crime writes that the "RPEI maintain control over key political positions—town councils, city halls, provincial governments—that have been used for personal enrichment, as well as the construction and consolidation of social bases. Some of the RPEIs' activities are developed on the margins of the law, which is why it is difficult to establish a clear distinction between what is licit and what is illicit."<sup>50</sup>

Thus, the Yacs may have been correct in guessing that their original extortionists in the mid-2000s were army-affiliated originarios using both their posts in municipal government and everyday violence to harass successful retornados. They were totally unaware, however, of the ties that were binding such officials to transnational crime rings and that were linking local groups of thugs to cartels. In the early 2010s, Lenin identified teenage members of a small-town street gang as his abductors, but all the evidence suggests that such gangs were tied into the RPEI—that is, into a web of criminality that linked them to some of the most dangerous kingpins in the hemisphere and their allies in the military, the government, and the judiciary. Indeed, even the local *mareros* who kidnapped Lenin may have been unaware of their high-level ties, until, that is, men showed up with assault rifles in expensive pickup trucks with rollover bars and floodlights to terrorize the Yacs for having testified. Who was out to get the Yacs? Was it originarios, members of city hall, hometown gang members who rely on the effective threat of deadly violence to extract payment, or the kind of cartel about which locals only whisper? And why the Yacs? Was it because they were retornados with suspected leftist ties? Or because they were 'new money' with businesses headed by a woman? Could it be because they were at once Indigenous and 'not-Indigenous-enough,' as Spanish-speaking K'iche' people who never mastered their parents' first

language, and had already been shunned in some circles for not being sufficiently traditional? Or were the two extortion attempts totally unrelated? Until after his escape and rescue, Lenin had never told his parents about the gang's prior repeated attempts to force him to join; that's how he recognized two of them. Berta and Víctor had seen this coming. Lenin was styling himself as a B-Boy, writing rap lyrics, learning to deejay, and wearing baggy jeans and a baseball cap turned backwards. "You look like a *cholero!*" his father had screamed at him in rage. He and Berta had come of age during the moral panic over "foreign ways," and they knew no good could come of this.

## 6. NEW POVERTIES, NEW IDENTITIES

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As seen in the stories of Guatemala City's "anti-break-dancer" street wars and of the provincial backlash against youth showing any sign of counterculture, brand-new yet historically-rooted social identities began to form in the last years of war and the first years of peace that bear directly on the contemporary crisis of social violence. These relational, caste- and class-based identities have evolved in dialogue with changing economic and social realities in a country experiencing rapid rural-to-urban transformation. The transformation of regional towns into small but still-agrarian cities (a process I have dubbed "agro-urbanization") was fueled not only by war displacement and population growth, but also by the spread of non-traditional agro-export crops (NTAs) and the rising importance of migrant remittances in the economy. Agro-urbanization was accompanied by new communications technologies, from FM radio to cable television to the internet, all of which helped to popularize transnationally inflected pop-culture forms, such as the B-Boy fad seen around the nation at the time of Lenin's abduction. Such "street culture" phenomena manifested on physical streets in growing municipal seats, local administrative capitals called *cabeceras*. Guatemalan municipalities are akin to U.S. counties; *cabeceras* are surrounded by small villages and remote hamlets. In the 1980s, war drove people to migrate from rural areas not just to Guatemala City, but also to local *cabeceras*; an extreme example, cut through by a period as refugees in exile, is seen in Berta Yac's case. In the years ahead, opportunity fueled agro-urbanization. Better wage labor could be found in the fields where NTAs like broccoli were planted, or in the growing service and construction sectors—low-paying work to be sure, but perhaps enough to send one's children to schools only found in the *cabecera* in hopes that they might up-class. Remittances also swelled the population of *cabeceras*, allowing village families to leave rural poverty and move to the center. In this process of rapid agro-urbanization, unfolding in the context of spreading crime and lawlessness on one hand and of growing Maya and mestizo cultural assertiveness on the other, racialized class- and caste-based identities took on acute dimensions.<sup>51</sup>

The economic panorama that confronts Guatemalans has been summed up with the phrase *nuevas pobrezas*, new poverties.<sup>52</sup> Linked to the new international division of labor and to neoliberal disinvestment in public services and a social safety net (which Guatemala never had in the first place), economic changes have seen more working-class Guatemalans laboring as masons, servers, cashiers, and in “gig-economy” jobs such as driving *tuc-tucs*, three-wheeled mototaxis. An ethos of “professionalism” also inspired the first generations of youth in the provinces to get an education to want to do anything but work in agriculture, only to find no professional employment upon their graduation.<sup>53</sup>

The local articulations of new poverties are intimately related to the threats that cause people to flee as the gangs, extortion rings, and other elements of the RPEI spread across the landscape. Ruy González and his wife moved into a marginal neighborhood near the center of Tacaná, San Marcos, and after years of labor saved up enough to buy their own *tuc-tuc*. When the extortion death-threats arrived and dead cats began flying over their wall, flung by motorcyclists, they had no way of knowing exactly who was after them, but decided to flee rather than risk their lives. In Chiantla—a municipal cabecera known for broccoli-cultivation that had grown so rapidly it formed a metro region with the neighboring departmental capital of Huehuetenango—sixteen-year-old Fredy Ixtuc fled a gang so intent on making him join that they threatened to murder his family and burn their house down. He suspected the family business as a motive; his father drove a broccoli truck, a notorious means of transporting cocaine, to the wholesale import markets in El Salvador, and having already resisted gang persuasion, might be corrupted for such a purpose if his son were a member himself. Fredy also noted the hatred with which his recruiters insulted him, calling him an “uppity *mozo*,” and a “*hueco burgués*” (“bougie,” and a vulgarity meaning gay).

A growing body of scholarship demonstrates that social discrimination against *castas*—the catch-all world used to denigrate brown-skinned, working-class Guatemalans—has steadily increased over the last few decades. The rapid urbanization of rural centers has added a caste-based, urban-rural dimension to social discrimination and violence. Impoverished, dark-skinned “country folk” who historically were farmers or ranch-hands, but who now are engaged in low-level service sector work, are discriminated against as being backwards and underdeveloped by putatively higher-class people and are either looked-down upon or targeted by people who have a similar demographic background. Those who have done well, “new money” families like the Yacs, are even more reviled. Identifiable through their skin color, physiognomy, and form of speaking and regional accents, among other factors, members of this caste are often called “*shumos*,” a vulgar, racialized slur that translates along the lines of “low-class brown trash” and denotes a category of people recognized as a tacky, disposable, and good-for-nothing “hick” class. Besides *shumo*, other slurs for this social category include “*muco*,” which connotes a “ghetto” *shumo* of the sort who might join a street gang; “*naco*,” a loan-word from Mexican Spanish with a similar meaning; and “*mozo*,” a word referring to landless Indigenous plantation workers who were often sold as part



of estates well into the twentieth century.<sup>54</sup> They are also insulted as being “*indios*”—an extremely racist slur for Indigenous people—even if they are of mixed racial heritage and are not culturally Maya, although they may phenotypically appear to be so. New research indicates that Guatemalans from the demographic sectors denigrated as *shumos*, *mucos*, *mozos*, *nacos*, and *indios*—or frequently, simply as *castas*—run an outsized risk of suffering all kinds of violence, including: forced childhood labor, gang recruitment, and “*robada*”-type “marriage”; extortion; and human trafficking and sexual exploitation. They are among the least powerful and most vulnerable people in Guatemalan society.<sup>55</sup>

Seen as a whole, discourse against the *shumada*—the mass of *shumos* and *shumas*—is a powerful indicator of rapidly changing class and caste relationships in an urbanizing and globalizing society that is historically characterized as having a small, light-skinned elite that enjoyed dominance over an impoverished agrarian class of disposable labor.<sup>56</sup> Hard evidence of this group’s concrete social existence is not lacking; anti-*shumo* hate speech broke out on the internet in Guatemala in early 2012, at first relating specifically to Guatemala City and quickly spreading through the provinces in the months and years ahead. Besides denigrating *shumos* as being tasteless, tacky, too-big-for-their-britches peons who ought to be picking the crops or cleaning the bathrooms, these hate videos also directed homophobic slurs against the young men from this social category and painted *shuma* women as tacky and promiscuous.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the use of the slur *callejera* to denigrate so-called “ruined” women like María Chunel and Flor Ordóñez also fits into this greater rubric of caste- and class-based discrimination; it references a real-and-imagined city street that serves as a metonym for Guatemala’s new poverties and new social identities.<sup>58</sup> Significantly, the same people spat upon for being *shumos* and *castas* by more elite sectors are also, because of their precarious socioeconomic situation, not only the members of society who are most at risk for criminal depredations, but also those most likely to be neglected or treated with indifference by agents of the state.

People denigrated as *shumos*, *mozos*, *castas*, and *indios* are targeted precisely because of their caste status and their social and political powerlessness—a powerlessness that applies even to members of this class who have accrued some financial resources, such as the Yacs. Their powerlessness is amplified by a state that is unwilling or unable to provide basic protection to its citizens, and by longstanding and new forms of discrimination. The very fact of their powerlessness and inability to resist the demands of their persecutors amplifies the political valence of such people’s resistance when they do resist, even if they themselves would not characterize standing up to criminal outsiders as a political act, but instead as a moral one, as did Fredy Ixtuc in refusing to join a gang and strong-arm his father into drug-running. As seen in the Yac family’s experience with the RPEI, however, such resistance is met with deadly reprisal, and indeed *must* be; criminals whose very success depends on the effective application of social terror can hardly allow themselves to be thwarted by the simple refusal to cooperate by the least powerful people in society.

A nuanced discussion of the pentimento of social identity can help to explain the risk of harm that victims of social violence face, underscoring that the violence they suffer is often not just personal and random. It is also invaluable in illuminating the many reasons why relocating internally does not allow for escape from harm. Working-class Guatemalans are deeply embedded in their communities—not to mention their linguistic communities, in the case of Indigenous peoples—and given the scarcity of decent jobs, they depend on local family and close connections in order to be able to make a living. Generally speaking, the need to find work outside of areas in which they have family and friend networks leaves them no practical choice but to move to urban areas where employment can be found. Such poor, marginal neighborhoods are increasingly becoming what the Guatemalan government calls *zonas rojas* (red zones), a term indicating that criminals have taken over. Once there, both as newcomers and by dint of their often racialized caste-and class-based status (not to mention their gender, in the case of women), they face significantly enhanced risk of harm. Red zones are found throughout the nation, but the most notorious are in Guatemala City, where working-class Guatemalans would likely need to move to have any hope of finding a job and being able to survive.

A prime example of criminal governance is found in the city's Zone 18, where Angélica Rubio relocated after being deported from the U.S., soon to flee again.<sup>59</sup> In the stall she rented to sell used clothing in Zone 18's Alameda 2 market, Angélica began receiving threatening notes from a gang calling her a dirty *shuma callejera* and telling her to pay up. Just days later, local residents found the forearms, hands, and head of a dismembered woman in a trash bag on a soccer field just 15 meters from the local police station. On the following day, the gang left another dismembered woman's corpse with a note that said, "To all the businesspeople of the market, we are the rent collectors, and whoever doesn't collaborate with the rent is going to end up like this; yesterday was the first message and this is the second. Sincerely, *El Demonio*."<sup>60</sup> Both criminal control and horrific violence against women have continued in the sector in the years since these events unfolded in late 2016. Headlines in January 2020 announced the discovery in the area of the body of a woman stabbed over 50 times with what appeared to have been a pickaxe, and stories of brutal violence against women continued to appear in the press even after the coronavirus lockdown began.<sup>61</sup> In a frank admission that it had lost all authority over the area, in March 2020 the federal government announced plans to regain control over Zone 18 with the same kind of quasi-military initiative that has largely failed to produce positive results over the last two decades. A video posted to Facebook by the Ministry of Government (which is responsible for security, the prisons, and the police, among other things) detailed a joint operation conducted by itself, the Public Ministry (which runs the justice system), the Ministry of National Defense (the Army), and the National Civil Police "*with the sole objective of being able to have territorial control*" over Zone 18.<sup>62</sup>

The Zone 18 story and *El Demonio* epitomize the lethal danger that Guatemalans confront. I bring a historian's lens to my interviews with targeted people like the Yacs

and the others whose narratives I have shared. We talk about the family's background and history back to the days of the war and explore present-day political connections. We delve deeply into the family's socio-economic status and parse the particular insults that were used against them—insults such as *callejera*, *shumo*, *indio*, and *mozo*. In many cases, victims may not be able to confirm which of these factors most directly put them in the crosshairs, just as they are unsure of whether they are eluding a gang, a cartel, city hall, or a combination of all of them. “Any of those things can be true” is a phrase I have heard on multiple occasions.

In my opinion, it is not *any* of these things, but *all* of them, that researchers need to take into account in analyzing the broad dimensions of social and socio-political violence in Guatemala. A close examination of the pentimento of factors relating to identity and social positioning historicizes and contextualizes the harms that far too many people suffer. As social scientists and humanists, it is our task to seek the underlying order and logic behind what can first appear to be unfettered social chaos. To be sure, well-studied social identities such as indigeneity, sexual orientation, and gender are critically important explanatories in understanding the nation's high rates of violence. Yet we must dig deeper, further exploring the racialized caste- and class-based identities that new research is just beginning to document. Complexity, nuance, and attention to local conditions are critical. In a world in which wartime vengeance still simmer and wartime sexual violence underpins femicide; in which children are enslaved, trafficked, and raped into conjugal servitude; in which poor workers are extorted on pain of death as soon as they climb one rung up the ladder; in which the hometown hoodlum might be backed by a cartel with more firepower than many sovereign states; and in which narcos behead campesinos and *El Demonio* leaves dismembered women on display, pentimento is perhaps too pacific a metaphor. Such oversaturation with violence results in frenzied sets of polythetic series, realities in which “any of those things,” and all of them, can be a death sentence.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## GLOSSARIES

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Two glossaries are provided, one covering Spanish terms and the other listing slurs related to social identity, which are offensive and should only be used with caution and in context.

### GLOSSARY OF SPANISH TERMS

**Alcaldía Indígena:** The Indigenous Mayoralty that has survived since the 1500s as a parallel form of local rule.

**Cabeceras:** Municipal seats/capitals.

**Campesinos/campesinas:** Country people, farmers, farmworkers, peasants.

**Consejos Comunitarios de Desarrollo Urbano y Rural (COCODES):** Municipal Urban and Rural Community Development Committees, created to give citizens a voice in the development process.

**Cuerpos Ilegales y Aparatos Clandestinos de Seguridad (CIACS):** Illegal Corps and Clandestine Security Apparatus; criminal organizations within the military and intelligence wings of the state.

**Franja Transversal del Norte (FTN):** The Northern Transversal Strip, which runs along the Mexican border.

**Juntas Locales de Seguridad:** Local safety boards. Citizen patrols akin to neighborhood watch committees, legalized by the government in 1999.

**Moreno/morena:** A non-white person.

**Originarios/Retornados:** These terms are commonly used to denote people who are respectively originally from a place or who have returned to it from elsewhere. In the Ixcán region of El Quiché department, they have taken on specific political meanings.

**Redes Político-Económicas Ilícitas (RPEI):** Illicit Political-Economic Networks, a term coined by CICIG—the Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala (the UN-backed International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, which operated from 2007 to 2019)—to describe the webs of alliances between criminals and agents of the state.

**Robadas:** “Robbed” or abducted women in the Eastern region of Guatemala, as documented by Cecilia Menjívar.

**Zona Roja:** A “red-zone” where criminals have taken over sovereignty from the state.

## GLOSSARY OF SLURS RELATED TO IDENTITY

**Callejero/callejera:** An insulting adjective derived from *calle*, meaning street, implying a lack of morals and decency.

**Castas:** Literally, castes. A catch-all term for members of the lower classes that is often used as a slur.

**Cholo/cholero:** An insult that loosely translates as “thug” or “street thug.”

**Hueco:** A vulgar term for a gay man.

**Indio/india:** A racist term for Indigenous people (properly referred to as *indígena*).

**Marero:** A member of a *mara*, or street gang.

**Marimacha:** A vulgar term for a lesbian.

**Mozo:** This term, historically used for resident workers on large agricultural landholdings, is now often deployed as an insult against impecunious rural people in general.

**Muco:** A slur for a gang member.

**Naco:** A Mexican slur for a person presumed to be poorly educated and of unrefined taste. Similar to *shumo*, used in Guatemala.

**Shumo/shuma/shumada:** A slur that loosely translates to “brown trash” in the masculine, feminine, and collective forms.

## REFERENCES

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1. As is customary in academic writing on human subjects, I have changed the names of the “Yacs” and enlisted pseudonyms throughout this essay. Beyond the sources cited, the primary evidence for this article consists of interviews conducted for over thirty years in Guatemala (and most especially for my research on contemporary history and social violence over the past decade), as well as interviews and documentation relating to asylum cases in the U.S. for which I have served as an expert witness. The latter documentation includes thousands of pages of testimonials, witness statements, police reports, medical and forensic records, death certificates, legal rulings, and the like; for reasons of privacy and confidentiality, these sources are not cited. I have triangulated the information derived from legal cases against my own and others’ research findings and have taken all necessary steps to protect the identity of the people involved in these cases, including changing identifying details in the life stories glossed in this article. These stories are representative of greater trends. Any resemblance to any particular individual is purely coincidental. The Yacs are a hybrid of several families.

2. For statistics, see United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), “Guatemala – Fact Sheet – May 2022,” <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/93819>; and TraCImmigration, <https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/reports/675/>. Additional accounts are found in Lauren Heidbrink, *Migranhood: Youth in a New Era of Deportation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020).

3. See Manuela Camus, Santiago Bastos, and Julián Lopez García, eds., *Dinosaurio reloaded: Violencias actuales en Guatemala* (Guatemala: FLACSO, 2015); Carlota McAllister and Diane M. Nelson, eds., *War by Other Means: Aftermath in Post-Genocide Guatemala* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); Gema Santamaría and David Carey, eds., *Violence and Crime in Latin America: Representation and Politics* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017).

4. Guatemalans have remarked upon what they call their society’s “identity crisis” for decades. “No society is as preoccupied with identity as ours is,” wrote the journalist and cultural critic Gerardo Guinea Diez in 2001. Gerardo Guinea Diez, *Gramática de un tiempo congelado: Ensayos y obra periodística, 1994-2007* (Guatemala: Editorial Cultura, 2008), 53.

5. Twenty-two Mayan languages are spoken in Guatemala, along with the Indigenous languages Xinca and Garífuna. Nearly half of the nation’s the population is

Indigenous. On multiculturalism and “Mayanization,” see Santiago Bastos, *Multiculturalismo y futuro en Guatemala* (Guatemala: FLACSO/Oxfam, 2008). For debates about neoliberalism and multiculturalism, see Simon Granovsky-Larsen, *Dealing with Peace: The Guatemalan Campesino Movement and the Post-Conflict Neoliberal State* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019); and Charles R. Hale, “*Más Que un Indio (More Than an Indian): Racial Ambivalence and the Paradox of Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Guatemala* (Santa Fe: University of New Mexico Press, 2006). For an entry into the literature on the Mayan Movement, see Santiago Bastos and Roderick Brett, eds., *El movimiento maya en la década después de la paz (1997-2007)* (Guatemala: F & G, 2010); Betsy Konefal, *For Every Indio Who Falls: A History of Maya Activism in Guatemala, 1960-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010); and Diane M. Nelson: *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); *Reckoning: The Ends of War in Guatemala* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); and *Who Counts? The Mathematics of Life and Death after Genocide* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

6. J. T. Way, *Agrotropolis: Youth, Street, and Nation in the New Urban Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2021).

7. Laura Briggs, *Taking Children: A History of American Terror* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020), 6-7.

8. Ricardo Falla, *Massacres in the Jungle: Ixcán, Guatemala, 1975-1982* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994); Beatriz Manz, *Paradise in Ashes: A Guatemalan Journey of Courage, Terror, and Hope* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Jennifer Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999). For a succinct summary of internal migrants and refugees, see Suzanne Jonas, “Guatemalan Migration in Times of Civil War and Post-War Challenges,” Migration Policy Institute (2013), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/guatemalan-migration-times-civil-war-and-post-war-challenges>.

9. The issue of returnees, both from Mexico and from internal Communities of the Population in Resistance, affected the entire highlands. The terms “originario” and “retornado” have a different valence in the Ixcán, where they have taken on the status of concrete political identities, than elsewhere in the nation, where they tend to be used generically. For more information, see: *El Periódico*, “Los Copones y su derecho histórico de posesión a la tierra,” 12 Jan. 2018, <https://elperiodico.com.gt/opinion/2018/12/01/los-copones-y-su-derecho-historico->



de-posesion-a-la-tierra/; Luisa Fernanda Nicolau Ozaeta, “El diálogo y su uso en la solución de conflictos, estudio de caso: conflicto de tierras (Base Militar # 20, El Quiché),” Licenciatura thesis, (Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, 2011); “Ixcán, ya sin guerra y aún sin la paz de los acuerdos,” Revista *Envío* No. 243 (June 2002), <https://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/1154>; and USAID, “Legacies of Exclusion: Social Conflict and Violence in Communities and Homes in Guatemala’s Western Highlands,” Guatemala Conflict Vulnerability Assessment, Final Report, Public Version (October 2015), [https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1862/Guatemala\\_Conflict\\_Vulnerability\\_Assessment.pdf](https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1862/Guatemala_Conflict_Vulnerability_Assessment.pdf), E-1.

10. Further research is needed on both the survival of such activism through genocidal repression and on the long arc of Maya cultural activism from the colonial period to the present. For methodological and theoretical approaches to studying organizing in periods of repression, see Alison Bruey, *Bread, Justice, and Liberty: Grassroots Activism and Human Rights in Pinochet’s Chile* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2018).

11. Like other communities, the Ixcán settlers referenced Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization, the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (1989), as the legal basis of their organization. The institution of the Indigenous Mayorality (*alcaldía indígena*) has operated alongside the official city hall in Guatemala since the 1500s, surviving through numerous periods of repression and having a renaissance from the 1990s forward. For a summary and analysis of the relationship of these municipal politics to everyday life in recent decades, see Way, *Agrotropolis. A history from the fifteenth century forward* is found in Lina Barrios, *Tras las huellas del poder local: La Alcaldía Indígena en Guatemala, del siglo XVI al siglo XX* (Guatemala: Universidad Rafael Landívar, 2001). For an entry into the literature on the cooperative experience, see Bonar L. Hernández Sandoval, *Guatemala’s Catholic Revolution: A History of Religious and Social Reform, 1920 – 1968* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018). A brief summary of these politics in the Ixcán is also found in USAID, “Legacies of Exclusion,” E-2.

12. Anti-mining activism has accelerated in tandem with new exploration and excavation licenses over the last two decades. “*Consultas comunitarias*”—open community polls in which residents vote for or against mines—have been seen in numerous communities, which despite their best efforts have been largely unable to have their wishes respected. These struggles and the state’s persecution of activists has inspired films and is the subject of a growing scholarly literature; see, for example, Simona Yagenova et al., eds., *La industria extractiva en Guatemala: Políticas*

*públicas, derechos humanos, y procesos de resistencia popular en el período 2003-2011* (Guatemala: FLACSO, 2012); and Stephen Henighan and Candace Johnson, eds., *Human and Environmental Justice in Guatemala* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018). There are also significant social movements linked to the global pan-Indigenous Movement and/or dedicated to transitional justice and historical memory, such as H.I.J.O.S. Guatemala (<http://hijosguate.blogspot.com/>).

13. See Amnesty International, “‘We Are Defending the Land with Our Blood’: Defenders of the Land, Territory, and Environment in Honduras and Guatemala” (2016), available as download from U.S. Department of Justice website, <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/file/889956/download>, 52-53; Giovanni Batz, *La Cuarta invasión: Historias y resistencia del pueblo Ixil y su lucha contra la Hidroeléctrica Palo Viejo en Cotzal, Quiché, Guatemala* (Guatemala: AVANCSO, 2022); Front Line Defenders, “CODECA: Comité de Desarrollo Campesino” page, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/organization/codeca>; Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, “Guatemala Needs to Do More to Stop the Killings of Indigenous Activists,” *Washington Post*, 23 May 2018.

14. Fearing the displacement of numerous farmers, they opposed the Xalalá hydroelectric project. USAID, “Legacies of Exclusion,” E-2.

15. Sebastián Escalón, “Laguna Larga: un desalojo en nombre de la naturaleza,” *Plaza Pública*, 17 June 2017, <https://www.plazapublica.com.gt/content/laguna-larga-un-desalojo-en-nombre-de-la-naturaleza>; Organization of American States, Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), “Situation of Human Rights in Guatemala,” 31 Dec. 2017, <http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/reports/pdfs/Guatemala2017-en.pdf>, 113; Peace Brigades International, *PBI Bulletin* no. 26 (2012), 10, [https://pbi-guatemala.org/fileadmin/user\\_files/projects/guatemala/files/english/PBI\\_Bulletin\\_No\\_26.pdf](https://pbi-guatemala.org/fileadmin/user_files/projects/guatemala/files/english/PBI_Bulletin_No_26.pdf); Aldo Santiago, “Guatemala: Carbon, The Metric of Displacement in Petén,” *Avispa Midia*, 28 April 2019, <https://avispa.org/guatemala-carbon-the-metric-of-displacement-in-peten/>.

16. In Resolution 36/2017, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights issued Precautionary Measure 412-17 on behalf of the displaced Laguna Larga community: Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Resolución 36/2017 Medida cautelar No. 412-17, “Pobladores desalojados y desplazados de la Comunidad Laguna Larga respecto de Guatemala,” 8 September 2017, <http://www.oas.org/es/cidh/decisiones/pdf/2017/36-17MC412-17GU.pdf>. In the IACHR’s words, “a precautionary measure is a protection mechanism of the Inter-

American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), through which it requests a State to protect one or more persons who are in a **serious and urgent situation from suffering irreparable harm.**” IACHR “About Precautionary Measures” website, <http://www.oas.org/en/IACHR/jsForm/?File=/en/IACHR/decisions/MC/about-precautionary.asp>; emphasis in original. See also the *Amicus Curiae* brief presented by Leilani Farha, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context for the case of the Community of Laguna Larga before the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Guatemala, Ref. File No. 2698-2017, 2017, [https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Housing/AmicusBriefConstitutionalCourtGuatemala\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Housing/AmicusBriefConstitutionalCourtGuatemala_EN.pdf). Commenting on the Guatemalan state’s pattern of forcibly evicting campesinos, the U.N. Committee against Torture wrote that “evictions are carried out in Guatemala with excessive use of force by agents from the State security forces, a situation which ... can violate the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment.” United Nations Committee against Torture, “Joint Shadow Report Submitted by Guatemalan Civil Society Organisations to the Committee against Torture, 2014-2018,” available as a linked document on <http://www.omct.org/monitoring-protection-mechanisms/reports-and-publications/guatemala/2018/11/d25115/>, 61, para. 229. Details on forced evictions and repression of activists are found in Amnesty International, “We Are Defending the Land with Our Blood,”; Comité de Desarrollo Campesino, “Represión Contra CODECA,” Oct. 2019, available as download from Front Line Defenders, [https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/represion\\_contra\\_codeca-2.pdf](https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/represion_contra_codeca-2.pdf), 5, 9; Front Line Defenders, “CODECA: Comité de Desarrollo Campesino” page, <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/organization/codeca>; Santiago “Guatemala: Carbon, The Metric of Displacement;” Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, “Guatemala Needs to Do More to Stop the Killings of Indigenous Activists,” *Washington Post*, 23 May 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/05/23/guatemala-needs-to-do-more-to-stop-the-killings-of-indigenous-activists/?noredirect=on>. For recent events, see “The International Land Coalition Latin America and the Caribbean (ILC LAC) expresses its deep concern about the violent evictions of peasant and indigenous communities that have taken place over the course of the last month in the Verapaces region,” International Land Coalition, 25 Oct. 2022, <https://lac.landcoalition.org/en/noticias/comunicado-rechazamos-los-desalojos-forzosos-y-la-ocupacion-militar-en-territorios-de-comunidades-campesinas-e-indigenas-en-la-sierra-de-las-minas-en-guatemala/>.

17. Rigoberto Ajcalón Choy, “Municipalidad, participación indígena y democratización en Sololá a partir de la firma de los acuerdos de paz, 1996-2010,”

Licenciatura thesis, (Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, July 2011), 112-15; J. T. Way, “The Movement, the Mine, and the Lake: New Forms of Maya Activism in Neoliberal Guatemala.” *Humanities* 5, 56, 15 July 2016, 7. See also Rigoberto Ajcalón Choy, “Masculinity, Gender, and Power in a Mayan-Kaqchikel Community in Sololá, Guatemala,” M.A. thesis, (University of Texas at Austin, 2014).

18. Matilde Gonzalez-Izás, “Labor Contractors to Military Specialists to Development Experts: Marginal Elites and Postwar State Formation,” in McAllister and Nelson, eds., *War by Other Means*, 261-82.

19. David Carey Jr. and M. Gabriela Torres, “Precursors to Femicide: Guatemalan Women in a Vortex of Violence,” in *Latin American Research Review* 45:3 (2010): 142-164; Sarah England, *Writing Terror on the Bodies of Women: Media Coverage of Violence against Women in Guatemala* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018); Paula Godoy-Paiz, “Not Just ‘Another Woman’: Femicide and Representation in Guatemala,” *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 17:1 (2012): 88–109. Calling violence against women “a continuum in the history of Guatemala,” UN Women notes its perpetuation as “a tool of submission and control on [over] women’s bodies and lives,” rooted not just in wartime violence but “also based in the patriarchal and conservative culture added to...[social insecurity and a] legal system that breeds impunity.” UN Women, Guatemala overview page, <https://lac.unwomen.org/es/donde-estamos/guatemala>, cited as accessed 19 Feb. 2022.

20. See Yolanda Colom, *Mujeres en la alborada: Guerilla y participación femenina en Guatemala, 1973-1978*, 4th. ed. (Antigua Guatemala: Pensativo, 2013).

21. See the chapter entitled “Oficios de su Sexo: Gender, the Informal Economy, and Anticommunist Development,” in J. T. Way, *The Mayan in the Mall: Globalization, Development, and the Making of Modern Guatemala* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 67-123.

22. See Grupo Guatemalteco de Mujeres (GGM, Guatemalan Women’s Group), <http://ggm.org.gt/>; OECD Development Center Social Institutions and Gender Index 2019 Datasheet, <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/GT.pdf>; United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, “People without Incomes of their Own,” 2018, <https://oig.cepal.org/en/indicators/people-without-incomes-their-own>, and that organization’s “Guatemala Country Profile 2019,”

<https://oig.cepal.org/en/countries/14/profile>; UN Women, Latin America and Caribbean, <https://lac.unwomen.org/en/donde-estamos/guatemala> and USAID, “Gender Analysis,” <https://www.usaid.gov/documents/1862/usaidguatemala-gender-analysis-final-report-september-2018>.

23. USAID, “Gender Analysis,” 13.

24. See data from UN Women (<https://lac.unwomen.org/en/donde-estamos/guatemala>) and Amnesty International (<https://www.amnestyusa.org/why-does-guatemala-have-one-of-the-highest-rates-of-femicide-in-the-world/>). For a simple explanation of the distinction between femicide and feminicide, useful in hearings, see the Guatemala Human Rights Commission USA (GHRC) webpage: “Femicide is defined as the killing of women, female homicide, or the murder of a person based on the fact that she is female. Feminicide is a political term... It...holds responsible not only the male perpetrators but also the state and judicial structures that normalize misogyny.” GHRC, “Feminicide,” <https://www.ghrc-usa.org/Programs/ForWomensRighttoLive/FAQs.htm#feminicide>.

25. See U.S. Department of State, “2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Guatemala” (released 30 March 2021), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/guatemala/>; Amnesty International (<https://www.amnestyusa.org/why-does-guatemala-have-one-of-the-highest-rates-of-femicide-in-the-world/>); and “Situación de violencia letal contra las mujeres en El Salvador, Guatemala y Honduras 2014 - julio 2018,” Fundación Heinrich Böll-Stiftung (San Salvador, 2018), [https://sv.boell.org/sites/default/files/violencia\\_letal\\_contra\\_mujeres\\_esgh\\_hbs.pdf](https://sv.boell.org/sites/default/files/violencia_letal_contra_mujeres_esgh_hbs.pdf). On laws and unfunded mandates, see “Guatemala: Violence against Women,” Submitted by The Advocates for Human Rights, a Non-Governmental Organization in Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC since 1996 for the 28th Session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review, 6 – 17 November 2017, [https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/uploads/guatemala\\_violence\\_against\\_women-march\\_2017.pdf](https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/uploads/guatemala_violence_against_women-march_2017.pdf); and United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), Committee against Torture, Concluding observations (2018) CAT/C/GTM/CO/7, especially paragraph 36. Significantly, in its 2015 ruling on Velásquez Paiz et al. v. Guatemala—a case involving kidnapping, rape, and murder—the Inter-American Court of Human Rights found in favor of the plaintiff and underscored the failure of the Guatemalan state to either prevent or prosecute crimes against women, in contravention of the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará), to which Guatemala is a signatory. Corte Interamericana de

Derechos Humanos, Caso Velásquez Paiz y Otros vs. Guatemala, Sentencia de 19 de Noviembre de 2015, [https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec\\_307\\_esp.pdf](https://www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_307_esp.pdf); Organization of American States, Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará), 9 June 1994, <https://www.oas.org/en/mesecvi/docs/belemdopara-english.pdf>; *Yale Review of International Studies*, “The Disappearance and Murder of Claudina Velasquez: A Story of Gender Stereotyping by Guatemalan Authorities,” Dec. 2018, <http://yris.yira.org/essays/2740>.

26. The details here draw on cases from my files in which the forced child marriage dates to the mid-1990s. This data squares with fieldwork interviews relating to everyday feminist acts and their political valences in society. On concubinage (*concubinato*) and de facto marriages, see UNHCR/RefWorld, “Guatemala: Information on Common Law Marriages,” <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a6a340.html>.

27. USAID, “Ending Child Marriage & Meeting the Needs of Married Children: The USAID Plan for Action,” (2012), [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PDACU300.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PDACU300.pdf), 3 and *passim*. See also CICIG (Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala) and UNICEF, “Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation Purposes in Guatemala,” (2016), [http://www.cicig.org/uploads/documents/2016/Trata\\_Ing\\_978\\_9929\\_40\\_829\\_6.pdf](http://www.cicig.org/uploads/documents/2016/Trata_Ing_978_9929_40_829_6.pdf); United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR), Convention on the Rights of the Child, 28 February 2018, “Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the Combined Fifth and Sixth Periodic Reports of Guatemala,” CRC/C/GTM/CO/5-6, [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC/C/GTM/CO/5-6&Lang=En](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CRC/C/GTM/CO/5-6&Lang=En); U.S. Department of State, “2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Guatemala,” <https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-trafficking-in-persons-report/guatemala/>.

28. Cecilia Menjívar, *Enduring Violence: Ladina Women’s Lives in Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Cecilia Menjívar and Shannon Drysdale Walsh, “Subverting Justice: Socio-Legal Determinants of Impunity for Violence against Women in Guatemala,” *Laws* 2016, 5:31, doi:10.3390/laws5030031, <https://www.mdpi.com/2075-471X/5/3/31>.

29. I have seen documentation from similar cases in which the captor has *bought* the child from the caretakers. See U.S. Department of State, “Trafficking in Persons

Report,” (June 2018), <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/282798.pdf>, 205. A comprehensive report on child labor in Guatemala from the early 2000s is “Understanding Children’s Work in Guatemala Report Prepared for the Understanding Children’s Work (UCW) Project, a Research Co-Operation Initiative of the International Labour Organisation,” UNICEF and World Bank, March, 2003, [http://white.lim.ilo.org/ippec/documentos/gua\\_\\_\\_national\\_report.pdf](http://white.lim.ilo.org/ippec/documentos/gua___national_report.pdf). See also: U.S. Department of Justice, “2018 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Guatemala,” <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1211721/download>, 2. See also: Soy502, “Muerte y esclavitud: el oscuro secreto dentro de las tortillerías,” (20 March 2019), <https://www.soy502.com/articulo/trabajo-infantil-ninas-encontraron-muerte-esclavitud-5313>; “La esclavitud ignorada en Ciudad de Guatemala,” *Nómada*, 16 Jan. 2017, <https://nomada.gt/cotidianidad/la-esclavitud-ignorada-en-ciudad-de-guatemala/>; and “Guatemala: Rescatan a 27 niños víctimas de explotación laboral, eran obligados a trabajar en tiendas de abarrotes y tortilla,” Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 11 June 2018, <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/guatemala-rescatan-a-27-ni%C3%B1os-v%C3%ADctimas-de-explotaci%C3%B3n-laboral-eran-obligados-a-trabajar-en-tiendas-de-abarrotes-y-tortilla/>.

30. U.S. Department of Labor data on forced child labor in Guatemala from 2021 is available at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/guatemala>, and is searchable for past years. For a full list of related legislation, see USAID, “Gender Analysis,” Appendix F.

31. Deborah T. Levenson, *Adiós Niño: The Gangs of Guatemala City and the Politics of Death* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

32. Manuela Camus, *La colonia Primero de Julio y la “clase media emergente”* (Guatemala: FLACSO, 2005), 211-12; María Gabriela Escobar Urrutia, “Enfrentamientos y violencias juveniles en la Ciudad de Guatemala (1985-1993),” Licenciatura thesis, (Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, July 2005); Way, *Agrotropolis*, 88-93, and fieldwork notes.

33. Amnesty International, “Ill Treatment of Street Children,” 27 Jan. 1992, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr34/005/1992/en/>. On social cleansing, see Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project*, 197-99.

34. J. T. Way, “City Streets in Rural Places: Emerging Cities, Youth Cultures, and the Neoliberalization of Guatemala,” *Journal of Social History* 53:1 (2019): 76-106; Way,

*Agrotropolis*, 121-22. Panic over youth can be traced in the national press and through a profusion of local newspapers in the 1990s, notably including *El Regional*, born in Huehuetenango's Huista Region (GT-CIRMA-AH-039). See also *Controversia: Revista Huehueteca* and *Ye' Quatanum: El Aguacateco* (CEDFOG vertical file).

35. Daniel Rothenberg, "Panic of the Robaniños: Gringo Organ Stealers, Narratives of Mistrust, and the Guatemalan Political Imagination," Ph.D. diss., (University of Chicago, 2018); Way, *Agrotropolis*, 67-68, 73-77, 84-85.

36. Amnesty International, "No Safe Place: Salvadorans, Guatemalans and Hondurans Seeking Asylum in Mexico Based on Their Sexual Orientation and/or Gender Identity," Nov. 2017, available on <https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/5a2ee5a14.pdf>; FLACSO/Proyecto Convivimos, *Violencia en espacios laborales hacia lesbianas, gais, y personas trans en la ciudad de Guatemala*, October 2019, <https://www.flacso.edu.gt/publicaciones/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Violencia-en-espacios-laborales-LGBTI.pdf>; Human Rights Watch, "'It's What Happens When You Look Like This': Violence and Discrimination Against LGBT People in Guatemala," March 2021, [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media\\_2021/03/%E2%80%9CIt%E2%80%99s%20What%20Happens%20When%20You%20Look%20Like%20This%E2%80%9D\\_0.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2021/03/%E2%80%9CIt%E2%80%99s%20What%20Happens%20When%20You%20Look%20Like%20This%E2%80%9D_0.pdf); USAID, "Guatemala Gender Analysis 2018;" and "Violencias contra la población LGBTIQ+: Vivencias y dinámicas que la sostienen" (Guatemala: Visibles, 2020), [https://visibles.gt/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Violencia\\_contra\\_la\\_poblacion\\_LGBTIQ.pdf](https://visibles.gt/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Violencia_contra_la_poblacion_LGBTIQ.pdf).

37. On the epidemic proportions of extortion, see InSight Crime, "A Criminal Culture: Extortion in Central America" (InSight Crime Global Initiative Report, May 2019), <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Central-American-Extortion-Report-English-03May1400-WEB.pdf>.

38. Debates about the juntas' legality have simmered for years. Silvia Edith Vásquez de León de Hidalgo, "Guatemala: Villa Nueva, una década de esfuerzos para mejorar la seguridad del municipio," paper for conference "Municipal Strategies of Crime Prevention," Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Washington, D.C. December 10, 2009, 3, [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/event/4-PONENCIA--\\_VASQUEZ\\_-\\_GUATEMALA.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/event/4-PONENCIA--_VASQUEZ_-_GUATEMALA.pdf); USAID, "Legacies of Exclusion," 22; Way, *Agrotropolis*, 135-36.



39. See USAID, “Legacies of Exclusion.”

40. Several such cases are documented in *Way, Agrotropolis*; for a case study from Panajachel, Sololá, see 194-99, 207.

41. There are numerous such cases; these are cited from Junta de Seguridad Local, San Miguel Acatán, Huehuetenango, Acta No. 18-2006, 10 June 2006, and collected related documents and legal proceedings in “Junta Local de San Miguel Acatán, Incidentes 2006,” CEDFOG HA/363.1/J9/008463. This Akateko-Maya municipality exemplifies the complexity of local politics. After widely supporting the guerrillas during the war, its people and its deeply rooted Maya cargo systems came under army attack, driving thousands to flee. In the postwar period, there were violent battles over land and resources between the mayor and villagers as the area was being opened up to foreign mining corporations. Socio-economic change was also being fueled by a boom of babies born since 1986 and the migrant remittances that increasing numbers of them sent from the U.S. See, in chronological order of events covered: Octubre Revolucionario, Colectivo para Trabajo Étnico [OR/CTE] internal work material, “El poder local en San Miguel Acatán,” n.d. [late 1980s-early 1990s], CIRMA-AH-003, Caja 09, Serie 3, Doc. 110; U.N. General Assembly, 53rd Session, Agenda Item 44, “The Situation in Central America: Procedures for the Establishment of a Firm and Lasting Peace and Progress in Fashioning a Region of Peace, Freedom, Democracy and Development,” Annex, “Ninth Report on Human Rights of the United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala [MINUGUA],” 10 March 1999, [undocs.org/A/53/853](http://undocs.org/A/53/853), 6, para. 21; Santiago Bastos Amigo and Roddy Brett, eds., *El movimiento maya en la década después de la paz (1997-2007)* (Guatemala: F&G Editores, 2010), 321-22, 340-41; “Política Municipal a favor de la Niñez y Adolescencia,” (Municipalidad de San Miguel Acatán, 2004), CEDFOG H/361.25/P63/008264, 3, 10; Regina Bateson, “How Local Institutions Emerge from Civil War,” research paper, Oct. 2015, [http://cpd.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Bateson\\_UCBerkeley\\_How-Institutions-Emerge-from-Civil-War.pdf](http://cpd.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Bateson_UCBerkeley_How-Institutions-Emerge-from-Civil-War.pdf); Vladimir Palencia Arciniega, “Análisis jurídico de las instituciones del sector justicia en el Municipio de San Miguel Acatán, Departamento de Huehuetenango y sus efectos en la población,” Licenciatura thesis, (Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, Sept. 2010), [http://biblioteca.usac.edu.gt/tesis/04/04\\_8596.pdf](http://biblioteca.usac.edu.gt/tesis/04/04_8596.pdf); Tania Palencia Prado, *Huehuetenango: Análisis de coyuntura 2009-2010* (Huehuetenango, Guatemala: CEDFOG, July 2010), 58-64, 67.

42. Decentralization was a global neoliberal project. I have related the often poorly designed micro-regions and related political and extralegal territories in Guatemala to what Raymond Craib calls “fugitive landscapes” that despite all efforts escape the

gaze of the state; Raymond Craib, *Cartographic Mexico: A History of State Fixations and Fugitive Landscapes* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). Way, *Agrotropolis*, traces this history in depth; see 1, 154, and, on decentralization and the multilateral institutions involved in the process, 149-160 and *passim*.

43. On the misuse of COCODES, see Mariola Vicente Xiloj, “Tul ch’ao’ un pajte: Etnografía de la política local y regional en los tiempos del postconflicto guatemalteco,” in Camus et al., eds., *Dinosaurio reloaded*, 177-94.

44. The police were historically involved in counterinsurgency and human rights violations; see Kirsten Weld, *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014). Abuses continue; see United Nations Committee Against Torture, “Joint Shadow Report Submitted by Guatemalan Civil Society Organisations to the Committee Against Torture, 2014-2018,” <http://www.omct.org/monitoring-protection-mechanisms/reports-and-publications/guatemala/2018/11/d25115/>. A useful report on the state of the police is International Sector Security Advisory Team (ISSAT), Geneva Center for Security and Governance, “Guatemala SSR Background Note,” 28 Jan. 2018, <https://issat.dcaf.ch/Learn/Resource-Library2/Country-Profiles/Guatemala-SSR-Background-Note>.

45. The Kaibiles (akin to the Green Berets) helped train the Mexican Airborne Special Forces Group (Grupo Aeromóvil de Fuerzas Especiales, GAFES) that combatted the EZLN, and the Guatemalan guerrillas are believed to have trained and worked with the EZLN in Mexico. In the second half of the 1990s, a leader of Mexico’s Gulf Cartel recruited GAFES soldiers into narcotrafficking, forming the Zetas, which worked as the enforcement wing of the Gulf Cartel before breaking away and beginning independent operations some years later. The Zetas would help both to battle the Sinaloa cartel and to expand operations not only all around Mexico, but also into Guatemala, where they recruited Kaibiles and other members of the Guatemalan military. Along with GAFES soldiers, members of the Mexican Federal Police also joined the new criminal organization. See: InSight Crime, “Zetas,” 4 April 2012 (recently updated), <https://insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/zetas-profile/>; Julie López, “The Zeta’s Bad Omen: From Mexico to Guatemala,” *ReVista: Harvard Review of Latin America* (Winter 2012), <https://archive.revista.drclas.harvard.edu/book/zetas%E2%80%99-bad-omen>; “Los Zetas Brutality Revealed in Guatemala Trial,” *Diálogo* (U.S. Southern Command Digital Military Magazine), 27 February 2014, <https://dialogo-americas.com/articles/los-zetas-brutality-revealed-in-guatemala-trial/>.

46. “Los Zetas Brutality Revealed.”

47. The Cobán operative, Horst Walther Overdick Mejía (also known as “El Tigre”), was briefly detained at a “narcofiesta” in the Los Copones region of Ixcán in 2011 before his 2012 arrest that resulted in his extradition to the U.S., where he remained until April 2019. See “Capturan a Walther Overdick, operador de Los Zetas en el país,” *DeGuate*, 4 April 2012, <https://www.deguate.com/artman/publish/noticias-guatemala/capturan-a-walther-overdick-operador-de-los-zetas-en-el-pais.shtml>; InSight Crime, “Horst Walther Overdick, alias “El Tigre,” 13 May 2019, <https://www.insightcrime.org/guatemala-organized-crime-news/horst-walther-overdick-el-tigre/>; *Prensa Libre*, “Capturados en Ixcán 11 presuntos narcos,” 13 July 2011, [https://www.prensalibre.com/guatemala/capturados-ixcan-supuestos-narcos\\_0\\_516548368-html/](https://www.prensalibre.com/guatemala/capturados-ixcan-supuestos-narcos_0_516548368-html/).

48. *La Prensa*, 16 May 2011, <https://www.laprensa.hn/mundo/540701-97/zetas-asesinan-a-unos-28-campesinos-en-guatemala>. The Zetas have recently been disbanded in Guatemala and their contingents are reportedly currently regrouping under the command of the Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG, New Generation Jalisco Cartel). InSight Crime, “The Jalisco Cartel’s Quiet Expansion in Guatemala,” 18 May 2022, <https://insightcrime.org/news/the-jalisco-cartels-quiet-expansion-in-guatemala/>; “El peligroso cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación se expande con alianzas en Guatemala,” *República*, 5 May 2022, <https://republica.gt/seguridad-y-justicia/el-peligroso-cartel-jalisco-nueva-generacion-se-expande-con-alianzas-en-guatemala-202252011580>; “Presuntos miembros del CJNG amenazaron a Policía de Guatemala,” *Infobae*, 7 September 2021, <https://www.infobae.com/america/mexico/2021/09/07/presuntos-miembros-del-cjng-amenazaron-a-policia-de-guatemala/>.

49. InSight Crime is a reliable source on cartels. See “Guatemala Elites and Organized Crime” (Sept. 2016), <https://insightcrime.org/investigations/guatemala-elites-and-organized-crime-series/>.

50. InSight Crime, “Guatemala Elites and Organized Crime: The ‘Huistas’” (Sept. 2016), <https://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/guatemala-elites-and-organized-crime-the-huistas/>. See also the regularly updated InSight Crime “Guatemala Profile,” <https://insightcrime.org/guatemala-organized-crime-news/guatemala/#Criminal%20Groups>, which also covers what is known as the Illegal Corps and Clandestine Security Apparatus (Cuerpos Ilegales y Aparatos Clandestinos de Seguridad - CIACS), or criminal organizations within the military and intelligence wings of the state. On CICIG (*Comisión Internacional Contra la*

*Impunidad en Guatemala*, International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala), see Matías Ponce, *CICIG: Misión posible* (Guatemala: Editorial Sophos, 2021). See also Instituto Centroamericano de Estudios Fiscales, *La corrupción: Sus caminos e impacto a la sociedad y una agenda para enfrentarla en el Triángulo Norte Centroamericano* (Guatemala: ICEFI, 2018).

51. Way, *Agrotropolis*. Case studies of Tecpán, Chimaltenango are found in Edward F. Fischer and Peter Benson, *Broccoli and Desire: Global Connections and Maya Struggles in Postwar Guatemala* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); and Kedron Thomas, *Regulating Style: Intellectual Property Law and the Business of Fashion in Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

52. I take this now-popularized phrase from an analysis of the aftermath of 2005's Tropical Storm Stan published by an umbrella group of Maya organizations, the Movimiento Tzuk Kim Pop, which "arced back to the colonial period and glossed centuries of distorted capitalist development, culminating in a government working in favor of the private sector, a landscape dense with microfincas [unsustainably small and often rented agricultural plots], and a population increasingly turning to migration to make a living," resulting in "a perverse spiral of economic growth with *nuevas pobrezas* for communities and regions." Way, *Agrotropolis*, 165-66; *¿Por qué tanta destrucción? Las amenazas naturales y estructurales: Sistematización de la vulnerabilidad, la negligencia y la exclusión regional del altiplano occidental en la tormenta asociada Stan* (Guatemala: Editorial Ciencias Sociales, 2006).

53. I chart many such cases in *Agrotropolis*; for related testimony, see USAID, "Legacies of Exclusion," 10.

54. The slur "*cafeína*" (caffeine, for people denigrated as coffee-pickers) has recently popularized as well.

55. Way, *Agrotropolis* discusses this topic extensively. A sample of citations on *castas*, *mozos*, and *shumos* from Guatemala includes: Jorge Ramón González Ponciano, "*De la Patria del Criollo a la Patria del Shumo: Whiteness and the Criminalization of the Dark Plebeian in Modern Guatemala*," Ph.d. diss., (University of Texas at Austin, 2005), and "The *Shumo* Challenge: White Class Privilege and the Post-Race, Post-Genocide Alliances of Cosmopolitanism," in McAllister and Nelson, eds., *War by Other Means*, 307-329; Carolina Escobar Sartí, "Shumos en un país de castas," *Prensa Libre*, 27 Jan. 2000; Claudia Navas Dangel, "Shumos contra la pobreza," *La Hora*, 6 July 2012; Marcela Gereda, "Se llena de shumos," *El Periódico*, 23 Jan. 2017; Silvia

Tejeda, “No son castas, son empleados,” *El Periódico*, 23 Sept. 2016; and Eduardo Villatoro, “Acerca de licenciados, shumos y cachimbiros,” *La Hora*, 17 Dec. 2012.

56. Camus, *La colonia Primero de Julio*, traces racialized class- and caste-based divisions in Guatemala City back to the 1980s. See also: Camus et al., eds., *Dinosaurio reloaded*; María Gabriela Escobar Urrutia, “Enfrentamientos y violencias juveniles en la Ciudad de Guatemala,” Licenciatura thesis, (Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, July 2005); and Deborah Levenson, *Hacer la Juventud: Tres generaciones de una familia urbana* (Guatemala: AVANCSO, 2004).

57. Anti-*shumo* hate videos based in the capital city appeared on YouTube in 2012, including: “Los shumos de Guate,” ShumosGuate, 18 Feb. 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s0-HTnzDS2> [no longer online, available upon request]; “Los Shumos de Miraflores 2 Loquendo,” asimeexpresoantetodo, 25 Feb. 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brEDFcZZJH0>; and “Shumos de Miraflores parte 3,” Shaggyanon buu, 2 June 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBtT28cgb14>. A less verbally violent video redubbed the Brazilian singer Michel Teló’s hit song “Ai Se Eu Te Pego,” as “Ai, sos un shumó,” with new lyrics about seeing *shumitas lindas* but deciding not to flirt because “*nossa, nossa, no salgo con shumos*” (I don’t date shumos; the “*nossa*” is from the song’s chorus). “Ai sos un shumó (Eu si te pego) parodia (shumos),” Antonio Ruiz, 16 Feb. 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqFkcWmWbXY>. As a simple search of “shumo” in YouTube indicates, the social category, and prejudice against it, persist, and have spread around the nation. See, for example, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYk0n3FLuag>; and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDkiAkJPP78>, among many others.

58. Way, *Agrotropolis*, traces discourse about “*la calle*,” or “*la KY*,” in internet parlance, through a wide array of cultural production.

59. Deportees are particularly at risk of harm; see Refugees International, “Harmful Returns: The Compounded Vulnerabilities of Returned Guatemalans in the Time of Covid-19,” June 2020, <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/6/16/harmful-returns-the-compounded-vulnerabilities-of-returned-guatemalans-in-the-time-of-covid-19>.

60. “El demonio’ aterroriza en Alameda zona 18 y deja macabro mensaje,” *Guatevisión*, 1 December 2016, <https://www.guatevision.com/historico/restos-humanos-alameda-pandilleros-letrero>. Background on “red zones” in Zone 18 may be

found in Elsa Cabria y Ximena Villagrán, “Zona 18: El milagro en el paraíso,” *Nómada*, undated (circa 2017-2018), <https://nomada.gt/el-milagro-en-el-paraiso/>.

61. Alvaro Alay, “Mujer es brutalmente apuñalada y abandonan su cuerpo en la zona 18,” *PubliNews*, 19 January 2020, <https://www.publinews.gt/gt/noticias/2020/01/19/mujer-es-brutalmente-apunalada.html>.

62. Ministerio de Gobernación de Guatemala, Facebook post, 12 March 2020, “#NoticieroMinGob: Viceministro de Seguridad, Gendri Reyes supervisa puesto de control en la colonia Alameda en zona 18,” <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=847267195747692>. The violence continues, and at the time of this writing, the U.S. Department of State has Zone 14 under a Level 4 Travel Advisory, which prohibits travel to the area (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/guatemala-travel-advisory.html>, as accessed 20 April 2023). See also, for example, two articles by Óscar García in *Prensa Libre*: “Cuatro hombres resultan heridos de bala en la zona 18,” *Prensa Libre*, 9 Nov. 2022, <https://www.prensalibre.com/ahora/ciudades/guatemala-ciudades/cuatro-hombres-resultan-heridos-de-bala-en-la-zona-18/>, and “Hallazgo de cadáveres en la zona 18: ligan a proceso y envían a prisión preventiva a mujer que escondía granada,” 16 Jan. 2023, <https://www.prensalibre.com/guatemala/justicia/hallazgo-de-cadaveres-en-la-zona-18-ligan-a-proceso-y-envian-a-prision-preventiva-a-mujer-que-escondia-granada-breaking/>.