

The Chaos Factor: Geography, Systematicity and Space in Ghetto Guatemala, 1944 – 1962

Guatemala City is a dangerous place. An overflowing tangle of shantytowns and gated communities, malls and Mayan markets, the metropolis is the epicenter of a nation in shock. Recovering from 36 years of brutal civil war, reeling from neoliberalism and seeking to integrate a poor and largely illiterate population that speaks 22 different languages, the Guatemalan nation-state is a laboratory of late capitalism's woes. Nowhere are those woes more manifest than in the city, afflicted as it is by gang and random violence, corruption, homelessness, lack of infrastructure and shocking levels of human misery.

Danger, common wisdom has it, comes from *chaos*. Chaos flows out of the countryside, out of the underdeveloped landscape and culture, and concentrates in the city's shack-speckled ravines and sidewalks crammed with vendors and beggars and muggers and whores. Chaos sums up quotidian Guatemala, running the gamut from its rural sorcerers to its corrupt politicians. Blared in headlines and hissed in cultural critiques, chaos is a word that above all others seems to Guatemalans and outsiders alike to capture the status quo. But it is a racist word. *Chaos* conceals a naturalized discourse that both rises from and serves the interest of capitalist development.

Beyond the exuberance that stereotypes Latin culture and distinguishes it from its more reserved Anglo counterpart, Guatemala's chaos comes from the lack of the transparency¹ seen in "first world" societies. No one can accurately describe exactly *how* Guatemala functions on a day-to-day level. Very little there looks like plan-rational capitalism. The unfamiliarity has an ethnic overlay. Travelers from rich countries will have to go far to find a more exotic "other;" being in a K'iche' town above the clouds is, for the gringo, like stepping onto another planet. Guatemala harkens to a precolumbian past. In many ways completely "undeveloped," its agrarian landscape and weaving-wearing women urge us to see it as a space apart from modernity, separate from globalization and all the ineffable baggage that implies.² But nothing could be further from the truth. Humankind has modernized Guatemala, and that modernization shows the projects of global corporate capitalism, the actions of national leaders, and the

¹ The idea of transparency comes from James C. Scott, *Seeing Like A State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998). Scott describes attempts to replace opaque, "local" systems of knowledge, organization and resource management with state-imposed, and controllable, systems that make sense in centers of power.

² For readers unfamiliar with this Central American nation, a few basics: a mountainous and volcanic country the size of Tennessee, Guatemala's total population has been more or less the same as greater New York City's throughout the mid- to late-20th century. Today a fragile democracy, it remains a personal place, not huge, but extraordinarily complex. The Mayan population, roughly half the total, is vibrant and growing, despite the toll of a civil war from the 1960s to the 1990s during which the right-wing military engaged in genocidal violence against civilians, especially in the remote highland villages in the 1980s.

ingenuity of the "others" and their opaque systems. "The chaos factor" is a shorthand for the common ground between these spheres—the blank space in the dialectic between systematizing, twentieth-century plan-rational development and system-making at the grassroots.

Modern "systematicity" (more on this word later) came to Guatemala in 1944 with a middle-class, democratic revolution that challenged the traditional agrarian power structure. Ten years later, the U.S. fomented an invasion and coup that installed a series of military dictators and accelerated the process of structuring Guatemala—with highways, hydroelectric dams and other infrastructure—to maximize the extraction potential of the corporate capital enterprises that were its clientele. This fact was not lost on Guatemalans; in the wake of the Cuban Revolution, they rose in arms, their guerrilla movements confronting imperialism and the national right wing alike.

After 1962, "development" from on high was linked with counterinsurgency. Before 1944, it had been the purview of great landholders. The period between offers a window on the chaos and the manifold "ghettoization" (of the region, the nation, the neighborhood, the brown-skinned body) so inherent to modern Guatemala. Many of Guatemala's present-day problems are rooted in its racist colonial past, but their modernity dates to the period from 1944 to 1962. During this time, the political system, the nation's infrastructure, the dominant economic regime, and even the shantytowns, markets and migration patterns that link the capital to the countryside took shape. That shape was the product of a multiplicity of social actors. Their actions show us that the oft-decried "chaos" was no accident. It was inherent to the making of modern space.

Saving El Gallito: The Making of the Modern Guatemalan Ghetto

Álvaro: ¡Hemos aquí convertidos en camaradas! ¡Todos somos iguales, con bigote o sin él, gordos o flacos, ricos o pobres, hombres o mujeres! ¿Qué diferencia existe entre un prominente abogado y un piloto de carreta de bueyes?

Fernando: ¡La carreta!

Alvaro: Here we've all become comrades! We're all equals, moustachioed or not, fat or thin, rich or poor, man or woman. What's the difference between a prominent lawyer and an ox-cart driver?

Fernando: The cart!

--"*¡Camaradas!*," *Campanillas: Revista Humorística (Oct. 1946)*, 3.

In September of 1946, residents of Guatemala City's Barrio El Gallito read in the newspaper about a plan to relocate them to the empty fields of the *finca* (plantation or farm) Bethania, raze their homes, rebuild the neighborhood, and return them years later as renters in modern apartment complexes. Furious, nearly 70 of them filed an *expediente* (legal brief) with the Ministry of Public Works to put an end to the scheme. They boasted that their hand-built homes surpassed those of the city center in standards of hygiene. Citing constitutional articles

protecting workers, the residents noted the cynical timing of the plan—put through as congress was still debating a labor code—and branded its author “anti-revolutionary.”³

For the residents, El Gallito space and proprietorship were intimately bound up with workers’ rights. *They* were the laboring class; they had won the 1944 Revolution; they had settled the neighborhood explicitly created for workers nearly two decades earlier. For engineer Enrique Prera, Director of Water and Sewers, former City Urbanization chief, and the plan’s author, El Gallito represented little more than failure. And if the El Gallito dwellers saw the Revolution as a time for them to take control, Prera saw it very differently. For him, the Revolution was a time to make the world anew and repair the devastated landscape. Far from empowering El Gallito’s poor, he would remodel them through a remarkable project of high-modernist construction and social engineering.

Prera began his proposal with an analysis of “theory of urbanism.” Residents reflect their barrios, he explained. Clean, modern citizens live in neighborhoods of which the same could be said. To sanitize filth-holes like El Gallito, he claimed, “is to make *patria*; to convert an enormous mass of humanity destined for vice and crime into citizens.” Thus, the mid-level municipal employee maintained, “the urbanist becomes a moralist.”⁴

To implement his moral vision, Prera advocated a cellular housing system in use in Britain and Russia. Three thousand modular dwellings would be accompanied by libraries, schools, play and sports facilities, dining and dance halls, and even an open-air theater. In planning his community, Prera reproduced the urban high modernism of Le Corbusier and the more quotidian mid-century currents of thought in urban planning that would give rise to both “the projects” and Levittown in the U.S., but he bowed to the Guatemalan by making the Catholic Church the centerpiece of his circular design. The result: the *citizen*, in a country where since October 20, 1944, the masses “destined for crime and vice” had been using “*cudadano*” as the preferred address, assuming, perhaps naively, that they were citizens already, and citizens with honor at that.⁵

Honor was precisely Prera’s point of attack. El Gallito was about as far from Prera’s sterile modernism as the human mind can imagine, and the engineer set out with a camera to prove that point. People were building huts with plywood and scrap metal. Pigs and dogs ran

³ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.11, No. Ord. 47082 (MCOP: Lot. Gallito y Palmita, 1943-46), 28 Sept. 1946, Expediente [Exp.] (Ing. Juan Prera, Reurbanización de El Gallito), vecinos, petition, 12 Sept. 1946. Expedientes are bound packets, often featuring numerous documents related to a single issue. See appendix for other abbreviations.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Enrique Prera H., “Proyecto de reurbanización del barrio El Gallito,” June 1946.

⁵ *Ibid.*

wild in the mud footpaths. Drunks snored in the gutter near illegal cantinas. The engineer caught one small child defecating in a vacant lot, surrounded by watching vultures. What troubled the engineer most about this scene was the shamelessness of the boy, who batted not an eyelid when Prera caught him in his lens. “*¡Pobre Guatemala!*”⁶

Prera’s boss, engineer León Yela, the Subdirector of Public Works, made the moral subtext more specific when he passed the plan along to the Director. El Gallito, he opined, was a place where people lived “in chaotic disorder and painful promiscuity.” Thus, he said, it would mean nothing to change the physical structure of the barrio if the population continued to be “uncultured, indolent, dirty and slovenly.” His verdict: a profound moral change was needed. Prera’s plan, combined with government extirpation of vice in general and an anti-alcohol campaign in specific, could be adequate. However, he noted wistfully, in this era “when we speak of liberty and democracy,” one couldn’t just displace the inhabitants to finca Bethania “as if to a concentration camp.” The change would have to be gradual, and homeowners would have to be paid market price for their expropriated dwellings.⁷

Market price speaks to the heart of León’s argument. The government’s original sin, he claimed, was to have given away the El Gallito lots for free after the neighborhood’s legal formation in 1928-29. Instead of inculcating a work ethic, the state had promoted beggary. Instead of solving the problem of homelessness that dated all the way back to the city-wrecking earthquakes of late 1917 and early 1918—a problem that prompted the government to buy finca El Gallito a decade later—the state had compounded chaos by implying that it had the power to provide for the lazy who refused to provide for themselves.⁸

In fact, like other Guatemala City “worker neighborhoods” such as La Recolectión and La Palmita, El Gallito had been born in a state of chaos. The state formed these neighborhoods both as an emergency measure to relocate homeless families who had been sheltered in state *campamentos* for years and as an explicit response to labor organizing in Guatemala City in the 1920s. The original plan had been to sell the lots on the newly purchased fincas to inhabitants for low monthly payments, but after a trial period, the Lázaro Chacón government backtracked and began granting properties to the proletariat and disadvantaged groups such as single mothers and widows, for free, by lottery. The Ministry of Development (later renamed Public Works) administered the neighborhoods, and in a confidential memo in 1942, its director admitted that from the beginning, poor judgment, confusing regulations and outright favoritism and corruption

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, León Yela to Director General of Public Works de Dios Aguilar, 17 Sept. 1946.

⁸ *Ibid.*

on the government's part had caused a "nightmare" of chaos and "a thousand bothers."⁹

The rules, not the residents, caused the thousand bothers. The government awarded the lots to the poorest of the poor, but provided neither aid nor services such as plumbing, sewers, electricity or garbage collection. Regulations required inhabitants to build a solid dwelling (not a *barraca*, or hut, though this was allowed as a temporary measure) within five years, although mortgages and loans were out of their reach. For ten years, residents could not rent, sell, subdivide or otherwise transfer or make money from their property, which in the eyes of the law, wasn't even really *theirs*, since the government failed to register it officially.¹⁰ In short, penniless people received naked hunks of dirt and were expected, collectively, to build a city neighborhood.

Today, El Gallito is in the very heart of Guatemala City. It forms a part of zone 3, a narrow, north-south strip made up of densely populated working and lower-class neighborhoods, bounded on the west and north by the ravine of the La Barranca River, on the east by zone 1 (the historic center), and by the also poor Zone 8. At its southernmost point is the Trébol, the city's major highway cloverleaf. Zone 3 is also home to the general cemetery and the municipal dump, one of the most notorious sites of poverty and misery in the western hemisphere. But in 1930, when lot-populating began, present-day zone 3 was only dotted with settlement and El Gallito was an infrastructure-free farm, a remote rural property awaiting human transformation. Winners of the land lottery wandered onto this empty canvas with their families and their belongings and tried to figure out what to do. Lots, if marked at all, were poorly marked, and numerous families quickly laid claim to the same spaces; residents had to petition the Ministry just to appoint an overseer.¹¹ Once the land was divided up—and it was divided so haphazardly that decades of confusing and conflicting claims would follow—families had to muster the resources to erect housing. They found it a daunting task. In 1931, a group of over 20 of them requested access to mortgages. They even offered to sign legal documents forcing them to invest all the mortgage money in construction. The government turned them down.¹²

Faced with mismanagement and necessity, the poor created a complex mix of strategies related to acquiring, keeping and developing land in neighborhoods like El Gallito. The

⁹ AGCA B/22256 (Fomento: Lot. El Gallito 1942), Memo, "Datos relacionados con la compra-venta de la Finca 'El Gallito,'" Amanda Morán Mérida, *Condiciones de vida y tenencia de la tierra en asentamientos precarios de la ciudad de Guatemala*, 2nd ed. (Guatemala: Ediciones CEUR-USAC, 2000), 18, 137-39; *Más de cien años del movimiento obrero urbano en Guatemala*, Tomo I, *Artisanos y obreros en el período liberal (1877-1944)* (Guatemala: ASIES, 1991), 227-46.

¹⁰ All the relevant legislation can be found in the appendix of Morán Mérida, *Condiciones de vida*. See government *Acuerdos* of 11 Feb. 1928, 4 June 1928 and 14 June 1928, 135-41.

¹¹ AGCA B/22237 (Fomento: Lotificación El Gallito), 30 Sept. 1930, Exp. (Moradores de El Gallito).

¹² *Ibid.*, Feb. 1931, Exp. (Vecinos del barrio El Gallito).

neighborhood thus serves as a microcosm inside of which we begin to see "the chaos factor" that characterizes contemporary Guatemalan development. We see mistrust, litigiousness and competition; popular notions of justice; deliberate opacity and double-dealing (keeping the state confused, in common language); and the forging of a geography of small enterprises that like an underground constellation of tiny points of production sustains human life, however miserably. None of these strategies were either born in or caused by neighborhoods like El Gallito. Instead, El Gallito serves as a window—politically, socially, economically—on the making of modern culture in this particular corner of what would later be known as the third world.

Petitions for urban lots, stretching all the way from the 1930s to the 1960s, show rhetorical and political strategies. After the initial lotteries, properties were awarded by petition, and petitioners soon overwhelmed the government's capacity to deal with them. A poor person's first choice was where to send the petition. Levels of authority overlapped within the bureaucracy, both a source of confusion and of opportunity to manipulate the system. Petitions sent as a personal appeal to the president sometimes proved more effective than those directed to Public Works; usually, the president's secretary forwarded them without comment to Public Works, but on occasion, an executive directive would be attached. The narrative forms of these appeals for aid from on high bespeak an entire colonial and early national history of client-patron relations. Nearly all petitions for state-owned lots from the 1930s to the 1960s begin with stories of hardship. "I am the father of six small children, and since my wife is ill, I have to feed and house them," wrote Manuel Alvarez, an unemployed, 37-year-old carpenter from Quetzaltenango living in the city's post-earthquake campamento in the Campo del Marte. "I do this so deficiently that I fear all of us will soon have to be hospitalized for malnutrition, because in truth there is no more than the little food we get from public charity to quiet the hunger, the thirst and the misery that flog us today without compassion." Alvarez also mobilized the two other most common lot petitioning tropes: political affiliation ("*we have always served in the ranks of the Partido Progresista*") and the denunciation of unutilized lots. Indeed, the Ministry investigated the 14 El Gallito lots that Alvarez had named by number, and found that though undeveloped, they were already owned. Still loathe to expropriate, the bureaucracy turned down Alvarez's request.¹³

Alvarez's request, one that epitomizes thousands from the 1930s to the 1960s, mobilized a popular discourse of property rights based on use rather than ownership. While the government's own rules required that lot recipients develop their land, the courts and cabinet ministers were nonetheless reluctant to expropriate private property. As early as 1932, with the

¹³ *Ibid.*, Oct. 1931, Exp. (Manuel Alvarez).

government already swamped in lot requests, the official in charge of the neighborhood commented that enforcing building codes would free up land.¹⁴ In practice, this rarely happened.¹⁵ Instead, lots, as they became available, were granted through opaque mechanisms: political favoritism, pure dumb luck, and through vicious denunciations and legal maneuvering. Renters turned against the landlords who had illegally given them a home, lovers denounced their partners, and neighbors spied on one another, sending the government reports of money-making enterprises and demanding that justice be done. Most nefarious were political denunciations. In the mid-1930s, the government began requiring police investigations of petitioners, a requirement that for the next decade served as a political background check. But the state got aid in its political oppression from the needy poor. During the Ubico dictatorship of 1931 to 1944, and again after the anticommunist invasion and coup of 1954, many neighbors denounced lot-owners' subversive political activities. Scarcity, poverty and state policy pitted people against each other.

If feuds, surveillance and mistrust were manifestations of Guatemala's growth pattern, so too were popular discourses of justice. As the state institutionalized random patronage, people came to demand that patronage within the context of the bureaucracy. Thus, in 1957, Délia Angélica Aquino Ralda, a washerwoman and single mother of three, wrote to the Minister of Public Works, "Since I know that [state housing] is destined for poor people, for people with children ... I come IN DEMAND of shelter and protection before you, Señor Minister, to DENOUNCE TO YOU a house that for a whole year has been boarded up and abandoned" (her capital letters). Aquino narrated the story of how her children's father had abandoned her, detailed the various properties of the absentee owner of the house she was denouncing, and attached a notarized 'certificate of poverty' along with medical records for herself and her children. Aquino's targeted property was not in El Gallito but in the finca Bethania, where the state had built rental units, but her demand and sense of justice sums up an entire literature of expedientes. The government responded to such claims. In Aquino's case, they investigated, but once again upheld original occupancy rights and denied her petition.¹⁶

If wresting aid, infrastructure or land from the government occasioned a 'war of all against all,' the use of government-granted land was an area of constant contestation, subterfuge and chaos. From the very beginning of El Gallito's history, improvisational building

¹⁴ AGCA B/22238 (Fomento: Lot. El Gallito), June 1932, Exp. (Susana Flores R.).

¹⁵ In 1941, the government began more systematic enforcement of building codes in El Gallito, but the measure does not appear to have resulted in a great deal of lots becoming available. *Acuerdo* of 9 April 1941, in Morán Mérida, *Condiciones de vida*, 141.

¹⁶ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.11/13 (MCOP: Camp. y Col., 1957), Dec. 1957, Exp. (Delia Angélica Aquino Ralda).

(anticipating the massive land invasions later to come) proved a successful strategy, but only for a handful of people. Soledad Girón de Cardona, for example, won the title to lot 459-B ("B" because it previously hadn't existed on any plan) by filling in a precipitous gully with earth and building a hut on it.¹⁷ Such stories encouraged similar actions, but most offenders were evicted, at least until the mid-1940s. More successful than improvisational building was finding and claiming a sliver of undistributed land, or "*cuchilla*." Poor people became skilled at reading the landscape and untangling the intricacies of borders and ownership, and would petition Public Works with hand-drawn maps. It became customary during the 1930s to create tiny "B" lots in response to their claims, even though it meant that government engineers had to do spot inspections and surveys to make sure access paths and future development plans for public facilities were taken into account.

Many times, improvisational builders and *cuchilla* petitioners chose sites destined for future streets, blocking access to interior lots. Another case, also from the early '30s, illustrates this sort of chaos in El Gallito space-creation. A man named Antonio Méndez Paz extended his lot, blocking access to three things: other people's properties, an area of the ravine used for a dump, and a white sand deposit. Trash and dead animals began piling up in residential areas. Besides finding this situation objectionable, neighbors were also furious about the loss of a local raw material. Over 100 of them, "from little children to little old people," had been excavating the sand and selling it for a few *centavos* a sack. How dare this man inhibit the working class's right "to take the white sand that gives them life to keep from dying of hunger?" they wrote. "It is justice that we ask." In the end, Méndez was forced to redraw his lot, but the neighbors didn't get their justice, as Public Works immediately took steps to block their access to the sand pit.¹⁸ Despite state efforts, over a decade later—as Prera was planning to level the neighborhood, erect his monument to Le Corbusier, and turn low-lives into citizens—Public Works was in the midst of another campaign to stop sand and stone excavation in El Gallito and La Palmita.¹⁹ Inner-city dwellers were literally mining the peripheries of their neighborhoods.

Besides showing the use of raw materials and underscoring the porous boundary between public and private space in the barrio, the case of Méndez Paz highlights another "chaotic" element: naming conventions. The neighbors investigated Méndez Paz, and alleged that he had falsified his name to double-cross the state. An original lot recipient, he had sold his lot

¹⁷ AGCA B/22237 (Fomento: Lot. El Gallito), Sept. 1931, Exp. (Soledad Girón de C.).

¹⁸ AGCA B/22238 (Fomento: Lot. El Gallito), June 1932, Exp. (Moradores El Gallito).

¹⁹ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.11, No. Ord. 47082 (MCOP: Lot. Gallito y Palmita, 1943-46), 2 Feb. 1946, DGOP informe. According to Public Works, the excavations were causing landslides and creating mosquito breeding-grounds.

(illegally), and then approached lawyers named "Paz y Paz" to win the land back, duping his buyer. Méndez, neighbors claimed, had never been a "Paz;" he made up the last name to trick the lawyers into thinking he was a distant relative. Name confusion was so common, and record-keeping so poor, that Méndez Whoever(?) managed to slip between identities undetected.²⁰ Throughout the century, as today, popular naming conventions confounded authorities and provided opportunities both for evading the state's gaze and for running scams like that of Méndez "Paz." Partly, name confusion can be attributed to a largely illiterate or only functionally literate society; Mayan last names in particular tend to be spelled differently every time they appear in an expediente. It is also a custom amongst many Maya, however, to use a different first name from that appearing on their identification. Thus Public Works officials trying to investigate Joaquín Chigüil Tecún (Chichil Tecum, Chigal Tegun, etc.), a K'iche' Maya from Totoncapán involved in a land dispute in the city, hunted for him for months, stymied because everyone knew him as "Francisco." When they finally found him, they evicted him.²¹

In *Weapons of the Weak*, James Scott discusses strategies by which the oppressed class "flies below the radar" and resists authority passively.²² Undecipherable naming conventions, even when they reflect culture and custom instead of a consciously designed plan to fool or defraud someone, clearly fit into this category. But in neighborhoods like El Gallito, residents deliberately and continuously tested the limits of passive resistance with far more overt strategies. They weren't supposed to subdivide, sell or rent, but they did so frequently. While most used their homes for legal businesses, such as washing laundry or making tortillas, some ran brothels and illegal cantinas. A few created whole, prohibited business networks, like Pedro Chinchilla, an absentee owner who in the early 1940s rented his lot to Victoriano Toc Marroquín. Toc, instead of living in the property's humble hut, sublet it to a third individual who used it as a horse stable. This venture proved so successful that Toc cut up the remainder of the lot to use for pigsties, starting a thriving livestock business (one that the state put an end to) in relatively urban

²⁰ AGCA B/22238 (Fomento: Lot. El Gallito), June 1932, Exp. (Moradores El Gallito).

²¹ AGCA B/22249 (Fomento: Lot. El Gallito [and La Palmita] 1937), Feb. 1937, Exp. (Joaquín Chigüil Tecún). The comment on first names is based on personal experience. Nearly all my Mayan friends who are not middle- or upper-class have a "cédula" (i.d.) name and a street name. While the observation is far from anthropologically precise, readings of expedientes show constant confusion in this arena.

²² James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). See also Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999 [1983]); and Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

El Gallito.²³ In general, the government was hostile to city livestock and agriculture, and, afraid that poor residents would sow all the ravines, parks and streets with corn, Public Works had worked hard during the mid-1930s to extirpate maize cultivation in its city neighborhoods.²⁴ Their success was only partial. Even today, especially in the metropolis's outer zones, *milpa* cornfields can be seen terraced into the near-vertical slopes of Guatemala City's ravines.

Thus, in 1946, the engineer Enrique Prera had a point. El Gallito was indeed chaotic, as were neighborhoods like it throughout the rapidly growing city. What he missed was the order within the chaos, and the root problems that had given rise to it. What he missed was the fact that the social and physical geography of the neighborhood reflected ingenuity and enterprise.

Prera's plan never stood a chance, even if the residents hadn't opposed it. When the Director General of Public Works forwarded it to the Minister, he attached a memo calling it utterly impractical. It would be wonderful to turn El Gallito into a middle-class neighborhood, he argued, but Prera's utopian scheme overlooks the fact that there are honorable people with good homes there who have no desire to go live in the mud while the neighborhood is rebuilt. Constructing adequate lodging for them—some 19,000 people in 3,000 families—in finca Bethania would be too costly. Why, he asked the minister, are we making grand plans while at the same time overlooking the main problem? Why are we tolerating illegal land occupations?²⁵

The great Guatemala City ravine invasions of 1945 to 1948 mark the birth of the modern Guatemalan ghetto. Propelled by a changing physical landscape, a tolerant political economy and a heightened sense of possibility in the years following the 1944 Revolution and the end of World War II, migrants began to set their sights on the capital at a markedly increased rate. The city itself, meanwhile, was absorbing neighboring municipalities, transforming local networks of production as city-supplying farmland became part of the urban fabric, itself needing to be supplied from further abroad. Within the city's historic heart, citizens emboldened by new civil liberties and inspired by greater employment opportunities in construction, industry and services began to migrate more intensively within the metropolis. In short, an always mobile populace became more so, and a city already lacking in infrastructure and housing became, slowly, the metropolis marked by "*asentamientos precarios*" (precarious settlements, or shantytowns) that we know today. Chaos, as it were, was cemented on the urban landscape.

²³ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.11, No. Ord. 47082 (MCOP: Lot. Gallito y Palmita, 1943-46), Feb. 1943, Exp. (re Julio Díaz).

²⁴ AGCA B/22240 (Fomento: Lot. El Gallito 1934), March 1934, Exp. (Rafael Hernández).

²⁵ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.11, No. Ord. 47082 (MCOP: Lot. Gallito y Palmita, 1943-46), 28 Sept. 1946, Exp. (Ing. Juan Prera, Reurbanización de El Gallito), de Dios Aguilar to Ministro de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas, 28 Sept. 1946.

Urban invasions of state-owned land began in La Palmita and quickly spread to El Gallito. Both neighborhoods backed onto the vertiginous ravines that crisscross the Ermita Valley in which the capital is located. The landslide-prone ravines had never been inhabited. They couldn't be, or so city authorities thought.

Early in April, 1945, just weeks after the inauguration of Juan José Arévalo, the first revolutionary president, Eduarda de Monzón and Isabel Hernández launched a two-couple land invasion in the La Palmita ravine. Poor, illiterate migrants from Santa Rosa, Eduarda and Isabel, the invasion's masterminds, were among the first to take advantage of the overlay of a new "people's" government upon a sloppy land tenancy system and a convoluted bureaucracy. In so doing, they won not only won a home of their own, but also the distinction of being the first among thousands to demand economic justice from the new regime by simply taking it.

Humberto Zelaya discovered the invaders on the morning of April 5. For years the government's point man for neighborhood affairs—technically, the *Encargado de Campamentos y Colonias* of the Development Ministry's *Dirección General de Obras Públicas*—straight-laced Zelaya was making his weekly rounds when he saw the couples driving stakes. Though he would write his report in the names of the men—Eduarda's husband Antonio and Isabel's partner Pedro Monzón—it was the women who responded to his questioning. Countering his claim that their building was unauthorized and his mandate that they had a week to desist, they unfolded a two-part strategy. First, they appealed to his sense of fairness: why should the poor go without when the land is standing empty? Second, they referred to technicalities. The land, Isabel maintained, was adjacent to lot 1069; a friend of hers had informed her that 1069's owner had illegally bought four lots from the *Encargado* for 20 quetzales apiece (Isabel must not have known she was addressing the *Encargado* when she made this claim). Thus apprised of his own misdeeds, Zelaya demanded the informant's name. Together, he and the women trooped through the neighborhood to find the rumor monger. After several stops, the group finally settled on naming María Leverón de Argueta as the source of information.²⁶

Events unfolded rapidly. The next day, both the couples and María Leverón appeared to give testimony at the DGOP (*Dirección General de Obras Públicas*) office and within a week, they did the same before a judge, the *Juzgado 4o de Paz*. When it turned out that 1069, a corner lot, was triangular and therefore larger than the norm, and that María Leverón had nothing to do with the matter, Isabel and Eduarda changed the story. They had never named María, they claimed, but María's sister Edelmira, who under questioning conveniently turned out to be "in a

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 14 April 1945, Guardia Civil.

state of dementia." Isabel and Eduarda admitted to building illegally, but argued that necessity obliged them to proceed this way, harming no other person, and depriving no one either, since none other would dare to make a home in such a dangerous place.²⁷

Others, however, did dare. By the time that the women were testifying, word had spread that land was for the taking in the La Palmita ravine. Zelaya served several other groups with cease and desist orders; shacks were cropping up, including the ones that Isabel and Eduarda's mates continued to build. Responding to Zelaya's urgent comunicades, the Director of Public Works toured La Palmita on the 12th of April. He came too early. The following night saw the first full scale invasion, with several dozen families staking claims at two o'clock in the morning. At sunrise, the *Guardia Civil* (an oppressive force throughout the '30s but now tethered to the Revolution) arrested a handful, all of whom, before their quick release, swore that Humberto Zelaya himself had sold them the land. The case wound through the courts and ministries in the month ahead. Zelaya, an honest man, denied ever having been a "promoter of public disorder" as various judges and the *Intendente Municipal* ordered evictions that the squatters ignored. By mid-May, there were over 600 unauthorized residents in the La Palmita ravine. Warning his boss, the Minister, of insoluble problems ahead if nothing were done, Zelaya spoke to the government's uncomfortable position as protector of the *pueblo* and enforcer of the law. "I figure it is now time for people to understand that the State is obliged to protect and provide for those who respect its laws," he wrote, "but we never have to tolerate abuses and disorder like that ... in La Palmita."²⁸

Zelaya was singing to the wind. The La Palmita invasion was never brought under control. Invaders tested authority's willingness to evict them by force of arms and found authority unwilling; invasions in El Gallito followed. A year and a half later, exactly as Prera's reurbanization plan was going public, Zelaya would declare the invaders in El Gallito to be in open rebellion. "If people criticize the urbanization of El Gallito today," he noted dryly, "imagine what they will say when the layout of the streets disappears and all public services become impossible."²⁹ Zelaya had first reported invasions in El Gallito in June of 1946, not just in ravines but also in undeveloped lots. The minister, hardened by the failure to stop La Palmita invaders, had sent out the *Guardia Civil*, and for two to three months, land seizures quelled.³⁰ They began again with new force at the end of August, in El Gallito and La Palmita alike. Invaders ignored Zelaya, court-ordered eviction notices, and the *Guardia Civil*, prompting the

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23 Oct. 1946, *Guardia Civil*.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, May-June 1946, *DGOP*; *passim*.

latter to petition the government for permission to demolish illegal dwellings—permission that was promptly denied.³¹ The same new occupants who had burst out laughing and mocked Zelaya in September of 1946 were still there, settled in huts, a year later.³²

Readings of 33 years worth of El Gallito and La Palmita petitions and transactions, as well as of the police and social worker reports that were often attached, show conclusively that the vast majority of inhabitants, legal and illegal alike, were extremely poor. However, the land invasions, like the land lotteries before, presented opportunities for scams. While it was grossly exaggerated, there was a measure of truth in subdirector León Yela's statement that there were some squatters who owned homes in other locations and were building illegal huts to start a rental or other "productive business," and some who were claiming "that since they have four or five children they need four or five huts, even though those children are still nursing."³³

By the middle of 1948, invaders in La Palmita were in a state of virtual warfare with the Guardia Civil, and two sub-inspectors set out to prove that the invaders were really speculators. They unearthed a number of infractions on the part of about a half dozen squatters. Rosario Méndez already had a home in La Palmita; so too did Elena Fernández, whose husband was a well-paid railroad worker; Sofía Romero just sold her El Gallito house to come here to speculate, and so on.³⁴ More interesting than the officers' revelations, however, is the fact that they appear to have been tipped off by another combative invader, Cayetano Villalta García. What emerges is a tangled tale that, while short on certainties, illustrates the chaotic politics of the ravines.

Villalta García's dealings with the government dated back to 1946, when he, a relative named Flavio, and a few dozen other people had begun building huts on the banks of an open sewer in the La Palmita ravine. The Guardia ordered them to leave, and they filed an expediente requesting property rights. It was denied. Then Villalta unleashed a torrent of paperwork on the government that would not subside for two years. In 1946 alone, he and the other settlers filed at least three allegations that the Guardia Civil was threatening them with violence. This proved an effective delay tactic, since the government investigated in every case. By the end of the year, the building had become "systematic," according to Public Works officials, who noted the degree of informal organization in the ravine with alarm. The colony had also grown. "There are now 400

³¹ *Ibid.*, 23 Oct. 1946, Guardia Civil.

³² *Ibid.*, 23 Oct. 1946, Guardia Civil, and *passim*; AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.13, 121.11, No. Ord. 47085, 47083 (MCOP: Colonias, 1947/50), 4 Sept. 1947, MCOP/DGOP re El Gallito Evictions.

³³ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.11, No. Ord. 47082 (MCOP: Lot. Gallito y Palmita, 1943-46), 23 Oct. 1946, Guardia Civil.

³⁴ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.13, 121.11, No. Ord. 47085, 47083 (MCOP: Colonias, 1947/50), 14 April 1948 (Gobernación re La Palmita), 30 March 1948, Guardia Civil informe.

families," an official wrote in December of 1946. "This is an incubator of disease."³⁵

The incubator continued to swell throughout 1947, despite several rounds of official eviction notices that the occupiers ignored, always filing counterclaims.³⁶ In this year, however, political organizers arrived to seek support amongst the growing and complicated network of alliances in the ravine. The two most important groups on hand were the government's PAR (*Partido Acción Revolucionaria*) and the smaller FPL (*Frente Popular Libertador*), both revolutionary labor parties. While the PAR served briefly as an umbrella labor organization, it for the most part competed bitterly with the FPL and others, weakening the Revolution's working class base.³⁷ Villalta García worked with the PAR and FPL, apparently playing them against each other and both against the government. By early 1948, in response to yet another attempted eviction, he warned President Arévalo that, "we have our branch of the PAR here, and as you know, the PAR has many adversaries."³⁸ At exactly the same time as Villalta was issuing this threat, the Guardia Civil was reporting that squatters, Villalta among them, had chased them away with machetes when they tried to serve eviction notices, screaming that they were "supported by the FPL, already having lots of meetings, and that nobody could force them to leave."³⁹

What happened next remains unclear. A good guess is that eviction appeared inevitable, and that Villalta García approached the local Guardia officers, who by this time he must have known quite well, and offered them damning information on a few of the other squatters. Perhaps he thought that some sacrificial lambs would satisfy the government's need to impose order. Perhaps he had vendettas against the people he named. Perhaps he wasn't the informant at all, but knew who was. Or, perhaps he was aware that at this very time, the Guardia officers, more than fed up, were compiling a personal case file on him, detailing the truly incredible amount of legal proceedings and correspondence to which he had treated the government over the past two years. All we know for sure is that Villalta's personal account of his neighbors' misdeeds appeared in President Arévalo's office, on official stamped paper, three days before the Guardia

³⁵ *Ibid.*, June 1948, Exp. (Cayetano Villalta García y comps.). There are (at least) three extensive packets of related expedientes and correspondence in the archive, all out of chronological order.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 16 May 1947, Exp. (Flavio Villalta C. et al.).

³⁷ *Más de cien años del movimiento obrero urbano*, Tomo II, *El protagonismo sindical en la construcción de la democracia (1944-1954)* (Guatemala: ASIES, 1992), 137, 174.

³⁸ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.13, 121.11, No. Ord. 47085, 47083 (MCOP: Colonias, 1947/50), June 1948, Exp. (Cayetano Villalta García y comps.), 17 March 1948, Villalta G. to President Arévalo.

³⁹ Of course, this could be an example of the Guardia playing politics to make the PAR-friendly government take its side, but the overall tenor of the documents, along with the depth of FPL organizing in the barrios during the time period, makes this seem the less likely option. Villalta and his neighbors were probably dealing with both parties. AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.13, 121.11, No. Ord. 47085, 47083 (MCOP: Colonias, 1947/50), 14 April 1948, Gobernación re La Palmita, 18 March 1948, Mayor Guerra Orellana, Jefe de la 5a. Estación de la Guardia Civil to Guardia Civil Director General Coronel Sandoval.

Officers filed their own report with the same information.⁴⁰

Chaos. Two weeks after this last exchange, eviction hanging in the balance, further documents cease. Villalta's fate remains unknown. The compilation of his long running battle is filled with Public Works' cover sheets, each of which has a space in which the "*trámite*," or ordered proceeding, is supposed to be filled in. Most of these simply have a series of question marks. The majority were written by typewriter. Several, however, say "?????" in crayon.

The ministry and Zelaya alike were overwhelmed. At the same time as the La Palmita drama was unfolding, a similar invasion mushroomed out of control on the slopes bordering 3a Calle del Bosque in El Gallito. The settlers were represented by a group of women who wrote, "We understand perfectly that we have no right to ask you [for tenancy] based in any human laws, but in accordance with those of a higher order, those that come from on high, yes, because we are not at fault for being poor and because of social causes we do not understand, we find ourselves in this painful situation. Therefore," they continued, "we ask you in the name of the principles of universal ethics." The government rejected their petition, despite their claim that during the Revolution "the people offered their blood at the foot of the altar of the *Patria*... poor people, but valiant and suffering, who ask not for compensation but for justice."⁴¹

We lose track of the individual land invaders, but we do know that their shantytowns suffered terribly when a storm ripped through Guatemala City in October, 1949. It devastated many precarious neighborhoods, including those in the Palmita and El Gallito ravines. What had been an eviction and control problem became one of emergency relocation.

The Secretary of Public Works, Víctor Manuel Marroquín Gómez, was charged with the job of moving La Palmita's homeless to the area's new state property, Colonia Labor.⁴² Colonia Labor was a neighborhood in formation, its every block highly contested. In general, goings on in the colonia show the mixed spatial, social and political geography of urban territory in mid-century Guatemala. The Life Insurance Society 'Pedro Molina Flores' and the Public Works Employees' Union were petitioning for land for social centers near the Evangelical church. The Guardia Civil wanted a police station. Neighborhood administrators were trying to stop plans to put in an insane asylum and poorhouse, and a frustrated city planner, with support from the Director of Public Works, was begging the unresponsive Minister to prohibit hut building by

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 14 April 1948 (Gobernación re La Palmita), 27 March 1948, Villalta to Arévalo, and 30 March 1948, Guardia Civil informe.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, July 1947, Exp. (Vecinos, 3a C. del Bosque Final). Interestingly, legally settled neighbors in El Gallito filed suit against the invaders, making reference to their dirty habits, their open-air defecation, and referring to them as an "immoral mob." *Ibid.*, Nov. 1948, Exp. (Celia de la Roca y comps.).

⁴² AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 161/64, 16.1, 163 (MCOP: Camp., Col., y Esc. 1951), 8 Aug. 1951, Sec. de Obras Públicas. The colonia is in the immediate La Palmita area.

people who "allege extreme poverty" but forget to mention their "laziness and vice-ridden habits" and the fact that they "reject all honest employment offered to them." The poor women, the director maintained, were no better than the alcoholic men. "There are swarms of women in rags in these neighborhoods who could well earn an honest living if they wanted to," he wrote.⁴³

The director's dreams of social hygiene in Colonia Labor, never realizable in the first place, were shattered by the influx of storm refugees. A frustrated Marroquín Gómez was still trying to place families all through 1951. Touched by their misery, he petitioned his ministry for special dispensations for some of the worst hit, but was told that it was out of Public Works' hands. In February of 1950, the government had attempted to rationalize the chaos by transferring management of Colonia Labor (along with another neighborhood, Colonia 20 de Octubre) to the *Crédito Hipotecario Nacional*, the national mortgage bank.⁴⁴ The result, however, was more chaos. Confusion and overlapping of authority made it harder for officials to place storm victims, many of whom waited for years for aid that often never came.

Those who did ultimately get housing were most likely to get it three years later, when the government opened the finca Bethania for settlement in 1952. Located northeast across the ravine behind El Gallito, Bethania provides an excellent example of mid-century city space formation. Today part of zone 7's archipelago of densely populated poor and working-class neighborhoods that run the ridge between the El Naranjo and La Barranca Rivers, Bethania began life as an isolated farm. Its story shows grassroots revolutionary politics, modern housing solutions (that failed utterly), institutional confusion, and urban planning thwarted by unforeseen disasters (the storm), by unprecedented levels of poverty and need, and by chaos.

Although preliminary surveys were underway, the government had been publicly denying plans to urbanize the finca Bethania since the mid-1940s, when the FPL had kicked a hornets' nest by promising evicted El Gallito land invaders spaces in the faraway farm. The PAR cried dirty politics, and as the FPL continued to champion the cause of El Gallito and La Palmita invaders alike, setting Bethania plans off to a chaotic start.⁴⁵

⁴³ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.13, 121.11, No. Ord. 47085, 47083 (MCOP: Colonias, 1947/50), 10 May 1948, Exp. (Soc. "Pedro Molina Flores" et al., re La Palmita, Col. Labor).

⁴⁴ The CHN was charged with sales and distribution of houses; it did not own these properties until later in the decade. AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 161/64, 16.1, 163 (MCOP: Camp., Col., y Esc. 1951), 8 Aug. 1951, Sec. de Obras Públicas; AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 161/64, 16.1, 163 (MCOP: Camp., Col., y Esc. 1951), Feb. 1951, Exp. (Andres Samayoa Santos); AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 161/64, 16.1, 163 (MCOP: Camp., Col., y Esc. 1951), 9 May 1951, Sec. Priv. de la Presidencia.

⁴⁵ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.13, 121.11, No. Ord. 47085, 47083 (MCOP: Colonias, 1947/50), Sept. 1947, Exp. (Lupe Porras Q. y comps.); 9 Sept. 1947, Fortuny (PAR) to MCOP; AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.13, 121.11+ (MCOP: Colonias, 1947/50), 20 Aug. 1947, Asturias V., Frente Popular Libertador, to Chacón P.,

Both grassroots political organizing and engineering foul-ups complicated Bethania's birth. Before the storm added another layer of confusion, the government had already generated two conflicting lists of land beneficiaries.⁴⁶ Only the land set aside for the *Sanatorio de Rehabilitación de Alcohólicos* remained uncontested as unions and corporate entities vied for what remained. Their claims were complicated by the fact that the land itself remained completely illegible. A single engineer had begun surveying and measuring the finca in August of 1947, but the government was building the National Stadium at the same time, and in the confusion, all the measurements got lost. The Ministry started over, but personnel changes caused more documentation problems.⁴⁷ Before the state finally opened the finca in 1952, replete with rental units, construction snags had included a seven-month work stoppage for lack of funds, interminable delays in opening an entrance road, and difficulties in laying drains and water systems that would later prove inadequate. Swamped with over 5,000 applications before a single home was rented, the government failed to keep its promises to numerous unions and groups.⁴⁸ The 620 worker dwellings, meanwhile, lacked basic services and had run nearly double the projected cost. Humberto Zelaya, defending the honor of the engineers and builders, attributed the cost overrun to "some unknown factor."⁴⁹

Amidst the din, civil engineers continued to point out that roads connecting the finca both to the Pan American Highway and to the city center would be of great utility. By 1961, there was still no bridge over the ravine to Bethania.⁵⁰ The neighborhood, by that time run not by public works but by INFOP, the Production Development Institute, suffered chronic problems both with access and basic services such as light and electricity. Public health was also disastrous.

MCOP; AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.13, 121.11, No. Ord. 47085, 47083 (MCOP: Colonias, 1947/50), 13 Nov. 1948 (Partido Frente Popular Libertador); *Más de cien años*, t.II, 137-140, 174, 244.

⁴⁶ The first comprised the Union of Automotive Drivers, the Postal and Telecommunications Employees, and Public Works garage workers, and the second, the teachers' union, the Presidential Joint Chiefs of Staff, railroad workers, municipal employees, and (keeping at least one original) the Union of Automotive Drivers.

⁴⁷ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.13, 121.11, No. Ord. 47085, 47083 (MCOP: Colonias, 1947/50), 13 Nov. 1948 (Partido Frente Popular Libertador), 8 Nov. 1948 letter, Ing. Amílcar Gómez Robelo, Jefe de Urbanismo, to Sub-Director de O.P. Ing. Carlos Cipriani.

⁴⁸ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 161/64, 16.1, 163 (MCOP: Camp., Col., y Esc. 1951), 11 April 1951, Memo, CHN to MCOP; AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 161/64, 16.1, 163 (MCOP: Camp., Col., y Esc. 1951), July 1951, Exp. (Pro-Colonia de Pilotos Automovilistas).

⁴⁹ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 07, 09, 011, 011.3 (MCOP: Acuerdos y decretos; planificación proyecto Desarrollo Socioeducativo Rural, 1955), 14 Jan. 1955, Memo, Humberto Zelaya, DGOP, "Proyecto para la construcción de casas baratas para obreros, colonias rurales y edificios multifamiliares."

⁵⁰ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.13, 121.11, No. Ord. 47085, 47083 (MCOP: Colonias, 1947/50), 13 Nov. 1948 (Partido Frente Popular Libertador), 8 Nov. 1948 letter, Ing. Amílcar Gómez Robelo, Jefe de Urbanismo, to Sub-Director de O.P. Ing. Carlos Cipriani.; *Actas de la Municipalidad de Guatemala*, 6 Sept. 1961, Acta 76.

According to the fifth grade newspaper of Bethania's *Escuela Experimental Indoamericana*—a school linked with rural "fundamental education" trials—three children a day were dying in Bethania from parasites and malnutrition in 1953.⁵¹ The situation would get no better under the anticommunist regimes after 1954.⁵² By decade's end, government files on Bethania would be stuffed with expedientes from the hungry, desperate, ill and unemployed.

Ordering the World for Capitalism: Development, Culture and Political Economy

"Pistol-Packing Peurifoy"

*By Mrs. John Peurifoy, wife of the U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala during the invasion of 1954.
Sing a song of Quetzals / Pockets full of peace / The junta's in the palace -- / They've taken out a lease. /
The Commies are in hiding / Just across the street: / To the embassy of Mexico / They beat a quick retreat.
/ And pistol-packing Peurifoy / Looks mighty optimistic, /
For the land of Guatemala / Is no longer Communistic.
– Reprinted in Daily People's World (San Francisco), 2 Aug. 1954, 8.*

The birth of the modern Guatemalan ghetto encapsulates a world in transition. The demands and the opaque systems of the lower classes both define Guatemalan modernity and arise from the conditions of its modernization. Systematicity came to Guatemala in mid-century. Its myriad articulations and contestations evidence a confluence of complex historical forces. In short, these include the nation's colonial heritage, the effects of new infrastructure and technology, and a changing political economy that was both locally and globally conditioned. Culture and development are linked; city and country are linked; and nation and world are linked.

To speak of modern "systematicity" is to speak of the nature of these linkages. It is to evoke concrete historical processes by which human beings transformed a world system characterized by a concatenation of 'systems-in-relation' to a globalized 'world system' that functions through communications and high technology that we see in operation but barely understand—a system that escapes us as soon as we view it as a totality or as a kaleidoscope of differing parts. The "chaos factor" may give us a glimpse of common ground. Guatemala functions chaotically at all levels, from the corrupt government to the tortilla shops in the shantytowns, but it functions. Every day Guatemala wakes up and works more or less the way it did the day before. In *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala*, the anthropologist Diane Nelson brilliantly explores modernity in transnational Guatemala. She uses the wounded body and body politic as a central metaphor for the Mayan movement's and the

⁵¹ *Horizontes*, Órgano de publicidad de 5o. grado de la Escuela Experimental Indoamericana, Colonia Bethania, No. I, Año I (20 July 1953), 3; Morán Mérida, *Condiciones de vida*, 94.

⁵² A dutifully anticommunist neighborhood improvement committee arose soon after the 1954 invasion, but to little effect. AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.1 (MCOP: Col. y Camp., 1955), June 1955, Exp. (Sub-Comité de Vivienda, Comité Pro-Mejoramiento de la Colonia Bethania).

state's trajectory through the matrix of the "global biopolitical economy."⁵³ Nelson's body imagery is a useful tool for understanding the flows of twentieth-century development, and of the culture of development in Guatemala, in the making of a national body from above and below.

In Guatemala, developers ordered the world for capitalism, and in this agrarian nation, that meant ordering it for agro-export. In 1871, a Liberal revolution had empowered the coffee-planting class, creating an oligarchy whose rule strengthened from 1931 to 1944 under the dictatorship of Jorge Ubico. Coinciding with the Depression, Ubico's regime eviscerated the nascent union movement and reversed the progressive, democratizing trends seen in the 1920s. Ubico's oppression-backed policies reinforced the colonial heritage of reliance on agro-export and underpaid agricultural labor, returning the nation to great planters both foreign and national.

Agrarian life has conditioned all development in Guatemala. Great plantations, besides dominating both land and investment resources and thus triggering unsustainable rural-urban migration, have from colonial times played a determining role in defining temporality and transhumance in the nation. Planting and harvest of agro-export crops, just as of maize in the highlands, have structured seasonal migrations of labor, while lash and gun enforced starvation wages guaranteed the emergence of what is ironically known as the "informal economy."

The reliance on agro-export fuelled by underpaid manual labor, reinforced in the Ubico era, has put Guatemala on the losing end of the global commodity lottery and crystallized in myriad and lasting ways in the local culture of development. If in the "first world" temporality came to be defined by factors such as the speed of the assembly line, the hourly wage and yearly salary, the rate of return on investment—resulting in a now naturalized formula of efficiency, speed, mechanization and wage earning that links time intimately with money—in Guatemala, capitalist consumption of the hungry rural body as a valueless, timeless "thing" produced very different results. There is little to no cultural consensus that time equals money; instead, space does: a big plantation, a plot of corn, a stall in a market, a hut in a ravine. As Guatemala modernized, families, already conditioned to migrating, distributed themselves more widely over space—some in the village, some on the finca, some in the city, and later, some in the U.S.—establishing ever more ephemeral "households" as sites of dispersed production. Wage labor was unavailable in sufficient quantities to support the population, and what wage labor there was (and is) paid only a pittance, forcing families to find other ways to survive. Meanwhile, Guatemalan capital enterprises from big to small developed within the context of labor exploitation, eschewing mechanization and efficiency (why get a washing machine when an *indita* will launder

⁵³ Diane Nelson, *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 348 and *passim*.

by hand for pennies; why buy a forklift when workers will haul loads with tumplines?).

Guatemalan "underdevelopment," poverty and chaos are not signs of the lack of modernization. They are the product of it. The Ubico state mobilized modernist discourses and fascist forms of corporate socio-political organization while promoting a racist 'lord and peon' economy. In short, totalitarianism, the agro-economy, the exploitation of Mayan and brown-skinned *mestizo* workers, and imperialism (itself steeped in racist ideology), became written upon the landscape and embedded in the Guatemalan culture of development.

Ubico's modernization program was centered on "highways," which were really ox-cart paths that linked large fincas. Finqueros paid for the roads, but not for the labor. Ubico's *Ley de Vialidad* forced campesinos, mostly Maya, to work for free on the roads project. Vagrancy laws, meanwhile, provided seasonal influxes of captive agricultural labor. Guatemala entered the 1940s with a complex constellation of land-labor arrangements linking finqueros, resident peons, sharecroppers, renter-laborers, seasonal migrants and small farmers.⁵⁴

Beyond finca agriculture, both U.S. and German imperialism structured the Guatemalan economy in the early to mid-1900s. German bankers and traders linked to Bremen and Hamburg houses had been involved with the cultivation and commercialization of coffee since the 1880s, coming to control as much as two-thirds of the trade and penetrating Guatemalan administrative and financial institutions.⁵⁵ The most significant U.S. enterprise on Guatemalan soil, meanwhile, was the United Fruit Company (UFCO), which owned not only vast banana plantations, but also the nation's railroads. Electric Bond and Share owned the electric company, and a subsidiary of International Telephone & Telegraph, the telephone system. With the coming of World War II, U.S. imperialism defeated the German in Guatemala. Though universally described as pro-Nazi, Ubico expropriated German properties and cooperated with the Allied war effort.⁵⁶

World War II and the increased role of the United States in the nation and the hemisphere had a profound impact on the making of modern Guatemala. It is a commonplace in Guatemalan historical analysis that World War II—the Allies' democratic discourse, the leaping to mass consciousness of the outside world in turmoil—was the biggest contributing factor to the 1944

⁵⁴ *Más de cien años*, t.I, 304-305.

⁵⁵ Carlos Guzmán Böckler, *Donde enmudecen las conciencias: Crepúsculo y aurora en Guatemala* (Mexico: Secretaria de Educación Pública, Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo, 1986), 159; *El Imparcial*, 19 Oct. 1923, 3; *Más de cien años*, t.I, 9, 227, 303.

⁵⁶ *Bulletin of the Pan American Union* (Washington: Union of American Republics), May 1933, 394; Jim Handy, *Revolution in the Countryside: Rural Conflict and Agrarian Reform in Guatemala, 1944-1954* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 69; *Más de cien años*, t.I, 301; "Anexo: Lista de empresas transnacionales en Centroamérica (1978)," in CIRMA (Antigua, Guatemala), Clasificación Infostelle 09/02/04.

Revolution that overthrew Ubico.⁵⁷ This analysis is correct, but it has an often-overlooked physical side. The United States not only spearheaded a massive wartime propaganda and diplomatic effort in Latin America, but, concerned with hemispheric defense, access to the Panama Canal, and above all, availability of strategic materials ranging from sisal to antimony, the U.S. War Department sent a team of military engineers to Central America in 1942. Its mission was to finish the Pan American Highway that the Pan American Union (progenitor, and later part of the Organization of American States) and the U.S. Bureau of Public Roads had been promoting piecemeal for nearly two decades.⁵⁸ By mission's end in late 1943, they had built a semi-passable thoroughfare that while inadequate for modern transportation, could at least facilitate the emergency movement of military materiel.⁵⁹

This first step toward a modern highway network, in tandem with Ubico's trails, cumulatively had a profound impact on Guatemala. Highways and points of production work together. The new sugar, cotton and beef economy would later follow the highways, just as highways structured urban settlement and industrial growth alike in Guatemala City.⁶⁰ Highway development (and the slow replacement of beasts of burden with motor vehicles) increased mobility and economic possibility for all classes. Thus, during the Revolution, modernization and mobility were aims common to all.

In general, the Revolution's goal was to get beyond the "feudalism" of the Ubico era. What started as schoolteacher and student protests in June of 1944 and ended in a military uprising in October ousted Ubico and his hand-picked successor and ushered in a new age of

⁵⁷ Depression-era deflation and the contemporaneous fall of El Salvadoran dictator Hernández Martínez also merit mention. See, for example: Orieta Alvarez, "Antecedentes históricos del proceso revolucionario de 1944-1954 en Guatemala," in Eduardo Antonio Velásquez Carrera, ed., *La Revolución de Octubre: diez años de lucha por la democracia en Guatemala, 1944-1954*, tomo I (Guatemala: Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, Centro de Estudios Urbanos y Regionales, 1994), 17-23; *Más de cien años*, t.II, 2-4; Alfredo Saavedra, *El color de la sangre: 40 años de represión y de resistencia en Guatemala* (Guatemala: Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo, 2001), 15-17.

⁵⁸ *Bulletin of the Pan American Union*, LXXV:2 (Feb. 1941), 94-108. A timeline can be found in *Chronology of the Pan American Highway Project* (Washington: Pan American Union, Technical Unit on Tourism, Department of Economic Affairs, 1963).

⁵⁹ *Design and Construction of Pan American Highway: Final Project Report* (San Francisco: [U.S. Army] War Department, Corps of Engineers, April 1944). This document is housed in the Columbus Library of the Pan American Union in Washington, DC. The War Department changed the Pan American's route (it would later be changed back), skirting the northern Mayan highlands and opting instead for the Pacific lowlands of Retalhuleu and Escuintla.

⁶⁰ Silvia García Vettorazzi, "El crecimiento espacial de la Ciudad de Guatemala: ¿un desorden permitido?," en *La Ciudad de Guatemala y su área de influencia urbana: Perfiles de problemas y líneas de solución*, Serie Temáticas Urbanas 2000, No. 1 (Guatemala: AVANSCO, 2000), 10-11. The War Department's Pioneer Road/Pan American Highway through Escuintla and Retalhuleu, later known as the Pacific Highway, was one axis of the new agro-economy; the Atlantic Highway, begun under Arbenz in the early 1950s, was the other.

reform designed to bring Guatemala into the "modern" world. At the same time, at Bretton Woods, the IMF and World Bank were born, the U.S. dollar became the dominant international currency, and the context for future "development" in places like Guatemala was set.⁶¹

Democratization, development and modernization were at the top of the agenda for both revolutionary presidents, professor Juan José Arévalo (1945-51) and colonel Jacobo Arbenz (1951-54), though the astronomical growth of the union movement both incurred U.S. wrath and pushed them farther than they wished to go.⁶² The reforms seen during under Arévalo were moderate, but nonetheless lost the Revolution the support of the elite, who were threatened by the labor movement, especially its rural wing. Well before Jacobo Arbenz took the oath of office in 1951, the elite, terrified of the mobilized populace, had launched a major anticommunist offensive on the capitalist Revolution with U.S. support.⁶³ The political opening of the Revolution resulted in enormously increased civic participation in unions, parties, and associations in the city and countryside alike.⁶⁴ It was also, however, an opening akin to the opening of Pandora's Box, unleashing, as we have seen in El Gallito and La Palmita, a torrent of actions that to the state, were as uncontrollable as they were undesirable.

The exploding into life of the Guatemalan body politic shaped the future nation. During the Revolution (October 1944 to June 1954), Guatemalans gave their nation its modern face, and not just in the inner city. They created or revamped virtually the entire landscape, society and state, from the banking system to Social Security to the military structure to the labor and cooperative movements to the political parties to the basic commercial and public works infrastructure. Their policies and development plans, and even their use of the army in national development, laid the template for what would follow after the CIA engineered the invasion that overthrew the Revolution in 1954. Furthermore, those same plans went hand-in-hand with the

⁶¹ A history of international financial institutions written for a popular audience is Wayne Ellwood, *The No-Nonsense Guide to Globalization* (Oxford: New Internationalist Publications/Verso, 2001).

⁶² During the 1944-1954 Revolution, Guatemalans forms 536 unions, 15 labor federations and two confederations. *Páginas Sindicales Guatemala* (n.p.: Iepala Editorial, n.d.), 14. This document is a well substantiated history of the Guatemalan labor movement from its inception to the end of the 1970s, donated anonymously to CIRMA, a research institution in Antigua, Guatemala (indexed under "Donativos").

⁶³ The politics of modernization and the restructuring of the agrarian economy, here summed up for brevity, were extremely complex. On the indigenous elite, who also opposed reforms, and for a trenchant analysis of conflict and community, see Greg Grandin, *The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), and "Everyday forms of state decomposition: Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, 1954," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 19:3 (July 2000), 303-320.

⁶⁴ The 1945 constitution guaranteed freedom of religious and political association and expression, a minimum wage, the right to unionize and strike, and offered special protections for women and children in the workplace. Communism, however, remained illegal. Illiterate men were denied the secret ballot, and illiterate women could not vote at all. "Constitución de la República," 15 March 1945, in *Recopilación de las leyes de la República de Guatemala*, LXIII (1944-45): 348-85.

gradual rise of heretofore unseen social classes and sectors: a new commercial and industrial elite; a diversified planter class; an expanding compendium of white-collar, service-sector and government workers; an enormous urban underclass; and a ghettoized rural proletariat. Guatemalans of every political bent recognize the importance of their democratic Revolution, earning it a capital "R" in this text. The new cadre of middle-class intellectuals, enjoying its first taste of power, inherited what they saw as a broken body; heady with theory, they would be charged with deciding how to give that body new life.

Arévalo's policy was to stimulate agriculture, particularly non-traditional exports, through colonization, cooperatives and experimental farms. A Department of Agricultural Mechanization was charged with transforming the countryside, along with a rural education program planned by the new *Instituto Indígena Nacional*. Industry would follow on agriculture's heels. Both were to be spurred by INFOP, the *Instituto de Fomento de la Producción* (Production Development Institute).⁶⁵ Arbenz sharpened the Revolution's focus on production. An economic nationalist, Arbenz was an ambitious developmentalist whose plans rested on extensive highway construction and high-modern public works projects, undertaken without U.S. aid.⁶⁶

Pushed by the CNGC, the *Confederación Nacional Campesina de Guatemala*, a confederation of 25 rural unions formed in 1950, Arbenz launched a comprehensive agrarian reform in 1952. The idea of agrarian reform predated Arbenz's presidency⁶⁷ and enjoyed advocacy from international finance and major Guatemalan political parties alike. Yet campesinos and authorities had different goals for agrarian reform. The former wanted land for its own purposes and the latter wanted to increase production. By increasing agro-export revenue, they could foster a domestic market and build industry. The backward campesino would learn high-technology farming and would be slowly drawn into the national sphere through education, social welfare and highway construction.⁶⁸ Geography, systematicity and space

⁶⁵ *Más de cien años*, t.II, 116-17, 119-21; *Ley de Fomento Industrial*, 23 Dec. 1947, in *Recopilación*, LXVI (1947-48): 136-39.

⁶⁶ Plans included building highways and a port at Santo Tomás, and forming a National Electric Energy Commission (implying a threat to Electric Bond and Share's monopoly) that would construct hydroelectric dams, beginning with the Jurún-Marinalá facility on the Michatoya River in Escuintla. See *Octubre* (Guatemala: Communist Party), 25 Oct. 1951, 5; 5 March 1953, 6; Otto Sergio Castillo de León, "Objetivos de Gobierno del Coronel Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán: Guatemala, 1951-1954," (Thesis: Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala, 1992).

⁶⁷ In 1949, Arévalo had signed Decree 712, the Law of Forced Rental, which empowered peasants to compel landowners to rent them fallow lands, two years at a time, in return for ten percent of the harvest. "Decreto No. 712 del Congreso: Arrendamiento obligatorio de parcelas de terreno en fincas rústicas, por dos años," *Recopilación* LXVIII (1949-50): 173-74;

⁶⁸ Decreto No. 900 del Congreso, "Ley de Reforma Agraria" of 17 June 1952, *Recopilación*, LXXI (1952-53): 20-31; Alfredo Guerra-Borges, "Semblanza de la Revolución Guatemalteca de 1944-1954," in

intersected in this thinking in a vision of widened exchange in the context of an economy stalled by uncommodified land, much of it fallow. The agrarian reform was a market- and value-oriented scheme based both in increasing private ownership of the means of production and in mechanizing/modernizing the inputs, process, and distribution of that production with fertilizers, irrigation, tractors, trucks, highways and ports. It was part of a vast project that involved engineering not only the landscape but society as well.

Guatemalan society was at a complex historical conjuncture. Campesinos, many of them newly organizing in rural unions that were themselves linked to national and international organizations, fed both themselves and the nation. They did so via a locally articulated and bottom-up network of markets that were integral to regional cultures and were structured temporally and spatially by microclimates, by Mayan, agricultural and Church calendars, by the available infrastructure and by custom. Great landowners, meanwhile, included entrenched traditional elites, new modernizers attempting to pioneer something along the lines of agro-industry, and the United Fruit Company. Even as the modern, global economic system was congealing, forces ranging from state agencies to the Pan American Union, promoter of agrarian education and modernization,⁶⁹ were endorsing variations of a capital intensive agricultural economy that would demand far greater monetary inputs than the Guatemalan state, not to mention the Guatemalan campesino, could hope to provide. All of these sectors, here greatly simplified,⁷⁰ contested and shaped the landscape, and they did so within the context of Cold War geopolitics that became more polarizing by the minute.

The Revolutionary state's vision of the Guatemalan national body devolved upon the body of the campesino. The dirty, untrained peon was, through rural education, to become a modernizing gentleman farmer. In general, the education's purpose was not just to teach reading, agronomy and the like, but to inculcate campesinos with modernist moral and political attitudes. As early as June 1945, the new *Instituto Indigenista Nacional* began training teachers to head to the highlands. The Revolution's *Misiones Ambulantes de Cultura* and rural education in general

Historia general de Guatemala, VI:14; Handy, *Revolution in the Countryside*, 26, 38-39, 74, 81; *Más de cien años*, t.II, 244. According to Handy (p. 39), Arbenz's economic program was extensively based on the thinking of George Britnell, a Canadian economist who had prepared a report on Guatemala's economy for the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD, the World Bank) in 1950.

⁶⁹ Even the United Fruit Company contributed to the foundation of the Pan American Union's agricultural school in El Zamorano, Honduras, in 1942. *El Imparcial*, 12 May 1942; AGCA MAC/450 (Universidades, Facultades, Institutos y Escuelas del País y Extranjeros, 1944 -1955), 18 Feb. 1947, Min. Agric. to Popenoe, Escuela Agrícola Panamericana.

⁷⁰ For fine-grained interpretations of class, race, and society in agrarian Guatemala, see Grandin, *The Blood of Guatemala*, Handy, *Revolution in the Countryside*, and David McCreery, *Rural Guatemala, 1760-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994).

represented a frontal attack on illiteracy and "economic, hygienic, cultural and civic ignorance." A concept borrowed from the Mexicans, these cultural missions broadly aimed to assimilate the Maya into ladino culture.⁷¹ The local agrarian reform committees, or CALs (*Comités Agrarios Locales*) formed in the 1950s to manage land expropriation and distribution showed similar thinking. On one hand, they provided many campesinos with their first voice in government; on the other, they linked those campesinos with vertically arranged state agencies to better facilitate their being engineered from above.⁷² Top-down strategies were confirmed with the 1953 creation of the *Instituto Nacional de Economía Indígena*. Its aims were to break the closed economy, incorporate the Maya, regulate migrant labor, commercialize local crops, and introduce 'scientific' fertilizers, seeds, tools and techniques in the highlands.⁷³

Paradoxically, the very population being engineered—the campesinos, whose organizing had caused the agrarian reform in the first place—was arguably the nation's most dynamic sector. Guatemalans eat, to this day, because non-exporting farmers grow and market food. These are, and were, mostly small farmers, whose systems, chaotic and inefficient as they surely are, nonetheless supply a nation. Even today, high level analyses of Guatemalan agriculture reference Chayanov, the nineteenth-century agrarian economist who argued that peasants only produce enough to fulfill their basic needs, lacking the entrepreneurial urge to expand along capitalist lines.⁷⁴ What appeared in Guatemala during the era of agrarian reform, however, was a dynamic one could call Chayanov-in-reverse. In broad strokes, economic motion came from below. Rural organizing and agrarian reform, along with farmers' expedientes, prove that many small

⁷¹ ABC: *Revista de Alfabetización* (Aug. – Nov. 1947); *Misiones Culturales: Revista de Misiones Ambulantes de Cultura Inicial* (April 1949), 5 (citation); Handy, *Revolution in the Countryside*, 51-52.

⁷² On this issue, see Grandin, "Everyday forms of state decomposition," 319; José Luis Paredes Moreira, *Reforma agraria: una experiencia en Guatemala* (Guatemala: Imprenta Universitaria, 1963), 57-60, 73; *Quitar el agua al pez: Análisis del terror en tres comunidades rurales de Guatemala (1980-1984)* (Guatemala: Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo y Centro Internacional par Investigaciones en Derechos Humanos, 1996), 30. The revolutionary governments had worked closely on rural education and social engineering with the Pan American Union's SCIDE (*Servicio Cooperativo Interamericano de Educación*). When SCIDE withdrew in protest of agrarian reform, the Arbenz government created a new *Dirección General de Educación Fundamental* that absorbed the Literacy Department (*Comité y Departamento de Alfabetización*) and the *núcleos escolares campesinos* that the government had been forming with SCIDE's aid. Gerardo Guinea, *Armas para ganar una nueva batalla* (Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional, 1957), 29.

⁷³ The Indigenous Economy Institute had been operating as a wing of INFOP for several years. AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 12, 0118, 016.1 (MCOP: Proyecto de leyes varios del Instituto de la Vivienda, 1953), 15 July 1953, Min. de Economía y Trabajo, internal memo, "Creación Oficial del Instituto Nacional de Economía Indígena."

⁷⁴ Daniel Thorner, Basile Kerblay, and R.E.F. Smith, eds., *A.V. Chayanov on the Theory of Peasant Economy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986). For references to Chayanov, see, for example, *Por los caminos de la sobrevivencia campesina*, tomo I, *Las estrategias de producción y reproducción campesina en la Zona Agropecuaria, Comercial y Fronteriza del Departamento de San Marcos* (Guatemala: AVANSCO, 1999), 12-15.

communities wished to expand their commerce.⁷⁵ The traditional elite, meanwhile, showed Chayanovian characteristics; they were content to produce only enough to guarantee their riches, leaving the economy in stagnation. They opposed virtually all government efforts to turn Guatemala into a production-based economy with the sorts of tax structures and social guarantees seen in any "developed" nation. Finally, corporate capital (forces like UFCO, transnational firms, the new industrialists and the like) propounded a cannibalistic capitalism that would increase points of production and produce GDP growth via capital creation fuelled by cheap, abused labor. This latter sector won, and not by accident. It won by force of arms.

Jacobo Arbenz delivered his March, 1953 state of the union address in the midst of a brutal anticommunist campaign. Reaffirming his policy of "land, bread, and industrialization," the president tried to appeal to sectors with widely divergent goals by appealing to their love of infrastructure. The Atlantic Highway—linking the two oceans and later to join the Pan American as the second axis of the nation's transportation network—was only partly paved, thanks to lack of funds and equipment, but work was underway to finish the project and also connect the nation's capital to all border crossings, ports, and departmental capitals by asphalt highways.⁷⁶ After the invasion, corporate capital, flush with U.S. dollars, would bring Arbenz's developmentalist dreams to fruition. The bulk of the population, though, would find their dreams dashed. They would find that they were not to speak in a democracy, but to be spoken to by dictators. They were not to consume, but, as dispensable cheap laborers, to be consumed.

For the Guatemalan elite, agrarian reform proved the communism they had been alleging. For UFCO, some of whose lands had been expropriated, and the United States, the reform was an excuse for a coup. A CIA-designed and supported army under colonel Carlos Castillo Armas "invaded" the nation in June, 1954. The Revolution was over, and the era of terror, violence and dictatorship began. While democracy, democratic participation, civil rights, and, needless to say, agrarian reform went by the wayside, much of the Revolution's program continued under a new guise. This is because the Revolution had brought systematicity in keeping with global modernism to the nation. That there ought to be such systematicity was never at issue. But systematicity is neutral. The war was fought over its application.

Under Castillo Armas (1954-57) and an old Ubico official, Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes

⁷⁵ Road construction petitions sent to MCOP throughout the period have a typical form. They describe the community's activities, enumerate the difficulties in getting the products to market, and express the desire to participate in the national project. Many of these post-date the Revolution, since they tend to run by region in tandem with the arrival of highway-building teams and equipment. The influx of U.S. dollars after the 1954 invasion greatly increased the pace of highway building.

⁷⁶ "Arbenz reafirmó su programa de tierra, pan e industrialización," *Octubre* (Guatemala: Communist Party), no. 121 (5 March 1953), 5-6. 78 kms. of the Atlantic Highway had been paved in the last year.

(1957-63), who replaced Castillo after he was gunned down in 1957, the Revolutionary highway and public works programs continued at a more rapid pace, now fuelled by ever-increasing amounts of U.S. aid. Even the Revolutionary focus on rural education and agrarian reform continued, but in keeping with corporate capital's agenda.⁷⁷ They called this reconfigured systematicity "agrarian transformation."

Agrarian transformation, based on colonization projects in development zones and the parceling of land near large fincas, became institutionalized in 1962 with the creation of the *Instituto de Transformación Agraria*, or INTA. While this agency would work closely with military civic action in the years of counterinsurgency ahead, its formation marks the formalization of agrarian policy since the 1954 invasion. Campesinos would be used in one of two ways: as spearheads of colonization to open new areas where large estates would follow, availing themselves of the labor force, or as settler-laborers near large fincas, endowed with tiny plots that could serve them as provision grounds.⁷⁸

The very phrase "agrarian transformation" speaks to a history of myth-making that mixed on-the-ground violence with ever more sophisticated discourse. Cultural producers in the service of the corporate capital system churned out anticommunist and pro-development propaganda even as the culture industry itself was maturing, playing an integral part in the creation of U.S. consumer culture. Hand-in-hand with this process, "development" itself became a part of the culture industry, completing its long separation from the infrastructure-creation which had once

⁷⁷ Numerous corporate forces were arrayed against the Guatemalan Revolution. In December, 1953, the U.S. National Planning Association, in a publication entitled *Communism Versus Progress in Guatemala*, declared that the nation was "for all practical purposes dominated by the Communists." The NPA, "an independent, nonpolitical, nonprofit organization established in 1934...where leaders of agriculture, business, labor, and the professions join in programs to maintain and strengthen private initiative and enterprise," was chaired by Frank Atschul, Chairman of the Board of General American Investors. Signing members included John F. Chapman, Associate Editor of the *Harvard Business Review*; Michael Ross, Director of International Affairs for the Congress of Industrial Organizations; and Walter H. Wheeler, the President of Pitney-Bowes, Inc. Astonishingly, the NPA claimed that agrarian reform was "especially necessary" in Guatemala. However, the experts opined, it should not be accomplished by breaking up banana and coffee plantations, since those two products provided over 85 percent of the nation's foreign exchange. Instead, the NPA recommended resettling highland Indians, who were responsible for "uneconomic use of the land," in underpopulated coastal regions and in the jungles of Petén—the northeastern province bordering Belize. This is exactly the type of "agrarian reform" that governments after the invasion undertook. Theodore Geiger, *Communism Versus Progress in Guatemala*, Planning Pamphlet No. 85 (Washington: NPA, 1953), 1, 8, 19, 33.

⁷⁸ *Anteproyecto de un plan para el desarrollo socio-económico de Guatemala en 21 años* (Guatemala: Dirección General de Cartografía, Feb. 1964), 37, 55; Susan A. Berger, *Political and Agrarian Development in Guatemala* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 111; *El Imparcial* 3 Jan. and 2 July 1958, 9 Feb., 6 July and 21 Oct. 1959, 26 Sept. 1962; *Informe* of Ydígoras Fuentes on agrarian transformation, *El Guatemalteco*, 5 March 1959, 932; "Ley de Transformación Agraria," in *El Guatemalteco*, 19 Oct. 1962, 1281-90; Manuel Villacorta Escobar, *Apuntes de economía agrícola* (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1973), 49-51.

been the word's referent. Corporate capital and the imperialist organizations paid for infrastructure to further their projects of creating value while devolving little to none of that value upon the workers who produced it. Development, on the other hand, came to refer to an endless striving to an end prevented by its very means, necessitating a surplus of ideological production, and, where that production failed to produce hegemony, as in Guatemala, violence.

Average Guatemalans might not have known how to read and write, but they were fully aware that the state was busting their unions, taking away their newly won lands, shattering their earning potential, neglecting their health and education, and supporting a corrupt elite on the backs of their battered bodies. Educated Guatemalans, too, understood, and could articulate the imperialist context of it all; many were driven into exile or killed. In this vacuum of hegemony, ordinary citizens continued to improvise and innovate in order to make some kind of life-sustaining economy, defining the landscape with tiny farms, markets and enterprises, with urban ghettos both legal and illegal, with the array of local solutions that would come to be called the informal sector. The development industry ever since has set out to cure this chaos.

Corporate capitalism, as it has evolved in the Americas, needs to appropriate discourses and practices that challenge its primacy and its ability to move through a transparent landscape. That transparent landscape hardly needs to be orderly; in fact, it has been the nature of corporate capitalism to create or reinforce chaos in places like Guatemala. International capital not only guarantees mayhem, it seeks it out. This is why, when applied to mid-century Guatemala, *both* World Systems Theory and its 'regional diversity/ground level conditions' critique are correct, and why the capitalist world, taken as a whole, remains so dazzlingly diverse even in the face of homogenizing, globalized development [REFS]. Because capital is constantly in search of the cheapest labor, it migrates to places like Guatemala that are nearly completely illegible socio-culturally and makes them legible *at the level of infrastructure* with projects like the Pan American Highway. The role of the state, then, is to provide sufficient repression to allow capital to function in the social and cultural murk.

In the Castillo Armas government we see both repression in the service of capital and cultural production in service of its myth. The Guatemalan historian Carlos Guzmán Böckler would years later savage the 1956 Seminar on Guatemalan Social Integration both for being in line with the dominant bourgeois ideology and for informing programs like integrated community development and army civic action. The seminar's participants, Guzmán Böckler said, falsely painted a bifurcated Guatemala, he said—one of "Indian" and one of "ladino," arguing that the traditional Indian was becoming ladino in a two-generation process. If Guzmán Böckler's assessment of foreign anthropologists was a bit harsh, his point that Mayans were growing both in

absolute numbers and in percentage of the population remains well taken. The Maya were not an ethnic, but a sociological minority, he argued, and the apparatus of state, supported by social scientists, launched an attack upon the people, their culture, and their languages—an attack that Mayan persistence and resistance made an ultimate failure.⁷⁹

Integrated community development was the nonviolent side of that attack. It was a program of Castillo Armas and Ydígoras Fuentes alike, supported by foreign capital and international institutions. Appropriating the educational bent of Revolutionary policy and assigning the campesino the responsibility for his own poverty, integrated community development combined infrastructure and public works programs with literacy campaigns, housewife clubs to promote home economics, hygienic model homes (never built), and new farming ventures—raising ducks, for example. Castillo's propaganda touted the program's similarity to "the celebrated *Nai Talin*, or 'new education' of Mahatma Ghandi."⁸⁰

Home economics and housewife clubs failed to transform society from 1954 to 1957, but the Castillo government did accomplish several things. It returned expropriated lands and welcomed foreign capital. With U.S. aid, it created two agrarian "development zones" on land purchased from UFCO that by the 1960s were overpopulated rural ghettos.⁸¹ It also set the template for future development. Aided by stepped-up U.S. and OAS efforts after the 1959 victory of the Cuban Revolution, Ydígoras Fuentes institutionalized Castillo Armas's agrarian development strategy under the rubric of agrarian transformation. He also strengthened Castillo "socio-educativo" development plan, linked it more explicitly with highway construction, and extended its scope to cover the city as well as the country.⁸²

Integrated community development evidences an ideological process of ordering society biologically that devolves in a series of repeating patterns upon the individual body: the New World as anticommunist alliance; Central America as defense bloc and common market; Guatemala as agro-exporter and open to foreign capital; the community as monad of obeseant

⁷⁹ Guzmán Böckler, *Donde enmudecen las conciencias*, 176-77.

⁸⁰ *Desarrollo integral de las comunidades rurales en Guatemala: Labor de la Dirección General de Desarrollo Socioeducativo Rural* (Guatemala: Editorial del Ministerio de Educación Pública, 1957 [Crónicas de Diaro de Centroamérica, Sept. 1956]), 77, *passim*.

⁸¹ Berger, *Political and Agrarian Development*, 93-95; Agrarian statute in *El Guatemalteco* (Diario Oficial de la República de Guatemala), 27 July 1954, 9.

⁸² Ydígoras's government increased urban "lotification" and, using the Revolution-created National Agrarian Bank to extend credits, awarded rural plots in development zones to small numbers of people. Most notably, Ydígoras launched the colonization of the Belize-bordering department of Petén, where timber, rubber—and later, minerals—presented profit potential. *El Guatemalteco*, 5 March 1959, 925, and 22 June 1959, 625; *El Imparcial*, 3 Jan. 1958 and 6 July 1959; James Dunkerley, *Power in the Isthmus: A Political History of Modern Central America* (London: Verso, 1988), 440.

labor and local food production; the family as gendered site of ideological reproduction; the individual as a unit in organized mechanisms of state and corporate power. "He who does not wish to speak of capitalism, should also be silent about fascism," wrote Max Horkheimer, director of the Frankfurt School.⁸³ It is an observation that holds true for Cold War Guatemala.

We see in the literature of the Pan American Union/OAS, of foreign infrastructure contractors, and of development agencies alike a bodily image of the New World. Its flesh would be fed by the circulatory system of the great highways and enlivened by the nervous system of telecommunications. Like children, its underdeveloped economies and societies would grow. During the 1954 invasion, Guatemalan Archbishop Mariano Rosell y Arellano had even transubstantiated corporate capitalist ideology. He declared the miracle-working Black Christ of Esquipulas to be the "Commander General of the Army of Liberation" and paraded the revered carving around the nation, holding anticommunist masses.⁸⁴

Transforming the national body had ideological and physical levels, and both were funded by the United States. In October of 1954, the U.S. and Guatemala signed a contract to finish the Pan American Highway from Colotenango to the Mexican border, with the Bureau of Public Roads paying most of the bill.⁸⁵ From that time, as we will see, work continued steadily on the Pan American and numerous secondary and feeder roads. These included the Atlantic and Pacific Highways along with a variety of "agrarian access" routes. Funding came from the World Bank and various U.S. government dependencies, including the International Cooperation Administration (ICA), which also worked with the Agrarian Bank in providing supervised agricultural credits. The rush of funds brought work to numerous contractors.⁸⁶ U.S.-based Thompson Cornwall was chief among them, tackling, among other projects, the blasting of the

⁸³ IN FIELD; INSERT SOURCE, PAGE.

⁸⁴ Saavedra, *El color de la sangre*, 71-72.

⁸⁵ Guatemala paid \$712,500, and the U.S., \$1,425,000. AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 07, 09, 011, 011.3 (MCOP: Acuerdos y decretos; planificación proyecto Desarrollo Socioeducativo Rural, 1955), 18 Jan. 1955, U.S. Bureau of Public Roads, Inter-American Regional Office, to MCOP.

⁸⁶ Contractors included Thompson Cornwall, Fisher de Guatemala, La Panamericana, Oceanic Constructors, Contica International, Asturias Vizcaíno, El Aguila, and Johnson Drake. These companies worked not only on the Pan American, but also the Atlantic Highway and Pacific Highways. Thompson Cornwall built the bulk of what today is the Interamerican Highway (the Mexican-Central American section of the Pan American Highway network). AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 650.2 (MCOP: Carreteras 1958), 12 June 1958, DGC Financial Report. By 1958, the United States had invested \$138,703,000 in the Interamerican Highway since the project's inception. *Chronology of the Pan American Highway Project*, 10. For the ICA and agriculture, see Paredes Moreira, *Reforma agraria*, 136-37. Its programs most clearly demonstrate the links between planning in highways, agriculture and rural education/social engineering.

Pan American Highway's El Tapón pass in Huehuetenango, a huge engineering challenge.⁸⁷ Interestingly, by the end of 1958, the Colotenango-Mexico leg remained uncompleted, and only 134 kilometers of the 511 kilometer Guatemalan section of the Pan American Highway were paved. Thirty kilometers were passable only in dry weather.⁸⁸ There were just under 37,000 vehicles in the nation, but travel was complicated by the fact that local construction was so chaotic that municipalities still were unconnected because roads didn't meet up at their borders.⁸⁹

By the early 1960s, the Ministry of Public Works was inundated by proposals from highway contractors and consultancies like Highways of the World of Mount Prospect, Illinois. Newly formed, Highways of the World teamed 17 professors, engineers, and construction professionals (and in some cases, their firms) dedicated to helping the Third World "keep up with the needs of this automotive age." Well-planned highways that, they argued, not only benefited "capitalism and capitalists" but humanity as well. "We recognize, of course, that many other factors than highway facilities enter into economic and social development," wrote managing director George F. Noble, recently back from a highway consultancy in Thailand and veteran of projects in Illinois, Pennsylvania and Saudi Arabia, "but we repeat our belief that highways constitute the bloodstream of the physical body of the economic structure just as telecommunication facilities constitute the controlling nerve system of that body."⁹⁰

Companies like Highways of the World (HOTW) bespeak the epochal remaking of the world's landscape that had been ongoing since the turn of the century but that peaked in the early years of the Cold War. The dossier of professionals like HOTW's John McCormack show the geography of this vital step in globalization; he had built modern thoroughfares first as a soldier in Guam, and then in Saudi Arabia, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Ecuador.⁹¹ If HOTW resúms

⁸⁷ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 650.2 (MCOP: Carreteras 1958), 13 June 1958, "Gobierno ... Frente al Problema de 'El Tapon.'" Blasting on the Tapón began in early 1961. AGCA 3/Cajas Clas. 650.2 (MCOP: Carreteras, 1961), 2 Feb. 1961, Thompson-Cornwall to MCOP.

⁸⁸ Council of the Organization of American States Special Committee to Study to Formulation of New Measures for Economic Cooperation Working Group, CECE/Subgroup 4; Working Paper No. 11, "Construction of the Unfinished Sections of the Pan American Highway;" (Washington: OAS, 11 February 1959), 7.

⁸⁹ Council of the Organization of American States Special Committee to Study to Formulation of New Measures for Economic Cooperation Working Group, CECE/Subgroup 4; Working Paper No. 11, "Construction of the Unfinished Sections of the Pan American Highway;" (Washington: OAS, 11 February 1959), 5; AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 650.2 (MCOP: Carreteras 1958), 23 May 1958, Ing. Carlos Von Ahn, Sub-Director Ejecutivo, DGC, to Ing. Otto E. Becker M., Sub-Secretario del MCOP.

⁹⁰ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 650.2 (MCOP: Carreteras 1961), 6 July 1961, Highways of the World to MCOP. The government did not contact HOTW.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* HOTW's economics specialist, Guillermo Reina, was an MIT- and University of Minnesota-trained professor then teaching Engineering and Industrial Economics at Pennsylvania State. A native Honduran who had consulted on the Pan American Highway project in Honduras and Guatemala, Reina

show global reach, their roster of services shows the complexity and centrality of highway planning and construction. HOTW would take into account current and potential population centers; agriculture, including waterway access, irrigation, timber, livestock and fisheries—both current and potentially exploitable; mining and raw materials; power, future and current, of all types; possible industrial development (with special attention to plastics); tourism; ports, airports, railroads, pipelines, and current highways with traffic volumes; telecommunications, and the like.

Such systematicity is so commonplace, even in places such as Guatemala where it barely begins to achieve its planners' goals, that we tend to take it for granted. The *real* story must be something else, something more local. But the making of the modern landscape combines the totality of what is local, in all its diversity, with the century-long engineering and construction revolution that brought a fairly standardized circulatory system (and banking system, and telecommunications system, and trade system, *ad infinitum*) to virtually all the globe.⁹²

Ordinary Guatemalans encountered this global engineering revolution when small gangs of highway workers showed up in their regions with bulldozers and dynamite. In 1958, villagers in Michicoy, Huehuetenango petitioned Ydígoras for a tractor and aid, promising him that they had fought for his presidency all the way back to his run against Arbenz in 1950. "We are delighted to see that cars are coming close to us and we are struggling to see if this little branch road (*ramalito*) might reach our little market (*mercadito*)," they wrote, expressing their desire to market their coffee more widely, "but God desired us to be poor and we aren't wholesalers..."⁹³ The petition is interesting not only because it exemplifies the entrepreneurial spirit of Guatemalan campesinos seen in thousands of such requests, but also because it shows the precarious penetration of the road network in the highlands. The Michicoy villagers had hacked out their own, inadequate, four-kilometer access road with hoes and shovels, but it was an access road to an access road to the Pan American—an access road that according to them, had been built not by

was credited with being the "initiator and promoter" of the Central American Common Market project, which in 1961 had only just come to fruition.

⁹² Standardization did not come easily. Highways involve advanced systems engineering. Roads have to meet across political borders, curves have to accommodate trucks' turning radiuses, signs should be intelligible, and regular access to fuel is essential. In the early 1960s, the most recent manifestation of the engineering and standardizing trend was the International Road Federation. Based in London, Washington and Paris, it was a consultative organ of the U.N., and a cooperative agency with the OAS and the Organization of European Economic Cooperation. In 1961, the IRF was working on international conventions to standardize road signs, as it propagandized the construction of new highways, many built with World Bank funding, in places like Vietnam, Lebanon, Mexico, and Kenya. *Carreteras del Mundo* (London, Washington, Paris: International Road Federation), 13 March 1961.

⁹³ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 650.2 (MCOP: Carreteras 1958), Sept. 1958, Exp. (D. Villatoro, Aldea Michicoy, Huehue.).

the state or municipality, but by the finquero Olivio Chávez to service his plantations.⁹⁴

It was to rationalize this situation that in 1958, ICA/International Development Services launched a \$1 million "Project Access Roads" in Guatemala as the latest chapter in the ongoing Rural Development Program fashioned after the 1954 invasion.⁹⁵ At the same time, the government was explaining to outraged communities that Pan American Highway contractors were under no obligation to build feeder roads into towns along the route.⁹⁶ Even as the clamor to get access roads—and very infrequently, to prevent them⁹⁷—increased, so too did the attendant chaos. Road workers were low-paid "*peones*" under the direction of "*caporales*;" the Ministry of Public Works frequently ordered their arrest for being drunk, crashing or "borrowing" equipment, failing to show up for work, and even, especially in remote areas, for rape. Municipalities would often muster volunteer labor as an incentive to get the MCOP to lend them equipment, and those workers, like the *peones*, had a tendency to walk off the job when the work got too onerous.⁹⁸

Such local efforts were the bottom level of ambitious integration plans. In 1962, CEPAL (the U.N.'s *Comisión Económica para América Latina*), BCIE (*Banco Centroamericano de Integración Económica*) and SIECA (*Secretaría Permanente del Tratado General de Integración Económica*) functionaries inaugurated the *Programa Regional de Carreteras Centroamericanas*, designed not only to add new highways throughout Central America but to modernize existing ones, less than a third of which were passable year-round.⁹⁹ The program established, with little variation and much World Bank financing, the present-day Central American road network.

In effect, the BCIE/SIECA plan existed to bolster the Central American Common Market (CACM). The CACM—according to the left, an invention of U.S. imperialism¹⁰⁰—was one step in the series of corporate capital's "orderings" as it ever more integrally linked infrastructure building with engineering plans to 'future-scape' society and culture in order to create clean, individualistic, and most certainly not communist consumers. CACM was to bring the consumer

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 650.2 (MCOP: Carreteras 1958), ICA Project Documents.

⁹⁶ For example, *ibid.*, May 1958, Exp. (Dpt. de Sta. Rosa).

⁹⁷ Opposition tended to result from right-of-way issues. AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 650.2 (MCOP: Carreteras 1958), Nov 1958, Exp. (El Progreso, Jutiapa); *ibid.*, July 1958, Exp. (Cantón 'Tunayac', Momostenango).

⁹⁸ AGCA 3 (MCOP: Carreteras), 1954-1963, *passim*.

⁹⁹ *Programa regional de carreteras centroamericanas: informe preliminar*, volumen I (Tegucigalpa and Guatemala City: BCIE, SIECA, Jan. 1963), 22, 29. In 1953, CEPAL and the U.N.'s AAT (*Administración de Asistencia Técnica*) did a study on Central American transport with an eye to the common market, recommending a network of 10 highways to integrate the region (*ibid.*, 28). Meanwhile, the still-to-be-completed Interamerican Highway was an ongoing concern for Central American public works ministers, who requested a comprehensive study from the International Road Federation in 1959. *Chronology of the Pan American Highway Project*, 11.

¹⁰⁰ *Boletín Internacional* (México: Frente Popular 31 de Enero, FP-31), May 1982, 10-11.

age to Central America through "development:" roads and industrialization and trade that would bring the Banana Republics up to par with the U.S. Formed in 1961, the CACM recycled the dream of Central American unity within the political economy of the Cold War.¹⁰¹ But by the end of the 1960s, U.S. capital had largely absorbed the boom that the CACM unleashed.¹⁰²

We see this dynamic of U.S. predominance quite clearly in Guatemalan industrial development. For Guatemalans, the CACM was the latest expression in a process of industrial promotion that had begun during the Revolution. "Love for the *patria* is shown by love for statistics," ads had trumpeted as the Arévalo government undertook the nation's first industrial census in 1946.¹⁰³ The same government's Industrial Development Law and creation of INFOP had produced slow increases in cement, electrical energy and general production, though the artisan sector remained by far the industrial economy's most important.¹⁰⁴ The real boom came after the Industrial Development Law of 1959, which allowed 100 percent foreign ownership of firms and "encouraged the establishment of multinational subsidiaries that only assembled or packaged imported components."¹⁰⁵ From 1959 to 1969, U.S. investment in the region increased

¹⁰¹ *El Guatemalteco*, 5 June 1961, 33. Central America had been united during the colonial era, and was a single nation for roughly the first two decades of independence. To this day, reunification (however unlikely) is a powerful political theme. The CACM, meanwhile, had its origins in the *Carta de San Pedro Sula*, a statement of mutual economic cooperation signed by Ydígoras and Dr. Ramón Villeda Morales of Honduras, on February 28, 1958. Later that same year, the Pan-American Union began promoting regional economic cooperation, and convoked a 21-nation conference on the subject; this was followed by the drafting of a Central American Convention based on the Carta de San Pedro Sula. By 1961, after much wrangling and debate, the CACM was a reality. See *El Imparcial*, 29 April 1958, 25 Sept. 1958, 17 Oct. 1958, 6 Feb. 1960, 9 June 1960; and *El Guatemalteco*, 5 March 1959, 923.

¹⁰² Guzmán Böckler, *Donde enmudecen las conciencias*, 173. The CACM fell apart with the 1969 Football War between Honduras and El Salvador.

¹⁰³ *Campanillas* (Oct. 1946), 9. The ad also guaranteed that the data "will be confidential and in no case will be used for purposes of taxation or legal investigations."

¹⁰⁴ 23 Dec. 1947, "Ley de Fomento Industrial," *Recopilación LXVI* (1947-48), 136-39; 28 July 1948, "Ley Orgánica del Instituto de Fomento de la Producción," *Recopilación LXVI* (1948-49), 88-100; *Más de cien años*, t.II, 119-21; Paul Dosal, *Power in Transition: The Rise of Guatemala's Industrial Oligarchy, 1871-1944* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 95. INFOP outlived the Revolution and by 1963, was enmeshed in a web of state agencies and banks—including the Revolution-created Agrarian Bank and the National Institute of Agrarian Transformation—working on an integrated program to bring credits to indigenous farmers, finish the Pan American Highway, improve feeder roads, and foment industrial production. See *El Imparcial*, 10 May 1963.

¹⁰⁵ Dosal, *Power in Transition*, 118. Resistance to taxation that could have funded national industrial growth was another factor. It was spearheaded by Guatemala's most important trade organization, CACIF (*Coordinador de Asociaciones Agrícolas, Comerciales, Industriales, y Financieras*, or Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial and Financial Associations), formed in January, 1957, near the twilight of the Castillo Armas regime. Dosal, *Power in Transition*, 114. Other trade associations of the era included the lasting and politically influential CIG (*Cámara de Industria de Guatemala*—Guatemalan Chamber of Industry, 1958), the *Asociación de Azucareros* (sugar, 1957), ANACAFE (coffee, 1960) and the post-Ydígoras *Consejo Nacional de Algodón* (cotton council, 1965). Dosal, *Power in Transition*, 114-15; *El Guatemalteco*, 11 Nov. 1960, 361, and 10 May 1961, 769.

by 120 percent.¹⁰⁶ Some 34 U.S.-based businesses acquired or opened firms in Guatemala, including General Mills, Cargill Central Soy, Beatrice Foods, Coca-Cola, and Pillsbury.¹⁰⁷ The proponents of cannibalistic capitalism who had brought Guatemala the 1954 invasion had equated nationalism with tribal anticommunism, and had kept labor cheap and beaten. But the class that fed itself on the nation's poor found itself consumed by forces higher up the food chain.

Camino de Adoloscete: Coming of Age in Guatemala City

"Yo lo que pienso es que en Guatemala nunca ha existido un gobierno futurista..."
"What I think is that in Guatemala, there's never been a futuristic government..."
—Letter from Ramón González to the public, concluding Cristóbal Monzón Lemus's novel *Camino de adoloscete: La vida de Ramón en el barrio 'El Gallito,'* 239.

Sometime between the late 1960s and early 1980s, two Guatemalans met at work at the Metropolitan Car Wash in Los Angeles—Ramón González and Cristobal Monzón Lemus—in nicknames, Monchito and Crimolém. According to the latter, they soon discovered that they both came from the Barrio El Gallito in Guatemala City, and, fast friends, made a pact: to write each other's life stories. The result was Monzón Lemus's 1990 novel, *Camino de adoloscete: La vida de Ramón en el barrio 'El Gallito.'*¹⁰⁸

Hailed by historian Deborah Levenson-Estrada as Guatemala's only proletarian novel, *Camino de adoloscete* provides a personal look into barrio life from roughly the 1940s to the 1960s.¹⁰⁹ Beyond this, however, it encapsulates mid-century Guatemalan history in a biographical morality play; Ramón is fully Ramón but also an inner-city "Everyman" grappling with modernization, rising high in life but ending up washing cars in L.A. *Camino* means road, way or path (access and secondary highways are called "*caminos vecinales*"), and *Way of the Adolescent: The Life of Ramón in the Barrio El Gallito* not only tells the story of adolescent dreams frustrated and young adult employment success turned awry, but also of a nation relegated to a permanent "adolescence" within the rubric of corporate capitalist development.

¹⁰⁶ Guzmán Böckler, *Donde enmudecen las conciencias*, 173.

¹⁰⁷ James F. Petras, "Cambios en la estructura agraria de la América Latina," in Antonio García, ed., *Desarrollo agrario y la América Latina* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1981), 111. According to Petras, companies expanding into Mexico and Central America during this period also included General Foods, Anderson and Clayton, Ralston Purina, King Ranch, Caterpillar Tractor, Borden, John Deere, Monsanto, Dow Chemicals and others.

¹⁰⁸ Cristóbal Monzón Lemus, *Camino de adoloscete: La vida de Ramón en el barrio 'El Gallito'* (Guatemala: n.p., Delgado Impresos & Cía., 1990). See Deborah Levenson-Estrada, *Trade Unionists Against Terror: Guatemala City, 1954-1985* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

¹⁰⁹ The author uses so few dates and identifiable political events that it is difficult to date the text accurately. Indeed, only a brief mention of Kennedy's Alliance for Progress (p. 173) gives any reasonable certainty of the timeline. The Revolution and "liberation" are mentioned, but only in hindsight.

Ramón's employment history serves as an example. One of two sons of a street-cleaning widower who lived in an El Gallito dirt-floored shack, Ramón began his career in his teens as a shoemakers' apprentice. The job lasted only days. He then made money by washing graves, by selling the Encyclopedia Brittanica door-to-door, by assisting in upholstering and varnishing furniture in a variety of workshops, and by becoming a sales assistant in a small department store owned by Palestinians. In this last and other capacities, Ramón traveled many times to sell goods in fairs and markets around Guatemala, often getting swindled. In the midst of his merchant ventures, he also worked as an insurance salesman and as a street vendor, hawking toys at Christmastime on the city's main street, Sixth Avenue—a thoroughfare that dates its history as one of the city's most "chaotic" street markets to the Christmas vendors of the 1960s and '70s.¹¹⁰

Ramón's adventures in the informal sector gave way to more established employment. Thanks to a good connection, the youngster got a government job in the *Controloría de Cuentas de la Nación*, where he found the bureaucracy torturous and was soon fired for leaving a door open for a few minutes. So he joined the Army Reserves. Later, he became an ambulance driver and social worker's chauffeur based in the Hospital Roosevelt, the nation's newest and largest. It was here that Ramón's working-class consciousness was raised. Election year corruption reached fever pitch; the bosses got a vote-buying raise, but the politicians passed the workers over. They organized, and elected Ramón to be their union rep. They won the raise and Ramón got fired.¹¹¹

Thus disciplined, Ramón finally found his career, making and dying polyester in the new, high-tech Matex textile factory supported by Kennedy's Alliance for Progress.¹¹² He became a technician, even traveling to Mexico for training, and later to El Salvador to train workers there. Now a middle-class man, Ramón could afford a place of his own. He bought a motorcycle and road-tripped to El Salvador along the Pan American Highway with some friends. When his friendly, paternal boss died, however, the new man who arrived was a shop floor tyrant. Tired of being called a *hijo de puta*, Ramón quit. He tried to work at competing factories in the same industry, but the workplaces were hostile and it didn't work out. Another stab at government work produced a stint on the Jurún Marinalá hydroelectric project in Escuintla, one of the great public works projects carried out after 1954 but planned during the Revolution. While in the field, Ramón observed traveling corn salesmen. Anxious to be his own boss, he spent all his savings on buying a truck. He purchased bad corn, was robbed by corrupt police and officials,

¹¹⁰ Monzón, *Camino*, 60, 72-73, 100-108, 111-55, passim.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 157-65.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 172-73.

lost all his money and surrendered to the hopelessness of it all, migrating to the United States.¹¹³

Thus, from the artisan's workshop to the poor man's street market, thence to bureaucracy, army and unionized public sector, onward to industry, and finally to public works and ultimate ruin in the agricultural sector, Ramón's story sums up the trajectory of a nation. The blunt allegory that looms large in the text, however, is repeated more subtly in the personal stories of Ramón's life in El Gallito.

The stories get very personal. Many times readers follow Ramón to the toilet. The novel's intimacy, the lower-class articulation of smells and bodily functions, shows the same trope as the modernizers' voyeuristic discourse about the defecating poor. Bodies are packed close in Guatemala, and there is little visual or sonic privacy. Consider the living space: Ramón's hut was a one-room shack, dirt-floored, infested with fleas. At sunrise the children would haul water from the faraway well with buckets and a rebar yoke, just to be able to splash their faces and clean behind their ears, lest they be shamed by the nuns' hygiene inspections at school. Once a week, before church, they had a real scrub. Poverty, lack of infrastructure, and enforced closeness have shaped Guatemalan cultural norms as well as notions of public and private space.

In barrios like El Gallito, even luxury housing shows how pressed together a large family would be. An El Gallito house valued in 1933 at Q122.52, a small fortune (the Guatemalan quetzal was on a par with the dollar), featured two bedrooms, a hall, and an outdoor patio with a small, covered kitchen. The floors were dirt, the walls were weatherproofed adobe, and the most valuable part of the home was the roof of new *lámina*, corrugated metal roofing often seen on chicken coops and warehouses in the United States but omnipresent on Latin American homes.¹¹⁴ The crowded chaos that marks Guatemalan public space, the lack of what Anglos call "personal space" and "privacy," is economically and historically conditioned and rooted in the home. In his discussion of Brasilia, James Holston describes modernism's inversion of traditional Latin American figure and ground relationships.¹¹⁵ Buildings become monuments surrounded by empty space. There is none of this in Guatemala, even in the city's modern civic center opened in 1954. Plazas fill with humanity; parks overflow with life. Shops and cheap restaurants open like garages onto the street, itself a commercial and social space. The alienated individual lost in a repeating commercialized landscape who characterizes U.S. edge cities is a cultural stereotype not seen in Guatemala, though the landscape of cinderblock cubes repeats even more

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 182-95; 212-35 passim.

¹¹⁴ AGCA B/22239 (Fomento: Lot. El Gallito 1933), 13 Jan. 1933, D.G.O.P., House Assessment, Lot 947, El Gallito.

¹¹⁵ James Holston, *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasilia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

monotonously than the pre-fab strip malls and housing developments whose architects "Learned from Las Vegas."¹¹⁶ [REFS] Poverty has contributed to another paradox of corporate capitalist modernization. The same systematicity that has eroded public space and public culture in the global North has reinforced it in the South.

This is not to say that systematicity and colonialism failed to give rise to forms of what the French sociologist Bordieu calls "distinction" that informed local articulations of global trends.¹¹⁷ Ramón and his friends would play soccer in an empty lot with a ball made of old socks. One day, a neighbor gave them a real leather ball. It changed everything. Suddenly there needed to be a team, and thus the *Club Social y Deportivo Los Invencibles* was born. The team needed a captain; little Ramón was elected. Most of all, there needed to be uniforms: white pants and jerseys. Problem was, Ramón couldn't afford white pants. He nicked a pair of his father's white boxer shorts. Since they came down to his knees, he thought he could get away with it. He was wrong. At the game, the other kids laughed and humiliated him, in front of his first love, no less. He ran away and tossed a rock in frustration at a sporting goods store window. The police observed this, thought it a break-in attempt, and jailed the boy. Despite the efforts of one good nun, the Sisters at his Catholic school voted to throw him out, and so, with only a partial education, Ramón began the working life that would end in the Metropolitan Car Wash.¹¹⁸

Besides capturing an intimate moment of poverty and hard luck, the tale of the football epitomizes what was a mass phenomenon of institutionalization, organization of space, and even social alienation at the grassroots in mid-century Guatemala. Sports clubs had traditionally been either the purview of the elite or the creation of foreign entities, and later, of unions, mutual aid societies and Guatemalan public and private employers. Thus in 1909 we see the Ohio, Cleveland, Portland and Standard clubs (just like that, in English) join in the *Club Deportivo y Social Hércules*; in 1928, we see the Boy Scouts found the *Sociedad Excursionista y Deportista Esparta*; in 1930 we see Team Michigan beat the *Tipografía Nacional* in baseball and the

¹¹⁶ [References, Venturi, *Learning from Las Vegas*, et al.] It is important to note that strip mall architecture has invaded Guatemala over the last decade or so. The most defining architectural feature, however, remains the lamina-roofed cinderblock cube, often "*repellado*," or coated—a form of shelter that occupies a middle ground between upper-class structures and huts made of scrap material. There is a paradoxical similarity in the repetitive landscapes seen in the global South and global North. The squat cement blocks are iconographic not of folkloric or lowbrow taste repackaged, mass-manufactured and mass marketed, but simply of what is available and possible in a tight economy. Guatemalans (in my experience, more than any other Latin Americans) compensate for this visual blandness with a riot of color. You can tell when a neighborhood is really poor, because the buildings aren't painted lime green, pink or orange.

¹¹⁷ Pierre Bordieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

¹¹⁸ Monzón, *Camino*, 21-60.

Sociedad de Auxilios Mutuos triumph over Team Heredia in basketball.¹¹⁹ Just like these earlier teams and associations, the one Ramón and his adolescent friends created would compete in an organized network, sporting mascots and a logo. The same was true in mid-century of hundreds of clubs that sought a juridical existence, regulated themselves with bylaws, and in general, mimetically reproduced the institutionalization of leisure from above. Sports teams were one way that ordinary Guatemalans appropriated a sense of corporate and cultural legitimacy. By forming teams, they wove themselves into an increasingly institutionalized society, and operationalized the mechanisms of "distinction" and "cultural power" in everyday life.¹²⁰ In Ramón's case, the acquisition of distinction led to immediate alienation; he was too poor to clothe himself appropriately and thus enjoy the legitimacy he himself had won.¹²¹

The story of Ramón and the *Invencibles* evokes a chaotic and nested series of contests between and within content (legitimacy, distinction) and form (social organizations and activities) that characterizes the creation of space as a cultural project and that links space creation from its grandest manifestations—trans-continental highways and high-modernist hydroelectric dams, World Banks and free trade zones—to its more humble: high-rise apartments, huts in a ravine, white clad bodies in formation on a grassy, level field. Corporate capitalist developers, a striated and heterogeneous group of individuals and organizations in constant internal competition, seek in general to create and order space for the ongoing and ever expanding production of profit via mechanisms that guarantee the ideological reproduction of power over time. In Guatemala, teams, clubs and committees form part of the cultural (and, of course, political) froth that resulted from this project, which was on one hand social and economic, and on the other, racist and colonialist. After Guatemala's liberal revolution of 1871, the new coffee exporting elite had promoted the state's creation of "public works committees" that gathered the regional well-to-do in the common purpose of getting roads built and other infrastructure installed.¹²² Themselves based in older forms, these committees were quickly imitated, and private citizens won funding or

¹¹⁹ *El Imparcial*, 21 May 1927, 2a sección, 1; 18 Feb. 1928, 2a sección, 1; 26 May 1930, sección deportiva, 1; 9 June 1930, sección deportiva, 1.

¹²⁰ Bordieu, *Distinction*; Brian L. Moore, *Cultural Power, Resistance and Pluralism: Colonial Guyana, 1838-1900* (Kingston: The Press University of the West Indies, 1995).

¹²¹ "How could he continue with the team if he had no one to buy him what he needed?... 'There's no doubt,' he thought, 'I'm a wretch, and one with very bad luck'... Then the whole volley of recent memories of the most humiliating moments of his short life came to mind, how for the first time he had realized the dream of his life—a football game on a grass field and with a leather ball—and he heard anew the laughter, the jokes, the humiliation and the scorn of which he had been the object because of his poor presentation." Monzón, *Camino*, 36.

¹²² AGCA B/22087 (Fomento: Comité de Obras Públicas), 1899, Exp. 372, for example.

aid to build churches, schools, access roads, plumbing systems, electric wires and the like.¹²³

Committees facilitated the mid-century explosion of formalized sports teams.¹²⁴ But recreational facilities were perhaps the committees' least significant contribution. In Ramón's case, the neighbors formed the *Comité Pro-Mejoramiento del Barrio 'El Gallito'* to win a municipal market, since their only access to food was through ambulatory vendors. Ramón was secretary.¹²⁵ The chaos that this committee encountered would take pages in the retelling. In short, the neighbors found the land but, for lack of "cuello" (a personal connection inside the patronage system) were unable to make progress. Finally, the committee's *presidenta* won the Miss El Gallito beauty contest. In her personal audience with the President, she pressed the committee's expanded claims: a market, police, and a school. Hopes sprang up in El Gallito, but the committee waited years for even simple juridical recognition.¹²⁶

The *Comité Pro-Mejoramiento* pushing for El Gallito's market (possibly the same of which the novel's Ramón was secretary) appears in the official records in 1957.¹²⁷ Like other committees, it marked the deployment of a culturally conditioned civic strategy to compete for government resources within a new context of rapid modernization. And like others, it produced a fragmented yet similar landscape of small gains (the El Gallito market opened in 1965) without ever producing, or participating in the production of, "first-world space." El Gallito got its market, but remained impoverished. Guatemala modernized, but remained a global ghetto.

Committees, both those organized around neighborhoods and around workplaces, were sites of political organizing, as we have seen. During the last years of the Revolution, the CGTG

¹²³ El Gallito residents won the building of the neighborhood Catholic Church in the mid-1930s, for example. AGCA B/22242 (Fomento: Lot. El Gallito 1935), June 1935, Exp. (Bernabé Salazar).

¹²⁴ Sports clubs formed in city worker neighborhoods as early as the 1930s, although the trend was not generalized for several decades. La Palmita's committee petitioned for equipment in 1936; they had acquired a field, but it was covered with corn-stubble, impeding their ability to contribute to the "physical culture" of the nation. AGCA B/22087 (Fomento: Comité de Obras Públicas), 11-22 June 1936 -- Comité "El Esfuerzo," La Palmita, to Gvt. See also AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 143 (MCOP: Caminos y O.P., 1960), 5 Dec. 1960 (Comité Pro-Construcción del Campo de Fútbol, Sta. Rosa); AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 143 (MCOP: Solicitudes de Materiales, 1961), passim; AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 142 (MCOP: Solicitudes de Maquinaria, 1961); AGCA Secretaría de Asuntos Sociales de la Presidencia/SBS, Paquete 4:1961-62/Tomo 6 (Solicitudes de Ayudas, Oficina de Asuntos Sociales-Casa Presidencial), 4 Sept. 1961 (Leonard Vásquez R); 11 Sept. 1961 (Escuela Rural Mixta de Tojocáz, Huehuetenango).

¹²⁵ Monzón, *Camino*, 112. "Pro-Mejoramiento" means "Pro-Improvement."

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 141-48, 175.

¹²⁷ *Actas de la Municipalidad de Guatemala*, 3/22/57, Acta 16. Ramón González's name does not appear in the City Council notes, although no other secretary's does, either. Apparently, the higher-ups were trying to clear the land for the market, but it was had been illegally occupied by seven families who had managed later to get title to the land. According to *El Imparcial*, the city bought the land for the El Gallito market in 1958 (21 March 1958). The market finally opened in 1965. *EDOM [Esquema director de ordenamiento metropolitano] 1972-2000: Plan de desarrollo metropolitano* (Guatemala: Municipalidad de Guatemala, 1972), 168.

(*Confederación General de Trabajadores de Guatemala*) began to organize both urban lot buyers and renters.¹²⁸ While left-labor parties made gains in the shantytowns, the right was not without its neighborhood victories, either. Guatemala City market vendors, for example, worked closely with "liberationist" parties seeking to overthrow Arbenz, and demonstrated many times on behalf of Castillo Armas.¹²⁹ After 1954, as a complement to traditional organizing, rightist parties attempted to penetrate ostensibly "neutral" groups like the neighborhood improvement committees. Petitions after 1954 show deliberate use of political affiliation on the part of "pro-mejoramiento" committees, though such affiliation was often purely utilitarian, especially in the inner city neighborhoods. Ydígoras Fuentes, a great public works promoter, even set up neighborhood committees that would be within the sway of his party, *Redención*.¹³⁰ Perhaps the most notorious example is the "*Comité Pro-Mejoramiento de las Colonias 'La Limonada', 'El Esfuerzo' y 'Quince de Agosto'*" created by the Ydígoras state in June of 1960. Legally "invested with sufficient authority to dictate the measures necessary for accomplishing its mission," the committee proved to be, in government eyes, unpatriotic and antithetical to social order. The attempt to make the neighborhood committee a simple tool failed, and Ydígoras stripped it of all real power, reducing it to an advisory role in July of 1961.¹³¹

The La Limonada, El Esfuerzo and 15 de Agosto committee brings us full circle, because these neighborhoods, today colonias in the city's zone 5, date to the land invasions of the La Palmita ravine of the mid-1940s. Indeed, the government had never managed to quell the trend,

¹²⁸ See *Más de cien años*, t. II, 314-15, and Ronald M. Schneider, *Communism in Guatemala, 1944 - 1954* (NY: Octagon Books, 1979 [Philadelphia: Frederick A. Praeger, Foreign Policy Research Institute of the University of Pennsylvania, 1958]), 272. Further research is needed to chart these groups' organizing and rent protests. It appears that they were short-lived and that they had greater penetration amongst renters and buyers in private as opposed to state properties. The *Liga de Compradores de Lotes* and the *Liga de Inquilinos* signed a protest of the 1953 U.S./OAS imposition of communist penetration as the subject for the upcoming (March, 1954) Tenth Interamerican Conference in Caracas, along with numerous political parties and unions and the *Confederación General Campesina*, the *Alianza Femenina*, the *Alianza de la Juventud Democrática*, the *Juventud Revolucionaria*, the *Frente Universitario Democrático*, and the *Grupo Saker-ti*. "Un Manifiesto Revolucionario," *El Imparcial*, 25 Nov. 1953.

¹²⁹ *El Imparcial*, 21 Jan. 1953, 9 Feb. 1953.

¹³⁰ Public Works documents show that the Ydígoras government used personal patronage, more than any other government during the period. Ydígoras granted everything from routine promotions for low-level road workers [AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 131 (MCOP: Caminos, 1961), 6 June 1961, Redención to Caminos] to routine moving of road-building equipment [AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 650.2 (MCOP: Carreteras 1958), 12 July 1958, Ydígoras to MCOP]. He also favored communities that supported him politically with feeder-roads. This could lead to confusion; once, he ordered a road built to a non-existent village in Fraijanes, a municipality now part of the metropolitan area. The specified land turned out to be a private finca, and engineers, scared to disobey, came back to the president with a suggestion to rebuild a nearby dirt road. AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 650.2 (MCOP: Carreteras 1958), July 1958, Exp. (Ydígoras to MCOP).

¹³¹ *Acuerdos* of 21 June 1960 and 18 July 1961, reproduced in appendix of Morán Mérida, *Condiciones de vida*, 155-58.

and in 1959, a new wave of occupation saw the arrival of some 11,700 people in 2,470 families around the finca La Palma.¹³² The overwhelmed Ydígoras government legalized land occupation in La Palmita and El Gallito the same year, granting rights to families who had constructed dwellings and who had "good customs."¹³³

1959 was a watershed year in Guatemala City's growth process. In 1959, the government inaugurated the Trébol—Guatemala City's biggest highway cloverleaf, linking the Pan American Highway and Atlantic Highway, the first running from Mexico to El Salvador through the Mayan highlands, and the second connecting the Atlantic and Pacific ports. Nearby, they built La Terminal, a national bus terminal and a wholesale market to supply the expanding city's network of municipal market vendors. Today, the Trébol is ground zero in a perpetual traffic jam. Lined with vending stalls, stripper bars and bordellos, it is not only a transportation disaster, but one of the city's most notoriously dangerous nexuses. Not even the fast-food franchises that have invaded the banks of the Pan American along the rest of its urban run will touch the Trébol. La Terminal is worse. Jammed with humanity, many of them transmigrating or newly arrived Mayan wholesalers who live in their windowless stalls, the wholesale market is pestilent and perilous. Crawling with rats and vermin, choking on its own garbage, the greater La Terminal area is a focal point of theft, drug and gun running, homelessness, glue sniffing and misery and crime of every variety. Both the Trébol and La Terminal contribute significantly to the city's stunning daily death toll. And while these problems have become more acute in the past two decades, they are nothing new. The chaos factor was there from the projects' inception.

El Trébol, officially Project 13-B of the Pan American Highway project, was billed as a "monumental" work that would solve traffic problems, open economic frontiers, and, thanks to the hundreds of housing units built around it, ease overcrowding and set the template for solving urban overcrowding. Three years in the making, the cloverleaf cost over \$5.2 million, involved scores of property expropriations and drainage problems, and accompanied a general overhaul and/or creation of key city avenues such as Calle Martí, the in-city leg of the Atlantic Highway, and Avenida Petapa, which runs to the modern university campus.¹³⁴ The Trébol's creation

¹³² Morán Mérida, *Condiciones de vida*, 20. Colonias El Esfuerzo, El Limoncito, 15 de Agosto, Lourdes I and Lourdes II date to this invasion. By 1968, about 60,000 families were living in *asentamientos precarios* in Guatemala City, mostly in zones 3, 5, 6, and 7 (p. 21).

¹³³ Morán Mérida, *Condiciones de vida*, 153-55.

¹³⁴ The engineering and positioning problems with the drain and sewer are ironically symbolic. Ultimately, the "*aguas negras*" (black waters) were released into the ravine behind the cemetery, which backs onto the slums around El Gallito and where the municipal dump provides housing and employment for thousands of garbage-pickers, many of them children, and all of them among the hemisphere's most miserable. AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 650.2 (MCOP: Carreteras 1958), 19 Dec. 1958, Internal Memo, Otto E. Becker Meyer, Jefe del Proyecto 13-B; AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 128 (MCOP: Préstamos, Carreteras, 1960), 5

marks a watershed in the connection of the city to the countryside via the new highway network, a visible coming of age of the automobile economy sketched in asphalt by an international apparatus over the course of decades.

La Terminal, the Trébol's sister project, shows the content of that coming of age. The reconfiguring of the landscape by highway development in the United States had been and would continue to be accompanied by the rise of the trucking industry, by fast food franchises, by the dispersion of industry outside of union heavy cities to more rural locales, by suburbanization—in short, by a constellation of capital creation in heavy, light and agro-industry alike later to be concentrated in the hands of increasingly few and huge multinational corporations.¹³⁵ Not so in Guatemala. The perseverance of agro-export led development along with light investment in manufacturing, concentrated landownership, starvation wages, the crushing of the union movement and the poverty of public services such as education brought a very different set of effects. On one hand, capture of wealth by transnationals is similar. On the other, however, there arose a paradoxical dispersion of points of production as citizens appropriated new infrastructure as they continued to fashion their own economy.

La Terminal (and by extension the Trébol and the highway network) serve as an excellent example of how this dispersion worked. A large complex opened in stages between 1959 and the early 1960s, La Terminal had two functions. First, it would be a transportation nerve center, connecting extra-urban bus routes to a single nexus. Second, it would supply the city with food. The high-modern wholesale market was built in cinderblock with ramps connecting its two levels. It ultimately boasted a dedicated grain market, a garbage dump, a police station, medical clinic, school and nursery.¹³⁶ During the time period here at hand, the project was characterized mostly by government hyperbole and popular resistance; bus companies and vendors alike preferred to remain in their traditional locales. The latter vowed in a town meeting (*cabildo abierto*) that the transfer to La Terminal would happen over their dead bodies.¹³⁷

Despite resistance, La Terminal was fully functioning by the mid-'60s, but in a chaotic way not anticipated by authorities and with profound social effects. The market represented income opportunity, and, utilizing the adjacent bus station, the desperate rural poor poured into

Feb. 1959, Roberto Woolfolk, Jefe de Expropiaciones to Ydígoras; AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 650.2 (MCOP: Carreteras 1958), 14 May 1958, Mejicanos, DGC, to MCOP, re Ave. Petapa; *El Imparcial*, 9 March 1959.

¹³⁵ An excellent journalistic account can be found in Eric Schlosser, *Fast Food Nation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002).

¹³⁶ *EDOM 1972-2000*, 168; *El Imparcial*, 14 Sept. 1962, clip. The grain market is known as "El Granero;" an area dedicated to the sale of tomatoes and chile also developed, known as "El Tomatero."

¹³⁷ *El Imparcial*, 14 Jan. 1959 (clip), 14 Aug. 1959 (clip); *La Hora*, 12 May 1959 (clip).

the area, invading nearby land (all were evicted except those along the railroad line). Would-be vendors from far flung points arrived to sell their scant goods in the streets or hallways, even as the established vendors undermined the system by selling retail. Far from the systematized network of production, distribution and sales that the modernists had in mind, what resulted was a free-for-all of selling and underselling fuelled by the busses and centered on La Terminal.

Besides providing an opportunity for informal marketing, La Terminal also occasioned social and economic changes in the countryside, giving rise to a bottom-up and locally articulated yet still modernized systematicity in transmigration, distribution and agriculture that remains little understood. For example, many of today's Terminal vendors are K'iche' Maya from Totonicapán and El Quiché departments—men who travel back and forth in a transformed tradition of salesmanship generations old.¹³⁸ Though further study is needed to document the changes, the opening of La Terminal also affected crop strategies in the countryside; onions and avocados tend to come to the city from the department of Sololá, tomatoes from Santa María de Jesús, etc. Crop specialization would change food supply lines and production patterns throughout the network of rural markets, or at least those linked to the city, even as "agrarian transformation" was strengthening large estates and generating a rural proletariat.¹³⁹

If during the mid to late 1950s and early 1960s the Guatemalan countryside was in the business of producing more wealth for agro-exporters, the city was in the business of producing more city. The two phenomena are intimately related. Nearby municipalities that had been essential metropolitan food suppliers, like San José Pinula, found themselves in competition with faraway farmers, a key factor in preparing the way for their urbanization.¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the agricultural economy outside the city could not sustain the rural population. Families like that of Juan Gámez and Carmen Muñoz, landless agricultural workers from Chinique, El Quiché, spent a lifetime moving from finca to finca all over the highlands. The couple finally ended up in the city, and after her husband's death, Carmen, a destitute, 51-year-old widow, petitioned the government for housing.¹⁴¹ They were not unique. From 1950 to 1964, the population of the municipality of Guatemala grew from about 290,000 to about 572,000. In 1950, just under

¹³⁸ See Manuela Camus, *Ser indígena en la Ciudad de Guatemala* (Guatemala: FLACSO, 2002), 111-12, and more broadly, 93-151 for an excellent ethnography of the present-day market.

¹³⁹ Ramón's idea to become a truck-driving corn merchant fits in with this dynamic. Camus, *Ser indígena*, 100-101; Mérida Morán, *Condiciones de vida*, 21.

¹⁴⁰ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 654.1.650 (MCOP: Carreteras, Reparaciones, 1959), Folder 650.3.149.220.357: Oct. 1959, Exp. (J. Ignacio Bran).

¹⁴¹ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.1/121.11 (MCOP: Solic. de Camp. y Col., 1963), 1962, Exp. No. 5892.

10,000 of its inhabitants lived in areas still considered rural. By 1964, none did.¹⁴²

The city was growing from without and from within. As more and more migrants poured into the urban area, many living as "*palomares*," or visitors/subletters in a friend or relative's dwelling, the city began to absorb the farmland and villages around it. The majority of the migrants, though by no means all, came from the *ladino* (non-Mayan) eastern reaches of the nation, and, unable to find work in industry, ended up either in commerce, the service sector, or self-employed in the growing informal economy.¹⁴³ Though employment statistics for the period are either unreliable or unavailable, it is clear that the expansion of the city to the south and west—to present-day zones 10, 13 and 14—as well as the urbanization of outlying municipalities offered work in construction, domestic labor, and retail services such as waiting tables and tending shops, but not nearly enough to employ the bulk of the working population.¹⁴⁴ The city as behemoth became an end in itself, its own expansion providing the basis of economic motion without firm or sustainable foundations. Guatemala City, sopping up the rural poor, expanded along two basic axes: luxury and poverty. Luxury would go south along the Avenida Reforma, as the rich fled the city center. Poverty would get much of what remained. In the center and surrounding areas, ghetto making proceeded at a rapid clip. In the outlying municipalities, meanwhile, farm economies were torn asunder as the land was cut into *lotificaciones* and urbanized, with little new economy other than the construction itself to support the population.

There are 17 municipalities in the department of Guatemala, and today all of them have some degree of urbanization, forming a greater metropolitan area, or AMG (*Area metropolitana de Guatemala*).¹⁴⁵ The process of urbanization became notable during the revolutionary decade and accelerated during the 1960s. City specialist Silvia García Vettorazzi maintains that "the processes of production of space in the city have been determined by the logic, strategies and practices of private actors faced with the lack of effective regulation and control on the part of the public sector....[such that] spatial expansion happens in a disorderly chaotic manner, giving rise to

¹⁴² García Vettorazzi, "El crecimiento espacial," 4-5; Francisco Rodas Maltéz, *Producción de suelo habitacional y de los servicios básicos en la periferia metropolitana de la Ciudad de Guatemala: Estudio de los municipios de Mixco, Santa Catarina Pinula y San José Pinula* (Guatemala: CEUR et al., 1996), 82.

¹⁴³ Camus, *Ser indígena*, 61-62; Mérida Morán, *Condiciones de vida*, 36-38. It is a rule of thumb in the Guatemalan scholarly literature that rural-urban migration before the 1976 earthquake was largely *ladino*. However, statistics for the period are unreliable, and close readings of archived documents indicate that there well may have been a much higher percentage (though still likely a minority) of Mayan migrants in the 1950s and 1960s than is commonly supposed.

¹⁴⁴ Camus, *Ser indígena*, 99; Rodas M., *Producción del suelo*, vii.

¹⁴⁵ Guatemala; Mixco, Villa Nueva; Petapa; Villa Canales; Amatitlán; Santa Catarina Pinula; San José Pinula; Fraijanes; Palencia; San Pedro Ayampuc; Chinautla; San Raimundo; San Juan Sacatepéquez; San Pedro Sacatepéquez; Chuarrancho; and San José del Golfo. Not all are fully urbanized, so people define the AMG differently (see Camus, *Ser indígena*, 86, fn15; García Vettorazzi, "El crecimiento espacial," 2).

an ever more dispersed and fragmented city."¹⁴⁶ Lack of control came from municipalities acting on their own, from low interest in urban planning, and from spiraling necessity that kept the city in a constant state of emergency. Though there had been several preliminary urban planning laws and proposals, Guatemala City never had a master urbanization plan until the early 1970s.¹⁴⁷

Thus it was in a fairly improvisational manner that in the 1950s and 1960s much of the city's contemporary geography was born, replete with its complex ethnic geography. By 1964, the government considered the municipalities of Villa Nueva, Petapa, and Mixco to be part of the AMG.¹⁴⁸ Mixco, a neighboring valley where wheat had been grown in colonial times, today is the nation's second city, the capital's "Brooklyn," if you will. Mixco is part of the "northwest corridor" whose main arteries are the Pan American Highway and the Calzada de San Juan, which runs to San Juan and San Pedro Sacatepéquez. Mixco until mid-century was a village surrounded by a patchwork of large estates and tiny, Kaqchikel Mayan hamlets. Unlike Mixco, which is visually inseparable from the city proper, San Juan Sacatepéquez and San Pedro Sacatepéquez still feel geographically distinct, thanks both to their mountain location high above the city and to the perseverance of *milpa* corn agriculture. Also Kaqchikel, these municipalities, home to poor farmers in the in the 1950s, are now best known for Mayan-owned textile maquiladoras, some of which manufacture highly prized *traje* (traditional Mayan dress), and many of which supply the gray market with counterfeit brand-name apparel. This Kaqchikel industrial cluster, unique in Guatemala (and the world), was born in 1959 when Cornelio Xuyá, a city textile worker, opened his own shop in San Pedro. The looms were run by pedals. San Pedro Sacatepéquez had yet to be wired with electricity.¹⁴⁹

Mixco was and is the epicenter of the northwest corridor. In 1958, Mixco lost "La

¹⁴⁶ García Vettorazzi, "El crecimiento espacial," 1.

¹⁴⁷ Entitled EDOM (*Esquema director de ordenamiento metropolitano*), the plan never came to fruition, thanks to disfavor on the part of the ruling military cadres and the devastation of the earthquake of 1976. *EDOM 1972-2000*. See also Rodas Maltéz, *Producción de suelo*, introduction, 1-2; *Actas de la Municipalidad de Guatemala, 7/6/61, Acta 57*.

¹⁴⁸ The census listed a total population of 586,698 in these municipalities. By the 1973 census, Amatitlán, Villa Canales, Santa Catarina Pinula and Chinautla had been added to the list, with a population of 899,172. García Vettorazzi, "El crecimiento espacial," 4. On Mixco, see Camus, *Ser indígena*, 154, 158. Mixco is located on the Pan American Highway between the old capital city (Antigua, Guatemala) and the current capital, settled in the 1773. Camus points out the importance of Mixco's agricultural heritage; though heavily indigenous, its proximity to the capital area meant that *hacienda* (finca/big plantation) agriculture predominated. Further west toward Mexico along the Pan American, in Chimaltenango, for example, Mayan communities were better able to preserve their landholdings.

¹⁴⁹ AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 143 (MCOP: Caminos y O.P., 1960), 16 July 1959 (Aldea Loma Alta, San Juan Sacatepéquez); Camus, *Ser indígena*, 159; Mario Roberto Morales, *La articulación de las diferencias o el síndrome de Maximón: Los discursos literarios y políticos del debate interétnico en Guatemala*, 2a ed. (Guatemala: Editorial Palo de Hormigo, 2002), 369.

Florida" to the municipality of Guatemala; it became zone 19 of the city. La Florida, heavily Mayan demographically and today the city's most densely populated lower class neighborhood, had been a finca whose anxious owners parceled it into lots during the agrarian reform. Isolated, but by the late 1950s becoming urbanized and serviced by busses, La Florida was a nexus of migration both for rural workers seeking a foothold in the city and city workers fleeing high rents in the center.¹⁵⁰ Neighboring La Florida was Colonia Belén, populated in 1958 by settlers who immediately began petitioning for churches, schools, drains, and access roads to both the Pan American and the highway to San Juan and San Pedro Sacatepéquez.¹⁵¹ La Brigada, another contiguous Mixco neighborhood, dates to same period, and was settled by the overflow from San Juan and San Pedro. Today afflicted with gang violence, La Brigada is a neighborhood where textile maquiladoras (not Mayan owned) and other industries continue to attract Guatemalans seeking work. The neighborhood and the shantytowns that ring it retain a heavily Kaqchikel demographic, supplemented by Maya from Baja Verapaz, El Quiché and San Marcos.¹⁵²

La Brigada is also notable for its historically high percentage of *albañiles*, or masons, who built much of the city and its periphery. According to Manuela Camus, nearly half the male heads of household in La Brigada work in construction.¹⁵³ La Brigada serves well as a metaphor for the city at large. Its local tradition of building reflects both the main economic activity of mid-century metropolitan spill and the ongoing tradition of regional specializations. Its demographic reflects the nation's ethnic complexity as well as the failures of development in the countryside. Its factories and its gangs and drug runners, the crowds on its streets—a mix that in Manuela Camus's words includes Mormon proselytizers, Mayan women in traje, stumbling drunks and transvestites¹⁵⁴—sums up, as does the chaotic urban fabric of Guatemala City as a whole, the pain, paradoxes and surprises of globalization in this corner of the third world.

Guatemala's historical flows from reactionary dictatorship to modernizing democracy to anticommunist imperial outpost are inseparable from the constant, day-to-day contestation over

¹⁵⁰ AGCA 3/Cajas Clas. 650.2 (MCOP: Carreteras, 1958), May 1958, Exp. (Empresas Alianza y Eureka); Camus, *Ser indígena*, 157, 157 fns. 5 and 6.

¹⁵¹ AGCA 3/Cajas Clas. 650.2 (MCOP: Carreteras, 1958), July 1958, Exp. (Colonia Belén, Mixco, Guate.). In July 1958, the community, 48 families large, was eight months old. Last names on the petitions include a mix of Spanish and Mayan (though Spanish last names are not necessarily an indicator that the family does not speak a Mayan language).

¹⁵² Camus, *Ser indígena*, 160-61. The Listex and Bon Max factories are two of La Brigada's largest. In her ethnography of this neighborhood, Camus does an excellent job of detailing the tensions between arriving and "passive" migrants, who became city dwellers by default as the area transformed from rural to urban.

¹⁵³ Camus, *Ser indígena*, 167.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 161.

and creation of the means of production, the literal weaving of survival in an improvised network of exchange that coexists with the very real global forces that structure the landscape. While hundreds of community studies are needed to document the mechanisms of this phenomenon, one fact remains clear: the dispersion and transformation of points of production, distribution and sales from mid-century forward did not alleviate poverty. Nor do they represent liberation. Capitalist development in Guatemala is marked by systems that no one fully understands (like the markets), by a high degree of self-employment and petit retail, and by strengthened ethnic and cultural diversity. It is also marked by some of the world's most shocking misery and by a history of genocidal violence. In looking at development, it is imperative to avoid false binaries. To point out that corporate capital development has been characterized by "bad" homogenization in the global North and "good" diversity in the South is not to exculpate capital, but instead to underscore both its paradoxes and the resilience and ingenuity of social actors who have had to cope with its shortcomings. It is possible (and numerous groups are hard at work on the task) to imagine "development" that neither devastates regional diversity and independent proprietorship nor relegates whole populations to the ranks of dire poverty.

That imagination had blossomed in Guatemala by the early 1960s, both in the form of resistance to the corrupt Ydígoras government¹⁵⁵ and, more globally, in the form of Communist organization inspired by the Cuban Revolution. Clandestine Communist organizations born during the 1950s formed ties with newly appearing guerrilla groups in the early 1960s.¹⁵⁶ Residents of the worker neighborhoods and shantytowns participated in the swell of public outrage that marks Guatemala's transition to a state of total war. In March and April of 1962, *capitalinos* took to the streets in a wave of protests and strikes against state corruption and economic crisis, calling for Ydígoras's resignation. The uprising soon spread to 14 of the nation's 22 departments. The government militarized public services in the city and attacked the populace; civilians skirmished with soldiers in the streets. In zone 5, thanks to heavy organizing in places like La Limonada—the collection of shantytowns around La Palmita—residents threw up barricades and declared their neighborhoods "liberated territory."¹⁵⁷ Ydígoras managed to

¹⁵⁵ Resistance to Ydígoras came from popular sectors and unions, from the army, and from the competing, fascist-inspired MDN (*Movimiento Democrático Nacionalista*), the party born from the Castillo Armas "liberation," which was accused of coup attempts on several occasions. *El Imparcial* 15 Dec. 1958; 17 Nov. 1960; 21 and 22 Nov. 1960; 14 June 1961; 29 Nov. 1962; 1 and 3 Dec. 1962. Ydígoras was finally overthrown by his minister of agriculture, colonel Enrique Peralta Azurdia, at the end of March 1963.

¹⁵⁶ For an excellent overview and personal memoir, see Chiqui Ramírez, *La guerra de los 36 años: Vista con ojos de mujer de izquierda* (Guatemala: Editorial Oscar de León Palacios, 2001).

¹⁵⁷ *El Guatemalteco*, 18 April 1962, 521; *El Imparcial*, 16 April 1962; *Paginas Sindicales Guatemala*, 19; Ramírez, *La guerra de los 36 años*, 91-109.

quell and survive the uprising; it would be another 11 months before the coup d'état that overthrew him. But in those months, Guatemala had turned a corner. The system had finally reached its breaking point, and the era of killing began.

APPENDIX: CITATIONS

The bulk of the documentation used is housed in the *Archivo General de Centro América* in Guatemala City. Of the collections examined—those of the *Ministerio de Fomento* (Development Ministry), the *Ministerio de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas* (Communications and Public Works), the *Ministerio de Agricultura y Caminos* (Agriculture and Roads) and the *Secretaría de Asuntos Sociales de la Presidencia/Secretaría de Bienestar Social* (Social Affairs Secretariat of the Presidency/Secretariat of Social Welfare)—only those of Fomento are indexed. The unorganized collections include many boxes, or “*legajos*,” with the same names. Given this situation, I have tried to facilitate the near impossible task a researcher would face in trying to request the legajos that I used. The name of the legajo given matches what is written on the box.

The footnotes show the folio (if one exists), the legajo name, and the expediente or document packet within the legajo. Expedientes were supposed to be numbered, but almost never were. I have identified them with the most prominent date on their cover, along with the name of the party listed. Only in cases where it is necessary to the clear flow of my text have I included the citations of individual documents within expedientes. The footnote that reads “*AGCA 3/Caja Clas. 121.11, No. Ord. 47082 (MCOP: Lot. Gallito y Palmita, 1943-46), 28 Sept. 1946, Expediente [Exp.] (Ing. Juan Prera, Reurbanización de El Gallito), vecinos, petition, 12 Sept. 1946*” refers to the General Archive, folio 3, legajo (classified by the numbers given) pertaining to the Ministry of Communications and Public Works, with the words “*Lotificación El Gallito y Palmita*” written on it. What follows describes the expediente within the legajo—its cover date and name (in parentheses)—and the document within the expediente, in this case, a petition submitted by neighbors on 12 September 1946.

Publications such as school newspapers and smaller-run magazines are housed in the archive’s *hemeroteca*, where a card catalog will lead researchers to the appropriate *paquete*, or box. Citations from the nation’s main newspaper, *El Imparcial* (also available at the Latin American Library of Tulane University in New Orleans), only include a page number if the article is not on the front page. Those references marked “(clip)” come from the excellent, indexed collection at CIRMA, the *Centro de Investigaciones Regionales Mesoamericanas*, in Antigua, Guatemala. Other documents housed at CIRMA are indicated in the footnotes. Several of the Pan American Union documents can be found at the Columbus Library in Washington, DC, and the two-volume BCIE/SIECA report, at Tulane. Finally, given the destruction of the Guatemala City municipal archive, the city council’s *Actas* must be used in the conference room of the *municipalidad* (city hall), where researchers are seen as an annoyance.

ABBREVIATIONS

AGCA – Archivo General de Centro América
MCOP – Ministerio de Comunicaciones y Obras Públicas
MAC – Ministerio de Agricultura y Caminos
SBS – Secretaría de Bienestar Social

A. - Acta
Caja Clas. - Caja Clasificada or Cajas Clasificadas
Camp. y Col. – Campamentos y Colonias
DGC – Dirección General de Caminos
DGOP – Dirección General de Obras Públicas
Esc. - Escuelas
Exp. – Expediente
Lot. – Lotificación or Lotificaciones
O.P. – Obras Públicas
No. Orden – Número de Orden.