

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

VIGILANTE:

Violence and Security in Postwar Guatemala

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in Anthropology

by

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2014



ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

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This monograph documents the rise and fall of a vigilante justice movement in order to understand the conditions that enable and hinder collective action in postwar Guatemala. Collective efforts to create a more equitable Guatemala were brutally repressed during its 36 year-long civil war (1960-1996). In the aftermath of this genocidal conflict, most Guatemalans seek better futures through individual projects such as education and migration. Security represents one domain where efforts at collective organizing remain strong. Guatemala City boasts one of the highest homicide rates in the region and less than 5% of crimes are prosecuted. Communities throughout the country have responded to this security crisis by organizing extralegal security patrols. These organizations resemble the civil patrols that Maya men were forced to join during the civil war. Adult men take turns patrolling the streets, apprehending wrongdoers, holding court and meting out punishment. Unlike their wartime incarnation, control is now entirely in local hands and “gangsters” have replaced “communists” as the targets of

disciplinary action. This study is based on a total of two years of participant observation and interviewing in Todos Santos Cuchumatán, a predominantly Mam-Maya community in rural Huehuetenango.

While the influence of wartime paramilitarism is profoundly felt, I argue that efforts to make and contest security involve the creative recombination of a wide range of discourses, including human rights, capitalist commonsense, zero-tolerance policing, Marxism, and Maya conceptions of personhood. Delineating and historicizing these multiple strands is essential for understanding the proliferation of violence in postwar Guatemala. Chapter one looks at what makes lynching possible. Chapter two explores vigilante leaders' justifications for their actions. Chapter three recounts the experiences of accused gangsters. Chapter four uses the exile of one "gangster" to explore how exclusion creates community. Chapter five focuses on debates over the legality of alcohol to understand the ambiguous legal position of the rights of indigenous people. While Guatemala represents an extreme case, many of the trends on display here, including the privatization of security, the economic obsolescence of young men, the forging of communal identities through violent exclusions, and moral panics about mind-altering substances, reverberate elsewhere.

The dissertation of Ellen Jane Sharp is approved.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank the people of Todos Santos, both in Guatemala and California, who fed me, housed me, befriended me, humored me, and shared parts of their lives with me over the past decade: *chontja tey!* Thank you especially to the wonderful women I met in this process, including Adela, Antonia, Cruza, Delfina, Elena, Luisa, Mirna, Ofelia, Rosa, Rosalia, Maria, Maria Teresa, Teresa and Yolanda.

At UCLA, I'm grateful for the enthusiasm and support of my dissertation committee, Carole Browner, Jessica Cattelino, Robin Derby, Akhil Gupta and Sherry Ortner. Special thanks to Sherry and Akhil for nominating me for the Young Award, which is supporting me as I write this, and to Jessica for always incisive feedback on my writing. I am especially grateful to Sherry for her support and confidence in me over the last seven plus years.

This work would not have been possible without generous financial support for my fieldwork. The UCLA Chancellor's Prize supported two summers of research in Todos Santos, a graduate division summer research mentorship made a third possible, while a mini-grant from UCLA's Institute for Research on Labor and Employment allowed me to conduct research in Oakland, California. While there, the folks at the Eastbay Sanctuary Covenant provided me with considerable logistical and emotional support and an entrée into the Todosantero community there, for which I am deeply grateful.

The bulk of this research was made possible by a dissertation fellowship from the Inter-American Foundation for Grassroots Development, which supported my fieldwork in Guatemala 2010–2011. Thank you to Paula Derby for her enthusiasm for my writing and to Christiana Kasner for her efficiency and tireless organizational efforts, as well as to my IAF cohort,

especially Rebecca Dirkson, Joe Wiltberger, Jelena Radovic Fanta, Jennifer Vogt, and Amy Offner.

Additional fieldwork in 2012 was made possible by support from the Drugs, Security and Democracy Fellowship Program, administered by the Social Science Research Council and the Universidad de Los Andes in cooperation with and with funds provided by the Open Society Foundations and the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada. I am indebted to this fellowship for introducing me to a lively group of violence-ologists, including Winifred Tate, Denis Martinez, Froylan Enciso, the Killable Subjects crew, and the best roommates ever, Susan Brewer and Ana Villarreal.

I would like to acknowledge and thank everyone who read and commented on chapter drafts. Rebecca Clouser, Katherine Fultz, Hanna Garth, Lisa Munro, and Colleen Supanich, gave helpful feedback on earlier incarnations of chapters one, four and five. Advice from Katja Antoine and Anthony Fontes sharpened the arguments in chapter three. Chapter four was greatly improved after input from participants in the Killable Subjects workshop: thank you to Diane Davis, Graham Denyer Willis, Alex Fattal, Anthony Fontes, Rosemary Gartner, Daniel Goldstein, David Holiday, Kevin O'Neill, Erica James, Robert Samet, Finn Stepputat, and Kimberly Theidon. Chapter five took a new direction after thoughtful feedback from Jessica Cattelino.

Additionally, I would like to thank the Guatemala Scholars network for introducing me to such a collegial group of colleagues, including Jennifer Casolo, Monica DeHart, Patricia Foxen, Ginny Garrard Burnett, Todd Little Siebold, Judy Maxwell, Diane Nelson, Tom Offit, Karla Pezzia, Debra Rodman, Tim Smith, and David Stoll. Special thanks go to Jennifer Burrell for her

helpful advice, generosity of spirit and shared love for Todos Santos. Thank you as well to Andrés Cholotio Garcia of the Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín. In Guatemala, the friendships of Edgar Chen Camay, James Denio, Emily Yates Doerr, Courtney Dowdall, Ryan Klotz, Patricia Escalon, and Kelly Chauvin sustained me during fieldwork. I am especially grateful to David Stewart for introducing me to the ever unfolding wonder of the adventure.

I want to express my appreciation for my academic siblings at UCLA for interchanges of advice and support over the years, including Brent Luvaas, Meher Varma, Misa Dayson, Devaka Gunawardena, Cassandra Markoe and Janell Rothenberg. For airport pick ups, places to crash and much more, thank you to Angela Orlando and Muriel Vernon. Thank you as well to Jena Barchas-Lichtenstein, Anjali Browning, Jennifer Guzman and Megan Heller. I have immense gratitude for my dissertation writing group—love and thanks to Katja Antoine, Keziah Conrad and Anna Corwin.

Thank you to my parents, John and Jane Sharp, for their enthusiastic backing of my graduate school journey, and most especially their support during this past year of writing up. I also want to express my gratitude for the support of my family of choice during this process, especially Barbara Adams, Michal Ashley, Un Choi, Beth Kracklauer, Charlie Mulkeen, Jacque Myers, Molly Rysman and Harriet Woodford. Many thanks as well to my comadres Laura McCann and Lucia Mendoza Pablo for friendship and fictive kinship over the years. Finally, thank you to Joel Moreno Rojas for love and butterflies.

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March 3, 2014

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## INTRODUCTION

### Three Moments

*July 12, 2008*

There was shouting outside in the courtyard. I peered out Magda's second floor window and caught sight of a slight, middle-aged woman angrily gesticulating at a large group of men who were pouring into the cramped domestic space of the yard. "It's *seguridad*," Madga whispered, "Don't let them see you see them." La Seguridad (security) was what people called the local security committee in Todos Santos Cuchumatán, Guatemala. While this group first formed in the early 2000s to attack youth gangs, earlier that year at a public meeting they banned the sale of alcohol throughout this rural, predominantly Mam Maya county. Madga's older sister used to run a cantina. Officially Candelaria had closed up shop, but when the security committee arrested a drunk man that day, he claimed Candelaria had sold to him. Madga continued to peek discreetly out of her window as the security patrol hauled Candelaria off to their office for an interrogation.

*July 25, 2008*

As she later recounted, Candelaria did not make things easy for herself when got to the security office when she was arrested. "How can you do this to me," she said she said to its leaders, "when you have government jobs and I have nothing? How is it that you have rights and I don't?" This reference to government jobs referred to their day jobs as schoolteachers: their work for the security committee was unofficial, voluntary and unremunerated. They responded by accusing her of being drunk, to which she said she retorted, "So what if I am. My daughter left for the States and I'm sad so I had a drink. You know what it feels like." They did, and

apparently they did not appreciate being reminded of it. They locked her up in jail for twenty-four hours. Then they sentenced her to a month of sweeping out the market. The market was big—it took her all day to clean it, and left her no time for any other work. When she asked them how she could work to feed her grandchildren when she had to work for free all day, they told her to ask her daughter to send her money.

“But she just got there and she’s not working yet,” Candelaria said. Sitting there in Madga’s house, she fairly glowed with an indignancy born of a panic about how she was going to make ends meet. While their family had had money to educate Magda, Candelaria, the oldest child, had been working all her life. Her husband disappeared during the war, leaving her to raise two daughters alone. She had been in the family business of selling handicrafts, but a precipitous decline in tourism had made this business much less profitable. Her other daughter was finishing high school in Huehuetenango, and her son-in-law, a day laborer, wasn’t working either. There were six grandchildren in the house under the age of ten. “I don’t know why her son-in-law doesn’t work and help out,” Madga muttered. To Candelaria she said, “You just have to accept it.”

Candelaria continued to rant: she was not ready to accept it. “Alcohol is good for you,” she said, “it warms you up when your body is cold. When a woman is giving birth she needs to drink a shot to help push the baby out.” Then she mentioned a list that they read at the meeting when they banned alcohol, how their late sister had been on this list of people who died of drink. “But she didn’t die of drink, she died of a fever.” Later other family members said that they thought her drinking had in fact done her hepatitis-compromised liver in.

*August 21, 2008*

Candelaria's daughter Romelia was tending the store that used to be a cantina. Now the shelves were stocked with a rainbow of Fanta products and clientele was scarce. Her mother was out of town, on a trip to sell handicrafts. Romelia said they were lucky that they had this business: many of the other liquor vendors had nothing else to fall back on. She had a notebook filled with words in English she was studying for her secretarial course. I helped her pronounce them: *lettuce, cabbage, radish*. I mentioned that I'd been visiting the village since 2004, when the streets had been full of roving groups of young men. "That's why the security committee started," she said. "That was a good thing, getting rid of the gangs." She said her husband used to hang out with the gangs, and his family wasn't important to him, but since then that had changed. He was bathing the children and while we were talking he handed her a damp two year old to towel dry.

### **What This Monograph Is About**

As Guatemalans are fond of saying, Guatemala is not a poor country; it has a wealth of resources, not the least of which is its incredible cultural and linguistic diversity. But Guatemala has one of the most skewed income distributions in the hemisphere, and its majority indigenous population historically and currently number among its most impoverished residents. When efforts at New Deal style democracy and land redistribution ended with CIA-backed coup in 1954, this event laid the ground for one of the world's longest running civil wars (1960-1996). Waves of political mobilization were met with ever-increasing levels of repression by military-backed elites. It took overwhelming force and a scorched earth policy that was declared a genocide to destroy long-term popular efforts for a more equitable Guatemala. The peace accords

were negotiated by a victorious military. Few of the concessions granted on paper were implemented. In the wake of this devastation, most Guatemalans' projects for a better future now rest on individual salvation, evidenced by the remarkable popularity of Pentecostal Christianity (Garrard-Burnett 1998, O'Neill 2010), high rates of migration to the United States, and efforts to take advantage of the one postwar concession that has made a meaningful change: educational expansion. But this monograph is not an account of these individual projects. Instead it is about one place where dreams of collectivity have survived in Guatemala, in what is arguably its most successful postwar social movement: self-help security.

While there are few scholarly accounts of these extralegal vigilante justice movements thus far, anecdotal evidence gathered from researchers and ordinary Guatemalans suggests that they are widespread. In Jennifer Burrell's study of an earlier moment in the history of La Seguridad, she suggests that the Todos Santos security committee offered a prototype for the rest of Guatemala (2013:163). Nationally, similar groups have made the news and attracted official intervention after they have committed especially egregious human rights violations, as happened in Panajachel, Sololá over the course of 2011, where vigilantes dumped bodies in Lake Atitán and threatened the journalist who covered the story (*La Prensa Libre* 2013). In most other places they operate more quietly. For example, in some communities residents report that they surveille the entries and the exits to their towns, writing down the license plate numbers of all unknown cars (fieldnotes, September 8, 2012). Guatemala's high rates of extrajudicial lynching offers another testament to people's frustration with the official justice system and their willingness to take "justice" into their own hands (Cullinan 2011).

I offer the opening description of one security action and its aftermath by way of an introduction to one such vigilante justice movement and some of the issues that its imposition of

power raises. The men who arrived at Candelaria's house that day were all volunteers, taking their turn on a rotating schedule to patrol their neighborhood. That day they had been sent by the leaders of the general security committee to search her house for alcohol. When she refused to recognize their legitimacy and allow them to enter her house, she was arrested. Candelaria saw this refusal as her "right" to refuse an unlawful search. Security leaders saw things otherwise. The law she had violated was not a national one, but rather a local one decided by consensus at a community meeting, a community decision she had violated by continuing to sell alcohol. She was on the losing end of a larger cultural conflict over the meaning of this substance: was it a part of Mayan tradition, useful for medicinal purposes, for warming up the body, as she said, or was it a public health threat responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Todosanteros, including her sister?

When Candelaria went to jail, it was in a jail cell that the security committee shared with the national police force: both groups have a set of keys. The police were present in town, but, as was often the case, they chose not to intervene. As one police officer remarked, indigenous people have the right to practice "costumbre," or customary law. He had learned about this right in his classes at the police academy. For this officer, actions like the ones taken against the local liquor vendors were a constitutionally protected right to cultural practices. Vigilante justice movements take place in relation to particular kinds of state formations, which I discuss below. In addition to the relationship between state and non-state actors, vigilantism brings up many other closely related issues. For example, if vigilantism is about security, however defined, then what is the relationship of security to rights, as Candelaria points out? What rights do people have as citizens of Guatemala? What rights do people have under transnationally recognized legal regimes as indigenous peoples? Which rights take precedence, and when? Also, what is the

role of violence in the imposition of extralegal justice? The threat of extralegal violence compelled Candelaria to do things that she did not want to do: go to the office of the security committee, spend time in jail, clean the market, and ultimately, stop selling liquor.

Finally, there is the issue of gender in this account. The image of this small feisty woman confronting a wall of identically dressed men has stayed in my mind's eye over the years. At that particular moment, the security committee was in the middle of a campaign against cantina owners, and many of them, like Candelaria, were single mothers. This action against the town's cantina owners managed to push the cantineras out of business. But most of the vigilante struggles that I documented took place between men. This movement began as an attack on young men like Romelia's husband who were considered gangsters. Many of the clashes discussed in the chapters that follow concern an intergenerational struggle between the men who ran the security committee and gang-associated youth.

In this battle, women for the most part decided to opt out. They were invested in other kinds of projects. Educated women like Madga pragmatically looked the other way, waiting until the time was right in the town for a more reasonable politics, one that might include women's opinions. Less privileged women like Candelaria were too busy struggling to feed their families to continue to fight the security committee. Romelia was busy in her own project of getting herself educated and seeking work as a "professional." Candelaria's other daughter, like many in the village, had already left the entire situation behind, joining a migratory exodus to the United States, what Diane Nelson has called "the postwar project of Guatemalan youth." Women's smaller-scale struggles are certainly worthy of analysis: I have written about them and will continue to write about them elsewhere (Sharp 2010, 2011, 2013). The work at hand, however, is for the most part concerned with the much more public and sometimes spectacular conflicts that

were taking place between two groups of men. As such, it represents a contribution to a growing body of work on men and masculinities in Latin America (e.g., Gutmann 2003, 1997, Melhuus 1996, Walters et al 2004).

In order to set the stage for these struggles, the following sections in this introduction outline the wider theoretical and historical contexts that frame this study. First I consider the relevance of competing theoretical frameworks for the analysis of violence. One dominant framework is that of structural violence. The second section highlights the structures that social analysts cite in their efforts to explain recent outbreaks of popular violence, including neoliberal capitalism, globalization and democratization. Sections three and four turn specifically to research on vigilante justice movements in order to show how many of the features of the movement I profile resemble other documented incidences of vigilantism. Common features include the lability of these movements and their ambiguous relationship to state actors. While most researchers argue that vigilantism represents right-wing, socially conservative movements, I contend that La Seguridad's recombination of competing ideological influences defies such tidy categorization. The fifth section recounts the wartime antecedents of self-help security in Guatemala. However, throughout the chapters of this monograph, I highlight different historical threads that go into the making of this movement as well as its opposition. While section six briefly outlines the methodological and representational approach that this study takes, section seven offers an overview of the chapters to follow.

## **I. The Three Leading Approaches to the Study of Violence**

Earlier generations of anthropologists have been criticized for either ignoring violence (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004, Starn 1992) or for interpreting it in ways that allowed it to be seen as

a sign of as cultural difference rather than social injustice (Farmer 1997). The political violence, state terror and civil wars that marked the end of the Cold War era in Latin America received belated anthropological attention (Carmack 1992, Huggins 1991, Menjívar and Rodríguez 2006, Robben and Suarez Orozco 2000, Sluka 2000). The end of multiple civil conflicts coincided with the global spread of market capitalism and the proliferation of new forms of violence. In response, studies of violence now represent a burgeoning field (Pine 2009:202). A trend in this work on violence has been a move to expand the definition of violence, and understand it not just as physical harm but a range of far more subtle but equally pernicious actions. I outline three of the most influential frameworks for theorizing violence below.

### **Foucauldian Approaches**

Weber famously defined the monopoly on the legitimate use of force as the basis of state power. This definition of state power has long troubled analysts of postcolonial contexts where state power, when compared to a European norm, is often found lacking (Sharma and Gupta 2009:10-11). Some have proposed that Latin America, in contrast, needs to be understood in terms of “violent pluralism” (Arias and Goldstein 2010). Despite important differences, Foucault’s analysis of modernity has many Weberian resonances, including its implicit assumptions about the existence of strong, centralized states. Because he defines sovereign power in terms of its relationship to violence, his legacy is one analysts of violence have had to contend with.

*Discipline and Punish* (1977) opens with a description of a spectacular punishment of an accused regicide. Foucault argues that this “spectacle of the scaffold” was the last of its kind in France, as punishment became more subtle and concealed, more intent on reforming the soul of the offender than mutilating the body. Foucault argues that this shift from power over death to power

over life, or biopower, represents the “threshold to modernity” that emerges in Europe over the course of the transformative years of 1760-1840.

Although elsewhere Foucault argues explicitly against a teleological interpretation of history (1984), *Discipline and Punish* is widely interpreted as arguing for one because it sets forth a clear before and after. The threshold to modernity marks a transition between unequal and value-laden binary terms: sovereign power/nation-state power, feudal/modern, and spectacular/self-regulated. Using this text to understand the recent proliferation of spectacular violence by non-state actors risks making these events seem like a regression or reversion to the pre-modern if they are interpreted in a strictly Foucauldian framework.

Despite the temporal and geographical specificity of Foucault’s argument, his claims have had an enduring appeal for many anthropologists. For the most part scholars have chosen to expand and extend rather than reject Foucault’s work (e.g., Goldstein 2004; Mbembe 2003). For example, in Lars Buur’s analysis of a South African vigilante justice group, he concludes that “physical violence does not disappear with the development of the modern state and its different forms of biopower but instead continues to exist in a parallel and partially invisible domain” (2005:194). Jean and John Comaroff (2006) take a different tack. While they admit that a strict interpretation of Foucault suggests that “where modern power runs out, primitive spectacle returns,” they conclude that the continued presence of the public performance of power does not refute the key insight of *Discipline and Punish*, rather it offers a “counterpoint” within this larger composition (2006:292). Historian Deborah Levenson offers a similar revision, writing that, “In the case of Guatemala, in Foucault’s formulation of the biopolitics that manufacture the life of members of modern nations as ‘a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and

ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them,' the words 'in addition to' need to replace 'rather than'" (2013:Loc 562)

Uneasiness with the implications of Foucault's work on sovereignty and violence has helped make Giorgio Agamben's "corrective" to this oeuvre popular among many anthropologists (Hansen and Stepputat 2006). Agamben argues that Foucault fails to appreciate the continuing relevance of the sovereign's power to mete out death. Thus, violence is foundational to forms of power, and the production of the biopolitical body, which can be killed without committing homicide, "is the original activity of sovereign power" (1998:6). Rather than implicitly grounding these discussions in the nation-state, Agamben's revision makes sovereign power a malleable and flexible phenomenon that can exist almost anywhere that violent force does. Many scholars have found Agamben's flexible definition of sovereignty more suited to the analysis of nation-states eroded by decades of decentralization, privatization and outsourcing, as well post-colonies where strong sovereign state power has always been more of an aspiration than an actuality. However, many have found the implications of Agamben's work problematic as well (e.g., Jennings 2011). I return to these points in Chapters Two and Four.

### **Symbolic Violence**

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence offers another influential framework for anthropological work on violence. Bourdieu emphasizes mundane, every day forms of violence rather than spectacular events. He defines symbolic violence as "the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (2004:273). Bourdieu immediately qualifies this statement, explaining that he is not blaming the subject for her subjection but rather emphasizing how social agents themselves contribute to what he calls the "efficacy" of larger determinative structures. Symbolic violence rests on another Bourdiesian concept, the habitus. Habitus refers to

a structural and cultural environment which is internalized in people's dispositions to act, think and feel in certain ways.

Adrienne Pine (2009) makes extensive use of Bourdieu's work in her study of violence in Honduras. She describes how violent death is normalized through people's constant exposure to it in everyday life and through mediated images. She refers to this experience as a "habitus of fear," while she uses symbolic violence to explain how people who die violent deaths come to be seen as deserving of their fate. In a larger context, symbolic violence explains how Hondurans come to see themselves as deserving of their place in the world order, as a "violent" people who are not as rich as Americans or as advanced as Mexicans. In this process of misrecognition, the dominated accept the logic of the dominant as a naturalized social fact. This analysis is equally applicable to Guatemala, where people explain the country's high crime rates by blaming their "culture of violence" and "a lack of family values." Structural factors, such as unemployment and poverty, are rarely mentioned. In Chapters Three and Five, I try to convey something of the habitus of fear that permeates postwar Guatemala by describing moments of my own interpolation into it during interactions with people who have themselves been victimized by vigilante actions.

### **Structural Violence**

The concept of structural violence is largely associated with Paul Farmer's work in Haiti as a physician, anthropologist and activist. Farmer focuses on the way in which larger social forces become embodied in individual experiences and how these forces structure people's risks for suffering, be it in the form of hunger, torture, rape, or disease (1997:263). A structural violence approach involves seeing all forms of violence as connected and emphasizes recognizing the human-made aspects of suffering. While Farmer acknowledges the influence of Bourdieu, his

primary theoretical antecedents are work from Liberation Theology, which Farmer praises for “taking the suffering of the poor as a central problematic” by using “social analysis to explain and deplore social suffering” (1997:273). It is impossible to reflect on the situation of the “wretched of the earth” without also attempting to understand the mechanisms by which the rich get richer. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois (2004) build on this approach when they assert the importance of seeing all forms of violence on a continuum that connects the political to the structural to the everyday.

In the chapters that follow, symbolic and structural violence prove to be closely related phenomena, as people participate in acts of symbolic violence by holding individuals personally responsible instead of understanding their actions in a context of limited options. Commissions of symbolic violence and the misrecognition of structural violence are certainly not limited to Guatemalan villages: both seem to be a very human tendency, as if blaming others for their circumstances allows us to imagine that we somehow have more control over our own fate. This tendency has become even more pronounced with the global spread of neoliberal capitalism, a project whose ideological basis, as many have observed, seems to be about holding the individual ultimately responsible for whatever happens to them (Miller and Rose 2006, Zilberg 2011). It is important to keep the structuring structures of structural violence in the foreground to combat this trend. However, ascribing agency to vague, amorphous entities represents an analytic challenge. The following section considers recent efforts by social analysts to do just that in explanations of contemporary violence. These accounts emphasize different aspects of the neoliberal moment, in an inter-related concatenation of trends that includes the changing face of the state, democratization and globalization.

## II. Explaining Popular Violence

Many of the Latin American and African countries where anthropologists traditionally work underwent transitions from military dictatorships and civil war to peace agreements that promised democratic forms of governance. This period was marked by a flurry of new constitutions, many of which for the first time extended recognition and rights to indigenous and minority populations. At the same time, structural adjustment policies mandating deregulation and privatization of national interests widened the gulf between the rich and the poor, dismantling the already tenuous social safety nets of the developing world. The result has been widely described as a shift from politicized, state-sponsored violence to privatized, depoliticized violence. Many anthropologists have sought to explain concomitant surges in popular violence, particularly communal justice movements and extrajudicial lynchings, as a result of larger structural changes in the organization of capitalism. They differ, however, on whether neoliberalism, democratization, or globalization should be emphasized in explanations of the spread of popular violence.

Popular violence refers to a range of situations in which citizens have taken the law into their own hands, including a vigilante patrol on the Arizona-Mexico border (Chavez 2008), a people's court in South Africa (Buur 2005), a lynch mob in Ecuador (Krupa 2009), or a youth gang in Nicaragua (Rodgers 2008). These groups involve non-state actors whose actions are extralegal. Often these actions are framed as a form of protest against the inadequacies of the state, especially its failure to adequately protect its citizens from both petty and violent crime. Lynching, or the collective murder of suspected criminals, represents an extreme example of recent incidences of popular violence. Historically, lynch mobs targeted victims who are constituted as a threatening other, such as white mob attacks on African Americans in the U.S.

South or on Chinese immigrants in California (Abrahams 1998). Religious differences often came into play in what has been called sectarian violence in Northern Ireland or communal violence in India. While many contemporary eruptions of violence still follow these historical divisions, many more recently documented cases involve poor people attacking other poor people who belong to the same religious and/or ethnic group (Fuentes Diaz 2006, Goldstein 2004, Jensen 2008, Pratten 2008). Most of the violence in postwar Guatemala falls into this category (Godoy 2006).

Supporters of popular violence in locales as diverse as Nigeria, South Africa, Brazil, Peru, and Mexico say they are forced to take action by corrupt police and inefficient judiciaries. Daniel Goldstein's (2005) case study of lynching connects this phenomenon to state cutbacks mandated by neoliberal restructuring in Bolivia. In a context where police salaries have stagnated, in order to launch a criminal investigation, citizens must pay its start-up costs, including purchasing tanks of gasoline. He argues that those who cannot afford to pay bribes are more likely to take justice into their own hands. Trust of state officials is also an issue in formerly repressive states where state police forces are deeply implicated in war crimes (Buur 2005). Although peace accords typically mandate the replacement of war criminals in police forces and the judiciary, scarce resources means that many implicated officials stay on the job (Nordstrom 2004).

In Guatemala, the war left national security forces in disgrace. Human rights reports credit government forces with 93% of wartime atrocities (CEH 1999). The national police, notorious for torturing and disappearing political dissidents, was disbanded and replaced by the national civil police (PNC) as part of the peace accords. The number of PNC officers per population remains low. Privatization has filled the security gap: while there are 18,500 police

officers in Guatemala nationwide, there are an estimated 80,000 private security guards (USAID 2006). The vast majority of these guards work in the capital city. In a related development, the PNC authorized community policing in 1999 (Argueta 2012). Such outsourcing of public safety represents part of a larger trend in policing, one that is emblematic of neoliberalism and its tendency to “responsibilize” ordinary citizens, inciting them to take over what were once functions of the state (Cattelino 2004, Garland 2001, Goldstein 2005). Ideally community policing volunteers are in ongoing communication with the official police force: in Guatemala, there is no such organized communication (Argueta 2012). While there is an official police presence in Todos Santos, there are only a handful of officers posted there at any given moment. Six to eight officers are charged with policing a county of 32,000, or about one officer per 4000 people. Apart from the thinness of their coverage, the police are widely regarded as corrupt and incompetent.

In addition to state cutbacks, many analysts argue that democratization also plays a role in recent increases in popular violence. Many anthropologists have observed the disjuncture between westernized legal notions personhood, where individual rights ontologically adhere to the person, and indigenous conceptions that see personhood as something relational that can potentially be revoked (Buur 2008, Godoy 2006). In communities that experience themselves as under siege, due process, individual rights, innocent until proven guilty may be perceived as a Western imposition (Goldstein 2007, Oomen 2004) or an impediment to justice (Holston 2009). As the president of a vigilante justice organization complained about the new South African constitution, its enforcement means that the “government treats criminals with kid gloves” (Oomen 2004:157). People’s ambivalent experiences with the global spread of human rights discourses features prominently in several of the chapters that follow.

Scholars who emphasize the relationship between democratization and popular justice interpret their coincidence in terms of what Caldeira and Holsten (1999) have called “democratic disjuncture.” At the very moment that states have granted official recognition to multiculturalism and the cultural rights of historically excluded groups, their rights to security and livelihood are far from guaranteed (Hale 2002). Holsten’s (2009) analysis of Brazil is an example of work that connects the democratization of citizenship to new forms of violence. He argues that the emergence of more inclusive forms of citizenship has created unstable and contradictory effects. While the police argue that human rights for criminals constitute “privileges for bandits,” imprisoned gang leaders respond in a language deeply imbued with human rights discourses. This generalization holds true for gang leaders in Guatemala, whether they are imprisoned gang leaders from the capital city (Fontes 2013) or imitation gangs protesting their mistreatment at the hands of the local security committees that rule rural areas (see Chapter Three).

Some authors also credit globalization, and its increased cultural flows and interconnectedness, as part of the etiology of contemporary violence. For example, Godoy, in a monograph on lynching in Guatemala, argues that globalization makes impoverished people more painfully aware of their position in the global hierarchy. Information about how the privileged live may be conveyed by Mexican *telenovelas* on satellite TV or experienced firsthand through transnational migration. Areas that were once off the grid are now flooded with transnational media images, feeding a phenomenon Godoy calls “globalization anxiety” (2004). The dissemination of music videos and bootleg CDs has fueled the spread of a global youth culture. This tendency is especially pronounced in transnational youth gang identifications. Rural teens throughout Central America now align themselves with rival gangs that originated in Los Angeles (Zilberg 2004). Sometimes these youthful gangsters do articulate with another

globalized flow, the black market in narco-trafficking, where they make up the largely expendable foot soldiers of the drug trade (Rodgers 2008). However, in many cases these bored young men only aspire to transnational gangster identities. Their appropriation of baggy pants and gothic lettered tattoos are viewed as a threat in communities like Todos Santos that already feel besieged by the destabilizing effects of global capitalism (Burrell and Weston 2008).

In conclusion, analysts cite different aspects of neoliberal capitalism in explanations of popular violence, variously emphasizing the impact of state cutbacks to policing and the judiciary and the destabilizing effects of privatization. Democratization in a context where people are allowed access to the ballot box to choose between elite candidates while they watch their standards of living plummet creates a combustible situation. And while globalization has contributed to an efflorescence of human rights discourses and internationally-connected social movements, it has also spread images of unobtainable affluence and glamorized criminality. All of these trends have remade state power and affected people's experiences of the state. The next section describes the relationship between popular justice movements and state authorities in more detail.

### **III. The Arc of Justice**

Popular justice movements simultaneously challenge and reinforce state authority. In his review article on the subject, Robert Gordon describes the relationship of these non-state actors to the states in which they live as "parasitic": vigilante groups emerge in response to state inaction and yet they cannot exist without the state they critique (2004:349). Popular justice organizations tend to be conservative movements aimed at critiquing what they perceive as failures of the state rather than questioning the legitimacy of state sovereignty per se. Generally they seem to be

asking for more state power, especially more responsive policing and a more effective judiciary, rather than less. Gordon concludes that vigilante groups work as “double agents” of law and order, as their extralegal efforts to bolster rule of law ultimately undermine state authority. To better understand the complicated back and forth between state authorities and popular justice movements, I briefly consider three case studies taken from Peru, Nigeria and South Africa below.

Orin Starn’s *Nightwatch* is a book-length account of the rise and fall of the *rondas campesinas* in northern Peru. Beginning in the late 1970s, rural villagers organized nightly patrols to combat cattle rustling and petty thievery in their communities. From their very inception, the *rondas* had an ambiguous relationship to the state whose inaction and corrupt policing their movement explicitly criticized. While provincial authorities initially authorized the group, in subsequent years official attitudes towards the *rondas* “zigzagged” from an outright ban to a presidential decree authorizing them followed by another round of arrests of *ronda* leaders (1999:26).

Non-governmental organizations played a significant role in the fluctuating relationship between *ronderos* and state authorities. Numerous NGOs run by middle-class Peruvians with the support of international donors threw financial support behind this working-class rural movement, providing, for example, bail money and legal representation for jailed leaders. Sometimes this support spurred the downfall of the *rondas*, when NGO funds disbursed to resource-poor communities led to infighting and resentments over how this influx of cash should be spent. The Fujimori administration’s crackdown on *ronda* leaders in the 1990s hastened the demise of the movement. However, Starn emphasizes that the movement’s success, and not just government repression, contributed to the end of the *rondas*. While the *rondas* were remarkably

successful at stamping out theft, when they expanded their duties into people's courts and community development projects, they alienated much of their constituency.

The vigilante group known as the Bakassi Boys in southeastern Nigeria has received considerable scholarly attention (e.g., Baker 2002, Meagher 2007, Smith 2004). Daniel Jordan Smith's account of their rise and fall is especially attentive to interpreting vigilantism as "a common response to ambiguities and ambivalence regarding the authority of the state" (2004:430). Smith observes that vigilante groups frequently arise in countries formerly subjected to authoritarian military rule because popular rationales for vigilantism and militarism are remarkably similar. Collective memory of this past history helps to explain public acceptance of violent action. The Bakassi Boys were exceptionally violent; while the *ronderos* Starn describes were usually careful not to maim their suspects so badly that they could not earn a living, the Bakassi Boys publicly executed and burned suspected criminals. Originally commissioned by a group of Igbo shoemakers in Aba, the Bakassi Boys quickly expanded to protect markets throughout the region from crime. A key part of the Bakassi Boys' popularity was that they represented themselves as supernaturally-empowered superheroes who were immune to bullets and completely righteous in their administration of justice. Their success attracted the attention of state authorities, whose approval and cooptation ultimately led to the group's downfall. Once they aligned themselves with clearly mortal politicians, they started to be seen as politically motivated thugs.

In a third study of vigilantes and state authorities, Barbara Oomen examines Mapogo a Mathamaga, a vigilante justice organization that formed in northern South Africa in the late 1990s. This group grew from a vigilante group of local tradesmen to a privatized security company with 72 chapters and a reported membership of 70,000. The organization began in

protest of local police inaction to the robbery and murder of local business owners in the northern province of Sekhukhune. Members began apprehending alleged criminals and beating them—sometimes to death—and dumping the bleeding bodies of their victims on the doorsteps of local police stations. Despite their open critique of the government, from the outset Mapogo’s charismatic “president for life” sought official government approval. In one of the organization’s foundational actions, members marched to the provincial governor’s office where a high-ranking provincial official signed an agreement with them that promised police support of their actions (2004:163). Despite the nation’s constitutional guarantees of due process, the cooperating provincial official stated that he agreed with the vigilante group’s assertion that “corporal punishment is indeed the African way” of doing things (2004:163).

While these popular justice movements began as challenges to state authority, the ambiguous and ambivalent relations that unfold between these two entities ultimately seem to end up reinforcing state power, as these movements are either disbanded, undermined or incorporated by the state. These accounts also reveal the unevenness of that entity that is reified as “the state,” which is made up of multiple levels of differently motivated actors. The closer authorities are to the local level, the more likely they are to support local initiatives. The generally passive police force in Todos Santos is a case in point. Finally, a generalization often made about vigilante groups is that they are labile formations; their informal and flexible institutional structures mean that they can easily morph, moving from patrolling the streets to running courts to managing community development projects. As these movements succeed and increase their mandate, they risk losing the popular support that brought them to power in the first place. For the security committee of Todos Santos, state intervention and an expanding mandate likewise contribute to the decline of their movement: their rise and fall from power,

detailed over the course of this monograph, connects them to the trajectories of other vigilante movements across time and space. Other organizational features that may contribute to the ephemerality of vigilantism are detailed in the following section.

#### **IV. Defining Vigilantism**

Thus far the *Annual Review of Anthropology* has yet to publish a review article on vigilante justice. There are three main sources in anthropology dedicated to the topic of vigilantism, and all three define the term “vigilante” broadly. Martha Huggin’s edited volume on *Vigilantism and the State in Latin America* (1991) includes death squads and paramilitaries in its purview. Ray Abraham’s (1998) overview of the subject draws on a wide range of sources, including his own fieldwork in Tanzania and examples from U.S. history. Following Huggins, Abrahams includes state-subcontracted Cold War violence in seventies and eighties Latin America in his overview. Most recently, Sen and Pratten in their introduction to the volume *Global Vigilantes* (2008) also cast a wide net. They note that it is more important to define vigilantes by what they do than by a strict conceptual framework. Thus their volume includes research on gangs and what they call “state vigilantes.” This blurring of boundaries may make sense from an editorial perspective, but I argue that there are foundational differences that distinguish vigilante justice movements from other types of contemporary violence.

Vigilante groups often claim to represent an ethnic, religious and or socioeconomic identity, such as Muslims in northern Nigeria (Pratten 2008), Igbo traders in Western Nigeria (Smith 2004), township dwellers in South Africa (Buur 2008), Hindus in Bombay slums (Sen 2008), or Aymara migrants on the margins of Cochabamba (Goldstein 2004). Localized ethnic identity characterizes rural security movements in Guatemala as well. Spanish colonial policy

and its “concentración” of indigenous people into manageable administrative units has had a long-lasting impact. Sol Tax’s (1937) observation that the municipio, an administrative unit that is roughly the equivalent of a U.S. county, formed the geographic locus for distinctive ethnic identities continues to hold true. Now the Guatemalan municipio marks the boundary of a security perimeter. The vigilante repertoire relies heavily on corporal punishment and may include lynching or banishment. Many have remarked that legalistic rituals and language often characterizes vigilante activities; although they are not of the state, vigilantes often try to legitimize their actions by acting as if they were (Buur 2005; Gordon 2004).

Despite this mimicry, vigilante groups are formed independently of the state; they are private groups of almost always male citizens (cf Blee 1991, Sen 2008) who are responding to a situation that they perceive as out of control (Gordon 2004). Their only source of funding comes from their own revenue-raising schemes, such as imposing fines or charging membership dues. Their weapons of choice, belts, whips and kerosene, are items appropriated from everyday life. Vigilantes cite the need to fight crime as their motivation; however, crime and criminality are imminently culturally-constructed concepts. Quite often that which constitutes a criminal offense for vigilantes does not count as a crime under formal law. For example, Godoy (2006) interviews rural Maya who consider the very presence of youth on the street of their villages after dark suspect. Many Guatemalanist anthropologists have puzzled over how to interpret these criminalized groups of young Maya men whom locals consider gangsters (e.g., Benson et al 2008). I consider this dilemma in more detail in Chapter Three. La Seguridad’s ban on alcohol distribution and consumption, which is legal in Guatemala, is another such example of a locally constructed criminal offense.

Closely related to this idea of criminality is the idea of the moral community. As Buur and Jensen describe vigilantes, “they view themselves as the defenders, indeed the embodiment, of the moral, virtuous community” (2004:146). But vigilantes’ right to speak for and represent this tenuous, contingent entity that sometimes coalesces into a “community” may contribute to the aforementioned ephemerality of these social movements. I opened this introduction with a moment when most members of the Todos Santos community backed a ban on alcohol, and those who did not were forced to accept it. But over the course of the monograph I document the unraveling of this fragile consensus and look at what this disintegration reveals about the contours of the postwar Guatemalan state and its policies concerning its indigenous majority.

Finally, scholars conclude that vigilantism is inherently conservative: their actions are authorized by traditional notions (invented though these traditions may be) of respect for elders and patriarchal authority. Candelaria, for example, ran afoul of patriarchal authority when she failed to speak to local vigilante leaders with appropriate deference. While overviews of the literature on vigilantism frequently cite Starn’s study of Peru’s *rondas campesinas* (Abrahams 2008; Sen and Pratten 2008), because Starn emphasizes the *ronderos*’ connections to leftist political parties in Peru, *rondas* are treated as a related but distinct phenomenon in the literature on vigilantism. Likewise, the Library of Congress catalogues Starn’s book under “peasant movements” rather than “vigilantism.” Despite the Maoist sympathies of the movement’s founders, the *rondas campesinas* resemble other vigilante justice movements in almost all other respects. For example, the gendered ideologies the *ronderos* practiced remained profoundly patriarchal. The trials that Starn observes recall the South African township trials Buur (2008) describes: in both contexts, violence against women is widely acceptable. The burden of proof is

on the woman to prove that she was a faithful, obedient wife undeserving of what must be presented as disproportionate brutality.

This interpretative confusion over whether or not vigilantism should be seen as conservative or progressive points to a larger crisis in efforts to apprehend contemporary politics using conceptions and terminology inherited from 18<sup>th</sup> Century revolutionary Europe (Tsing 2013). Many read security committees in Guatemala as the direct inheritance of right-wing counterinsurgency policies. There is much that is true in this claim, and I consider the enduring impact of Guatemala's wartime civil patrol system in the following section. However, counterinsurgency is not the only experience that went into the making of this vigilante justice movement. As I explore in Chapter Two, older conceptions of community service and the centrality of fulfilling communal obligations come into play in vigilante leaders' rationales for their disciplinary actions as well. In Chapter Five I trace the influence of the Marxist insurgency on the generation of men who make up the leadership of Seguridad, especially as this experience expresses itself in their justifications for the alcohol prohibition. Meanwhile, critics of the security committee draw upon different ideological threads in their efforts to discredit their elders, including their experiences with postwar education, transnational migration, their faith in the postwar constitution and knowledge of transnational human rights discourses.

Instead of uncovering one systematic ideological system that goes into the creation of a unitary entity that could be called vigilantism or the opposition to vigilantism, my research reveals multiple strands of competing ideologies that people adopt, adapt and recombine at different moments in different ways. This finding is consistent Daniel Goldstein's most recent conclusions about the constitution of self-help security in urban Bolivia (2013:30). Borrowing from Levi-Strauss' concept of bricolage (1968), Goldstein argues that marginalized Bolivians act

as legal bricoleurs, creatively recombining the different legal discourses available to them in their efforts to create security.

Many have discussed postcolonial states in terms of legal pluralism (Merry 1988). In other words, transnational, national and local regimes of law compete for legitimacy in a landscape of uneven and fragmented sovereignty. Although legal pluralism recognizes the multiplicity of law in post-colonial contexts, this framework still implies that the singular systems that go into making up the whole represent relatively coherent entities. Ethnographic research tells us otherwise. It reveals the ways in which customary law is not always customary, and why human rights are not always experienced as humane. It shows the ways in which paramilitary organizations in Guatemala draw their inspiration not only from counterinsurgency techniques and zero tolerance policing policies, but also from utopian Marxism and Mayan conceptions of personhood. I elaborate many of these competing elements in the chapters that follow. The following section, however, attends to the importance of wartime legacies in Guatemala's postwar security committees, with particular attention to the history of the one that came to power in Todos Santos during the first decade of the twenty-first century.

## **V. From Paramilitary Patrols to Postwar Security**

Guatemala is a tiny country of about 14 million people, known for both its incredible ethnic diversity, with 23 distinct language groups, the majority of them Maya, as well as its extremes of inequality and high levels of violence. Most of its majority Maya population lives in the western highlands: the Mam Maya *municipio* of Todos Santos is one of these. Of its approximately 32,000 residents, around 4000 live in the county seat. Ninety-five percent of the population identifies as Mam Maya. Located in the steep terrain of the Cuchumatanes mountain range,

people grow potatoes at its highest points, corn in the warmer valleys, and coffee on lower altitude terrains. With each passing generation, the subsistence agriculture that one fed Mayan communities and provided the basis for a distinctive *cosmovisión* has become less and less sustainable.

Migration has been a way of life for rural Mayans in Guatemala for centuries (Lovell and Lutz 1994), but until the disruption of the civil war, people supplemented local farming with seasonal wage labor on coastal coffee and cotton plantations. Conditions on the coast were bad and wages were low, which helped make many rural Mayans open to the message guerrilla insurgents brought to the western highlands in the late 1970s. In Todos Santos, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor briefly occupied the town in 1981. Then in April of 1982 the Guatemalan military arrived. They tortured and killed at least 140 people and razed the populous hamlet that abuts the county seat (Burrell 2004). Then they forced all adult men to participate in the civil patrol (Patrulla Autodefensa Civil, or PAC), a system of forced labor that obliged Maya peasants inform on their neighbors (Remijense 2002).

The military's rationale for this auxiliary force was that it would be "the eyes and ears for the army" (Schirmer 1998:90). All Maya men between the ages of 15 and 60 were forced to patrol for 24 hours shifts every 20-30 days. Those who refused were accused of subversion. Patrollers were supposed to search their villages for insurgents, patrol with the army, and perform labor for the army, such as roadwork and construction. In many places, civil patrols participated in massacres under military orders. Its top commanders were named by the army, and they reported to local military commissioners. Initially patrollers were paid with food: after 1986 they were not compensated at all.

The military architects of this program considered its goal to be “localized statism,” meaning that the PACs would provide seemingly localized yet centrally-controlled security. The civil patrol system brought Mayan villages onto the grid of nationally intelligibility to an extent unprecedented in Guatemalan history. Previously state presence in the region had been episodic at best. Village names writ large in whitewashed stones on the hillsides above towns are the most obvious evidence of this inscription. (Legible from the air, these signs marked the spot for aircraft landings or bombings: Todos Santos continues to maintain “Las Letras” above the town as a point of civic pride.) As Jennifer Schirmer describes the military’s intentions in her oral history of this institution:

Once the army had destroyed, reconstructed, and penetrated the geographic and cultural fabric of villages in the northwest highlands and had militarized the Civil Patrol leadership, they believed they could expect these new power brokers to step down (1998:95).

However, many of these new powerbrokers were not willing to step down. Contemporary ethnographies document the growth of a strong sense of community sovereignty as a result of the patrols (Kobrak 1997, Stoll 1993). Reportedly many indigenous people viewed the PACs “as less an attack on community than as a way to strengthen village sovereignty, as less a submission to their oppressor than an escape from both sides of the violence” (Schirmer 1998: 97).

Anthropologist Finn Stepputat encountered a similar attitude when he interviewed a former civil patroller who asserted, “This is our place, here we are in command.” Stepputat concluded that, “This self-confident statement of autonomy could be read as a challenge to state authority” (1998:76).

Some communities disbanded their patrols before the end of the war: others kept them going until the very end. Todos Santos was among these. There seems to be wide variance in

how different communities responded to the patrols: some were enthusiastic and worked closely with the military. Other leaders took advantage of the situation for personal gain and to avenge personal grudges (Paul and Demerest 1988) and some just went through the motions of participating and avoided informing on each other (Watanabe 1990). Jennifer Burrell, who started conducting fieldwork in Todos Santos when the patrols were still active, suggests that the patrols of Todos Santos fell into the latter category. Nonetheless, when she started conducting research in the mid-nineties, no one would talk to her until she assured them that she had been given permission to do so by the local PAC commander.

Once the Guatemalan military had put this rural police force into place throughout the countryside, it could not simply be dismantled by decree. Although the PACs were officially ended in 1996 as part of the peace accords, in many villages this rural police force did not lie dormant for long. As Burrell points out, these structures provided a “pre-existing resource” for dealing with new social problems that arose in the postwar period. Many of their techniques bear the markings of their wartime incarnation. Along these lines, Rachel Sieder observes that “[p]ractices such as constant surveillance within communities, rapid and collective response to detain interlopers, and the occasional summary and spectacular use of physical violence are just some of the legacies of this paramilitarization” (2011A:176). But as I argue in and across the chapters that follow, the Guatemalan military project is not the only legacy that resonates in the practices of Guatemala’s reconstituted civil patrols.

The revival of these patrols took place in response to the effects of another wartime development: out-migration. The civil war displaced 200,000 people, many of whom ended up in refugee camps in Mexico. Others continued on the United States, forming receiving communities for subsequent generations of economic refugees. Todosanteros have created large satellite

communities in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Oakland, California. As subaltern migrants these sojourners face risks that include dehydration and narco-gang predation during the desert crossing, unsafe working conditions in the United States, and random killings on the streets of the ghettos where they can afford to live. Others have experienced that suspension of political life represented by stricter immigration enforcement, with extended incarceration followed by deportation. Yet a significant number of Todosanteros have been adept at using the U.S. political asylum system to obtain citizenship. The pro bono legal service in Berkeley, California, which has done the bulk of these cases, estimates that at least 1000 Todosanteros have won their papers through them. These grantees have the right to petition for legal status for their close relatives.

This sizable population living abroad, including a significant number with papers that allow them to travel back and forth easily, has transformed the social landscape of this small town. By the mid-1990s a youth culture emerged. Todos Santos is one of a handful of predominantly indigenous villages in Guatemala where men as well as women wear *traje*, or traditional clothing. Men's *traje* involves red-striped pants and white-striped shirts with colorful hand-woven collars. The youth started having their clothes tailored in hip-hop inspired styles, such as baggy pants with elaborately embroidered, oversize pockets. Freed from agricultural labor by remittance money, these young men began hanging out on the street together and drinking.

To their elders, the presence of roving gangs of shiftless youth was intolerable. Adults latched on to a regional anti-gang discourse to discredit them (Pine 2008, Zilberg 2011), labeling this unprecedented instantiation of youth culture *maras* or *pandillas* (gangs). However, these young men differ from other gangs in the region in that they predominantly hail from more affluent families. Most have a high school education, a qualification that in Guatemala allows

you to be a teacher or an accountant. Furthermore, they do not have formal connections to the transnational gangs that operate in the region, nor are they involved in the drug trade or other organized criminal activities. What is clear however is that there are at least two groups in Todos Santos, and membership in these groups depends on the boundaries of *cantónes*, or wards, of the town. Mostly these young men just drink and socialize, but sometimes they fight each other, and there have been casualties.

Adults responded to the emergence of these youth groups by reviving the wartime patrol system. Unlike the civil patrols of old, the new one is under local leadership. Each cantón organized its own patrol, as did the rural *aldeas* (hamlets). The number of days these groups patrolled varied: in the center, for example, the patrol was limited to weekends and Wednesday, the market day, or the days of the week when drinking and sociality peaked. The size of the patrols varied as well, from six to twelve men. People who did not show up for their patrol night had to pay a fine. Fees ranged from 25-50 quetzales (\$2.75-\$5.50), depending on the neighborhood. Women were not expected to patrol, but if they had no men in their household, they too were expected to pay this fee. Many patrollers reported that the groups would use this money to buy dinner or a snack for themselves during their patrol.

Much like reports on the widely variable enthusiasm for patrolling during the war, commitment to patrolling seemed to vary just as much in Todos Santos, depending on the neighborhood, the current leadership of the committee, and the perceived level of threat. Some cantones were said to be run like fiefdoms by ambitious leaders who charged steep fines for minor infractions and enriched themselves considerably during their command. Other patrols avoided taking punitive actions whenever possible and performed public services for their communities, like picking up trash and installing lights on public paths. Each neighborhood

committee had an all-male governing board that included a president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary and several spokesmen. The secretary needed to be a literate man who could keep track of the patrolling schedule and inform his neighbors when it was their turn to patrol.

Literacy in its leadership became more valued as the patrols continued, a point I consider in more detail in Chapter Two.

The leaders of these neighborhood patrols elected the leaders of the general security committee. This group of men made general policy decisions for the county. They also met every Saturday, when the town population swells on the main market day, and heard petitions. These disputes included arranging restitution for injuries, mediating debt-repayment plans, and settling land disputes. One governing board was in charge from 2004-2008. They were known for their hardline position on the youth they considered gangs. A new board took over in 2008: this was the group that decided that most of the village's problems were exacerbated by alcohol consumption, and they set about banning its sale and public consumption. These were the men Candelaria confronted the day she was sent to jail. In 2010 a third governing board took over. These men were committed to propping up a by then sagging alcohol ban.

Local security committees represent one element in a Guatemala's fragmented, uneven judicial system (Argueta 2012, Sieder 2011A). Since the municipal reorganization of 1965, the mayor has been allowed to act as a judge in small communities like Todos Santos (Handy 2004:556). Relations between the mayor and security committee vary: some mayors work closely with them, while others have engaged in power struggles with them. In 1993, an office of the justice of the peace opened in Todos Santos. The justice of the peace is authorized to deal with minor crimes and misdemeanors. This office is staffed by monolingual Spanish speakers who are mostly from other communities. Because of the expense entailed in an official legal

proceeding and the language barrier, most people prefer to take their problems to the mayor or to the security committee. As previously mentioned, there is also a national civil police presence in Todos Santos. They are housed in a small office in the town square. In the event of an actual crisis, such as a lynching, the police generally hide in their office and avoid confrontation (Sharp 2012).

The rebirth of local security committees must also be seen in the context of widespread insecurity in Guatemala. Crime rates, at least crime as conventionally defined, remain low in rural areas. The capital city, however, is another matter. Raymond Williams (1973) observed that the concepts of “the country” and “the city” in England over the centuries has provided central tropes for conceptualizing the social and economic changes associated with capitalist development. Notions of the “country” as natural, pure and authentic contrast with that of “the city” as a site of immorality, corruption and anomie. This dialectic is complicated in Guatemala by the association of the countryside with indigenous people: claims for their authenticity (especially as they are packaged for the international tourist market) are intertwined with a long-term policy of neglect and underdevelopment. During the peasant wars of the twentieth century, violence was for the most part concentrated in the countryside. But wartime violence decisively shifted populations, swelling Central American cities with rural people escaping violence and the devastation of their livelihoods. This demographic shift accompanied a shift in the geography of violence: in the postwar period, the cities of Central America have become infamous for their spiraling crime rates (Rodgers 2009). Over the past decade, San Salvador, Tegucigalpa and Guatemala City compete for first place as the murder capital of the region.

Guatemala’s government bureaucracy is overwhelmingly concentrated in the capital. Capitalinos, as these city dwellers are called, refer to the rest of the country as “the interior.”

When Todosanteros use the word “Guatemala,” on the other hand, they are almost always referring to the capital. In recent years, this term has acquired increasingly negative connotations. Bureaucratic procedures continually require Todosanteros to travel there, and these trips generate crime talk that circulates in the village. Everyone knows someone who has had a bad experience. News of crime and chaos in the capital spread via national newspapers and national news programming seen on the television sets that have become increasingly common. The nation’s most popular paper, *El Diario*, dedicates itself almost exclusively to sensationalistic crime coverage, featuring colorful graphics of crime scenes intended for a low-literacy audience. These representations contribute to Todosanteros sense of besiegement, and their conviction that they need to police their boundaries to keep criminality out of their own community.

Many scholars have observed that crime and criminality work as a “metaphor” for larger economic and social transformations (Godoy 2006, Schneider and Schneider 2008, Simon 2007). In other words, definitions of the criminal often fall within the realm of symbolic violence, in which the poor and disadvantaged place the blame on individuals rather than larger structural processes. One of these transformations is a change in labor markets that has made young men increasingly unemployable. Part of this problem of excess labor was solved by sending young men to work in the United States. In a nation where 60% of inhabitants rely on agriculture to survive, a mere 2% of the population owns 70% of all productive farmland (Viscidi 2004). Meanwhile population growth has created even more land scarcity in impoverished agrarian communities. Just as internal migration to coastal plantations was an economic necessity for previous generations of indigenous Guatemalans, out-migration to the United States has become a way of life for the postwar generation. Nationally remittances are the third largest source of Guatemala’ GDP, after export agriculture and tourism (Green 2009:336). For the poorest of the

poor, remittances make up to 50-60% of family income, and all of this money is spent on basic necessities (Cheikhrouhou et al 2006: 36). After food, the next most popular remittance expenditure is education (Cheikhrouhou et al 2006:5). In Todos Santos, there are now more certified bilingual teachers than there are positions for them. Many of these graduates end up joining the migrant stream to the United States.

Nationwide 10% of Guatemalans work abroad, but in Todos Santos this percentage is closer to a third of the population. The build landscape, where multi-story cement block houses have pushed out one-room thatched adobes, confirms this story. Between 2003 and 2006, remittances to Guatemala grew by 20% every year. But by 2008, the annual growth rate dropped to 6% (Lopez et al 2009). Many Todosanteros held jobs in industries severely affected by the 2008 recession. In Michigan many worked for subsidiaries of the car industry, while their cohort in California found jobs in housing construction. Lay-offs coincided with stricter immigration enforcement. In 2008, 22,670 Guatemalans were deported in a trend that has yet to slow (USDHS 2009:92). The combination of heightened surveillance and reduced hours and wages encouraged other untold thousands to return to Guatemala on their own.

The contracting U.S. economy, increases in deportation, and the growing numbers of un- or underemployed men in the village contributed to two waves of criminalization in Todos Santos. The first was the security committee's campaign against the young men they considered gangsters in 2004. This was followed by the criminalization of alcohol four years later. At the very moment that migrant remittances started drying up, people in Todos Santos became frustrated with the wasteful expenditure of money on alcohol, first in 2008, and again in 2010 as the crisis wore on and remittances continued to dwindle. Chapter One looks at the moment when these tensions erupted again in 2010; the last chapter returns to this incident and recounts the

long legal aftermath of this event. I outline these chapters below after a brief discussion of the methods of this study.

## **VI. Issues of Methodology and Representation**

I have visited Todos Santos every year since 2004 and conducted fieldwork during the summers of 2007, 2008 and 2009 and lived in the village continuously for a year during 2010-2011. In the summers of 2008 and 2009 I also spent time in Oakland, where I volunteered with the legal aid agency that serves the large Todosantero community in the Bay Area. Studying something that is officially illegal has its challenges. I arrived for my year of fieldwork right at the beginning of a major legal challenge to vigilante power, which no doubt increased people's concerns about liability. Many of the operations of the security committees and its patrols were not accessible to me. For example, I was only able to attend two security meetings. One of them was put on as a performance for the visitors from the legal aid agency to demonstrate to them that security was not so repressive after all. At the other I was confronted about my presence and told my notes would be confiscated (in the end, they were not). I was not able to patrol with any of the neighborhood patrols. It would have been odd to patrol as a woman, but foreign men who asked about patrolling with them were rebuffed as well. Thus this is an ethnography of the possible. In many ways, just as Timothy Mitchell drew a distinction between the state as an entity and the state effect as its abstraction, this is as much a study of the vigilante effect as it is of vigilantism.

Apart from its putative topic, this is also a book about fieldwork. As such I am very much in the text that follows. Everything that was said and shown to me reflected people's perceptions of me, as an outsider, as a *gringa*, as an *estadounidense*, as a woman. As such, some people really wanted to talk to me, while other people really did not. My connections to the legal aid

agency were known, and thus some of what people told me was positioned as an attempt to make an asylum case, for themselves or for others. Others talked to me in an effort to defend the project of vigilantism and combat its poor international reputation (one largely created by political asylum cases). Still others described the truth as a malleable, pliable thing to be used to your own advantage (and these people told me great stories, who knows if they were true). I was only seldom able to record interviews, and those that I did tended to be stiff and formal, filled with monosyllabic answers and the continual prompting “anything else?” So my methods became much more informal. I looked for collaboration wherever possible. I volunteered with the community radio station and later with the newly opened migrant services office. I tutored English to migrants, paid friends for Mam lessons, studied weaving, and lived in a range of households. For a while I worked as the coordinator of one of the language schools then in their final throes of existence as tourism to Guatemala plummeted. I translated documents for people, from English legalese to Spanish and from Spanish legalese to conversational Spanish. I helped people with visa applications, took trips with them to the capital to visit the U.S. embassy, and accompanied people to court hearings.

In the ethnography that follows I have tried to make clear where information came from and what the context was that produced it. Whenever possible I have tried to avoid disembodied quotes and instead tried to represent people in their living flesh specificity. Including details about people from such a small town risks making them immediately recognizable to those in the know, but I have taken this risk in an effort to create an ethnography that remains transparent about the conditions of its production. Keeping myself in the text was an important point, especially in moments where I found myself interpolated into the larger habitus of fear that is so

palpable in postwar Guatemala. I do so in an attempt to convey something of the conditions that make vigilantism possible.

## **VII. Organization of the Dissertation**

Anticipating the postmodern decentering of ethnographic writing by half a century, Ruth Bunzel wrote in the introduction to her monograph *Chichicastenango*, “There are many paths to partial truths, and however wise we are, we never learn the whole truth about another culture, or, for that matter, about our own” (1959:xiv). I often had the feeling that my fieldnotes were a compendium of partial truths that contained more questions than answers. The moments that began this introduction contain a few of these questions: Was Candelaria selling that day or wasn’t she? Was her husband lying in an unmarked grave in the mountains or starting his third family in California? Did her sister die of drink, heartbreak, hepatitis, or all of the above? Was the attack on the youth gangs a good thing? Was the prohibition a necessary public health measure or a violation of civil liberties? The ambiguity of the answers to these questions points to one of the themes of this work: a commitment to representing the messiness that surrounds meaning-making in postwar Guatemala. Each chapter takes up a different topic to examine a different aspect of this ambiguity.

### **Chapter One: Death**

In contemporary Guatemala death represents a key site for successful collective action. While there is trust within the limited time frame of a death event, this trust rarely extends into other forms of community organizing. When people blame fate or destiny, reactions to a death are non-violent and the collective practices around death offer logistical, financial and emotional support for the bereaved. I describe one such death event in this chapter. However, this support

can turn into violent collective action when a human agent is held responsible. Lynching represents an extreme but not uncommon response to death. While conventional wisdom holds that lynching in Guatemala is a symptom of a frayed social fabric and an absence of social solidarity, I contend that lynching constitutes an extension of the collective mobilization that exists around death.

## **Chapter Two: Vigilantes**

How do vigilante leaders justify their actions? What techniques do they use to impose their power? This chapter uses an encounter between visiting human rights advocates and the leader of the security committee to present a narrative of the origins of the security committee, both the official version and a version that includes some of the violence its leaders would elide. For the leader profiled in this chapter, an older view of communal obligations motivates his service to the village. He argues that human rights are an outside imposition that inspires bad behavior among the town's rebellious youth. I place this local instantiation of vigilantism in the context of research on other movements in order to discuss how this particular movement uses an imitation of the state bureaucracy, in this case the production of written documents, to enact its power.

## **Chapter Three: Gangs**

Elders insist that the town has a serious gang problem, while younger people say that their elders wouldn't recognize a gangster if they saw one. This chapter includes interviews and participant observation with many of the young men who are considered gang leaders in an attempt to understand why youth would be attracted to this stigmatized identity. In a place where young men are shut out of other avenues for status, the gangster identity and its elaboration of machismo offers an alternate route to community and prestige. I place this attraction in the

context of literature on gangs that relates this phenomenon to larger conditions of structural violence where young men's labor is no longer valued.

#### **Chapter Four: Lizard**

This chapter uses a series of scandals surrounding one young man in Todos Santos to explore how his exclusion from the community helps to produce the community itself. I look at how crime is socially constructed, and how the figure of the criminal, however that is defined, becomes an included outside that unifies an otherwise divided community. Lizard was an aggressive kid with a big mouth who was always causing trouble. When he beat a rival gang member, community elders made him pay restitution to the injured party. But when Lizard himself was badly beaten, local authorities declared him undeserving of justice. From this unprotected position the scandals surrounding Lizard mounted; he became a symbol of all the social forces beyond the control of the community, especially changes in labor markets and family structure.

#### **Chapter Five: Alcohol**

This chapter uses the trial that took place over the legality of liquor to look at the contradictory relationship between neoliberalism and multiculturalism in Guatemala. While vigilante leaders considered rights discourses an outside imposition, in this case their extrajudicial actions turned out to be legally protected under a transnational regime of rights. At the very moment that the leaders of Seguridad were officially recognized as the legitimate leaders of the pueblo, with the right to speak for the pueblo and ban alcohol, the fragile consensus that supported the security patrol and its prerogatives crumbled.

In sum, this monograph is about what happens when revolutionary dreams and the vision of a better future crash and burn. It is about the people who try to hold onto that vision, but in a way that has been so shaped by their own subjection to violence that it comes out sideways. It describes people trying to remake their world in the long aftermath of war, but their efforts at reconstruction bring them into continual conflict with each other. It tracks the traces of different ways of being in the world as competing cultural repertoires are picked up and recombined in not always expected ways in the crucible of postwar Guatemala. Guatemala is an extreme case, but many of the trends on display here, including the privatization of security, the economic obsolescence of young men, the forging of communal identities through violent exclusions, and moral panics about mind-altering substances, reverberate elsewhere.

## Chapter One: DEATH

*For Garrett Scott, Q.E.P.D.*

In the fall of 2010 I was just beginning my year of fieldwork, and I hadn't seen my friend Mateo for at least a year. We'd first met in 2004, when he had recently returned from two years working in California. He was a sharp-witted, restless and ambitious man with a ready laugh who seemed frustrated by his limited possibilities back in the small town of his birth. I always thought that of all the Todosanteros I knew, he would be the most likely to end up on my couch in Los Angeles. But the 2008 recession hit migrant workers hard. The housing market collapse in California wiped out the jobs Todosanteros held in landscaping, construction and housecleaning. So in September of 2010 I encountered a Mateo no longer daydreaming about crossing the desert again and making a documentary about his experience in the process. Instead he had settled into improving on what his little piece of the boom years had bought him.

Two years of work in a plant nursery purchased the land and materials for his house, and by 2010 he had cleared the uneven boulder-filled lot that straddled a stream behind his home. Mateo began the conversation by telling me, "There's something I always say, and that's as long as Todosanteros have cellphones and minutes they're happy, they don't need food." Then he amended this rather extreme statement, adding, "If they have beans, that's enough" (fieldnotes, September 12, 2010). In contrast Mateo and his family were going to have fresh carrots, onions, lettuce and cilantro. His wife and daughter continued weeding these plots, while Mateo, who had been mixing lime into the soil of a new bed when I arrived, stopped working and leaned on his pick axe while he chatted with me. I perched on the side of a boulder to listen to his meandering tale.

“Oakland is a really violent place,” is how the story began. When he was living there in 2002 three Todosanteros were killed together one night. They’d gone to the liquor store that was open until 2 or 3 in the morning next to the Walgreens on Foothill near 31<sup>st</sup> Street. No one ever figured out what happened to them. Their car was found in the Walgreen’s parking lot, while their bullet-riddled bodies appeared on 19<sup>th</sup> street. One of them died right away, the other two ended up in the hospital on life support but they never recovered.

One irony of undocumented migration is that although it costs \$5000 to smuggle yourself into the United States alive, the return trip for a lifeless body costs considerably more. The companies that send bodies back to Guatemala were really taking advantage of the situation, Mateo continued, charging \$25,000 for the transport of each body. There was a committee of Todosanteros in Oakland and Mateo got involved with them during this crisis. They went around and asked for a “colaboración,” or contribution, from the community to send the bodies back. They went knocking door to door, and some people just gave \$5 or \$20 but others gave \$100 and within a few days they had raised \$35,000. They also contacted other Todosantero communities in the United States, like the one in Michigan, and asked them to chip in. The members of the committee who had their papers went to the offices of the airlines that shipped the cadavers back to ask them to lower their prices, which they did, charging only \$5000 each.

When times were good people were sending home between \$1000 and \$2000 a month, Mateo said. The work that he did with the committee gave him the idea that if everyone gave a little bit, they could do a lot. They could create a fund in Todos Santos and loan out money to people here so they could start businesses. He’d talked to people in Oakland about it, maybe 10 or so people had been interested, but it wasn’t enough, and finally even these people backed out because they didn’t trust how the money would be managed. “But if we had done that then, when

there was a lot of work, there could have been help for their families now that remittances have dried up,” Mateo concluded.

Mateo’s revisiting of this triumphal moment of Todosantero migrant activism, and the subsequent failure of his effort to extend the model to other spheres, recalled a comment made by an immigration lawyer in Oakland. Carol has worked extensively with political asylum seekers in the Todosantero community since the 1990s. “Why,” she wanted to know, “do Todosanteros spend so much time and money on getting bodies back to Guatemala, instead of on project that could improve people’s lives?” I remember my immediate response to her comment: “But death is really important—the Day of the Dead is their biggest holiday. How are you supposed to continue a social relationship with the dead if you don’t have a body?” (Brandes 2001). But this is an incomplete answer to a larger question. Namely, why is it that death produces community, maintains social ties, and provides a repository of tradition more effectively and less contentiously than other areas of social life?

One of my interlocutors once told me “we’ve lost everything except for our death rituals” (fieldnotes, August 18, 2007). Another man commented in the course of a conversation about the pernicious effects of westernization: “One of the traditions that’s still left, one of the things that people do that is still very Maya, is around death, the wake, the collaboration, the getting money together” (fieldnotes, August 30, 2011). While these assertions may be hyperbolic, they have a point. For example, while everyone could describe to me how marriage should work, with a formal “pedida” and the delivery of bride wealth, when queried further almost no one had actually experienced a marriage arranged in this way. But whenever a death occurred, which was often, the whole community became caught up in its observance. Blow-by-blow accounts of these proceedings seemed like the *raison d’être* of the community radio station. Whenever they

played the death song, a jaunty acoustic piece on violin and guitar, everyone, even evangelical converts who are not allowed to listen to secular media, paused to turn up the radio and find out “whose day has come.” Hundreds turned out to bring money, food and flowers to the wake and stayed to follow the meandering procession to the cemetery. These final perambulations took the deceased to visit all the places that had been important to them in their lifetime for one last time.

In this chapter I explore how collective action is mobilized around death. First I discuss a group of deaths in which no one is blamed in order to show the kinds of communal actions that take place around an unexceptional death event. In the second part of the chapter I look at what happens when human agents are held responsible for a death. Death, especially premature, violent and unnatural death, brings ideas about responsibility and blame to the fore. The security committee is often called upon to make sure those deemed culpable are held responsible for their actions, and they played a major role in the response to this death event. While there is much about their organization that partakes of the paramilitary structure imposed upon them during the war, in this instance La Seguridad’s actions also draw upon preexisting traditions of mutual aid and reciprocity.

Before I turn to a specific case, I explain a key element in the repertoire of do-it-yourself justice in Guatemala: lynching. Lynching is the extralegal apprehension, beating and quite often murder of a suspect in a public act of spectacular violence. There has not been a fatal lynching in Todos Santos since 2000, several years before the security committee formally organized. Nonetheless, the threat of lynching informs its power. Throughout Guatemala, lynching is a common practice, to the extent that it constitutes a national embarrassment and an object of government intervention. Many argue that lynching in Guatemala must be seen as a secula of war. These analyses assert that the genocide destroyed the social fabric of Mayan communities,

leaving such extensive anomie in its wake that people can only be brought together by acts of collective violence. But as I show in the first part of this chapter, there is considerable social solidarity around death in Mayan communities: people turn out en masse to support the bereaved. However, these same traditions of mutual aid can transform into lynching violence when someone is held responsible for a death. The logic of blame in these cases reveals fissures in the community that have been exacerbated by postwar developments. Despite these tensions, the argument that indigenous communities are “broken” overlooks much that has survived, much that is vibrant, and ignores an important point about how easily social practices that are benign in one context can turn nasty and violent in another. Before turning to these points, the following section looks at what happens when death is greeted with acceptance and resignation rather than violence.

### **When No One Is to Blame**

A woman ran through the alley below my balcony wailing. A moment later my neighbor Jesus shouted up to me: “Did you hear Doña Caro crying?” Then he told me what had happened: A crowded bus slid off the rutted dirt road that connects Todos Santos to the next municipio to the north. Seven Todosanteros died: five were members of the same family, relatives of my weeping neighbor. It had seemed to me that Jesus had been avoiding me after an intense interview we had about the attempted lynching he survived. But this was not the first conversation I was have the next few days with people normally not inclined to talk to me. The almost giddy mood in the village reminded me of being in New York City on September 11, 2001: the crisis broke us out of our usual habits and heightened sociality. Everyone talked to everyone. Jesus was soon distracted from our conversation by the opportunity to break the news to a deaf woman who

happened to pass by. I watched as his right hand traveled along the road of his left arm before tumbling down with a circular motion.

When I left the house and walked down the street I could hear the death song playing on the radio of every house I passed. This acoustic piece is in the style that shepherders used to play while whiling away the hours on mountaintop pastures. These same musicians used to play at wakes: now only recordings remain of this tradition. By the time I'd walked two blocks the death count had risen. Some had heard that the brakes failed, while others said that the driver had been talking on his cellphone when he veered off the cliff. He died on impact: his death meant that there was no one to blame. In this kind of death, when there is no one to blame, people invoke fate. Maybe it was just their destiny, one young man told me after saying he heard eight had died. Half a block later an older woman confirmed that ten had died. Then she used a phrase I was to hear repeatedly the next few days: "It was their day" ("Ya llegó su día"). This idea that the day that you die is predestined references an older tradition of calendrical divination. Most people talking about the Mayan calendar were foreign experts obsessed with the meaning of 2012 (e.g., Pinchbeck 2007). In daily life only the common sense things one says in the face of death evoke this history.

Meanwhile people rushed to the accident site: ordinary citizens were the first responders. They climbed down the mountainside to pull the dead and the injured from the wreckage. Transport to either the hospital or to the households of the deceased happened in private cars. In the press coverage of the accident, the reporter claimed that the people present at the accident site prevented the public ministry, the government division charged with investigating death, from doing their job. I asked a friend who had gone to see the accident site if that was the case. She snorted, "What are they talking about, the public ministry never showed up." Accidental

deaths made my own expectations about what a state should do visible to me. I took for granted the presence of state agents who would take bodies away, conduct an investigation, clean up the site, and fill out paperwork. In Guatemala, none of these things could be taken for granted. Months after the accident the bus remained right where it landed. One victim's family had an excellent view of its crushed hull from their yard. When I visited them they pointed to the metallic slash on the hillside above that had taken their daughter from them. Then they stood aside, faces blank and somber, while I photographed the wreckage.

The evening of the accident, I was at Candelaria's house listening to the radio with her family. In this household, usually only Candelaria leaned in to listen to the radio while her grandchildren were transfixed by Mexican *telenovelas* on TV. But that night the radio held center stage. The children excitedly ran to the small window in their adobe wall to watch the caravan of cars returning from the accident site as it wound down the mountain in the dark. They counted the headlights: seventeen! The radio announcer explained that it was not known yet if the bodies would be taken to the church in the center of town or to their homes first. An expectant crowd had been gathered and waiting for the arrival of the bodies outside the church since midday. The announcer explained that the family had not decided what they wanted to do yet, and asked people to please be patient.

This event was a reminder of the intimate connection of this community to its Oakland satellite. The accident had killed a set of grandparents and multiple grandchildren. The middle generation, several of whom were also on the bus, survived to face the loss of their parents and children on the same day. While there were wakes in Todos Santos, there were simultaneous wakes in Oakland for family members who could not travel. Some migrant members of the middle generation had their papers. The radio commentary kept us up to date on the progress of

these bereaved sons, telling us when their flight would arrive, who was picking them up at the airport, and where they were on the road between the capital and Todos Santos.

Community radio is an incredibly powerful force, especially around death. There was often a lot of criticism the radio station; while some decried the quality of their programming, others questioned the transparency of their fund drives. “Where does all that money that they collect go?” my friend Juan Pablo grumbled on several occasions. But the surveys taken by radio staff revealed one place where their ratings were consistently high: keeping us informed of who has died is one thing radio does best (fieldnotes, January 18, 2011). The radio station started fundraising for the bereaved and the injured immediately, announcing the drive on the radio and then sending a car all over the county to remote hamlets to collect donations. Within a few days they had raised tens of thousands of dollars that they immediately redistributed to the victims and their families. Even the usually skeptical Juan Pablo, who lost a niece in the accident, admitted that they had done this task well.

This colaboración was a scaled-up version of customary funeral behavior. I observed these practices of mutual aid when I attended the wake of the grandparents and one of their teenaged grandsons. In the process I realized that financial colaboración was just the beginning of the caring, supportive practices that come to the fore around a death. Candelaria invited me to go with her. We stopped off to visit her daughter at work on the way there. Romelia had picked sprigs of a plant called ruda for us, which she tucked into our clothing. Ruda is a cure for *susto*, a folk ailment widespread throughout Latin America thought to be brought on by a shock. I realized later that I needed it, because when we arrived at the house the sight of the dead bodies gave me a jolt.

Unlike sanitized death in the United States, where corpses are cleaned up by funeral homes, plastered in pancake make-up and arrayed in overpriced caskets with satin linings, the bodies on view were just as they were when they were pulled from the bus wreckage. Three crumpled forms laid out alongside each other on planks of plywood in the center of an overheated house. The angles of their limbs looked unnatural. The grandparents' faces were so puffy and swollen that they looked identical in death, while the grandson's destroyed face was concealed by a scarf. A woman sat by their heads and fanned flies away. A basket was suspended from the ceiling over the bodies, and as people pressed their way through the crowd to view the bodies they reached up to drop crumpled bills in the basket. Bags of beans and sugar and fistfuls of flowers were handed off to family members in the kitchen at the back of the house.

Candelaria, who had been calm, even joking, on the walk over, pushed her way through the crowd to the feet of the deceased and broke into a dramatic sobs at the sight of them. The house was filled with these cries, which begin with an inhalation, and then whatever words the person sees fit sung in a sob on the exhale that ends with the repetition of the last syllable, often in a vibrato. The first time I heard this stylized lament up close was at a Christmas party. An older woman got very drunk and started singing the names of her children who live in Oakland in this manner, adding that she was sad because she knew she would never see them again before she died. The following day at the interment I saw a woman answer her cellphone with the same stylized lament: "We're in the cemetary ree ree ree ree [ragged intake of breath]. We're about to say the last good by ay ay ay ay."

That day at the wake Candelaria sang-sobbed about how much she liked chatting with the couple whenever they passed her house on the way to their property, and asked when they would

see each other again. As she pulled up her shawl to wipe her tears it went askew on her shoulders. Her granddaughter stepped forward and straightened it out. Then her hands lingered as she patted her sobbing grandmother. This was just one of many of the small gestures of support I saw proffered to the distraught during these days of intensive mourning.

At the wake, many of the women cried themselves hoarse. Many of the male mourners, on the other hand, dealt with their grief by drinking until they were nearly unconscious. Inebriation is so much a part of the Catholic wake that for people who were trying to cut back on their drinking, wakes were places they avoided. As my landlord once observed wryly when yet another body came back from the United States, “When there’s a death, there’s a party” (fieldnotes, December 2, 2010). He however was going to pass on attending the wake because he had a lot of work to do and the inevitable fiesta would get in the way. For others attendance at a wake began a long binge where they disappeared for days on end, their whereabouts unbeknownst to their families.

But binge drinking is specific to Catholic wakes, and somewhere between a half to a third of all Guatemalans have converted to some form of Pentecostal Christianity over the course of the last few tumultuous decades (O’Neill 2010). This proportion holds in Todos Santos as well. Abstaining from drinking is a key tenant of evangelicism. The evangelical version of the wake is thus a sober affair. One summer night in 2007 I lay awake all night listening to the evangelical equivalent taking place next door through ear plugs. A non-stop stream of men offered up eulogies, prayers and off-key hymns in an open mike attached to a powerful amplifier. The earsplitting ruckus made me feel as if I were trying to sleep in a circle of hell, perhaps one that as a U.S. citizen I deserved. The deceased had perished in the desert on the Arizona border, one

among some 50,000 deaths since the U.S. government fortified its southern border, pushing migrants into ever more remote, unforgiving desert terrain (Green 2009).

The wakes of the family devastated by the bus accident were decidedly Catholic and blessedly mife free. At the first wake I met one of the sons who had returned from Oakland and was coping with his grief by drinking. “You wanna hear my story?” he asked me in English. “My mother die, my father die.” When I saw him again at the interment he was much the worse for wear, his white t-shirt covered in mud, his brow crusted with dried blood. He approached me as if for the first time and asked, “You wanna hear my story?” As the caskets containing his nephews were slid into their slots in the cemetery wall, he became even more distraught and tried to rip his shirt off. An older man standing nearby bear hugged him to stop him and murmured “min, min, min” (“no, no, no”) softly in his ear.

Just as this distressed migrant wanted to tell me the story of his abrupt orphaning, the wake and funeral provide a social space for the bereaved to narrate their loss to a large, rotating, and sympathetic audience. At the same wake, one of the surviving daughters sat in a small bedroom off the main room. People pressed into this tiny space to listen to her, then moved on, making room for others. Candelaria pushed her way in, and I asked her later what the daughter was saying: “That they found her parents pinned together in their seats, that just as they lived together, they died together.” In another death event, I did not attend the wake but several people who did at different times repeated the same detail from the monologue given by the bereaved father. He described a dream that his teenaged daughter whispered in his ear one morning shortly before her death. She dreamt that her grandparents, who had died well before her birth, came to tell her that she wasn’t safe here but that they had a safe place for her. Around the same time a bird flew into their kitchen. After the daughter’s sudden death, these signs took

on a new significance. These details, retold and reinterpreted, helped not only the father but the larger community come to terms with yet another unexpected, premature death by making it seem like something supernaturally fated.

On the day of the burial of two more grandsons from the same family, I was in the cemetery and witnessed another instance of the public address performed by the bereaved. My friends took me to see the grave where the grandparents had been interred the day before. We walked along the back of the cramped cemetery and then climbed down over graves to a spot crowded with wreaths and flowers adorning freshly cemented slots. The principal mourners continued sing sobbing, their voices raw and cracking after so many days with so many funerals. One of the daughters addressed the gathering crowd. She described how she raised the grandson they had buried that day, how he came to her when her was just over a year old when his mother abandoned him.

While this public address was happening an older man approached me and said, “People don’t do this in your country, do they?” I said, “No, it’s not like this, there the burials happen fast and then people are left to cry alone in their houses. I think this is better, this opportunity to express your feelings in public and get more support.” A weeping teenage girl who was listening in on the conversation nodded in agreement (fieldnotes, June 13, 2011). An outpouring of literature on death in the 1970s and 80s made a similar point about Western death ways (e.g., Bloch and Parry 1982, Palgi and Abramovitch 1984, Rosenblatt et al 1976). Philippe Ariès’ historical overview (1974) is perhaps best known for making the argument that part of the epochal shift of modernity involved a transformation of attitudes about death, as it went from something “tame,” a normal process that took place in the home, to something hidden away, institutionalized and repressed.

While historians and psychologists (e.g., Becker 1973) have not shied away from creating universalizing accounts of the history and psychology of death, anthropologists have critiqued their own discipline for its parochializing tendencies. In an essay originally published in 1972, Johannes Fabian (2004) claims that the anthropology of death focuses on the behavior of survivors, cataloguing their rituals and folklore of “how others die.” Such studies typically place these exotic practices at a safe remove from the anthropologist’s own society, rarely connecting what death means for “them” to “us.” Along these lines, Antonius Robben (2004) critiques the anthropological tendency to argue that “others” have a richer death culture than “we” do. He counters that the west has a large repository of art, film and music dedicated to death. Nonetheless, contemplating the West’s extensive public culture of death offers little comfort in the face of devastating loss.

Like many of the paradigms proffered by Eurocentric histories, Ariès’ claim for a clear-cut shift in attitudes about death is complicated by the hybrid history of Latin America (Lomnitz 2005). For example, one of Ariès’ claims is that with this transition, cemeteries went from being seen as a pleasant place to socialize to a creepy place to avoid. In contrast, throughout much of Latin America the Day of the Dead constitutes one of the most festive days of the year. On this day people honor their dead by cleaning and decorating their graves and then spending the first two days of November drinking and picnicking with their dead relatives. While this holiday is most widely celebrated in Mexico, in Todos Santos this day coincides with their patron saints day celebration. Any Todosantero living elsewhere comes home for the holiday if they can afford it. In the local variant of this celebration, teams of riders drink and dance at house parties for several days before they race horses on November 1. On the following day these same groups traverse the packed cemetery, setting up their hired marimbistas on top of the larger tombs where

they then continue to drink, dance, and whoop and holler in the style of Mexican *corridos* amidst the setting off of terrifying amateur fireworks.

For Todosanteros the happiest, most intensely social day of the year is also the saddest. The exuberant performances that take place in the cemetery are interspersed with the observance of more recent losses, as people kneel, pray, burn candles, make offerings and sing-sob on the graves of loved ones who died during the previous year. Joy and grief represent two sides of the same coin, and this ambivalent dialectic is built into the main event of the feria, the horserace. Racing horses when one is almost too inebriated to sit up straight is a dangerous endeavor: injuries are commonplace, and fatalities not unheard of. People have told me that traditionally people believed that deaths during the horserace were sad for the family but good for the community overall. The sacrifice was seen as appeasing the gods right before the harvest and thus benefiting the collective good.

In a particularly dramatic death event like the devastating bus accident in July of 2011, these deaths produced collective action in a number of ways. It heightened sociality, giving people who normally would not talk to each other something to talk about. It created an opportunity for an outpouring of mutual aid. People made up for the absence of infrastructure and the thinness of the state by retrieving the bodies from the wreckage and transporting them, either to their homes or the hospital, themselves. Then there were the collections taken up for the families of the victims, both at the wakes, and on a larger scale throughout the county by the radio station. Apart from this logistical and financial support, there was the emotional support that people provided, as people attended the wakes and burials en masse, and listened patiently to the bereaved as they narrated their losses to a sympathetic public and began the process of remaking their lives.

Much of this collective action is born of necessity created by systemic structural violence. The manifestations of this uneven distribution of hardship can be seen in the second hand school buses imported for public transportation, or in the rutted, unpaved roads they travel upon that wind around the sides of steep mountains without a guardrail in sight. This lack of infrastructure is the material manifestation of long-term neglect and exclusion of this predominantly indigenous region of Guatemala by the state. This neglect continues in the near absence of emergency response workers and health insurance. The lack of livelihoods that forces people to seek their fortunes elsewhere represents another form of structural violence, exposing people to risk in the desert crossing and again on the street of the ghettos where they can afford to live. These larger structural factors mean that people are all too often given the opportunity to practice collective action and mutual aid in the face of a death.

However an absence of state support does not mean that organized communal support is necessarily forthcoming, as, for example, the personal indebtedness brought on by the US healthcare crisis attests (Graeber 2011). The communal response to death draws upon an older cultural ethic that valorizes social reciprocity. This value is most clearly seen in the oft-evoked maxim that Mam-speakers use when deciding to help out in a crisis: “Today it’s you, but tomorrow it could be me.” In my introduction to grief and mourning in my own culture, I observed a much less empathetic response to death among my peers. When a dear friend died of a heart attack at 37, many responded to the news with questions: Was he a smoker? Did he exercise? In an admittedly anecdotal and unscientific study filtered through grief, I was left with the sense that people were looking for a way to blame the victim and thus protect themselves from the same fate. The impulse underlying this reaction seemed to be *He must have done*

*something to bring this upon himself, and by extension, there must be something I can do to protect myself from the same fate.*

In contrast, in Todos Santos the common sense comments around death underscored our common existential dilemma. The phrase “ya llegó su día,” implies that we all have a day: theirs may have come already, but inevitably ours will too. Other observations around death explicitly invoked a “we.” The diminutive Candelaria, upon hearing of yet another fatal car accident, peered up at me, cracked a crooked grin, and announced, “Estamos jodidos.” Despite the differences in privilege written on our bodies in stature and dentistry, when it comes to death, “we” are all equally “fucked.” In another incident, my friend Marcelina, after recounting the death of a woman who was struck down by a stroke while doing her washing, looked out at the majestic mountain range framed by her front porch and sighed, “What a beautiful world. And here we are in it just to die” (fieldnotes, December 22, 2010). There is a radical, ruthless equality to this truth: no matter what our position, we’re all just here to die. In Todos Santos, a tremendous amount of support, love and tenderness is mobilized around this social fact. I saw it in the large turn-outs for wakes and funerals, where people patiently attended to the speech acts of the bereaved. It came through in small gestures, like the tucking of a protective herb in a pocket, the straightening of a shawl, or a bear hug accompanied by soft whispers. This is what takes place when there is no one to blame for a death. However, when there is someone to blame, these same sentiments can transform into far less benign forms of collective action.

## When Someone Is to Blame

### Lynching

At the end of Guatemala's thirty-six year long civil war, the United Nations mission to Guatemala (MINUGUA) arrived to oversee the transition. MINUGUA was the first agency to collect statistics on a troubling new trend: lynching. Between 1996 and 2004, over 500 people met their end at the hands of an enraged mob. During the same period the homicide rate climbed precipitously. By late 2010 the number of violent deaths that had occurred since the end of the war surpassed the wartime death rate. Although lynching deaths represent less than 2% of the overall homicide rate, their spectacular nature has made these collective murders an object of official intervention in a way that more individualized homicides are not. Since 1999 the Guatemalan Ministry of Justice has run a lynching prevention program: no comparable homicide prevention program exists.

In English the term "lynching" implies a death. However, when MINUGUA began documenting this trend they collected statistics on both deadly and attempted lynchings (2000, 2002). According to their figures, about half of all lynching victims each year survive their ordeal. Guatemalan government officials are currently working to limit the definition of lynching to acts of mob violence that result in death. In this way, events without a fatality will be categorized as beatings rather than lynchings, and thus bring lynching numbers down. But colloquially many Guatemalans continue use the term "linchamiento" to describe an unlawful apprehension by a mob whether this encounter is fatal or not.

When I interviewed one of the bureaucrats in charge of the anti-lynching program in the summer of 2012, she remarked that sometimes people lynch each other "over a few stolen limes" (interview, August 20, 2012). Soon after I heard this same statement repeated by one of her

coworkers as he facilitated an anti-lynching workshop (fieldnotes, September 7, 2012). It is difficult to contradict this claim empirically: data on lynching appear as columns of numbers disaggregated from any narrative of events. In this same interview I learned about the challenges of collecting accurate data about lynching: the government bases its numbers entirely on written press accounts. Journalists in Guatemala are underpaid and thinly spread, and they are often uninformed or unwelcome by communities when a lynching is underway. I suspect that the number of lynchings that make it into the official tally each year represents a conservative estimate at best.

Despite the lack of accurate information on the incidence and motivations of lynching violence, the majority seem to occur in response to a death. The reactions of multiple communities to a kidnapping death in Huehuetenango underscore the fine line between collective action and mob violence. Sociologist Emilia Quan was employed by a center for investigations in Huehuetenango, and in December of 2010 she was on her way to Todos Santos to deliver a book donation to the local library. Two men overtook her car and abducted her along with her driver well before she reached the town. She was thrown from the car at the edge of the county line.

The official police force of Todos Santos contains a half dozen officers at any given time. They had nowhere near enough manpower to mount an effective search for Quan. One officer related how he called the leader of the security committee in the *aldea* (hamlet) near where Quan went missing when he heard the news: this leader used a phone tree to call the security leaders of each *cantón* (ward) in his aldea, who in turn called their sub-patrol leaders. Within an hour hundreds of people were combing the forest. The driver of Quan's car was found bound and alive: Quan had already perished. When Officer Frank described the organization of the search

party to me, clearly he was proud. There was much about police work in Guatemala that frustrated him, but this moment his efforts at building good relations with the community had paid off: even if they hadn't saved Quan, they managed to locate her body in a timely manner (interview, December 9, 2010).

In contrast, in other communities in Huehuetenango that same day, the collective action of the citizenry brought them into direct conflict with the police. Press accounts were contradictory: here I rely on the version Officer Frank heard from his fellow police officers. Quan's suspected kidnappers were apprehended by the police, and held in separate towns in northern Huehuetenango. One was in a jail in Barillas, where a mob broke into the jail, dragged the suspect out and lynched him. Police had the second suspect on the way to another holding cell when residents of Santa Eulalia overtook their convoy, apprehended the prisoner, and burned him alive. When discussing these events with Officer Frank in Todos Santos he sighed, "When that many people come at you, what are you going to do?" He threw up his hands in a gesture of surrender and concluded, "It's either hand them over or get killed with them" (interview, December 9, 2010) .

In Todos Santos, citizens filled in the gap left by the state when they took part in the search party for Quan. But this collective action can easily cross the line from helpful to aggressive when suspected criminals are in sight. People often talk about lynching as preventative: if they don't do something with the criminal this time, this person will return to commit crimes against the community again. There is a strong belief in recidivism and little faith in rehabilitation. Few believe that the official justice system is capable of prosecuting crime. Indeed, a look at statistics on homicide reveals that people are justified in this impression: 5% of

homicides were prosecuted in 2010. And this single digit represented an improvement on the previous year's prosecution rate.

In other words, lynching serves as a warning to outsiders that the community is organized and unforgiving: don't mess with us. In the case of the lynchings in response to Quan's murder, Todosanteros speculated that the rage evidenced by their fellow Huehuetecos came from a feeling of vulnerability. Quan was captured on the one road that connects the department capital to all of the villages on the western flank of the Cuchumatanes: people from Barillas, Santa Eulalia, Soloma and Todos Santos have to travel this narrow, sparsely populated road any time a bureaucratic, business, educational, legal or medical necessity takes them to the departmental or national capital. The lynchings were meant to send a message that car theft, extortion and kidnapping on this essential artery would not be tolerated.

Because lynching is such a disturbing phenomenon, and a clear cut human rights violation, it has received considerably scholarly attention. While Guatemala leads the hemisphere in lynching statistics, it is not the only Latin American country to suffer from this scourge. Brazil, Mexico, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia also report incidents of extrajudicial execution. Globally lynchings are thought to occur during crises of political legitimacy, such as the end of serfdom in Russia, the collapse of the New Order regime in Indonesia, post-apartheid South Africa, or the post-bellum U.S. South (Berg and Wendt 2011). Although for many the word "lynching" evokes images of white on black terror in the United States (Tolnay and Beck 1995), in most contexts poor people lynch other poor people within their own ethnic group. Explanations of the recent spate of lynchings in Latin America typically point to neoliberal economic reforms as the root cause (Binford and Churchill 2009, Fuentes Diaz 2006, Goldstein

2003, Vilas 2005). Work specifically on the Guatemalan case additionally interprets lynching as a sign of postwar trauma.

These analyses of the Guatemalan context draw upon Durkheimian social theory to argue that the war destroyed social solidarity among the Guatemalan Maya (Godoy 2006, MINUGUA 2000, 2002). In these accounts, lynching is a symptom of anomie: people's sense of community is so attenuated that they can only be brought together in acts of collective violence. It is true that during the war any form of mutual aid, collective action, or leadership was labeled communist and targeted by the counterinsurgency. In this way, the civil patrols remained one of the few sites where Guatemalan villagers could safely practice mutual aid and collectivism (Kobrak 1997, Nelson 2010:92). This form of social organization, now under local rather than military control, remains strong in the postwar period. Sometimes local security patrols play a role in lynching: at other times mob violence escapes their control.

Another point that supports the argument for the wartime origins of lynching can be found in its *modus operandi*. The Catholic Church's truth commission report determined that the second most common form of death during the war, after gunshot wounds, was immolation (REMHI 1998). The military regularly burned suspected insurgents alive in public spaces before large crowds (e.g., Menchú 1984). This history lives on in the form that lynching takes in contemporary Guatemala. Guatemalans are often surprised to learn that the word lynching does not necessarily mean to burn alive, and that in other places the word is more commonly associated with hanging deaths.

A delicate point in the study of lynching in Latin America is the role of indigenous people in these atrocities. Most countries where lynching is an issue also have a significant

indigenous population. Other countries with histories of a brutal civil war but without a significant indigenous population, such as neighboring El Salvador, do not have lynchings. Some analysts of the Guatemalan context argue that lynchings occur in parts of Guatemala with high indigenous populations (Mendoza 2007): others argue that these correlations are faulty (Bateson 2012) and that even to make this claim constitutes racism (Krupa 2009). There are a host of other factors also true of indigenous areas of Guatemala. They were hard hit by the war: people have seen other people die, lost family members, and been subjected to extremes of violence. They are historically and currently excluded from many basic state services, including access to adequate policing and a functional judiciary. They have among the highest indices of infant and maternal mortality, childhood malnutrition, and poverty in the region. Nonetheless, not all lynchings take place in indigenous areas: urban, predominantly non-indigenous Guatemala City vies for the top spot in lynching numbers year after year, suggesting that profound frustration and a lack of faith in the official justice system transcends ethnic lines in Guatemala.

I certainly do not want to be complicit in providing evidence to support a long history of racism in which lynching provides evidence to support stereotypes about the savagery of the indigenous other. However, given the previous material in this chapter, I suspect that there is something that grows out of a tradition of *colaboración* around death that can be mobilized in a lynching scenario. Claims that the social fabric of Mayan communities was destroyed seem too categorical. To extend this metaphor, the fabric has been strained, rented, most certainly, with many bonds of trust replaced by resentment and suspicion. But when NGO workers characterize Guatemalan Mayan communities as “broken” (Clauser n.d:10-11), this designation overlooks the places where mutual aid flourishes and collective action thrives. One of the primary sites for these practices is death, that great leveler that takes us all.

## From Collective Action to Collective Violence

Todosanteros would be very unhappy to see their town mentioned in the same breath as lynching. As a caveat I must point out that it is the very infrequency of lynching in Todos Santos that made its study possible. Ever since a lynching in 2000 brought them international notoriety, there has not been a fatal lynching there. In order to understand the context, I discuss this incident below before turning to a fuller consideration of a more recent situation in which collective action around death begat collective violence.

Although the 2000 lynching in Todos Santos was not in direct response to a death, it occurred in response to a perceived death threat. A rumor started in the department capital: Satanists were on their way to town and they were looking for children to kidnap so that they could sacrifice them in bloody rituals. People were so panicked in the city of Huehuetenango that they closed the schools and shut down businesses. The rumor traveled up the mountain to Todos Santos, and when a busload of elderly Japanese tourists arrived on market day, people were already on edge. Some say the tourists were wearing black, which seemed odd. Or donned surgical masks, which was weird. Or that the bus was decorated with a camouflage pattern that reminded people of the war. Whatever the truth was, when one of the Japanese tourists made a gesture at a crying baby who was tied to his mother's back, she started to scream. People in the market chased him, ultimately killing the son who intervened to save his elderly father. Rumors spread that their tour bus was full of the corpses of children. When the Guatemalan bus driver tried to prevent the crowd from entering the bus, he too was bludgeoned and burned.

The official response was swift. Government agents arrived to investigate, and arrests were made. Many say that those who took the fall for the lynching had nothing to do with it: the guilty parties had already fled, leaving people with the same names to be arrested, while others

took advantage of the event to avenge personal grudges on unrelated matters. The woman who screamed was incarcerated for several years along with her baby. This intervention did have an effect: as noted above, since 2000 there has not been a fatal lynching in Todos Santos. There have, however, been several non-fatal lynchings, and the majority of them have unfolded in the aftermath of a death. For example, during the fiesta of 2008 a young man was stabbed to death and his body was left in the town dump. The vigilantes arrived at the suspects' houses, searched the property for evidence, arrested the subjects and took them to their office for interrogation where they beat confessions out of the men. They were threatened with lynching for several days before the army was allowed to rescue them and take them to official justice in the capital, where they were released soonafter for lack of evidence.

Many have suggested that this case, as well as others, did not end in a lynching because of the scandal the 2000 lynching brought upon Todos Santos. The town once enjoyed a steady stream of tourists, but when guidebooks started mentioning the tourist lynching, those numbers dropped precipitously. Apart from the prosecutions, these fatal lynchings also had long-term economic reverberations. When talking about the fiesta murder of 2008, one man referenced the 2000 incident when he said, "We're already infamous, and if it weren't for that, those guys would be dead" (January 13, 2011). But while people stopped short of immolating suspected criminals, popular violence offered one way of imposing the will of the people. In the following section, I describe the collective action that erupted in the aftermath of a death. Chapter Five returns to this case. Here I briefly discuss one aspect of this incident to show how the logistical, financial and emotional support proffered to the bereaved can transform into mob violence when blame is cast.

Every market day the *cabecera* [county seat] of Todos Santos swells with visitors from the outlying aldeas. They come to town to shop—and to drink. In early 2008 people decided to take action against the cantinas that attracted these rowdy crowds. A meeting of the center decided to ban alcohol sales in the cabecera. The mayor took the issue to the wider community in a mass public meeting in April of 2008. At the meeting, security leaders read a list of the names of all Todosanteros who had died of drink. This lengthy catalogue of the dead, which included the casualties of car crashes, cirrhosis, hepatitis and drunken brawls, moved the crowd. People often mentioned this list when they discussed the ban. While Candelaria was angered by her sister's inclusion, Madga said hearing her sister's name evoked in this context *pained* her. Others, like Dionisio, a security leader and a major proponent of the ban, made a speech about his brother's alcohol-related death that underscored the dangers of alcohol consumption and the suffering it caused their families. The meeting concluded with those present overwhelmingly voting for a county-wide alcohol ban.

Despite this community decision, about a dozen cantineros continued to sell. The cantineros were meeting at one of the cantinas where they were planning a legal challenge to the ban when a mob encircled them and dragged them from the building. They were thrown in the fountain in the middle of town and forced to spend the night shivering in an open-air jail cell. The next day they were told their land would be expropriated and they would be exiled from the community if they continued to fight the ban. At first the ban appeared to be a success. But like any prohibition, ultimately it only succeeded in creating a lucrative black market. The two families who continued to sell tripled their prices and soon became some of the wealthiest people in town. Things were calm until late May 2010, when another alcohol-related death spurred a second mob action.

That month Hurricane Agatha pelted the region with torrential downpours. In Todos Santos the sky turned black, the Río Limón overflowed its banks and a man went missing. One of the cantineros went to the local radio station to announce the man's disappearance and organize a search party. When the water subsided the search party, which numbered in the hundreds, found the missing man's battered body stuck to a branch in the river. A rumor spread that the dead man's last phone call had been to his wife to say he was going to the cantina for another drink. People were enraged. How could people still be dying of drink when they had banned alcohol? The search party morphed into a mob. They installed the dead man's body in the town square and marched on the clandestine cantinas, breaking down their doors and confiscating their stock. The mob visited all of the town's former cantinas, even the ones no longer in operation. Candelaria's house was among them. She described how the crowd forced their way into her home, sending her small grandchildren scurrying under the bed in fear. She was worried that the empties she'd been collecting would be misinterpreted as evidence that she was still in operation. Fortunately they did not discover this cache, and after upending her house the crowd moved on.

Oscar, who still operated a cantina, remembers watching the mob move down the main street toward his house. It took him a moment to realize they were coming for him. He had been "lynched" a few years before when he's been accused of killing a rival gang member. He ran for his life. His wife Marta stayed behind, and barricaded herself behind the door to their house. I interviewed her later about what happened that day.

The people broke down the door and dragged us out, they mistreated us. It was like the passion of Christ. They were really angry. They said 'It's your fault the guy died. You cantineros are eating well and we haven't eaten anything.' See, they'd gone to look for the guy, so they hadn't eaten all day. They made us speak into a microphone and say we're guilty because we're selling liquor. When it was my turn to speak I was frightened

and I said, ‘we’re not selling anything, maybe my husband is, but I’m not’ (fieldnotes, September 16, 2011).

While Marta interpreted the comment, “You cantineros are eating well and we haven’t eaten anything,” to mean that particular day, I suspect that the rage that she experienced was not just about one day’s low blood sugar. Most likely her attackers were talking about the situation in general. Oscar and Marta opened their black market cantina in 2008, the same year that the U.S. economy tanked, an economy that had employed up to 30% of Todosanteros. In these lean times of declining migrant remittances and stepped-up deportations, the liquor vendors were some of the only people in town doing well, and these profits came at the expense of others.

The search party brought the body to the town square and displayed him there, right outside the office of the national civil police. Frank was hiding inside with his fellow officers when this happened. They knew better than to intervene. After all, “When the people take the law into their own hands like that, there’s nothing you can do” (interview, April 13, 2011). He said there was a collection basket next to the body. People lined up to see the body and donate money to the bereaved family. The drowned man’s battered appearance fueled rumors that there had been foul play involved in his death.

While these features are all standard parts of the wake, what was extraordinary about this event was that the usually voluntary “colaboración” was in this case forced upon the cantineras. As Marta put it, “they made us speak into a microphone and say we’re guilty.” Then the crowd demanded money for the bereaved family. Even before the ban, the security committee had forced cantineros to pay indemnity for the deaths of drinkers. In the year after the 2010 mob action, the cantineros sued the security committee for violating basic rights protected by the Guatemalan constitution. In the process, the prohibition crumbled, and many more vendors

started to sell alcohol again. Candelaria contemplated getting back into the business. Liquor had a much larger mark-up than her new occupation, selling french fries, especially when the price of potatoes kept going up. But she thought better of it, because, “it’s all okay, until somebody dies.” She was pointing to the social fact with which I opened this chapter: the power of death to gall people into collective action. These actions, when they occur, borrow elements from a familiar cultural repertoire.

In this case, the search party’s actions resembled the funeral procession. Bodies are often transported between private and public spaces for viewing. In Catholic funeral processions in Todos Santos, the casket is always driven to the imposing 16<sup>th</sup> century church in the middle of town for one last public display in its entryway before being taken to the cemetery for the “ultimo adiós” (the last goodbye). When the search party displayed the body in the town square, which is adjacent to the church, they did so with the permission of the bereaved family. The widow had an active role in this decision. After all, she was the one who publicized the content of her spouse’s final phone call, information that turned a search party into a mob. Normally funeral processions take the body to visit places that have been important to them in their lives. In this instance, the crowd visited all the possible cantinas where the man might have spent his last moments, searching for contraband, smashing bottles, and confiscating the cans of beer that they could not smash. While other processions involve carrying a casket or an image of a saint, in this case the crowd carted off the cases of beer they uncovered, which they then locked up in jail along with the cantineras.

Analyses of crowds observe that groups use the religious repertory of their culture in their actions (Goldstein 2004, Tambiah 1996, Zemon Davis 1973). In Guatemala, 500 years of Christian missionization has left its mark. One day I was discussing lynching in general in

Guatemala with Juan Pablo (who was not only a critic of community radio but also the then president of the security committee), when he remarked, “Maybe people like to lynch because it’s like killing Jesus.” “But why would people want to be like the people who killed Jesus?” I asked. Juan Pablo deflected my question by saying, “I don’t know, I’m just telling you what people say” (fieldnotes, January 21, 2011). Then he took another sip of his tea and changed the subject. But as his allusion to “what people say” suggests, he was not alone in making this association between lynching and the crucifixion. Marta experienced this resonance when she compared her experience to “the passion of Christ.” She was dragged through the streets and taunted in an experience she considered her own personal Calvary.

A young deportee named Max made a similar comparison when he described his homecoming to Todos Santos. The fashion he had acquired in the United States marked him as a “gang member” in his hometown. Shortly after his return he went to the market with a large amount of cash. Instead of buying the wardrobe his mother had instructed him to, he spent the money drinking with a friend until he was senselessly drunk. He was fuzzy on the circumstances that led to his arrest. As he recounted the incident to me in English, he was in jail when

They came back for me and they took me up to the salon, and it was packed with people. They took me up on the stage and they said I was a gangster because of my tattoos and the haircut I had then, you know, with lines shaved in the side of my head, and they beat me with a cable that was tied into knots. The first one hurt so much I was like “oh, Jesus, please help me!” And the crowd was screaming, I really thought that was it, that they were going to light me on fire like that Chinese (sic) guy. You know like how they did to Jesus? My back was like that afterward, I still have a lot of scars (October 13, 2010).

In this anecdote, Jesus appears twice, first in Max’s supplication for help and shortly thereafter when Max occupies the position of Jesus, similarly martyred and suffering.

In another invocation of the Son of God, security leader Dionisio, a skilled spinner of tales, twice told me about how he'd stopped lynchings that were in progress by making a speech to the crowd that included a quote from John 8:7: "I told them that this man is like Jesus. And then I said 'He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone.'" In his narration, this call to conscience in an act of oratory stopped the crowd in their tracks (fieldnotes, October 14, 2010).

Later I asked one of the men this security leader claimed to have saved from a lynching death with his oratory about the veracity of this tale. His wife laughed at my question and said, "The security guys were there, but they didn't do anything, they just supported the mob." Then her husband took over the story. In his account, the mob dragged him from the jail cell where the security committee had imprisoned him. They already had gallons of gasoline and firewood piled up on the street outside the cell. They were screaming, "He's the one who did it!" He responded, "'Gentlemen, I didn't do it. But if you want to kill me, go ahead, here I am.' After I said that they didn't touch me." In this version, it is not the speech act of the security leader but rather the speech act of a suspected murderer that prevents a death. But, as it so happens, this man's name is Jesus.

## **Conclusion**

Historian William Sewell (2005) suggests that an event becomes worthy of that name when it succeeds in changing larger structures. He analyzes the storming of the Bastille as one such event, arguing that this action changed the definition of revolution and forever associated popular violence with the declaration of popular sovereignty. While some events change local structures, their long-lasting effects on larger structures are unclear. The actions surrounding the banning of

alcohol in Todos Santos fall into this category. Local structures were for a time decisively changed. The first act of popular sovereignty occurred during the mass meeting when the prohibition was collectively decided. When this sovereign decision was not respected by the cantineros, first in 2008 and then again in 2010, acts of popular violence reasserted the will of the people.

Many have commented on the ways in which collective actions make use of ritual. In the case of several instances of popular violence recounted here, people in a range of subject positions interpret these events in terms of the crucifixion. Sewell argues that reference to ritual helps make events meaningful: the most minimal definition of ritual is that which is set aside from the profane, from the everyday and ordinary. Referencing ritual then makes an event an event by making it memorable and meaningful to those who participate in it. The crucifixion is about redemption, and as I discuss later, the idea that corporal punishment can redeem the criminal and allow them to reenter the community is a common one in places where vigilantism thrives. This idea is at work with the reading of the list of the dead at the meeting too: doing so could be seen as an effort to make these senseless deaths meaningful by putting an end once and for all to the public health threat of alcoholism.

Violent actions against the cantineros also expressed frustration with the extent to which they refused to think of the collective future of the community, thinking instead only of their personal fortunes. There had always been muttering about the dishonesty of cantineros, who were frequently accused of robbing patrons who were blind drunk. The cantinero who was assassinated during the war was said to have been murdered for shortchanging his drunk customers. Since the prohibition, reduced competition allowed the remaining cantineros to gouge their customers even more dramatically. Now that delivery trucks no longer came to Todos

Santos and the cantineros had to drive the liquor in themselves from the department capital and run the risk of selling it, they marked up prices three times.

Why does death and seemingly only death provide a site for successful collective action? Trust among Todosanteros rarely extended farther than death: in the “colaboración” that a death incites, there is trust during the limited time frame of this event. It was clear what the money was going for, and the misdirection of funds would be too heinous to be considered. In other contexts, there was always widespread suspicion and gossip about corruption. Mateo for example could not get his efforts at creating a homegrown micro-lending project off the ground because even the handful of people he managed to interest in the project were not sure they could trust him with their money. On a larger scale, people often complained about the supposed corruption of the migrant committee in Oakland or the fundraising efforts of the community radio station. However when it came to these organizations’ involvement in fundraising around a death, the criticism ended.

The collective actions inspired by deaths in this chapter, first the alcohol ban itself, and then the second mob action against the cantineros after a drowning death, represent the high point of the collective support for the alcohol prohibition. At this moment, many believed that the social problem of alcoholism could be solved by force. In these actions, social practices that are benign and provide solace in one context, such as the procession, the wake, and colaboración, easily turned into collective violence when people were faced with events that they interpreted as a threat to their future.

As is already evident from the opening example of the hapless drunk migrants gunned down in the street, structural violence, or the uneven distribution of suffering in the world, plays

a major role in these examples. Maybe one of the reasons death rituals remain so articulated and are experienced as something “traditional” is that people are given the constant opportunity to practice them. I was often stunned over the course of the year by the amount of misfortune that continually struck the young of the community—car accidents, suicides and other senseless premature deaths under often mysterious circumstances. Connecting structural causes to their individual instantiation constitutes a difficult task. Nonetheless, tracking this relationship represents one of the goals of the chapters that follow.

## Chapter Two: VIGILANTES

*We are born under a load of obligations of every kind, to our predecessors, to our successors, to our contemporaries. After our birth these obligations increase or accumulate before the point where we are capable of rendering anyone any service. On what human foundation, then, could one seat the idea of “rights”?*

Auguste Comte, “Positivist Catechism” (1891:295)

*I blame the system in Guatemala in which the young are only taught about their rights. “These are your rights. These are your liberties,” and that’s it. So the system is bad. They don’t talk about “These are your obligations.”*

Juan Pablo, interview, January 11, 2011

This chapter examines the rationale and justification for the organization of a citizen’s security committee in one Mayan community. I use an encounter between one of its leaders and some visiting human rights advocates to frame this history. At the time Juan Pablo was the president of the board of directors of the general security committee. His account of La Seguridad, as it is called locally, reveals the extent to which this movement resembles other vigilante justice movements that have appeared across a range of historical contexts. I briefly consider some of these commonalities before detailing this encounter.

One commonality of these movements is that they appear at the margins of state power, such as the western frontier in the United States or South African townships at the end of apartheid. The relationship of these non-state actors to their respective states is fraught with ambiguity. As noted in the introduction, vigilantes work as “double agents,” simultaneously critiquing the absence of the state while their extralegal actions undermine state power. They are

generally considered socially conservative movements, confronting social change with an idealized view of the past and tradition.

In this particular case, the confrontation between vigilantes and their targets of disciplinary action takes place in a familiar idiom. The dichotomies between what has variously been called the traditional and the modern, the collective and the individual, a complex web of obligations and the inalienable rights of the individual, represents a conflict that has taken place on multiple fronts wherever the capitalist reorganization of non-capitalist social relations takes place. What I present here is a particular variant on a larger pattern experienced over the last 500 years of capitalist expansion, as human economies meet commercial ones and convulsively experience the changing answer to the question “What are our obligations to each other?” This is not to suggest that rural Mayans were by any means isolated from previous stages of capitalist predation. However, something about the most recent intensification of accumulation by dispossession visited upon them in the postwar period has brought these debates to the fore once again, as people see their social relations in a state of crisis and experience every social change as utterly unprecedented. The subjectification of young people through postwar educational expansion and labor migration to the United States has heightened this conflict by opening an experiential gap between pre- and postwar generations. This tension is expressed locally as a conflict between “gangs” and vigilantes. In this battle “rights” occupy an ambiguous position. Sometimes elders use a discourse of rights to protect collective rights and defend local sovereignty (see Chapter Five), but at other times these very same actors call human rights the apotheosis of an externally imposed western individualism that must be violently confronted.

Apart from their social conservatism, another common theme among vigilante justice movements is their effort to legitimize their movements by mimicking the state. As Gordon

(2004) observes, they tend to give their public performances a “legalistic gloss.” For many, this means that they often imitate the courtroom procedures of their nation-state’s official justice system (Buur 2008). In Guatemala, despite or perhaps because of low rates of literacy, the production of written documents provides this gloss. If writing is an instrument of obfuscation and domination in the official justice system, it serves this function in unofficial ones as well. The written document for vigilantes is not merely the precursor or follow up to action: often it constitutes action itself (Gupta 2012). I consider this point at some length below.

Finally, previous ethnographic studies of vigilante groups have revealed is that they are extremely labile formations (Oomen 2004, Smith 2004, Starn 1999). In other words, they rise and fall quickly. It seems that their very success does them in: they start overstepping their bounds, intervening in new areas of social life, and charging fines or fees for their services. Power goes to their heads and they start committing even more extreme acts of violence. The end result is that they lose popular support and attract the attention of state actors who move against them. This arc accurately describes the trajectory of vigilante justice in Todos Santos. By the time Juan Pablo recounted the history of the movement he helmed in 2011, La Seguridad’s biggest successes were already behind it. However, the exchange that follows finds their leader in a moment of exuberance, proud of their accomplishments and optimistic about their future.

### **The Encounter**

Early January 2011 found me hosting some visiting dignitaries from California. Ostensibly Ted and Carol were on vacation, but that was not how the visit of these well-known immigration advocates was perceived by people in Todos Santos. News of their arrival spread rapidly. This couple had been instrumental in helping a significant portion of the Todosantero community

obtain legal status in the United States: over the last 20 years the organization they worked with had won cases for more than a 1000 people from this small rural county. At first the asylum cases they helped their clients win were based on claims of political persecution stemming from the war. Many who had taken refuge in camps in Mexico found that upon their return their land was gone and they were less than welcome in their communities. In these accounts, the children of Marxist guerrilleros were stigmatized for their parent's militancy. But during the early 2000s new villains emerged in these narratives of persecution. Carol and Ted started hearing a lot about the security committee and their extralegal actions, actions which were in clear violation of basic human rights. When I told Ted and Carol about my friendship with Juan Pablo, the president of the security committee, they asked if they could meet him.

Juan agreed to the meeting. He had his own motivations: he felt unfairly maligned by things migrants in California had said about the group he led. His reputation had gotten so bad among his *paisanos* (countrymen, or fellow Todosanteros) in Oakland that when these migrants had come back for the feria a few months before, some of his old friends refused to acknowledge him when he passed them on the street. He was still smarting from these snubs when he agreed to speak to the visiting delegation of gringos from California.

I told Juan that they had heard a lot of awful stories about this place. I mentioned a story Carol had told me with great feeling that morning over coffee. It involved a woman who tried to return to Todos Santos but was apprehended by the security committee at the entry. She had her infant tied to her back and they wanted to make her break up rocks in the sun, but she convinced them to let her stay in the jail cell. Juan Pablo responded with what at first seemed like a tangent: "What we have accomplished here, nobody else has dared to. We've taken on the rich who own the liquor industry. Here we are in this country where the laws aren't enforced, where the

government doesn't bother to educate the young, but it's okay to sell liquor to them." Then he added, "I'd rather see a woman breaking up rocks than see her drunk" (fieldnotes, January 10, 2011).

Both parties to this conversation had an agenda. Juan wanted to clear his name and justify the righteousness of his voluntary communal service. Ted and Carol needed to believe in the righteousness of what they were doing as well, and part of this righteousness lay in believing the worst about the security committee. The categories of asylum law are narrow: arguments must be made in terms of political persecution. The problem is the U.S. government's definition of the political is exceedingly narrow. Advocates must argue that the war is still going on in Guatemala. Thus the security committee must be seen as a continuation of the civil patrols imposed by the military during the war. Meanwhile their victims need to be represented as leftist dissidents persecuted for their political commitments. Winning an asylum case requires presenting a black and white view of reality, one that where every actor's political motivations can be neatly categorized as either right-wing or left-wing. On the ground things are a lot more ambiguous than the clear-cut categories inherited from cold war politics.

I use this encounter between the visiting human rights advocates and the leader of an extralegal communal justice movement as a way into narrating the history of the security committee. The *charla* (talk) Juan Pablo crafted for this critical audience of outsiders frames this history. What follows is what Juan Pablo would want you, distinguished foreign guest, to know about his town and the social movement whose leadership he was charged with. While this chapter is structured around the 23 minute-long monologue that Juan delivered, it also contains a section that details some of the violence of the security committee's foundational actions that Juan's account elides.

A small-scale version of the security committee formed around 2000. They wore masks, and disbanded in the wake of nationally publicized scandals (Burrell 2009). By 2004 they reformed and attacked the local youth they considered gangsters. This campaign was perhaps the apex of their power, when they enjoyed the widest public support. In 2008 a new administration took over and started off their term by banning alcohol. Juan Pablo and his board of directors took over in 2010: he was largely attracted to this leadership role because of his commitment to continuing the alcohol prohibition. But their decisive inaugural action, the second mob attack on the cantinas that continued to operate (described in the last chapter), led to a protracted lawsuit. While Juan was proud and optimistic about their accomplishments during this interview, as the lawsuit wore on popular support for his organization dwindled. Many of his opponents had been formed by, as he describes it below, their encounter with “a different law” in the United States. Political asylum, almost the only way for Guatemalans to gain U.S. citizenship rights, comes under particular fire in his account.

Ted and Carol were largely responsible for much of the political asylum success of so many Todosanteros. Ted is an archeologist by trade, and fatefully he specialized in the archeology of Central America. By the late 70s and early 80s things were too unsafe on the isthmus to continue this work. He got involved in the Central American solidarity movement that was burgeoning in the Bay Area at that time, and started volunteering at an organization called the Sanctuary. At first most of the Sanctuary’s clients were Salvadorans. Around the same time Ted’s partner Carol went back to school to study law. Carol was a newly minted lawyer when she did her first case for a Todosantero in the early 90s. This man’s legalization success opened a flood gate of applications from his fellow paisanos. Carol sees private clients, and she also works as the legal advisor to the Sanctuary, where Ted continues to work. Even though Ted never

earned a law degree, he is staggeringly knowledgeable about asylum law. Every summer he oversees an eager cohort of law students who take on pro bono asylum cases for a never-ending flow of clients. Each of the estimated 1000 Todosanteros who have won asylum cases have the right to petition for spouses, children and parents. In 2009 Ted let me into their database to count their cases: that year only 155 Guatemalans received political asylum in the United States, but 89% of these cases had been done by the Sanctuary. Of these cases, almost 30% listed Todos Santos as their birthplace.

For nearly 20 years Ted and Carol had been advocating for Todosanteros. They knew its darkest moments inside out. They'd heard perhaps hundreds of accounts of the day the army burned neighboring El Rancho, where the smoke billowed and filled the air with the smell of burning corn as the fires consumed the year's worth of food that hung in the rafters of the houses. It was the smell of starvation. "It's like Proust and the madeleine," Ted once said, reflecting on the power of smell to evoke memory. They knew all the details of the moment when the military came and gathered up the townspeople in the massive colonial church in the center of town. That day the military had a list and a local collaborator in a mask who fingered seven young men in the crowd. Their torturers left their twisted bodies in a pile in the whitewashed jail cell, white shirts and white walls spattered with blood. They had heard these memories recounted so often from so many mouths it was as if they were their own. But in all this time they had never actually set eyes on the town they'd spent the last two decades representing to asylum officials and immigration judges. The last thing they expected was to be told that their efforts at helping people from the town legalize their status in the United States was the cause of the town's social problems. That, however, is exactly what happened.

## Charla

There is one nice hotel in town, and Ted and Carol were lodged there. Its rooms open onto a plant-filled balcony overlooking a major thoroughfare: we began the conversation seated outside. The recording that documents this encounter is punctuated by the banging of construction two floors above us and the bustle of the village below. Sometimes the wind blows into the mike and carries Juan Pablo's words away. The conversation begins as an uninterrupted monologue, the speech Juan Pablo delivered. While he talked Ted and Carol listened with arms crossed and faces blank. Maybe this unfriendly body language was in part because of the weather: it was a chilly day and as Juan talked a cloud moved in and enveloped the town. But I also think that Juan was saying things that they couldn't or didn't want to hear.

Juan Pablo is a serious man who's in his mid-fifties. He has large brown eyes set in a usually stoic face. While many Todosanteros delight in teasing and word play, Juan is not among them, at least in the face he presented to me. A gringo friend commented once, "Juan Pablo just looks like a hero." In part this impression comes from the tall white cowboy hat he almost always wears. The handful of times I saw him without this trademark hat (addressing an assembly, testifying in court), his head looked strangely small and vulnerable, as if his skull were too small for the large features of his face. On this day and other days Juan often referred to things as "sad." Drunk women, the youth of the town, these things made him sad. And there is a sadness about him: some things in his life have been disappointments to him. Ultimately his involvement in the leadership of the security committee ended in disappointment, but this interview finds him at a high point, facing challenges but proud of their accomplishments. As he'd said earlier that day, "What we have accomplished here, nobody else has dared to do." He showed me his idealistic side. I knew there were other sides to him: the brutal enforcer of rules,

the angry man with a short temper, the critical father, the distant husband. Other people in the village, especially young men, had a very different experience of him (see Chapter Three).

Juan Pablo begins his tale historically, with the history of labor exploitation of indigenous Mayans by the Guatemalan oligarchy.

So what was the village like. There was a little discrimination by rich people against indigenous people. They made a law that if people didn't cultivate a certain amount of corn, they had to go to the south coast to work on rich people's land<sup>1</sup>. There were a lot of trees, and they had to cut down the trees and get the land ready to plant for the rich. Many people didn't agree with this. There were also cotton plantations, coffee plantations, where the people had to go every year for a certain amount of days, like 70 days, so more than three months. So, people weren't okay with this.

He goes on to explain that some escaped this economically desperate situation by migrating to Mexico, while others colonized the jungles of the Ixcán: "nobody was working it because of the bad climate there, there was a lot of malaria. But the poor of Todos Santos went. There, they dared to go, looking for a better life" (Manz 2005, Falla 1992). At this point the wind blows his words away, with only the dates 1944-1954 remaining intelligible. In this abbreviated history of Guatemala, Juan references the decade when Guatemala was democratically governed by New Deal-inspired progressives. President Arbenz tried to address the nation's profound inequalities by redistributing land. Unfortunately the fallow land the Guatemalan government expropriated was owned by the United Fruit Company. A CIA-backed coup brought these egalitarian efforts to an abrupt halt, initiating more than thirty years of military rule (Handy 1984, Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982). Dissident army officers formed the first groups to oppose the U.S. backed military regime. As Juan continued his history,

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<sup>1</sup> In 1936 dictator Jorge Ubico replaced the debt peonage laws that legalized forced labor recruitment with the vagrancy laws, which Juan Pablo refers to here. Any indigenous man who was not the titled owner of a certain amount of land was required to work a certain number of days each year on the coastal coffee plantations owned by Guatemala's oligarchy (Adams 1990).

Four guerrilla groups appeared in Guatemala, groups who were opposed to the rich. And they were strong. People understood the situation, the problem of the rich and the poor. They were conscious. Everybody was talking about a revolution in Guatemala.

The extent of indigenous Guatemalans' participation in the Marxist insurgency was fiercely debated by foreign scholars in the 1990s (Nelson 1999, Sanford 2003, Stoll 1993). Did indigenous people have agency, or were they forced to support the guerrilla, caught as they were, "between two armies"? Juan Pablo's answer clearly falls on the agentic side of this debate: "People understood the situation, the problem of the rich and the poor. They were conscious." I heard many other Guatemalans of his generation express similar sentiments. As one man put it, "the guerrilla came and they said look at the situation, the rich have everything, and you have nothing. It wasn't like we could argue with that."

Academic debates aside, the purpose of this history in Juan's tale is to move on to the consequence of war: the flow of refugees that started a major outmigration. His account moves quickly from military occupation to the population movement that followed. While the Guerrilla Army of the Poor briefly occupied the town starting in 1981, by 1982 the military moved in, announcing their presence by razing neighboring El Rancho and assassinating suspected sympathizers—the historical events Ted and Carol had heard so much about. Juan Pablo glided over this history, continuing his account by noting that, "after '83 kids started going to the United States. These cement block houses are the product of the United States." As he said this he gestured to the street visible from the balcony, a block filled with two to three-story concrete block constructions in various stages of completion. Many have commented on how radically migration has changed the built landscape of Guatemala's Mayan villages, where concrete houses adorned with polarized glass windows have pushed out traditional one-room adobe dwellings (Green 2009, Kron 2007).

For Juan Pablo, changes in the built landscape were inextricably connected to the other social change that constituted the main theme of his talk: the troublesome youth of the town. Others of his generation made this connection as well, pointing out that architectural changes like larger living spaces and separate entrances meant that youth were no longer so easily controlled by their elders (fieldnotes, January 11, 2011). In Juan's talk he jumped from pointing out the buildings back to his main theme, the young.

But the young had other ideas. Between 1985 and 2000 there were only primary schools in Todos Santos. To keep studying you had to go to Huehuetenango, and to do this you had to have your parent's support. The kids left, and that's when the disaster happened, a very different result. The young people went there and they weren't working every day, just a few days a week, and that's when the gangs started. Their idea was who could make the strongest group. First came the Salvatrucha, from Los Angeles, then the Mara 18.

According to Juan Pablo, underemployment and idleness created the gangs. In contrast, many accused gang members describe their lives in the United States in terms of unending labor. But what did happen was once many migrants returned to Todos Santos, many found the jobs available to them not worth their while. Day laborers are paid about \$5-6 a day in Todos Santos: in the United States, most make more than this an hour. What is closer to the truth about youth group formations is Juan's reference to the role of education in the emergence of the gangs. Gangs first formed among the first generation of youth freed from agricultural labor who were able to socialize with their peers at the town's only middle school. But are these youth groups really "gangs"? I explore this point, and the perspective of these imputed gangsters, in more detail in the next chapter. In the meantime, suffice it to say that the emergence of a rebellious transnational youth culture on the streets of Todos Santos was experienced as something that was deeply threatening to their elders' notions of social order.

Juan Pablo frames this threat in terms of their exposure to what he calls, “another kind of law.” As he continues his analysis of the gangs, “law” emerges as an important theme.

Gangs aren't a part of Todos Santos, they are the product of another culture, the product of another kind of education, the product of another kind of law. Even though Guatemalan law is no good, because a lot of it is just about protecting the government, and a lot of it is just about protecting the rich. [The youth] came with a new law. So people who were over 40 or 50 who had been to the States, they knew what the situation was like there, and they knew you couldn't form groups like that. Between 1995 and 2000 the young people weren't thinking about money, because they already had a roof over their head, a place to live.

Guatemala offers legal scholars an exemplary case of legal pluralism (Sieder 2011A). It is an utterly ambiguous landscape of contested sovereignties, many of them, like the security committee of Todos Santos, extralegal. In this analysis, Juan adopts a plural approach as well: there are many laws in his account. There is the “existential sovereignty” Mayan communities have enjoyed for centuries, excluded from the larger body politic, taking care of their own conflicts through a parallel justice system (Watanabe 1990). There is the law of Guatemala, which is designed to protect the government from prosecution for war crimes along with the economic interests of the oligarchy. National laws aside, there is the extent to which Guatemala is a neocolonial state, subject to transnational regimes of law imposed during the internationally brokered peace accords. Finally there is its role as a cheap labor reserve for transnational capital, and the effects of the ambiguous incorporation of these workers in the United States. For Juan, migration leads to exposure to “another kind of law.”

This “new law” imported from the United States represents a law of masculine competition, of “who could make the strongest group.” But older migrants also learn about another kind of law in the United States: they learn that gangs are illegal, vilified and scapegoated for many of the nation's social problems. They learn that framing themselves as anti-gang, as hard on crime, dovetails with a transnational anti-gang discourse: “they knew what

the situation was like there, and they knew you couldn't form groups like that." But what is the law? In the burgeoning field of critical legal anthropology law is seen not merely as a body of codes, but as a historically constructed process, a "cultural power," (Merry 2000), and a site of political contestation (Comoroff 1994). In the following section Juan Pablo elaborates the difference between the "law" of his generation and that of the succeeding one.

### **These Are Your Obligations**

I blame the system in Guatemala in which the young are only taught about their rights. "These are your rights. These are your liberties," and that's it. So the system is bad. They don't talk about "These are your obligations." Or "These are the sanctions." So the law prepares young people to be violent.

In other words, "We are born under a load of obligations... On what human foundation, then, could one seat the idea of 'rights'?" (Comte 1891:295). This section is dedicated to discussing the tension between rights and obligations as people experience them in contemporary Mesoamerican communities, before turning to a discussion of the connection Juan Pablo makes between law and violence.

Juan's critique resonates with Comte's critique of French Revolutionary reason as well as with the words of contemporary Mayan leaders. For example, in Totonicapan, Kiche community leader Benjamin Son argues that the biggest problems facing Mayan communities are "impunity, violence and a lack of balance between human rights and obligations" (Ekern 2008:123). As Son elaborates,

The focus of the human rights discourse is off the mark. In the communities, the focus is on the community as such. The correct approach is to talk about rights and obligations simultaneously. The problem is not the lack of rights, but that the obligations are not respected (Ekern 2008:123).

The focus of human rights places the emphasis on relations between the individual and the state. In this schema the community disappears from view. But as generations of foreign anthropologists working in Guatemala have documented, in the past one could only acquire rights by gaining the respect of your elders through communal work (LaFarge and Byers 1931, Wagley 1949, Watanabe 1990). Rights were not abstract and universal but rather earned through fulfilling one's obligations to the community as a whole.

The bulk of this communal work took place through the *cofradía*, or what anthropologists termed the civil-religious hierarchy (Cancian 1965). Men moved through the ranks of this age-graded system, gradually taking on greater responsibilities. Although the *cofradía* was an exclusively male domain, men's success depended upon the support of their wives, who helped them to fulfill their duties and picked up the slack at home (Eber and Rosenbaum 2007). In a gender system based on strict sexual division of labor and elaborate interdependency, men and women worked as a team (Bossen 1984). In his discussion of this system in Santiago Chimaltenango, John Watanabe describes its positions and their corresponding duties as "conventions of responsibility." Throughout his discussion the term "obligation" comes up continually and is used interchangeably with "responsibility." Young men show they can fulfill their obligations, and thus move up the ritual ladder, taking on responsibility for ever more important ritual events.

But the *cofradías* have been steadily dismantled over the course of the twentieth century. Beginning with the political reforms of 1944, party politics started becoming locally important (Handy 1984). In the 1950s, the Catholic Church started a missionization campaign that trained young Mayan men in an orthodox Catholicism shorn of its Mayan syncretic elements (Brintnall 1979). By the 1970s evangelical Christianity was starting to make inroads, and conversion meant

opting out of the fiesta system entirely (Annis 1987). The impact of the war years on traditional structures of authority hastened a process that was already well under way.

In Juan's quote he blames "the system in Guatemala in which the young are only taught about their rights." But what is this system? I suspect it's the school system that he referenced earlier, right before he introduced the "disaster" of the gangs: "Between 1985 and 2000 there were only primary schools in Todos Santos. To keep studying you had to go to Huehuetenango, and to do this you had to have your parent's support." Here he refers to a seemingly counterintuitive social fact about the gangs of Todos Santos. While in urban areas it is the poor and disenfranchised who make up the rank and file of gangs (Ward 2013), in Todos Santos gang fashion is limited to the relatively affluent, to people who have been to school, especially high school graduates whose parents supported their education. Other Maya social critics have also called educational expansion "responsible for pushing the Maya toward westernization" (Esquit and Ochoa 1995). As anthropologist Stener Ekern describes this process, "the school replaces the parents and particularly the elders in their all important roles in community socialization" (2008:133). What seems to happen then is that youth socialize each other and peer groups become more important to identity formation than family. Transnational youth gang signs and symbols provide the language, style, and embodied dispositions of this westernization. Older people experience this way of being as radically different from that which they grew up with.

### **Greatness Must Be Thrust Upon You**

As Juan continues his charla, he reveals another aspect of a competing view of personhood when he talks about his ambivalence about taking on a leadership role with the security committee.

At first I was really opposed to it. I was just an observer, and I saw the good and the bad about them. They called me, but a group of about 20 opposed my leadership, so I turned

it down. But then they said if you don't accept we'll cut off your water supply, the people will cut your water, so I said alright I'll accept a year-long term. But they said two years. I think some people nominated me out of hate, while other people thought I could make a change.

On another occasion Juan told me a tale with a similar story line. Once there was a man who lived outside of town, and his mother was ill and he went to the market to buy medicine for her. When he arrived he found the village in the middle of a town assembly that had formed to elect the new mayor. When they saw him they said, "You should be mayor." He said no, thank you, that he had too many other commitments. And they said no, you have to do it. If you don't do it we'll cut your water off. "So why did they force him to be mayor?" I'd asked Juan. "Well, because he was intelligent," he replied. Accepting power in both of these stories is something that must be done reluctantly. It is not just thrust but in fact forced upon these men.

This pattern recalls Groark (2009) and Gossen's (1999) analyses of selfhood among the Tzotzil Maya in San Juan de Chamula, Mexico. Groark quotes Gossen when he describes "a reluctance to 'engage in 'instrumental acts' that suggest individual volition and exercise of power over others' unless somehow legitimated in the eyes of the community" (2009:715). They attribute this reluctance to Mesoamerican soul beliefs, in which the self is seen as subject to the will and agency of both human and supernatural others. In other words the self is controlled and created by a "non-local nexus of causality and destiny," one that includes messages from dreams and animal familiars (Groark 2009:715).

The relationship between the ambivalence of self-assertion and a non-local nexus of causality is clearly illustrated in the biographies of shamans and healers. These people always describe themselves as reluctant to take on the responsibilities of being a spiritual guide, but they are plagued by debilitating illnesses and prophetic dreams until they do so (fieldnotes, August

15, 2007). Juan cites a similar archetypal pattern in his assumption of a worldly leadership role, wherein which, “For the call to be viewed as authentic, the conscious self of waking life—the seat of everyday volition and striving—cannot be seen as having chosen the path” (Groark 2009:715). Juan Pablo did not chose his path. Community members, whatever their motivations, chose it for him.

### **So They Broke Them Up**

Juan was the president of the third board of directors of the security committee. The group initially formed during the mayoral administration of Julián Mendoza Bautista (2000-2004) to confront a ring of livestock thieves. They were a small group, they wore masks, and after some bad national publicity they disappeared for a while. But by 2004 they organized again and began a major campaign against the gangs. Juan described the actions of the first administration to Ted and Carol as follows:

This little project of volunteers, this group of men in the streets, this first group had a really tough job. They had to take the gangs down. The idea of security was to break them up. So they broke them up.

He continues his account by saying that although the gangs were “broken up,” they went underground and still cause problems for the security committee. Juan’s matter of fact statement, “they broke them up,” glosses over the many important details of the symbolic and physical violence visited upon the youth of the community. This section is an aside, a break in Juan’s narrative that unpacks the stages involved in this process of “breaking them up.” The details reveal the extent to which vigilante elders imitate the techniques of state bureaucracies, particularly their use of writing as an instrument of domination. Meanwhile, some of the metaphors they use to describe the town’s youth as a blight on the body politic resonate with those used by other contemporary vigilante justice movements.

When Juan mentioned taking the gangs down, he was referring to the glory days of the security committee, when the power and respect they commanded was at its height. After the alcohol ban in 2008, their popularity faltered. In contrast, their initial attack on the town's youth in 2004 received widespread public support. Former Mayor Mendoza chuckled admiringly when he described the actions of this first group: "They were a little *mano dura*." *Mano dura* refers to a tough on crime approach. Many trace the roots of this trend to 1990s New York City, when Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and chief of police William Bratten started touting "zero tolerance" for crime in what Bratten termed the "broken windows" approach (Cattelino 2004, Goldstein 2003, Simon 2007). In other words, respond to the first sign of vandalism with full force. This ideology spread through the transnational consulting gigs given to these and other like-minded men who tried to apply the New York City model to urban Latin America, with disastrous results. Despite the growing numbers of politicians elected on *mano dura* platforms (including the current president of Guatemala), crime has only increased throughout the region (Muñoz 2013).

Young people with their baggy pants, elaborate handshakes and gang-style tags became the broken windows of Todos Santos. As such they were subjected to zero tolerance. When I started visiting Todos Santos in 2003-2004, the streets were full of young men and adolescent boys who wore their traditional clothes tailored in baggy hip hop styles. They hung out in public, drinking beer and harassing passersby. Sometimes they fought each other. Rocks and broken beer bottles were their weapons of choice. By the time I returned for preliminary fieldwork in 2007, these youth had mysteriously vanished from public life. I set about collecting information about what had happened to them. In those days many people spoke about the actions of the security committee positively. As one young woman reported happily, "They've solved

everything” (fieldnotes, July 31, 2007). But this respect was intermingled with fear: people only spoke about them behind closed doors.

Mateo was more forthcoming than most about the actions of the security committee. He had just returned from several years of working in the United States and was in the process of reintegrating himself in his hometown. He was then his mid-thirties, which put him a generational cohort ahead of the youth targeted by security. At the time, Mateo was an enthusiastic supporter of the security committee’s efforts. The first administration of security leaders were uneducated, which meant they did not know how to write and had limited Spanish. Nonetheless, the written word in Spanish in the form of the *acta* played a key role in their enactment of power. The word *acta* can refer to an agreement or accord, the minutes of a meeting or an affidavit. Stationary stores in Guatemala sell hardcover legal-sized lined notebooks labeled “ACTAS.” The security committee enlisted literate people to keep files on their actions in these official-looking books. Mateo described walking through the town square one day when men at a security meeting hailed him by calling out “maestro!” (teacher). He entered their office and created a document for them. It concerned two outsiders they had captured who had tried to pass counterfeit bills in the town. The *acta* stated that if these men ever returned to Todos Santos and tried this again the people of Todos Santos might “commit another error.” The first “error” was a reference to the 2000 tourist lynching that made the town famous. The counterfeiters were made to sign the document before they were released.

This incident suggests the slippery line between action and writing. Building on Weber’s assertion that all modern bureaucratic order depends upon a system of files, Michael Herzfeld calls the written word “the symbol and instrument of all bureaucratic power” (1992:139). In vigilantes’ attempts to put a “legalistic gloss” on their actions, the act of writing provides this

gloss. But the term gloss in this case is misleading. As Akhil Gupta (2012) has argued, when it comes to state bureaucracies, writing is not merely a record of actions, but may often constitute action itself. Writing-as-action comes to the fore in Mateo's account of the anti-gang campaign:

Mateo credits the mayor with calling the people together to say what are we going to do about the youth, how are we going to stop the deaths, the injuries, the rapes? They made a list of the gang members and their leaders and called upon them to participate in the meeting, so that they would be taken into account. But the gang members didn't say anything, the youth just denied it all. They had the gangsters sign *una acta* agreeing to disband. This had no effect—they were worse than ever, so a second meeting was called, and that's when the security committee was formed. The gangsters were made to sign *una nueva acta* saying “we won't hang out together, graffiti the walls or make trouble.” This too had no effect, and there was a third meeting in the central park, in which the gangsters supposedly said we're free to do what we want and *ustedes no necesitan la moda actual* (you don't need to keep up with the latest fashions). This ended with the surrender of their knit caps, clothes and knives. Then they threw the youths in the water—there was a huge crowd looking on (fieldnotes, August 23, 2007).

In this account, the committee's first action was to make a list. List-making recalls what the military did when they arrived in small indigenous towns like Todos Santos in the early eighties: they carried with them a list names of suspected guerrilla collaborators. Then they tracked these people down and executed them. The commonality of list-making points to the continuity of their approach with wartime oppression, a continuity that Ted and Carol emphasized in their asylum work. As Ted likes to point out, the military always referred to Marxists as “delincuentes” (delinquents). In this new anti-gang campaign, the security committee continues to rout the enemy within, whom they also refer to as “delincuentes.”

The security committee's second action was to force the youth to sign a document. When this warning did not work to curb their activities, they were made to sign a second document. These documents served as the precursor to the physical coercion to follow. These practices suggest the extent to which action and writing are not necessarily separable categories. In this

case, writing is action, and the action of creating a document may be as powerful as the content of the document itself. It does not matter that the men who order its production cannot read the documents produced, nor that the subjects of this disciplinary action are not allowed to read them. These documents, the actas the security committee recorded, were not public documents. There was no way for its subjects to request their files. In fact, their very power lay in the unobtainability of these records.

The very knowledge that there was an “acta” somewhere on file was a form of power held over its subject. One suspected gangster who had had an acta written about him once remarked, “What I wouldn’t give to get my hands on that file.” He then described how an errand took him to the house of one of the former security leaders, and while he was waiting for him to arrive he realized all of the books of actas created during his administration were right there, piled up in his living room. “So you maybe you could get it,” I said. “Oh my God, they would kill me if I did that,” he replied. Even the subsequent administrations of the security committee did not have access to these files.

People who were the subjects of an acta found that knowledge of its existence was used against them. One man who was exiled from town by the security committee snuck back in to visit his family. Members of his extended family who lived on the same compound were very unhappy about his presence, worried that the security committee would blame them. When tensions came to a head, those opposed to his visit threatened him by mentioning the acta that barred him from entering the town. When his wife told me about this fight, I asked where this acta was. She shrugged and said, “in the municipality maybe?” The very mysteriousness of this document and its location seemed to give it its power.

Guatemala's state bureaucracy is as reliant on paperwork as any. Like most Latin American countries, lawyers are also licensed notary publics, authorized to produce and authenticate the reams of paperwork any legal proceeding requires. For the uneducated, the potential power of these papers was both mysterious and awe-inspiring. People kept documents in special plastic folders hidden away in chests and drawers in their houses: on more than one occasion I was shown these documents and asked for help to make sense of them. Most poignantly one woman showed me all of the paperwork she had kept surrounding her deportation from the United States. She fervently hoped that one of these documents could form the basis for an appeal of her case. This carefully preserved file included receipts for the extra packets of instant oatmeal she'd purchased from the prison commissary and copies of the prescriptions for Xanax sympathetic infirmary nurses prescribed to her while she awaited her deportation. For the unlettered, all of these illegible documents were potentially powerful.

The role of writing in the security committee's actions underscores their ambiguous relationship to the state. Their very existence critiques state incompetency, and yet their actions imitate the state's reliance on the symbolic power of writing. While in a bureaucracy, files are ideally used for record keeping and as a repository of institutional memory, here the use of writing was predominantly performative. Being forced to publically sign a document was an act of power itself, and often formed the prelude to more violent physical coercion. Once that document existed, knowledge of its existence took on a life of its own. In his analysis of vigilantism Robert Gordon writes, "The public inscription of the body of the culpable signifies the power of the vigilante" (2004: 362). By public inscription, Gordon means corporeal punishment. However, in *Todos Santos* the *acta*, a written description of the crime followed by a pledge by the wrongdoer to desist, or else, typically precedes or accompanies the beating that

literally inscribes the body of the accused. Tellingly, while the first administration of leaders were not literate and could not read the *actas* they ordered created, the next two security administrations were headed up by “maestros,” members of the first generation of men to receive an education in the village.

Apart from writing, another feature that comes out in Mateo’s account is the importance of fashion. Clothes were a major target of these actions. As Mateo recounted the youths’ response: “but you [old people] don’t need to keep up with the latest fashions.” The situation sounds like a classic generation gap, one in which petulant teens use outlandish fashions to create an oppositional identity through consumption. In the context of the postwar Mayan village, this eruption of youth insolence was experienced as utterly unprecedented. In Mateo’s account as well as later in Juan Pablo’s narrative, there is slippage between fashion as their crime and the violence attributed to them. When the security committee confiscates their gear, they take their knives and their knit caps: the two items gain equivalence in this list. Similarly, in Juan’s *charla* below he equates tattoos with murderousness. In these accounts the youthful violation of fashion norms is equated with violence. Unsurprisingly, the violence enacted against these youth targets their clothes. In other versions of the confrontation in the town square that Mateo described, people mentioned that the security committee cut the youth’s baggy pants into shreds. Effectively turning their pants into skirts, elders then taunted the youth by calling them “women.” Along these lines, that same year some longer-locked young men found themselves cornered on dark streets by the security committee and forced to undergo haircuts while being subjected to homophobic slurs. In these accounts, fashion that does not respect rigid gender norms becomes the youths’ crime. Looking like a gangster is tantamount to being a gangster.

As Mateo's narrative of gang repression continued, even the public stripping and dunking had no effect on the recalcitrant gangsters. The *mise en scene* of the next confrontation moves to the outskirts of town, where the town's waste water spills into the Río Limon. The young men were then forced to drink sewage water. According to Mateo, drinking raw sewage "was the only medicine that could cure them." When he said this he laughed and then repeated the words, "the only medicine," seemingly pleased with his turn of phrase. It was not, however, an original metaphor for vigilante violence. In South Africa the founder of the massive vigilante organization Mapogo a Mathamaga often refers to their physically coercive actions as medicine, boasting "my medicine is never wasted" (Gordon 2004:363). In this metaphor, criminalized acts constitute a disease in the body politic that can only be eradicated by violent means.

Likewise, the youthful rebels of Todos Santos were seen as a blight on the body politic. Tellingly, in this Mesoamerican agricultural community, comparisons to milpa agriculture informed the metaphors most commonly applied to social disorder. Milpa refers to the Mesoamerican agricultural system in which maize, beans and squash are planted together. In this logic, violent youth were like weeds that needed to be cut down, just like when you weed the milpa. As Marcelina told me emphatically in the aftermath of another youth scandal, "These sprouts are like weeds, like the scrub, you need to cut out the bad parts so the good parts can grow" (fieldnotes, August 6, 2011). This agricultural metaphor underscores the youth's real crime: non-productivity. Just as non-productive weeds can choke the food-producing plants in the milpa, these youth were seen as unproductive parasites. As Juan Pablo put it above, inactivity birthed the gangs: "The young people went [to the States] and they weren't working every day, just a few days a week, and that's when the gangs started." Later he returned to this point about the relationship between relative privilege, familial support and gang formation: "the young

people weren't thinking about money, because they already had a roof over their head, a place to live."

If for Mateo raw sewage was "medicine," in the South African cases Gordon discusses, flogging is the main prescription. Flogging also took place along the river banks of the Río Limon, where fathers were forced to beat their sons with belts. If they refused, they too were forced to drink raw sewage. This description of vigilantism has much in common with accounts of similar actions in South Africa, where vigilantes also force parents to beat their children in public. Both contexts rely upon the public spectacle: there is a need for "a huge crowd looking on." Corporal punishment is the main event of this spectacle, such as dumping the denuded gangsters in the fountain in the middle of town, or the forced flogging by family members.

The homophobic and misogynist slurs, the laughter in the face of brutality, sewage as medicine, flogging and lynching as weeding; this is an account punctuated by nastiness, a nastiness that Juan Pablo understandably omits in his defense of his group to the visiting human rights advocates. This latent potential for violent nastiness recalls Partha Chatterjee's conception of political society (2004). Chatterjee created this category as a critique of the limitations of the notion of civil society propounded by the likes of Jurgen Habermas and Charles Taylor. Civil society, Chatterjee argues, is limited to a small proportion of the populace, property-owning elites who live within walled enclaves. Most of the world, he argues, operates in the world of political society. These groups are defined not as citizens with rights but as populations that must be governed, and as such become the targets of policy. Chatterjee asserts that the job of political society is to take the categories assigned to them from above and invest them with moral content. In Todos Santos this moral content comes from below, from older currents, containing competing conceptions of personhood that have informed and sustained the alterity of this

excluded population in constantly reinvented traditions ever since the conquest. As Juan Pablo concludes his charla below, this moral content, his attempt to rescue obligations in the face of an onslaught of rights, comes to the fore.

## Two Laws

Back on the hotel porch that afternoon during the whirlwind visit of the U.S. immigration advocates, clouds closed in on the village. The hammering of construction overhead and the yammering of street vendors below punctuate Juan Pablo's monologue. While he was talking Carol abruptly got up and then reappeared shortly thereafter: later she told me she'd gone to hide the wine bottles we'd emptied over a long chatty dinner in the communal kitchen the night before. She had heard a lot about the repressive actions of the security committee from her clients, and was concerned that there would be repercussions if their leader realized that we were violating the dry law. She had forgotten about the hotel menu posted on the wall of the kitchen, one that listed prices for wine, beer and shots of rum for your hot chocolate. The hotel proprietor, however, had not. I later learned that she was having a nervous fit downstairs during the interview, terrified that Juan Pablo would find out she was still selling alcohol to tourists. Fortunately Juan Pablo, who was focused on his presentation, did not seem to notice. As he continued,

The gangs were broken up, but they still exist, it's not like they completely disappeared. The problem is when a lot of them come back, like for example, during the feria... they make a stronger group. It's like a soccer team putting in its best players.

When Juan made this soccer analogy, he chuckled for a moment, before turning serious again and adding, "They kill, they have no fear. But now there is a barrier in between them, and that barrier is the security committee."

Juan's use of a soccer game analogy to describe the town's competing male sodalities is telling. When Juan Pablo spoke earlier about the "idea" of the gangs, he claimed that the youths' idea was "who could make the stronger group." In his analogy, the security committee acts as the referee, a barrier between them. But really, more often they seemed to act as an adversary, and their idea at its base was the same: who could make the stronger group. People admired the first security committee because they did make a stronger group: they used pseudo-legal procedures (the *actas*) and violent coercion to do so.<sup>2</sup>

Practice theory has a tradition of discussing social action in terms of "serious games" (Bourdieu 1990, Ortner 1996, 2006). If all of social life can be seen as the interaction of acting human subjects and the larger structures that enable, define and constrain them, then the game metaphor suggests an appropriate relationship between these two entities. Actors have agency, but one constrained by the rules of the game and enacted on an uneven playing field. By way of example, Ortner cites "the game of power and authority we would call patriarchy" (1996:15). Clearly this game of vigilantes versus gangsters is one of these, an intergenerational struggle between men over male dominance, or "who can make the stronger group." As they are in recreational sports, in this town that boasts a men's soccer league and only one women's basketball team, women are largely sidelined in this game. They attended security meetings and contributed money, but almost never participated in patrols or leadership positions.

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<sup>2</sup> By the time Juan was in charge, the committee was in the midst of being sued by the towns remaining liquor vendors for violating their basic human rights. This legal threat made them more hesitant to undertake further actions that were clearly illegal. In the eyes of many this newfound prudence had "weakened" them.

Closely related to the idea of the serious game is that of the project. Both of the teams in this game had attached themselves to distinct cultural projects, one that looked to an idealized past where aging led to enhanced social status, and another that glorified youth and individual expression through fashion. Juan Pablo describes how these competing projects have been informed by differing relationships to the experience of transnational migration.

I can say that the leaders of these groups, these young people had been to the United States. They worked in the United States, maybe they were considered war orphans, poor people looking for a better future... We need to, what do you call it, legalize. But the result is when they come here it's like they have two nationalities, Guatemalan and American, so in Guatemala they can do anything they want, they can kill, and these kids turned up with tattoos of their organizations, and already there had been some deaths, and this was the result of them being protected there and then they come back here and bring violence with them. We've had more problems with young people who have gone to the United States. We've been an object of aggression for them, these young people who've gone to the United States. We don't know why they do this. Because the laws of Guatemala say that you can organize, in a voluntary and peaceful way, but some young people oppose this, even though the situation is calm, it's better. Everyone who's 50, 60 years old is thankful that there's a change in Todos Santos. But with young people between 20 and 30, there are 30% who don't accept it.

Here he refers to critics who point out that their organization is extralegal. One young man had recently had the temerity to do so at a public meeting. While in this conversation Juan Pablo claims that "the laws of Guatemala say that you can organize," in fact, as he admitted privately, this was a legally ambiguous point in Guatemala. While the postwar Guatemalan constitution gave its indigenous population the right to practice their "culture," it declined to explicitly spell out if judicial autonomy fell under the category of "culture." Likewise, police reforms after the war legalized community policing. But the relationship between local security committees and the police was informal and uncodified: as Juan well knew, their legal status was a major point of contention. However, just as older migrants used the argument that "you can't form groups like

that,” to attack the gangs, younger men also used their experience in the United States to make the same argument against vigilantism.

Interestingly, both groups of men had been to the United States and drew upon this experience in public discourse. However, there was a clear generational difference in what this experience had meant to them. Many members of the vigilante leadership had been able to go to the United States on tourist visas, arranged either with the help of legalized family members or sympathetic tourists. Less privileged men their age crossed repeatedly without papers in the early 1990s and worked numerous seasons as agricultural laborers following the fruit harvests from Oregon to Florida. However, what Gilberto Rosas (2011) has called “the thickening of the border” has changed the migration experience dramatically, as increased surveillance and harsher enforcement have made border crossing prohibitively expensive and risky. As a result, younger migrants tended to do longer stints abroad, learning more English and acculturating much more than their elders whose long term projects always remain rooted in Todos Santos. While Juan Pablo assumes that this generation’s legal education came about through legalization and the asylum process, in fact just as many of the youthful opponents he calls gangsters returned to Todos Santos because they were deported. But as I suggest in Chapter Five, this experience with illegality in the United States also provides an education in rights and due process that inspires people to challenge the imposition of popular justice.

### **Relationship to Official Justice**

Juan concludes by talking about his group’s relationship to the official justice system. Mayors traditionally acted as de facto judges in rural areas where state presence was thin. Previous mayoral administrations played a key role in founding and supporting the security committee. The current mayor, however, had a much more ambivalent relationship to vigilantism, especially

when it came to their efforts to prohibit alcohol sales. The national police and a justice of the peace also staffed offices in the town. Justices of the peace are charged with handling minor crimes and they work in coordination with the local police. These positions were all held by non-Mam speaking outsiders who rarely stayed very long in these positions. The relationship between official and unofficial justice was one that varied over time: unlike previous administrations, Juan's was unprecedentedly conciliatory with state officials, seeking to work in coalition with them. By the end of his term, the police and the security committee started patrolling together. As his example below suggests, sometimes the security committee acted as an intermediary between locals and the official justice system:

We need to do this because a lot of people are counting on us, they trust us, and they don't trust the justice of the peace, they trust us more. But we don't have a background in legal matters, so we ask for help from the judge and the mayor. We talked to the judge today because there are some siblings here who want to kill each other over a property dispute. But that's how the system is in Guatemala, you have to fill out a lot of forms, and let a lot of days pass, but meanwhile the situation the people are in doesn't wait, and then sometimes there's violence. But that's a problem around the world, right?

Juan cites the popular stereotype of bureaucratic inefficiency: you have to fill out a lot of forms and wait. The security committee in contrast offered more efficient, speedier action (even if this action also entailed written documentation). Every security committee and each mayor disagreed about what exactly the security committee was responsible for. Many thought previous committees overstepped their bounds when they intervened "in family matters" like infidelity, child-support payments or wife-beating. The alcohol ban only deepened this alienation. Critics complained that they were being punished and fined for things that were not illegal under Guatemalan national law.

These decisions, about what is their mandate and what is not, were intensely debated, wildly inconsistent, and varied according to the preferences of whomever happened to be in

power at the time. According to the current mayor, the security committee had two priorities: keeping out thieves and keeping kids out of gangs. According to Juan Pablo and his board of directors, the security committee had three priorities: stopping thieves and gangs *and* stamping out alcohol. Juan opined that generally it was better to stay out of property disputes, because they were too complicated and messy. Really, he said, land issues were something the justice of the peace should deal with. They had only gotten involved in the one he mentioned to prevent the embittered siblings from killing each other.

Witchcraft represented another contentious issue. Some security committees at the hamlet level intervened in witchcraft cases. In one community an older woman was lashed for putting serpents in the intestines of her neighbors. Juan for one refused to hear these cases when people brought them to the meeting of the board of directors on market day. He considered witchcraft decidedly beyond their jurisdiction: you can only fight witchcraft with witchcraft, he argued. All of these inconsistencies point to the incredible challenge of running an ad hoc justice system that is short on institutional memory and legal codification. Juan spoke wistfully of how he liked to talk to older men because they had experience and good ideas, but many men from this generation had perished in the war. Juan's own godfather was one such war casualty. I often had the sense while talking to security leaders that they were making it up as they went along. This meant for people locally that they never knew where they stood, what was legal or illegal, punishable or condonable, from one administration or even from one day to the next.

Most people distinguished between *la ley del pueblo* (village law) and *una ley grande* (big law). Getting the official justice system involved meant playing the game of big law: this required money for lawyers, Spanish fluency and a certain cultural savvy. Thus many Todosanteros preferred to take their problems to the security committee, because, as Juan put it,

“they trust us more.” There problems could be resolved in Mam on the same day and with minimal expense. For example, for many women obtaining child support payments from wayward fathers was a pressing issue. Some praised the local security committees for effectively dealing with this problem. La Seguridad had the power of social pressure and shaming on their side. Parents of men who had migrated were forced to give some of the remittance money they received to support their grandchildren. Other women scoffed at the efficacy of the security committee, saying that while they could arrange a few payments, if you wanted something long term and backed by the force of law, working through the justice of the peace was preferable.

Where exactly was the law located in this landscape of uneven and fragmented sovereignty? What did people even mean when they referred to “law”? Apart from local law and national law, the role of U.S. law in the subjectification of local youth loomed large in Juan’s account. Another recurring theme in this account is his connection of law and violence. When we left him, he had just been speaking about the siblings threatening to kill each other over a property dispute: “meanwhile the situation the people are in doesn’t wait, and then sometimes there’s violence.” As he continued,

But many times the government itself, the laws themselves, makes this happen. The very same ones. For example, universal rights, global rights are to blame for this. And there are a lot of people who are in the United States and come to Todos Santos and they’re excellent, they’re respectful. They talk about laws and how they work in the United States and it’s nice talking to them about this. It’s nice when they talk.

It seemed for a moment that he was referencing his present company, the anthropologist and the visiting lawyers capable of speaking at great length about how the law works in theory in a country where rule of law is largely respected. But in his next statement Juan makes it clear he is also talking about Ted and Carol’s clients.

But there's a small group, a group of troublemakers that say one thing one minute and change their minds ten minutes later. They make me sad, I'm a little sad for these kids. And the main thing is they know two laws, American law and Guatemalan law. So what happens is they say that there are no laws, that they want to implement their own law.

The stakes of the game here seem to be law: who has a legitimate claim on the law, community elders on the security committee or young people who use their exposure to U.S. law to criticize them? There is a slippage between law and violence in his account: the law becomes the right to punish with impunity. Juan Pablo nears his conclusion by returning to the theme of obligation.

So our work as Guatemalans, as Todosanteros, is to safeguard order. Some people say we do this work voluntarily, but no, as others have said, we do this because we're obligated. Juan was referencing an earlier conversation held at a security meeting about policing the fiesta that year. Some of the men had decided that the security committee should carry ropes so they could tie up the wrongdoers they came across. Others argued that this seemed like an unnecessarily repressive measure. In the course of the discussion an advocate for the ropes made an impassioned speech that impressed Juan greatly. Reportedly the man said, "They say that we are volunteers, but we are not volunteers. We are obligated to take care of and protect the village." Juan warmed to this notion of obligation: it connected what they were doing as the ad hoc, secular security committee to a much longer history of community service and mutual aid. Through this service, men gained the right to speak, to express an opinion in community affairs. I wondered if the problem with the troublemakers was not so much what they said, but that they spoke at all, as both youth and recently returned migrants they had yet to earn the right to speak, much less to criticize their elders.

Juan concluded his talk by saying,

And that is my small (sic) introduction. As Elena has realized, in Todos Santos there are no thieves, there are no bandits, but in Guatemala and other parts you always have to be

careful, don't go out after nine, and this is the advice I'd like to give you. Thank you very much.

This conclusion draws attention to an important point about the context in which Guatemala's rural security committees must be understood. People were very aware of skyrocketing rates of homicide, theft and extortion in Guatemala's capital. Although only a dozen newspapers rode the bus up the mountain to the village every day, the community radio station carefully translated national crime stories during lulls in programming. Thus everyone had access to headlines like, "Seven gunned down at disco in Zone 18 of the capital" or "Headless corpse found in ravine." People often had to run errands in the capital: many Todosanteros had become crime victims themselves. I collected many stories about nicked wallets, stolen shoes, purloined backpacks and snatched gold chains. Every time I had to travel myself every one of my acquaintance warned me to beware of the dangers of travel, just as Juan warned Ted and Carol in this instance: "be very careful." In this context, outsiders were regarded with suspicion, like the strangers who tried to pass off counterfeit bills in the town. People had the sense that they were living under siege, trying to maintain their community as a bastion of safety against the perceived violence and chaos of Guatemala's capital city (Williams 1975).

## **Conclusion**

In Todos Santos there is a power struggle between two groups of men roughly broken down into those who came of age during the war and those born after. Despite this generational difference, both men use critiques learned in the United States in their efforts to delegitimize each other. Elders latch onto an anti-gang discourse to discredit local youth. Their repressive actions gain national and transnational support in larger ideologies of *mano dura*, broken windows and ideologies of community policing. Youth likewise criticize the security committee as an illegal

organization. In effect both are saying “you can’t form groups like that.” Both rely upon instrumental violence to impose their will. But while youth are said to be violent, and sometimes they are, their crime as much as anything seems to be their transnationally-inspired fashion along with a willingness to publically criticize their elders. Across a range of historical contexts vigilantes cite the need to fight crime as their motivation; however, crime and criminality are culturally constructed concepts. In this case, the transnationalism of youth who came of age in the United States goes a long way in constituting their crime.

Literature on vigilantism suggests that they create simulacra of state bureaucracies, an observation that holds true in this case as well. Here the simulation of state power is signaled by the use of writing as an instrument of domination. Prior to the imposition of force, vigilante action takes the form of writing. This writing is more performative than functional: the act of forcing someone to sign a document seems more significant than the content of the document itself. Afterward, public knowledge of the existence of this usually inaccessible document gives it an enduring power.

The term “law” comes up continually in Juan Pablo’s public presentation of the movement he led. There are many laws in the account, and he argues for the legitimacy of the law he and his fellow patrollers impose. He legitimizes this law through a discourse of obligation. This talk of obligation, of caring for the village, evokes the history of customary law traditionally practiced in Mayan villages excluded from the national polity. There have been many postwar efforts to revitalize the use of *derecho maya*, or Maya law. Legal experts argue is that *derecho maya* is rarely punitive; rather it focuses on restitution in order to restore order and harmony (Esquit and Ochoa 1995). Sometimes security actions did focus on restitution, when they, for example, ordered perpetrators pay their victim’s medical bills. However, for the most

part “law” is used in this conversation as a synonym for the right to use force without punishment. According to Juan Pablo, the problem with the youth is they want to implement their own law, and then there is violence. Both teams in this masculine game have their own law, but this law is foundationally tied to violence, to the right to use violent force with impunity.

Ted and Carol received Juan Pablo’s defense of the security committee he led with a certain level of skepticism. They seemed unhappy to hear that many of the seemingly innocent victims they had defended were perceived as violent provocateurs in their hometown. In the question and answer session that followed his charla, Ted pressed Juan Pablo to describe his involvement with the civil patrols during the war. Like all Mayan men who stayed in the village during the war, Juan had participated. Afterward Ted claimed that at one point in discussing the civil patrols, Juan had switched from using “they” to “we” to describe their actions. He seemed to be suggesting that Juan Pablo was more complicit in the civil patrol’s repressive actions than he cared to admit. After this encounter I also observed the attorneys checking out what Juan Pablo had said with others in town. “Juan Pablo says there’s no crime here. Is that really true?” Ted inquired of a shopkeeper. “Oh yeah,” the man replied, “things are so bad here that if you stole something you’d probably get lynched” (fieldnotes, January 11, 2011).

The visitors also expressed surprise at the Marxist-inspired class analysis that informed Juan Pablo’s view of Guatemalan history as the struggle of the poor to resist exploitation by the rich. In their years of arguing asylum cases, clear distinctions had to be made between Marxist insurgents and the state-funded paramilitaries. On the ground, these categories were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Many former guerrilleros or guerrilla sympathizers participated in the civil patrol system. In reconstituted civil patrols like La Seguridad, former guerrilleros and former civil patrollers banded together to battle the village’s unruly youth. Although these

groups were once separated by competing political projects, despite this difference in theory, there had never been any difference the way these projects were implemented. Both relied on militarism, hierarchy, male dominance and the use of violent force.

We live in a historical moment where examples of authoritarian politics abound. Rights to habeas corpus and due process are routinely suspended in Guantanamo Bay, U.S. immigrant detention centers and in the “states of emergency” Guatemalan presidents regularly declare in rotating trouble spots across the country. Many anthropologists have turned to Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben to explain why putative democracies so easily slip into dictatorships for those deemed undeserving of protection (e.g., Comaroff 2010, DeGenova 2010, Ticktin 2005). Agamben (1998) reframes sovereign power as the right to kill without punishment. He bases his definition of sovereignty on Carl Schmitt’s claim that “sovereign is he who decides on the state of exception.” In a state of exception, the law only applies to the exceptional case by no longer applying.

While Weberian and Foucauldian frameworks presume a strong nation-state, Agamben’s work allows for the analysis of de facto sovereignty, or, “the ability to kill, punish, and discipline with impunity wherever it is found and practiced” (Hansen and Stepputat 2006:296). Using this flexible framework, it becomes possible to spot sovereign power and the state of exception everywhere. Not only is it evident in the local politics of Mayan villages, but also in the project that informs the other side of this battle in Juan Pablo’s schema, asylum law. In a context of ever more punitive immigration politics, asylum law itself works through a politics of exceptionalism, as each applicant must prove the exceptional circumstances that make them a deserving subject of protection. Recently some have started to question the dominance of this theoretical trend that privileges the search for sovereignty over other more liberatory forms of politics (Jennings

2011). Miriam Ticktin writes that although it is easy to find examples of law “reduced to little more than a means of exercising force,” it is important to distinguish between the discovery of “empirical correlates” to Schmitt’s theory without signing on to his larger authoritarian political project (Ticktin 2005: 349).

So while the “empirical correlates” are certainly there in this case of “the law” reduced to the right to use violence with impunity, by pointing to this pattern it is not my intention to naturalize it. As others have observed, vigilante justice movements frequently arise in countries formerly subjected to authoritarian military rule (Smith 2004). Popular rationales for both vigilantism and military rule are remarkably similar and collective memory of this past history helps to explain public acceptance of violent action. Linda Green (2013) recently made a similar point at a workshop on contemporary politics in Guatemala at the Latin American Studies Association meetings. She argued that impunity represents the long lasting legacy of the unsuccessfully implemented peace accords. This impunity not limited to the national level, where war criminals serve in congress and win the presidency, but permeates local level politics as well.

### Chapter Three: GANGS

*[The Mara Salvatrucha] is the most violent gang in America...It has 10,000 foot soldiers in the U.S., spreading its brutal ways across 33 states...And now it's going international, fueled by migration across the Western hemisphere, leaving its bloody mark from Central [America] to the American heartland...Police in a half dozen countries struggle to crack its code and decipher its methods.*

– World's Most Dangerous Gang (documentary) (quoted in Zilberg 2011:1)

*It's like that broom. I could say it's a bad broom, but it's just a broom.*

– Chentin, alleged gang leader (interview, March 21, 2011)

“Your ship has hit a rock and it's sinking, and your lifeboat will only hold three people. Who will you sacrifice?” The participants at the anti-lynching education workshop were shifting around awkwardly in their newly formed groups. They were a sampling of municipal workers, community leaders, legal aid workers, journalists and radio announcers. In other words, they represented “civil society” and as such they had been targeted for this “civic education” program. Each person had been given a slip of paper with an identity written on it: *marinero, maestro, prostituta, juez, fiscal, policia* and *marero* (sailor, teacher, prostitute, judge, prosecutor, police officer and gangster). They were given a few minutes to make their decision before a representative reported back to the full group. One group saved the prostitute (the only noun gendered as female in the list), “because women give life,” as well as the teacher, “because our children are the future.” Another group said that they were going to sacrifice the prostitute and the gangster first, but then they thought better of it, “because all human life is valuable.” Alicia, the Ministry of Justice worker charged with facilitating this “ice breaker,” intervened at this

point, addressing the group gathered in a spacious conference room at an upscale Panajachel hotel:

Great, that was the point of this activity. That's what all groups say at first, sacrifice the gangster and the prostitute. But in the universal declaration of human rights the first right is the right to life, no matter what your age, gender, religion, profession, we're all human beings. Why does organized crime grow? That's something we should all be motivated to think about. Those of us who are here have the benefit of being born into supportive families, we feel like we belong to a group, we're part of a community, we belong. Who joins a gang? A lack of belonging, of food, of housing, that's what makes people seek out gangs. We here in this room are privileged: with the majority of Guatemalans, that's not the case (fieldnotes, September 7, 2012).

I start with this moment in which a group of non-indigenous bureaucrats from the capital seek to educate an ethnically mixed group of citizens in the predominantly indigenous state of Sololá about the undesirability of lynching to highlight two points. First, this interaction underscores the stigmatizing power of the word *marero*: “That’s what all groups say at first, sacrifice the marero.”<sup>3</sup> Unlike the female sex worker, the marero cannot be redeemed by the sanctity of motherhood. Instead, the marero label targets youth for incarceration and deportation in the United States, while back in their Central American counties of origin, it marks them for death. The second theme that emerges in Alicia’s comment is the conventional wisdom used to explain this phenomenon: gangs are caused by the broken family. Alicia was even more explicit on this point the second time I heard her conduct this activity: “We’re in a select group, we grew up in a family with love, in a nuclear family...if we talk to psychologists, we learn that [criminals] come from broken families, they’re in the street when they 5 years old, and they don’t have the opportunity to go to school” (fieldnotes, September 8, 2012).

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<sup>3</sup> Marero is derived from mara, and the origin of the word is debated. Some say it may have come from the name of a horror movie about ants (Rodgers 2009): others credit Salvadoran slang for “the masses” (Ward 2012). Whatever the word’s origin, in Central America the term “mara” had largely replaced “pandilla” to talk about gangs.

Many social scientists have remarked upon this tendency to blame the individual, in this case the individual family, for social problems like lynching (Girón 2007), youth gangs (Pine 2008) and violent crime (Thomas 2009). This tendency has only become more pronounced with the rise of self-responsibilizing discourses that are ideologically central to neoliberal economic reforms. Contrary to Foucault's prediction that "free markets" would coincide with more trust in the self-regulating individual, market liberalization has coincided with draconian policing policies known as "zero tolerance." Based on the "broken windows" philosophy of policing, in this approach the first symptom of disorder must be treated harshly. It is a shift from preventative to proactive policing. Gang abatement policies, which criminalize certain gestures, whistling and the wearing of certain colors, represent a key piece of these tough-on-crime policies. Elana Zilberg, in her analysis of the "transnational gang crisis" that connects the United States to Central America, observes that these policies both criminalize a wide range of behaviors and hold transgressors wholly responsible for their fate. As Zilberg clarifies, "This is not to say that gang youth are not agents in their own demonization, criminalization and elimination: indeed they are. However, neoliberal security discourses and practices displace *all* agency onto gang youths and their families" (2011:9, emphasis in original).

This chapter, a portrait of several alleged gang members in Todos Santos, is dedicated to representing this fine line between being "agents in their own demonization" and the effects of the community's displacement of all agency onto these men. This narrow focus on individual pathology makes wider structural forces drop out of sight. While I focus on several individuals who either resist or embrace the label "marero," my intention is to relate these individual choices and experiences to the larger social context that circumscribes them. These changes include the replacement of unionized jobs with contingent labor, the predominance of punitive approaches to

social problems like undocumented immigration and crime control, and the reworking of patriarchal power in the face of these changes.

Calling someone a marero is so instantly vilifying in Guatemala that using this term to talk about the vulnerable group of young men who are the subjects of this chapter gives me pause. This label marks them as expendable, as worthy of lynching. Several of them have survived lynching attempts already. The marero label renders these attacks unworthy of investigation or even much comment, except for the observation that they had it coming. But what is a mara or a marero for that matter? An industry of policing and security experts has emerged over the past few decades to weigh in on who and what counts, how to identify them, and how to squash them. In the transnational discourse of mainstream criminology, gangs are a well-organized, centralized, internationally connected threat. In the “outside agitator” theory of gang formation (Hagedorn 2008), gangs started on the streets of Los Angeles before they were deported to Central America after immigration laws became more punitive over the course of the 1990s.

Todos Santos security committee leader Juan Pablo referenced this narrative when he described the origins of gangs in his town: “First came the Salvatrucha, from Los Angeles, then the Mara 18.” When Todosanteros talk about the problem with local youth in Mam Maya, they use the word “mara.” The alternative, *klopj*, which could mean any kind of group, from a flock of sheep to a church congregation, lacks the same specifying force. While Juan Pablo is right about the geographic origins of the gang names that the youth of the town have borrowed, very few of young men he considered gangsters had ever lived in Los Angeles, where the Todosantero community is relatively small. While the town’s young men borrowed their baggy fashions and

elaborate handshakes from America's urban ghettos, they in fact represented a largely homegrown, localized phenomenon.

At first I thought the loosely organized, recreational, highly imitative "maras" of Todos Santos were an aberration, that they were poseur gangsters unlike the "real" ones that rule the marginalized zones of the nation's capital. For one thing, the young men associated with them are relatively privileged and relatively well-educated: most are the sons of locally prominent families. This is in contrast to the prevailing logic that gangs are made up of the children of the underclass who suffer from, as Alicia put it, "A lack of belonging, of food, of housing." However, the relative privilege of these youth is after all relative. The small aperture that created their parent's generation of bilingual schoolteachers and petty bourgeois professionals is quickly closing. Just as middle class parents in the United States find their efforts to pass on their class status to their children increasingly thwarted (Ehrenreich 1998, Ortner 2006), rapidly shrinking livelihood options hamper class reproduction even more dramatically in the far more precarious context of rural Guatemala.

While there are noteworthy differences in the backgrounds of the youth Todosanteros consider mareros and their counterparts in Los Angeles, Oakland, Tegucigalpa or Guatemala City, similar underlying circumstances have brought this particular form of oppositional youth identity to the fore at this particular historical moment. The biographies of the so-called gangsters profiled below reveal a consistently troubled relationship to wage labor and to status, recognition and esteem in the community through venues other than youth gangs. Many justifications for patriarchal dominance center upon men's roles as breadwinners: economically providing for a family constitutes the cornerstone of adult male identity in Latin America and beyond (Bourgeois 2003, Safa 1995, Walter et al 2004). Larger trends glossed as the shift to a

service economy or the feminization of labor have left this particular form of masculinity in “crisis.” Assuming economic responsibility for a family is increasingly out of reach for growing numbers of men around the globe. Rather than rework what it means to be a man out of whole cloth, many young men have chosen to elaborate aspects of machismo, a hard-drinking, womanizing variant of masculinity. Instead of valorizing the role of the responsible husband and father, they emphasize loyalty to the group, the willingness to fight in the defense of territory, and the ability to withstand pain. In addition to the pursuit of violence, the pursuit of women seems to form an equally important a part of this reworked male identity.

The answer to the question “Do maras exist in Todos Santos?” depends on whom you ask. But beyond the issue of the authenticity of these local youth groups, what does the term *marero*, at once a model, an identity and a behavior, do for people? For the vigilante leaders, as I argued in the previous chapter, claiming that the town has a mara problem gives them a *raison d’être* and justifies their violently repressive actions. Given these conditions, it seems counterintuitive that young people continue to gravitate towards this scapegoated identity. Yet that is precisely what has happened in multiple locales throughout the corridor that connects Central America to California, where zero tolerance policing and youth gangs flourish in a dysfunctional dialectic. Most of my interlocutors denied the gang label, and yet it continued to stick to them. Here as elsewhere, playing with this label put their lives in danger. But inevitably there was an upside to this identification too: imitating mareros garnered them the admiration and respect of their peers and juniors and it gave them multiple opportunities for hedonism freed from the limits of the fiesta cycle. In what follows I delineate the dance around the marero label and illustrate the work that this floating signifier does across a range of contexts.

## Before Security

When I first started visiting Todos Santos in 2003 the streets were full of adolescent boys. They clustered on corners, ineptly smoking cigarettes, cracking jokes in cracking voices. One on one, they were unthreatening undersized youth in comically oversized pants. En masse was another matter. I remember trying to go for a walk one day and finding the bridge out of town blocked by dozens of adolescent boys. One demanded money for the crossing: the rest laughed at his impudence. I gave up and turned around. “Putá!” (whore) one called out after me. More laughter followed. People described the gangs as an annoyance, and this experience gave me a glimpse at what they were talking about.

Incidents of youth violence punctuate my sketchy fieldnotes from this time. That Easter I was on my way back from a celebration in another community. We were packed into the back of a truck winding its way around the mountain when suddenly the whole crowd surged forward, pressing me against the front. Kids were fighting each other at the back of the truck bed. One grabbed an overhead beam and swung with his booted feet at another kid’s face. When we finally arrived in town and I stepped over long red smears of fresh blood on the floorboards of the truck.

There was no doubt—the kids were a nuisance and sometimes they were violent. It was also clear that there were at least two groups of them, one in the center of town and the other in the surrounding neighborhoods. These neighborhoods had longstanding rivalries well before the word “mara” ever reached Todos Santos. Men now in their 50s complain that when they were young they weren’t allowed to court girls who lived in the rival neighborhood, but in this case it was older women rather than their peers who ran them off. By the late 1990s these pre-existing divisions solidified into gang turf lines.

When the security committee formed to “break up” the gangs in 2004, many people were happy to see them go. Older people were fed up with streets full of broken beer bottles, or of getting robbed when they passed out drunk in public. Younger men were tired of constantly being on guard for a fight, while young women were weary of street harassment. Limited mobility was a recurring theme in accounts of this time: people described being afraid to walk around at night when the gangs roamed freely. Ultimately they replaced one kind of restriction of movement with another. When people described their newfound surveillance by the security committee, especially young people who were questioned about being on the street at night, they were matter of fact about it. Things were so much better, almost everyone seemed to agree, even if you now had to explain to a patrol of your elders why an errand had taken you out after sunset.

### **“The Gangs Don’t Exist”**

When I first moved to town I rented a house in a neighborhood called Los Ramos. Only later did I realize that my house was in the heart of what was considered red gang turf. The house had been built by a woman who lived in Oakland, but because she did not have papers she was rarely in Guatemala. In order to enter, you had to walk through her parents’ family compound a level below, so there were no secrets about my comings and goings or those of my guests. Around this time vigilante leader Juan Pablo started visiting me. I soon discovered that the antipathy he expressed for many of the youth of the town was not one sided. Anselmo, my 30 year old neighbor, appeared on my patio on a pretext one day. Ostensibly he was switching some hoses around, but the real point of his visit seemed to be to deliver the following message: “Juan Pablo may seem nice, but he’s violent.” My interest piqued, I asked him if I could interview him.

Anselmo first went to the United States in the late 1990s. He applied for political asylum and received it, which allowed him to go back and forth between the two countries. Now in long periods of under and un-employment since the 2008 crash, he was spending more time in Todos Santos. When Anselmo appeared on my patio at the appointed time, I explained my research and then asked point blank about the existence of the gangs. He responded with a demurral:

I grew up in this and I was never a gang member. Security started because of the gangs, but they really don't know the definition. Sure there are gangs in Huehuetenango, in Xela, and in the capital, but not here. And while [security] started with the gangs they soon got involved in other things, like intervening in domestic violence, in debt repayment, in punishing people who have lovers, in alcohol, making justice their own way. The thing is that in none of these areas did they take the constitution into consideration. They just kept on taking over more space (interview, December 10, 2010).

Around the time I had this conversation, two U.S. based immigration advocates were planning a visit to the village (see Chapter Two), which Anselmo knew. He had worked as a volunteer translator at Ted's office, and knew I'd volunteered there too. Anselmo mentioned that many young people were using evidence of the security committee's abuse of them in their political asylum cases. We both knew that if these youngsters were perceived as "mareros" instead of innocent victims of continued wartime repression, they would not be seen as deserving subjects of asylum.

Anselmo stayed on message in the interviews he granted me: Juan Pablo is a bad man, and there are no gangs here.

The gangs don't exist...Sometimes a group gets together, and they say that we're going to steal or rape, but all they do is talk about work, or talk about their girlfriends. It's really funny to hear what they have to say about their girlfriends (interview, December 14, 2010).

In this comment, Anselmo at first used “they” to refer to the security committee. “They” say that “we” are criminals. But then the “they” becomes the youth who hang out and talk about “their girlfriends.” Understandably he avoided implicating himself in this talk of girlfriends: after all, I lived on his family compound along with his wife and child.

Other neighbors in Anselmo’s age cohort gave similar responses when I asked them about the existence of the gangs. Although no one would ever accuse Fredy of being a marero, he repeated the party line of the youth in this neighborhood when I asked him about the alleged maras: “People from the hamlets say that about us because we’re a big neighborhood and there are lots of young people here, lots of mothers with lots of kids. This thing they say about the maras, it’s not really a mara, it’s just a group of young people” (fieldnotes, September 5, 2011). Gossip about Chentin, on the other hand, often linked him to the leadership of the local mara. When I asked him about the existence of gangs in town, his response echoed Anselmo’s:

So if I go to the store to get something and I see my friends and we hang out and talk, say about their girlfriends, and we sit on the corner and have a few drinks. They say we’re thieves but we’re not. I mean sure sometimes when we’re up in the mountains to cut wood and on the way back down we’re hungry and thirsty, we may take a few peaches or apples from a tree, but that’s it. In gangs you have to leave your home to join them, you have to kill somebody or rape somebody to be in them, and you have to steal things for them (fieldnotes, October 12, 2010).

Chentin creates a stark contrast between the bucolic innocence of rural youth, who dutifully cut wood for their families, mischievously nick a few fruit, and gather to gossip about girls, and the violent criminality of a “real” gang. Press accounts of the violent excesses of these gangs reached us daily, on the national news seen on the TV sets that were increasingly commonplace in the village, as well as in the dozen sensationalistic newspapers that arrived each day and passed through multiple hands before they were recycled for toilet paper. At the time extortion rackets

run by imprisoned gang members were terrorizing public transportation in the capital. Gang underlings demanded protection money from the bus drivers: those who refused to pay were shot dead while driving their route.

Anselmo seemed to have this kind of wider criminal enterprise in mind when I asked him about Ricardo. Ricardo was the reputed founder of the other local gang, the one that took their inspiration from the Mara Salvatrucha. People said he'd killed someone in the States and spent time in jail before his deportation. Rumor also had it that during the fiesta in 2008 he had taken out a hit on Chentin. But instead of killing Chentin, a younger, slighter neighbor turned up dead. Ricardo and his friend Jesus were accused of the crime. Security apprehended them and beat them for several days before handing them over to state authorities, who released them shortly thereafter. Both men were subsequently exiled from the village. When I mentioned Ricardo's name, Anselmo remarked, "He thinks he's a gang leader, but he's not. You have to have a lot of money to be a gang leader. What he is is a person who needs psychological help" (interview, December 14, 2010).

### **"No Me Dan Espacio"**

My informants from Los Ramos were all on the same page: older people may think there are gangs, but they wouldn't know one if they saw one. The one person in town who considered himself a gang leader was purported to be delusional. These so-called gangs were really just young men who liked to hang out together and gossip about their girlfriends. Real gangs are murderous business enterprises. A lack of formal economic opportunities coupled with criminalization had hardened these groups into something more sinister in the capital. However, accounts of social and economic exclusion likewise emerged across the series of conversations I had with the young men of Los Ramos. Born in the early eighties, they had all come of age after

worst of the war. Although they were significantly more educated than their parents, this privilege had not led to more economic opportunities. Instead, they saw doors closing around them everywhere. Anselmo was especially given to spatial metaphors when he described his predicament: while the security committee was continually “taking over more space,” they steadfastly refused to give him any. As he put it on more than one occasion, “No me dan espacio.”

This denial of opportunity went farther than the actions of the Mayan leaders of the security committee. Although the war significantly eroded the power of local Ladinos (non-indigenous Guatemalans), one place in town that remained a Ladino stronghold was the local middle school. As Anselmo described the employment situation, “they’re all related and they only let each other in” (interview December 14, 2013). One day he’d seen this group of teachers on the street, and he approached them and offered to teach English classes for free at the school. According to Anselmo, they just kept on walking as if he hadn’t spoken at all.

Fredy was one of a handful of Mayans employed by the middle school, but he was paid so poorly that he ended up quitting. He had been the first person in his family to get an education, but the degree he received, by his own account, turned out to be next to useless. When he and his mother had gone to the department capital to enroll him in high school, they discovered they’d missed the deadline for the program that certified people to become teachers. They enrolled him at another school that offered a degree in management. This degree allowed him to teach classes at the middle school on a contract basis, but he was ineligible for permanent, unionized teaching positions. He was paid 250 quetzales per month per class (about \$30 US), and he was never given more than two classes at a time. “You can probably make more money farming,” he said, adding that day laborers earn 25-30 quetzales a day (\$3-4 US, or \$70 a

month). He added that sometimes he wished that his mother hadn't wanted him to be a professional: it would have been better to be a farmer. "Couldn't you still do that?" I asked. He shook his head: "You have to know how and be used to it." He knew how to take care of corn, he said, but that was it. "People are making a lot of money on potatoes now," he added wistfully (interview, September 6, 2011). Growing potatoes, however, required owning land up on the cooler altiplano above the town, which he did not.

Historically the teaching profession in Guatemala was dominated by Ladinos, but postwar educational reforms that mandated bilingual education created an opening for indigenous schoolteachers. Before the war there had only been 9 positions for teachers in town. After the war that number grew to 118. This first generation of Mayan teachers, now in or approaching their fifties, did well for themselves. In the 1990s and early 2000s, this group benefited from tourism, working in one of the three Spanish language schools the town then boasted. Many had been able to build comfortable houses and buy additional land. Several were active in the leadership of the security committee. Younger people graduated to a much tighter job market: by 2011 there were at least 200 people with teaching degrees in the village, and the number of unemployed teachers grew with each graduating class. Meanwhile, the legislature was trying to reduce allocations for unionized teaching positions. The plan was to increase the number of contract positions, jobs like the one Fredy held, without security, paid vacations or retirement plans. In addition, there was a move underfoot to require additional years of training for teachers. While Guatemala has some of the lowest educational requirements for teachers in the hemisphere, increasing the expense of this degree will clearly reduce the number of indigenous Guatemalans able to enter the profession.

Meanwhile, tourism to Guatemala in general and Todos Santos in particular dwindled. One by one each of the town's Spanish schools closed. Anselmo connected this decline to rising levels of repression by the security committee: "Tourism has declined a lot, and it's their fault, for spending their time perpetuating violence instead of building schools, building parks and developing sports programs" (interview, December 10, 2010). He continued his critique:

We don't have free expression. A lot of people are going to the United States and they're going to succeed outside of Todos Santos. The United States is free, and every day it's going to grow more. Of course there's a lot of racism against Latinos there, but even so. Living here in Todos Santos is like living with the doors closed. That first generation of teachers just wants to live well; they want to be the first forever (interview, December 10, 2010).

These young men were shut out of the few opportunities for gainful employment that there were in the village. Fredy described his frustrated attempts to find a job with the municipal government: his family was not wealthy enough to participate in the nepotism that acquiring these positions required. Chentin talked about feeling blackballed from the teaching positions and local NGO jobs he applied for. However, he had excellent English skills, and obtained work as a translator with a visiting NGO project that was unaware of his reputation. He worked five days with them, but on the sixth day members of security arrived at his house and took him to jail. "There was this kid who lost a tooth, his mouth was really messed up, and his mother said that I did it," Chentin explained. "I had nothing to do with it, but they don't believe what you say." He had to spend the night in jail and pay a fine of 600Q (\$75 US) for the youth's medical bills, exactly what he'd earned in the last five days. The Canadian NGO workers came to talk to him across the bars of the jail cell that opens onto the street. "Can't you talk to the judge?" he said they asked. "They didn't understand that what starts with security ends with security, and

what starts with the judge ends with the judge. These systems are totally separate” (fieldnotes, October 12, 2010).

A sense of constriction and confinement came down to the very boundaries of the bodies of these young men. Both Anselmo and Chentin had the broad shoulders of former weightlifters. One day when I was talking to Chentin I commented on the absence of recreational activities for youth in the town. He agreed that it wasn't like the States, “where you can go to the park or go out.” He mentioned that for a while Anselmo was talking about opening a gym, but then thought better of it after an experience that Chentin had. The leader of the first security committee was visiting Chentin's house and noticed his homemade dumbbell, a metal pole with concrete cast in buckets attached on either end. Chentin said the man said, “Why do you have that except to get strong to beat people up?” (fieldnotes, October 12, 2010). Later I asked Anselmo about the gym idea. He replied, “People don't understand, exercise is good your health, and everyone, including women and people of all ages, would benefit.” Then he added, “But if I built a gym, they'd probably burn it down and kill me” (fieldnotes, November 2, 2010). Even though the older generation was not, in his opinion, doing anything for the youth of the village, neither was he permitted to do anything for them: “No me dan espacio.”

Even the space of organized sports was considered suspect. On the day that I was at Chentin's house talking to him about the non-existence of the gangs, he proudly pointed out the soccer trophy displayed on top of his microwave oven. His team had won the championship the previous year. After they won, he said, they paraded through the streets with drums and whistles, “but a lot of people didn't like that.” The security committee had prohibited groups of more than five youth to congregate at a time, and it was unclear if this rule applied to sporting events or not.

Chentin claimed that some guys had decided to stop playing soccer because they were worried that people would accuse them of being *mareros* (fieldnotes, October 12, 2010).

### Respecting Your Elders

Any group of young men hanging out together could be perceived as a *mara*. But even alone, these young men who had come of age outside of the village were not safe if they failed to show proper deference to authority figures. The importance of showing respect for elders in Mesoamerican communities is well-documented in the ethnographic record (e.g., Brintnall 1979, LaFarge and Byers 1931, Vogt 1969, Warren 1978). Mayors in particular are considered worthy of respect. Under the *cofradía* system that once dominated Mayan village life, these collectively chosen community elders were spiritual as well as secular leaders. The constitutional changes of 1985 were one of many nails in the coffin of the *cofradía*. These changes mandated elections for mayors and gave these popularly elected officials oversight of federally allocated funds (Dracoulis et al, 2013). What was once an honorary position with little financial recompense became one tainted by worldly corruption. Anthropologist Donald Dracoulis quotes a resident of Santa Catarina Ixtahuacan who succinctly describes this shift in perception:

Before, the *alcalde* was seen as a volunteer position without any benefit. A poor simple man could be *alcalde* and people respected that. Now, only the rich, who want to use their positions for their own ends, want to be in charge (2013:50).

This sentiment could have just as easily been expressed by any number of *Todosanteros*, no matter what their age. Yet, despite private admissions that many mayors acted out of selfish rather than communal interests, security leaders persisted in punishing their juniors for failing to show proper deference to the town's mayors.

Security President Juan Pablo made this issue explicit in his conversation with the immigration advocates (see Chapter Two) when he remarked that one problem with the younger

generation was their lack of respect for their elders, especially the mayor. He was describing an attempted lynching that happened in 1997 to a young man named J.M., who was the reputed founder of the Los Ramos gang. According to Juan Pablo, J.M. physically attacked the mayor. As he described the incident, he remarked, “We respect the mayor. We respect our elders. We can’t disrespect them, and he did, and they were going to kill him, but he escaped” (interview, January 11, 2011). J.M. eluded his attackers that time, only to be murdered by local police officers six years later (Burrell 2013: 138-163). People let the police flee, Juan Pablo claimed, because J.M. already had this “black mark” (antecedente negra) against him.

Unsurprisingly, several of Anselmo and Chentin’s encounters with the security committee involved accusations of disrespecting the mayor. Anselmo was out drinking when he ran into the mayor on the street. According to Anselmo, the mayor was drunk too, and they exchanged words. Anselmo was hauled into the security office and beaten. His family was forced to come watch and his sister almost lost her job with the municipality. They would not release him until his family turned over his California driver’s license and green card. They never returned these documents, and replacing them had been a bureaucratic nightmare.

Years later, Chentin was caught drinking in the town square. According to Juan Pablo, who caught him, Chentin made things worse for himself by pointing to the hypocrisy of the alcohol ban: “The mayor drinks, so why can’t I?” Chentin was pointing to a double standard in the enforcement of the prohibition: older drunks were generally treated much more indulgently than younger ones. If a man was seen as fulfilling his responsibilities to his family and had expendable income to spend on drink, enforcers were willing to look the other way. As Juan Pablo justified this situation: “The mayor has money, the mayor is taking care of his children. You can’t say the same for Chentin” (fieldnotes, September 23, 2010). Ironically, when Chentin

was called into the mayor's office for a meeting with the security committee after the incident, he was taking care of his child while his wife was at work. But instead of recognizing this caretaking as a legitimate form of fulfilling family responsibilities, the rambunctious toddler's presence irritated the elders. "It wasn't appropriate to bring him," Juan Pablo sniffed. Chentin was made to sign a document that stated that if he continued to misbehave he would be exiled from the village.

Fredy, on the other hand, had never been publically censured for public disrespect by the security committee. However, on the day he granted me a lengthy interview I was left wondering about the emotional toll of his public displays of deference. He described several incidents in which the imperiousness of the mayor and other community elders had infuriated him. His face and ears flushed bright red as he relived insults that had taken place many years previously: while he had held his tongue in the moment, he had clearly rehearsed rebellious retorts many times in his mind's eye in the intervening years. In a seeming non sequitur, he told me about watching a boxing match on TV where the bigger fighter knocked out his smaller opponent. The little guy lost the match and was taken to the hospital, where he died a few days later. Afterward the announcers said that the man hadn't died of his injuries, rather he'd died of rage. It can happen, Fredy assured me. You can die of rage.

### **Surveillance and Paranoia**

The gendered dynamics of the encounters that garnered the above observations about gang life, or lack thereof, bear mentioning. On the days that I sat on my porch chatting with Anselmo, his mother, sister and wife all found pretexts to appear on my patio. Seemingly the turkey and the pig that lived in the yard behind my rented room required immediate tending. On the day I talked to Chentin I had been visiting his wife, but then she left their shared room to go cook dinner in

the other house on the compound. We were not left alone for long: soon after Chentin's grandmother appeared, took a seat nearby and silently watched us for the remainder of the conversation. I had never seen her enter their house on the dozens of occasions when I'd visited his wife alone. As these incidents made clear, there were strict separate spheres for socializing, and I was violating this rule. Men and women were not allowed to be friends. Any interaction in private was suspect. It was yet another realm in which the older generation did not trust the younger generation enough to give them any space.

When I moved several blocks away to a different family compound, Chentin started to pay me unchaperoned visits. He was worried that he was losing his English, and so he would let me interview him while I wrote out his answers and then showed him the places where the illogic of English prepositions tricked him up. Chentin spoke a slow, thoughtful, grammatically accurate English, but he spoke Spanish slowly too, giving him a depressed affect. Often when talking about his life he would sigh and say, "It's hard, it's really hard." He suffered from migraines. On the day ICE agents along with members of the sheriff's department entered his Michigan home without a warrant and demanded to see his identification, he was only there because a migraine had kept him off the soccer field that Sunday. He'd been incarcerated and then deported with a ten year bar on reentry. But that treatment was nothing next to what awaited him in Todos Santos, where the security committee immediately regarded him with suspicion.

"I had never been treated like this before, not even in the States. I mean in the States they discriminate [against] people, maybe because you work harder than American guys, you work overtime and they don't," he said.

"So you weren't even treated that badly when you were deported?" I asked.

“No,” he said, “and here it is your same people, treating you this badly” (interview, March 10, 2011).

By 2011 unauthorized crossings cost \$5000, and a previous deportation meant that if Chentin were caught at the border he would face lengthy incarceration. Anselmo, who had migrated earlier and successfully sought asylum, had far more options. When Anselmo remarked, “A lot of people are going to the United States and they’re going to succeed outside of Todos Santos,” he was placing himself in this category. He talked a lot about how he was working on arranging his young daughter’s papers so she could have more educational opportunities. Chentin on the other hand worried about what would happen to his son, who had already, at the age of three, been labeled a troublemaker. “I don’t want my son to be treated this way,” he said, “but if they don’t change, if they keep doing this, I’m moving” (fieldnotes, February 5, 2011). Unfortunately, he did not have the resources to finance this move.

During our English lesson/interview exchange, Chentin combined lethargy with jitteriness, slow speech with a rapidly jiggling leg. Sometimes when he was talking about things that were upsetting to him, he would leap from his chair and start pacing the floor of my tiny kitchen. Or he’d stand up suddenly and draw the curtain to survey the street below. On one occasion as he was departing he felt the need to deliver a warning to me:

He said that people had been talking about me, about how I’ve been interviewing people, and how some people are fine with that but some people don’t like it so I should be careful. What do you mean by be careful? Well I don’t mean like watch your back (he imitates this kind of paranoia, looking over his shoulder) but just like be careful when you’re talking to people (fieldnotes, February 22, 2011).

When Chentin delivered this cryptic message I felt anxiety rising within me. Which people?

Careful how? It was as if he’d taken his own anxiety and passed it to me, lodging it directly in

my solar plexus. For a moment, I think I felt how he felt. It was a hard place to live. Later I thought of this interaction as an exercise in empathy far more visceral than getting handed an index card that says “marero” during an ice-breaking activity at an anti-lynching workshop.

### **Or Do They?**

Sometimes I missed Los Angeles. Whenever I felt that way I used to go drink hot chocolate at Milton’s store. Milton was an extremely short man in his mid-thirties who had thinning but elaborately *gelatina*’d hair swirled atop his head. If he wasn’t busy he would reminisce with me about Los Angeles, using wrapped candies taken from his display case to build elaborate maps of the southland on the glass countertop between us. While many returned migrants were reluctant to discuss the circumstances of their departure, Milton openly admitted that he had been deported for doing “bad things.” Like most people involved in the drug trade, in between making deliveries to customers and attending far-flung court dates, he had a masterful grasp of the geography of greater Los Angeles. There was something insinuating about his manner, but he was so diminutive that I found it amusing rather than creepy. He ended every conversation by asking, “So when are we going to go dancing?”

The opportunity for dancing came with the arrival of the fiesta. Most of the latter half of October is a lead up to the celebration of the patron saint’s day, and during the height of this *feria* there are activities in the salon cum gymnasium in the center of town every night. One of these nights I went with Chentin and his wife Rocio to a dance. They were charging an entry fee, and the area outside the doors was packed with boys without tickets milling about. As we walked up the steps to the salon, the crowd parted. Boys called out Chentin’s name as they clustered around him, vying for his attention. One gave him several tall boys of beer, which he hid in the bag that I was carrying. As we approached the ticket seller’s stall the line evaporated and we

moved to the front, but then we were waved inside without paying. When I looked at Chentin quizzically, he explained, “It’s because I’m the best soccer player in the county” (fieldnotes, November 1, 2010).

Inside the salon a rented deejay with an oversized sound system blasted the inevitable ranchera hits imported from Mexico. I lost my friends in the crowd. Just then I saw Milton. He gestured an invitation to dance and I followed him onto the dance floor. Suddenly Chentin and Rocio reappeared, dancing alongside us. After all, I had the beer, and Chentin reached into my bag to take a can. They danced away and I was left with Milton who had stopped looking at me. He was dancing badly. As soon as the song was over he waved goodbye and backed away. In the fieldnotes I took later that night I wondered, “Did he just now realize I’m more than a foot taller than he is, or was it something else?” (fieldnotes, November 1, 2010).

The following day was Day of the Dead, when the teams who participated in the *corrida* (horse race) the day before take to the cemetery with their rented marimbas and continue the party. In the cemetery I ran into Anselmo, who invited me to dance. I was the only woman in their group dancing on one of the few flat surfaces available in the packed graveyard, although there were scores of observers staggered on the neighboring gravesites, many of them with video cameras filming us. Anselmo left and I joined Rocio who was training a video camera on the dance floor.

Others groups in the cemetery that day were either the boisterous teams of *corrida* participants or members of extended families reflectively drinking in clusters around family plots. My party was set up next to the heavily adorned grave of J.M., the reputed founder of the local Barrio18 gang. Chentin explained that he and his friends each kicked in 20 quetzales (\$2.50

US) to pay for the marimba for the afternoon. On the grave above the dance area there was a core group of young men. They had shaved heads, hoodie sweatshirts, and wore their red striped pants low-slung and baggy. They were steadfastly putting away cans of Gallo beer taken from a stack of cases. Periodically they posed for pictures together in which they contorted their hands into the number eight. One drunk fellow asked Chentin for permission to dance with me: he granted it. Another indication of Chentin's status came when his young son started screaming, "Ice cream! Ice cream!" He had spotted a perambulating ice cream vendor from a long way off. The vendor approached and several young men fell over themselves to buy some for him: one knelt down to show the toddler all of his flavor options while two others leapt for their wallets, brandishing cash (fieldnotes, November 4, 2010).

A few days later I ran into Milton. The encounter generated the following fieldnote:

Today I passed Milton on the street; we saw each other coming from a long way off. I said hey and he ducked into the market, taking his cell phone out of his pocket and putting it to his ear. I mean maybe he had a call (November 4, 2010).

Every time I went back to his store, which was just a few feet past the invisible boundary between red and blue turf, he was too busy to talk. Meanwhile in the market vendors sold copies of the videos made during feria. They charged outrageous prices for them, so few people could afford to buy them, but there were always crowds of spectators clustered around the video monitors. More than one person told me, "I was at the market and I saw you dancing." My affiliation with the gang that wasn't a gang was now widely known.

### **The Unabashed Gangster**

Fortunately Ricardo knew nothing about this association because places like the salon and the market and the cemetery during the feria were off limits for him since his exile in 2008. That

year when people found the dead kid's body in the cemetery, Ricardo was suspected immediately. The security committee grabbed him, took him to their office and started pummeling him. He thought that they were going to kill him. Finally they let the army take him to the hospital and then jail in the department capital. When he went before the judge, he was released for lack of evidence. His father lost his job with the municipality and his mother was expelled from her market stall. His family had to leave town for a while. Ricardo had been told he would be killed if he returned to Todos Santos, so he spent a year working construction in Mexico. But he missed his friends and the mountains and eventually he returned to Guatemala. His father arranged for him to live on a family plot located just across the county line from Todos Santos.

I had an appointment to interview Ricardo's father, but when I was walking up the road to his house he passed me on a motorcycle headed the other way. When I got to his house, only Ricardo was at home. While many people in Todos Santos were unnerved when I revealed how much gossip I already knew about them, Ricardo was flattered. I asked him about his time in the United States, and he said answered that a lot of guys had gone there and a lot of them had had trouble with the *norteños*. The conversation moved on, and he added that he had a picture of himself with them. With the *norteños*? I asked, confusing the referents. "No, no, with the *sureños*," he said adamantly, "We're *sureños* here!" (fieldnotes, August 30, 2011). I found his open, indeed, enthusiastic admission of his gang affiliation refreshing. And perhaps because he was a bit bored in his semi-exile, he was eager to talk to me.

A few days later he met me at the closest point that he could venture into town. It was on boundary of his neighborhood, just after the bridge where his minions had taunted me some eight years earlier. I had told him that story, which he found really funny. He brought it up a lot as a

joke—“Remember that time I called you a whore?” As we were walking we passed a man who was out in his yard washing a Toyota Hilux truck. “Did you see that guy staring at me? He doesn’t like it that I’m here, he wants to call security,” Ricardo said. Later he mentioned the incident again, and added the detail that the man hated him because he’d gotten his daughter pregnant.

Ricardo had invited me to a party celebrating the opening of a new elementary school outside of town. He led me off the main road and through a series of cornfields. He was used to taking secret routes through the forests and fields whenever he ventured near town. He darted ahead of me through the corn rows while I kept getting slowed down by stray leaves and blown over stalks. I had a moment of concern about where we were going as we cut deeper into these unpopulated fields. I’d told Rocio about my plans to meet up with Ricardo. Before Chentin she’d dated Ricardo’s best friend, so she’d spent some time with him. She’d said, “He’s nice enough, except he’s always talking about killing people.” Anselmo’s words came back to me too: “what he is is someone who needs psychological help.” I started wondering where we were going and if there was indeed a party. Just then we exited the cornfield onto a newly widened road next to a school festooned with balloons and surrounded by people.

We passed through a bevy of boys in the schoolyard who greeted him respectfully, and then stood to the side while we chatted, eying us curiously. “You’re not going to see any red here, just blue,” he told me. “But you have to wear red pants,” I said, referring to the uniform of the county. “Yeah, red below, blue above.” On that day he was wearing navy blue Nikes, a blue striped polo style shirt and a blue New York Yankees cap. “So you bought the hat for the color,” I said. “No, not even. It’s about the N, *rayado*, crossed out, like the *norteños*.” He drew his finger across his throat when he said this.

He told me that the gangs had started with his friends in middle school when they were about fourteen. That's when they started drinking. At first they called themselves the *Rockeros*, because they hated *música romantica*. At the time there were the Vatos Locos in El Calvario, the R Tres Puntos in Los Lucas ("You'll have to ask them what that meant."), and the Salvatrucha in the center. As it turned out, I did not have to ask: Vatos Locos and Tres Puntos are the names of the gangs in the cult film *Blood In, Blood Out* (1993). Anthropologist Adrienne Pine (2009) likewise discovered that the gang members she interviewed in Honduras imitated the style and Spanish of this Hollywood representation of Chicano life in Los Angeles.

Ricardo continued that he heard about the name and number of the sureños from a returned migrant who had met them in the States. "So how come the sureños have so much more territory than the other gang?" I asked. "Because of me," he answered without hesitation. They were a group of 15 guys armed with bats and nunchucks and they went to talk to the young people of all of the neighborhoods he'd mentioned and asked, "Are you with us or are you with them?" Ricardo unified this new territory under the name SUR 13. "SUR stands for Soldados Unidos a la Raza," he explained. "Why 13?" I asked. "Because m is the thirteenth letter, M13," he answered. "And it's like Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, bad luck. Not bad luck for us of course, but for everybody else."

Meanwhile, the other gang lagged behind them. "Over in Los Ramos they didn't even have a name other than Los Ramos. It was us that started calling them Los Cholos." They didn't have a color either. "First they picked green, but that didn't take, so then they settled on red," he said with no little disgust. The derivativeness of this unsatisfactory rival was a favorite theme of his. Recently the red gang had a run in with their local security committee over pictures they had posted of themselves throwing gang signs on a Facebook page. They had to take down the page,

and many of the boys' relatives lost their jobs and market stalls. The sureños, on the other hand, had had pictures of themselves posted on the internet for years, he boasted. Ricardo was fuzzy on where these pictures were, exactly. The important point was they had been up for a long time, and the norteños had just now gotten around to copying them.

In contrast to the enmity that my Los Ramos friends expressed toward the security committee, Ricardo spoke of them fondly. When I first brought them up, he said, "Security is a good thing." When I expressed surprise at this response he added, "They keep things under control." It was almost as if they were worthy opponents in a way the rival gang was not. He referred to the leader of the first security committee by an affectionate nickname. He told a story about how this man had helped him out one time when he had been arrested. People in the crowd were shouting, "He has tattoos, make him take his shirt off!" The security leader ignored them and locked him up in the jail cell, where he was safe from the crowd (fieldnotes, September 1, 2011).

The next time I saw Ricardo I took the bus out to the first community in the next county to meet him. In this sparsely populated farming community the houses and fields are wedged into steep inclines. Every possible space on the patchwork surface of mountains surrounding us was planted with milpa, coffee and beans, on slopes so steep it was hard to imagine how people managed to plant there without sliding down the mountain. Ricardo was living next door to one of his uncles who owned a string of houses along the top of a ridge. Ricardo's accommodations were simple. He had a bed that faced a TV and a stereo system balanced on a table made out of a ladder.

He showed me his photo album, which seemed to be the main purpose of my visit. First, there was a group shot of teenage boys in Todos Santos. Ricardo stands in the center looking young and plump, making a hand gesture, four fingers pointed inwards. The next photo shows a group shot taken in California. These men wear even more of a standardized uniform than the Todosantero boys: bright white t-shirts, khaki pants, shaved heads, and sunglasses over scary blank faces. Ricardo is in the front row, looking huge, almost fat, although it's hard to tell in his excessively baggy clothing. "No one's wearing blue," I remarked. They don't wear visible blue so they can't be identified, he explained, but everyone has a blue handkerchief on them. He pointed out that although the style is different in Todos Santos, what with the red fabric, he still has his pants tailored in the exact same cut. Indeed the pants he was wearing that day had a crotch that hung half way down his thigh and long, low back pockets (fieldnotes, September 7, 2011).

It turned out that it was a coincidence that Ricardo encountered the sureños in the States. He'd decided to move to San Francisco rather than Oakland because there were fewer Todosanteros there. Once there he moved into an apartment building that happened to be full of them. One day one of them hailed him, saying, "Hey, we noticed that you always wear blue." Later he ran into them at the liquor store, and they said they said, "Invitamos," so he bought them a case of Bud Light. Several cases of beer later, they invited him to play soccer with them. They gave him tips on his clothing, because when he got there he was still wearing his clothes small. (Small, he added, like that other gang in town *still* wears their clothes.) When his new friends saw that he was unafraid, they asked him to join them. They wanted to beat him for 13 seconds as part of his initiation, but he said no, I already went through that with my gang in Guatemala. They respected that.

Ricardo mentioned that the sureños he knew in California had been involved in the drug trade, selling cocaine and marijuana. So how come the gangs here don't sell drugs? I asked. "Well, there's no market for it. There's more money in beans" (September 7, 2011). He took me to see the beans he'd planted: he was proud of them. I asked him who had taught him to farm, thinking of Fredy's assertion that effective farming required a long-term apprenticeship. The people here, Ricardo answered. People here work, not like in Todos Santos, he added. He hadn't grown up farming, he'd been groomed to be a teacher like his father. But when he graduated high school instead of applying for jobs he just made trouble, he said, until his dad got the money together to send him to the States.

While reminiscing about his life in the United States he called it "la vida loca." But as ethnographers of gang life note, living the life vacillates between boredom and danger (Ward 2013). Much as Ricardo's movements were extremely circumscribed in Todos Santos, they were in San Francisco as well, where norteños far outnumbered sureños. "You couldn't really go anywhere unless you were in a big group," he said. One time they were waiting for a bus and the norteños drove by and shot at them. The guy next to him fell to the ground. Ricardo thought he'd just tripped and was startled to realize he'd died instantly from a bullet to the chest. They went and got a car and drove a few blocks over to where the norteños hung out by the McDonalds to get their revenge. There was always somebody dying every day, he said. And sometimes they would kill each other, like the time a sureño shot another sureño in a motel room because he was sleeping with his girlfriend.

Riding along for the drive-by shooting in the McDonalds parking lot had been the beginning of the end of Ricardo's stateside sojourn. The police caught the driver, who confessed. Ricardo went on the lam, and spent a year laying low in the Todosantero community in

Michigan. But late one night he was roused from his bed by the authorities. He was sent to prison for three years: “Three years just for hanging out with the sureños.” Prison is not so bad if you have your group, he added. He worked out a lot, buying protein supplements in the commissary to help him bulk up. And he’d gotten several very professional looking tattoos. At one point while we were out walking he’d taken off his shirt to let me photograph his tattoos, but later when I gave him copies of the pictures, he was distressed to see how much muscle mass he’d lost. “Now my only exercise is farming.”

Ricardo had had a lot of girlfriends. It came out over the course of the day that in addition to the daughter of the glowering truck owner, he’s fathered six children, seemingly each with different women. Several of them lived in the States. This previous promiscuity had complicated things for him in his most recent romance with a teenaged neighbor. We were out walking when we stopped to rest at a spot with a view of the valley. He told me that this is where he and his girlfriend had broken up. She had accused him of still talking to his girlfriends in the States.

“And are you talking to girlfriends in the States?” I asked.

“No,” he replied.

“So what did you tell her?”

“Well that if that’s what she wanted that was fine by me.”

“Ah, wrong answer,” I teased him, “You were supposed to tell her she was the only one.” At that point Ricardo leapt to his feet and we were off again on a rapid fire jaunt around the hillsides. It came out slowly over the course of the day how actually disappointed he was with the end of this most recent relationship. Later he explained that this girlfriend had been about to

move in with him: they were going to “juntar,” the term people use for a common-law marriage. He’d planned on stopping drinking when this happened. “But now, why bother?” he asked.

I was concerned about how Ricardo would react to the news of my friendship with his nemesis, so I confessed my friendship with Rocio to him. “Which Rocio?” he asked.

“Chentin’s wife,” I clarified.

“Oh, so they probably say a lot of bad stuff about us,” he said.

“She doesn’t,” I said, “she told me she used to date a friend of yours.”

“I don’t know why she didn’t stay with him,” he said, “I guess because he always had a lot of women, that bothers some women.” Then Ricardo mentioned that Rocio’s sister used to date his brother before she started dating a member of the red gang. Then he laughed, “We have a joke among the sureños that when we’re done with our women we give them to the norteños” (fieldnotes, September 1, 2011). Putting the misogyny in this statement aside for a moment, it was striking that territorial boundaries did not seem to stick to women. For example, Ricardo talked about hanging out with a group of women from Los Ramos and asking them, “So who’s more fun, us or them?” They’d replied, “You guys are.” I had to agree—after the angst of my Los Ramos friends, there was something about Ricardo’s openness that made him easy to be around, even as I still found myself wondering whether or not he was a sociopath.

Part of the pleasure of interviewing Ricardo came from his palpable *joie de vivre*. Some of this manifested in the pride that he took in his accomplishments, whether that work was unifying gang turf, ripping off rooftops in California, or planting even rows of beans. It was refreshing to meet someone who would talk openly about being a gangster, even if, according to

other students of gangs, his explanations diverged from those of hard core gangsters in the capital, for whom the S in SUR stands for southern, not soldier, and the M references their connection to the Mexican Mafia (Anthony Fontes, personal communication). Despite these inaccuracies, Ricardo was perhaps the most authentic gangster of Todos Santos, and even so his connection to gangsters seemed to be mostly about emulation.

Whether or not the gangs of Todos Santos are “real,” clearly these young men and boys took great pleasure in acting like gangsters. Drinking together and posing for photos and videos as a gang constituted a major activity for these youth. Ricardo cherished his archive of photos, which he kept carefully hidden from his disapproving father. The day that I accompanied the Barrio18 to the cemetery, creating representations of their party seemed almost as important as the party itself. Afterward these mediated images took on a life of their own, playing repeatedly in the market and traveling via courier service to the Todos Santos expatriate communities of Michigan and California. These Todosanteros’ embrace of the gangster mystique seemed to be almost as much about image as action. Claiming this identity had its downside when it came to beatings and persecution by their elders, but clearly it had its advantages as well, as Ricardo’s long list of romantic conquests made clear. I return to this point below after situating this study in the intersection of literature on gender in Latin America and research on gangs.

### **Masculinity**

Like most disciplinary domains, Latin American studies paid scant attention to gender until second wave feminist scholars made it a priority (Browner and Lewin 1982, Stevens 1973). However in this early work “gender” was usually taken to mean women (and sometime gay men), while straight men remained the unmarked category. It was only in subsequent decades

that research that theorized gender as a relational system started to emerge (Cantú 2003, Gutmann 2003, Lancaster 1992). However, even though masculinity remained under-theorized, references to machos and machismo have been a constant in analyses of Latin America (most famously in Paz 1962). Machismo is usually defined as a virile, homosocial, hard-drinking, womanizing variant of masculinity. The relative absence of machismo in Mayan communities emerges in the few references that there are to gender systems in ethnographies of Mesoamerica. As Laurel Bossen put it, no amount of “sowing of wild oats,” could endow a Mayan man with adult status. Only assuming responsibilities as a head of household in partnership with a woman constituted male adulthood (1983:35).

Bossen conducted fieldwork in multiple communities in Guatemala, including Todos Santos, in the late seventies. She described a gender system that was relatively egalitarian, based on interdependence and complementarity centered on subsistence maize production. But as more men entered the wage labor force, Bossen predicted that this fragile egalitarianism would end, with dire consequences for women. She did not foresee that the economic restructuring then underway was about to have equally dire consequences for many men as well. In the subsequent transformation, the maquiladoras that sprouted across Latin America preferred to exploit supposedly more docile female labor (Pine 2008). Even factories that employed men failed to pay wages that were sufficient to support a family. On another front of the spread of wage labor across rural Guatemala, schoolteaching, the first generation of men trained in this profession were quickly followed by equal numbers of women.

In the Todos Santos that Bossen encountered, men grew the corn and women processed it into tortillas: men and women could not eat without each other. In the intervening years, few men own enough land to support a family, and many more women have entered the labor force

and can buy their own mass-produced corn meal, making this kind of gendered economic interdependency increasingly less obtainable. These changes in labor markets coupled with the ongoing decline of the subsistence corn production that once constituted the center of Mayan communal life have created a crisis that expresses itself through an intergenerational conflict in which many younger men align themselves with the oppositional identity offered by the imitation of youth gangs.

Much of the previous work on gangs reads them through a class-based analytic. Stephen Humphries' classic history of British youth gangs is emblematic of this approach. Street-gang culture, Humphries asserted, "offered working-class youth the opportunity to conquer its feelings of hunger, failure and insignificance and to assert a proud and rebellious identity through which its members could feel masters of their own destiny" (1984:179). Deprivation and economic exclusion creates gangs. Alicia's observation at the anti-lynching workshop that opened this chapter reveals how much the scholarly perspective has merged with the common sense one when she remarked that gangsters, "come from broken families, they're in the street when they're five years old, and they don't have the opportunity to go to school" (fieldnotes, September 8, 2012). Suffering from multiple exclusions, these youth create an alternate form of belonging.

Certainly, poverty and exclusion describe the backgrounds of the majority of gang members across time and space. However, the alleged gangsters of Todos Santos did not hail from "broken homes," nor did they grow up on the street. All of them, as did most of their friends, had the opportunity to finish high school, a rare achievement for the generation that preceded them. And yet, despite these relative privileges, something about the particular historical constellation in which they found themselves drew them to the youth sodalities that

their elders labeled “gangs.” Excluded from stable employment, community leadership, and land tenure, these young men sought esteem and respect among their peers in a social group that centered on the elaboration of machismo.

While research on female gangs sees “doing gender” as the main objective of these groups (Chesney Lind and Hagedorn 1999), male gangs are rarely discussed in these terms. Historian Andrew Davies’ research on late nineteenth century Manchester gangs represents an exception when he argues that “the assertion of masculinity” was one of the “focal concerns” of the “scuttlers” he studied. Despite marked differences in time and space, these Victorian youth offer an instructive comparison to the rural Mayan “mareros” in question. Scuttlers were young men for whom the breadwinner role of masculinity was also not an option: most were under 20 and thus too young to take up a trade. While their working class Irish community did have the ideal of the family man, a stalwart breadwinner, a competing masculine ideal was that of the “hard man” who held his liquor, never backed down in a fight, and withstood extremes of pain. The ideal of the “hard man” recalls the machista variant of masculinity in Latin America. While the classic machismo complex may not be characteristically Maya, Mayans have many opportunities to encounter it among Ladinos in Guatemala or among the Mexicans and Salvadorans they live and work with when they migrate.

Victorian scuttlers and Mayan mareros have other commonalities. Scuttlers were preoccupied with setting themselves apart through fashion, particularly with the cut of their trousers, which they wore flared in a bell bottom style. Likewise boys in Todos Santos decided that it was uncool to wear their pants “small” the way their fathers did. Another similarity between Victorian “scuttlers’ and Mayan “mareros” is the importance of drinking. While drinking in Todos Santos had once been tied to the celebration of the feria and other ritual

events, these more affluent youth have turned drinking into an everyday activity. Hanging out together and getting drunk, picking a name and a color, all these activities were intermingled in the gang origin story that Ricardo told me. Or as Chentin described the main activity of his social group: “we sit on the corner and have a few drinks.” Drinking was what these men and boys did together, and being able to hold your liquor was a marker of status. As Rocio confided, she thought that her husband evaded the 2008 attempt on his life because he could hold his liquor.

In Davies’ scouring of the court records of the scuttlers, he finds that much of their brawling involved fighting over women, protecting their “sweethearts” or other women associated with their territory. Glaster’s (1998) survey of Soweto gangs from 1950-1970 reveals a similar male sexual possessiveness of the women who lived in their turf. So did Ricardo’s experience of gang machismo in San Francisco: “one time a sureño shot another sureño in a motel room because he was sleeping with his girlfriend.” Or as another way of expressing contempt for his disappointing, derivative rival gang: “we pass along our women when we’re done with them.” But back in the village, such possessiveness seemed less marked. Women (including the ethnographer) could hang out with members of both gangs with relative ease. This subdued territoriality when it comes to women suggests the residual power of a pre-existing gender system that places less emphasis on male possession of female sexuality.

Gender scholars of Latin America have designated marianismo the counterpart to machismo. It refers to an ideal of self-sacrificing, virtuous womanhood, or the selfless altruism embodied by the Virgin Mary. But just as critics point out that the totalizing term *machismo* obscures widespread variations in this cultural practice (Gutmann 2003), there is evidence that the orthodox Catholic ideal of marianismo failed to take root in religiously syncretic Mesoamerica. One difference the relative unimportance of female virginity. As Bossen observed,

in 1970s Todos Santos women were free to move from one partner to another without stigma if their first union did not work out. Female purity was not part of the marriage contract: a willingness to work hard was.

But these gender ideals founded upon a subsistence production economy are in the midst of a major transition. The masculine mystique of the alleged mareros of Todos Santos is not just about fighting and toughness: an equally important part of their identity comes from their sexual attractiveness to women. Both Anselmo and Chentin describe the main activity of their groups as “talking about their girlfriends.” While these men never admitted to me that they had multiple partners (after all, I talked to their official wives), Ricardo was frank on this point. He had several lovers in the area. Not girlfriends, he explained, just friends, really, but “men and women have needs.” Sexual prolificness offered an avenue to status and esteem among the clusters of teen and preteen boys gathered on the corners in town or in the mountain meadows above it. In a village where migration started as an overwhelmingly male phenomenon, seemingly there are more than enough women with “needs” willing to sign on for these temporary trysts.

These youth embodied a shift in what was considered attractive: clearly small muscles were as undesirable among this cohort as small pants. In evidence of acculturation to U.S. standards of beauty, muscles were not just about looking or being strong, but about being attractive. The wiry frame made by farming was no longer what younger women were looking for. As my friend Mari once asked me earnestly, “Why do guys always get better looking after they migrate?” New diets and recreational rather than incidental exercise brought these men back to the village bulked out. When Rocio talked about what attracted her to her boyfriends, their broad shoulders featured prominently in the list of their charms. But while muscles and the ink

that adorned them were seen as attractive among the youth of the village, their elders insisted on interpreting these embodied fashions as a threat.

## Conclusion

Law enforcement agencies argue that that gangs are tightly organized, criminal organizations “imported” by outside agitators (Hagedorn 1988). Local law enforcers in Todos Santos held to this theory too, ignoring the fact that what they saw as a gang invasion was “primarily a re-labeling of existing local rivalries” (Sullivan 2006:28). Of the alleged gang leaders, only Ricardo had actually made contact with a gang in the United States, and this happened *after* he founded his own group in Guatemala. Instead, youth gangs seem to be localized, independent responses to a global process of economic polarization. While economic deprivation is usually but not always part of this story, exclusion from other routes to power is always present. Repression has been the official response to gangs. This approach has only forced gang members into more criminal and violent behavior. Imprisonment has meant an expansion of contacts, creating a world where men like Ricardo could move comfortably in both the U.S. and Guatemala because, “prison’s okay if you have your group.”

Sometimes the youth gangs of Todos Santos are violent. The 2008 fiesta death is a case in point. However, often these young men’s local community is far more of a danger to them than they are to it. Almost everything about these young men is perceived as threatening, including their muscles, their tattoos, their reinvention of traditional clothing, their cultural and linguistic fluencies, and their less than deferential attitudes to authority. Responsibility is a major flash point in this discussion. These young men are seen as failing to assume adult responsibilities by providing for a family. While academics are quick to point to the ways that

larger structural forces create the conditions for the possible, on the ground such structuring structures are much harder to see and individuals are much more likely to come under fire in accounts of social problems. Anti-lynching educator Alicia credits the broken family for Guatemala's bumper crop of mareros, and in Todos Santos people cite the failure of the family as well. Ricardo's parents have been punished and shunned for having a bad son. Chentin's grandfather, who raised him, was forced to beat him with a belt in public. Anselmo's sister almost lost her job while his parents were made to witness his beating. Fathers are held responsible for failing to discipline their rebellious sons, and where fathers fail, the security committee steps in to pick up the slack. This focus on the individual family points to a larger issue: the failed reproduction of the patriarchal family centered around a male breadwinner. In the face of the growing impossibility of reproducing this ideal, younger men have aligned themselves with the version of manhood provided by gangs.

While their imitation of a gangbanging identity puts them at considerable personal risk, clearly these men would not be playing this game if it did not also entail certain advantages. Directly asking what gang affiliation did for them was not something I could do with the men of Los Ramos who so steadfastly denied their group's existence. Meanwhile for my unabashed gangster interlocutor, the answer was self-evident: "We're sureños here!" But as other students of gangs have observed, participation in gangs gives its members a tight-knit, supportive community and opportunities for status and esteem. For me the palpable sadness that Chentin conveyed in conversation is forever juxtaposed by the chorus of boys shouting his name outside the salon that November night. Ricardo's greeting at the schoolhouse inauguration offered a similar scene. While my Los Ramos informants were tightlipped about their sexual conquests, in Chentin's case, comments made by his long suffering wife suggested that there were many.

Ricardo, on the other hand, was open about the sexual hedonism that went along with his version of “la vida loca.” Finally, this identity involved a defiant attitude that infuriated their elders and caused these men no little grief. But when I thought of Fredy’s impotent anger and impassioned assertion that the hot blood of suppressed rage could kill you, taking a beating in the name of self-respect starts to seem like a viable option.

## Epilogue

Anselmo spends most of his time in the States. He’s still working on his daughter’s papers. Ricardo was recently accused of leading up a band of highway robbers. “He’s going to get himself killed,” the friend who told me about it opined. Chentin found a job working with the local health clinic. He was there for a year before he was fired for being a marero. But they rehired him shortly thereafter. Then a mentally disturbed young man was caught trying to set fire to a truck the neighborhood next to his. The would-be arsonist said that he was acting under Chentin’s orders. This neighborhood is known for its especially authoritarian security committee. They apprehended Chentin and took turns beating him for several days. They were about to burn both of them alive when Chentin’s accuser admitted that he’d lied about Chentin’s involvement. Both men were released, and Chentin was fired from his job again.

In his ethnography of the Mara Salvatrucha in Los Angeles, T.C. Ward (2013) notes that while the life expectancy of an active gang member is low, those who make it past 30 are allowed to “age out” of the gang. The men profiled in this chapter are all now past 30, and have partners and children. While in popular accounts it is the gangs themselves that are seen as not letting their members graduate, in Chentin’s case his community seems determined not to give him any other options. The marero label continues to stick to him. This attitude represents the

downside of “the non-local nexus of causality and destiny” that characterizes Mesoamerican conceptions of personhood (Groark 2009:715). In these vestiges of a belief in calendrically-determined predestination, people’s natures are seen as unchangeable: once bad, always bad. People expressed this opinion when they caught a con artist in Todos Santos in 2011: “We should kill her now or she’ll just keep doing this.” I heard this same logic expressed repeatedly by participants in the anti-lynching education workshops I attended in 2012. In this view, rehabilitation is impossible and recidivism is inevitable. One day back before his most recent troubles, Chentin was seated in my kitchen talking about his predicament in his slow, thoughtful English. He pointed to a broom that was propped up in the corner of the room: “It’s like that broom. I could say it’s a bad broom, but it’s just a broom” (fieldnotes, March 21, 2011).

## **Chapter Four: LIZARD**

The first time I heard his name was on the lips of my friend Rocio. When she pronounced the word “lizard,” her lips hit the bottom of her nose as if she were smelling something bad. She was talking about the irresponsible man who’d gotten her sister pregnant (fieldnotes, September 19, 2010). It wasn’t long before I heard this nickname again. My friend Mateo told me that Rocio’s husband Chentin and his buddy Lizard had gotten into trouble (fieldnotes, October 3, 2010). Lizard and Chentin were beating up another member of their gang at two o’clock in the morning in front of the internet café. Lizard was about to stab his fallen friend in the gut with a screwdriver when the internet café owner broke up the fight by throwing rocks at them. A few days later Lizard went back and threw rocks through the window of the internet café. As punishment Lizard and Chentin had been stripped down to their underwear and whipped in front of a large crowd. “The youth here really have to watch out,” Mateo concluded, “people here are vengeful, and they aren’t going to forget this.” He was right about that.

Postwar changes have helped exacerbate economic inequality in what were once much more uniformly impoverished communities. In the aftermath of war, some have benefited from transnational migration and migrant remittances, and others have not. Some migrants to the U.S. have been able to legalize their status through the political asylum process, while the vast majority remains undocumented. Among those who stayed in the village, some have benefited from postwar educational reforms, while education remains inaccessible for the vast majority. Lizard, as the educated son of a documented migrant, was privileged in all of these categories. But his troublemaking tendencies and involvement with a local youth gang helped make him, for one intense period during the year I conducted continuous fieldwork in the village, the embodiment of all the social forces beyond community control.

I use this case to explore the how communities draw the line between belonging and exclusion, and how certain community members become marked for violent death in the process. Guatemala has received considerable attention for its high incidence of lynching, a phenomenon first recorded at the end of its 36 year-long civil war that has continued unabated in the post-conflict period (Cullinan 2011, MINUGUA 2000, 2002). In the press these public, collective murders of suspected criminals are often represented as spontaneous acts of mob violence. But in this chapter I show how becoming lynchable is a process, one involving perceived transgressions and gossip about these transgressions that can build for months or years.

What follows is about lynchability rather than lynching: Lizard's family removed him before community antipathy escalated to that point. The vigilante practices that scholars have called "everyday policing" includes a wide repertoire of actions, with violent sanctions like corporal punishment and lynching at one end of the continuum (Jensen and Buur 2004). But the use of violent force by practitioners of extralegal justice is risky: it can attract the attention of state officials if its victims have the wherewithal and resources to enlist their help. When the Lizard scandal was underway, many of the leaders of the security committee were in the midst of a lengthy court case brought against them by the victims of the mob action described in Chapter One. After these leaders beat Lizard in the incident described above, when he got into trouble again, they decided not to deal with him at all. Their decision made it clear that Lizard had been excluded from community protection. This exclusion served to reproduce the community itself, as people who were otherwise ambivalent about the security committee united against the wayward youth Lizard and all that he represented. In the process, Lizard became, "the included outside upon which a community constitutes itself and its moral order" (Hansen and Stepputat

2006: 296). Before I describe this process, I spend some time denaturalizing what is often, especially when modified by the adjective *Mayan*, far too naturalized a term: *community*.

### **The Dialectical Production of Community**

Although Raymond Williams called “community” a “warmly persuasive word” that “unlike all other terms of social organization...never seems to be used unfavorably” (1983:76), ethnographic data complicates this claim. The term is associated with what Laura Nader (1991) has called “harmony ideology,” but as her long-term study of a Zapotec community proved, this consensus is produced through constant disputing. Conflict has been a constant theme in ethnographies of Mesoamerica, leading many to conclude that these communities are forged by conflict as much as consensus (Burrell 2013). As multiple Mesoamericanist ethnographies attest, intergenerational conflict seems to be over-determined in Mayan family structures, where oldest sons are expected to take over patriarchal responsibilities but cannot do so without displacing the patriarch (Bunzel 1952, Oakes 1951, Warren 2003).

One of the most well-known conceptualizations of the Mesoamerican community is Eric Wolf’s (1957) “closed corporate peasant community” model. This model, “a creature of the conquest,” is likewise forged in conflict. Spanish colonizers “concentrated” indigenous people on limited allotments of land. Maintaining an exploitable labor reserve represented a fine balance: indigenous people needed to be given enough land to reproduce themselves, but not so much land that they could completely support themselves and escape from laboring for the Crown. While the names for this system changed over time, from exacting tribute to forced labor to debt peonage to the “free” market, the “dual system” that Wolf identifies has remained remarkably durable. Wolf argues that in the face of their ongoing exploitation, indigenous

peoples created leveling mechanisms, such as religious cargos, that provided people with an informal social security system and guaranteed a “shared poverty.”

In the over half century since its publication, Wolf’s thesis has been roundly critiqued. It has been called “naively reifying” because it simultaneously engages in cultural essentialism and historical determinism (Watanabe 1990:201). Scholars have proven that many Mesoamerican communities were neither closed (hostile to outside influences) nor corporate (based on communal land holdings) (Lovell 1988). Others countered that leveling mechanisms did not successfully circumvent class stratification, as the prestige earned in fiesta expenditures could be leveraged for labor (Cancian 1965). Despite much valid revisionism, Wolf’s observation about the potential strains caused by population growth was remarkably prescient:

The corporate community may then be caught in a curious dilemma: it can maintain its integrity only if it can sponsor the emigration and urbanization or proletarianization of its sons. If the entrepreneurial sector is unable to support these newcomers, these truly “marginal” men will come to represent a double threat; a threat to their own home community into which they introduce new ways and needs; and a threat to the peace of the non-peasant sector which they may undermine with demands for social and economic justice, often defended with the desperation of men who have little left to lose (1957:13)

Currently, neither the local, national nor transnational “entrepreneurial sectors” are able to absorb the labor and energies of these “marginal” men, whose “new ways and needs” are indeed considered a threat by their home community. But these prodigal sons are not a “double threat” in the way Wolf imagined. The “demands for social and economic justice” that Wolf references sound sadly anachronistic: in Guatemala, these demands have been successfully squashed by decades of unrelenting repression and subsequent impunity. The youth who were once considered the political vanguard of Central America have been replaced by a new social movement: youth gangs who do not subscribe to any overtly political ideology (Levenson 2013,

Rodgers 2009). Many descriptions of contemporary Central America gloss the postwar period as a transition from politicized to depoliticized violence (Burrell and Moodie 2011). But as Levenson points out, this much touted depoliticization serves political purposes, as politicians use the specter of youth gangs to justify “mano dura” policies. This politically productive relationship is evident at both the national and local levels: locally, talk about the criminality of gangs can be used to produce “community.”

Even though those that would defend “the community” claim that they are reproducing “what is allegedly there already and always has been,” community is continually contested category (Buur et al 2007:20) whose content changes over time (Nugent 1996). Buur et al describe it as a “productive impossibility” that must be “performed over and over again in order to make it real” (2007:20). In the margins of the state where people do not trust state agents and vigilantism thrives, expunging criminality is a key part of this performance, providing the included outside on which community constitutes itself. As many scholars have observed, crime and criminality work as a metaphor for larger economic and social transformations (Godoy 2006, Schneider and Schneider 2008, Simon 2007). Along these lines, Steffen Jensen argues that community and crime are not only sociological facts, but also historically contingent products of discourse that exist in an interdependent relationship. While people see the community is the benevolent repository of hope for the future, crime destroys these aspirations:

As crime destroys, it becomes the constitutive outside of the community: it constitutes the outer boundaries of the community. In this way, and in a seemingly paradoxical manner, while it is outside, its definition and naming constitutes the inside. To produce a moral community is hence partly about eradicating crime from its midst. Practices to eradicate crime...are then midwives of community (2007:195).

Practices to eradicate crime in Todos Santos include surveillance by the patrols, apprehension, interrogation, and public flogging. But there is also a second order to these practices: talk about

them. The wider community either supports or contests the security committee's actions through talk. In other words, gossip. If crime produces community in a dialectical relationship, then gossip is the medium of this production. Luise White makes this connection when she writes, "if we can historicize gossip, we can look at the boundaries and bonds of a community. Who says what about whom, to whom, articulates the alliances and affiliations of the conflicts of daily life" (quoted in Theidon 2012:15-16). In his account of what makes a Maya community a Maya community, John Watanabe cites "neighborliness," which he defines as "engaging with those nearest at hand in the immediacies of life" (1990:203). Thus, while this is a chapter about an exile, it is also a chapter about gossip. Furthermore it is a reflection on the process of fieldwork itself, on the partial inclusion of the anthropologist in "the alliances and affiliations of the conflicts of daily life," as well as an account of dead ends, silences and evasions.

**"If you don't support authority, authority won't support you."**

Lizard's smashing of the windows at the internet café turned out to be the last straw for community elders. When he came to the attention of the local authorities again, all of them refused to act on his behalf. In effect, Lizard became the exceptional case, the one to whom the rules do not apply. This state of exception effectively rendered him one who can be killed by anyone without punishment. This section looks at how the local security committee marginalized Lizard and how community members reacted to this decision.

The security committee of Todos Santos represents a hybrid, one that combines the structures and strategies of the civil patrol imposed during the war as well as an attempt to reconstitute traditional systems of authority. Important community decisions are made through public meetings at which people speak and try to sway public opinion. The communal decision

to ban alcohol sales happened in this way. Decisions are made by consensus. In this aspect their practices resemble *derecho maya* (Mayan Law), which uses public hearings aimed at restoring community harmony. Elders hear both sides of the conflict and make decisions that typically emphasize restitution rather than punishment (Esquit and Ochoa 1995).

In early fall of 2010, Lizard got in a fight and smashed another kid in the face with a rock. The leaders of his local security committee called him and his victim to a meeting to hear both sides of the story. Lizard was made to pay the medical bills of the injured party. Despite this restitution, a few weeks later Lizard was in the town square, which is right on the boundary of gang turf, when he himself was smashed in the face with a rock. This incident occurred in front of the office of the national civil police. They witnessed the incident, and briefly jailed the youth they saw throw the rock. The injury was bad enough that it could not be tended to at the local health clinic. When Lizard returned from the hospital, his family sought redress for his medical bills through the security committee. But this time there was none forthcoming.

Juan Pablo was the first to mention the incident to me. While the security committee and the mayor were often at odds, on this issue they were in agreement. The local police fell into line with their decision. During the subsequent investigation by the security committee, the police claimed they were unsure if they had really jailed the right suspect, who vehemently proclaimed his innocence. Juan said that even though they stayed late at the meeting hall hearing the petitions of Lizard's mother and sister, it had already been decided: it wouldn't be correct to pursue this case and make the accused pay Lizard's medical bills because Lizard had always been really violent (fieldnotes, December 21, 2010).

Just a few months prior Juan said he'd spent some time "orienting" Lizard. "What did that entail?" I asked, wondering if Juan would mention the spectacular beating Mateo had told me about. "Telling him to stop making trouble in the street because he's already a professional," he replied. "Is he a teacher?" I asked. "Yeah, or an accountant or something. But there he was at the fiesta this year, hanging out with Gaspar's sons making trouble, provoking the other young people." His old friend, Gaspar, he added, was not happy about this decision. Lizard had subsequently taken up his case with the local justice of the peace, but nothing will come of that, Juan said. Too much time had already passed and he doesn't have any witnesses. "Let this be a lesson to Lizard," he concluded.

Soon after I talked to Gaspar's daughter Nicolasa about what she thought about the situation. "We're very unhappy about that," she replied. Her father, a healthcare worker, had been the one to stitch Lizard up. But the next day his eye was so alarmingly swollen he sent him to the doctors in the department capital. And then they had that meeting where they decided not to do anything because of the things he'd done before, like insulting people, picking fights, and throwing rocks at cars. "Maybe Lizard is like this because he's the only son, and he's spoiled, but what a bad example this is," she said. She continued that the kid Lizard accused of hitting him had declared his innocence, and instead of taking Lizard's word for it, the security committee demanded witnesses. "They say it's Mayan law, but with Mayan law they never ask for witnesses, it's always just been your word against someone else's." She felt that they were changing their standards in this case (fieldnotes, December 23, 2010).

Her father had complained to the mayor and the leaders of security, Nicolasa said, but to no avail. People said he was doing this because they were relatives of Lizard, which they aren't, or because they're neighbors, which they are, but that was beside the point. It was the principle

of the thing. “They’re setting him up like they set up J.M.,” Nicolasa said, referring to the founder of the neighborhood gang to which Lizard belonged. “They’re just setting him up to be killed, for that to be okay,” she continued, “because now the police and everybody knows that he’s a bad kid.”

### **“The Police Did Us a Favor”**

Even though J.M. died in 2003, he remained a key figure in the social imagination of Todosanteros. Once when I mentioned his death to a friend, she immediately editorialized, “Ah yes, for all the trouble he made.” Then she added just as quickly, “Actually he was a nice guy.” This ambivalence about J.M. was widespread: was he a troublemaker deserving of his fate, or a nice guy who met a bad end? This ambiguity seems more generally representative of the slippery status of “gangs” themselves in the town. Depending on whom you talked to, J.M. was either the founder of the local chapter of the 18<sup>th</sup> street gang or just a charismatic guy who happened to have lots of friends.

A legal permanent resident of the United States, J.M. had been able to travel back and forth easily. He was said to have long hair, big arms, and a defiant attitude. In 1997 the mayor made an incendiary speech against him, inciting residents from the outlying hamlets who were in town for the market that day to attack him. J.M. escaped immolation by barricading himself inside of a store. He managed to sneak out hours later by disguising himself in women’s clothing (Burrell 2013). The attempted lynching revealed a certain class antagonism: J.M. was a relatively privileged young man. His father was a local politician, and J.M. had finished high school and could have been a teacher if he had wanted to. Unfortunately, J.M. did not lay low for long after this incident: soon after he and his friends joined a school field trip, where they proceeded to get drunk and throw beer bottles at schoolchildren (Burrell 2013, fieldnotes, October 14, 2010).

Despite this ongoing antagonism of his fellow villagers, J.M. was killed by an outsider: a police officer shot him during the fiesta of 2003. As with any event in Todos Santos, there are multiple versions of what happened. One has him drinking with the police, and when he started making fun of them, one took offense, followed him home and shot him. The salacious version has him walking in on his sister having sex with said police officer, sparking an encounter that led to the fatal confrontation (fieldnotes, October 14, 2010; September 1, 2011). The entire police force fled town after the shooting, leaving the county without an official police presence for several years. No one was ever prosecuted for the murder. The attitude that J.M. deserved his fate seemed to be widely held in the town. One man reported that there was a momentary discussion of burning the police office in protest after J.M.'s death, but no one was enthusiastic about this plan. More were of the opinion that, "the police did us a favor" (fieldnotes, December 2, 2010).

J.M. was not the only worrisome precedent for Lizard's untenable situation. The fiesta murder of 2008, when the body of one of the norteros turned up in the town dump stabbed eighteen times provided another. The security committee apprehended Ricardo and his friend, beat them for several days and threatened to burn them alive before the military arrived and forced the unarmed security committee to turn the suspects over to official police custody. While both were released shortly thereafter for lack of evidence, they were told that if they returned to the village they would be killed. They stayed away for several years, but by 2010 both had snuck back into town and lived in hiding in their families' houses. Their presence caused their families considerable anxiety and no little ostracism by the wider community.

## “The Bad Seed”

On Christmas day I walked through the center of town at midday and passed Juan Pablo standing outside the security office, on break from a security meeting. “My God you guys even work on holidays,” I said. “Well, we’re a voluntary group,” he replied, standing up straighter and jutting his chin in a characteristic gesture. He said that things had been really calm, “except for the people who are unhappy about the Lizard decision. But what are we going to do, there are no witnesses and they put the wrong person in jail for it.” Then he added, “If you don’t always support authority, authority won’t always support you” (fieldnotes, December 25, 2010). In this case all of the different levels of local authority, including the mayor, the local security committee, the police and the justice of the peace, had decided that the violence inflicted upon Lizard would go unpunished.

From that point on, Lizard became emblematic of the town’s social problems. When another scandal involving young people erupted, I was chatting with a middle-aged shopkeeper named Chico about it when he pronounced it a sign of “societal disintegration.” I perked up at this sign of social analysis and pressed him on it. “Maybe what I really mean is familial disintegration” he clarified. “Like take Lizard for example. His father is in the States, and he sends him money, and what does Lizard do? Nothing. He doesn’t have a job, he never works, he just hangs out and makes trouble,” he said (fieldnotes, August 7, 2011). Now when he was a kid, Chico recalled, he had to get up at 4 o’clock in the morning to go get firewood, and if he dallied on the way back his mother would beat him when he got home.

I brought this conversation to an abrupt end when I asked Chico how he had raised his own children. He and his wife were strict with them, he replied, but they seem to have turned out well enough. As he said this his voice trailed off and he dropped his gaze to the notebook filled

with stock lists that lay on the counter between us. The conversation was over. At the time, I thought of this aborted exchange as a fieldwork failure. In retrospect I'm struck by how someone who judged the effects of familial disintegration most harshly suffered in the light of this judgment himself. Chico and his wife were separated, and the children had stayed on with her in Michigan when he returned to Guatemala alone. It had been an acrimonious break-up, and his contact with his children was infrequent at best.

Despite the brevity of this exchange, two points that emerge in Chico's criticism formed recurring themes in the gossip surrounding Lizard. One strand directs the blame at Lizard's parents, while the other blames Lizard. The parental responsibility angle came up in a subsequent conversation with Juan Pablo about ongoing complaints about their decision: "His parents are upset, but it's their fault for not educating their children" (fieldnotes, January 10, 2011). On another occasion he stated his conviction that, "Children's problems are caused by their parents" (fieldnotes, February 11, 2011). Many shared this opinion, although people differed on how Lizard's parents had failed him. According to some, his parents were violent with him, and that was why he was violent with others. According to others, his parents were not strict enough with him, and that made him aggressive. Others, like Nicolasa, claimed he was spoiled because he was their only son. Some said, incorrectly, that both his parents had gone to the United States and left him to raise himself, and that was the reason why he behaved so problematically.

Whatever the cause, talk about Lizard's aggressive behavior pointed to people's anxieties about a larger crisis in social reproduction. Massive outmigration had created disjointed nuclear families, with different combinations of parents and children living in different countries. While nationwide 10% of Guatemalans have migrated to the United States, in the county of Todos Santos that number approaches 30%, leaving few families untouched by geographic separation

and estrangement. Many parents, like Lizard's father, were not around to discipline their children. Chico was not alone in reminiscing about the strict discipline he had been subjected to as a child. Marcelina, also in her forties, told a similar story about a mother who could tell time by the angle of the sun, and whacked her if she came home even a few minutes late from primary school. In these accounts, children are beaten for playing (or even being perceived as playing) instead of working. Parental discipline was centered on instilling a strong work ethic in a strictly gendered division of labor where boys farmed and gathered firewood and girls cooked and cared for siblings.

In addition to parental absence, public speculation about Lizard revealed the suspicion that his problems stemmed in part from his family's relative affluence. He did not need to work, and he spent his father's remittances on leisure (hanging out and drinking) rather than investing it productively. Instead of learning how to farm, Lizard had been sent to school. But like J.M. and Ricardo before him, Lizard seemed to have little interest in finding gainful employment after he graduated. What these criticisms of Lizard ignored were larger structural conditions in Guatemala, where only 25% of the population is formally employed (Green 2009). Meanwhile, land shortages combined with population growth in the countryside have made the subsistence agriculture that sustained Mayan communities for centuries increasingly untenable with each passing generation (Taylor et al 2006).

In spite of its declining relevance, subsistence agriculture centered on corn and bean production informs the moral universe inhabited by Lizard's elders. Generations of Guatemalanists have documented the extent to which milpa production informs the Mayan cosmovision (e.g., Bossen 1984, Carlson 1997, Green 1999). To be a moral person was to be a productive person involved in producing and processing food for your family and community.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, in other cultural contexts, vigilantes refer to the corporal punishment that they inflict on rebellious youth as “medicine” that is meant to cure the diseased body politic (Gordon 2004). In Mesoamerica, the milpa provides the metaphor for the body politic. In the same conversation I had with Marcelina about her strict upbringing, she made the comment that I quoted I previously when told me that she thought that gangbanging youth of the town like Lizard should be burned alive: “These sprouts are like weeds, like the scrub. You need to cut out the bad parts so the good parts can grow” (fieldnotes, August 7, 2011).

Marcelina returned to this point the following month, when the same youth scandal that inspired Chico’s words about Lizard dominated the local airwaves with talk about what was to be done about the town’s gang-identified youth. She began with a reference to local gang colors:

What’s the meaning of these colors, all this about red and blue? If you spend all day from 4 am until 10 pm planting milpa, then what color are you? If you’re a mason, a cook, a farmer, what color are you? It’s like saying “I’m green, I’m a bus driver.” Things that you can eat are good, like beans and squash. But the weeds that grow among them in the field, we kill, we chop them down, we fumigate. You have to kill the bad seed (fieldnotes, September 6, 2011).

Marcelina’s forceful analogy returned to my mind when I was interviewing a man charged with running educational workshops for the parents of school children. He proudly showed me some of the visual aids he had drawn to use with his presentations. One illustration featured a productive milpa with healthy ears of corn, while the other showed an unproductive field choked with weeds. My interlocutor happened to be the father of Ricardo, who had been exiled for the 2008 gang-related murder. As we were talking he remarked, “I work a lot, but my sons don’t work at all. Their minds are confused, they’re not productive, they drink a lot, and they’ve lost their sense of values.” I asked him how he thought that happened, thinking that in his case, the disruptions of migration could not be blamed. “I don’t know,” he answered sharply. Then he

changed the subject (fieldnotes, August 30 2011). Even though his neighbors had attempted to weed out one of his sons, he shared their views on the morality of hard labor and productivity.

### **The Relativity of Justice**

This case gave me an insight on how people in Todos Santos thought about justice: justice was not blind but rather deeply embedded in extenuating circumstances. And the extenuating circumstances in this case made it okay that Lizard represented the exception to the rule. While Nicolasa had made it sound like she and her father were interested in an abstract principle of justice, others gave less generous estimations of their motives. A friend of the family opined that Gaspar was worried about the case because he thought that the same thing could happen to his sons when they came back to visit from the United States. “They’re obnoxious troublemakers when they’re drunk too,” he explained (fieldnotes, December 27, 2010).

People who had previously been critical of the actions of the security committee nonetheless supported the Lizard decision. For example, my friend Magda once referred to them as “dictators,” adding that they didn’t have the training or experience to do the work that they did. This was especially true in cases of violence against women: how could this all-male committee fairly decide cases of domestic violence when some of them were wife beaters themselves? But when I brought up the Lizard controversy and the committee’s refusal to seek restitution on his behalf, Madga’s reaction surprised me. “Well, his dad is in the States,” she said, “so he doesn’t really need the money for his medical bills” (fieldnotes, December 24, 2010).

While Madga privately held critical opinions of the security committee, Mateo had made his criticisms of them public. That year at the fiesta the security patrols had decided to carry

lassos with them, so they could tie up recalcitrant troublemakers if need be. Mateo attended one of their meetings to protest, arguing that this measure seemed unnecessarily repressive. Although his request was not heeded, his criticism was heard. Shortly thereafter some drunks flipped over the french fry cart his wife operated. When Mateo went to the committee to press for damages, they refused to act on his behalf: it was another case of “If you don’t support authority, it won’t support you.” After his wife pled their case, and offered up their teenage son for extra security patrols, the committee relented and arranged restitution for the damages.

Members of the security committee told me about this incident, but Mateo neglected to mention it to me. It had happened recently when I joined Mateo for drinks in his yard on Christmas Day. He had been drinking rum all morning, which I hoped would loosen his tongue. I brought up the Lizard controversy, making what I hoped would be a leading observation: “So it seems like the security committee only supports you if you don’t criticize them.” But instead of connecting the incident to his own experience, Mateo brushed my comment aside. He said that Lizard was “a violent character” and “payment for medical bills is something the kids needed to work out among themselves.” Besides, he added, making the same point Madga had, his father has money. And not only does he have money, it seemed, but money earned by exploiting his fellow countrymen: he manages apartment buildings in the States where he rents out rooms to fellow Todosanteros at exorbitant rates (fieldnotes, December 25, 2010).

I had previously encountered this relativist attitude about justice when in September of 2010 an attorney in California emailed me with a request for expert testimony on young women and domestic violence. Her underaged client had escaped abuse in Guatemala but was now in deportation proceedings. She asked me if I could, “opine as to the risks teen women face in Guatemala and the treatment and conditions against females in Guatemala” (fieldnotes,

September 5, 2010). I canvassed people in Todos Santos on their opinion on this issue. No one was willing to commit to abstract or generic statement about the vulnerability of teenage girls in Guatemala without more details about this particular case. Does the girl have family here? How much money do they have? Do her relatives in the States have money? The extenuating circumstances, it seemed, were everything. In the case of Lizard, his extenuating circumstances did not work in his favor: his past history of violence, his family's relative privilege as recipients of migrant remittances, his failure to take advantage of these privileges and occupy a profession he was qualified for, and his father's personal enrichment at the expense of his own people all weighed against him.

### **The Facebook Scandal**

Things were calm with Lizard for a while. Then that spring another scandal broke. It was an act of vengeance on the part of the internet café owner whose window Lizard had smashed. He collected a file of images he found on the internet that the youth in his neighborhood had posted of themselves. In them they appeared wearing red, throwing gang signs and posing next to graffiti of the number eighteen. Reportedly these images and a video were posted on a Facebook page. As the scandal raged I found myself frequently enlisted to explain what the internet was to people who had never used a computer. Whatever this thing was that had happened “*tuj* internet,”<sup>4</sup> people were very disturbed by the idea that these youth were creating a bad image for the town. Search as I might, I never found any of these images online.

A meeting of the local security committee of Lizard's neighborhood was called. They viewed the video in question. According to one man, the video was obviously fake: the heads of

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<sup>4</sup> *Tuj* is a Mam Maya preposition that expresses location.

Lizard and another neighborhood kid were clumsily grafted onto the heads of real gangsters in a documentary about the real Barrio18 gang. People were surprised that the internet café owner had bought into this. According to some, the young man who made the video was a member of their group. According to others, he was a member of the opposing gang who had pulled this prank to get his enemies into trouble. Whatever his sympathies, the video maker was swiftly punished: he was beaten and ordered to remove the offending document from the internet. Then the municipality expelled him from the market stall where he ran his video business. How to get to Lizard when he had no job to be deprived of was another issue. At first there was talk of cutting the water line to his mother's house. Finally, the committee settled on punishing his wife as a means of punishing him. At the time, Rocio's sister Maritza was gainfully employed in the mayor's office. The leaders of the neighborhood security committee pressured the mayor to fire her. He did so promptly.

As Juan Pablo weighed in on the whole incident: "The result of education just isn't good. Here the young people have learned how to use the internet, but then they use it for bad instead of good when they use it to spread the message that gangs operate freely in Todos Santos" (fieldnotes, April 13, 2011). Juan Pablo admitted that he was not very comfortable with using computers. His older brother, however, was almost always online. Despite this familiarity, his brother expressed a similar opinion: "Before our sons worked the land, and there was hardly any technology. People were enclosed in a circle. Technology has its good side, but young people aren't using it in a good way" (interview, August 30, 2011).

At stake was how the community would be represented, who would control its image in the amorphous transnational space of the internet. This imagined public could not be allowed to believe that "gangs operate freely in Todos Santos." The incident pointed to the polyvalence of

crime, and what gets defined as a criminal action and why. In their discussion of the meaning of crime, Buur and Jensen argue that one type of criminalized activity includes actions seen as “hindering the community from realizing its full potential,” which could mean behaviors that might prevent development funding, foreign investments, or tourism (2004:147). A similar anxiety appears in one of the court documents in the trial discussed in the next chapter: an amicus brief written by the local doctor asserts that public drunkenness was scaring off much needed tourist dollars. In the case of the Facebook scandal, taking swift action to counteract the youths’ antisocial message was crucial. Furthermore, oft-photographed Todosanteros are understandably sensitive about how they are represented and who profits from the circulation of these images. While it was hard to track the origins of the picture postcards of them sold to tourists in the rest of Guatemala, this was one case where they could exert some control.

### **Who is Lizard?**

Despite my growing file of notes on Lizard, I had yet to meet him. Then in June there was dance in the gymnasium in the middle of town. The music started, but the lights stayed on high. For the longest time only one brave couple dared to dance while a crowd of hundreds watched. I was standing on the sidelines with Madga, turning down all invitations to dance because dancing under those circumstances seemed unbearably conspicuous. I entertained myself by watching a large jeering agglomeration of boys wearing red shirts watch the proceedings. Suddenly there was a mobilization and they moved across the floor together. One of them stopped before me and asked me to dance. I was about to refuse again when Madga nudged me onto the floor. In the shouted small talk that followed I realized that the scrawny young man before me was in fact the legendary Lizard. He looked even younger than his twenty-something years, and he wore patched pants and a knit cap pulled down low over his ears. Other couples were dancing

together, but Lizard danced some distance apart from me, pumping his arms and avoiding eye contact; it seemed he had asked me to dance on a dare. When the song finished he said “ya?” (enough?) and backed away. The rest of the night I watched Lizard dance with an endless succession of girls. His wife Maritza was nowhere in sight (fieldnotes, June 3, 2011).

There was something protean and indistinguishable about Lizard’s features, so that every time I saw him I was never sure that it was him. He always had a different hat on, always pulled as low on his face as possible, perhaps to hide ears mutilated by so many fights. Not long after the dance I walked by a store that doubled as a clandestine cantina. There was a group of boys sitting on outcropping of rocks next to the store drinking. One of them appeared to be Lizard. I bought something at the store and chatted with the owner for several minutes. Then I left, and was already half a block away when the group of boys on the rocks erupted into whistles and other cries of sexual harassment in Spanglish (“Oye, mamita!” and “Come here baby!”). There was something comical about this belated harassment that they had been too timid to perform when I was in close proximity (fieldnotes, June 5, 2011). That was the last I saw of Lizard.

## **Escape**

Lizard’s common-law wife Maritza was almost as much an object of gossip as he was. I watched numerous conversations fall to a standstill if she happened to pass by. With Maritza barely out of earshot, my interlocutors would then ask the question that seemed to perplex everyone: “What is she doing with him? They say she loves him, but he doesn’t love her.” Part of this confusion may have had to do with their appearances: while there was indeed something reptilian about Lizard’s looks, Maritza’s beauty was widely acknowledged. As traditions of patrilocal dwelling demanded, she lived in Lizard’s parents’ house, and acted the part of a good daughter-in law. I

even heard gossip from people about what chores they had seen her performing as part of the household. Her behavior was irreproachable, but since her partner regularly left her at home alone while he went out drinking and chased other women, her virtue itself became an object of speculation.

Because Rocio was one of my closest friends, I often saw her sister Maritza at social events at her house. I always wanted to ask Maritza more about the drama that she was at the center of, but as often happened in Todos Santos, when I pushed, doors closed. I was pleased when Maritza friended me on Facebook, happier still when she started chatting with me. It was after she'd lost her job, and when I asked her what she was up to, and she said not much, that she was bored. I asked her if we could talk sometime. Then came the response: "Actually I'm really busy." After I met Lizard at the dance, I also hoped that there was some time I could talk to him about his experience of ostracism. I was not to have that chance. His father returned from the United States for a visit and Lizard disappeared from public life. People said his displeased father was keeping a tight rein on him.

Later that same month I saw Maritza at a party at Rocio's house. Rocio had just had a second child: it was the celebration her first 20 days of life, a traditional observation in Mayan culture. The midwife was there, bathing in the *chuj* (sauna) with Rocio and then with the baby. Rocio wanted me to take pictures of this ritual. I'd left the party after the lunch, as had Maritza, and I returned to try to photograph the ritual at the right moment. When I arrived Rocio emerged from the sauna and went inside to lie down. Rocio's mom handed the baby to the midwife inside the *chuj* and shut the door. I was seated in the yard waiting for the photo opportunity when Maritza rushed into the yard, brushed past me and ran behind Rocio's adobe house, where she burst into wracking sobs. Her mother came running from the house and joined her; I could hear

her soothing murmur over Maritza's disconsolate tears. I decided to give them space and left without taking the picture.

A few days later I visited Rocio again. She was still in bed, resting with the baby. "Maybe I didn't explain it to you well, but I wanted a picture of the baby inside the *chuj*." I told her I'd left when her sister arrived. "Oh, I was even angrier with her," she said. She had really wanted her mother to be there to take the baby out of the *chuj*, she explained, because sometimes the midwife bumped the baby's head on the door and made her cry. But her mother wasn't there to help because she was with Maritza.

"What was wrong?" I asked.

"What do you think?" she replied.

I hazarded a guess: Something happened to Lizard. I was right. But instead of suffering a grievous injury, it turned out he'd slithered away like his namesake. Maritza got home from the party to find that her husband wasn't there. He had left early that morning with his father, supposedly just to see him off at the airport in the capital. But instead of saying goodbye, he'd boarded the plane with him. When Maritza asked her mother-in-law where Lizard was, she replied "probably in the United States by now." Maritza didn't believe her until she searched their room and discovered that his passport was missing. His father had arranged his papers and taken him back with him. The whole family had known about this plan for months and yet no one had mentioned anything to her.

"Everyone knew he was leaving," Rocio said. She'd heard her neighbor and mother-in-law gossiping about it the morning of the party in their shared kitchen. They were saying poor Lizard, it was dangerous for him here because so many people hate him and he has to leave

town. She hadn't paid much attention to them, she said, not realizing his departure was so imminent.

"What do you think?" she asked me.

"Poor Maritza," I said, "I feel sorry for her."

"Yeah, I feel sorry for her too, but more than anything this makes me mad. Why does she just stay there? Why does she let them treat her that way? If Chentin left like that, I'd leave too. She says Lizard loves her, but look at how he treats her," Rocio replied (fieldnotes, August 18, 2011).

There are several cruelties in this story. First there is the long-term deception of Maritza by Lizard and his family. Then there is Rocio's complete lack of empathy for her sister's predicament. What seemed to irk Rocio was that her sister had been wronged publicly: "everyone knew." Maritza remained a faithful wife and devoted daughter-in-law while her husband and in-laws publicly disrespected her. But while her situation was extreme, it was not so different than the situation that Rocio found herself in with her husband Chentin. In the anecdote that opened this piece about attempted murder and property destruction that led to Lizard and Chentin's flogging, there were of course many more details that circulated about this event, including gossip that the men had been fighting over a woman whom they were all sleeping with. The scandal made Chentin's infidelity public knowledge. In some ways Rocio's reaction to her sister's predicament parallels Chico's harsh judgment of Lizard's family formation.

The original motivation for this chapter grew out of a desire to come to terms with those moments in the emotionally and ethically murky process of fieldwork when my interlocutors,

who were so often kind and generous in their dealings with me, displayed a profound lack of empathy for each other. Apart from Rocio and Chico, Madga and Mateo's reversal of their positions on the security committee when it came to their treatment of Lizard is also germane, as is Marcelina's desire to cut down recalcitrant youth like weeds. What work was being done by these moments where empathy ended? I follow other scholars of extralegal justice in reading these moments as productive of the boundaries of a community that must be continually performed.

### **Theorizing Exclusion**

In their overview of the literature, Buur and Jensen (2004) argue that vigilantism needs to be seen as a fluid set of "everyday policing" practices. These practices are a moving target, one where the lines between the legal and the illegal, the moral and the immoral, and the legitimate and illegitimate imposition of authority are constantly negotiated. Lizard comes to the attention of the security committee when he is caught brawling late at night on the street. The first line of defense is corporal punishment. Students of vigilantism argue that the point of corporal punishment is the redemption of the criminal through violence and pain (Buur and Jensen 2004, Oomen 2004). Undergoing such punishment allows the criminal to reenter the moral community. Thus Lizard's beating could be spoken of as an "orientation" to proper behavior, in which one takes care of one's family by working.

When this punishment failed to transform Lizard into a suitably docile subject, the security committee declined to take action when he himself was victimized. Although their deliberations were generally based on the principle of restitution and the restoration of harmonious community relations, they decided that Lizard, because he was "violent," was

undeserving of such justice this time. In many ways, what happened to Lizard recalls Agamben's work on sovereignty and "the state of exception" (discussed in Chapter Two). In the state of exception, the rules apply only by no longer applying. Nicolasa made this point when she said, "They're just setting him up to be killed, for that to be okay because now the police and everybody knows that he's a bad kid." Thus, while most community members are seen as deserving of restitution when they are subjected to violence, Lizard was placed outside of these protections: the rules no longer applied to him. In an Agambenian scheme, he was reduced to "bare life," or *homo sacer*, one who could be killed by anyone without punishment.

Or was he? There are two difficulties with applying this theory, which point to a larger issue of what happens when theory drawn from exclusively European historical examples is applied to non-western contexts. In the first place, *homo sacer*, which Agamben derives from a figure of archaic Roman law, refers to someone who can be killed but not sacrificed. The question then becomes, does lynching count as a sacrifice? The persistent comparison of lynching to crucifixion by its would-be victims and other observers, discussed in Chapter One, suggests that many do see in fact see lynching in terms of sacrifice.

The second problem with using this theory is its totalizing scope. In this paradigm, *homo sacer* and the sovereign are two correlative figures: everyone is potentially *homo sacer* to the sovereign, and everyone is potentially sovereign to the *homo sacer*. Both figures exist in a mutually constitutive loop that Agamben calls the originary political relation (1998:6). But in this story, Lizard escapes. The fact of this escape recalls the critique Jean Comaroff (2010) has made of the limits of Agambenian theory for anthropology. She argues that Agamben's schema potentially reduces modern political life to a very limited set of metaphors that lend themselves to over-simplification: complicated local histories are obscured by grand allegories. On the

ground, “exclusion is less a total exile from the law of social order than a dislocation from certain sites of its instantiation” (2010:32). This observation bears out in Lizard’s case, where his exile from one social order is compensated by his inclusion in another. The international recognition of Guatemala as a violent and failed state unable to protect its citizens has helped to create the possibility of the inclusion of some of its members within a U.S. citizenship regime through the political asylum process.

Or does Lizard really escape? Policed out of one place, he receives protected status in another as the offspring of a successful political asylum seeker. Yet in a sense, he has entered another space of juridical indeterminacy where exceptionalism reigns. Anthropologist Miriam Ticktin (2005) argues that policing and humanitarianism represent two sides of the same coin: both enact law as a series of sovereign exceptions rather than a regime of systematic justice. Asylum policies are part of prohibitionist, restrictive immigration laws, one of the few options left for immigrants as states close other routes to legalization. In these cases, the asylum officer or immigration judge becomes the *de facto* sovereign, deciding who deserves to become the exception to an exclusionary rule. These officials are very careful not to create any precedents could lead to the recognition of systemic injustice. Petitioners must fit themselves into legal narratives in which they appear as non-agentive victims of an individualized political persecution (Coutin 2001).

It is dishearteningly easy to find empirical correlates to support Agamben’s claim that, “the state of exception has today reached its maximum worldwide deployment” (2005:87). Despite numerous examples that support this theory, many have called its utility into question. Agamben’s work has been called fatalistic (Negri 2003), politically complacent (Žižek 2005), and critiqued for failing to provide a theory of political action (Passavant 2007). Ethnographers

of immigration have taken another approach, by engaging with Agamben but then pushing his theories further by asking what they omit. De Genova (2010) points out that labor disappears from arguments about sovereignty. Likewise Ticktin urges us to look beyond the reality of law as exception to see what it enables, writing that, “[u]nderstanding the place of the state of exception must also involve an examination of how arbitrary and irregular discretionary law relates to the imperatives of the capitalist labor market” (2006:367). Zero-tolerance policing policies both within and beyond Guatemala converge to produce a pool of undocumented, unprotected flexible labor. Lizard’s fate once he reached the United States is a case in point: he found work at a poultry processing plant in Georgia. Even though he has papers, Lizard ended up in an industry where working conditions are so notoriously bad that native-born workers refuse to accept them.

While there is a similar dialectical relationship taking place between homo sacer and the sovereign and the criminal and the community, this second set of terms offers a more capacious way to think about the talk that took place in Todos Santos about the troubled and troubling Lizard. Several basic assumptions undergird vigilantism. The first is that vigilantes see themselves as working on behalf of a community. The second is that this community requires defense. In this sense, they see themselves as the moral guardians of the community. The very act of drawing the line, of casting some one out, creates the community. Scholars assert that vigilante groups are crucially occupied with the production of moral communities. The crimes that they punish are not necessarily crimes that would be recognized by the larger legal system: some of Lizard’s crimes would be, such as property destruction and assault, but others, such as failing to take up a profession, neglecting to productively invest remittance money, and hanging out and drinking with his friends, fall in the realm of moral failures.

At the time that I was conducting my fieldwork, people were deeply divided over the security committee's foray into the regulation of alcohol. Drinking cut across all age groups and involved members of everyone's family. Apart from its public health risks, it was also carried positive associations, such as its role in rituals and its medicinal purposes. People were much more united when it came to scapegoating local youth. During a time of division, Lizard's behavior gave a divided community an opportunity to reunite. Below I briefly reconsider the positions of four of the interlocutors mentioned in this chapter, all of whom voiced doubts about vigilantism in general but ultimately supported the exclusion of Lizard.

Chico was not enthusiastic about the security committee. When he first returned to Todos Santos after almost a decade in the United States, it was a bit of a culture shock for him. He drank every weekend, but in secret because he was afraid of punishment by the security committee. At first he shirked his patrol duty. He didn't want to get involved in disciplining other people, because that could just create resentments that could make trouble for you in the long run. "Have you ever seen someone getting beaten?" he asked me one day. I admitted that I had not. He told me that he had, and pronounced it "terrible." An adolescent had been caught stealing from a house and neighbors started lashing him on the street. Chico said he had hung back because he didn't want to be made to take a turn beating the young man. Even though the economy was bad in the States, and he hadn't been making any money, Chico kept thinking about going back. But finally he committed to being in Todos Santos, and he took his remaining savings and invested them in a store. In his new role as a local businessman, he started participating in the security patrol. Perhaps part of this new embrace of the community came through in the words I heard that day at his store when he told me to "take Lizard" as an example of the sloth that the community must be defended against.

Madga was very involved with local politics. If there was a committee, she was on it. Part of this successful politicking came from her ready laugh, teasing manner and delight at word play. Another part came from her ability to keep her opinions to herself. One day she told me one of her groups had to expel an outspoken member. The mayor arrived late to meet with their group, and the woman had quipped, “Were you too busy stealing money to get here on time?” Despite widespread grumblings about municipal corruption, this impolitic behavior was not tolerated. Madga on the other hand was pragmatic—as she advised her sister who balked at security control, “you just have to accept it.” But privately she admitted that she did not think they went about imposing their power correctly. She thought for example that the alcohol ban should have been put in place for just a month, so that people could spend some time “reflecting” on their drinking. She thought the problem should be solved by education rather than force, by talking about the public health harms of excessive drinking rather than throwing people in jail. But then she too agreed with their assessment in the Lizard case: after all, his father has money.

Mateo had been supportive of the security committee’s anti-gang campaign, but he thought they overstepped their bounds when they started intervening in “family matters.” Rumor had it that his wife once had him jailed for cheating on her—another example of the security committee policing moral rather than legal violations. A man with a restlessly entrepreneurial mind, during the fiesta Mateo ran a side business that placed visiting tourists with homestay families. I suspect this was why he was worried about how it would look if the security patrolled the fiesta armed with lassos and tied people up. Yet when it came to Lizard, he too had no sympathy.

Rocio might be expected to take a more sympathetic position: after all this exile was happening to her brother-in-law and the same extralegal actions that he suffered had befallen her

husband. She was not however critical of them on this point. When Chentin and Lizard were beaten in the meeting hall in their neighborhood, she went to watch. She wasn't happy to see her husband beaten in public, but she was happy with the immediate results of this action, which was that her husband was home much more often. She agreed with the intentions of the security committee: "He should be home with his family and not out drinking on the streets."

All four of these people were invested in different kinds of self-improvement projects: they were ambitious for themselves and their town. Chico had just opened the cleanest, shiniest, most well-stocked grocery in the whole village. Madga was a budding community leader. Mateo, among his many hats, grew vegetables, sold potatoes, and facilitated tourists' experiences of the village. Rocio supplemented her income as a schoolteacher as a nutritional supplement saleswoman. Ambivalent on the one hand about some of the measures of the security committee, reactions to Lizard's ruckus-raising created a momentary consensus among a range of community members. A year after his departure, people continued to talk about him as the emblem of all that was wrong with today's youth. Even in his absence, his memory had the power to continue to draw the line that creates community.

Events like J.M.'s lynching and subsequent murder and the violence inflicted on the suspects in the 2008 fiesta murder and the subsequent shunning of their families gave Lizard's informal exclusion power and no doubt motivated his family to arrange his departure. This bloodless exclusion met the same goals that a lynching would have, perhaps more effectively. As Morten Lynge Madsen writes on the power of exclusion:

It protects the community by eliminating the threat... and in the act of protection simultaneously demarcates the internal threshold of the community, both in terms of tolerance and belonging, thus creating and sustaining the community in the very same act (2004:187).

Madsen draws this conclusion from research among undocumented migrants from Mozambique who live in South Africa, for whom an actual act of violence could attract unwanted official attention leading to deportations. As he concludes, “since the objective of everyday policing is to protect and maintain the community, the form it takes cannot be a threat to the community” (Madsen 2004:187). In the case Madsen examines, migrants are shunned by their compatriots when they assume an improper attitude towards money by drinking it away instead of saving for the future.

Although the circumstances are very different in Todos Santos, lynching risked attracting official attention and intervention, created negative publicity in a town that had thrived on tourism, as well the potential for legal retribution. Furthermore, outright violence risked alienating people like Chico who found the sight of corporal punishment “terrible.” Instead, Lizard’s exile permitted the creation of a moral community without the performance of violent actions that many would have deemed immoral. His crime, along with his propensity for throwing rocks and picking fights, centered on his refusal to assume financial responsibilities for his family, much like the moral condemnation Madsen analyzes. This analysis blamed Lizard rather than larger structural conditions of chronic under-employment in Guatemala. Ultimately Lizard’s situation recalls Wolf’s prediction about the effects of land scarcity on agricultural communities, one where the community, “can maintain its integrity only if it can sponsor the emigration and urbanization or proletarianization of its sons” (1957:13). Lizard’s exclusion leads to his proletarianization, cutting up chickens on a factory line, in an ironic situation where a community has responded to the disposability of its young men by disposing of them themselves.

## **Chapter Five: ALCOHOL**

When people talk about local politics in Todos Santos Cuchumatán, Guatemala, they delight in those moments when things turn out exactly the opposite of someone's intentions. As one man chortled when gloating over a political rival's defeat, "Salió un tiro por la culata," or his rifle shot from the butt. These backfiring guns are legion in local politics, but this violent unpredictability transcends the local: it is intimately connected to a larger contradiction in a contemporary sociopolitical moment in which rights are severed from economic equality. While social movements such as the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and feminism explicitly connected economic inclusion to social justice (e.g., "Equal pay for equal work"), contemporary political movements encounter post-neoliberal states that are increasingly unwilling to connect rights to economic equity. This paradox is profoundly felt in Guatemala, where official recognition of its multicultural polity emerged alongside neoliberal economic reforms that have helped keep its majority indigenous population in extreme poverty.

The events that unfolded in late May of 2010 in Todos Santos offer a good example of a backfiring gun. These were an apocalyptic few days in Guatemala: the Pacaya Volcano spewed ashes at the very same moment that Hurricane Agatha pelted the region with torrential downpours. In Todos Santos the sky turned black, the Río Limón overflowed its banks and a man went missing (an event described in Chapter One). Paco Pérez went to the local radio station to announce the man's disappearance and organize a search party. He did so in his capacity as a leader of the local community development committee: unfortunately for him he was better known to people for the cantinas his family operated. Little did he know that he had just summoned his own lynch mob.

When the water subsided, the search party found the missing man's battered body stuck to a branch in the river. A rumor spread that the dead man's last phone call had been to his wife to say he was going to a clandestine cantina for another drink. Faced with undeniable evidence that the village's collective decision to prohibit the sale of alcohol was being ignored, the search party morphed into a mob. Although the police had been involved with the search party, and the justice of the peace had issued a death certificate, at this point state officials backed off. The justice of the peace filed a form explaining that mob action prevented an autopsy from occurring. Instead, the crowd installed the dead man's body in the town square. Then they marched on the clandestine cantinas, breaking down their doors and confiscating their stock. Fearing for their lives, Pérez and his sons fled, leaving their womenfolk behind. The mob apprehended their wives and dragged them to the town square, where they were taunted by the crowd and forced to take moral and financial responsibility for the man's drowning. Meanwhile, Pérez and his fellow cantineros were already meeting with a lawyer in the department capital, launching a lawsuit against the leaders of the security committee who were responsible for banning alcohol. The case took an entire year to unfold.

Pérez's radio announcement had not turned out as expected, and neither did the lawsuit. In their initial complaint the cantineros asserted that their rights guaranteed under the Guatemalan constitution had been violated. However in his decision the judge exonerated all of the security committee leaders of all of the charges. He stated that he was making this decision out of respect for the rights of indigenous people as established by the Guatemalan state's adoption of the International Labor Organization's Convention 169. ILO 169 states that indigenous people have the right to self-determination; thus, violence enacted in the name of a collective good turned out to be a legally defensible action.

If the whole situation turned out contrary to the hopes of the cantina owners, the case also points to a larger tension in the contemporary political moment. Without ascribing agency or intentionality to either of the amorphous transnational trends referenced by the terms “multicultural” and “neoliberal,” in what follows I argue that the melding of the two produces an unstable combination and a politically fraught terrain for newly rights-bearing citizens. In Bolivia, the other country in Latin America with a majority indigenous population, indigenous social movements have used multicultural politics to oppose privatization, form political parties and elect an indigenous president. But in Guatemala the ambiguous legal status of multiculturalism places its indigenous majority in a state of perpetual legal indeterminacy. The lines between what is legal or illegal and who is a deserving or undeserving subject of rights are continuously shifting, largely left to the discretion of individual state officials, if and when cases come to their attention. In the case that I examine below, the paradoxical combination of neoliberal multiculturalism ultimately backfires on the defendants as well as the plaintiffs, as official recognition of the security committee’s right to represent the *pueblo* coincides with the evaporation of public support for their efforts. In other words, the paradox of neoliberal multiculturalism in Guatemala may itself constitute a rifle that shoots from the butt.

### **Multiculturalism versus Neoliberalism**

Neoliberalism, which refers to a package of policies that emphasize decentralization, privatization and the devolution of responsibilities from the state to its citizenry, has gradually become the hegemonic form of capitalism over the last forty years (Graeber 2011, Greenhouse 2010, Harvey 2005, Ong 2006). The term has been so consistently invoked by anthropologists in the past decade that many now wonder if this “confusing, conflating” term is even useful at all (Ferguson 2010:166): some argue it should be tossed out entirely (Mains 2012). One difficulty of

deploying this term, apart from the plethora of locally specific variants, is that it may very well be defined by its paradoxes. In an influential formulation, Jean and John Comaroff (2006) argue that one important aspect of neoliberal ascendancy is its combination of rising lawlessness alongside a marked fetishism of the law. As evidence of this fetishism they cite the rise of legal globalization and the explosion in new constitutions ratified around the turn of this century. These constitutions represent a new vision of the state. While nation-states once based citizenship upon the conception of a homogenous citizenry (Anderson 2006), these new constitutions grant official recognition to their multicultural polities. However, this recognition takes place alongside a whole package of neoliberal economic policies that have exacerbated economic insecurity among these newly enfranchised citizens.

This tension points to another paradoxical aspect of the neoliberal moment. Many theorists of neoliberalism, following Foucault, see it as the triumph of an aggressive individualism, the ascendancy of *homo economicus* as at the fundamental unit of governance (e.g., Miller and Rose 2006). While this perspective on economic and social behavior began as a minority opinion cultivated by economists associated with the University of Chicago, theory became policy with the elections of Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in Britain. Thatcher summed up this ideological shift to primacy of the individual economic actor when she asserted, “there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families” (quoted in Harvey 2005).

Both Reagan and Thatcher attacked collective bargaining rights, ending the “truce” between capital and organized labor that had characterized capitalism throughout the twentieth century in the industrialized north (Harvey 2005). The neoliberal economic restructuring imposed by multilateral agencies upon much of Latin America in the 1980s and 90s included

massive public sector lay-offs that likewise disempowered labor unions (Van Cott 2006:288). But if collective labor rights were anathema to the new organizing logic of turn of the twenty-first century neoliberal capitalism, other kinds of collective rights came to the fore, especially if they could be framed in terms of the right to culture. In Latin America, neoliberalism occurred alongside vibrant indigenous rights movements (Postero and Zamosc 2004, Warren and Jackson 2002, Jackson and Warren 2005). Grassroots organizing accompanied concrete legal changes. In the past, citizenship in much of Latin America had been based on the ideology of *mestizaje*, or assimilation based on an ideal of cultural and biological mixing. But a new round of constitutions, including Guatemala's, valorized ethno-racial differences by granting recognition to their multicultural polities. In addition to new constitutions, instruments of international law, like ILO 169, defined the collective rights of indigenous people as a human right.

Many initial enthusiasts for multiculturalism saw this trend as something counterhegemonic to the capitalist juggernaut. Others have argued that as "counterintuitive" as the enfolding of collective rights recognition within a project of radical individualism may seem, these two elements form integral parts of the same package. In Elizabeth Povinelli's (2002) discussion of land rights claims brought forward by aboriginal Australians, she argues that "late liberal" states coopt claims not by denying rights but rather by granting them. Warren and Jackson (2002) likewise observe that the state has shifted from adversary to arbiter, maintaining its power by deciding which indigenous claimants constitute deserving subjects of rights. Charles Hale (2002, 2005) terms the confluence of neoliberal economic reforms with the adoption of a limited package of cultural rights "neoliberal multiculturalism." In an influential essay, Hale (2002) challenges advocates for the transformative power of multiculturalism by asking, "Does multiculturalism menace?" Hale answers this question in the negative, asserting that

multiculturalism is the cultural project of neoliberalism. Per Hale, multiculturalist discourses are what puts the “neo” in neoliberalism, as the abundant energy of cultural activists are easily coopted and redirected by powerful agents who determine who shall be deserving of rights. Donna Van Cott (2006) counters that this view ascribes too much intentionality and consistency to neoliberal elites. Instead of seeing the inclusion of multiculturalism under neoliberal regimes as a meaningless concession, Van Cott claims that “state recognition of a modest set of demands encourages more radical demands” (2006:288) However, in the case that follows, state recognition ends up diffusing more radical demands.

If neoliberal multiculturalism can be defined as a new relationship between citizens and states, this relationship still carries the imprint of previous citizenship regimes (James 2013). Below I examine some of the echoes of this past as it is poured through alcohol. Alcohol carries with it a particular history and a peculiar relationship to state formation and indigenous identity in Guatemala (Carey 2012). The reverberations of this history have made alcohol a flashpoint for contentions over the righteousness of disciplinary actions and the boundaries of community belonging in Todos Santos. Alcohol provides another front in the intergenerational conflict taking place between pre and postwar generations. If part of the paradox of neoliberalism and multiculturalism are their respective emphasis on individual versus collective rights, then this same tension can be seen in debates about the righteousness of the prohibition. While elders cite their collective right and responsibility to safeguard the future of the village from the effects of problem drinking, younger people argue that drinking is an individual decision and a constitutionally protected right.

## Distilling the Past

Any discussion of “citizenship” in Guatemala must reference the fact that for most of the nation’s history, its majority indigenous population was excluded from formal citizenship and yet systematically exploited as part of its nation-building project. In the late nineteenth century Mayans were forced to contribute seasonal labor to coastal coffee plantations. For Guatemala’s elites, an economy organized around coffee was a precarious one: the growing season was short and the international market fickle. Over the course of the nineteenth century the alcohol monopoly system became the nation’s primary source of revenue. By the 1890s, taxes on legal rum production provided between a fourth and a third of the national budget (Carey 2012:7). These profits financed Guatemala’s first police state, and bootleggers and contraband rum runners became the primary targets of these police actions.

While the state was extremely thin on the ground in the predominantly Mayan highlands of Guatemala, in Todos Santos, older people still recall how customs agents periodically swooped down to prosecute unauthorized moonshine production. Don Fausto, now 60, remembered seeing bootleggers forced to carry their stills all the way to the department capital 43 kilometers away on foot (interview, October 8, 2010). Juan Pablo, 56, remembers his family laughing at his mother when he was a boy because she confused legal with illegal liquor and rushed to bury empty bottles of legally-produced rum in the yard when she heard that customs officials were on their way (fieldnotes, December 2, 2010). Don Irwin, a retired Ladino schoolteacher and active Alcoholics Anonymous member in Huehuetenango, told stories about his youth in the seventies when he was posted to a remote indigenous village in the same state. While there he befriended the customs agents because they always had an endless supply of confiscated homebrew on hand. Irwin drank so much that he hallucinated that he saw *La*

*Llorona*, the weeping woman of Latin American legend. Apart from schoolteachers like Irwin, customs agents were some of the few representatives of the state to make their presence felt in rural indigenous Guatemala. Forcing rural Mayans to purchase legally-licensed rum helped connect the highlands to the national grid.

Alcohol played a major role in the debt peonage system. Labor contractors arrived during alcohol-fueled patron saints' days celebrations and offered cash advances that created ongoing indebtedness. Even though this practice was outlawed as part of the labor reforms during Guatemala's ten years of spring, it continued unabated for decades. In the ethnographic film *Todos Santos Cuchumatán* (1982), Olivia Carrescia records these labor contractors in action during a late seventies feria. Historian Virginia Garrard Burnett (2012) returns Mayan agency to this familiar account of labor exploitation through alcohol. She argues that as Mayan communities were increasingly pulled into wage labor outside of the village, the role of ritualized public drunkenness during fiestas became ever more important to reproducing a communitarian ethos. By drinking to excess together, Mayans strengthened communal ties strained by labor migration and filled the national coffers, contributing to the production of both a local and a national polity. At the same time, ritualized public drunkenness allowed Guatemalan elites to blame their nation's subsidiary status in the world system on "backward, drunken Indians" (Carey 2012).

This nineteenth-century legacy reverberated in twentieth-century developments. In the first place, Mayans' subordinate position helped make the Marxist insurgency a threat to the Guatemalan state in the 1970s. When the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) occupied Todos Santos in 1981, one of their first moves was to assassinate the local liquor vendor and ban alcohol (Perrera 1993). Kobrak (1997) describes this technique as a common procedure used by

the EGP throughout Huehuetenango. Alcohol consumption was considered counterrevolutionary. If legalized alcohol consumption connected remote Mayan villages to the Guatemalan nation through liquor profits and debt peonage, while the Marxist insurgency attempted to remove them from it, then the counterinsurgency campaign with its imposition of the civil patrol system forcibly reconnected the space of remote Mayan villages to the nation-state. Anthropologist Finn Stepputat's discussion of the effects of wartime displacement emphasizes the spatial aspect of the military's counterinsurgency techniques. As he writes, "In the process, new political subjectivities with a national orientation were formed among the excluded refugees and displaced people, as well as among the inhabitants that were incorporated in the armed villages" (1999:77). What becomes clear in the material that follows, however, is that while national orientations are salient for some, the Guatemalan nation is just one of multiple scales that appear in debates over alcohol in Todos Santos.

The security committee's existence already evidences multiple histories. It can be read as part of the ongoing effects of wartime paramilitarization. It can also be seen as a symptom of neoliberalism, as states move to decentralize by outsourcing state functions to civil society, as evidenced by the rise of community policing. The PNC authorized community policing in 1999 (Argueta 2012). In places where the civil patrol system existed, these preexisting structures represented a resource that could be mobilized in efforts to devolve policing to communities. Ideally community policing volunteers are in ongoing communication with the official police force: in Guatemala, there are no formal channels of communication (Argueta 2012).

If these local security committees emerged initially as part of neoliberal police reform, in indigenous areas, at least, another part of their justification comes from the multiculturalist ethic that permeates the postwar period. In Guatemala neoliberalism and multiculturalism arrived

simultaneously during the internationally brokered peace process that produced a new constitution. One of the peace accords, the 1995 Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, recognized the right to practice their own forms of customary law. But formal recognition of this right was never included in the constitution. Instead, the constitution grants official recognition to the nation's indigenous population and acknowledges the right to culture (such as language, traditional dress, customs and traditions), stopping short of officially recognizing the judicial autonomy of indigenous communities. However, Article 46 of the constitution gives human rights conventions adopted by the Guatemalan state preeminence over national law. ILO convention 169 is one such convention, and it commits its signatories to recognizing the right of indigenous people to administer their own forms of justice, "as long as these respect fundamental and internationally recognized human rights" (Sieder 2011B:247). Guatemala ratified ILO 169 in 1997.

Although ILO 169 played a decisive role in the trial, few on the ground in Todos Santos were clear on what this convention meant. People were more familiar with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Every week the extremely popular community radio station broadcast a program dedicated to translating this lengthy document into Mam Maya. The idea that indigenous rights were human rights was literally in the air. Many people were given to observing that the *pueblo* (meaning both the village and people more generally) had the right to organize: it said so somewhere, even if they weren't sure where.

According to Julian Mendoza, mayor of Todos Santos from 2000-2004, the security patrol reorganized during his administration to rout a band of livestock thieves. When they confronted the PNC with their failure to handle the issue, the police suggested that they organize themselves. "But if something happens," Mendoza said they told him, "it's not our problem"

(interview, August 3, 2011). The first security committee's campaign against the unruly youth people considered "gangsters" had widespread public support: their next target, alcohol, was considerably more controversial.

In 2008 a new board of directors took over the leadership of the security committee. These leaders, who included former mayor Mendoza, had an agenda. As Mendoza explained, the problem was not just the youth. The kids were polite and respectful when they were sober, but once they got a few drinks in them they became violent thugs. Security leader Don Dionisio was even more explicit in connecting gangs to drinking. "What was the origin of the gangs? Liquor!" (interview, July 20, 2008). But this problem, the problem of alcohol, wasn't just limited to the young people: most of the problems that the security committee dealt with, like street brawling and wife beating, could be blamed on alcohol. Apart from violence, alcohol was also holding back the economic progress of the village. "If there's drinking there are children who go without shoes and sick women who go without medicine," Mendoza observed (interview, August 3, 2011). Or as Mateo put it, "Men go to the market and instead of spending their money on food, they buy beer and don't come home for days" (fieldnotes, July 12, 2008). Drinking, an overwhelmingly male activity, made women and children suffer. After 2008, shutting down cantinas and arresting and fining the obviously inebriated became part of the mandate of the security committee.

The view that addressing problem drinking was the collective responsibility of the pueblo was a decidedly generational perspective. Mendoza, like his fellow anti-alcohol activists, is around 50 years old, which means he was young during the EGP occupation in the early 1980s. Thirty years later, a revolutionary rhetoric continued to resonate in local leaders' justifications of the alcohol ban. In these narratives, alcohol has played a key role in long history of continuous

oppression. As one man told me “Liquor was a weapon of the conquest.” It continued to be a weapon of exploitation in the post-colonial period when labor contractors arrived in indigenous villages during fiestas offering cash advances in exchange for signing a labor contract (Eber 2000 describes a similar system in neighboring Chiapas, Mexico).

In Guatemala the Castillo family owns the national brewery and the Botran family the national distillery. Both are among the handful of Euro-descended families who control the nation’s wealth. They sell a rot-gut rum called Quetzalteca and a beer called Gallo that is slightly better than Budweiser. In rural Guatemala it’s very hard to buy any other alcoholic beverage. This is how Juan Pablo, who numbered with Mendoza among the accused, explained the situation:

The people who are the consumers of alcohol are the poorest, people who haven’t been educated. Liquor is a product of the rich. They manufacture Quetzalteca Especial. And it used to be that everyone here went to the coast, because they needed cheap labor, and there you’d get paid but just down the road there’d be a cantina, so the all the money you earned went right back to them. Quetzalteca Especial isn’t their drink, the rich don’t actually drink it themselves. They put an indigenous woman on the label, and then in the beer ads for Gallo they use a blonde woman—all to make a man lose his head. So then the money doesn’t stay in the family, and that’s why there’s malnutrition, poverty and a lack of education in Guatemala (interview, October 13, 2010).

Juan Pablo made it clear that his belief that extreme measures needed to be taken came from his own struggles with alcoholism:

I’m speaking from personal experience, I already spent time there. It’s been almost 30 years now, but because of drink I couldn’t continue studying, and when we played soccer after spending Saturday in the cantina we didn’t play as well as we could have. I didn’t get ahead as much as I could have, and the reason: alcohol. So I have personal reasons for fighting the dominance of alcohol (interview, October 13, 2010).

If alcohol had held him back personally, it was also holding back the village as a whole, as men spent money on drink instead of food, education and health care for their families. For Juan

Pablo and others of his generation, doing something about alcoholism was an obligation, a collective responsibility to the welfare of the village and the progress of his people. These men set out to disarticulate the connection of “drunken” to “Indian,” a linkage that had been central to Guatemalan elite justifications for racism for centuries. Sobriety became a point of civic pride: these men started to talk disparagingly about other indigenous villages they visited, places where liquor propaganda covered the walls, passed out drunks littered the streets, and the womenfolk could only afford cheap plastic shoes. If capitalist individualism reached its apotheosis in post-cold war triumphalism, the legacy of its opposition lived on in the hearts and mind of a generation given to talking about the need to “conscientizar el pueblo” [raise people’s consciousness] about the dangers of drink. In what they called “the battle over alcohol,” they felt justified in using force to impose their will. For a while, many in the village agreed with this perspective.

### **Imposing the Ban**

Every market day in Todos Santos people from the rural hamlets descend upon the *cabecera* (center) for shopping and drinking. In early 2008 people in the center decided they were fed up with streets full of howling drunks, broken bottles, and stale urine. A meeting of the *cabecera* elected to ban alcohol while the newly elected mayor was out of town. Irked by this decision, the mayor confidently took the issue to the wider community in a massive public meeting in April of 2008. The meeting turned into yet another backfiring gun when the population overwhelmingly voted for a county-wide alcohol ban, and the mayor found himself forced to spearhead the prohibition or risk expulsion from office. The meeting concluded with all present signing a document declaring their support of a county-wide alcohol ban. This document later became a key piece of evidence in the trial.

When I describe what happened in Todos Santos to outsiders, many people ask me if women were behind the ban. Certainly it could not have happened without their support, but the leaders who implemented it were all men who did so in the name of women. Dionisio, the intellectual author of the ban, always emphasized how alcohol led to sexual impropriety in his anti-alcohol talks. On the one hand, he complained that the cantinas were unsanitary and lacked tables, chairs, sinks and restrooms for their customers. On the other hand, he claimed that some cantinas housed backrooms full of beds where insentient women were forced into having sex (interview, July 20, 2008). Many of the smalltime operators had been widows and single mothers, women like Candelaria who supplemented her meager income by selling beer and rum out of their houses. Whenever Dionisio spoke about the liquor vendors who refused to respect their increasing regulation by the security committee, he always referred to them as “cantineras.” Thus while some women supported the ban, others lost their livelihoods.

Another common question involves the role of religion in the prohibition: many assume that evangelical Christians, who are not allowed to drink, imposed their piety on the pueblo. This was not the case. While most evangelicals certainly supported the decision, they were not responsible for it. Its leaders were overwhelmingly Catholic. In fact, security leaders often spoke with frustration about evangelicals’ reluctance to involve themselves with the public actions and worldly politics of the security committee. As Dionisio put it, “They only care about their families, not the pueblo.”

Despite the community decision, about a dozen cantineros continued to sell, including Jeronimo Gomez, who had already made a fortune as a coyote (migrant smuggler) and been run out of a neighboring hamlet for a long history of unacceptably violent behavior. That June, he himself became a victim of violence when a machete-brandishing mob marched through the

streets and attacked the remaining cantinas. The cantineros were meeting at the bar owned by Jeronimo's son Wilfredo when the mob encircled them and dragged them from the building. Jeronimo was hit in the head and lost consciousness until a dunk in the fountain in the center of town revived him. Soaking wet, the recalcitrant cantineros were forced to spend the night shivering in an open-air jail cell. The next day they were told their land would be expropriated and they would be exiled from the community if they continued to sell.

At first the ban appeared to be a success, and the security committee held a triumphant celebration of the first 100 days of sobriety. A variety of religious leaders offered up prayers to thank God for their success. But ultimately the prohibition only succeeded in creating a lucrative black market in alcohol sales. Jeronimo Gomez and son and Paco Pérez and sons started selling again. They tripled their prices and soon became some of the wealthiest families in town. Not only did the remaining cantineros have the resources to mount a legal challenge when the next incident occurred, but also their previous experiences with mob justice made them inclined to seek retribution.

Marta is married to Paco Pérez's son Oscar. She is a soft-spoken woman with a gentle manner who is in her late twenties. The day she agreed to talk to me about what had happened we sat on my back porch and watched the clouds roll in over the mountain ridge that looms above the town. Marta told me about another business venture her husband had been involved in in Todos Santos: transportation. They brought a four-wheel-drive truck back from the United States, and for a while Oscar made his living giving people rides. He used to drive people all over the place, "even all the way up there," she said, gesturing to the ridge before us. But as more migrants came home and transportation services flooded Todos Santos, giving rides became less profitable. Selling beer and liquor during a prohibition, however, was another

matter, one that involved a large profit margin and considerable risk. “Selling liquor is like selling drugs,” she sighed (interview, September 16, 2011).

I asked her about what happened during the second mob action against the cantineros in June of 2010. Marta was locked in her house with her mother-in-law when a crowd broke down the door and dragged them through the streets. She recalled a woman slapping her on the face while shouting, “It’s your fault he died!” Then the crowd shoved them all in to the jail along with their confiscated stock. Her two young children were with her, and they were terrified. Her 4 year old daughter was crying: in the melee someone had punched her and her face was bleeding. “It was really scary for me,” Marta concluded in her whispery voice, “I was traumatized by it.”

In my fieldnotes that day I recorded my ambivalent reaction to Marta’s account: “Why when Marta said that she was traumatized did I have a flicker of skepticism, a feeling that this was part of the official presentation?” (fieldnotes, September 16, 2011). In retrospect I can see that I was struggling with the bar for what constituted violence: it had been raised for me after a year of living in Guatemala. Acts of collective violence had become normalized. I’d interviewed an otherwise stoic man who started covertly dabbing tears from his eyes when he described how his would-be killers dragged him from his jail cell to show him the pile of wood and cans of gasoline they had gathered for his immolation. Another lynching survivor told me she couldn’t sleep on her back for weeks after she escaped from three days of public flogging in the town square to the relative peace of prison. With time and distance the trauma of the day Marta’s neighbors turned on her comes into view.

## “Drinking Is My Decision”

In the June 1, 2010 action, anti-alcohol forces tried to force Marta and her fellow cantineras to take responsibility for their customers. The dead man was not seen as responsible for his death: as angry crowd members told her, “It’s your fault he died.” Blame was placed on the liquor vendors themselves, who were forced to publically accept moral and financial responsibility for the drinker’s mishap. Even before the ban, the security committee had forced cantineros to pay the funerals costs of those who died of drink. Security leaders described this fine as a way to send a message to the cantineros that they should get out of the business. The conflict over alcohol revealed two diametrically opposed ways of looking at responsibility that set the village on a collision course. This division roughly broke down along generational lines.

Older security leaders were alarmed by youth drinking. They argued that these youths should fulfill their responsibilities to their families before they spent their money on alcohol. Their policies tried to make the liquor vendors responsible to the rest of the community, forcing them to think about the future of the village instead of their own bottom line. People who had come of age after the war tended to be critical of this collective allocation of responsibility. As one 30 year old told me, “People here always blame the cantineros for everything. They go out drinking and they spend all their money and then they say the cantinero took all my money” (fieldnotes, December 16, 2010). When I asked Marta about why they were blamed for the death instead of the drinker, she replied, “that’s what our customers say too: ‘You don’t come to our house, you aren’t forcing us to drink’” (interview, September 16, 2011). Another critic reported having the same conversation at the rival clandestine cantina. As he summarized the gist of the conversation: “Even if you came to my house and said here, drink this, it’s my decision to drink.” (fieldnotes, October 4, 2010). Another opponent of the ban made the same point over

dinner as he picked up a cup off of the table and waved it in my face: “I can’t force you to drink this, it’s up to you” (interview, August 30, 2011). These critics of the ban have received more formal education than their parents’ generation, done stints of labor migration in the United States, or both. I contend that these experiences have helped inculcate the conviction that drinking is an individual decision, and an individual’s responsibility. Below I take a closer look at the roles that education and transnational migration play in forming the opposition to the alcohol ban.

## Education

As mentioned previously, throughout most of the twentieth century, formal education in Guatemala was a profoundly alienating experience for indigenous children. Most Mayan parents avoided sending their children to school if they could. In contrast, the postwar period has seen a dramatic increase in school attendance, due in large part to the institutionalization of bilingual education during the Peace Accords. Bilingual education is a piece of a larger ideological shift in definitions of citizenship, from one based on assimilation to one that acknowledges cultural difference. As the Peace Accords asserted, Guatemala must be reconstructed as a “multiethnic, pluricultural, and multilingual” nation. Paradoxically, the limited cultural recognition represented by bilingual education may well be enabling more assimilation and cultural loss than the older national model. According to many elders in Todos Santos, the increase in formal education is behind the emergence of a more individualist ethic. Don Fausto, one of the first people in the village to finish secondary school, seemed rather rueful about his experience when he commented that education, “separates us from our culture.” Among Mayan teachers, he remarked, “There’s a lot of individualism, we’re not united at all” (interview, August 30, 2011).

Many of this educated younger generation used what could be called “constitutional patriotism” to frame their objections to vigilante power. This term first appeared in discussions of the European Union in debates over whether or not allegiance to a document could replace nationalism (Habermas 1998). In Guatemala, constitutional changes marked stages in the long denouement of the civil war. The 1985 constitution codified basic liberal democratic guarantees, but it also legalized the civil patrol system. Subsequently constitutional reforms in 1996 subordinated the army to civilian control and officially eliminated the civil patrol system (Jonas 2000). As Guatemalans are given to saying, the postwar constitution is a beautiful document, in theory. Practice is another matter. Yet, given its historical role in inaugurating the end of the conflict, it is unsurprising that critics of vigilantism reference it in their efforts to oppose extralegal repression in their local polity.

This sort of constitutional patriotism came across in the interview with my neighbor Anselmo that I discuss in Chapter 3. During this conversation he complained about the security committee’s ever-growing mandate: “they started with the gangs [but] they soon got involved in other things, like intervening in domestic violence, in debt repayment, in punishing people who have lovers, in alcohol, making justice their own way. The thing is that in none of these areas did they take the constitution into consideration” (interview, December 10, 2010). Anselmo suggests that the constitution should be the guide to what is legal and illegal in Guatemala. Instead, the leaders of the local security committee ignored the law of the land and made “justice in their own way.”

Other men from Anselmo’s generation echoed his use of the constitution to question the extrajudicial actions of the security committee. His neighbor Fredy had never left Guatemala, but like Anselmo he had a high school education. Fredy’s mother had supplemented her income by

selling beer out of their house. But in 2008 the mayor arrived with a mob and told them that they had to respect the will of the people. Then the crowd cut their water supply. Three years later, Fredy still flushed with rage when he described this event. We were talking in my kitchen, and he picked up a little notebook that was lying on the table between us, brandishing it as he said, “What has happened in this town with the constitution? In my opinion what’s happened here is unconstitutional. People say that indigenous people have rights,” he said, waving the notebook, “But no, everything is in the constitution.” Fredy continued,

They’ve made things illegal here that aren’t illegal in Guatemala. The president hasn’t said that alcohol is illegal, it’s not in the constitution that alcohol is illegal. It’s a person’s decision to drink in moderation. I drink when I have money. When I don’t, I don’t.  
(fieldnotes, September 16, 2011).

Fredy laid claim to national citizenship, as a citizen with constitutionally protected rights, as well as the sovereignty of the individual decision. While for Fredy respect for rule of law came from his exposure to the postwar constitution in his high school curriculum, for others the notion of law as a meaningful category came from their experience of subaltern migration to the United States. Marta’s husband Oscar, one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, was one of these.

## Migration

I met Marta through her husband, and I met Oscar because I’m a *gringa*. One day I was out walking when a pick-up truck screeched to a halt alongside me. Its driver, who was clearly intoxicated, leaned out the window and peppered me with questions. He was very happy to learn I was from the United States: he’d spent many years there and he loved my country. I warmed to this conversation once he told me he lived “in the cantina.” As a woman, especially a conspicuously foreign one, hanging out at in the all-male social space of the cantina was awkward at best. But once I’d met Oscar, I didn’t feel shy about stopping by the wooden shack

where he dispensed tall boys of Gallo beer and liters of Quetzalteca rum. Oscar was always drinking, and always apologetic about it: “Perdóname, Elena, I’m drunk again.” My queries about when we could talk when he was sober always received evasive answers. My notes on our conversations are free-associative fragments. The following represents one of our more lucid exchanges:

Oscar talked about work, about what a good worker he was because he’s smart. He worked a big machine at the car factory, GM, for four years and his bosses Bill and Rick would come to him and say Jose, he went by Jose, he wasn’t Oscar then. Why’s that? I asked. Ah, Elena, you know why. Jose, you’re a good worker, they’d say, you’re intelligent, you can work seven days a week. And he did for four years until they started taking an extra 100 dollars out of it for social security and he went to see about that and that’s when they found out they weren’t his papers. That’s when he “decided” to come home (fieldnotes, July 27, 2011).

There are two points in this conversation that I want to highlight. The first is Oscar’s pride in being recognized as a hard worker. This sense that benefits should accrue to you by virtue of hard work came through in the language of the cantineros’ initial complaint, which stated “we are working people” who were “victims of an act that did not respect our persons, our rights, or our property as clearly guaranteed by the constitution of the Republic of Guatemala.” In conversation, Oscar emphasized the legality of their business. As he often stated, they paid their taxes. His idea of how things should work seemed to come from his experience with illegality in the United States, which brings me to the second important point in this exchange.

I did know why Oscar went by Jose. On an earlier occasion he had referenced his problems with using a fake social security number. As I wrote in my notes that day, “He can’t get into the United States because he used two different names there, and they take that seriously there. If you say you’re telling the truth and you’re not, then it’s a big problem” (fieldnotes, July

4, 2011). Oscar frequently expressed respect for police officers in the United States. “The police there are honest,” he said.

“Well, not all of them,” I interjected.

“No, they are,” he countered, “If you try to bribe them, that only makes things worse for you.” Even though he had ended up on the wrong side of the law in the United States when he was caught using a false social security number (and possibly on another occasion when he tried to bribe a cop), these experiences seemed to increase his respect for it, and helped to create a false hope that the law could be a meaningful and enforceable category in Guatemala as well. That same day he told me, “It’s taken a whole year with this legal process, but I’ve been to the United States and I know it’s not right to enter your house and take your things. We are a legal business” (fieldnotes, July 4, 2011).

While part of the implicit argument Oscar made came from a belief in a constitutionally protected regime of rights, his assertions contain echoes of an older citizenship regime as well. His emphasis on their legality, that they were an officially licensed business and that they paid their taxes, connects them to an older model of the Guatemalan nation-state, one that put him and his family in the category of people that the state sought to protect. The cantineros’ case was heard at the *Juzgado de Primer Instancia* (Court of First Jurisdiction) in Huehuetenango. Throughout most of its early history, the majority of cases heard there involved prosecuting Mayans caught importing contraband liquor from nearby Mexico for their fiestas (Schwartzkopf 2012:28). As a licensed vendor of the legally distributed products of the national liquor monopoly, Oscar was confident that this time around he would be on the right side of the law.

Others in town echoed this opinion about the liquor monopoly and its relationship to national interests. As Candelaria put it, “They say alcohol generates a lot of money for Guatemala, and that’s why the ban couldn’t work here” (fieldnotes, March 8, 2011). Security leaders grumbled that the mayor had expressed this opinion to them as well. In this line of argument, depriving the state of its liquor revenues was almost unpatriotic. As if to underscore this point, in late 2010, the legislature passed a new law mandating a 15% tax on alcoholic beverages to support the construction of maternity hospitals (fieldnotes, December 18, 2010). In this savvy public relations move, no doubt passed with the approval of the liquor industry, drinking legally distilled and distributed alcohol directly contributed to the health of Guatemala’s future.

In the battle over alcohol that took place in Todos Santos, each side faced off across a generational and experiential divide. While pro-prohibition activists touted the collective responsibility of the village to address problem drinking, anti-prohibition proponents looked beyond the confines of the village to justify their position. This generation had their horizons broadened by a secondary school education outside of the village, by labor migration to the United States, or by both. These processes had taught them to have faith in the rule of law and individual rights, whether guaranteed by the Guatemalan or the U.S. constitution. However, in the trial that followed, collective rights took legal precedence when the judge recognized the right of the security committee to enforce the will of the people and ban alcohol.

### **Individualizing Collectives**

As Jackson and Warren (2005) remark in their overview of literature on indigenous social movements, the most effective ones are those that are able to pull off successful “pueblo performances.” In other words, their leaders convincingly present themselves authentic

representatives of an autochthonous collectivity. In contrast, over the course of the liquor trial, security leaders' confidence in the efficacy of their own "pueblo performance" faltered. Several reversals took place over the course of the trial. While the defendants started out by insisting on a collective defense, they ended up presenting individual ones on the day of the trial. Meanwhile, their lawyer initially proposed defending each of the men separately, but on the day of the trial it fell to him to make the case that these men did what they did in the name of the pueblo.

When the charges against them became known, Juan Pablo wanted to hire a lawyer who sympathized with their struggle against alcohol. Instead, the lawyer they retained opined that he did not support their efforts because alcohol provides much needed employment in Guatemala. (He, it seems, was among the "they" Candelaria was referring to when she said, "They say alcohol generates a lot of money for Guatemala.") The defendants were further dismayed when he suggested taking each of their cases individually. As Dionisio put it, taking the cases separately did not make sense under the circumstances: "This is a case of the pueblo. This is the case of alcohol!" (fieldnotes, March 7, 2011).

The third security committee had 28,000 quetzales (about \$3,000) in their kitty when they took office. The second security committee had been famous for levying fines as part of their disciplinary techniques. It was not entirely clear where all this money went. Of the many criticisms that could be made of Juan Pablo (see Chapter 3), he was scrupulous about money and avoided any appearance of personal enrichment from his position. Over the course of lawsuit, the money they had inherited disappeared quickly, as the 11 defendants had to travel to appointments with their lawyer and pay for numerous trips to the department and national capitals to acquire the documentation required of them in their defense. Previously the security committee had gone out of their way to remain unknown to the state. While the second security

committee wanted to create identification cards for its participants, the third security committee roundly rejected this suggestion out of concerns for liability. As Juan put it, “People in Todos Santos know who I am, but no one in Huehuetenango does.” The reams of official documentation produced by the trial put an end to these leaders’ anonymity.

The defendants thought that they should not be personally liable for the expenses of the trial: after all, what they were accused of doing they had done in the name of the people. They called a public meeting to ask for support. In April of 2011 all of the leaders of the various local security committees throughout the county came to meeting in the salon where security leaders explained the situation to them. They promised to take these fundraising efforts back to their communities. But there was no help forthcoming. Security leaders approached the municipality as well. But apart from paying the bills of the two defendants who were municipal employees, this financial aid was not forthcoming either.

In the build up to the trial, the defendants were clearly nervous. There was an order of capture out for them. The charges against them, breaking and entering, aggravated assault, robbery, and violent coercion, were serious ones. It seemed very likely that they might have to go to jail. The mayor captured this pessimism, and the harsh reality of Guatemalan jails, when he mused during his speech to the April 12 assembly, “Some of these men may have to taste jail, and some of them may die” (fieldnotes, April 12, 2011). The cantineros, on the other hand, were confident. They boasted of the deepness of their pockets and the intelligence of their lawyer.

Enthusiasm for the alcohol prohibition steadily evaporated over the course of the trial, in the face of mounting evidence that addiction could not be treated by force and growing exhaustion with a ban that had only succeeded in raising prices. As one young woman whose

parents used to sell beer from their house during fiestas commented, “What’s happened has just generated new *ricos*, people who weren’t in the business before. Why are they allowed to sell?” Then she answered her own question when she remarked, “They must have good lawyers” (fieldnotes, November 2, 2010). Cynicism about the prohibition also came through in my notes on an exchange with Marcelina, who had weathered many years with a hard-drinking and sometimes violent partner. The relationship had cost her her front teeth and her health.

I asked Marcelina more about what kind of effect the alcohol ban had, and she said there were many who were saying, “Thank God there’s no more liquor,” but what are they talking about? Liquor didn’t go anywhere, it’s still around. The only thing that had happened in her household since the ban was she and her husband fight more, because he spends more money on liquor than before and then he comes home and accuses her of spending the money. Used to be it was 35 quetzales in Huehuetenango for a liter of rum, and 40 here, but now they charge 100. And the men just keep on drinking and pissing, drinking and pissing. Like dogs in the garbage dump, hanging out in trash, waking up in trash (fieldnotes, June 18, 2011).

Symptomatic of a more general disenchantment, the security patrols of Todos Santos started to fall by the wayside. The cantón of Los Ramos officially disbanded their security patrol for a week, before public outcry about “the birthplace of the gangs” suspending their security efforts forced them to regroup. Patrollers from various cantones reported that their neighborhood had cut back on the nights and hours they patrolled, and that absenteeism and disinterest ran high. Rumors spread that alcohol sales were legal in the county again. The story went that the security committee had been forced to settle out of court with the cantineros, and ending the prohibition had been a precondition of this agreement. New unofficial cantinas popped up on an almost daily basis. People started passing out drunk on the street again without fear of fines or imprisonment.

A mysterious anti-alcohol activist named Diana appeared to help the beleaguered defendants. She was a middle-aged white woman who spoke only Spanish but dressed like a Todosantera. Diana had come to town before to give anti-alcohol workshops, but she'd snuck out without paying her hosts for her lodging. When I met her she refused to answer the most basic questions about herself, like where she was from or where she lived. Instead she made mention of death threats. She also offered a conspiracy theory about the mayor of Todos Santos, saying he had been bought off by Big Liquor. When she tried to attend the meeting that April, the mayor had her kicked out of the auditorium. But over the course of the trial she went from persona non grata among the security committee to something of a deus ex machina. The tone in which the men called her "muy cabrona" (which more or less translates as "bitch") went from disparaging to admiring. She attended their meetings with their lawyer, and became irate when she discovered that he was not mentioning ILO 169 in their defense. She visited human rights agencies and got them to supply amicus briefs for the defense. Diana also wrote a brief herself, in which she identified herself as a community leader of Todos Santos, and described how the "500 year-long nightmare" of alcoholism had affected "us as women." These briefs, many defendants said afterward, had helped them greatly with their case.

When it came time for the trial, the judge agreed to hear each of the defendants separately. Despite their initial efforts to fight the charges collectively, the defendants ended up presenting themselves before the law as individuals. While there had been grumbling within their ranks about their members who were trying to find alibis to absolve themselves, on the day of the trial everyone presented an individual alibi, such as "I was at work," or "I was in Mexico," or "I was playing soccer" when the mob action in question occurred. The lawyer became frustrated with this individualism. On a lunch break during the trial, he urged the defendants who had yet to

testify to make a collective case. “You need to explain to the judge,” he told them, “why something had to be done about alcohol. Talk about all the damage it has done, how many people have died, how much violence against women there was. The judge doesn’t know this, he thinks you were just a small group acting alone.” He concluded by saying to the men who had yet to testify, “I’m counting on you, Julian and Dionisio, to convey this” (fieldnotes, July 13, 2011).

Dionisio was the last defendant to be called to testify. Members of the public were not allowed into the courtroom, so that afternoon I sat with him outside in the courthouse stairwell while he nervously awaited his turn. I had heard Dionisio make eloquent arguments against the evils of liquor many times over the years: I gave him the opportunity to perform this speech to me again, but he seemed to have lost all interest in the battle he had been fighting for years. Instead he was obsessed with talking about what bad people the cantineros were. Oscar was a murderer and a rapist, Jeronimo a child molester. According to their colleagues, when Dionisio and Julian testified, contrary to the lawyer’s instructions, they did not invoke the *pueblo*. Instead, like everyone else, they sought to save themselves. These omissions left it to the lawyer to make the case for the men as indigenous authorities selected by the pueblo. He produced a copy of the document signed by the entire community when they banned alcohol at the public meeting back in 2008. He also cited ILO 169 in his closing arguments. The judge incorporated this reference into the first page of his decision.

A contradictory process took place over the course of the trial, whereby the defendants tried to mount a collective defense, were forced to testify individually, but then ultimately won the case because of the recognition of their collective right to rule the pueblo. The deserving subject of rights was the side that was seen as representing the will of the people, as evidenced

by pages and pages of smudgy thumbprints, the documentation of the communal decision to ban alcohol, and reinforced by the flurry of amicus briefs Diana gathered from human rights organizations. This evidence trumped the cantineros' representation of themselves as contributors to national revenue and citizens of Guatemala with constitutionally protected rights.

When I ran into former mayor Mendoza in a shop a few days after the trial, he seemed giddy at the prospect that they could use the decision to ban alcohol legally this time, without violence. However, in order to pursue a legal case they needed the help of their lawyer. In order to secure his help, they needed to pay him for his services for the trial. He had charged each of the 11 defendants 3,000 quetzales each (about \$333). Some of the men couldn't pay this sum: others refused to pay it on principle. This dispute over the lawyer's payment revealed the security committee's liminal position: they had been accused of a crime that had been committed collectively, but they had gone to trial as individuals. As Mendoza said about forming the security committee a decade ago, police officials had told them go ahead, but if anything happens, it's your responsibility. Indeed, when something did happen, it was their responsibility. The security leaders were individually liable. There were no state or municipal coffers or as it turned out unofficial public *colaboración* available to pay their legal costs. The April 12 meeting had not succeeded in generating donations for their cause.

State intervention, the threat of jail time, the expense and stress of a lengthy legal process undermined the power of the security committee; they became more and more hesitant to impose their will through force, to do anything that could be perceived as a violation of human rights. Many neighborhood groups cut back their patrols. The grumbling about the prohibition that people had kept to themselves out of fear became more and more open. The prohibition

completely crumbled. Many more people went into business, many of them without the official licenses to sell.

## Aftermath

After the trial the mayor called a meeting of all municipal employees. He reportedly told them not to drink in the cantinas because the cantineros might avenge themselves on people associated with the municipality. “If you get into trouble, it’s not my problem,” he concluded (fieldnotes, July 18, 2011). Other defendants were likewise concerned about vengeance. One man told me he was afraid to leave his house because he’d heard a rumor that Jeronimo Gomez wanted to kill him (fieldnotes, July 21, 2011). Even the usually unflappable Juan Pablo changed his routes through town so that he no longer walked through the neighborhood where the clandestine cantinas were located.

I went to visit Oscar in his cantina after the trial. At first he was irked with me: why were you there supporting *them*? But then he lost his train of thought and started apologizing to me: “Ay, perdóname, Elena, I’m drunk again” (fieldnotes, July 27, 2011). By the end of the conversation he was telling me how much he loved my country and he beckoned me into his shack to show me the American flag he had hanging on his wall.

I was less lucky the next time I visited Oscar’s cantina. It was shortly after the cantineros lost their right to appeal the judge’s decision, and another one of the plaintiffs was drinking there. I was chatting with Oscar and his family when Wilfredo, who’d been urinating on the wall of the shack, lurched out of the shadows. His face started twitching with rage when he saw me. “Oscar do you know who she is!” he shouted in Spanish, before he started sputtering in Mam Maya about how I’d been at the trial. Then he addressed me in Spanglish: “You were there laughing, you were there with the security committee laughing, there were cameras, we saw

you!” He leaned into my face and covered me with spittle when he bellowed, “You’re not welcome in my home!” At that moment I thought that he might hit me. Fortunately Oscar intervened, saying, “But, Wilfredo, this is my house and she’s welcome here.”

Wilfredo continued his tirade. “But you’re from the United States! You were there with the security committee! What do you think they break into your house, they take her and the baby,” he shouted, gesturing at Marta, who was manning the counter. “Is it okay,” he continued, “just to break into people’s houses and take their families. Like this!” At that point he grabbed me and spun me around in what felt like an awkward dance step. I started talking nervously, explaining I’d been interested in this case ever since I saw the ban happen. At the mention of the 2008 prohibition Wilfredo shouted, “Yeah, but some of us have balls!” He grabbed Oscar by the collar and shouted in his ear, “Balls! We’re made of money. There *will* be another trial!”

Oscar joined in: “If they come back, if they try that again, I’m going to kill them, with an AK-47. They look like a toy but they’re not. I can kill at least 20 people with my AK.” Wilfredo in the course of his drunken gesticulating reached out and patted my breast. Oscar said, “Hey, don’t touch her there, touch her here,” and demonstrated patting me on the shoulder. Oscar started to say something about how in the United States you could be arrested for that. Once again, the idealized shadow of the United States and its functioning rule of law hovered over the conversation. My nationality combined with my apparent support of the security committee was part of what had initially been hurtful to Oscar and then infuriating to Wilfredo. Being from the United States, I should have known that it was not okay to break into someone’s house and take their family.

I decided it was time to buy the bottle of rum I had come there for, and leaned in the window of the shack to start the negotiation with Marta. “Did they scare you?” she whispered. “Yeah, that was a little scary,” I admitted. What had happened was minor, but as I walked away I realized that my heart was pounding and I’d broken into a sweat beneath the layers of sweaters I’d put on against the chilly night air (fieldnotes, August 24, 2011).

Part of the message of the trial was that the Guatemalan state could not be counted upon to protect its citizens from aggression. As Juan Pablo put it, “If the people go and kill Jeronimo Gomez or if he decides to kill me, the state isn’t going to do anything” (fieldnotes, March 15, 2011). The mayor warned his workers that they were on their own if they were attacked by the embittered cantineros. The defendants laid low, going out of their way to avoid the clandestine cantinas. Paranoia reigned on the part of the plaintiffs as well. Oscar fantasized about taking out the front row of a mob with an AK. Wilfredo claimed that he had seen me laughing at him on an imaginary closed-circuit TV. If Wilfredo was powerless over the whole situation, he managed in his state of inebriation to momentarily assert some dominance over me, first by screaming at me, then by touching me inappropriately. I had witnessed drunken bravado covering up an impotent rage.

I include this awkward encounter and my physical reaction to it because it represents an instant where I felt interpolated into a habitus of fear. It was a moment like the one I had with Chentin where for a second I caught a glimpse of how someone else must feel when they handed those feelings to me. Once again those feelings were a mix of rage, confusion, and helplessness. In the face of Marta’s expression of empathy to me as she sold me a discounted bottle of rum, I felt ashamed that I’d minimized her encounter with the mob when she first told me about it. For me this moment and others were a lesson in the lived experience of violent potentiality, how at

times the power of violence lies as much in what you think might happen as in what actually happens. Of course, it was not the same for me, because, as Wilfredo pointed out, “you’re from the United States.” The aftermath of the lynching of the Japanese tourist in 2000 had proven that there were repercussions when foreign nationals were harmed. Guatemalans hurting each other, as the trial outcome suggested, was another matter. I relate the implications of this impunity to the larger ambiguities of neoliberal multiculturalism in the following section.

## **Conclusion**

In the end, the liquor case turned out to be a backfiring gun for all concerned, as neither side got what they wanted. The security committee won the battle, but they lost their war on alcohol consumption. At the very moment that they were officially acknowledged as the legitimate representatives of the collective will of the people, that will crumbled around them, as people began to publically question not only the ban but the utility of the security patrols in general. The cantineros lost their lawsuit, but they won the de facto right to sell liquor unmolested. They were not happy though: they were out a lot of money for their legal expenses and facing more and more unlicensed competition every day. The ambiguity that characterized this particular case is more broadly representative of the contradictory ways in which neoliberal multiculturalism has been implemented in Guatemala.

National differences in the legal codification of multiculturalism have contributed to the creation of competing conclusions about its overall significance. As Van Cott reminds us, all conclusions are, of course, case-dependent. Thus her own research in Ecuador and Gustafson’s (2002) work in Bolivia draw much more optimistic conclusions about the political possibilities of multiculturalism than Hale’s influential formulation. Scholars like Van Cott maintain that multiculturalism could be the backfiring gun within neoliberalism, as successful indigenous

social movements demand political participation and oppose the upward redistribution of wealth. The much more dispiriting conclusions that Hale draws from his case studies mostly come from Central America, and especially Guatemala. While Van Cott (2006:285) claims that Hale's account ascribes too much agency to neoliberal elites, on the small scale of national politics in Guatemala, elite agency seems relatively transparent. Any anti-alcohol activist can name the two families who have grown rich off of the liquor monopoly over the course of the last century. Likewise, opposing the codification of indigenous people's right to practice customary law represents another example of a successful elite project, as well-funded propaganda helped keep voter turnout for this constitutional referendum low. Rachel Sieder describes the result of this failure to codify indigenous peoples' jurisdictional autonomy as follows:

[W]hatever agreements tacitly exist to recognize indigenous jurisdiction, these are not formally recognized in Guatemalan law. Indigenous authorities are therefore subject to the shifting preferences of individual state officials, who can opt to prosecute them for pursuing their own forms of dispute resolution if they so choose, effectively keeping them in a state of permanent legal in-definition (2011A:174).

In the case discussed in this chapter, the individual state official in question opted not to prosecute the security committee for their own form of dispute resolution. In these shifting preferences, it is never clear if or when ILO 169 will be applied: doing so is largely a matter of judicial discretion. The message from this trial was that vigilantism may be protected, but not without an expensive, stressful and time-consuming legal process. While the security committee's lawyer managed to convince the judge that they represented the will of the people, that ineffable will went up in smoke, as its representatives stopped believing in it themselves, or at least in its power to keep them out of jail. These leaders learned that an indigenous pueblo may have the right to self-determination, but in the case of legal challenges, individual leaders are on their own. This lesson was enough to keep these men from political action in the future.

Reportedly the former mayor angrily balked at a recent community meeting when people tried to elect him to yet another leadership position: “Why should I represent you when you’re not there when I need you?” Dionisio, who had once proudly claimed a pivotal role in convincing people to back the ban, started back peddling in subsequent conversations on the topic, retroactively claiming he had never really believed the prohibition could work. He did, however, compare the security committee’s efforts and subsequent martyrdom to the crucifixion: “It’s like Jesus; you can’t make change without getting into trouble.”

The current security leader Juan Pablo likewise initiated a gradual retreat from politics. Over the course of the year that the trial took place, he started spending more and more time on farmland he’d purchased outside of town. Over the months, his conversation shifted from astute analyses of local politics to topics like how to best irrigate a lime grove or fumigate coffee bushes. When the charges against him first came out he asserted,

I’m proud of what we’ve done with liquor. It bothers me when I go to other pueblos and see all the ads for beer and liquor and all the cantinas full of people, really poor people... The rich of Guatemala who own the big liquor companies are against us. It’s like Fausto said, Todos Santos banning alcohol is like the mouse and the elephant, you can’t do it. But even if it ends tomorrow I’m proud of what we’ve already done (September 5, 2010).

The end was of course already underway, as the prohibition eroded day by day, undercut by corner stores that started openly stocking beer again, flaunted by drunks who once again dared to stagger through the streets and pass out in the public way. But for a brief moment, they had succeeded in seceding from a nation-state that they were in many ways bound to by alcohol. State intervention in Huehuetenango first arrived in the form of customs agents who stamped out small-scale producers of fermented homebrew and protected the vendors of commercially-produced liquor. As many historians of Guatemala have pointed out, alcohol consumption and labor exploitation were inextricable processes as the debt peonage system pulled Mayan

subsistence farmers into the national cash economy. For a moment, local leaders had refused to let the town participate in this important part of the national economy. At the same time, they refused indigenous peoples' role in the national imaginary as drunken Indians, drinking and pissing like dogs in the garbage, as Marcelina so memorably put it. But they had imposed this vision of a village that committed scarce resources to progress instead of alcoholism through acts of violence and clear violations of the cantineros' civil rights.

The case marked the end of a chapter in this particular self-help security movement, as their claim to be the legitimate leaders of the pueblo, a claim that was always backed up by the threat of instrumental violence, weakened its hold. They may reform in the future, but not without a galvanizing event, such as an extreme example of youth violence. The ephemerality of their grip on power is something they have in common with other vigilante justice movements across time and space. Like these groups, their very success did them in. They fought crime, but in the course of fighting crime, however defined, people started to perceive them as behaving like the very criminals they sought to prosecute.

## CONCLUSION

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up  
like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore--  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over--  
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags  
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

– Langston Hughes

Once I sat next to a teenager at a dinner party who became excited about my project when I explained it to him. “You should get people to tell you about the war,” he told me, “They won’t talk to us about that.” But I was no better at penetrating these silences than he was. As I discovered early on, asking pointed questions closed doors. For me, learning how to ask was learning how to *not* ask, and then seeing what happened. Wartime experiences were something that came up only after many years of friendship with people, and even then these references were fragmentary and contradictory. Direct involvement with the guerrilla was not something anyone ever admitted: it was only something they accused others of participating in.

One place where the war was mentioned was in the observation that “things are better for us now.” Sandra, reportedly the village’s first female schoolteacher (she disputed the claim: there was one before her, but she left the village), made this observation. She noted that although many Mayan villages suffered a lot, here in Todos Santos things have improved. Her sister Mayra (the second or third female professional, depending on how you count it) made a similar

statement. Then she commented that before the war in Guatemala, indigenous people were treated, “like your African Americans. We had to sit on the back of the bus.”

Mayra was speaking in the past tense, but there is much in her analogy that is suggestive in the present tense as well. In the first place, just as the Civil Rights movement created possibilities for upward mobility for *some* African Americans, the Guatemalan Peace Accords likewise made things better for *some* Maya. The Maya families who stayed during the war were able to recolonize the town center, buying the land cheaply from Ladino families who fled the guerrilla, most of them never to return. For those who were able to benefit from openings in education, and then find work in the wake of postwar reforms, things are better. But as I have pointed out, this aperture was small: as Anselmo complained, the first professionals in town, “just want to keep on being first forever.” Postwar multiculturalism has allowed a handful to succeed, and in doing so it has opened an economic and experiential gap between the few and the many.

Another resonance between the positioning of African Americans and Guatemalan Mayans appears in the labor slot they fill in U.S. capitalism. The moment that African Americans gained full citizenship and were able to organize and demand that employers respect labor laws was followed shortly thereafter by deindustrialization. Meanwhile in Latin America the imposition of structural adjustment policies and free trade agreements devastated small scale agriculturalists, leading to massive undocumented migration to the United States. These changes brought Latinos into many of the same jobs and the same substandard housing once occupied by African Americans. As Nicholas DeGenova (2005) argues for “Mexican Chicago,” migrants’ vulnerability as deportable non-citizens has made them the docile, tractable labor force that African Americans used to be prior to the Civil Rights movement. In “Todosantero Oakland,”

indigenous Guatemalans and African Americans live side by side in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion, where Todosanteros see their neighbors as unwilling to work while African Americans resent these newcomers for accepting illegal labor standards and lowering wages.

In this process, many young Maya men, following African American, Chicano and Salvadoran teens before them, have gravitated to an oppositional, rebellious masculine identity whose signs and signifiers are borrowed from hip hop culture. The response to this adoption and reinvention of a “gangsta” aesthetic provides an example of another traveling discourse, as the same neoliberal security strategies of gang abatement and zero tolerance have spread from Giuliani’s New York to Central American capitals and on to the Guatemalan highlands. These tough-on-crime discourses hold the individual wholly responsible (Zilberg 2011)

Another parallel between these two marginalized groups arises in the cultural explanation deployed to explain their “pathology.” Anthropologist Oscar Lewis is often credited with starting this trend, when he coined the term “culture of poverty” to describe an impoverished Chicano community. Daniel Patrick Moynihan brought this concept to national attention in the United States when his “Report on the Negro Family” blamed African American poverty on black matriarchs who supposedly propagated a “culture of poverty.” In these explanations, it is the behavior that causes the condition, rather than the condition that causes the behavior. The solution to larger structural problems like economic exclusion and male unemployment lies within the individual family.

This cultural explanation appeared repeatedly in a research project I conducted on anti-lynching education in Guatemala (referenced in Chapters one and three). “We live in a culture of violence,” workshop leaders were given to remarking, adding, “we have lived in this culture of

violence since before the conquest.” The only way to change this culture, they argued, is by changing the family. “We need to strengthen family values,” organizers opined. This solution is depicted graphically in the anti-lynching program’s promotional material: their “Just Say No to Lynching” logo features the hands of a baby, man and woman layered on top of each other. Graphically, changing the “culture of violence” is represented as an individual solution found within the nuclear family. A similar pattern of blaming families emerged in the practices of the Todos Santos security committee, when parents were punished for the actions of their gangster sons, or when people explained Lizard’s problematic behavior by way of his family structure.

Social analysts’ efforts to explain why people commit acts of symbolic violence by way of referring a larger context of structural violence often seems like a less than satisfying argument, at least to this analyst. It is as if by making this argument we are gesturing at unseen forces that can only be represented by what Bourdieu would call the “statistical regularities” of life chances. On the ground, these structures are not any more visible to us than they are to our interlocutors, especially when it comes to apprehending our own lives. This conclusion represents an attempt to flesh out this sterile structural argument a little more by suggesting that there is some larger similarity in the way that “racial others” are subjected to the demands of U.S. capitalist imperialism, and that this incorporation generates similar effects across a range of locations.

Finally, this conclusion is also in part a response to a generational split taking place among Guatemalanist scholars. People who were old enough to be there during the war insist that the war still matters. Slightly younger scholars are discovering in their fieldwork that no one, especially young people, talks about it anymore, and so they question the determinative power of war for explanations of contemporary Guatemala. I maintain that just because people do not

want to talk about it does not mean that the war no longer matters. In fact, the silence surrounding the conflict may give it even more power. Part of this youthful scholarly rebellion comes from a frustration with those who insist on reading the present in terms of the categories of the past. For example, reading gangs as the new vanguard of the left is extremely problematic. I contend that one of the main results of the war and its ambiguous conclusion was the shattering of the Cold War categories of right and left. As people pick up the pieces, their creative recombination of available ideologies cannot be categorized as wholly one or the other.

In many ways this monograph has told a story about a dream deferred—a dream of economic equality, of a different Guatemala that so many died for, detailing how people cope in the aftermath when much has changed and much has not. Bowing to international pressure, Guatemalan military elites agreed to a new constitution that grants unprecedented recognition to its multicultural polity. These changes have opened up space, but as I recounted in the last chapter, it is a nebulous one that keeps indigenous leaders in a tenuous position where the limits of their authority are decided by judicial discretion rather than clearly codified in law. It is a Guatemala that is better for “some of us,” for the handful who have received an education, found jobs and relative economic security, while the health and economic indicators for the vast majority remain dire.

Upward mobility through education is one project where people have placed their hopes and aspirations in postwar Guatemala. It is an individualized project, as are other projects of individual salvation through migration and/or conversion to Pentecostal Christianity. These less spectacular dramas (although Pentecostal services can get pretty dramatic) form the backdrop for the main focus of this study: the effects of the vigilante justice project implemented by a group of men who still dreamed collectively. These leaders imagined a better village, a place where

men would work hard and support their families and money would stay within the family and the local community instead of pouring directly into the pockets of Guatemala's elites. This dream exploded in incidents of popular violence. Then, over the course of a long legal battle, it sagged. It was a vision compromised by its methods, which used instrumental violence and trod upon the most basic of civil rights.

It is yet to be seen what will happen when the generation of men who were around 30 during this study comes to power. How many of these men will still be alive and still live in the village? Will they be so twisted by their own experiences of repression that they too will deal with the young as a threat? Or will something else happen? Perhaps the patriarchal stranglehold on local politics will loosen and let some of the many agile-minded women in the community have a voice. If so, will that voice would be any less repressive than that of their male counterparts? Whatever happens, I can only conclude that politics and the categories we use to apprehend them have fragmented. This leaves us analysts left with using words like "messiness," "contingency" and "ambiguity" in our efforts to understand a world where we are all in a sense bricoleurs recombining what has been left lying around in the wreckage of utopian collectivities crushed by neoliberal exigencies.

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