Coffee and Civil War

The Cash Crop That Built the Foundations for the Mass Slaughter of Mayans during the Guatemalan Civil War

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I can tell you these stories, telling it is the easy part, but living it was much harder.

-Alejandro, 2015[1]

[1] Alejandro is one of the eight people whose testimony is featured in this thesis.

Abstract

This thesis explores the connections between coffee production and genocide in Guatemala. This thesis centers its analysis in the 19th and 20th centuries when coffee was Guatemala's main cash crop. Coffee became Guatemala's main export after the Liberal Revolution of 1871. Prior to 1871, the ruling oligarchy in Guatemala had been of pure European descent, but the Liberal Revolution of 1871 gave power to the ladinos, people of mixed Mayan and European descent. With the rise of coffee as an export crop and with the rise of ladinos to power, indigenous Guatemalans from the western highlands were displaced from their lands and forced to labor on coffee plantations in the adjacent piedmont. Ladino elites used racism to justify the displacement and enslavement of the indigenous population, and these beliefs, along with the resentment created by the continued exploitation of indigenous land and labor culminated in the Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996). This conflict resulted in the genocide of Maya communities. Historians have traced the war to the 1954 CIA backed coup that deposed democratically elected president, Jacobo Arbenz over fears that he was a Communist. This thesis will take a different approach and argue that the origins of the war can be traced to the introduction of coffee in the late 19th century. This thesis is important to understanding the mechanisms of genocide because it argues that dependence on commodities leads to the commodification of entire groups of people.

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Introduction

The following thesis is a culmination of a three-year long journey that began in the summer of 2014. The summer after my first year at Duke, I volunteered on the US-Mexico border during the immigration crisis of 2014. In 2014, record numbers of Central American women and children were caught by US Border Patrol. 2014 was the year when the most people applied for asylum in the United States since the Mariel Boatlift in 1980 and I was in the middle of it[2]. Because I was a native Spanish speaker, I worked as an interpreter for migrants that were caught and released from short-term detention facilities. Many of them had different reasons for coming, but they were all coming to the United States seeking a better life. Part of my job included interviewing them to determine human rights abuses by US Border Patrol, and I had to record the places where the migrants were coming from. I found that the majority came from the western highlands of Guatemala. They specifically came from the departments of San Marcos, Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango, and Quiche.

[2] Greenblatt, Alan. "What's Causing The Latest Immigration Crisis? A Brief Explainer." *NPR*, National Public Radio, 9 June 2014, www.npr.org/2014/07/09/329848538/whats-causing-the-latest-immigration-crisis-a-brief-explainer.

[3]

Political Map of Guatemala

I found it strange that they all came from the same region in Guatemala, and that many of them spoke Spanish as a second language. I did some preliminary research, and I found out that they were coming from areas that were not only predominantly indigenous, but that were also the most affected during the Guatemalan Civil War. I began to do my own research on Guatemala's racial makeup and on its civil war, and I found that Guatemala had a long and complicated history with race.

Guatemala is home to the largest indigenous population in Central America. Over half of its population is descended from the ancient Mayan civilization. Most of the indigenous population lives in the western highlands and they are subsistence farmers. Despite having lived in Guatemala, long before the arrival of Europeans in the 16th century, the Mayas have been marginalized and barred from full citizenship within the Guatemalan state for centuries. Today

[3] *Guatemala Political Map*. Digital image. *Ezilon*.2009. Web. http://www.ezilon.com/maps/images/centralamerica/political-map-of-Guatemala.gif.

twenty-two different indigenous languages are spoken in Guatemala, but the language of government, of business, of power is Spanish[4].

Since the Spanish conquest, Mayans have found themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy in Guatemala with people of European descent at the top. In contrast to the Mayans, the Spanish-speaking ladinos who are people of European descent or of mixed European and Maya ancestry make up the other half of the Guatemalan population. Ladinos hold the most important positions in business, government, and the military. However, this disparity in power and privilege is historical. These inequalities can be traced to the colonial era, and they continued after the founding of the Guatemalan state in 1821. These differences in belonging and access ultimately culminated in the Guatemalan Civil War.

The Guatemalan Civil War was an armed conflict that took place from 1960 to 1996. Fought over a brutal thirty-six-year period, the conflict between the right-wing government and left-wing guerrillas, arose from the inequities between the rich and the poor. But it was more than that. The Guatemalan Civil War was also the unraveling of the Guatemalan political system after the left-leaning, democratically elected president, Jacobo Arbenz, was removed from power by a CIA-backed coup led by General Carlos Castillo Armas. The coup ended a short lived democratic era in Guatemala that had begun in 1944, and it ushered in an era of right wing dictatorships. Jacobo Arbenz was controversial for passing a set of reforms that aimed to uplift and strengthen, the long oppressed Maya peoples. One of those reforms was the 1952 Agrarian Reform. The law expropriated uncultivated land for poor farmers, who were largely Mayans. However, the problem was that much of that land belonged to major coffee plantation owners and to the United Fruit

[4] Perera , Victor. *Unfinished Conquest: The Guatemalan Conquest* . University of California Press, 1995, 76.

Company, the largest multinational company at the time. The United Fruit Company and the coffee elite saw the threat that the agrarian reform posed to their business and political interests in Guatemala, and they began to seek outside help.

In the early 1950s, executives of the United Fruit Company and members of elite families in Guatemala, exploited the geopolitics of the Cold War by lobbying members of the United States Congress to overthrow the Arbenz government over fears that his government was becoming Communist. The fears over the rapid changes taking place in Guatemala led people in the United States government to fear that Communism was taking ahold of Guatemala which ultimately led "new administration leaders—President Dwight Eisenhower, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and DCI Allen Dulles" to persuade themselves "that the Guatemalan government was red[5]". Jacobo Arbenz was subsequently labeled a "Communist" and he was forced to flee his country in his underwear. With Arbenz's flight from the country, came an era of authoritarianism and dictatorship that would last nearly forty years. 1954 marked the end of the Democratic Revolution in Guatemala. The coup led to burgeoning divisions in Guatemalan society, with the right supported by traditional Guatemalan elites and by the ladinos, and with the left largely supported by university students and Mayas who lived in the highlands.

By the 1960s, these divisions manifested in the rise of left wing guerrilla groups who declared war on the Guatemalan government, with the most violent part of the war taking place from 1980 to 1982. The war ultimately resulted in the deaths of 200,000 people, 83% of whom

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[5] Barrett , David M. "Sterilizing a "Red Infection" Congress, the CIA, and Guatemala, 1954." *CIA*, Central Intelligence Agency , 8 May 2007, www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/kent-csi/vol44no5/html/v44i5a03p.htm.

were Mayans[6]. This number is remarkable considering that the population of Guatemala was ten million by the time that the Peace Accords were signed in 1996. The vast majority of the killings were perpetuated by the ladino controlled military, and the vast majority of those killed were civilians. While there is considerable debate as to whether the Guatemalan Civil War was a genocide or not, indigenous Mayans were the most affected by the war. After the war was declared, the guerrilla fled into the western highlands, an area that was largely inhabited by indigenous people. The Guatemalan highlands became the battle ground for the conflict between the left-wing guerrillas and right wing government.

After learning the history of the Guatemalan Civil War, I decided to travel to Guatemala to contextualize the war with the current wave of migration. In the summer of 2015, I traveled all around the western Guatemalan highlands to conduct oral histories with people who had immigrated to the United States and come back, and with people who had lived during the Guatemalan Civil War. When I was planning my trip to Guatemala, I hypothesized that the legacy of the Guatemalan Civil War was one of the causes of migration to the United States. However, once I was on the ground I found that the causes of migration were much older than a war that had ended twenty years earlier. While I was right that many of the areas that were most affected by the war are now the greatest suppliers of immigrants to the United States, the war did not explain the poverty that afflicted those communities nor did the war explain why indigenous people were the most impoverished population in Guatemala.

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[6] Center for Justice and Accountability . "Silent Holocaust: The Mayan Genocide ." *Center for Justice and Accountability* , Center for Justice and Accountability, Aug. 2009, cja.org/where-we-work/guatemala/.

In many of my oral histories, the Guatemalan Civil War was described as a "war on poor people" and it was through those interviews that I began to realize that the poorest communities had been the communities that had been the hardest hit during the war[7]. Through my oral histories it became clear that I was not only in the same spaces where the most violent parts of the war had taken place, but I was also in the same spaces that had provided the land and labor for coffee production. I realized I was asking the wrong questions and that if I wanted to understand the root causes of migration I needed to understand racialized poverty in Guatemala. I needed to understand Guatemala's long and complicated history with coffee. **Therefore, my main question shifted from being is there a link between the Guatemalan Civil War and migration to, why are indigenous people in Guatemala poor and why do most of them live in the western highlands?**

By asking myself these questions, I realized that I needed to understand the Liberal Revolution of 1871. In Guatemala, as elsewhere, power is raced, and the Liberal Revolution intensified Guatemala's long standing social hierarchy by converting Guatemala into a coffee producing state. Today the richest families in Guatemala are of European descent or of partial European descent, but they were made even richer by the introduction of coffee in the mid 19th century. Even though indigenous people had long been placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy, for hundreds of years they had been able to preserve many of their cultural, economic, and political traditions. After the Spanish conquest in 1524, many indigenous people fled into the highlands to flee Spanish rule and to maintain a sense of autonomy. However, their autonomy and ability to be self-sustainable was disrupted by the introduction of coffee as a cash crop in the latter half of the 19th century.

[7] Paula. Interview. By Mariana Calvo . 5 Aug. 2015.

Coffee unlike many other cash crops, can only grow at a certain temperature and a certain altitude. This turned the western highlands, an area of Guatemala that had long been ignored by the central government in Guatemala City into an area of tremendous economic value. Coffee specifically grew in the piedmont region of the highlands. With the passing of the Liberal Reforms in 1871 that aimed to modernize Guatemala, the Guatemalan state began to incentivize the production of coffee to stimulate economic growth. However, this change in direction came with new challenges because much of the land that was ideal for coffee production was inhabited and owned by indigenous Guatemalans. Over the course of the late 19th century, and early 20th century, thousands of Mayans were forced to give up their land in the piedmont, in the highlands, and on the coast. This process then forced them to migrate to different parts of Guatemala, many of them fled up into the more infertile parts of the highlands. Once the Guatemalan government was able to seize the land needed for coffee production, two questions remained: who would provide the capital necessary to produce coffee and who would work in the plantations?

Answering the first question was difficult. Coffee production was a tough business, because the prices of coffee constantly fluctuated, and the Guatemalan government often struggled finding capital to finance farming. One way of addressing this issue was to encourage immigration from Europe, and thereby having European emigres provide the capital to produce coffee. In the latter half of the 19th century, the Guatemalan state devoted many resources to encouraging immigration from Europe, mostly from Germany, and to a lesser extent from Italy and Spain. To stimulate European immigration, the Guatemalan government "created two national banks that [made] low-interest loans to landowners" and with European immigration

came an increase in capital to finance the growing coffee economy[8]. However, throughout the late 19th century and early 20th century, the Guatemalan state would struggle to secure stable capital as coffee prices constantly rose and fell.

For the Guatemalan state, answering the second question was simple, the labor would be provided by the indigenous people, the people that had long been viewed as inferior by the Guatemalan state. At the time of the Liberal Revolution, the government was largely controlled by ladinos. Since Guatemala gained its independence in 1821, the ladinos took the reins of the government from the Spaniards, and over the course of the 19th century, the ladino controlled state used its power to oppress and exploit the indigenous population. Using old beliefs on race and combining them with scientific eugenics imported from the United States, the Guatemalan elites justified forcing indigenous Mayans into working on coffee plantations. This process of imposing forced labor in Guatemala was enabled by the gradual collapse of indigenous representation in government in the decades following independence. Over the course of the late 19th century and into the 20th century, indigenous Guatemalans saw their livelihoods and political power gradually disintegrate, as the ladinos consolidated their economic and political power. Coffee in Guatemala displaced thousands of indigenous people reinforcing the racist beliefs that allowed the Guatemalan Civil War. **It became clear to me that the insidious legacy of coffee production explained why indigenous Guatemalans were the poorest of the poor in Guatemala, but it wasn't enough to ask why, I needed to ask myself, how?**

The following thesis will explore how the introduction of coffee intensified stark racial and regional divides that generated the Guatemalan Civil War, and it aims to explain why the clear

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[8] Wilkinson, Daniel. *Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal, and Forgetting in Guatemala*. Duke University Press, 2004, 69.

majority of those killed during the war were indigenous. **This thesis aims to answer two main questions, the first one being: how did the introduction of coffee affect perception of race in Guatemala; and how did this change in perception affect the economic, political, and social status of indigenous Guatemalans? Both questions inform answers to a broader, more pressing question: how did the legacy of coffee production lead to the mass slaughter of Mayan people during the Guatemalan Civil War?**

To answer the two questions above, I will be analyzing the oral histories that I conducted in the western Guatemalan highlands in the summer of 2015 and one that I conducted with a Guatemalan from San Marcos in Lynn, Massachusetts in the summer of 2016[9]. The content from these interviews will be used to illustrate how deeply tied coffee, race, and violence were in Guatemala. To explain these oral histories, I will be using a variety of secondary sources and archived articles from *The New York Times* that will give historical background to the voices and perspectives that are shared in this thesis. The oral histories that illustrate how coffee was behind the mass slaughter of Mayans during the Guatemalan Civil War are featured prominently in the second and third chapters of this thesis because to read them properly one must first understand the history of land and race in Guatemala.

It is for that reason that the first chapter from this thesis titled "Land and Race in Guatemala" has most of its analysis based on secondary sources and archived articles from *The New York Times*. This first chapter analyzes how the rise of the coffee production in Guatemala

[9] Because of the nature of the sensitive nature of the oral histories that I conducted, I have changed the names of the people that I interviewed. I also purposely made the locations of the events they recount vague to protect their identities. It is also important to highlight that everyone interviewed for this project came from the western highlands, and that they all had ties to not only coffee production, but to the violence that was unleashed during the Guatemalan Civil War.

led to the intensification of discrimination and subjugation based on race. The first part starts by discussing the racial hierarchy during the colonial period and in the decades following independence to better showcase how coffee changed the way race was perceived in Guatemala. The following section then explores how Guatemala's quick transition from using cochineal as a cash crop to using coffee as a cash crop led to the rapid exploitation of indigenous labor and land. The purpose of this section is to show how the introduction of coffee production in Guatemala in the mid-19th century made the western Guatemalan highlands transition from being an area that was largely autonomous and economically irrelevant, to an area of upmost economic, social, and political, importance for the Guatemalan state. The final section will then analyze how the rise of the Liberals under Justo Rufino Barrios and the subsequent land grab and forced labor system that they imposed, severely impoverished the indigenous population.

This analysis sets the stage for my second chapter titled "Coffee as a Catalyst for Revolution" that explores how the exploitation of indigenous people in the coffee-based economy set the stage for the Guatemalan Civil War. To do this I focus on the Guatemalan Revolution, a brief period of democratic rule in Guatemala that lasted from 1944 to 1954, and on the early period of the Guatemalan Civil War. This chapter is also a literature review that explores how the Guatemalan Revolution was a direct response to the legacy of coffee production in Guatemala. It then explores how the sympathies of President Jacobo Arbenz for the indigenous population ultimately led to the end of democratic rule in Guatemala with the US sponsored military coup of 1954.

In this second chapter, there is a thorough discussion on Decree 900, the infamous land reform that aimed to redistribute unused land owned by the coffee plantations and the United Fruit Company, to landless indigenous peasants. This following section then explores how the

beneficiaries of the land reform, in other words indigenous people, came to be associated with Communism and with the left-wing guerrillas that arose in the wake of the 1954 military coup. Afterwards, I explore how the resentment and divisions that the CIA sponsored coup created led to the rise of the guerrilla and to the Guatemalan Civil War. To add more foundation to these claims I included analysis on some of the oral histories that I conducted in Guatemala and on articles published by *The New York Times* during this time period.

This chapter sets the stage for my third and final chapter titled "Coffee as the Foundation for Genocide". This chapter explores the more intense period of the war that began in 1978 and ended in 1996. Compared to the other chapters, this chapter is heavily based on the oral histories that I conducted in Guatemala and in Massachusetts. The previous chapters created a map to understand the conditions that led to the Guatemalan Civil War, this chapter uses the oral histories to explore how the actual war was fought. This chapter builds upon the historical analysis and background provided in the previous chapters and explains why the Guatemalan Civil War's most brutal campaigns took place in the predominantly indigenous western Guatemalan highlands. The testimonies analyzed in this chapter show how the war was not a war between capitalism and Communism, rather it was a war between the coffee-holding elite and the classes of people who had lost their land and labor to those elites. My hope is that these oral histories will help explain the level of brutality used by the ladino controlled military against the indigenous population.

This thesis then ends with a conclusion that challenges the common narrative about the Guatemalan Civil War. Today many historians and activists trace the Guatemalan Civil War's beginning to the racism created by the encounter between Europeans and Mayans in the 1500s. While this narrative is true, this narrative makes the Guatemalan Civil War seem inevitable. In the conclusion, I argue the opposite. While I believe understanding the legacy of colonialism is

fundamental to understanding the mass killing of Mayans during the Guatemalan Civil War, it is not enough. For the ladino controlled government to kill over 150,000 indigenous people during the Civil War it required something more than colonialism, it required a profound belief in the inferiority and inhumanity of indigenous people.

In the conclusion and throughout this thesis I argue that belief was augmented and cemented into law by the introduction of an addictive cash crop—coffee. This thesis aims to show how the dependence on a commodity led to the commodification of an entire race of people. To my knowledge, this thesis is one of the few works that blames the genocide of Mayan peoples during the Guatemalan Civil War on the legacy of coffee production, rather than on colonialism and/or the fear of Communism. This thesis is important to our understanding of the Guatemalan Civil War because it challenges the traditional narrative about the Guatemalan Civil War that traces its inception to the 1954 CIA coup.

While much attention has been put on the presence of the United Fruit Company and their massive land holdings, not much attention has been placed on the circumstances that forced indigenous Guatemalans to have to labor on lands they didn't own to survive. This thesis therefore illustrates how coffee led to the imposition of a forced labor system and to stark losses of land that led the Mayan people to lose their ability to be self-sustainable and to have to work for money. It is for that reason that I argue that the Guatemalan Civil War was fought to undo the profound cultural, political, and economic obstacles imposed by the coffee plantation system.

This topic is important because today Guatemala is one of the countries that provides the most immigrants to the United States. Many of the people that are coming to the United States come from the western Guatemalan highlands, the area that was not only the most affected by the Guatemalan Civil War, but it was also the region that had the deepest ties to coffee production. If

the causes and solutions to this wave of migration are to be understood, understanding the legacy of coffee production is crucial. The war in Guatemala may have happened during the Cold War, but the left-wing guerrillas did not come into existence because they were inspired by Communism, they came into being to address the stark racial, economic, and regional inequalities created by coffee. Their existence did not justify the Guatemalan military's brutal response to the civilian populations in which they lived. **This following thesis is an exploration of the mechanisms that created the conditions that were ripe for the mass slaughter of indigenous Guatemalans, and the poverty that continues to afflict them.**

Chapter 1: Land and Race in Guatemala

"Guatemala is not a little Mexico. It is not at all like Mexico. It is not just another picturesque Latin American country for tourists to travel to. It is not just another anything. Guatemala is altogether itself: a white man's country with a population two-thirds Indian; a physically upended land where firm modern roads win among steep and sudden volcanic ranges; where customs and beliefs handed down by the Mayas mingle with the medieval piety and practice imposed by the Spanish conquerors; where every Indian community has its own bright immemorial dress, and where the aristocratic ladies of the "Latin" towns return from European convent schools to lives almost as veiled and idle as old-time Moslems; a land which keeps an individual character though Germans raise its coffee and Americans export its bananas, and in which one of the finest Maya ruins in existence is conscientiously safeguarded by a foreign fruit monopoly as an enclave in its own broad acreage"

-Katherine Woods, *The New York Times*, February 28, 1937[10]

[10] Woods , Katherine . "In the Towns and Jungles of Modern Guatemala." *The New York Times* , 28 Feb. 1937, query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9E02E4D71330EE32A2575BC2A9649C946694D6CF.

Coffee in Puerto Barrios, Carlos Manuel Pellecer, a Guatemalan politician talking to coffee workers in Puerto Barrios, Guatemala, 1953. Photo Courtesy of Cornell Capa.

The Colonial Racial Hierarchy

Guatemala is a country "about as large as Tennessee" located in Central-America and it is one of the most linguistically and culturally diverse countries in the world[11]. About 51% of the population in Guatemala identifies as indigenous, the majority of whom are of Mayan descent[12]. Today over twenty different indigenous languages are spoken in Guatemala, but the most common language spoken is Spanish. Despite hundreds of years of colonialism and conquest, the Mayas have managed to preserve their culture and heritage. However, that task has not been an easy one, and throughout Guatemalan history, indigenous people have been subject to severe

[11] "Communists in Guatemala." *The New York Times* , 14 July 1951, query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9F06E4D7103DE03BBC4C52DFB166838A649EDE.
[12] "Guatemala-Maya ." *Minority Rights Group International* , Minority Rights Group International, July 2008, minorityrights.org/minorities/maya-2/.

injustice and discrimination. After the Spanish conquest in 1524, different ethnic groups with their own histories and cultures that had lived in Guatemala for centuries, became known as "indios", and with that they were relegated to the bottom of the social pyramid with Spaniards and their descendants at the top. From one day to the next, people who had once identified strongly with their own distinct languages and traditions became bonded by the brutal treatment that they received at the hands of the Spaniards. With time, they became "indigenous".

However, the Spanish people who came to colonize or as Bernal Diaz del Castillo said "to bring light to those in darkness, and also to get rich" did not live in isolation[13]. Their culture, religion, economic system, and most notably their genes changed the social, political, and economic landscape of Guatemala forever. In the beginning, the Spanish government tried to create communities of Spanish settlers and administrators that were separate from indigenous communities. For example, in 1538, "Spain instructed Francisco Marroquin, recently appointed Bishop of Guatemala to see that Indians grouped together and settled in towns and villages where they could be politically controlled and more readily subjected to taxation and forced labor[14]". In 1542, a Spanish priest named Bartolome de las Casas published an account titled "A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies" that recounted the mistreatment of indigenous people in Spanish colonies in the Americas. In her chapter titled "Unfixing Race" featured in *Histories of Race and Racism*, Kathryn Burns explores how race was constructed in Guatemala during the colonial era. She states that because of Bartolome de las Casas' account, Spanish authorities "gradually assembled the juridical fiction of "two republics," the republica de españoles and its

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[13] Bernal Diaz del Castillo cited in Farriss, Nancy M. *Maya Society Under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival*. Princeton University Press, 1984, 29.
[14] Cambranes , J.C. *Coffee and Peasants: The Origins of the Modern Plantation Economy in Guatemala, 1853-1897* . Plumsock Mesoamerican Studies, 1985, 36.

corresponding republica de indios[15]". Therefore, by the 1570s, the Spanish crown "was betting on a strategy of physical segregation of Indians from non-Indians, and the forced relocation or "reduction" of the former into all-Indian towns[16]".

This attempted physical segregation was never a reality, and throughout the colonial period there was widespread interracial mixing and cultural exchange between Spaniards, African slaves and indigenous people. The conquest led to an emergent group that was first known as the "casta population, a group now called ladino" or mestizo who owed their existence to interracial marriage and mixing between these new populations of people[17]. These new populations of people included Spanish immigrants who were in their majority single men, and African slaves who came to Guatemala through the Transatlantic Slave Trade. They all mixed with each other, and with the local indigenous population. Even though there were laws that segregated indigenous people, castas, and Spaniards from each other "no one seemed to stay in the place the crown had assigned[18]". This meant that people of different ancestries and heritages were interacting with each other on a daily basis, and that ultimately meant that there was a lot of interracial mixing. Interracial mixing was also intensified by the fact that many of the invading Spaniards commonly had sexual relations with indigenous women who they would take as slaves, servants, or wives.

The casta population was actually first made up of "mulattos (slaves and free)—the offspring of disenfranchised Indian servants and (naborios) with Spaniards or blacks—and Indians who no longer identified themselves as Indian[19]". After 1700, the casta population began

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[15] Burns, Kathryn. "Unfixing Race ." *Histories of Race and Racism* , edited by Laura Gotkowitz , Duke University Press, 2011.
[16] Ibid, 60.
[17] Carlsen, Robert S . *The War for the Heart and Soul of a Highland Maya Town* . University of Texas Press, 2011, 105.
[18] Burns, Kathryn, 60.
[19] Carlsen, Robert S., 105.

to increase, particularly on the coastal piedmont and in the eastern part of Guatemala. Their "numbers grew especially quickly following the earthquakes that devastated Santiago in 1773, and the establishment of a new capital Guatemala City, in 1776[20]". However, despite their growing numbers, ladinos, people of mixed indigenous and European blood, were barred from holding significant positions of power in Guatemala. In a society that tried to segregate indigenous people and Spaniards into two republics, Burns shows that members of castas "fit neither of the two republics—and[…] [they] seemed, to the Spaniard's dismay, to threaten both republics with their disorderly conduct" and they were seen as "[Spain's] impure New World Others"[21].

Spaniards and people of pure Spanish blood known as criollos or creoles "retain[ed] the spoils of the Conquest" and they were in charge of major political and economic institutions in Guatemala[22]. People of pure European or "white" descent became the "colonial aristocracy" and they "remained closed to the people of mixed blood and to the Indians during the respectable lapse of three centuries[23]". During the colonial period, creoles were in charge of local government and they owned large land holdings where indigenous people and ladinos labored.

During this era, ladinos and indigenous people were deemed to be inferior to the criollos. In her book that explores the importance of whiteness in Guatemala, Maria Casaus Arzu, shows that white supremacy had existed in Guatemala since the colonial era. Casaus Arzu states that "socio-racial discrimination was, during, colonial times, the main tool used in building a

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[20] Wilkinson, Daniel, 31.
[21] Burns, Kathryn, 60.
[22] Cambranes, J.C., 40.
[23] Smith, Carol A . "Race-Class-Gender Ideology in Guatemala: Modern and anti-Modern Forms." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Oct. 1995, pp. 723-749, www.jstor.org/stable/179207?pq-origsite=summon&seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents, 731.

hierarchic society" and "pigmentocracy, certificates of purity of blood, the first-born inheritance system and endogenous wedding practice were the main mechanisms behind the concentration of wealth in the colonial social structure[24]". This hierarchy therefore placed people of "pure" European descent at the top of the social pyramid, people of claimed mixed descent in the middle, and indigenous people at the bottom. Indigenous people "were subjected to institutionalized relations of subordination, especially forced labor, obligatory specialization in food production, and tribute payment[25]". However, it is important to emphasize that during this period, the economic and social divides between indigenous people and ladinos were not as stark, and even though ladinos were generally more well positioned than Mayans, they were still mistreated by the criollo controlled state.

Mayan people largely lived in rural areas, specifically in the "western highlands and the isolated upper Verapaz" whereas "non-Indians were most numerous in the warm lowlands south and east of the capital[26]". Ladinos were in their majority an urban population, and by the end of the colonial period they made up "perhaps a quarter of all rural inhabitants[27]". The "geographic, territorial, and economic segregation" of indigenous people from Spaniards, creoles, and ladinos "had a racialist and discriminatory undertone that contributed to forming a stereotype of the indigenous person as an "inferior, lazy, barbaric, and savage being[28]". The stereotypes about ladinos weren't positive either and they were viewed as "people of broken color" who were

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[24] Casaus Arzu, Maria. " Social Practices and Racist Discourse of the Guatemalan Power Elites ." *Racism and Discourse in Latin America*, edited by Teun A. Van Dijk, Lexington Books, 2009, 175.
[25] Burns, Kathryn, 95.
[26] McCreery , David. *Rural Guatemala 1760-1940*. Stanford University Press , 1994, 34.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Casaus Arzu, Maria, 175.

neither indigenous nor Spanish[29]. After independence, ladinos gained and seized significant political, economic, and social power, but during the colonial era they were viewed largely as outsiders and as squatters–on the same level as indigenous people. The state was dominated by and for criollos. While the Guatemalan state still benefits members of criollo families today, in the decades after independence the ladinos gained acceptance and prominence in Guatemalan society through their control of the state.

However, during the colonial period, the creole controlled state, denied ladinos them benefits and acceptance and treated them as outsiders. Because of their mixed background, they "were rejected just as much by the colonial authorities as by the Indian communities[30]". Because most ladinos were the results of affairs between Europeans and indigenous women, they were born out of wedlock. Thus, the children were illegitimate and "no law, no moral code, obligated the colonial gentleman to his Indian concubine, nor the children he procreated with" the indigenous women, and they could not inherit any of the land or property that belonged to their fathers[31]. This meant that during the colonial period, "most of [ladinos] did not have legal access to land[32]". It was for that reason that most ladinos lived in cities because cities were the only places where they could live. Ladinos therefore "came to constitute a mass of landless men condemned to slave labor on Spanish-owned plantations, where they settled as tenant farmers" which led many to settle in areas that were far away from the central government in the late colonial period[33].

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[29] McCreery, David, 34.
[30] Cambranes, J.C., 38.
[31] Smith, Carol A., 731.
[32] Cambranes , J.C., 38.
[33] Cambranes, J.C., 38.

In contrast, the Spanish gave indigenous people some rights because they "understood that it was not only necessary to avoid the extermination of a people which supplied them with tax money and labor, but that this same population hid in terrain not readily accessible to the colonist and in depopulated zones controlled by the Spaniard[34]". Indigenous people were therefore allowed to live in relative isolation as long as they paid taxes and they supplied their labor on indigo, sugar, and cacao plantations when it was needed. The Spaniards allowed indigenous people to maintain their culture, traditions, and language because the western highlands, where most indigenous people lived had very little economic value. The relative isolation of the Mayas does not excuse the "ruthless exploitation" that they were subjected to on Spanish owned plantations[35]. Owning land, however, did not place indigenous people above ladinos on the social hierarchy, and ladinos had one major advantage over them, their ability to speak Spanish.

Ladinos all spoke Spanish, the language of the elite. In the years after independence, the Guatemalan state would establish Spanish as the official language of the government and of the schools it provided. This would therefore exclude indigenous Guatemalans, who didn't speak Spanish or who spoke it as a second language. Having Spanish be the official language would ultimately allow ladinos to be overly represented in Guatemala's educational, governmental, and economic institutions. In the long run, this would result in deeper economic, political, and social divides between ladinos and indigenous people. However, it is important to stress that this stark divide wasn't always present. Throughout the colonial period, the mixed status of ladinos or

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[34] Ibid, 37.

[35] Lovell, George W., and Christopher H. Lutz. "Conquest and Population: Maya Demography in Historical Perspective ." *Latin American Research Review* , vol. 29, no. 2, 1994, search.proquest.com/docview/1297392737/fulltextPDF/AE9AEBA4491F426DPQ/1?accountid=10598, 134.

castas meant that they were seen not only as inferior to criollos, but as a threat to society. Their lack of property made it extremely difficult for ladinos to find employment, and the Spanish state was always wary of their presence. Because ladinos didn't own land, they were denied the ability to be self-sufficient. Therefore, the government always believed that ladinos would be the first to revolt if there was unrest.

The First Signs of a Ladino Land Grab

Associating ladinos with revolt and unrest, meant that both indigenous people and ladinos were subjugated and surveilled by the creole controlled state. For example, if independent ladino communities were discovered, they would be "subjected to the same demeaning policy as the native population" and they would be "reduced to criminals and potential enemies of public order who had to be kept under surveillance at all times[36]". As such many ladinos fled state control, and established themselves in areas that were far away from cities. This phenomenon was best described by Archbishop Pedro Cortes y Larraz on one of his trips through the Guatemalan countryside. He said

> An unknown number of persons from many parishes who never think of mass or the Christian doctrine or of the sacraments live there; their idea is to hide themselves from the priests and all civilization and religion with no one knowing who they are or where they are[37].

Ladinos first fled to areas of the country that were largely unpopulated to escape the discrimination and mistreatment they faced. They first moved to the eastern part of Guatemala and to the western coast, however, they would soon start migrating to an area that was predominantly indigenous, to the western highlands and to the adjacent piedmont.

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[36] Cambranes, J.C., 38.
[37] Archbishop Pedro Cortes y Larraz quoted by McCreery, David, 34.

In the beginning this migration was highly controversial because in the colonial era, ladinos were barred from residing in "Indian villages, to protect them from the "deleterious influences of mixed-blood vagrants and mulattoes[38]". However, the real reasoning behind keeping indigenous people separate from ladinos was to prevent revolt. As was previously mentioned, ladinos were thought to be inherently rebellious and Guatemala's European minority wanted to prevent ladinos from joining with the majority Mayan population in rebellion. For centuries, Spaniards had been successful in keeping ladinos and indigenous people separate, but in the late colonial period, ladinos began migrating to the western highlands to seek better economic opportunities. This migration was made even more dramatic when there was a major earthquake in the nation's capital in 1773. Santiago de Guatemala, was largely populated by ladinos, and when the city was destroyed after the earthquake many of them migrated to the western highlands and to the adjacent piedmont to start over.

One town that was largely representative of this illegal migration was the town of San Juan Ostuncalco, a town that is high up in the traditionally indigenous, western Guatemalan highlands. San Juan Ostuncalco is located "about seven miles west of Quetzaltenango" in the "center of the southeastern of the Mam-speaking population[39]". While most of its population is still indigenous, it has a large ladino population. In his book, titled *Ladinos with Ladinos, Indians with Indians: Land, Labor, and Regional Ethnic Conflict in the Making of Guatemala*, Rene Reeves explores the impacts that ladino migration had on indigenous communities, and how they foreshadowed the land grab created by the Liberal Revolution.

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[38] McCreery, David, 34-35.

[39] Ebel, Richard E. "When Indians Take Power Conflict and Consensus in San Juan Ostuncalco " *Harvest of Violence: The Maya Indians and the Guatemalan Crisis* , edited by Robert M. Carmack, University of Oklahoma Press, 1992, 174.

He shows that late in the colonial period, San Juan became "a center for ladino settlement in an otherwise indigenous zone", and this immigration was largely due to a variety of factors that included the growing textile industry in Quetzaltenango, the earthquake in the capital, and the growth of aguardiente[40] production[41]. The ladinos' presence in San Juan Ostuncalco would have dramatic effects on the local economy and local government. By 1806, the "colonial authorities granted Ostuncalco's ladinos permission to form their own municipal council alongside the preexisting indigenous one, established back in the sixteenth century[42]". This was highly unusual because Guatemalan elites had long "resisted granting legal status to mixed-blood settlements" and by barring ladinos access to land they "assure[d] landowners a supply of cheap labor[43]". However, as ladinos migrated into traditionally indigenous areas to seek "refuge[…] from pressures for taxes and forced labor" they gained access to land and government representation that had been denied to them previously[44].

[40] Aguardiente is a liquor made from sugar cane.
[41] Reeves, Rene. *Ladinos with Ladinos, Indians with Indians: Land, Labor, and Regional Ethnic Conflict in the Making of Guatemala*. Stanford University Press, 2006, 17.
[42] Ibid, 17.
[43] McCreery, David, 36.
[44] Ibid, 36.

San Juan Ostuncalco, Guatemala, 2015
Photo Courtesy of Mariana Calvo

When ladinos first moved to western highland towns, like San Juan Ostuncalco, and onto historically indigenous lands they came there without any titles to the land, and with no governmental representation. However, Reeves shows that their lack of government representation began to change in the late colonial period. Prior to the late eighteenth century, the principal form of government in the western highlands was the cabildo. The cabildo was an indigenous municipal council, and for centuries it had allowed indigenous people to administrate their affairs with great independence. However, starting in the 1750s, more and more ladinos started migrating to the western highlands, and throughout the latter half of the 18th century a "growing number of ladino municipal councils" also known as ayunatamientos "were established and incorporated into the state's regional governing apparatus[45]". By the end of the colonial era,

[45] Reeves, Rene, 137.

ayuntamientos had displaced cabildos as the most important governmental institutions, which meant a drastic decrease in political representation for the indigenous population.

The ladinos' takeover of local government in the highlands ultimately would allow them to gain ownership of the land that they had illegally settled on, thus causing indigenous communities to lose lands they had lived on long before the arrival of Europeans in the Americas. Since pre-colonial times, the highland indigenous Mam community of Ostuncalco had "an enduring relationship with the adjacent [piedmont] region[46]". A report by a Spaniard named Diego Garces (ca. 1570), the mayor of a town called Zapotitlan stated that San Juan Ostuncalco had "maintained several coastal estancias y sujetos" called "Santa Catalina Retalhuleu and Santa Maria Magdalena[47]". Indigenous communities like Ostuncalco had maintained these piedmont dependencies to plant corn, "cacao, cotton, and other hotland products" and some highlanders settled in these communities[48]. However, "well into the nineteenth century this burgeoning population of transplanted highlanders had no interest in severing ties with the communities of origin" and as these highlanders settled on the piedmont, so did ladinos[49]. The costa del sur[50], as it was called, would soon become "a major theatre in the struggle over land that marked Mam Quetzaltenango[51]". The lands in the western highlands that were invaded by ladinos, would eventually become major coffee plantations at the end of the 19th century. The events that took place in the western highlands and on the piedmont in the late colonial period would set the stage

[46] Reeves, Rene 25.
[47] Ibid, 25.
[48] Ibid, 26.
[49] Ibid, 29.
[50] The word costa is misleading, in Spanish the word costa is used to refer to the piedmont region of the highlands.
[51] Ibid, 30.

for the dramatic losses of lands that indigenous people would face at the hands of the ladino controlled state in the late 19th century.

What happened in San Juan Ostuncalco, would happen throughout the highlands. By the end of the 18th century, demand for cotton, sugar, and cattle grew tremendously, and Guatemala's piedmont region was perfect for planting those crops and for raising cattle. This meant that "more and more ladinos laid claim to [piedmont] lands with the intention of supplying the nearby highland population center with sugar, cotton, and cattle"[52]. However, "the illegality of this migration led to a revealing contradiction despite burgeoning numbers, ladino residents could not participate, at least formally, in local politics or administration"[53]. By the early 1800s ladino settlements on the piedmont and higher areas of the highlands were allowed to form their own community level government that would eventually overtake the local indigenous governments, and soon the Guatemalan government itself.

The growing political power of the ladinos, ultimately led indigenous people to lose their lands. Reeves showed how this phenomenon took place throughout the highlands. The town adjacent to San Juan Ostuncalco called San Martin Sacatepequez also had lands on the piedmont that received many ladino settlers. At first the indigenous people of San Martin tolerated the arrival of ladino settlers onto their land because "municipal officials lacked the documentation that they believed they needed to mount an effective court challenge to intruders[54]". In 1811, San Martin had lost "its official land title" in a fire, and when they sued to have their land rights reinstated in the mid 1830s, they were able to make some gains because the Liberal government passed a law that banned privatizing communal indigenous lands called ejidos in 1837. However,

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[52] Reeves,Rene, 32.
[53] Ibid, 142.
[54] Ibid, 42.

the passing of that law did little to satisfy the discontented indigenous populations of the highlands who saw much of their land be encroached on in the late 18th century and early 19th century. That anger culminated in an indigenous revolt that placed Conservative, Rafael Carrera in the presidency in 1837.

Rafael Carrera came to power largely due to the frictions that existed between ladinos and indigenous people. However, he did little to help the indigenous population. While San Martin Sacatepequez did have its land rights recognized by the Conservative government it failed to expel ladino squatters from its territory. Even though "Conservative authorities did not revoke San Martin's title, they essentially disregarded its legal significance" and "instead of backing the title with the force of law, Conservative authorities bestowed de facto property rights on the land claims of ladino squatters who had surreptitiously invaded the town's ejido[55]". It is important to highlight that for the most part the highland Mayan population still controlled many of their extensive ancestral lands that were "held communally and controlled and governed by each village[56]". However, the hold they had on those lands was fragile. As ladinos consolidated their political and economic power throughout the 19th century, indigenous communities saw their political and economic power disintegrate.

By the end of the 19th century, indigenous Guatemalans would see most of their lands lost to coffee plantation owners and to ladino families. While it is unclear when and how the term ladino came to be used, many Guatemalans believe the word ladino is "derived from the word ladron, which means thief", a direct reference to the gradual, but nonetheless dramatic loss of land

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[55] Reeves, Rene, 62.
[56] Steinberg, Michael K. "Coffee and Mayan Cultural Commodification in Guatemala." *Geographical Record* , vol. 104, no. 3, 23 July 2014, pp. 361-373, 363.

and power that indigenous people faced at the hands of the ladinos in the 19th century[57]. No process would accelerate their loss of political and economic power than the introduction of one major cash crop—coffee. However, to understand the significance of coffee in Guatemala, it is important to understand the history of cash crops in Guatemala.

The History of Cash Crops in Guatemala

Unlike Mexico, Guatemala did not have abundant silver mines, and its "only natural source of wealth was its fertile soil[58]". Throughout the colonial period, Guatemala's fertile soil was exploited to produce cash crops like cacao and indigo. While Guatemala was under Spanish control, agriculture was "divided into two principal sectors: the commercial sector which comprised of medium and large-scale landowners, interested in cacao, indigo, and sugar cane, and the sector made up of the bulk of Indian and mestizo (mixture of Indian and Spanish) peasants dedicated to growing foodstuffs on small plots of land made available to them by the Spanish authorities or simply snatched from the mountains[59]".

Prior to the conquest, Mayans used the soil to plant corn, beans, cacao, and squash. Once the Spaniards came they embarked on a "civilizing" project, and the ancient cultivation of "corn, beans, bananas, etc. was considered characteristic of a subsistence and thus antithetical to progress[60]" . The Spaniards therefore began to stimulate the use of cash crops to promote development. They introduced cotton, tobacco, and sugar that were mainly cultivated by indigenous people through encomienda and haciendas, but the major cash crop during the colonial period was indigo.

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[57] Wilkinson, Daniel, 169.
[58] Wilkinson, Daniel, 75.
[59] Cambranes , J.C., 23.
[60] Burns, Kathryn, 97.

Indigo became especially prominent after 1770, and it was produced by small scale farmers in the eastern and southern parts of the country. During this time "the cash economy [was] centered on the region south and east of the new capital city of Guatemala[61]". However, after 1800 the indigo trade in Guatemala collapsed because "most of the small producers of indigo, who at one time were responsible for more than half the total output, had been ruined by droughts and locust, unstable and falling prices, competition from the large growers, and monopolization by Guatemala City merchants[62]".

After independence in 1821, "El Salvador and Nicaragua continued with indigo production, while Guatemala began cultivation of cochineal, which became the country's principal export product between 1840 and 1860[63]". Unlike indigo, cochineal was cultivated in the western highlands, and it was used to make a crimson-colored dye. By 1850, "cochineal accounted for 93 percent of Guatemala's exports[64]". While the cases of San Juan Ostuncalco and San Martin Sacatepequez were mentioned earlier, for the most part the Mayas still controlled most of their land because prior to the introduction of coffee in 1870, the lands in the west and the people who lived off them had no economic value. In her book titled *The History of Coffee,* Regina Wagner shows that unlike coffee, cochineal "did not require a large labor force" and it was cultivated by smallholders[65]. Cochineal is cultivated on prickly-pear cactus also known as nopal, and its "cultivation was concentrated in the Amatitlan and Panchoy valleys"[66]. During this

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[61] McCreery, David, 7.
[62] Ibid, 37.
[63] Wagner , Regina . *The History of Coffee*. Villegas Editores , 2001, 37.
[64] Handy 1984, quoted by Steinberg, Michael K, et al, 361-362.
[65] Wagner, Regina, 91.
[66] Burns, Kathryn, 99.

time “the demands on Indians were reduced” because the cultivation of “cochineal provided[…] little incentive to force substantial amounts of Indian labor”[67].

In contrast to indigo, cochineal was not under a monopoly led by elites in Guatemala, it was “completely under local control” meaning “small ladino and Indian growers produced much of the crop[68]”. Furthermore, what made cochineal a convenient export crop was that it “never involved large amounts of land[69]”. Therefore, it had little effect on land distribution in rural Guatemala because it was concentrated in very specific areas. However, there were some disadvantages to producing cochineal. Cochineal production was often threatened by “torrential rains” and disease affecting the cochineal producing insect; “the vulnerability of cochineal production prompted the Government to encourage farmers to plant coffee on their vacant fields[70]”. Despite the risks that came with cultivating cochineal, Guatemala was dependent on the crop until “artificial dies were invented in England [in] 1860, leading to a consequent decline in demand for cochineal[71]. In his book titled *Rural Guatemala, 1760-1940* that examines the history of different cash crops in Guatemala, David McCreery shows that for the indigenous community having Guatemala’s main cash crop be cochineal was advantageous. Having the concentration of agricultural export production be centered in the center of the country meant that many communities in the western highlands maintained their independence from the central state. For a brief period in Guatemalan history, a substantial percentage of the Mayan population was given a

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[67]Handy , Jim. ""A Sea of Indians": Ethnic Conflict and the Guatemalan Revolution, 1944-1952 ." *The Americas* , vol. 46, no. 2, Oct. 1989, pp. 189-204, www.jstor.org/stable/1007082 .
[68] McCreery, David, 114.
[69] McCreery, David, 122.
[70] Wagner, Regina, 42.
[71] Wagner, Regina, 29.

break from laboring on large plantations and they were allowed to "increase their agricultural productivity on the basis of their tradition of communal labor[72]".

During the 1860s demand for cochineal fell abruptly, just as ladinos were starting to plant coffee on their newly acquired lands in the piedmont. When they realized that planting cochineal wasn't sustainable, ladino coffee growers began to petition local ladino municipal councils to support their ventures. Starting in the 1860s Guatemalan elites started to have "a lively interest in coffee, and government officials promoted its cultivation during the 1850s precisely because a great many influential people felt that the country shouldn't be dependent on a single crop for financial health[73]". However, it is important to highlight, that "although coffee eventually would engage the sources of the Guatemalan countryside as no commodity had ever done before, production expanded erratically, in a rhythm driven by the ups and downs of the world market and conditioned by peculiar regional circumstances and patterns of acceptance or resistance among the rural population[74]". It would take twenty years for coffee to become Guatemala's main cash crop with the first commercial coffee plantations being established in Coban, Antigua, and Amtitlan. As agricultural elites shifted from cochineal to coffee in the 1860s and 70s, "export production expanded to an unexampled degree, engrossing large areas of the country until then little touched by export agriculture[75]".

In 1860, cochineal accounted for 78% of exports, and by 1871, the time of the Liberal Revolution, it accounted for 33%. As the production of cochineal declined, coffee production rose. In 1860, coffee accounted for 1% of exports, and by 1863 it had grown to be the second-

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[72] Cambranes, J.C., 41.
[73] Wagner, Regina, 59.
[74] McCreery, David, 161.
[75] Dawson , Frank G. "Labor Legislation and Social Integration in Guatemala: 1871-1944." *The American Journal of Comparative Law* , vol. 14, no. 1 , Winter 1965, pp. 124-142, 129.

largest export[76]. By 1870, coffee accounted for 44% of exports[77]. After the Liberal Revolution of 1871 led by General Justo Rufino Barrios, coffee production grew astronomically and by 1880 "coffee made up about 92 percent of Guatemala's export earnings[78]". This new dependence on coffee would have dramatic effects on the western highlands and on lives and livelihood of indigenous Guatemalans.

The Creation of a Coffee Nation

The 19th century has been referred to by many as the "coffee century" in Latin America. During this time coffee production in the region expanded astronomically. In 1770, 320 metric tons of coffee were traded around the world, in 1870 it was 450,000 metric tons, and by 1920 it was 1,600,000 metric tons[79]. Throughout Latin America, governments began to see coffee production as a means for prosperity and development. In the 1860s. "Guatemala's well-to-do realized that the future lay in coffee" and that "the beans could bring unprecedented profits on the emerging world market[80]". However, there were many challenges that came with turning Guatemala into a coffee nation, and they were all directly related to land, labor, and capital.

It happened to be that the lands most conducive for planting coffee were indigenous lands. The "highest quality coffee grows in volcanic soil at altitudes ranging between 500 and 1, 500 meters about sea level" which made the "southeast and western slopes of the Pacific piedmont,

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[76] Wagner, Regina, 52.
[77] Ibid, 43.
[78] Steinberg, Michael K, et al, quoting Jonas (1991), 364.
[79] McCreery, David. "Wage Labor, Free Labor, and Vagrancy Laws: The Transition to Capitalism in Guatemala ." *Coffee, Society, and Power in Latin America* , edited by William Roseberry et al., Johns Hopkins University Press , 1995, 207.
[80] Wilkinson, Daniel, 68.

and the Alta Verapaz region" the most important coffee-growing regions in Guatemala[81]. Most of the land in these areas belonged to the native Maya people. The land in these areas were divided into what were called ejidos, extensive "ancestral lands" that "were held communally and controlled and governed by each village[82]". Suddenly, "vast areas of the country which had once been neglected by Spanish colonist were incorporated into the economic life of the country"[83]. Even though "Indians lived in the nation, comprised over half its population" they were "still not a part of it" meaning that they weren't given a choice in deciding if they wanted to take part in coffee production[84]. By the time coffee was introduced in the western highlands and the piedmont, indigenous people lacked access to political institutions that would have allowed them to protest the dramatic changes it would unleash on their communities.

Ladinos were the first to see the economic potential in coffee and they began to immigrate at higher rates to traditionally indigenous areas as businessmen and coffee farmers. Ladinos from major cities like Quetzaltenango started to move to the Pacific piedmont at record numbers in the mid 1800s. The ladinos claiming ejido land started to create serious tensions, specifically in the Retahuleu region, and "there were various indigenous towns including San Felipe, San Francisco, Zapotitlan, El Palmar, and San Sebastian that resented the ladino businessmen who had invaded their communal lands to grow coffee[85]". The people from the town of San Felipe had long "complained of ladinos invading their ejidos, demanading censo land for coffee and then treating it as if it were their private property[86]". In May 1862, they protested to the Ministry of

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[81] Regina, Wagner, 71.
[82] Steinberg Michael K., et al, 363.
[83] Cambranes, J.C, 47.
[84] Ibid, 47.
[85] Wagner, Regina, 63.
[86] McCreery, David, 164.

Government citing that they were not "irrational beings" and they complained that "ladinos had seized control of the municipal government[87]". Unfortunately, their complaints were dismissed by the department governor citing the ladinos' claims that the coffee industry was bringing "prosperity to the town and higher wages to the Indians[88]".

Despite the proliferation of indigenous complaints about ladino coffee farmers, later on in that year "48 ladinos from Quetzaltenango requested an additional 6740 cuerdas of ejido land[89]". This later led to a full blown indigenous rebellion in 1864, throughout the Retalhuleu department, which led the governor of Retalhuleu to call in 200 militia to stop the violence. In the governor's account of what happened he cited the "single cause" of the rebellion as coffee[90]. In spite of indigenous people's protests, coffee continued to grow throughout western Guatemala and in Alta Verapaz, but the coffee production industry still lacked the land, labor, and capital to take hold in the entire country. Elites saw the enormous potential in coffee production, but they also recognized that "setting up coffee plantations was not an easy business and many began to feel that the Conservative regime governing at the time was not doing enough to make it easier[91]". They were especially frustrated with the "Conservative attitude toward the Indian" and indigenous people were seen as the biggest obstacle in allowing Guatemala to become a coffee nation[92]. Soon, their frustrations would be lead to a new shift in government dedicated to eradicating the so called "Indian problem[93]".

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[87] McCreery, David, 164.
[88] Ibid, 165.
[89] Wagner, Regina, 63.
[90] McCreery, David, 165.
[91] Wilkinson, Daniel, 68.
[92] McCreery, David, 171.
[93] Garrard-Burnett, Virginia. "Indians are Drunk and Drunks and Indian: Alcohol and indigenismo in Guatemala 1890-1940." *Bulletin of Latin American Research* , vol. 19, no. 3, July 2000, www.jstor.org/stable/3339298, 354.

In 1871, frustrated ladino landowners, threw their support behind a large rebel army primarily constituted by "ladino soldiers and officers from the western part of the country[94]" . This army was led by a man from the San Marcos department named Justo Rufino Barrios, the son of a coffee grower. Their triumph in Guatemala City would institute a so called Liberal regime that would effectively turn Guatemala into a coffee nation, with long lasting implications for its identity as a nation and for the indigenous population. Furthermore, it would turn ladinos from people who were once seen as rebellious outsiders into the ultimate insiders, a people on whom the state was modeled after. The changes that the Liberal regime would enact were so profound that the 1870s are known as the Liberal Revolution in Guatemala. This Liberal regime would make coffee production and civilizing the Indian a part of the national project, that would have profound effects on Guatemala's land, labor, and capital.

The Liberal Revolution

One of the most dramatic impacts of the Liberal Revolution was on land distribution in Guatemala. As was mentioned earlier, the land that was the most well suited for growing coffee was on indigenous communal land called ejidos. Much of that land was uncultivated or cultivated with subsistence crops like corn, potatoes, and beans. Coffee growers had persistently complained that "lands ideal for coffee were being wasted by the Indians on subsistence farming, and [by] not being uncultivated[95]". Beginning in 1871, the government began to find ways to privatize communal lands so they could be turned into coffee plantations. For example, in July 1873, President Justo Rufino Barrios, "declared 2,0000 caballerias of unowned fertile land […] to be put

[94] Burns, Kathryn, 103.
[95] Wilkinson, Daniel, 68.

up for sale in the Costa Cuca region, and El Palmar, Quetzaltenango[96]". These areas would soon become the most important areas for coffee production in the country. However, they were traditionally indigenous land. Similarly, in that same month, other executive decrees "began authorizing the sale of baldios[97] to private parties [,] [o]nly baldios already planted with coffee, sugar cane, and cacao were exempted"[98]. In 1874, Decree 112 "required all landholders to survey and register their holdings and titles to facilitate assessment for new land taxes" and "if sixty days elapsed without registration, lands could be declared baldios and sold"[99]. Similar to what had happened in San Juan Ostuncalco and San Martin Sacatepequez, many indigenous towns saw their land be "simply confiscated because [they] didn't have any official legal title recognized by the state[100]".

These changes in land redistribution would be solidified when President Barrios implemented Decree 170 in 1877. Decree 170 "demanded that Indian villages prove or obtain title to their lands prior to survey and reevaluation at their expense" if they didn't comply with the rule, "their land could be declared state property and sold, as it could if, after re-evaluation, taxes based on the new assessment were not paid[101]. This decree "allowed for the privatization of communal lands" and it gave local communities and individuals the opportunity to "improve lands, and in some cases land did remain in the hands of local communities, [but] it also provided an opportunity for better-financed and politically connected individuals to acquire large tracts of

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[96] Wagner, Regina, 87.
[97] Baldios are plots of unusued land.
[98] Dawson , Frank G. "Labor Legislation and Social Integration in Guatemala: 1871-1944." *The American Journal of Comparative Law* , vol. 14, no. 1 , Winter 1965, pp. 124-142, 129.
[99] Ibid, 129.
[100] Steinberg, Michael K, et al, 363.
[101] Dawson , Frank G, 129.

previously Mayan controlled lands[102]". By "improve" the Guatemalan government meant that individuals and local communities had to plant crops that were "profitable", not sustainable. The government decreed that most of the piedmont was "uncultivated" and "put it up for public auction[103]". However, these lands were cultivated, they were cultivated with maize, beans, and potatoes, crops that were used for subsistence farming. Lands that were declared cultivated were those planted with coffee, sugar, cocoa, or cattle feed. Once the lands that were used for subsistence agriculture were declared uncultivated, a land rush followed. By the 1980s, coffee plantations proliferated the piedmont.

This process had profound effects on the indigenous population, "seemingly overnight, tens of thousands of peasant agriculturalists became landless" and "within a few decades of 1871, about half of all native communally held lands in Guatemala had been taken over by private interests, almost all related to coffee production[104]". However, as the land in the highlands was "freed" for coffee production, thousands of indigenous people were suddenly homeless, and one other resource was needed to make the land valuable, labor. By the end of the 19th century, 2% percent of the population owned 65 percent of the arable land[105].

This land theft was best described in one of my oral histories. This oral history was conducted with a man named Fernando. Fernando was a fifty year old man who came from Quiche. Quiche is a department in Guatemala located in the western highlands. The majority of the population is Mayan, and many of the people who were forced to labor on coffee plantations came from here. Quiche was one of the areas where the population lost their lands due to the

[102] Steinberg, Michael K, et al, 363.
[103] Wilkinson, Daniel, 68.
[104] Steinberg, Michael K, et al, 363.
[105] Ibid, 364.

Liberal Reforms in the 1870s. Many important coffee plantations like la finca[106] San Francisco were located in Quiche. The following is what Fernando recalls from the land grab that commenced with the Liberal Revolution and that continued into the 20th century.

> My uncle, my father's brother used to always tell a story that I remember. He recounted how the plantation owners first came, and how they started to measure territory. They went on our property and yelled at my uncle and told him that our property was now theirs. They didn't take all of our land, but they took some of it. We used to ask my uncle what they did when that happened, and he told us, "We followed them, but we couldn't do anything, we couldn't complain, we couldn't discuss. They couldn't understand us because we spoke different languages. All we could say was very good. We tried, but nothing worked. All we could do was watch them build a fence around their new land[107].

Stories like the one told by Fernando were not isolated, and the story that Fernando recounted above took place all across the highlands. For a century, indigenous Guatemalans saw their land be taken by the government and they had no institutions to protect their lands. The Mayans also didn't have institutions that respected their right to use their labor in whichever way they saw fit. In fact, government institutions created laws that turned indigenous people into a slave-like underclass by forcing them to work on coffee plantations. These laws were specifically created by the ladino population to target the indigenous population.

Throughout the 1870s and the decades that followed, the ladino controlled government began to issue decrees that specifically targeted labor, indigenous labor. The triumph of the Liberals in 1871, not only signified the triumph of a new political movement, but it also signified the triumph of a social and racial group in Guatemala, the ladino coffee planters. Throughout the 19th century, the ladinos had been gaining tremendous political and economic power, but their power was consolidated with the triumph of General Barrios. The Liberal Revolution of 1871

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[106] Finca is the Spanish word for coffee plantation.
[107] Fernando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 14 July 2015.

therefore represented the emergence of the ladino coffee growing class over the indigenous population and their acceptance into elite circles in Guatemalan society. With the rise of a ladino to positions of political and economic prominence came a change in what the word ladino meant. The term "ladino came to mean in the language of the state, the assimilation or coming together of mestizos, blacks Chinese, ladinoized Indians, whites, Arabs, and Creoles[108]". The term ladino would soon apply to the growing number of European immigrants, primarily from Germany who came to provide the capital for the new coffee plantations.

With the ladinos' full takeover of the government in 1871, they were able to expand the term ladino to include everyone who was non-indigenous. The ladino identity therefore became an identity of opposition, and by defining ladino as non-indigenous, Guatemalan society further excluded indigenous people. By having ladinos refer to everyone who wasn't indigenous, ladinos were able to define their state as a non-indigenous state. This allowed them to justify policies that stripped indigenous people not only of their lands, but also of their humanity.

Unlike cochineal and indigo, coffee "requires a massive amount of labor for its production" and ladinos quickly turned to using indigenous people as labor[109]. However, this didn't come without challenges, and many "refused to forsake traditional highland village life to work under poor conditions on ladino plantations down on the unhealthy Western coast[110]. Many indigenous people refused "to work for ladino landowners, but when this work had to be done from their communities, they were even more reluctant" because many of them "did not want to abandon their own crops in order to care for those of strangers, particularly because after years of exploitation they knew they would be abused and subjected to paltry wages from those who

[108] Burns, Kathryn, 107.
[109] Burns, Kathryn, 100.
[110] Dawson, Frank G., 129.

solicited their services[111]". Their approach "only served to reinforce (emanating from the ruling class) of the Indian as lazy, naturally opposed to the idea of work and only capable of being incorporated into commercial agriculture by means of forced labor[112]". The exploitation of indigenous land was mapped onto indigenous bodies through the passing of government policies that forced them to work on coffee plantations.

Labor Legislation and Its Implications for Race

On April 3, 1877, the government passed Decree No. 177, also known as the Reglamento de Jornaleros, "legalized debt peonage, reinstated mandamientos, and began a frontal assault on the physically isolated Indian culture developed since independence[113]". Mandamientos were forced labor drafts, and under this system "planter[s] would request a certain number of laborers from the departmental governor, who in turn would order a particular town to supply the workers, with stipulations on lengths of service and wage, which would be paid in advance[114]". Ladinos were largely exempt from the mandamientos, and most of the labor drafts took place in "the western highland and the Alta Verapaz, where most of the majority indigenous population lived[115]". In the beginning, mandamientos were used by planters the most, and debt-peonage was secondary. However, this changed in 1894, when a law provided indigenous people a way to escape the mandamiento system, which was to become "an indebted worker for a plantation"[116].

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[111] Cambranes, J.C., 106.
[112] Cambranes, J.C., 106.
[113] Dawson, Frank G., 131.
[114] Roseberry, William, 19.
[115] McCreery, David, 207
[116] Wilkinson, Daniel, 77.

By the end of the 19th century, most indigenous people opted to become indebted workers, and the labor draft system was only used in times of emergency. Under the 1894, general labor law, indigenous people were exempt from plantation labor, if they had a debt that was less than fifteen pesos. The way this debt-peonage system worked was that indigenous people in order to buy food for their families and other necessities for their families would ask a plantation owner for money, and the owner would lend him money in exchange for their labor. An article published by T H Wheeler in "Littell's Living Age" in 1886, explained this system:

> [Once the indigenous person gets in debt] then their master for the time being advances them a few dollars, and thenceforward he is their master forever, for he has a right to their services till the debt is paid, and it rarely happen that an Indian gets free, for they are entirely ignorant of money, and utterly improvident. If an Indian so situated is transferred to the service of another estate-owner, his price, the amount of his debt, has to be paid by his new master, so that he is practically sold. If he refuses to work or absents himself, he is liable to be sent up to the alcalde for a whipping, which he much dislikes[117].

Coffee production required a large amount of labor, and in order for Guatemala to be a "coffee nation" it needed to use its institutions to coerce its population, specifically its indigenous population into working on the plantations. Guatemala needed a slave like system, and this system was imposed through a system that evolved from mandamientos to debt-peonage, ultimately to vagrancy laws.

While these laws were distinct, they were laws that sanctioned forced labor. Debt peonage lasted until the 1930s, when President Jorge Ubico abolished this system, and instead instituted vagrancy laws. Vagrancy laws became the backbone of coffee production in Guatemala until 1944, with the advent of the Guatemalan Revolution. In the 1940s, "the number of laborers needed every year for 11, 200 coffee fincas was estimated 425,000" and all of the labor was

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[117] Wheeler, T. H. "General Barrios, Late President of Guatemala." *Littells Living Age* , 31 July 1886, p. 282.

provided "primarily through a vagrancy law applied almost solely to Indians in highland Guatemala"[118]. Ladinos were largely excluded from forced labor, and during this period they continued to accumulate wealth and power in Guatemala. However, this is not to say that there weren't poor ladinos.

The vagrancy law known as Decree 1996, was enacted on May 8, 1934, and it "labeled as a vagrant anyone without sufficient property to provide an adequate income, anyone contracted for work on a finca but who had failed to comply with their agreement, and anyone without a contract for agricultural labor who did not cultivate at least three manzanas of coffee, sugar, or tobacco, four manzanas of corn, wheat, potatoes, vegetables, or other food products, or three manzanas of corn in the hot country giving two harvests a year[119]". Few indigenous people had access to that amount of land, which meant that they were subject to providing forced labor. People who only had ten or more cuerdas of land had to provide 100 days of labor a year, and people who had less than ten cuerdas of land had to provide 150 days of labor a year. This new law also required that "all agricultural laborers now carry a new form of libreta, [or notebook], to be renewed each calendar year, in which employers were to record the number of days worked for wages[120]". People who hadn't worked the days they were supposed to work, were either jailed or fined. From the Liberal Revolution up until the Guatemalan Revolution, forced indigenous labor was the foundation of the coffee production in Guatemala, but in order for indigenous people to become the backbone of the coffee economy, the government had to find a way to justify their oppression, and that justification was racism.

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[118] Handy, Jim. *Revolution in the Countryside: Rural Conflict and Agrarian Reform in Guatemala, 1944-1954* . The University of North Carolina Press, 1994, 192.
[119] McCreery, David, 220.
[120] McCreery, David, 220.

The Solidification of Racist Beliefs

As a result, indigenous people started to be viewed as a problem, and as people who were in need of being "civilized". Liberals made it a part of their national project to solve the so called "Indian problem" and they believed that the "Mayan failure to conform to modernity had little to do with biology, and everything to do with their implacable resistance to change and a stubborn determination to retain their distinctive culture and identity"[121]. As a result, polices to civilize or ladinoize, the indigenous population became national policy and they tainted Guatemala's intellectual and academic discourse for decades, this ideology was called indigenismo. Indigenismo was inspired by racial eugenics that Guatemalan elites imported from the United States. Some indigentistas believed that "Indians were capable of being civilized, others believed that such changes could only be secured by introducing Europeans to interbreeding[122]". Language used by anthropologists also observed these beliefs. For example, an account written by Sol Tax in 1941, described indigenous people as "classical primitives" with minds that are "clouded with animism[123]". Indigenismo infected many of Guatemala's top academics. For example, Miguel Angel Asturias, the Nobel Prize winning poet, was a prominent indigenistas, and he wrote his law thesis titled "Sociología guatemalteca: El problema social del indio" on the "Indian problem". In it he wrote:

> "The Indian represents a past civilization and the mestizo, or ladino as we'll call him a future civilization" (65). To bring the Indian into this future civilization, Asturias proposed that the indigenous communities should be genetically

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[121] Reeves, Rene, 9.
[122] Adams , Richard N . "Guatemalan Ladinization and History." *The Americas* , vol. 50, no. 4 , Apr. 1994, pp. 527-543 , www.jstor.org/stable/1007895, 528.
[123] Sol Tax. "World View and Social Relations in Guatemala." *American Anthropologist* , vol. 43, no. 1, Spring 1941, pp. 27-42, www.jstor.org/stable/662985.

> overwhelmed by "transfusing new blood in their veins" (105). The nation would be cured by giving a kind of life that lets the Indian die[124].

The goal was to gradually erode, by no means obliterate, "the more marked cultural distinctiveness of the Indian population[125]". However, this processing of civilizing or ladionizing had its roots in the colonial period. Starting in the colonial era, the Spanish elite believed that "both Indians and ladinos needed to be civilized, the colonial experience allowed ladinos to begin this civilizing process from a more advantageous position than Indians[126]". Ladinos were a difficult group to define. Antonio Bartes Juaregui, a prominent indigenistas defined them as:

> The word…meant in old Spanish "the romance or new language," from which it was derived that those who spoke one or more languages besides their own were called ladinos, and thus the Indians who spoke ladino (or Castilla as they themselves call it) were called ladinos. The meaning of this word is now extended to all those who in these countries are not Indians, or even when they are Indians, do not retain their language or customs [127].

They were people who spoke Spanish, wore western clothing, and over the course of the colonial period, a sizable minority of them learned how to read and write. While most ladinos had lighter skin than indigenous people, what made race and racism in Guatemala unique was that it was malleable, there was a "possibility of movement—up the ladder and forward on the timeline—the possibility, that is, of becoming Ladino[128]". That meant that people could go from identifying as indigenous one day, to identifying as ladino the next, literally. This was the case in San Pedro Sacatepequez. On October 13, 1876, the government of Justo Rufino Barrios issued the "Decree

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[124] Miguel Angel Asturias quoted in Wainwright, Joel, and Joshua Lund. "Race, Space, and the Problem of Guatemala in Miguel Ángel Asturias's Early Work." *Geohumanities* , vol. 2, no. 1 , 13 May 2016, pp. 102-118, www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/2373566X.2016.1167616?needAccess=true, 105-106.
[125] Ebel, Roland E., 174-175.
[126] Burns, Kathryn.
[127] Jauregui , Antonio B. *Los Indios su historia y su civilización* . Ministerio de Instrucción Pública, 1893, 91.
[128] Wilkinson, Daniel, 46.

Declaring the Indians of San Pedro Sacatepequez to be Ladinos[129]". That meant that indigenous people could become ladino simply if they abandoned their culture, if they forgot their past. Once this decree was passed the residents of San Pedro Sacatepequez were forced to take off their traditional garb and to speak Spanish.

Traje tipico, Traditional garb worn by a Mayan woman in San Juan Ostuncalco, 2015
Photo Courtesy of Mariana Calvo

Since the colonial era, indigenous people in Guatemala had worn traditional clothing to mark their identities. This history was best explained in an interview that I conducted with Ricardo, an elementary school teacher who identified as Mayan. He said:

> The [Spaniards] started to exploit the land, and to oppress indigenous people. They treated them terribly. They started to force them to color their clothing, so they

[129] Burns, Kathryn, 107.

> could identify them so they wouldn't escape. I imagine that indigenous people inspired themselves in the colors, and made them prettier[130].
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> .

What had begun as a form of oppression, had become a huge sign of pride for many indigenous people, and by forcing the people of San Pedro to take off their clothing they were forced to forget their past. The example of San Pedro shows how race in Guatemala was more than just skin color, it was a way of life, and the Guatemalan government wanted to bring it to an end.

With the rise of the Liberal Revolution and the rise of indigenistas, Guatemala was "imagined and represented not as a merging of indigenous and Ladino culture or blood, but as a nation of separate people[131]". The 1894 Census Report showcased this mindset best:

> The Ladinos and Indians are two distinct classes; the former march ahead with hop and energy through the paths that have been laid out by progress; the latter, immovable, do not take any part in the political and intellectual life, adhering tenaciously to their old habits and customs. The Indians do not cooperate actively in the progress of civilization[132].

Indigenous culture was therefore seen as a force that was inhibiting Guatemala's growth, and as a problem. To justify the subordination of the indigenous population in exchange for economic profit, the Liberal elite needed to devise a logic that established indigenous people as "savage, raged creatures" and who needed civilization[133]. The Guatemalan elite drew "on the theory of social Darwinism" and they "publicized a national history that aimed to demonstrate scientifically the degeneration of the indigenous race"[134]. By turning indigenous degeneration into an official government narrative, "civilizing" indigenous people became one of the government's main priorities. Civilizing was so important to the Guatemalan government that in the 1894, the

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[130] Ricardo . Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 17 July 2015.
[131] Konefal, Betsy. *For Every Indio Who Falls: A History of Maya Activism in Guatemala, .* University of New Mexico Press, 2010, 15.
[132] 1894 Census Report quoted by Wilkinson, Daniel, 46.
[133] Wilkinson, Daniel, 46.
[134] Burns, Kathryn, 107.

census stated that the government was "constantly striving to "instill into the Indians new customs, showing them new paths to success"[135]. It was believed that "requiring labor on the fincas[136] would convert indios, still untouched by civilization, into something useful and productive for the nation[137]". This logic would justify the inhumane treatment of indigenous people on coffee plantations. The insidious nature and effects of this logic were best shown in a 1886 magazine article mentioned earlier written by T H Wheeler:

> Very little difference there seems between this system and slavery, but still it is hard to condemn it all together. The country would be ruined at once if it were abolished; no Indian would do one stroke of work from that time forward, and every coffee plantation and other industry in the country would have to be abandoned. The Indians of Guatemala are a gentle, peaceable, harmless race, patient under hardships, and do not seem to feel any bitterness in their bondage; it has been the customs from time immemorial, and they are used to it[138].

While T H Wheeler says that the condition of indigenous people as oppressed people enslaved to plantation life had always been a custom, that is false. Prior, to the introduction of coffee into Guatemala, indigenous people had retained or rather regained a strong sense of independence and isolation from the central state. During the colonial period, many Mayans were forced to labor on indigo, sugar, and cacao plantations on the coast. However, much of their land and communities in the piedmont and in the highlands had been left untouched by the creole controlled state, and that independence was made even stronger during the period when cochineal was the main cash crop.

While indigenous people had always been viewed as inferior by the creole, and later ladino elite, they were allowed to maintain their customs and way of life for centuries. It was only

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[135] Wilkinson, Daniel, 46.
[136] Spanish word for coffee plantation.
[137] Konefal, Betsy, 17.
[138] Wheeler, TH, 1886.

until the gradual consolidation of the ladino state after independence in 1821 when indigenous people began to see their land and customs under siege. This full-on attack on their way of life and on their culture would be cemented by the triumph of the coffee state under the Liberal Revolution of 1870. The dependence on coffee as a cash crop made indigenous people's land and labor relevant, and the ladino controlled state did everything in its power to build institutions, laws, and frameworks to justify its theft. To justify stealing the land and livelihood of an entire group of human beings, Guatemalan society had to view indigenous people as subhuman. By the 1870s, racist beliefs about indigenous people were not only a part of government policy, but they were also a part of the vernacular. In the 1870s, an American travel writer observed that "People regard [the Indians] as little better than animals and fit only for cargo carrying, almost always addressing them as "chucho," a word used for a dog[139]".

The proliferation of racist beliefs in Guatemala was best showcased in an article published in 1888 in *The New York Times* titled "A Land Without Renown Further Aspects of Life in Central America" that described ladinos as being "very proud of their white blood" and as people who "would be insulted if called Indians"[140]. This quote is very telling because it shows how ladinos were able to justify the enslavement of indigenous people. By distancing themselves from their indigenous blood and claiming whiteness, ladinos created a separation between themselves and indigenous people that allowed them to rationalize their oppression. By rejecting their indigenous background, ladinos rejected their connection to the despicable treatment of

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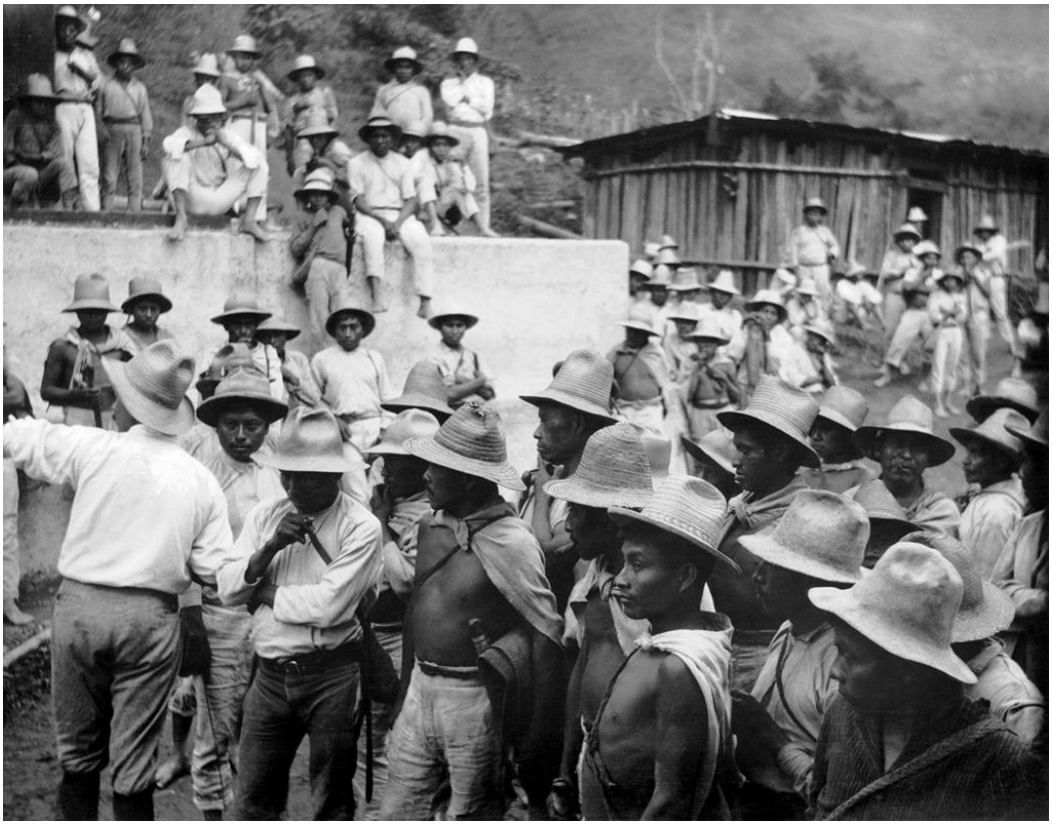
[139] Wilkinson, Daniel, 46.

[140] "A Land Without Renown Further Aspects of Life in Central America." *The New York Times* , 25 June 1888, timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1888/06/25/112635122.html?pageNumber=3.

indigenous people on coffee plantations at the hands of white and white claiming people. This dynamic is best shown in the image below:



Coffee pickers at roll-call in Guatemala, 1925
Photo Courtesy of Herbert List

This image shows the racial dynamics on coffee plantations in Guatemala. In this image, the "white" coffee plantation owner is directing his indigenous workers. All of the men in this picture were forced to work on a coffee plantation through debt-peonage laws. This photo was taken in 1925, fifty years after the Liberal Revolution, and it shows how the Liberal reforms created a racial caste system that turned indigenous people into laborers who were at the disposal of a ladino controlled state. To have images like this, racist discourse needed to proliferate political and academic circles. This phenomenon was best shown in a text by Carlos Samayoa Chinchilla, who said:

> The Guatemalan Indian is a very valuable decorative element, he is part of our landscape and in what regards his condition he deserves our human respect...But the Indian, even loaded with knowledge and favored by every imaginable circumstance, will always be an Indian, that is to say, a being that is unsociable when faced with any new idea, impenetrable and like a sleepwalker in the swarm of anxiety that harass man in his march toward the conquest of the future...his true redemption will not arrive until his old blood has the opportunity to mix with specimens of the white race (Samayoa, 1937; 6)[141].

These racist beliefs were used to justify the continued discrimination and oppression of Mayan people at the hands of the ladino controlled state. Beliefs about indigenous inferiority along with the severe economic inequalities that resulted from the introduction of coffee as a cash crop in Guatemala in the 1860s, would create the circumstances that would lead to the mass slaughter of Mayan people during the Guatemalan Civil War. However, it didn't have to be this way.

Viewing indigenous people as a problem was actually a very recent phenomenon, because for most of the colonial period and the years that followed independence, "the state and the ruling Ladino society was essentially parasitic to Indian society" and the ladino state, "led by Criollos and Ladinos could not survive without the food and labor provided by Indians[142]". Things changed with the rise of coffee production and the Liberal regime. The state began to "consider the very existence of the indigenous population to be a problem" and "no efforts were being made to incorporate the indigenous population in the nation-state[143]". Indigenous people were incorporated into the national economy once coffee became the nation's major source of income, and the ladinos began to force "Indians to depend on ladinos for income and survival"[144].

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[141]Casaus Arzu, Maria, 177.
[142] Adams, Richard N., 531.
[143] Rasch, Elisabet D. "Representing Mayas: Indigenous Authorities and Citizenship Demands in Guatemala ." *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice*, vol. 55, no. 3, Winter 2011, pp. 54-73, www.jstor.org/stable/23182209, 57.
[144] Adams, Richard, N, 532.

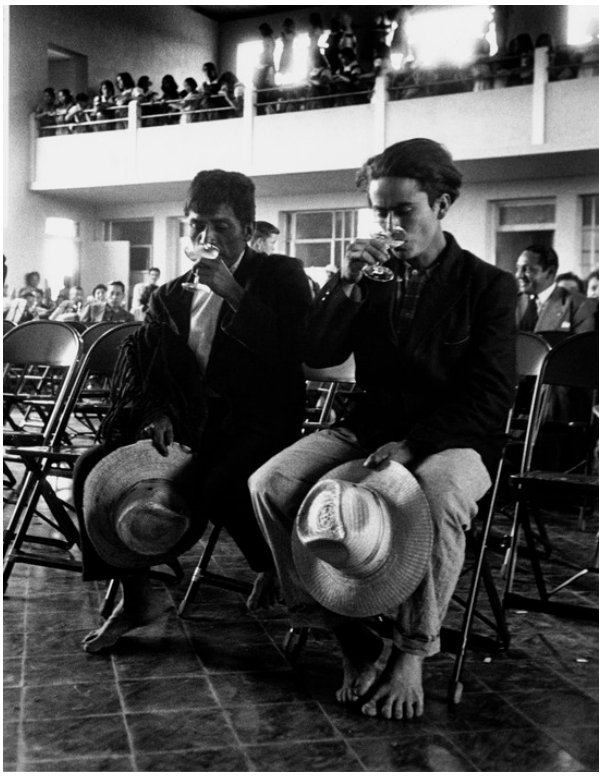
By taking away their land, and thus taking away their farming independence, indigenous people had to start working to make a living, "access to land was so limited that Indians had to spend their time laboring for Ladinos if they were to survive"[145]. With the loss of their self-sufficiency and independence away, Mayan people were relegated to the lowest strata of society. And their inferior position in Guatemalan society would ultimately cause them to be associated with left-wing insurgent movements. The following chapter will illuminate our understanding of how indigenous people came to be seen as Communists. To do this, I will explore the role coffee played in the rise and fall of the Guatemalan Revolution. I will then analyze the CIA-sponsored coup of 1954 and the rise of left-wing guerrillas in response to the coup.

[145] Adams, Richard N, 532.

Chapter 2: Coffee as the Catalyst for Change

"Yet constantly under the light foam-like surface of the white man's civilization, this student from the United States felt the profound depths of the Indian culture, like a dark sea: "That sea still ebbs and flows a tranquil tide, but it has terrific power, yet unaroused. I wonder if it will ever wake to realization of its own power, and if it does what will happen"

-*The New York Times,* Katherine Woods, 1937[146]



The Guatemalan Revolution, Barefoot peasants drink champagne at the dedication of a school built by the reformist government, 1953.
Photo Courtesy of Cornell Capa

[146] Woods , Katherine . "In the Towns and Jungles of Modern Guatemala." *The New York Times* , 28 Feb. 1937, query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9E02E4D71330EE32A2575BC2A9649C946694D6CF.

The Guatemalan Revolution

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, the Mayan population not only lost most of its ancestral land, but they were also subjugated to forced labor on coffee plantations. Even though debt-peonage was abolished in 1934, forced labor came back in a new form, vagrancy laws. These "laws declared individuals with insufficiently large landholdings to be vagrants and compelled them to work on coffee plantations for paltry wages for up to 150 days each year, and throughout Guatemala, Indians were required to perform this forced labor, whereas Ladinos were able to avoid it[147]". President Jorge Ubico (r. 1931-1944), a dictator, passed vagrancy laws that helped secure cheap labor for plantations and he also "launched a massive roadbuilding program that depended on the forced labor of peasants[148]". By the early 1940s, the coffee land grab that had resulted in dramatic losses of Mayan land at the hands of European and ladino coffee growers reached its apogee. The effects of that land grab were about to usher in a popular uprising that would be known as the Guatemalan Revolution or the October Revolution.

In the late 19th century, indigenous people had to be coerced into working on coffee plantations, but by the eve of the 1944 Revolution, "what had begun as a forced artificial dependency had become an economic reality" and "access to land was so limited that Indians had to spend time laboring for Ladinos if they were to survive[149]". No longer were indigenous people forced into picking coffee, by the "mid 1950s, they had no choice but to seek it out[150]". Coffee

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[147] Brintnall, Douglas E . "Race Relations in the Southeastern Highlands of Mesoamerica." *American Ethnologist*, vol. 6, no. 4, Nov. 1979, pp. 648-652, www.jstor.org/stable/643561, 642.
[148] Wilkinson, Daniel. *Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal, and Forgetting in Guatemala*. Duke University Press, 2004, 99.
[149] Adams , Richard N . "Guatemalan Ladinization and History." *The Americas* , vol. 50, no. 4 , Apr. 1994, pp. 527-543 , www.jstor.org/stable/1007895, 532.
[150] Ibid, 532.

therefore stripped indigenous Guatemalans of their ability to be self-sufficient and consequently enslaved them to the market. This led to increased suffering and hardship for the Mayans and by the early 1940s, they were fed up with the status quo. In 1944, a popular indigenous uprising brought progressive Juan Jose Arevalo to power. This led to what is now called the October Revolution (1944-1954), also known as the "ten years of spring", during this period there were "two successive, democratically elected presidents [who] attempted to redress the plight of the majority indigenous population through significant land reform and political enfranchisement[151]".

During this period the government stimulated "the formation of political parties, trade unions, and peasant leagues" that promoted indigenous rights[152]. Democratically elected, President Juan Jose Arevalo, passed a lot of progressive legislation, for example in 1947 he signed a "labor code that outlawed corporal punishment in the plantations, established a minimum wage, an eight-hour workday, and a six-day workweek, and protected the right to unionize"[153]. Arevalo was succeeded by someone who was even more liberal than he was, Jacobo Arbenz Guzman. Jacobo Arbenz was one of the chief military officers behind the October Revolution. Arbenz was "an unusual young colonel who cared passionately about social reform[154]". Arbenz won the presidency in November 1950, and he succeeded Arevalo on a "reformist platform advocating agrarian reform", in other words he won on a platform to give indigenous people back the land

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[151] Green, Linda. *Fear as a Way of Life* . Columbia University Press, 1999, 329.
[152] Davis, Shelton H., " Introduction: Sowing the Seeds of Violence " *Harvest of Violence: The Maya Indians and the Guatemalan Crisis* , edited by Robert M. Carmack, University of Oklahoma Press, 1992, 16.
[153] Wilkinson, Daniel, 100.
[154] Gleijeses , Piero. *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954*. Princeton University Press, 1992, 3.

that had been taken from them as a result of the Liberal Revolution[155]. Not only did Arbenz's national project include redistributing land owned by coffee planters, it also included lands lost to sugar and cacao plantations and to multinational companies like the United Fruit Company. The Liberal reforms of the 1870s, had not only liberalized land for coffee plantations, but it had also liberalized land for anyone with capital.

When Arbenz was elected," 2% of the population controlled 72% percent of Guatemala's arable land, while 88 percent of the population only held 14% of the land"[156]. However, "of the total privately held land, less than 12 percent was under cultivation", this was highly controversial considering the fact that "more than two-third of the population participated in agriculture, this meant sweeping poverty, malnutrition, and its accompanying health problems[157]". The fact that large landowners were simply owning land as a backup while thousands of poor Guatemalans were starving was seen as unacceptable by many.

Malnutrition, illness, and poverty were especially concentrated in predominantly indigenous regions. Issues pertaining to health and poverty would continue late into the 20th century, and they remain issues today. The poverty that indigenous Mayans who lived in the highlands experienced was best explained by a woman named Olga who worked as an elementary school teacher. She lived in a small town in the department of Totonicapan and worked in a K'iche' speaking community. She was young and single at the time, and she lived in a community that had lost much of its productive land to the land grab that had come in the wake of the Liberal Revolution. As a result, the people who lived in the town she worked in were merchants. In her

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[155] Trefzger , Douglas W . "Guatemala's 1952 Agrarian Reform Law: A Critical Reassessment." *International Social Science Review*, vol. 77, no. 1/2, 2002, pp. 32-46, www.jstor.org/stable/41887088, 32.
[156] Trefzger, Douglas W., 32.
[157] Ibid, 32.

interview, Olga powerfully described the poverty that afflicted the majority of indigenous people who lived in the highlands. She said:

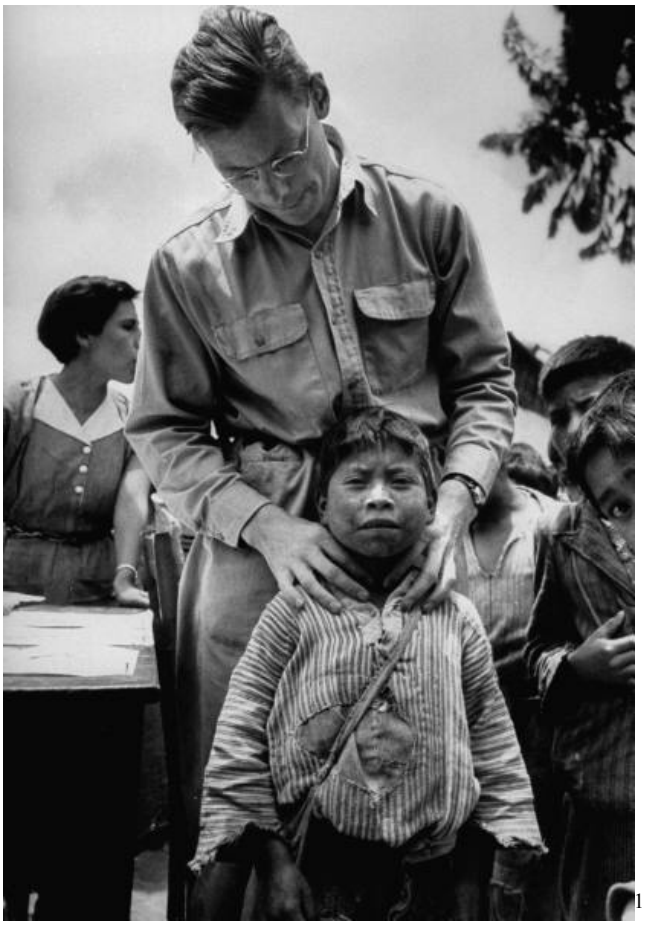
> It was a very poor place. There were a lot of poor people. There were villages that there were really far away. I lived with a woman whose husband was a merchant in Guatemala City, but he sold things on the street. Every two months the man would come, and during that time, the woman would eat very little so her kids could eat. They would only eat two times a day. She would give them breakfast at 10 in the morning, but just tamalitos and a tortilla with salsa. In the afternoon, they would eat a lot of chili peppers.
>
> The house was very simple too. They often slept on the floor. They didn't have shoes. They would only eat meat when the husband came. They even invited us. Over there, teachers are very respected, teachers are very respected in remote communities, and when the father came, the kids would brag about how they were going to eat meat, how their mother was going to make a soup with tomatoes, onions, chili, and meat, because that's what their father wanted. They would always say how happy they were that their father was coming. Every two months, a bread, a soup, some meat, but yes, that's what extreme poverty looks like[158].

The poverty that affected the Guatemalan population also had profound effects on people's health. This was best described in an oral history interview that I conducted with a man named Jose Pablo. Jose Pablo had worked as a medical volunteer from 1985-1988, in the Ixil Triangle, a predominantly indigenous region where the majority of the population provided labor for coffee plantations nearby. The Ixil Triangle is located in Quiche, a department on the western side of Guatemala. In his interview with me, he described the health and poverty of the Mayan people who encountered in his time in the Ixil Triangle. He said:

> They looked really sick, really sick. Their clothing showed their poverty. Men and women. All of them were sick, especially with tuberculosis. […] It's a remote place, and its far from the capital and from the cities, and it's where the poorest people are, supposedly poor. From what I saw they had land, but in spite of owning land, they didn't have the support to develop their lands, I suppose that's why the guerrilla came into being, to help the people that were truly poor[159].

[158] Olga . Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 6 Aug. 2015.
[159] Jose Pablo. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 6 Aug. 2015.

This excerpt shows the profound ways in which coffee production had affected indigenous people. Not only did indigenous people lose their land and labor to coffee, they also lost their health. Coffee was therefore more than a crop; it was a lived experience.

 [160]

Doctor Treating Indigenous Boy, Nutritionist Dr. Nevin S. Scrimshaw of the Central American Institute of Nutrition, feeling goiter in last Indian boy to be examined, July 1953.
Photo Courtesy of Cornell Capa

The Government Takes on the Indigenous Cause

Jacobo Arbenz made it a part of his government platform to help and empower indigenous people, and to undo many of the Liberal Revolution's policies. He received overwhelming

[160] This image better illustrates the affects that poverty created by coffee production had on indigenous people's health. This image supports the details shown in Jose Pablo's account.

support from labor unions and peasant labor movements that had their bases in indigenous communities. From the beginning, however, Arbenz's indigenous sympathies were met with skepticism from the Guatemalan elites and from the American government. Throughout his tenure, Arbenz's government was accused of having Communist sympathies until it was ultimately accused of being Communist in 1954. Arbenz's perceived connections with Communism were multi-faceted. On one hand, he was perceived to have Communist sympathies because his progressive stances had received acclaim from local Communist party, and because he had shown a willingness to work with them. On the other hand, he was associated with Communism because of his pro-indigenous stances.

It was believed by both American and Guatemalan elites that indigenous people were most likely to be sympathetic to Communism because of their mistreatment under the feudal system that the Liberal Reforms had created. This belief was best transmitted in a 1951 *New York Times* article titled "Communists in Guatemala". The article stated the following.

> Within our own time Guatemala has seen a dictatorship overthrown by revolution. Its population, at least 75 per cent Indian, has too often been exploited by large landowners. The percentage of illiteracy is high. The nominal democracy of the 1945 Constitution has not been realized, and this failure has given the Communists their opportunity. We cannot expect a Maya, living in an ancestral village high in the hills, unable to read, cut off from the main world currents, to recognize communism by instinct as just another system of slavery[161].

Elites thought continuing to pass progressive reforms would cause indigenous people to radicalize and start a Communism revolution. These fears over Communism taking ahold in Guatemala intensified when Arbenz passed his agrarian reform program, a program that largely aimed to redistribute land to landless indigenous peasants.

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[161] "Communists in Guatemala." *The New York Times* , 14 July 1951, query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9F06E4D7103DE03BBC4C52DFB166838A649EDE.

Jacobo Arbenz and Wife, Jacobo Árbenz, then president of Guatemala, with his wife Maria, Guatemala, circa 1953
Cornell Capa

On June 17, 1952, the Guatemalan Congress approved Decree 900, which "licensed the redistribution of 603, 704 hectares of land to an estimated 100,000 families[162]. Decree 900, had its foundations in the "1946 Guatemalan Constitution Article 88 which empowered the Guatemalan

[162] Trefzger, Douglas W., 32.

government to direct the national economy toward benefiting Guatemalan society"—a stark contrast from the governments prior to the October Revolution[163]. This constitution also declared that Guatemala's president ""create and maintain institutions" to address and resolve Indian problems[164]". The land reform was an example of one of those institutions. It was a reform that aimed to undo the legacy of coffee production in Guatemala, With Decree 900, the government declared its right to expropriate, divide, and redistribute idle, privately owned land. By the end of Arbenz's presidency, his government redistributed almost "16 percent of Guatemala's private land to an estimated 100,000 families[165]". Arbenz's emphasis on helping indigenous people at the expense of coffee growers was best shown in a *New York Times* articles from 1953 that discussed his land reform project. The article stated:

> President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman in his annual message to Congress aid that with enforcement of the agrarian reform that had been the main object of his program the country initiates an economic transformation that would bear satisfactory fruits in the near future and benefit thousand of undernourished and underpaid peasants
>
> Señor Arbenz said it was time that Guatemala lost its dependence on coffee exports and developed other national sources of income, which now would be possible with agrarian reform opening new land for cultivation of many new products
>
> Government officials recently voiced a protest against what they said was a systematic campaign against the Government and unfounded charges that it is pro-Communist[166].

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[163] Tzefzger, Douglas W, 33.
[164] Ibid, 35.
[165] Ibid, 43.
[166] "ARBENZ FORESEES GAINS IN REFORMS; Tells New Guatemala Congress His Land Law Will Relieve Dependence on Coffe." *The New York Times* , 3 Mar. 1953, query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9800E6D71F3AE53ABC4B53DFB5668388649EDE.

This article showcases Arbenz's commitment to bringing change to Guatemala, but it also shows the backlash that he faced. His attempts to help the indigenous population in Guatemala, swiftly became equated with Communism. However, the only reason that he was charged with having Communist sympathies was because he was threatening the hegemony of the coffee planters and of the United Fruit Company. To combat the threat that the land reform was to their power, they turned to the American media to promote a narrative that the land reform had been drafted by Communists. As more land was redistributed, their claims would grow louder and louder, until the government's progressive reforms "were rolled back violently with the 1954 CIA-sponsored coup d'etat which unleashed a reign of terror against the Mayan population"[167].

This historical process was best explained in an interview that I conducted with a man named Armando. Armando is a retired member of a guerrilla group called ORPA. He joined the guerrilla because as an indigenous identifying person he wanted to help create a state that included indigenous people. Now retired, Armando is a professor at a local university in Guatemala, and he was very well versed in Guatemalan history. According to Armando this is what happened during the 1954 coup:

> In the years prior to 1954, Guatemala had ended the military dictatorships that had dominated Guatemala for decades and they instituted what people call the democratic spring for ten years. But then because of the CIA interests, Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán was removed. The CIA had a lot of interests in Guatemala because the United Fruit Company was staffed by important American government officials like the Dulles brothers. They wanted to gain back the lands that the democratic governments had given back to the people[168].

[167] Green, Linda, 329.
[168] Armando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 5 Aug. 2015.

The United Fruit Company was "the first of modern multinationals" and it was in charge of selling bananas, the world's fourth most important crop[169]. While the growth of the United Fruit company and its role in Guatemalan society is beyond the scope of this paper, the United Fruit Company held significant land and power not just in Guatemala, but across the Americas. Founded in 1899, the United Fruit Company would soon hold a monopoly on bananas, and they would hold billions of dollars in assets, until their subsequent decline in the 1960s. At one point The United Fruit Company held the "world's largest private navy[170]". The United Fruit Company employed millions of people, and it was responsible for building a lot of the infrastructure in countries like Guatemala, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic. Most of the infrastructure that had been built by the ladino and European coffee planters, but a sizable portion of the railroads and highways were also built by the United Fruit Company.

The company's anxiety, grew with the anxiety of coffee growers when Jacobo Arbenz passed his infamous Agrarian Reform in 1952. Despite the fact that most of the land that plantation owners and the United Fruit company had to give up "had been unused and was part of its stock of territory kept in reserves" its executives, along with many coffee planters, were not happy with Arbenz's efforts at redistributing land for the landless peasants. United Fruit executives along with coffee growers began to say that Arbenz was plotting to "implant Communism" in Guatemala[171].

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[169] Chapman, Peter . *Bananas: How the United Fruit Company Shaped the World* . Canongate U.S., 2009.
[170] Ibid, 8.
[171] Ibid, 124.

Just as United Fruit executives were starting to sound the alarm that Communism was beginning to take a hold in Guatemala, there was an election taking place in the United States. In 1952, General Eisenhower came to power on the premise that his predecessor Harry S Truman had gone "soft on Communism[172]". Eisenhower appointed John Foster Dulles as Secretary of State, and his brother Allen Dulles as the CIA Director. Both of these men were "old confidants and advocates of United Fruit" with each of them owning shares in the company[173]. This would have devastating consequences on the Arbenz regime and on the indigenous cause.

The United Fruit Company began to plot a campaign against the Arbenz regime, and they hired John Clements, a former marine to write a report on the Communism threat in Guatemala called "Report on Guatemala". This report "held that Communism had already gained a foothold in Guatemala" and that "action was imperative as the enemy closed in[174]". The report contended that Arbenz wanted to take over the Panama Canal zone, and soon Guatemala became the CIA's number one priority. The Dulles brothers began to plan a military coup to remove Arbenz from power and on "June 18, 1954, after many months of preparation by the CIA, a rebel forced led by the former army officer Carlos Castillo Armas began the invasion that would topple Arbenz and end a decade of democratic rule in Guatemala[175]".

Castillo Armas' army was also known as the Liberation Army, and by the CIA's own estimation it was "extremely small and ill-trained" and no match for the 5,000 strong

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[172] Chapman, Peter, 124.
[173] Ibid, 126.
[174] Ibid, 129.
[175] Wilkinson, Daniel, 180.

Guatemalan Army" but was only "really intended to a serve a psychological rather than military function[176]". It didn't matter that Castillo Armas' army wasn't as large or trained as the Guatemalan Army, the fact that a foreign supported army was invading Guatemala provoked a lot of fear, and by October 1954, Jacobo Arbenz resigned and fled to Mexico. His Revolution and the changes it brought left with him. The fall of Arbenz' government at the hands of a US sponsored coup led to another era of military dictatorships, which rapidly undid his reforms and set the stage for a thirty-six-year long war, the Guatemalan Civil War. But perhaps, more tragically, the coup solidified the narrative that the indigenous movement was tied to Communism.

These beliefs were best expressed in a *New York Times* article titled "Communism in Guatemala" by Flora Lewis that stated:

> Now, the Communist appeal among the peasants is strong. The Indians suddenly winning earth's greatest treasure—land—feel that the Communist land agent who turned this miracle deserves their reverence, attention, respect and, without question, their vote.
>
> The Communists have been urging the Indians, awakened to their hunger for land, to go ahead and seize whatever is at hand, cultivated or not, despite the fact that the land reform law provides only for expropriation of uncultivated acreage. The Communist party now is claiming the title of stanch champion of the excited peasants, to be relied upon, they say, if distant authority should seek to halt the Indians wondrous feast before their appetite for land is sated. There are enough landless peasants to form a formidable army of support for the Communists if a clash should come[177].

As a result of the United Fruit Company's campaign to delegitimize the Arbenz regime, the struggle for justice for indigenous people, for the land lost to coffee, was erroneously equated with Communism. The linking of indigenous land and the indigenous race to

[176] Wilkinson, Daniel, 180.
[177] Lewis, Flora.

Communism, would ultimately turn the western highlands into the epicenter of a war, which was at its core, the struggle to undo the legacy of coffee production in Guatemala.

The Beginning of the Guatemalan Civil and the Rise of the Guerrilla

The 1954 coup would create stark divisions in Guatemalan society, and they would unravel in a conflict within the Guatemalan military. The beginning of the war was best explained in an interview with Armando, the former guerrilla member who was cited earlier in this thesis. Armando joined the guerrilla in the late 1970s, but he knew the history behind the early years of the war very well. This is his account of what happened:

> So I'm assuming you know the classical story about the Guatemalan Civil War. You probably know that it started in 1960, and that it didn't start off as an ethnic conflict, but rather as a conflict within the same military. You probably know that the war started with officers that were educated at the School of the Americas in the United States, at the Panama Canal, and in Guatemala. The first major military officers to come out in rebellion were Luis Trejo Esquivel, Turcios Lima, Alejandro Ibarra, and company […
>
>]The military began to fight within itself, and this progressive part of the military went to seek refuge in the eastern part of Guatemala. That's another important thing to mention, the first guerrilleros were white. In the beginning the guerrilleros were called canchitos or white people. They had blonde hair and blue eyes. There are still some guerrilleros in that area today. Some of them are still frustrated. Then the Fuerzas Armadas Rebeles, were formed. They were a real combat group and they had been a faction of the Communist party in Guatemala. The party was never combative; they were just ideologists. The ideologists were of the ladino or mestizo race, but they had a lot of differences among themselves as well[178].

In 1960, there was a rebellion among major leaders in the Guatemalan military, who first fled into the eastern part of the country as isolated guerrilla groups. Over the course of the 1960s and in the 1970s, they built their ideological basis and support. By the 1970s they built "massive

[178] Armando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 5 Aug. 2015.

popular mobilizations that engulfed much of the majority indigenous highlands region[179]". However, it is important to highlight that in its early period, the guerrilla was primarily a class based movement. It was started by poor ladinos, who made up a sizable minority in Guatemala.

However, they were only a minority. They teamed up with ladino university students, but the leaders of the movement knew that they needed the support of the indigenous population if they were ever going to succeed. Starting in the mid 1970s, the guerrilla started to put a stronger emphasis on the indigenous cause. Indigenous people were the poorest population in Guatemala, and if the guerrilla movement was going to truly be a class movement, it had to include the poorest of the poor, the Mayans. The very people who had been disenfranchised and subjugated by the ladino government in the name of coffee, in the name of profitability and production. Race became an increasingly important component of the guerrilla, and by taking on the cause of the indigenous people, the guerrillas were acknowledging that race was at the center of economic inequality in Guatemala. At their core, however, they were fighting for greater economic justice in Guatemala.

Although the guerrilla was first based in eastern Guatemala, a predominantly ladino region, by the 1970s, most of the guerrillas moved their recruiting and organizing efforts to the western highlands, a predominantly Mayan region. The western highlands were the region that had long defined the labor and land used for coffee production in Guatemala. Not only were the highlands the region of Guatemala with the highest proportion of indigenous people but due to decades of exploitation the highlands were also the poorest region. When I interviewed Jose Pablo, the man who had served as a health care provider in the Ixil Triangle from 1985-1988, I

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[179] Hale, Charles R. *Más Que un Indio (More Than an Indian): Racial Ambivalence and Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Guatemala*. School for Advanced Research Press, 2006, 13.

asked him if people in the western highlands liked the guerrilla. He replied by saying "yes, of course they did, their objective was to help poor people, and they were poor[180]".

The economic situation of people in the highlands made the guerrillas see the western highlands as a place where they could build a movement that focused on improving the lives of Guatemala's poorest people. While left-wing guerrilla groups were immediately labeled as Communist by the US supported government, and while there was some Communist influence among guerrilla groups, I had a different perspective from people who grew up in communities where the guerrilla was present. This was best said in an interview with Fernando. Fernando was mentioned earlier in this thesis. In the excerpt shown earlier, he described the dramatic loss of land that indigenous people suffered as a result of the Liberal Reforms. Fernando grew up in the Ixil triangle, a region in the western Guatemalan highlands, that not only had deep ties to coffee production, but it was also a major theatre of the Guatemalan Civil War. Because of his experience growing up in one of the regions that was hardest hit by the war, Fernando was very well versed in the history of guerrilla. This is his perspective about the founding of the guerrilla and its goals.

> Well, the story about the guerrilla is that they were a part of the military. At some point one part of the military started to conflict with another part of the military. There was a faction of the military that was very pro-CIA, and they began to fight against other parts of the military. One group expelled the other, and they fled into the mountains, well they went north, but the military followed them and pushed them into the mountains. There they found people who helped them, and they saw that the people there were very solidary, hospitable, and open, but they were also very poor. So among themselves they had an ideological awakening. Before it used to be just a fight between factions of the military, but after that they took on the cause of poor people. With that as their justification, they started their struggle.
>
> Little by little, the indigenous people got involved because in the beginning there were no indigenous people in the guerrilla. The elite of the guerrilla, the people in

[180] Jose Pablo. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 6 Aug. 2015.

> charge, were always ladinos. There were some indigenous people who held medium rankings, but most of them were just ground troops. After that they started to move into the Quiche region, into the mountainous regions because people there helped them and they were safer there. In the 1970s the guerrilla grew stronger, and in 1978 they appeared in San Pablo. The military's brutality started in 1980 and 1981[181].

The guerrillas started to organize in the western Guatemalan highlands because they knew that the local population would be sympathetic to their ideas. These people had lost their lands and dignity to coffee plantations, so the guerrillas knew that their narrative on social justice and land reform resonated with many people in the highlands. The guerrillas "promise[d] radical social change in the language and imagery familiar to the Left throughout Latin America: social equality, material well-being, and political voice for all"[182]. These ideas appealed to many indigenous people because they had been denied those ideals for centuries. These ideals appealed to Armando, the former guerrilla member who I interviewed for this project. He was attracted to the guerrilla not because of its emphasis on class, but because of its emphasis on race. These were his reasons for joining ORPA:

> I was looking for something that the state wasn't capable of giving me. The state wasn't capable of recognizing that indigenous people, my people were people who deserved dignity from a cultural, social, economic, political, and religious stand point. The guerrilla promised us that space, but it wasn't the space that we were looking for. We were looking for the state to recognize the dignity of its people[183]

This excerpt from Armando's interview therefore illustrates how the guerrilla appealed to indigenous people because it took on the issue of race. It promised a space where indigenous people would be able to fight for their rights and traditions to be respected.

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[181] Fernando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 14 July 2015.
[182] Hale, Charles R., 13.
[183] Armando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 5 Aug. 2015.

While I have referred to the guerrilla as a singular noun, there was never one guerrilla group. There was a variety of different guerrilla groups, who were also simply called the guerrilla. In all my interviews, the guerrillas were also referred to as guerrilla. No distinction was made between the different groups. The only person who ever made a distinction between the different guerrilla groups, was Armando, a former member of ORPA. The "three main guerrilla organizations" were "the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), the Revolutionary Organization of People in Arms (ORPA), and the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR)[184]". The heads and ideologues of the guerrilla "were of the ladino or mestizo race" and the majority of the lower-rank members were indigenous[185]. However, they targeted their organizing and recruitment methods in the largely indigenous western highlands. This structure shows a profound contradiction in the guerrilla movement. Even though the guerrilla movement had declared itself as a movement that aimed to help Guatemala's poorest people, it was not immune to the racism that had defined Guatemala for centuries. Within the guerrilla, ladinos were still the ones with the most power.

Furthermore, because the ladinos were the main ideologues and heads of the guerrilla, they were less likely to die in combat whereas indigenous people who made up the majority of the foot soldiers were. This inequality was further heightened by the fact that starting in the late 1970s, the Guatemalan government initiated its brutal counterinsurgency campaign in the western highlands because they were the chief areas of support and recruitment for the guerrilla. However, the guerrilla wasn't the only group that challenged the government's authority. There were also peasant leagues and labor unions. Peasant leagues were organizations that focused on

[184] Perera , Victor, 10.
[185] Armando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 5 Aug. 2015.

the rights of rural agricultural communities in Guatemala, specifically on the conditions of workers who worked on coffee plantations.

The CUC and Other Opposition Groups in Guatemala

Most of these peasant leagues were local and they had been founded during the Guatemalan Revolution. For example, in 1950, "a number of peasant leagues formed to join the Confederacion Nacional Campesina de Guatemala (Guatemalan National Peasant Confederation-CNCG)[186]". However, after the 1954 coup, most of the peasant leaders were killed or jailed. No prominent peasant league would emerge until the mid-1970s, when many local peasant leagues joined to form CUC (Comité de Unidad Campesina) "the most consequential indigenous campesino organization in Guatemalan history[187]". CUC was formed to "link the urban and rural labor movements with the country's large indigenous peasant population" and it was the "first Indian-led labor organization in the history of Guatemala and the first to bring together highland Indian peasants with poor ladino farm workers[188]". The CUC came into being to protest the "horrendous abuses of Mayan workers in highland coffee fincas[189] and to [protest] the equally deplorable conditions of servitude to which ladino and indigenous peons were subjected on the

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[186] Grandin, Greg . "To End With All These Evils: Ethnic Transformation and Community Mobilization in Guatemala's Western Highlands, 1954-1980." *Latin American Perspectives* , vol. 24, no. 2, Mar. 1997, journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0094582X9702400202., 14.

[187] Grandin, Greg. "Five Hundred Years ." *The Last Colonial Massacre* , University of Chicago Press, 2011, pp. 50-70.

[188] Davis, Shelton H. " Introduction: Sowing the Seeds of Violence " *Harvest of Violence: The Maya Indians and the Guatemalan Crisis* , edited by Robert M. Carmack, University of Oklahoma Press, 1992, 20.

[189] Fincas means coffee plantation in Spanish.

Pacific coast's sugar, coffee, and cotton plantations[190]". During this period, a prominent labor union known as the National Committee for Trade Union Unity (CNUS) was founded in April 1976. The CNUS was a labor movement comprised of independent trade unions and worker organizations, but it always guarded "its independent radical political parties and a nascent guerrilla movement[191]".

However, that didn't mean that it was in favor of a pro-plantation, conservative government. In 1978, CNUS along with other labor, peasant, and religious organizations began to protest the increasing militarization of the western highlands. They were specifically protesting the massacre of Kekchi-speaking Indians in Panzos, Alta Verapaz, a major coffee producing region. This group of Kekchi Indians had actually been "soliciting the National Institute of Agrarian Transformation (INTA) for titles to their lands", lands they had lost as a result of the Liberal Revolution. At first the government agreed to give them the titles to their land, but the Indians were then "met by heavily armed soldiers when they marched on the town hall to obtain them", a hundred of them died[192]. The Panzos massacre foreshadowed the larger scale massacres that would plague the western Guatemalan highlands in the years to come.

With the Panzos massacre, greater protest of the militarization of the western highlands took place, along with greater protests over the conditions of peasants and workers in Guatemala. For example, in February 1980, the CUC organized a strike of "70,000 cane-cutters and 40,000 cotton pickers, an action that, along with another CUC-initiated strike of coffee pickers in September 1980, forced the government to raise the minimum wage of farm workers from $1.12

[190] Perera , Victor, 67.
[191] Davis, Shelton M., 20.
[192] Ibid, 17.

to $3.20 a day[193]". However, the CUC and CNUS were not on good terms with the plantation supported, conservative government, and CUC especially operated in secrecy to protect itself. Just as CUC was organizing its strikes to improve the living conditions of workers in Guatemala, the Guatemalan army was preparing itself for war. By 1980, "the army's strength had expanded from 27,000 to 40,000, which made it the largest standing military force in Central America at that time"[194].

Another major force of opposition to the US-sponsored government was the Acción Católica or Catholic Action movement. The Catholic Action movement was a religious social justice movement that "became the basis of a fairly strong ethnic revitalization and rural modernization movement[195]". The Catholic Action movement had its roots in liberation theology, a movement that "sought to combine Catholicism with revolutionary socialism" and that emphasized liberation from social, political, and economic oppression as a form of salvation[196]. During the 1960s and 70s, Catholic priests observed the oppression and suffering of the indigenous populations at the hands of ladino landowners, and many of them began to institute programs to education, organize, and aid the indigenous population. The most famous priests affiliated to the Catholic Action movement, lived in the Ixil Triangle. They included priests like Juan Gerardi, Xavier Gurriarán, and Luis Gurriaran.

Father Xavier Gurriarán was notable for having "helped establish agricultural and craft cooperatives with indigenous leaders drawn from Accion Catolica[197]". Fernando, the man that I

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[193] Ibid, 20.
[194] Perera, Victor, 68.
[195] Davis, Shelton H., 16.
[196] "Catholicism and liberation theology: A new sort of religious radical." *The Economist* , 20 Aug. 2014, www.economist.com/blogs/erasmus/2014/08/catholicism-and-liberation-theology.
[197] Perera, Victor, 66.

interviewed who grew up in the Ixil Triangle described listening to speeches "about social consciousness inside the Catholic Church[198]". According to Fernando, as an indigenous man, "The Catholic Church changed everything. The Catholic Church started to raise awareness. They taught us to question things and to organize. The Church really helped[199]". In his interview, Fernando recounted that the Catholic Church even questioned the state of land distribution. He said:

> "That was the big question, a lot of people were displaced from their lands. I think that's why, the Catholic Church started to get involved, to question the situation, and to make people aware of the injustice. Even I remember how some people lost their lands"[200].

This meant that the Catholic Church, like the guerrilla was combating the legacy of coffee production in Guatemala by questioning the state of land reform in Guatemala. By 1968, close to the time when the Catholic Church was beginning to make people question the status of land distribution in Guatemala, 86% of the Guatemalan population could not live off the land they lived on[201]. This was no accident; this was directly connected to the land theft initiated by the government in 1871 to turn Guatemala into a "coffee nation".

As the boycotts, strikes, and opposition to the government grew through groups like CUC, CNUS, and the Catholic Church. The growth of these groups coincided with growing guerrilla numbers. In his interview, Fernando recalled seeing the guerrilla for the first time in the mid 1970s. He said:

> My father started working, and I remember that one Sunday, my father ran into the house to say something to my mother. They ran out of the house and we followed them. I saw a group of guerrilleros marching. We didn't know who they

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[198] Fernando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 14 July 2015.
[199] Fernando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 14 July 2015.
[200] Fernando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 14 July 2015.
[201] Statistic from McDowell and C. Smith (1976:274) Carlsen, Robert S . *The War for the Heart and Soul of a Highland Maya Town* . University of Texas Press, 2011, 118.

> were, they were wearing an olive-green uniform. The military used to wear that same uniform, but they later changed it to a camouflage color. We went to the park and there was a meeting there, the entire town was there. […] Later that afternoon, the military came. That was the start of the war in San Pablo[202].

By 1980, the government launched Operation Sophia. Operation Sophia was counterinsurgency campaign in the western Guatemalan highlands, primarily in the Ixil Triangle region that aimed to destroy the civilian base in which it was thought that the guerrilla hid. The military would come to see all indigenous people as Communist, and using that as their justification they launched a scorched earth campaign that resulted in a Mayan genocide.

This chapter explored how the legacy of coffee created the foundations for a left-wing guerrilla movement in Guatemala, the following chapter will explore how the legacy of coffee production created a genocide in Guatemala. Because the guerrillas took on the cause of indigenous people, the government no longer saw indigenous people as solely a problem, they saw them as the enemy. The fact that the guerrilla was operating in predominantly indigenous areas served as the perfect justification for the ladino controlled military to express its racism towards Mayan people through acts of genocide that were spread throughout the highlands. However, if we are to understand the brutality that was unleashed by the Guatemalan military against the indigenous population, it important to recall the legacy of coffee production. A century earlier coffee production had turned the existence of indigenous people into a problem that needed to be dealt with, the Guatemalan Civil War was a continuation of that legacy. Coffee production had turned beliefs on Mayan inferiority into official government policy, Operation Sophia was an extension of one of those policies.

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[202] Fernando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 14 July 2015.

Chapter 3: Coffee as the Foundation for Genocide

"Beginning in July, 1982, the Army descended on the Ixil region, indiscriminately burning houses, murdering men, women, and children, destroying fields, and killing livestock. Refugees who fled into the mountains were bombed and strafed by helicopters and planes. In the end, between seventy and ninety per cent of the Ixil villages were destroyed. Ríos Montt and Rodríguez Sánchez are specifically charged with fifteen massacres in which eleven hundred and seventy-one Ixils were killed and twenty-nine thousand Ixils forcibly displaced. There are also rape and torture charges.

The trial [that charged President Rios Montt with genocide] opened on March 19th. The prosecution scheduled some hundred and thirty witnesses. Many testified in Ixil Maya, their own language. There were wrenching accounts of military assaults on Ixil towns with names like Xesayi, Chel, and Tu B'aj Sujsiban; of old people slain when they were too old to flee; of infants tossed into the flames of burning houses; of unborn children being cut out of pregnant women's uteruses; of captives being held in holes in the ground, raped in churches. Others told of fleeing to the mountains, where they were forced to live off of wild plants. Numerous witnesses testified that if they tried to plant crops, or even build a fire, they were bombed and strafed from the air. A further twenty-nine thousand Ixils are estimated to have perished under these conditions. A former soldier testified that, as far as he could tell, his orders were simple: Indio visto, Indio muerte. *("Indian seen, Indian dead")."*

-Peter Canby, *The New Yorker*, 2013[203]

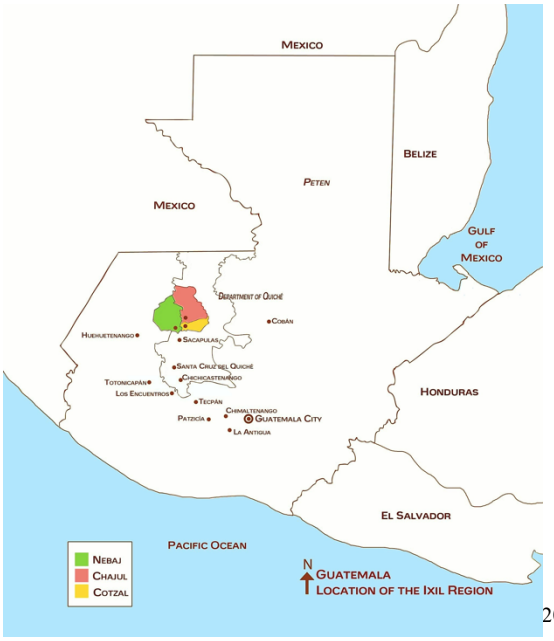
[203] This is an account written by Peter Canby that describes the testimonies used to prosecute ex-President Efrain Rios Montt of the crime of genocide.

The Kaibiles, Im*age of the Kaibiles, a special counterinsurgency force of the Guatemalan army that has been accused of human rights violations, Guatemala City, 1988*
Photo Courtesy of Larry Towell

The War in Quiche

The most prominent images and media surrounding the Guatemalan Civil War come from Quiche. Within the Quiche region, the Ixil Triangle was known for being one of the main battlegrounds between the government and the guerrilla. The Ixil Triangle is an area of Guatemala made up of three major cities: Nebaj, Cotzal, and Chajul.

Canby, Peter . "The Maya Genocide Trial." *The New Yorker* , 3 May 2013, www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-maya-genocide-trial.



[204]

Ixil Triangle Location in Guatemala
Photo Courtesy of Susanna B. Place

This area is a region in the Quiche department of Guatemala where the majority of the population speaks the K'iche' language, but in this particular region, another language called Ixil is spoken. According to Victor Perera, a Guatemalan journalist, Ixil is a language

> abound with subtle idiosyncrasies and a native gallows wit, is an offshoot of Mam that has evolved into a language so distinct it cannot be understood by any of the Ixils' neighbors. Of the twenty-two languages spoken in Guatemala by the five dominant Mayan groups, Ixil is one of the best conserved and to this day retains its community folktale's and creation myth[205].

This region was particularly notable because many of its residents were known for their historical opposition to the central government. For example, in 1530 residents of Ilom and Salquil, along with residents of Uspantan "revolted and killed a dozen Spanish officers and

[204] Place , Susanna B. *Ixil region of Guatemala* . 2013.
[205] Perera , Victor. *Unfinished Conquest: The Guatemalan Conquest* . University of California Press, 1995, 76.

encomenderos[206]". It was the sight of yet another rebellion in 1799 against colonial authorities, and most notably, it was also the site of the 1936 rebellion. During this rebellion, mobs of indigenous people rebelled against the new vagrancy law instituted by the dictator Jorge Ubico. They were protesting a law that "compelled landless mayas" to work fifty hours on coffee plantations in the piedmont. Because of these uprisings, the Ixil triangle, and by extension all of Quiche, the department where it is located, was known for its history of resistance to the Guatemalan government. That history would prove to have tragic consequences.

In the period between the Liberal Revolution and the Guatemalan Civil War, the Ixil Triangle received significant ladino migration as the coffee industry began to grow. While the ladino population never surpassed "five percent of the total populations" of the Ixil Triangle, "as the wielders of power in these communities their influence on the regional economic, religious, and social life was understandably considerable[207]". Like in many regions in Guatemala, the ladinos took over indigenous land to build large coffee plantations, and with that they gained the power to manage indigenous labor supply. Many Ixils were forced to labor in the coffee plantations that were nearby. One of the most famous coffee plantations was la finca San Francisco.

In my interview with Jose Pablo, a man who had lived and worked in the Ixil Triangle in the years after Operation Sophia, described where the coffee plantations were located. He said, "most of fincas were close to the Ixcan"[208]. The Ixcan was a jungle region just below the

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[206] Ibid, 65.
[207] Richards , Michael. "Cosmopolitan World View and Counterinsurgency in Guatemala ." *Anthropological Quarterly* , vol. 58, no. 3, 1 July 1985, search.proquest.com/docview/1289839034/fulltextPDF/DF834D60409E422BPQ/1?accountid=10598, 90.
[208] Jose Pablo. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 6 Aug. 2015.

highlands of the Ixil triangle. The fincas were located on the piedmont just above it. In his interview, Mr. Gutierrez described how some indigenous people had land, but that their land was not "profitable". In his interview, Mr. Gutierrez described the Ixil Triangle, a majority indigenous region, as being the place "where the poorest people are[209]". According to him, indigenous people did have some land, but "they didn't have the support to develop their lands[210]". This was largely because maize, beans, and others crops, weren't considered profitable. As a result, many indigenous people didn't have the resources to develop their land. By the time of the Guatemalan Civil War, the western Guatemalan highlands had the highest rate of infant mortality in the western hemisphere[211].

Jose Pablo was working in the Ixil Triangle and in the rest of Quiche in the years after the Operation Sophia. He worked primarily with refugees, and in his interview, he stated that most of the refugees came from the Ixcan region. This was further corroborated by a report by Berkeley Beatriz Manz. Manz worked with many refugees who were forced to flee Quiche, and she identified "the Ixcan as the region from which most refugees fled[212]". The Ixcan was a region in Quiche where many of the people that had been displaced by the coffee land grab came to build a better life. Most of the migrants who settled in the Ixcan came from the Ixil region, and were ethnic Ixils. This migration was encouraged by the Catholic Church during the 1960s and 70s. Most of the settlers first came from Huehuetenango, but "settlement in the Ixcan continued

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[209] Ibid
[210] Ibid
[211] Perera, Victor, 25.
[212] Beatriz Manz quoted by North, Liisa, and Alan B. Simmons. *Journeys of Fear: Refugee Return and National Transformation in Guatemala, Place and Maya Identity*. McGill-Queen's Press, 1999, 217.

in the 1970s, landless Guatemalans heard about available land in the area[213]". This whole process was best described by Fernando, a man who grew up in an area close to the Ixil Triangle. He said

> Those speeches that I remember about social consciousness took place inside the Catholic Church, inside of the convent. When we were still living at the plantation, Father Xavier took a lot of people to colonize the Ixcan, it was a jungle region that has now been converted into a place for pastoral farming. A lot of people who didn't have land in Quiche, decided to move there. Father Rodrigo encouraged a lot of people to move there, and he brought trucks full of livestock which he handed out to them. The people who moved there soon started to plant food, and because the region was so remote, the priests had these vans that they used to transport people from Ixcan to Quiche. The priests were really close to the people. They understood our reality, our struggle[214].

This region later became notable for its large guerrilla presence. The Ixcan was known as the stronghold of the EGP (Guerrilla Army of the Poor). In 1972, ladino members of the guerrilla moved into the Ixcan and they formed the Guerilla Army of the Poor (EGP). Similar to what they were doing in the highlands, ladino guerrilla commanders saw that it was in their best interest to adopt an "indigenous agrarian philosophy" because they "recognized the growing importance of Indians in a national revolutionary struggle, and the growing membership of Indians themselves in EGP ranks lead to their increased participation in decision making processes[215]". As a result, the Ixcan soon became the sight of some of the worst atrocities committed during Operation Sophia, the government's scorched earth campaign. This was largely due to the fact that it the Ixcan was an important recruitment center for the EGP.

There were numerous reasons as to why the EGP saw the Ixcan as the ideal place to start a movement. The guerrillas believed that people from Ixcan were more likely to be sympathetic

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[213] Taylor Matthew . "Militarism and the environment in Guatemala." *Geojournal* , vol. 69, no. 3, 2007, pp. 181-198, search.proquest.com/docview/223675018?pq-origsite=summon&accountid=10598, 185.

[214] Fernando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 14 July 2015.

[215] Richards, Michael, 93.

to the guerrilla's cause because they were people that had been displaced, largely due to the effects of coffee production in Quiche. Furthermore, the fact that the Ixcan had dense forests that could offer protection to members of the guerrilla and that it was located next to Mexico, made it the ideal place for the guerrilla to hide and plot attacks against the Guatemalan military. After the guerrilla was able to build a strong base in the Ixcan, they expanded into the highlands, into the Ixil Triangle. By 1979, the EGP had gained a presence in the entire Quiche region. This was best exemplified by the fact that in "January 1979, an EGP contingent composed of two hundred conscripts-most of them Ixils—occupied the town of Nebaj to hold a recruitment rally[216]". The Ixcan and Ixil region would soon become the site of the worst atrocities of the Guatemalan Civil War, and this is due to its long and complicated history with coffee.

Racism as the Catalyst for Genocide

Since the Liberal Revolution, indigenous people from Quiche had been forced to labor in coffee plantations in the piedmont above the Ixcan and on the Pacific littoral. The indigenous inhabitants in Quiche had long been people who were oppressed by coffee plantation owners, and the state that supported them. The introduction of coffee in Guatemala created the conditions that would attract indigenous Mayans to the revolutionary ideals that were promoted by groups like the guerrilla, Acción Católica, and CUC. This would have catastrophic effects on the Guatemalan population because the Guatemalan military would not be generous in sorting out revolutionary indigenous people from the population in which they lived. Under the governments of Romeo Lucas Garcia and Efrain Rioss Montt, the Guatemalan military would adopt a scorched earth strategy that saw indigenous communities in the Ixcan, in the Ixil Triangle, and

[216] Perera, Victor, 69.

by extension all of the Quiche and the greater highlands as "the sea that provided the fish (guerrillas) with sustenance" and it became their mission to dry up the sea[217]. This strategy turned all indigenous people into enemies of the state. To be indigenous meant to be a revolutionary. To be indigenous meant to be a rebel. To be indigenous meant that you needed to be pacified.

In the Quiche, pacification would take on the form of indiscriminate violence towards the indigenous population. However, seeing the indigenous population, or rather indigenous identity as something inherently revolutionary was nothing new, and pacification had long been a part of state policy. This was expressed through the ladinoization policies and beliefs adopted by the Guatemalan elite during the late 19th century and early 20th century. Earlier in this thesis, it was mentioned that President Justo Rufino Barrios, the leader of the Liberal Revolution had declared the town of indigenous people San Pedro a town close to the Pacific piedmont, ladino in his Decree Declaring the Indians of San Pedro Sacatepequez to be Ladinos on October 13, 1876. His reasoning for doing this was best described in an interview with a man named Alejandro. Alejandro was a man originally from San Pedro who worked in a school in the Quetzaltenango Department. Alejandro has lived all of his life in San Pedro, and in his interview he described Justo Rufino Barrios' reasons for issuing that decree. He said:

> In my town, it wasn't bad. The only thing that the guerrilla did was kill some members of the national police. San Pedro has an interesting history. That community has always been known for fighting back, it's a very revolutionary place, so the famous Justo Rufino Barrios who was from San Marcos declared the town ladino. He forced the people to take of their traditional garb, and he prohibited Mam. The only people who spoke Mam were the old people. The idea was to pacify the town[218].

[217] Taylor, Matthew, 186.
[218] Alejandro. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 1 July 2015.

Viewing indigenous identity as inherently rebellious became especially popular during the Guatemalan Civil War. The height of the Guatemalan Civil War from 1978 to 1983 would dramatize what happened in San Pedro, one hundred years earlier. Government documents from 1972 stated "the enemy has the same sociological traits as the inhabitants of our highlands[219]". The Guatemalan government therefore declared indigenous people the enemy. It wasn't solely about eradicating Communism and opposition to the government; it was about eradicating an entire people. This meant that the ladino controlled government unleashed a wave of violence that led to the mass slaughter, to the genocide of indigenous people in Guatemala. Between 1978 and 1983, during the scorched earth campaign, the government "killed or displaced upwards of 25,000 Ixil residents of Mayan descent" when the population estimates for the region in 1978 were 85,000[220]. This reign of terror led many indigenous Guatemalans to conceal their identity. The Commission for Historical Clarification found that many indigenous Mayans were "obliged to conceal their ethnic identity, manifested externally in their language and dress[221]".

Seeing indigenous people as enemies of the state was not solely an issue in San Pedro and in the Quiche. This detail was also brought up in an interview with a ladina woman named Paula from the Quetzaltenango department. She came of age during the most violent part of the war, and in her interview she discussed the discrimination that indigenous people faced at the hands of the military. She said:

> Growing up I could see the discrimination that poor people, that is indigenous people faced at the hands of the military. We are mestizos, and I would see

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[219] Government documents cited by Kiernan, Ben. *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur*. Yale University Press, 2008, 585.
[220] Perera, Victor, 62.
[221] Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico, Guatemala, Memory of Silence: Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification, Conclusions and Recommendations, (Guatemala City: Oficina de Servicios para Proyectos de las Naciones Unidas, 1999), 29.

> discrimination when they wanted to recruit people. They would come on Sundays, on the day of the market to recruit people. They would come and take the young men that they wanted, and the number they wanted. They wouldn't take rich people, they only took indigenous people. They would do that twice a year[222].

In this section of her interview, Paula is referring to some of the tactics that the Guatemalan military used to discriminate against indigenous Guatemalans. Purposely recruiting more indigenous Guatemalans was a tactic used by the Guatemalan military to divide indigenous communities. By forcing young indigenous men to enlist into the military, they were ridding communities of young men who could potentially resist the military's actions. Thus, by purposely targeting indigenous communities for military enrollment, the Guatemalan military was reinforcing the belief that indigenous communities were inherently rebellious and at odds with the state. Also by enlisting them forcibly into the military, this made indigenous people more likely to die during the war. Indigenous people were put in more danger, no matter what side they were fighting on.

The deliberate targeting of Ixcan, the Decree Declaring the Indians of San Pedro Sacatepequez, and the forced recruitment of indigenous Guatemalans into the military were all examples of the Guatemalan government's belief that indigenous Guatemalans were enemies of the state. These beliefs were the legacy of coffee production in Guatemala. Because coffee production depended on indigenous labor and on indigenous land, indigenous identity was both an asset and a liability for the state. To maintain its dominance and to maintain the coffee business, the Guatemalan government needed racism to be a widespread ideology. The only way the government could justify subjugating indigenous people was by producing and reproducing beliefs about their inherent inferiority, laziness, and savagery. However, the government also

[222] Paula. Interview. By Mariana Calvo . 5 Aug. 2015.

needed to employ violence towards indigenous people as a way to keep them subdued and controllable.

The Guatemalan Civil War was a culmination of racist beliefs that had existed in Guatemala since the Spanish Conquest and that were exacerbated by the introduction of coffee as a cash crop in Guatemala. Documents have shown that the Spaniards had had racist beliefs about indigenous people for centuries, and that indigenous people had long been forced to labor on Spanish cacao, indigo, sugar, and later cochineal plantations. However, during this era in Guatemalan history, indigenous Mayans were allowed to maintain their culture, language, and traditions. For the most part indigenous people had been forgotten and ignored by the Spanish state in Guatemala City. Things changed "with the advent of coffee growing in Guatemala" and "vast areas of the country which had once been neglected by Spanish colonists were incorporated into the economic life of the country[223]". Because of their resistance to the Liberal government's coffee polices, indigenous people were always seen as a problem and as inherently rebellious. Prior to the introduction of coffee, the indigenous population in Guatemala had been largely left alone. However, the Liberal Revolution changed everything, and it created a state that policed the lives and lands of indigenous people. This level of subjugation could not exist without violence, and for over a hundred years, the ladino controlled government issued policies that systematically disenfranchised and subjugated the Mayas.

The government was supported by elite coffee planters most of whom identified as ladino or European. Therefore, the state and coffee planter apparatus worked to subdue indigenous population through various public polices such as vagrancy laws, labor drafts, and debt peonage that were mentioned earlier in this thesis. However, this system was a system that depended on

[223] Cambranes, J.C, 47.

state violence, because the government was run by an ethnic/racial minority. At the time of the Operation Sophia, the population in Guatemala was 7.5 million, four million of whom identified as indigenous[224]. The guerilla activity combined with the boycotts by indigenous organizations like CUC and the organizing by Accion Catolica, meant that indigenous people were not only threatening the status quo, they were also threatening a government that had built its foundations on coffee production and the racism it produced to sustain itself.

Under the guise of the Cold War, any attempt at bettering the conditions of indigenous people was labeled as an act of rebellion, as Communism. The government paraonoia and fear of change was best explained by Armando, a former member of ORPA, one of the major guerilla groups during the war.

> When I was growing up, people said that Communism was going to divide a big house, and give one half of it to the people. That wasn't true. That hasn't occurred in any place, but that was the fear of the right and of the military. I think in the end what we were looking for was the recognition of human dignity and opportunities for everyone[225].

The leaders of Guatemala during the civil war were the inheritors and perpetuators of the legacy of the racist beliefs that became law during the Liberal Revolution. The militarized Guatemalan government never once believed that educating and providing resources for the indigenous population would be beneficial to the country, and up until 1996, they believed that the only way that Guatemala could "progress" was by "pacifying" the indigenous population, by keeping them down. The coffee plantation economy could not survive without having a class of people that were deemed inferior, and that was subjugated. The military absorbed these beliefs when they were sent out to "wipe out the peasant support bases" of the guerrillas in the highlands[226].

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[224] Perera, Victor, 62.
[225] Armando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 5 Aug. 2015.
[226] Perera, Victor, 62.

Seeing indigenous people as inferior, as subhuman created the conditions that would permit genocide in Guatemala.

The military's aversion and disgust at seeing successful indigenous people was best explained in my interview with Fernando, an indigenous man from Quiche who came of age during Operation Sophia. His older brother was a teacher who was involved in the Accion Catolica movement, and who was active in organizing indigenous people to demand their land rights. Because of his political beliefs and his personal life, Fernando's brother was killed on October 4, 1981, in broad day light. In his powerful interview, Fernando shows how the Guatemalan military and by extension the government saw indigenous identity as inherently revolutionary and how they wanted to keep them as a part of the lower class.

> One of the men who killed my brother is still alive. He is a military commissioner. You know what hurts me? Never having done anything to look for my brother. I still admire what my parents did after his disappearance. They exposed themselves. They went to the Defense Ministry and to the military encampment, and they talked to the military and the police to look for my brother. I never did that, and until this day we don't know what happened to my brother. We don't know what happened. We do know who did it. He was kidnapped in the town he was working in. They took him on October 4, 1981. It was a Sunday at nine in the morning, so people saw when he was taken. The military took him, and everyone saw the military commissioner take my brother. That was brutal.
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> The thing with my brother was that he was a teacher, and he had a motorcycle to go to work. He was very successful and well established. It went against everything we had been taught. The ladinos were supposed to be above indigenous people. My brother was an irreverence, an abomination, he was breaking with everything that society had said was right. The fact that he had studied was a threat, well, a lot of my family members were threats because they were studying. Another one of my cousins, who studied teaching with my brother, was also kidnapped. But we found him. All of us wanted to do more than just study, we wanted to change our situation, to better ourselves. One of the commissioners once threatened by father with his gun, and he said "I don't like that your son is on that motorcycle". It was like my brother was threatening his pride because he was riding that motorcycle so freely. Motorcycles weren't meant for people like us.

> I thought the motorcycle was intransient, insignificant, but I understand it now. There are certain places for everyone, and we as indigenous people were defying what corresponded to us. We had to be careful because what we were doing was frowned upon, and we were a threat. I understand this now, but back then I did not. I remember one December, I don't remember which day, I cried. I cried in my bed, and asked "Why us? Why is there so much persecution towards indigenous people? Why are the ladinos fine, and we're not?" Because we were sure hit hard. I later asked myself that, and now I understand. I don't think I am the only one who thought about these things. People always used to say "Those indios are involved in things that don't correspond to them". But the truth was we sympathized with the movement and we were studying, because we were trying to change our situation, our condition, our access to opportunities[227].

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Domingo Rodriguez, Image of Domingo Rodriguez a young man killed by the military in 1982, 2015. Photo Courtesy of Daniele Volpe

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[227] Fernando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 14 July 2015.

[228] Domingo Rodriguez, 15. He accompanied his father to the Xolosinay military base in Cotzal to pick up a flag that they had to place on the roof of their house to prevent planes from bombarding it. He has been missing, along with his father, since January 31, 1982. His story is similar to the story of Fernando's brother.
Volpe, Daniele. "Family Photos and Mass Graves Reveal the Horrors of Guatemala's Civil War." *National Geographic*, 8 Dec. 2015, proof.nationalgeographic.com/2015/12/08/family-photos-and-mass-graves-reveal-the-horrors-of-guatemalas-civil-war/.

In this interview, Fernando addresses the racism that fueled the Guatemalan military's scorched earth campaign that devastated the Quiche region of Guatemala. It was no coincidence that the Mayas made up "80 percent of the war's dead and disappeared, an estimated 93 percent of them killed at the hands of the state[229]". However, what this statistic fails to fully explain is how deeply tied those deaths were to the existence of coffee plantations. This can best be explained by the fact that most of the people who were killed in the war were indigenous and were therefore people who had labored on coffee plantations at one point in their lives or who were the descendants of people who had once labored on coffee plantations. Those who were killed were displaced people, descendants of those who had lost their lands to the land grab that the rise of the "coffee nation" produced at the end of the 19th century and into the 20th century. It was more than an indigenous massacre, it was the genocide of people who had been displaced and subjugated because of coffee.

Coffee Plantations as Battle Fields

It comes as no surprise that many of the war's most important battle scenes took place on coffee plantations. This was certainly the case in the Ixil Triangle where the war was ushered in by a guerrilla taking over la finca San Francisco, the region's most important coffee plantation. Victor Perera's account of the war in Quiche titled "Unfinished Conquest" lines up with the testimonies given to me by Fernando and Jose Pablo who described the beginning of the war in Quiche with the guerrilla's seizure of the plantation, and with the killing of its owner Enrique

[229] Konefal, Betsy. *For Every Indio Who Falls: A History of Maya Activism in Guatemala, .* University of New Mexico Press, 2010, 13.

Brol on 1979. This event was mentioned to me by Jose Pablo, who had worked as a health care provider in the Ixil Triangle from 1985-1988. He said:

> There was a finca an hour and a half from Nebaj, in a place called Cotzal. The finca was called San Francisco and they produced coffee and cardamom. The owner of the finca lived in the capital, I forgot his name. One day he was kidnapped by the guerrilla, and they asked him for money to help the people who lived on the plantation. He gave very little and the guerrilla killed him. The guerrilla also took the finca. A lot of people from Ixil worked on that finca[230]

While Jose Pablo did not give a detailed account of what happened, his interview shows that the events that took place in San Francisco had a profound effect on the Quiche region. The killing Enrique Brol and the seizure of his finca laid the foundations for the military's invasion of Quiche and the for the implementation of a scorched earth campaign. However, before explaining the events that took place on that finca and how that shows the Guatemalan Civil War's deep ties to coffee production, it is important to discuss what la finca San Francisco was and who Enrique Brol and his family were.

The Brols were an Italian family who had immigrated to Guatemala at the end of the 19th century to take advantage of the growing coffee business. By the mid 1930s, the Brols came to own "vast ranch lands and coffee fincas covering thousands of acres [and] during the harvests as many as four thousand resident and seasonal peons, the majority of them Ixils, worked in San Francisco finca, in the northern lowland region of Cotzal municipality[231]". The Brols were famous for their "wretched pay and for treating their workers like indentured slaves" and in 1979, a group of two hundred EGP members occupied the finca and they killed Enrique Brol[232]. The killing of one of the most hated men in the Quiche gave the guerrilla a momentum among the native population, and "it created an infrastructure of thousands of residents of the Ixil

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[230] Jose Pablo. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 6 Aug. 2015.
[231] Perera, Victor, 65.
[232] Ibid, 20.

Triangle, who were willing to risk their lives to provide food shelter, and military intelligence to the four hundred guerrillas entrenched in the neighboring mountains[233]". The military was aware of the significance of the occupation, and in the wake of its occupation they began to plot their invasion of the Quiche.

The events that took place at the finca de San Francisco, were best described by Fernando who spent his childhood living as a permanent resident on the finca and who there when the EGP occupied the plantation. Prior, to the guerilla's takeover of the plantation, Fernando had moved to a neighboring town to finish his studies, but his parent's were still living on the plantation. One day a rumor spread that the guerrilla was about to take over San Francisco, and they decided to take action. This is what Fernando recalls from what happened during the guerrilla's takeover of San Francisco:

> One day, two of my sisters came to visit us, and they told us that the plantation was in trouble. They told us that the guerrilla had killed one of the owners, Don Pedro. Many of the employees went to his funeral in Nebaj, but the people who worked the fields were left behind. While they were gone two or three police officers who were guarding the plantation were killed by the guerrilla. The guerrilla then took over the plantation and they didn't let the people work, but the owners of the plantation were telling them to work. It was complete chaos.
>
> After we heard what had happened, we went to the visit my parents at the plantation. My father didn't want to leave the plantation. We had gone to take them back to San Pablo. We told him, "Let's go," and my father said "No". He said, "We are not leaving, we will die here. We don't owe anyone anything. We've never done anything". But the thing was two of my brothers had gone to Nebaj to borrow a pickup and when they came with the truck, a man carrying wood on his back told us that he had bumped into a group of guerrilleros and that the situation was hitting a breaking point. He said that the guerrilla was going to come to the plantation to kill people.
>
> That really scared my father, and he agreed to come with us. I don't remember how many of us rode the pickup, but we took some of our belongings, and left. Who knows what happened to the rest of our belongings? We left the plantation at eight at night, and we got to San Pablo at three in the morning. That's how we left

[233] Ibid, 71.

> our home, the place where we spent our childhood, the place where we played. It hurt me a lot, because it was an abrupt flight. We had played games pretending that we were going to leave, but it didn't play out in the way we'd planned. We didn't have time to pack. We didn't have time to say goodbye[234].

Clothes of guerrillero Pedro Raymundo, who was involved in the guerrilla in Ixil
Photo Courtesy of Daniele Volpe

Fernando and his family moved to a town away from San Francisco to escape the guerrilla. However, the guerrilla soon caught up with them, and one Sunday in 1979, the guerrilla held a meeting in the town. He said that the first thing that he recognized about them was the fact that they were speaking Ixil, but he said the thing that shocked them most was the fact that some of the guerrilleros "used to work on the plantation[235]". Earlier in the interview he contrasted the identity of the plantation owners with the identities of the people who worked the land. He said:

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[234] Fernando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 14 July 2015.
[235] Ibid.

> I never thought the plantation owners were bad people, because you know that when you are a kid, everything is a paradise, everything is good. I just remember that when we would see the owners of the plantation, we thought they looked foreign. They weren't like the ladinos, they were foreign, they were white. We always associated white skin with the owners of the plantation[236].

San Francisco was a microcosm of the greater forces that were at war with each other in Guatemala. When the guerrilla took over San Francisco in 1979, they were taking on the cause of all oppressed indigenous people in Guatemala. It was a battle between masters and oppressed workers. However, it was about more than class, it was also about race. While the traditional narrative of the Guatemalan Civil War was that it began as a struggle between different factions of the military, what the Guatemalan Civil War was, was a struggle against the loss of land and dignity that the coffee plantation economy had imposed on indigenous Guatemalans. Coffee as a cash crop had introduced a system that introduced a loss of independence for indigenous people. Under this system, Mayas did not have the right to choose how they were going to spend their time or how they were going to use their skills because the government decided that they were only fit for working on coffee plantations[237].

The government also took away their ability to be independent and self-sustainable by taking away their land. Over the course of decades, indigenous people were forced to labor on coffee plantations to survive. However, the conditions on coffee plantations were brutal. San Francisco exemplified those conditions with "Enrique Brol's miserly wages and underhanded extortions" that assured that "the peons would remain indebted through the end of the harvest and beyond[238]". The guerrillas promised a future that was different from the one that currently

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[236] Ibid.
[237] To a lesser extent on sugar plantations and on banana plantations owned by the United Fruit Company.
[238] Perera, Victor, 70.

existed. By killing a man who exemplified the worst of the coffee plantation, they were sending a profound message to indigenous Guatemalans, and that message was that they were fighting to undo the insidious effects of the coffee economy. For many of the people on the ground, for the people who belonged to the "human sea in which the guerrilla fish swim" as the government phrased it, the war was about changing the stark inequalities that the Liberal Revolution had brought [239]. The government said the war was about Communism and about saving the nation, but the war wasn't about saving, it was about preserving a system that had left indigenous people impoverished and disenfranchised.

It comes as no surprise that coffee plantations were sights of recruitment for the guerrilla and of important battles during the war. This was described by Alejandro, when he described another battle scene taking place on a coffee plantations between the guerrilla and the military.

> I remember one time we were playing and they told us to go inside. We could hear the helicopters bombing the area. You know where San Rafael Pie de la Cuesta? The guerrilla was over there hidden in the coffee plantations, and we could hear the helicopter bombing the area, and we saw three helicopters fall, the guerrilla shot at them. The military stopped all of the cars, and there were people carrying chickens to sell at the market. There were a lot of people carrying chickens in baskets, and the military set fire to the cars, and you could her the chickens screams. The military could grab you in any moment because they never respected anyone. Things changed after the Peace Accords were signed [240].

The reason that much of the violence in the Guatemalan Civil War was concentrated on coffee plantations was because coffee plantations were the sight of many of the injustices that existed in Guatemala. They were the places where indigenous people were forced to work under ladinos and they were built on land that had been taken from the Mayan people. For indigenous Guatemalans coffee plantations were the sight of their oppression, and during the war they

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[239] Richards, Michael, 95.
[240] Alejandro. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 1 July 2015.

became the sight of their liberation. It was for that reason that the guerrilla would use coffee plantations as the places to fight against the coffee controlled regime and the injustices it supported.

While coffee plantations were often the sight of extreme violence during the war, the towns that had historically supplied labor to plantations were also targeted by the military. This was especially the case in the Quetzaltenango department. I interviewed an indigenous woman named Rufina whose town was also the sight of many confrontations between the guerrilla and the military. Her town happened to be adjacent to the Costa Cuca region. The Costa Cuca region was a coffee producing region on the Pacific littoral of Guatemala. Shortly after the Liberal Revolution it became the most important coffee producing region in Guatemala. In 1880, the Costa Cuca "became the most productive coffee zone in all of Guatemala" and it too owed its existence to stolen land[241]. Almost "the entirety of the Costa Cuca-nearly 500 sq. km-constituted the ejido of San Martin Sacatepequez, a Mam Maya town located in the political district of San Juan Ostuncalco[242]". Rufina grew up in the region whose ejidos were used to build the Costa Cuca, and that had provided labor for its plantations. It came as no surprise that her town was the site of many acts of violence between the guerrilla and the military. She mentioned these acts of violence in her interview when she said:

> I had family members who were killed. They killed my uncle's father in law. He was killed because he worked in a bakery, and the soldiers said that he made bread for the guerrilleros. That wasn't true, the guerrilleros said that if we worked, we were giving money to the soldiers. No one could work, because if you worked the guerrilleros would get jealous, and if you worked the soldiers would get jealous. You couldn't go anywhere, you couldn't even talk. There were moments where all you could do was look at the person in front of you[243].

[241] Reeves, Rene, 39.
[242] Ibid.
[243] Rufina. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 10 July 2015.

In her interview Rufina talked about a different type of violence, poverty. Like many women in her community Rufina was never able to get an education because her community only had up to primary school. They also didn't have access to health care. Rufina described her family's circumstances in her interview when she said:

> I remember one time, my mom had sheep, and my younger brother had just died because we couldn't go to the hospital because you either had to go with the soldiers or the guerrilleros, but I remember that my young brother died because he was really sick and we couldn't take him to the doctor. He was dead, he was a year old. We didn't have drinkable water either, so we used to wash our clothing at the river[244].

The poverty that afflicted her community and that continues to afflict her community is stark compared to its wealth in land. Adjacent to her community were the lands that used to provide Guatemala with its biggest source of income. Many of the people that grew up in Rufina's town labored on coffee plantations and they were the descendants of people that had their land stolen after the Liberal Revolution. The injustices that shaped Rufina's community and indigenous communities throughout the highlands attracted guerrilla activity. Sadly the injustices that indigenous Mayans faced were cloaked under the mask of Communism.

Fernando always described the Guatemalan Civil War as a struggle for justice for indigenous people. His interview was not about Communism versus capitalism, it was a personal account about the poverty and injustice that he and his family faced because of their identity as indigenous people. In his interview, Fernando stressed that he saw the Guatemalan Civil War as a struggle for justice for indigenous people. He admitted in his interview that he was not well versed in Communist ideals, but he did state that some members of the autodefensa civil knew about it. The autodefensa civil were volunteer groups set up by the military that forced people from local towns to patrol their communities. Fernando was forced to participate, and he

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[244] Ibid.

described the long conversations that he and his platoon members had about Communism and his ignorance about the topic. He said:

> We couldn't talk at night because we had to pay attention, it was very intense. But during the day we could rest a little bit, and we would take turns. We would have long conversations. I wasn't very interested in what they had to say, but I remember some of them talking about communism. Some of them had been to Russia and China, and they would describe how people lived in Cuba. They said that people there didn't have property and that when communism came, people who had homes would lose them, and how land would then be divided. They talked about communism as if they knew it, and the rest of us were very ignorant when it came to that[245].

Not once in his interview did he mention the United States' role in funding the Guatemalan government to carry out its scorched earth policy. When I asked him if the United States had been involved in the war, he told me that he was not aware of their presence in the war. And while I contend, that the war was a war between coffee land owners and the people who worked their lands, between the oppressed and the oppressors, it is important to highlight that this war took place at a critical moment in history, the Cold War. It is therefore important to emphasize the role that geopolitics played in the Guatemalan Civil War, and the real fears of Communism taking ahold in Guatemala. This perspective was best given by a man I interviewed named Ricardo. Ricardo had worked as a teacher in Quiche at the height of the war. In his interview he said:

> In Guatemala there are a lot of wealthy landowners, who have taken all of the land, and they have all of the wealth. Their interests have always been aligned with those of the United States, and as a result the United States has determined many elections in Guatemala. However, there came a point when people got fed up, and members of the military rebelled and joined forces with university students. They were people who saw that there was a lot of injustice in Guatemala and that certain people had all the money, and that poor people remained poor and that the system wasn't changing. These injustices created the perfect environment

[245] Fernando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 14 July 2015.

> for Communism to take ahold of Guatemala, and the United States saw this, and supported the Guatemalan government strategically and economically[246].

The fact that the Guatemalan Civil War took place during the Cold War therefore increased the scope of the war. The Cold War allowed the right-wing Guatemalan military to receive more funding and weapons to carry out its massacres, but Communism was not the root cause of the war, coffee was.

Coffee as the Grounds for Genocide

The Guatemalan Civil War was a struggle to undo the deprivation that indigenous people had faced due to the country's reliance on coffee. However, what made this war so brutal was its timing. The war took place during the Cold War and the Guatemalan government was able to use the rise of left wing guerrillas to justify receiving millions of dollars in foreign aid from the United States to carry out massacres of indigenous people under the pretense that they were Communists. This was best explained by Armando, the former guerrilla member who said:

> One thing is clear the United States supported the Guatemalan military heavily. If they had cut their support, the military would have fallen. However, if you think about what was happening at time, Cuba had fallen and so had Nicaragua, then El Salvador and Guatemala were in the midst of two wars, so there was a fear of a domino effect. If El Salvador and Guatemalan fell, there was a fear that Mexico would fall as well. The United States could not tolerate that[247].

These beliefs tragically led to the genocide of indigenous people who due to the legacy of inequality created by coffee were seen as Communists. Despite the fact that there were a few thousand guerrilla members in Quiche, tens of thousands of innocent people were killed in Quiche. Entire towns and villages were destroyed because they were thought to be supporting the

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[246] Ricardo . Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 17 July 2015.

[247] Armando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 5 Aug. 2015.

guerrilla. It was a new kind of war, a war that saw an entire race as the enemy by imposing an ideology on them. This brutality and destruction was best described by Ricardo in his interview. Ricardo was not originally from Quiche, he was simply assigned to work there and he arrived at the height of the war. One day he wasn't able to take a bus to the town that he was working in, and he was forced to walk. On this walk he encountered entire villages that had been massacred. This is what he recalls from that experience. He said

> There were trees knocked down everywhere. Mountains were burned. The environment was very different, you could sense that there were problems. I started to walk there, everything was so quiet. I walked by that community where the massacre had taken place, there were cats, dogs, chickens, all types of domestic animals, but there were no people[248].

Everyone in the town that Ricardo had been walking by had been disappeared, killed. Sadly entire villages in the highlands would vanish during Guatemala's, thirty-year war. However, it is important to highlight that while Communism was the justification to annihilate entire communities, what was really taking place was the genocide of on an entire people. This was best illustrated in the military's destruction of the environment. Trees are sacred to Mayan people. Across the highlands, any traveler will notice endless pine trees. They will also notice indigenous Mayans carrying wood on their backs as fire wood to bring to their homes and as patterns on indigenous women's clothing. In fact, K'iche' which is the most widely spoken indigenous language in Guatemala literally translates to "many trees". The K'iche's come from the land of many trees. During the civil war, the Guatemalan military exploited this knowledge and they cut down trees as a form of psychological warfare. This level of deforestation was described in many of my interviews. For example, when Jose Pablo first arrived in K'iche' he described seeing trees knocked down everywhere. He said:

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[248] Ricardo . Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 17 July 2015.

> Just before entering Nebaj, you could see a lot of trees that had been knocked down, but I am assuming it has been reforested. In that time, there were a lot of trees that had been knocked down[249].

This was also confirmed by Fernando when he described what his town was like before the war.

> My village was beautiful, it was a real paradise—until the war hit. During the war, the military thought that if they cut down all of the trees they would be able to see the guerrilleros better. One day, I remember, a bunch of men with axes knocked down all of the trees in the village and on the mountainside. So the village was really deforested after that. It was never the same[250].

The deforesting of the western highlands during the Guatemalan Civil War illustrate how deeply tied race and land were in Guatemala. Cutting down trees was a larger reflection of what was taking place in the war, which was the mass slaughter of Mayan people as a way to maintain the status quo.

During the war, indigenous Mayans were massacred indiscriminately by the ladino controlled military. Even though many of the soldiers were indigenous, the ones sending out the orders were all ladino, people who had absorbed racial prejudices and biases about indigenous people. These prejudices manifested themselves in the large massacres that took place during the war, and they also manifested themselves in day to day interactions. This was best explained to me by Rufina, an indigenous woman. She said:

> As an indigenous woman it was particularly difficult. Thank God for the Peace Accords, because after that the situation got better. Before that the indigenous woman was never valued, I remember, I remember. I used to travel a lot, my mom bought fruit and avocados, and I would go to sell them from house to house. I remember when I would sit next to a ladina, and they would make weird noises and faces at me. I didn't know what it meant at the time, but there was a lot of discrimination towards indigenous people[251].

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[249] Jose Pablo. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 6 Aug. 2015.
[250] Fernando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 14 July 2015.
[251] Rufina. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 10 July 2015.

This was also described to me by Fernando who described what it was like to live under a system where ladinos were privileged over Mayans. In his interview, he described watching his parents' behavior towards ladinos. He said:

> There were no set rules when we interacted with ladinos, we just absorbed them. I always remember my father's behavior towards ladinos, it was one of submission. My mom used to tell us stories about how in mass, they were instructed to give up their seats and sit on the ground, so the ladino could sit. There were a lot of different rules. In subtle and direct ways, we were taught to believe that our culture was inferior, that we had to adopt new customs and traditions[252].

These excerpts from these two different interviews help explain how beliefs about Mayan inferiority manifested themselves in day to day interactions. They shed light on how race and racism was lived in Guatemala, and they help shed light on how the ladino controlled military could issue orders that killed indigenous people indiscriminately. Genocide required not only seeing indigenous people as enemies, but as subhuman. Such beliefs allowed events like the ones described by Fernando. In his interview, he described the following atrocities:

> I was lucky, because I left San Pablo for a year in 81. My father told me to leave, he was scared I would be captured or threatened. So I left. I went to Santa Cruz for a year. My siblings and parents saw more than I did. My dad always tells me one story, of the time that there was a massacre. They killed 54 people. My dad recounts that he saw the body of a little boy clenching his fists. He was probably terrified. All of their heads had been chopped off. That was what the military did. They slaughtered us. We were terrified of them during those years[253].

This type of violence could only exist by dehumanizing indigenous people and by choosing to see them as a threat to the nation. And during the war, indigenous people were a threat to the state, not for providing supposed support to the guerrilla, but for providing a challenge to a system that had turned them into a slave-like class. By terrorizing indigenous communities, the

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[252] Fernando. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 14 July 2015.
[253] Ibid.

Guatemalan military forced them into submission, and reminded them of their position in Guatemalan society.

The Red Coffin, A man carrying the coffin of one of 76 villagers who were killed during a massacre by the Guatemalan Army in 1981. Anthropologists had spent two years studying the remains. Cocop, Nebaj, 2008. Photo Courtesy of Rodrigo Abd

However, it is important to mention that there were some ladinos who were targeted by the military. While 80% of those killed in the war were indigenous, ladinos were also killed by the military. This was best described in an interview that I conducted with a man named Sebastian in Lynn, Massachusetts. Sebastian grew up in San Marcos, Guatemala, a department in the western highlands. He grew up in a town that was primarily ladino, and as such it was a more well off community compared to the towns of indigenous people. His mother was a cook and did not do hard work in the fields. His brothers worked as bus drivers. However, this didn't mean that they weren't targeted by the military. He described what the war was like, with the following words.

> Close from my house, about five houses from my house, there was a man who get "lost". We don't know what happened to him, or if it was the guerrilla or the military, but he later appeared. His car was destroyed, and he was like the car, completely destroyed. They abused him, they killed him brutally. They did a lot of things to him. And another couple was also taken. They were lost for like two months, and they were found in similar conditions. That was more impactful, because the son appeared in parts, and the woman appeared in parts too.
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> At my age, it was really impactful. It was impossible not to see that, it was something you lived, you couldn't avoid it. I was twelve years old when that happened. I could see what was happening. A lot of important people from the town were also targeted. I remember that our ex-mayor, who was really good, was targeted one day at three in the afternoon. There was an empty field a block away from my house, and we were playing, and I remember hearing gun shots, and we all knew that something bad was happening. We hid behind the trees, and moments later we saw that the ex-mayor had been killed. The men who killed him were in masks, so we couldn't tell if it was the guerrilla or the military. The cars they were using didn't have license plates either. They knew what they were doing[254].

However, it is important to highlight that even though the community that Sebastian is describing was not predominantly indigenous, the military's activities in his town were meant to terrorize the inhabitants and to detract them from joining the guerrilla. It is no coincidence that Sebastian town's is located a few miles away from major coffee plantations, and it is also no coincidence that despite some of the privileges he had, his town was poor. And while, the statistic that 80% of the people killed during the Guatemalan Civil War were indigenous, it also important to consider the socio-economic status of the people killed. The vast majority of the people killed in the Guatemalan Civil War were poor.

In my interview with Paula, a ladino woman from Quetzaltenango, who had a brother who had joined the guerrilla she described the Guatemalan Civil War as a "war against poor people[255]". This was because the people that were most attracted to the guerrilla and its ideals

[254] Sebastian. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 16 May 2016.
[255] Paula. Interview. By Mariana Calvo . 5 Aug. 2015.

were poor people. According to Sebastian the guerrilla used to market itself as a movement for poor people.

> People used to say that they fought for poor people and that they were fighting liberalism, and trying to give liberty to everyone. But in reality they only caused more problems, I can't remember a single good thing they brought. They only brought conflict and death. I never understood what good they brought, in their meetings they used to say that everything they did was for poor people, for us[256].

Therefore, in the national conversations about the war in Guatemala, the military never explicitly said it was going to unleash a mass slaughter of indigenous Mayans. The narrative that they presented was that there was a rebellion in Guatemala, and that they needed to terminate the rebellion. It was seen as a battle between the left and right, between change and the status quo, as a war between classes. The grammar used by the government to describe the war was never about it race, but at its core the war was about race.

Indigenous Guatemalans made up the bulk of Guatemala's poor people, whereas ladinos were the people who owned all of the land and capital in Guatemala. The reason that indigenous Guatemalans were poor was due to the legacy of the Liberal Revolution and the pro-coffee and anti-indigenous policies that it passed. Growing coffee required a lot of land and a lot of labor, and the only way ladinos could create a coffee nation was by stripping indigenous Guatemalans of their land and freedom. This led to widespread poverty in the indigenous community in Guatemala, and the demands for change tragically resulted in the Guatemalan Civil War. The struggle to rid Guatemala of Communist ideology sadly overshadowed the real injustices and inequalities that coffee had created in Guatemala. However, the war was about more than the ties between race and class, it was also about a deeply rooted racism created by coffee

[256] Sebastian. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 16 May 2016.

production, that under the right conditions led to the genocide of Mayan people. Without the dehumanization and displacement that coffee production introduced in Guatemala, there would have never been a genocide in Guatemala.

Conclusion

There were a lot of massacres. When it was Hurricane Stan in 2005, there was a lot of rain, and all of the cadavers that the guerrilleros and the army had hidden came out. There were clandestine graves made by the guerrilleros and there were clandestine graves made by the army, the guerrilleros' grave is in a village close by, and when the water came, they found bones, they found legs, they found arms, it was horrible. That's where they used to throw the bodies of the people they killed. We have yet to find everybody that was lost.[257]

-Rufina, 2015

Fidelia Ajcalón and Santiaga Cumes, Maya widows whose husbands and sons were murdered in a military massacre in Xeatzán Bajo, visit their husbands' graves in Chimaltenango, Guatemala, 1997.
Photo Courtesy of Thomas Hoepker.

[257] Rufina. Interview. By Mariana Calvo. 10 July 2015.

The war in Guatemala came to an end in 1996, with the signing of a final armistice between the government and the left-wing guerrillas. The conflict left an estimated 200,000 deaths, and it had profound effects on the people who lived it and on the communities where it took place. When traveling through the western Guatemalan highlands, it's easy to forget that they were once the sight of a brutal civil war. The endless pine trees and volcanoes, the traditional Mayan garb and the colorful buses, the *artesanías* and the fruit markets, will captivate any traveler. However, millions of people in Guatemala were affected deeply by the war. As the quote above illustrates, the stories and lives of people whose lives were irrevocably changed by the violence have yet to be fully unearthed.

The landmines may have been taken down and the country may have demilitarized, but the scars of the war are carried by many, too many. Few communities in the highlands were left untouched by the war, and those who survived and their descendants continue to grapple with the conditions that led to an armed resistance. Many of the coffee plantations where thousands of indigenous people used to work have closed, and they have been substituted with foreign mining companies and hydroelectric companies. Some of the men behind the war's worst massacres are still alive, and they continue to hold prominent roles in government, ex-president Otto Perez Molina, among them. But perhaps, more tragically, the conditions that created the conditions for the Guatemalan Civil War are still very much alive.

Since the passing of the peace accords in 1996, some indigenous people have managed to reach prominent positions in education, politics, and business, however, the vast majority of indigenous people remain poor. The struggle for land and justice remains. Today many of the communities that once supplied labor to the coffee plantations and that were the sights of massacres are now the biggest suppliers of migrants to the United States. In the introduction of

this thesis, I mentioned that on top of interviewing victims of the Guatemalan Civil War, I also interviewed people who had immigrated to the United States and come back to Guatemala.

The stories of those who had once immigrated and of those who lived during the war were very different, but at their core they address the same issue, poverty. Many of the people who lived through the war said that their communities had been sympathetic to the war because they wanted change, they wanted a system that recognized human dignity and that guaranteed opportunities for all. When I interviewed Armando, a former guerrilla member, I asked him why he had joined the guerrilla. His response was simple, he said, "I was looking to do something, to do something new". His response, wasn't different from the migrants that I met on the US-Mexico border in the summer of 2014 and from the migrants that I interviewed in Guatemala and in Lynn. When I asked them why they had left Guatemala, their responses although phrased differently were very much the same, they were all trying to make something of their lives, to create a reality that was different from their lives in Guatemala. They were trying to combat the legacy of coffee production.

Coffee by definition is a crop of displacement. When it was first introduced in Guatemala in the middle of the 19th century, it displaced thousands of indigenous people from their lands. Using profit as their justification, the ladino elite created a system that not only forced indigenous people off their lands, but they also created a system that forced indigenous people into working in deplorable conditions on coffee plantations throughout the highlands. Coffee created a system of forced migration and forced labor that survived on the pretense that indigenous people were inferior. These beliefs were used to justify the enslavement of indigenous people, and their subsequent impoverishment at the hands of the ladino controlled state. Race made a system that left indigenous people as laborers and ladinos as landowners seem

natural, when it was in fact man-made. Race, or rather racism made it possible to exist in a country where it was ladinos whipped indigenous people into submission, and where the word for indigenous person literally meant dog. The beliefs of superiority and the power that racism gave to ladinos, ultimately made it possible for the ladino controlled military to commit genocide against the indigenous population.

A hundred years after coffee became the main cash crop in Guatemala, the indigenous population, those who had been most negatively affected by coffee production, rebelled with the goal of creating a reality that was better than the one they found themselves in. However, attempting to fight the legacy of coffee production, would only lead to further displacement, and by the end of the war over one million Mayas were internally displaced and 200,000 Mayas fled to Mexico. In the decades following the war many of those that were displaced, came back to their villages. However, the factors that led to the war, to their displacement have not changed. Today many of the villages that lie next to coffee plantations, that once supplied labor for coffee plantations, or that had their lands taken to produce coffee, are some of the most impoverished in Guatemala. This level of poverty had led to the displacement of many of its residents; some to other cities in Guatemala, and others to the United States.

While the number of Guatemalans immigrating to the United States since 2014, has declined, the number is still significant. Thousands of Guatemalans, specifically indigenous Guatemalans, are still willing to risk their lives to seek better opportunities in the United States. The vast majority of them are fleeing the poverty that was inflicted upon them after the Liberal Revolution terminated their ability to be self-sustainable. While some indigenous villages, like Cajola in Quetzaltenango have succeeded in gaining back some of the land that was lost to coffee

plantations, no major land reform was implemented to redistribute land to landless Mayas[258]. The goals of Jacobo Arbenz's 1952 Agrarian Reform have yet to be realized. Instead of waiting for change, thousands of indigenous people have made the decision to migrate. However, the war that was fought for land and justice cannot be discounted.

During the Guatemalan Civil War, the battle to undo the land grab and racism created by coffee production created the circumstances that would allow the Guatemalan military to commit genocide against its own people. Guatemalan elites were deeply conscious of the precarious conditions in which indigenous people lived. While they used racism to justify the circumstances in which indigenous people found themselves, they knew that indigenous people could revolt, and they knew that Communist would be a system that would appeal to them. The degree to which Communism appealed to the Mayas has never been clear, but one thing was clear, indigenous people were hungry for change, they were hungry for land. However, that hunger for land and change was equated with Communism. With Communism as their justification, the Guatemalan military unleashed a brutal scorched earth campaign that aimed to drain the sea in which the guerrilla lived. Tragically, that sea were the indigenous communities of the western highlands, the communities that had supplied the land and labor for coffee production, for over a century.

However, the war was about more than land, it was about the deep connections that land and race had to one another. The Guatemalan did not simply brutalize indigenous bodies, they brutalized indigenous lands. By cutting down trees and bombing villages with helicopters, the ladino controlled military turned a war that aimed to change how land was held in Guatemala

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[258] Wilkinson, Daniel. *Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal, and Forgetting in Guatemala*. Duke University Press, 2004.

into a war on an entire race of people, the race of people that had had its land stolen. This meant that the violence that was employed by the ladino controlled military was racial in character, which made it particularly brutal. The elimination of entire villages, the deforestation, the forced military drafts on indigenous communities, and the large-scale massacres that took place throughout the highlands could have only taken place, if the ones issuing the orders believed in the inherent inferiority of the people they were terrorizing.

Now there is a new terror, the terror unleashed by gangs. The enemy is no longer an invading army, rather its people from the community. Some of the people that have remained in their communities have resorted to other methods to combat the poverty that afflicts their communities, violence. In many towns and villages across the highlands, young people have decided to join gangs like *la mara Salvatrucha* and M-18. These gangs have been described by journalists as "mafias of the poor", and they were present in many of the communities that I visited[259]. Young people who see that they have no opportunities have joined these gangs to make a living through extortion and robberies. Many of the people that I interviewed, referred to them as the new guerrilla. In towns across the highlands, people do not leave their homes after dark because they want to avoid getting robbed by the gangs. These groups of hopeless young men and women, are a symptom of the poverty and demoralization that plagues highland communities today. The legacy of coffee production is therefore very much alive today, and it continues to perpetuate violence in Guatemala today.

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[259] Martinez , Oscar , et al. "Killers on a Shoestring: Inside the Gangs of El Salvador." *The New York Times* , 20 Nov. 2016, pp. 181-198, www.nytimes.com/2016/11/21/world/americas/el-salvador-drugs-gang-ms-13.html.

If the current problems in Guatemala are to be addressed today, the legacy of coffee production and the massive displacement of land and labor that it created must be addressed. Poverty in Guatemala continues to be racialized, and if Guatemala is ever to became a country that offers equal opportunities for all, it has to reckon with its past, with its past with coffee. Solely understanding the colonial era does not fully explain how race and class are lived in Guatemala today. While it is important to recognize how the colonial era established a racial hierarchy that privileged people of European descent over all others, this doesn't explain how indigenous Mayans came to be slaughtered by a ladino controlled government. In other words, only understanding the colonial era fails to explain the mechanisms that created a genocide in Guatemala. The mechanisms that created that genocide were rooted in coffee production. Therefore, the Guatemala case is particularly useful to our understanding of other genocides around the world. For example, in 2008, Isaac A. Kamola, published an article "Coffee and Genocide" that explored the role that coffee played in creating the conditions that led to the Rwandan Genocide. This thesis contributes to that body of work and it helps us understand the mechanisms that led to the otherizing of different ethnic, religious, and racial groups.

On a different note, the case of Guatemala is important because it is a case study on race-making and what happens when an export-based cash crop is introduced. Guatemala shows how the dependence on a commodity, often leads to the commodification of groups of people. The commodification of indigenous people in Guatemala to produce coffee for export is part of a larger narrative. Guatemala is a part of a larger ecosystem of forced labor that stretched across the Americas. If we are to understand the poverty that afflicts different racial and ethnic groups across the Americas, understanding the role of commodities is crucial. Guatemala's history with coffee can therefore illuminate our understanding of how other commodities like sugar and

cotton created other racial caste systems throughout the Americas. Understanding the Guatemalan case can therefore provide the framework to understand how race and class are lived throughout the Americas.

However, there are some questions and issues that were not addressed, which could be expounded upon in future works. For example, today there are also many ladinos migrating to the United States because despite the hegemony of ladinos in Guatemala, there is a sizable percentage of them that live in poverty. In the case of poor ladinos, coffee does not explain the poverty that afflicts their communities. If we are to have a fuller picture of race and class in Guatemala, the causes for ladino poverty must be further examined. This thesis largely focused on the indigenous population in the western highlands, however, there was a sizable minority of indigenous people who lived on the western coast. These people were forced to labor on the lands of the United Fruit Company, and further research can be done to explore why the lands of the United Fruit Company were exempt from the violence that plagued the western highlands. Further research could also be done on the violence that the guerrilla perpetuated. While the military was behind the worst massacres during the Guatemalan Civil War, exploring the violence unleashed by the guerrilla is important because it gives us a fuller picture of the events that transpired during that conflict.

The study of the role that Guatemala's history with coffee production can help us understand the historical forces that are behind the current racial and class distinctions in Guatemala, and by the extension the Americas today. However, this framework can also be used to frame our understanding of commodities that are currently producing violence. One of those such commodities, is cocaine. From 1990 to 2010, Colombia had 450,000 homicides, the clear

majority due to coke[260]. Today Mexico, is facing unprecedented levels of violence largely due to the cocaine trade. However, cocaine has not only led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people, it has also led to the displacement of millions. The same framework used for this thesis, can therefore help us understand the role that cocaine is playing as a commodity in the Americas today. The Guatemala case is thus a starting point that can help shape our understanding of the violence that is tied to export-based commodities across the world.

An indigenous coffee pickers in western highlands bearing his harvest of the day, 2015
Photo Courtesy of Jerome Sessini

[260] Vance , Erik . "Cocaine Is Evil." *Slate* , 29 Dec. 2013, www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/medical_examiner/2013/12/cocaine_trafficking_horrors_users_are_complicit_in_the_atrocities_of_the.html.

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