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Tourism and Territory in the Mayan World

By

Jennifer Ann Devine

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction for the

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University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Gillian Hart, Co-Chair
Professor Michael Watts, Co-Chair
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Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in Geography

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Professor Gillian Hart, Co-Chair

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In post Peace Accords Guatemala, tourism development is engendering new claims and claimants to territory in a climate of land tenure insecurity and enduring inequality. Through ethnographical research, this dissertation explores the territoriality of tourism development through the empirical lens of an archaeological site called Mirador in the Maya Biosphere Reserve. I develop a process-based understanding of territoriality to analyze tourism related struggles over identity, boundary making, land use, heritage claims, and territorial rule at the frontier of state power. In theorizing tourism's territoriality, I argue that the intertwined practices of capitalist spatial colonization and the commodification of place uniquely characterize the industry. I identify five manifestations of tourism's territoriality in the Maya Biosphere: practices of *historical and geographical erasure* in Mirador tourism imaginaries, *territory-based identity production*, tourism-enabled practices of *enclosure and land dispossession*, the "*scaling up*" of *heritage claims* through the social construction of global heritage, and the militarization of conservation spaces through tactics of *counterinsurgency eco-tourism* development.

In conceptualizing tourism's territoriality, this project contributes to the fields of political ecology, critical tourism studies, political geography, and spatial theories of territory. At the chapter level, analytical contributions include analyses of identity formation in contemporary Guatemala, the role of tourism development in driving the global land grab, how implicit ideas of scale in global heritage discourses usurp local claims to natural and cultural resources, and the revival of counterinsurgency methods in the making of paradisiacal places. In Guatemala's booming post-war tourism sector, this dissertation argues that ongoing struggles over territory are taking deceptively innocuous forms of national park creation, world heritage designation, and environmental conservation.

Dedicated to my mother, Marsha Ann Whitmore

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Chapter 1

EL DORADO OR APOCALYPTO?

Tourism and Territory in the Mayan World

“People have searched for Atlantis and Shangri-La, to no avail. But if it's lost cities you seek, look no further than the Mirador Basin in northern Guatemala. The area is home to some of the largest pyramids in the world and the largest ancient freeway system in the Western hemisphere, and it's the cradle of Mayan civilization. The basin contains dozens of pre-classic Mayan cities — the oldest in existence — most of which remain unexcavated” (Himmelsbach, 2009)

Over 2,000 years ago in the lowland forests of northern Guatemala, the Mayan metropolis of Mirador ruled over hundreds of miles, one million inhabitants, and dozens of urban cities (Hansen et. al 2002; Hansen & Guenter, 2005). Mirador reigned as the capital of this vast empire now laying under a blanket of old growth forest in the Maya Biosphere Reserve, part of the largest tract of tropical forest in Central America. Mirador is famous among archaeologists, Mayanists, and global heritage conservationists for many reasons beyond its impressive political history. Mirador's great pyramid, *La Danta*, is perhaps the world's largest by volume, and is but one of thirty in the imperial city. Mirador boasts the oldest Mayan glyphs and exquisite works of art, including a stucco frieze depicting the earliest representation of the *Popul Vuh*, the Mayan creation story of the universe. These distinguishing attributes motivated archaeologists working in the area to call northern Guatemala the “cradle of the Mayan civilization” (Hansen, 2012).

Figure 1: Hero Twins Frieze at Mirador



Source: Author

Most visitors reach the Mayan archaeology site of Mirador in the tropical forests of northern Guatemala by trekking two days through dense, humid, lowland tropical forests. Tourists often describe the five-day trek to Mirador as a trip of a lifetime. It is easy for visitors to see the tourism potential of this majestic place characterized by seemingly endless forest, charismatic species, like jaguars and scarlet macaws, and a landscape dotted by Mayan archaeological sites. The grandeur of the archaeology combines with the surrounding old-growth forest to make this place truly breathtaking. However, despite housing the oldest and largest structures of the Pre-Columbian Maya (Hansen 2001, 2002), the site receives only around 3,000 visitors per year (GDT, 2010). In contrast, the nearby World Heritage Mayan site of Tikal receives 200,000 tourists annually who contribute over \$US 200 million to the national economy (GDT, 2010).

Mirador's relative obscurity from the global tourism industry is quickly coming to an end. State officials, development practitioners, and private sector donors describe Mirador as an *El Dorado*, a lost city of gold containing untapped wealth promising to catalyze economic development for local residents, the state of Petén, and Guatemala as a nation.¹ Today, Mirador occupies center stage of several economic development and conservation initiatives that are working to convert the forests of northern Petén Guatemala into tourism space. A World Bank loan funds a \$30 million dollar sustainable development project that aims to transform Mirador and the surrounding region into a global tourism destination (IADB, 2006). Guatemalan President Alvaro Colom's (2008-2012) "Four Jaguar" eco-tourism project furthered this shared vision of turning the Maya Biosphere Reserve, housing Mirador, into the largest archaeological tourism park in Latin America. At the same time, private-sector foundations run by Guatemalan elites are funneling millions of dollars into Mirador tourism development as a means of promoting and conserving the site as national patrimony and global heritage.

Residents living nearby, however, fear Mirador mega-projects and their elite interests represent an impending apocalypse that threatens to destroy their homes, histories, and livelihoods. This concern is not unfounded. The army's Green Battalion (*Batallón Verde*), established in 2010, alongside the National Civil Police, has evicted residents from the Maya Biosphere for allegedly breaking conservation law. Green Battalion soldiers don shoulder patches of Temple Four from the Tikal Mayan archaeology site in symbolic representation of the unit's mission to protect Guatemala's natural and cultural heritage. This mission has translated into a remilitarization of the northern Guatemala in the name of eco-tourism development and conservation. Many local residents hope that increased army presence will help decrease violence stemming from narco-trafficking in the region, while others are worried that innocent parties will get labeled as environmental and cultural "predators" and be evicted from the reserve. Re-militarization of

¹ Petén is called *El Petén*, the Petén, in Spanish. I drop "the" writing in English for readability. I also refer to it as a state, rather than a department (*departamento*), as it called in Spanish for clarification.

Guatemala's northern forests is but one of several territorial practices enabled by eco-tourism development of the area.

This dissertation argues that in post Peace Accords Guatemala, tourism development is engendering new forms and fault lines of territorial struggle that are redefining boundaries, identities, history, and forms of territorial rule in a climate of land tenure insecurity and enduring inequality. I argue that tourism's territoriality stems from two interrelated practices distinct to the industry. First, the eco-tourism industry physically colonizes space by extending the neo-liberal frontier of capitalist relations into geographies outside of, or partially integrated into, global circuits of capital accumulation. Second, the tourist industry uniquely commodifies the identity, culture, and history of place as consumer products. What is being sold is not a diversity of identities and histories that define people and places, but a tourism imaginary, an idealized abstraction that materializes in tourism built environments, performances, and marketing campaigns.

In Guatemala's booming tourism sector, ongoing struggles over land and territory are taking deceptively innocuous forms of national park creation, world heritage designation, and environmental conservation. I argue that locals articulate, forge, and reproduce a *territory*-based identity when narrating local history and individual identity that challenges blood-based binary differences between the racial categories of Mayan and *ladino* (non-indigenous). I also critically interrogate the creation of global heritage and the subject position of global citizen by unpacking the implicit notion of scale inherent in these discourses that legitimize national and global elites' claims to Mayan antiquities and sites, while delegitimizing the claims of Maya Biosphere residents to history, resources, and territory that are sidelined in the name of humanity. This dissertation also bears relevance for questions regarding the relationship between conservation, security, and militarization. The territorial practice I identify as counterinsurgency eco-tourism suggests that the newly founded Green Battalion is militarizing the forests of northern Guatemala in the name of eco-tourism development and conservation.

Petén: The Frontier

Eco-tourism development of the Maya Biosphere Reserve is the latest chapter in a much longer history of Guatemalan state efforts to colonize the northern state of Petén, and integrate the region into the national fabric (Grandia, 2012). The forests of northern Petén have always been politically contested spaces (Schwartz, 1990). Individuals and political entities seeking to exert territorial control over Petén, its inhabitants, and resources have long considered the region a frontier space (Grandia, 2012). Spanish colonizers established the *Camino Royal* (Royal Road) through the area now known as Petén in the mid 16th century, yet the Mayan Itzá stronghold of Tayasal, the site of Petén's capital today, was the last Mayan polity to be integrated into the Spanish colony in 1697.

The national borders of three countries – Guatemala, Mexico, and Belize – artificially divide Petén’s lowland tropical geography that is united by history. Following independence in 1823, northern Petén was more closely tied to Belize and the Mexican Yucatan than the Guatemalan State. Flores, the capital of Petén, could only be reached from Guatemala City by air or long, complicated land/sea travel until 1967 when the first asphalted road was completed. As such, many people who settled in the Petén until then were Mexican or Belizean citizens, in addition to Guatemalan nationals. The international borders themselves are highly contested. The exact location of the Mexican-Guatemalan border on the northern side has long been disputed by both states, and the Guatemalan state continues to accuse Mexican authorities of complicity in illegal logging by Mexican companies in Guatemalan territory. In the 1950s, the two countries sparred again when Mexico planned to dam the Usumacinta River, which would have inundated the unpopulated Guatemalan territory along the northern eastern Petén border. In response, the Guatemalan state initiated a peasant colonization program of the area, using landless peasants as political pawns to successfully thwart Mexico’s dam building project.

Guatemala’s border disputes with Belize are even more contentious. Following controversial treaty terms with Great Britain in 1793, subsequent post-colonial presidential administrations did not recognize the country’s international borders with Belize until 1991. Shortly thereafter, however, following an abrupt change of military leadership, subsequent administrations continued to press to incorporate half, if not all of Belizean territory. The Organization of American States has negotiated talks between the two parties since 2000 and facilitated diplomatic and military cooperation building measures, but the issue remains unresolved (Hall, 2013).

Colonizing Guatemala’s northern forests: 1950s to today

During the late 1950s, at the same time the Guatemalan state perceived the sovereignty of Petén’s territory to be under threat from Mexico and Belize, racialized inequality and landlessness in the rest of the country threatened sovereignty internally from the south. Agrarian pressures were acutely accentuated following failed land reform. During Guatemala’s “ten years of spring” (1944-1955), democratically elected social reformist Jacobo Arbenz initiated a land reform in 1952 that provided terrain for more than 100,000 landless peasants and their families. The land reform aimed to address the vast inequalities in landholding inherited from the Spanish colonial government and perpetuated by post-colonial elite liberal politicians and national coffee barons (Paige, 1988). Citing fears of communism, the CIA supported a military coup in 1954 to oust the reformist president, and the 1952 agrarian land reform was immediately overturned. The largest beneficiary of this reversal was the United States-owned United Fruit Company, the largest landowner of idle land subject to agrarian land reform.

The 1954 CIA sponsored coup began over 40 years of brutal military dictatorships (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2006). Following the death of Guatemala's decade of social democracy, many political reformists went underground and formed armed revolutionary guerilla brigades, and Guatemala's thirty-six year civil war (1960-1996) began, a war that that many people refer to as the "*guerra interna*" (internal war) (Jonas, 2000). The Guatemalan civil war cost the lives of an estimated 200,000 people who were murdered or disappeared, and a million more were displaced (REHMI, 1999). The United Nations Mission for Historical Clarification determined that the Guatemalan military was responsible for 93% of civilian deaths and committed acts of genocide and war crimes against the country's Mayan people (REHMI, 1999).

During wartime, the first of several military governments sought an alternative to agrarian reform, and military officials looked north to Petén. Petén's low population density and large tracts of forest gave rise to an imaginary of the region a vast open space ripe for settlement (Centeno Cordon, 1973; Soza, 1970). In 1958, the military-state established the National Agency for the Development and Strengthening of the Petén, called FYDEP for its acronym in Spanish, for the purposes of demographic colonization and economic development of the region.² For nearly 30 years, FYDEP ruled Petén's political economy. Run by high-ranking army officials, the agency profited from near economic monopolies in forest industries like *chicle* (chewing gum resin) production, and legislated and litigated all things related to land use and tenure (Pellecer Robles, 2010). FYDEP's colonization of Petén entailed imagining and territorializing new economic geographies based on agricultural production, cattle ranching, and forestry (Millet, 1974). In this aim, FYDEP declared the region north of the 17th parallel as a protected reserve for forestry, laying down the geographical coordinates for the creation of the Maya Biosphere Reserve in 1990.

Following FYDEP's completion of the first road connecting Petén's capital to Guatemala City in the late 1960s, inequalities in land, wealth, and opportunity sparking civil war in the rest of the country spurred an exodus to Petén in the decades that followed.³ Some migrants were pulled by rumors of FYDEP granting free land to anyone willing to "improve" it, which meant felling trees, planting pasture, and building fences. Others were pushed to Petén not only by their poverty, but also by civil war violence. During the war, Petén became not only an escape valve for agrarian demands, but also an escape from the heart of civil war violence concentrated in the indigenous western highlands (Sundberg, 1999). Petén became a place for displaced and refugee communities to settle and start anew or pass through as they fled to Mexico.

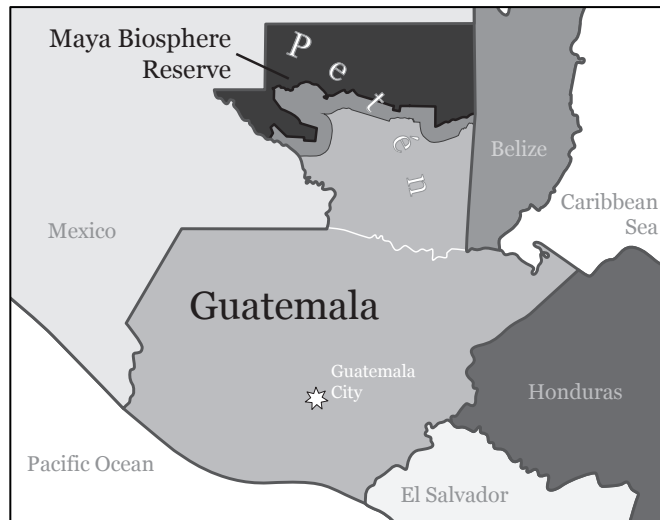
² FYDEP in Spanish is the acronym for *Empresa Nacional de Fomento y Desarrollo del Petén*.

³ In the 1930s, there were 25,000 people living in Petén (Schwartz 1990). Today, there are approximately 630,000 people concentrated in the urban centers of San Benito, Santa Elena, Sayaxché, La Libertad, and Melchor de Menchos (INE 2011).

Counterinsurgency Forests

In contrast to spaces of refuge, or pathways to safety for migrants and refugees, the army identified the sparsely populated forests of northern Petén as spaces of guerilla subversion and insurgency (Schirmer, 1998, Sundberg, 1998). In Guatemala, the military wielded several territorial tactics and spatial practices of counterinsurgency warfare during the civil war to tame Petén's jungles (Ogelsby & Ross, 2009; Sanford, 2003). In Petén, anywhere from 500 to a couple thousand guerilla insurgents avoided army capture by hiding and organizing in what is today known as the Sierra del Lacandón National Park of the Maya Biosphere (USAID, 1995). Following the civil war, enduring poverty combined with decreased guerilla and army presence in the region to result in an increase in practices of poaching, trafficking, and the illegal extraction of timber and antiquities.

Figure 1.2: Map of Petén, Guatemala



Source: Author

In 1990, during Guatemala's eleven-year peace process (1985-1996), national and global conservationists teamed up to convince congress to create the Maya Biosphere Reserve spanning nearly 1/10th of the total national territory (Sundberg, 1998). The Guatemalan Maya Biosphere forms 60% of the Mayan Jungle (*Selva Maya*), the largest tropical forest reserve in Mesoamerica. Like most UNESCO Biospheres, the Maya Biosphere has three types of land use and zoning: a nuclear zone of strict conservation where no one can live or work, a multiple-use zone home for legally-residing villages and community forest concessions, and a buffer zone (see Figure 1). Creating the Maya Biosphere delimited a new and politically powerful geography in Petén and infused the landscape with what Sundberg (1998) calls North American conservation ideologies. As civil war violence drew to a close, many landless migrants caught wind of rumors that

historically established communities in the park might obtain land tenure. These rumors weren't unfounded. The 1996 Peace Accord on Socioeconomic and Agrarian Issues stipulated that organized, landless peasants receive land from the state, as a half-hearted nod to issues of agrarian inequality. Yet, landlessness for the vast majority endured, including Mayan Q'eqchi' refugees returning from Mexico.⁴

From the Maya Biosphere's creation until today, thousands of Q'eqchi' and non-indigenous residents have established dozens of so-called illegal settlements in areas of strict conservation, like the national parks dominating the geography of the western Maya Biosphere (Carr, 2008; Suter, 2012; Ybarra et. al, 2012). Ybarra (2010) suggests that conservationists strategically seized a political opportunity to create the Maya Biosphere before the end of the peace process when indigenous and human rights groups might have successfully organized to acquire land in the park. Rather than allowing for return refugee settlement, Maya Biosphere law (Decree 5-90) establishes that only people living within the reserve at the time of its creation are permitted to reside within its boundaries. In short, the war's end left the issue of land inequality unresolved by failing to enact meaningful agrarian reform, and the national imaginary of Petén as an empty no man's land continued to draw the destitute in hopes for a better future.

Post Peace Accords Tourism Boom

Peasant struggles for land reform and indigenous discrimination were principal impetuses of the war (Manz, 2004), yet the Peace Accords (1985-1996) failed to fully redress these longstanding inequalities (Jonas, 2000; McAlister, 2013; Nelson, 2009). The Peace Accords did, however, initiate a comprehensive process of neo-liberal political and economic restructuring of the country (Short, 2007). These reforms brought Guatemala in sync with broader dynamics of neo-liberal restructuring taking place across Latin America that was fueling an economic revolution and the growth and diversification of the tourism industry.

Across Latin America, tourism is big business, but it hasn't always been that way. In the last thirty years, the tourism industry has grown dramatically across the hemisphere. From 1995 to 2007 alone, Latin American countries experienced a 49% increase in tourist arrivals, and a 61% growth in tourism receipts (expenditures by visitors) (WTTC, 2013). In 2009, tourism constituted 6.6% of Latin America's GDP (US\$ 177 billion) and 8.3% of total investment (\$US 45 billion) (WTTC, 2013). In Guatemala, the industry constitutes an even larger share of the national economy. In 2013, tourism and travel accounted for 8.6% of total GDP in 2013 (WTTC, 2013).

⁴ The Q'eqchi' are one of 24 Mayan ethno-linguistic groups living in Guatemala who collectively comprise an estimated 60% of the population (Nelson, 1999). The other 40% of population are *ladinos*, an identity in Guatemala that signifies non-indigenous (Nelson, 1999).

Latin America's tourism boom reflects the perfect storm of several events coalescing in the mid 1980s. While the roots of Latin America's tourism turn precede this era, the so-called "lost decade" of the 1980s signaled the economic collapse and restructuring of many economies, from Mexico to Argentina.⁵ From the ashes of crisis, newly rejigged economies and debt payment plans were laid out along neo-liberal lines.⁶ The majority of Latin American nations were subject to International Monetary Fund or World Bank Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) that shared many key points in common. SAPs privatized and downsized government, eliminated state subsidies, slashed social welfare spending, and championed export-led development based on the principle of competitive advantage (Portes, 1997).

The particular form SAPs and other neo-liberal reforms took and their implications for livelihoods in Latin America are diverse, but in many countries, the resulting rising food and housing costs, decreased social service provision, and increasing poverty and unemployment engendered often-violent protest from citizens.⁷ In response to the widespread political opposition and economic hardship caused by SAPs and neo-liberal stabilization, the World Bank and the IMF revised their development approach and policies to add "a human – face" to neo-liberalism, what has also been called "development with identity" or "ethno-development" (Sieder, 2002). Ethno-development projects solicit indigenous participation and aim to maximize benefits for indigenous communities, as well as women and the poor (Mohan & Stokke, 2000).⁸

At the same time, concerns about environmental degradation foregrounded at the United Nations 1992 Rio Summit gave birth to the sustainable development movement. From the early 1990s, Latin American leaders have strategically invested in so-called "green industries" with purportedly fewer negative environmental impacts than traditional manufacturing or extractive industries, like mining or timber, as part of a focus on environmental sustainability in development practice (Brohman, 1996). Eco-tourism has figured centrally to these strategies. Eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and other forms of so-called non-traditional tourism are further attractive to economists and state officials because of the relatively low cost of market entry, which makes it easier for cash strapped individuals or start-

⁵ The "lost decade" refers to a nearly hemispheric-wide debt crisis across Latin America that marked the end of economic nationalism, and development strategies based on protectionism and import substitution industrialization (Bulmer-Thomas, 2008).

⁶ As the well-known story goes, the International Monetary Fund attached conditionalities to bailout loans requiring countries to implement neo-liberal economic and legal reforms (see Pastor, 1987; Remmer, 1986).

⁷ These responses took the form of IMF bread riots, anti-privatization movements, and "anti-globalization" protests (Lawson, 2007). These demonstrations and their constitutive social movements made clear that the effects of neo-liberal structural adjustment policies were classed, raced and gendered in particular ways as women, indigenous people and the poor bore the greatest burden of neoliberal economic reform and led the bulk of the social resistance (Canak 1989, Portes 1997).

⁸ With the state and the market ruled out as ideal sites for development intervention and practice, civil society, non-profit organizations (NGOs), and "the local" became the new panacea for development (Rose 1999).

up companies to enter the industry as tour operators, guides, drivers, and so forth (Mowforth & Munt, 2009).

Many advocates champion eco-tourism and other forms of non-traditional tourism, like community tourism and cultural tourism, because they ideally validate and value host cultures by providing a way for indigenous people and the poor to make money while celebrating their heritage and history (Scheyvens, 2002). Perhaps most importantly, the global tourism industry is predicated on the mobility of people, goods, and foreign currency to highly indebted countries, and thus, provides foreign revenue to national economies with little ecological cost. In other words, tourism appears at the surface level to be the perfect solution to the pressing problem of how to promote economic development, reduce extreme poverty, and protect the environment simultaneously. From this complex amalgam of neo-liberal reform, austerity-induced protest, indigenous organizing, and calls for environmental conservation, non-traditional tourism, and eco-tourism in particular, emerged as the poster child of neo-liberal economic development in Latin America and many regions across the Global South.⁹

Central American countries, like Guatemala, exemplify the hemispheric turn toward neo-liberal driven tourism growth. In 1989, *National Geographic* showcased Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula and the surrounding Guatemalan and Belizean lowlands as a newly branded geography, the "Mayan World." The popular piece segued into a multi-billion dollar Central American marketing campaign and tourism industry stretching from the "Mayan Riviera" beginning in Cancun to the remote forests surrounding Mirador (see Chapter Two). The rebranding of Central America as the "Mayan World" has unfolded hand in glove with the now infamous Puebla Panama Plan (PPP) that financed the completion of the Pan-American Highway and the construction of the "Mayan World" airport in northern Guatemala. The PPP identified tourism as one of eight strategic development sectors, and constituted the infrastructure-building component of the Central American Free Trade Agreement ratified in 2004. The World Bank, USAID, Central American governments, and private boosters have all jumped on board to make tourism *the*

⁹ Rather than analyzing eco-tourism, community tourism, and cultural tourism as distinct sub-industries, I refer to them collectively as "non-traditional" tourism because they are intrinsically tied together as part of neo-liberal, sustainable, ethno-development ideology and practice. Eco-tourism and cultural tourism are defined in the industry as "non-traditional" because they are a break from the previous era of "traditional" state-led tourism development in Latin America focusing on mega-resorts selling sand and sea like Acapulco, Mexico that defined the era of import substitution industrialization. Eco-tourism commodifies nature, while archaeological and community tourism commodifies intangible heritage and culture. In many senses, it becomes difficult to untangle the simultaneous commodification of nature and culture in "non-tradition" tourism forms because they are tightly interwoven through discourses and practices of sustainable development. During the trek to Mirador, for example, several forms of non-traditional tourism combine so that tourists not only visit the archaeological site by way of a 50 mile trek through old growth forests, but tourists can also experience a community visit where locals organize their own tours and demonstrations of cultural practices, like hand-making tortillas on wood-burning clay stoves.

industry driving post-war economic growth in the region. At the end of Guatemala's revolutionary war, the tourism industry underwent its own revolution, fueled by neo-liberal economic and legal reforms that identified non-traditional forms of tourism development, like cultural and eco-tourism, as Central America's competitive advantage.

Tourism: Spatial Colonization and the Commodification of Place

Spatial Colonization

Neo-liberal reforms enabled Central America's tourism revolution, but the depth and breadth of tourism's reach in its non-traditional forms also reflect qualities inherent to the industry itself: practices of spatial colonization and the commodification of place. Tourism is a primary driver of capitalist spatial expansion whereby global capital searches out unexploited environments and labor forces, making the industry a frontier sector that pushes the boundaries and articulations of capitalist development into uncharted geographies (Duffy and Moore 2008).

Henri Lefebvre long ago identified traditional resort-based tourism development as a mechanism of capitalist spatial expansion. Tourism, he argued, is a prime mechanism through which capitalism further expands its global reach into non-or semi-privatized spaces. Tourism destinations and leisure spaces epitomized what he saw as the capitalist, urban form of "abstract space" spreading unevenly, but perpetually across the world (1991). In the *Survival of Capitalism* (1976) Lefebvre talks about leisure as an "intermediary stage" wrapped up with capitalism's colonization of space, "the connection between the capitalist organization of production and its conquest of space as a whole" (p. 84). Tourism is central to producing capitalism's space and provides a means to commodify seemingly pristine nature in the sun, sand, and sea resorts of places like the French Riviera (Lefebvre 1976). Tourism destinations like beach resorts have the appearance of a non-work space, but have a specific role in the social-spatial division of labor (1991, p. 58). These leisure spaces exude a distinctive, non-productive, natural quality compared to urban industrial centers and, thus, appear to be outside circuits of capitalist development. The truth, however, is this appearance is planned with the greatest of care, and is centralized, organized, and programmed to meet the interests of tour-operators, bankers, and entrepreneurs in London, Hamburg, Paris (1991, p. 59).

For Lefebvre, tourism spaces illustrate how urban, rural, and so-called natural spaces are relationally produced through capitalist development. In short, tourism destinations from the Mayan Riviera to the French one exemplify capitalism's attempts to colonize space, the allocation of places of work and leisure, and the constitutive relations between "urban" spaces and areas that appear quite distinct, "rural" or "natural." Through tourism development, new people and places

are brought into the capitalist fold, although unevenly. Countries like Thailand and Mexico become multi-billion dollar destinations whose histories of tourism development are connected through practices of US imperialism, but simultaneously differentiated by their proximity and Cold War relationship to the United States. Other places have been left completely off the tourist map.

In the era of neo-liberal capitalism, eco-tourism development is a powerful driver of the capitalist frontier into conservation spaces, commodifying nature in novel ways (Duffy & Moore, 2010; West & Carrier, 2004). Eco-tourism is not the only site of the neo-liberalization of nature. Critical geographers have identified the ways neo-liberalism has privatized natural resources (McCarthy & Prudham, 2004; Perrault 2006), fueled new waves of enclosure (Heynan & Robbins, 2005) and global land grabs (Fairhead et. al, 2012), created new forms of environmental governance (Bakker, 2007; Heynan et. al 2007) and eco-system services (McAfee, 1999), and commodified nature through conservation practice (Busher et. al, 2012). Eco-tourism commodifies nature for tourism consumption, not for large-scale resort development, but for consumption of socially constructed spaces conceived of as wilderness, pristine nature, and the antithesis of urban space.

Eco-tourism is conventionally defined as responsible travel to areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of the local people (Fennell, 2007; Honey, 1999). In contrast, I understand eco-tourism as a practice of capital accumulation that integrates people, places, and resources into the global economy, and comes replete with normative ideas about what constitutes nature, who embodies an ideal tourist, and the types of activities desirable or permissible in tourism spaces. In other words, tourism development is driving the expansion of the neo-liberal capitalist frontier into northern Guatemala and across the Global South, not by simply integrating green spaces into circuits of capital accumulation, but by producing culturally and racially infused notions of nature as products and places of tourist consumption.

When I talk about tourism as a conservation strategy throughout this dissertation, I am not simply talking about eco-tourism as a particular niche of the tourism industry. I am talking about a broader, encompassing neo-liberal economic and political ideology that renders commonsense the idea that tourism development of green spaces and cultural places in the global south is the best, and perhaps *only*, “sustainable development” strategy. From this witches’ brew of social dynamics, the idea and justification for tourism development became synonymous with environmental and cultural conservation, and private sector and development dollars spread like wildfire across Latin America, straight into the forests of the Maya Biosphere Reserve surrounding its crown jewel of Mirador.

Commodification of Place

In addition to tourism’s dynamics of spatial colonization, the industry also uniquely commodifies the culture, identity, and history of a place and its people as

objects of tourist consumption. When I argue that tourism commodifies place, I am also arguing that tourism commodifies identity, history, and culture. Granted, all practices of capitalist accumulation exploit and reproduce notions of race and gender and other forms of difference in relations of production (Massey, 1994). In that sense, tourism is similar to other service industries that hire women and pay them poorly, defining their work as unskilled precisely because it is socially defined as women's work (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2003; Enloe, 2000). At the same time, cultural tourism is distinct from other industries in this regard. A consumer buying a t-shirt made in a sweatshop may be unaware of the exploitative and power-laden relations of production embedded in its fabric and swiftly sewn stitches. These relations are hidden and objectified in the t-shirt itself and by the temporal and physical distance between the production of the commodity and its final sale.

In contrast, when a tourist travels to the so-called Mayan World in search of an authentic cultural experience, the identity and history of a place-turned-tourist destination and its hosts are the products consumed. This creates another level, another dimension, of the commodification of identity through representation and performance in the tourism industry not present in other sectors. This second layer of objectification and commodification of identity and culture as end products themselves conveys immense power to tourism's representational practices. What is sold, of course, is an imagined identity that does not reflect the multiple subjectivities, histories, and landscapes constituting space, but rather an abstraction, an object of consumption.

This dynamic reflects how tourism not only physically pushes the frontier of capitalist expansion into so-called green spaces, but also into the realm of the intangible, into history, identity, and culture. David Harvey (2003) recognizes this expansion into intangible aspects of culture in tourism as a form of what he calls ongoing accumulation by dispossession, a modern day example of neo-liberal primitive accumulation. In Guatemala, this practice takes the form of indigenous performances or tourism workers dressing in indigenous clothes called *traje*. Indigenous people do not necessarily have to participate in this process for it to occur. In the tourism mecca of Panajachel on the majestic Lake Atitlan, there is a four-star hotel and restaurant that employs *ladinas*, non-indigenous women, to wear traditional Mayan *traje*. The *traje* is infused with deep historical, geographical, and cultural meaning, and it is often adorned with stitched images of animals, food, landmarks, and other elements of Mayan cosmology (Hendrickson, 1995).

Thirty years ago, women were killed for being identified as indigenous, an identity marked, in part, by wearing the unmistakable *traje*. Today, non-indigenous, private-sector tourism entrepreneurs cater to the desires of international tourists to experience indigenous culture in Guatemala by having non-indigenous women wear *traje*. This practice separates indigenous Maya from what Marx (1859) might call the use-value of the object. In this way, the commodification of culture in tourism is a form of accumulation by dispossession

as Mayans are separated from the means of reproducing their own culture through wearing *traje*.

As with all capitalist commodities, practices of commodification objectify the relations of production (Marx, 1859). The commodification of culture, history and identity of people and places in tourism produces an abstract spatial conceptualization of “the local” or “community” so easily identified in tourism narratives and practices. In this black-box understanding of place, a rigid line is drawn around a tourism destination, like the villages of Juanita or Yamul neighboring the Mirador site, which divorces a place from its interconnections with other sites defining and producing it. The metaphor of the black box understanding of place also suggests that the internal dynamics of places-turned-destinations are completely obscured. Tourism imaginaries frame tourism destinations like the villages of Juanita and Yamul as homogenous entities, whose internal relations, living histories, and global connections are invisible. In other words, the conception of place that is commodified, objectified, and sold to tourists in Mirador tourism imaginaries is a concept of place as a bounded unit, as space made meaningful (Basso, 1996; Escobar, 2001).

Tourism’s Territoriality

This dissertation argues that tourism’s dynamics of spatial colonization and the commodification of place distinguish the industry from others. In the frontier space of northern Petén where claims to territory have long been contested, incipient tourism development in northern Petén renders clearly visible tourism’s territoriality in its multiple forms. When I refer to territoriality, I refer to the production of territory, and the power relations and practices underpinning exclusionary claims to space and resources. Each chapter elaborates a distinct but intertwined expression of tourism’s territoriality. These include practices of *historical and geographical erasure, territory-based identity production, enclosure and land dispossession, global heritage production, and new forms of militarization and state territorial rule.*

In conceptualizing tourism’s territoriality, this project draws on and contributes to the fields of critical tourism studies and geographical theories of territory, as well as making chapter level contributions to debates about identity in Guatemala (Chapter Three), tourism and the global land grab (Chapter Four), concepts of scale in global heritage discourses (Chapter Five), and the militarization of conservation spaces (Chapter Six). In doing so, this project seeks to address the paradoxical status of tourism research within critical geography. Tourism geographers have identified the seemingly contradictory marginality of tourism research within critical geography, with the centrality of tourism in shaping economic geographies, racial and cultural identities, and power relations in everyday life (Britton 1991; Gibson 2009). In my own experience, this manifests in questions regarding whether or not my research is about tourism per se, or if the

study of tourism reveals some other, presumably more politically important, phenomenon. I attempt to bypass this either/or framing by identifying the spatial dynamics of colonization and commodification in tourism that politicize a whole host of concerns over life and livelihood in the historical-geographies in which tourism development projects unfold.

Critical Tourism Studies

My geographical and historical approach starts by recognizing the long history of violence underpinning the creation of natural and paradisiac spaces like the US National Park System (Cronon, 1996) and African wild game reserves established during European colonialism (Neumann, 2004). The violent histories of the protected parks movement are reappearing in practices of eco-tourism development and biodiversity conservation in the neo-liberal present. Across the globe, practices of accumulation by dispossession serve as a precursor to eco-tourism development and the construction of paradisiac places (Harvey, 2003; Ojeda, 2012). Ojeda (2012) links ideas of identity production and violence in tourism to show how the creation of Colombian eco-tourism paradises defines local Afro-Colombian bodies as “out-of-place” (Creswell, 1996) in ways that facilitate their land and livelihood dispossession. Several scholars of big game and eco-tourism in African relate practices of land dispossession in conservation and tourism development that label the Maasai and other minority grounds as poachers, and thus out of place in conservation spaces (Duffy, 2010; Gardner, 2012).

Across the world, scholars have shown how tourism destinations serve as contact zones between “hosts” and “guests” where notions of social difference such as race, gender, sexuality and nationality among others are performed, contested, and reworked (Gregory, 2006, Pratt 1992). Stein (2008), for example, illustrates that Israeli-Jewish tourism to Arab-Israeli communities is a mechanism by which the Israeli Jewish majority disciplines and defines Arab citizens’ relationship to Israel’s body politic. Jamaica Kincaid (1988) also conveys how tourism space naturalizes and reproduces (post) colonial inequalities and legacies in Antigua, West Indies. Elsewhere, I show how the state-affiliated Guatemalan Tourism Commission identified the strategic promotion of Mayan cultural tourism as a means to better its international image abroad amid the context of genocidal civil war, as well as a means to manage the meaning of “multicultural” in the post-war era (Devine, 2009). Rather than reflecting the diversity of Mayan subject positions in tourism promotion materials, scholars have critiqued the construction and reproduction as essentialized, feminized, and folkloric representations of Mayan culture (Brown, 1999; Medina, 2003; Little, 2004, 2008). Diane Nelson (1999) uses the term “*mujer Maya*” (Mayan woman) to refer to this stereotypical portrayal of Mayan identity in the tourist industry (Burtner, 2004; Little, 2008).

As this literature suggests, critical tourism studies have explored practices of land dispossession in the creation and reproduction of tourism space (Ojeda,

2012), the commodification of heritage and history (Giruado, 2011; Mortensen, 2007), and the militarization of eco-tourism spaces (Lombard, 2012; Duffy, 2010). In theorizing eco-tourism's territoriality, I aim to explain why these practices are unfolding in the tourism industry and not elsewhere. I use the analytic of territory to understand the specificity of tourism's dynamics of commodification, and breath and depth of tourism's power-laden socio-spatial relations as they articulate with the multiple, often contradictory, historical geographies of the Maya Biosphere.

Territory

In light of processes of neo-liberal globalization, in the early 1990s, scholars of territory unhinged the concept from its previous coupling with the nation-state to explore processes of territorialization unfolding at multiple scales (Agnew, 1994). Since then, the concept has found new life in critical geography. Early on, anthropologists and post-colonial theorists identified practices of "deterritorialization" as a way to refer to a shifting balance of power and concentration of activity away from the nation-state to other sites and scales, such as transnational networks of grassroots social movements and global flows of capital, commodities, and labor (Appadurai, 1996; Bhabha, 1994). Yet, recent interventions (Elden, 2005; Sparke, 2005) suggest *deterritorialization* is a misnomer that forecloses more innovative spatial analysis precisely at a moment when new forms and practices of territoriality are emerging. My research echoes this sentiment and answers its implicit call for research investigating the forms and practices of territoriality unfolding in neo-liberal practices of capital accumulation in the tourism industry.

I draw on Peluso and Vandergeest's (1995) focus on processes of *internal* territorialization of state power in Thailand, where they examine how global conservation efforts legitimate new forms of state territorial rule that often includes the use of violence. Donald Moore (1998; 2005) also provides a conflict-ridden, processual understanding of territoriality in the Kaerezi region of Eastern Zimbabwe. His work suggests not only that governance is continually *reterritorialized* at multiple levels (historically and in the current age of globalization), and also that territoriality has never been the exclusive domain of the state in modernity.

In this vein, Moore (2005) and Ng'weno (2007) illustrate how non-state actors like post-colonial Zimbabwe subjects and Afro-Colombian activists undertake their own individual and collective territorial projects to claim space and resources by drawing on a whole host of histories, tactics, and cultural practices. The emphasis on multiple, competing claims to territory suggests that multiple territorialities overlap and may uneasily co-exist in any one given space, as conflicting actors struggle to render their definition and right to place as exclusive and hegemonic. Along the way, these territorial practices – like the ones transforming the northern Guatemalan forests into tourism space – are critical elements remaking physical landscapes, geographical histories, and cultural

landscape identifications. Following Moore and Ng'weno, I use the concept of territory as an analytic to understand the ways in which unequally empowered people stake claim to resources and land through tourism practices and discourses to fight for the wellbeing of their families in a place of enduring poverty and inequality.

In *Turf Wars*, Ng'weno (2007) shows how Afro-Colombian state struggles to receive multicultural, territorial recognition from the Colombian reveals a broader transformation in the meaning of citizenship, ethnic minority-state relations, and the meanings of race and ethnicity all together. Ng'weno's work, alongside the scholarship of Charles Hale in Guatemala (2002, 2006) and Nancy Postero (2007) in Bolivia, leads a robust body of Latin American literature examining indigenous and Afro-Latino territorial politics in the neo-liberal, multicultural present. This literature has foregrounded the formal political sphere of multicultural reforms, and has yet to fully attend to how shifting ideas about race, ethnicity, territory, and history are shaped by dynamics of capitalist development. Rather than focusing on constitutional reform and politics in the formal electoral sphere, my research is grounded in relations of capital accumulation. This analysis brings to both critical tourism studies and the geographical literature on territory an understating of territoriality, not just as a state project, but also as the relationship between territorial struggle and everyday practices of capitalist expansion and commodification of place.

A Tale of Two *Chicle* Villages: Methodology & Chapter Overview

Methodology

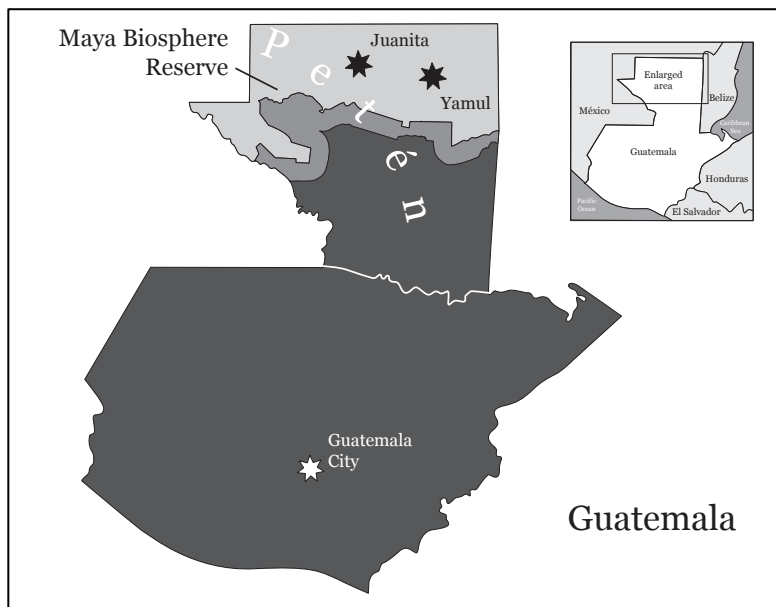
Tourism's twin processes of spatial colonization and the commodification of place are at work in multiple places around the world, defining a global industry. The ways in which this dynamic unfolds, however, is far from uniform or predetermined and reflects the history and politics of place. The villages of Juanita and Yamul in Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve are at the center of Mirador development where complex, multi-scalar processes of tourism's territoriality converge in place. The villages both serve as tourism and archaeological gateways to Mirador and are the nearest contemporary neighbors of the 2000-year-old Mayan metropolis that is still almost 30 miles away. Poverty is deep and enduring in these two small communities comprised of approximately 400 and 1,300 people respectively. The Wrigley's Chewing Gum Company founded the villages at the turn of the 20th century as chewing gum resin extraction camps.

This global history belies the false sense of geographical isolation tourists glean from the surrounding forests, restricted access by dirt road, and the lack of basic services like electricity, water, and waste disposal. The history, labor, and culture of *chicle* extraction continue to define village folklore and identity in both villages (see Chapter Three). Despite these shared foundation histories, the

villages differ in important ways. The modern day village of Yamul, unlike Juanita, is literally built on top of and within a Classic Era Mayan site. Juanita does, however, have the good fortune of being the favored entry point for treks to Mirador. The villages are further distinguished by Yamul's history of chicle labor recruitment from the Q'eqchi' indigenous area of Alta Verapaz, which has produced a village today comprised of approximately 40% indigenous and 60% non-indigenous *Yamultecos*. In contrast, only one family in Juanita identifies as Q'eqchi' and many people identify with Mexican heritage.

Research on the Petén and the Maya Biosphere in particular has examined Petén's history and cultural legacy of *chicle* production (a resin used to make chewing gum) (Schwartz 1990), how North American ideologies about nature underpin conservation practice in the Maya Biosphere (Sundberg 1998), the demography, patterns of migration, and agrarian practices of settlers in the west of the biosphere (Carr, 2008; Suter, 2012; Ybarra et. al, 2012), and how practices of conservation revive counterinsurgency histories and discourses (Ybarra 2012) and reproduce legacies of land dispossession among Mayan Q'eqch'i (Grandia 2012). My research contributes to this regional literature an analysis of the role tourism development plays in reviving chicle's legacy in Petén, foregrounding shifting ideas of nature and history articulated in Mirador tourism imaginaries, and how eco-tourism development is militarizing the Maya Biosphere, producing new forms of land dispossession.

Figure 1.3: Juanita and Yamul, Petén



Source: Author

I conducted sixteen months of ethnographic fieldwork from 2009 – 2010 to complete this project that built on four months of preliminary research in 2006 and

2008. I spent eight months living in Juanita where I taught English at the request of the community and practiced ethnographic methods that included participating in and observing over fifty community tourism and forestry meetings. I also conducted over thirty oral histories and personal interviews. From Juanita, I moved to the capital of the state of Petén, Flores, where I conducted twenty interviews with leaders of non-profit organizations working in the Maya Biosphere or Mirador conservation or development. This included individuals from Guatemalan non-profits headquartered in Petén, leaders of the grassroots Association of Petén's Forest Communities that represent forest concessionaries, state officials working for the Council on National Protected Areas (CONAP), and foreigners working in collaboration with these groups from large international conservation organizations like The Nature Conservancy and the Wildlife Conservation Society.

I then moved to Yamul for six months where I undertook methods akin to those practiced in Juanita. I attended and participated in thirty community tourism and forestry meetings that included the community-led "Festivals of the Equinox" in Yamul of 2010 and 2011. I attended the festival the first time as a tourist, the second time as a collaborator. In Yamul, I also conducted 25 life histories and interviews. While living in Juanita and Yamul, like the community leaders living there, I travelled frequently to the state capital and Guatemala City to meet with high-ranking officials from CONAP and the state-run Institute for Guatemalan Tourism. I conducted an additional twenty in-depth interviews with national conservation experts, state officials, military officers, and development workers shaping the future of tourism in the Maya Biosphere. Additional participant observation experiences included attending and observing meetings of high cache state planning meetings, presidential visits, ministry meetings, expositions of Mirador development plans, and displays of public bravado by the newly inaugurated army's Green Battalion, which rounded out my methodology.

Interviews with state officials and residents' oral histories proved essential to identifying the ways in which the legacies of civil war live on in peoples' memories, the cultural landscapes of the Maya Biosphere, and the worldviews of state development officers, conservationists, and soldiers. These memories shoot through personal narratives, place-based identifications, village folklore, and institutional inertia. I draw on Benjamin (1968) to think about history not as the linear temporal unfolding of sequential events, like beads on a rosary, where one moment leads to the next, and the next, and so forth. Rather, the past is not dead (Pred. 2004), but lives on as memories and practices that resurface in moments of conflict and danger, as a social force defining the conditions of possibility in the present (Benjamin, 1968).

My methodology is grounded in what Gillian Hart identifies as the intertwined practices of critical ethnography and relational comparison (2002; 2006). Critical ethnography is explicitly political in the sense that it advocates for social justice, draws on a commitment to situated, partial knowledges (Haraway,

1988), and emphasizes “power-laden processes of constitution, connection, and dis-connection” (Hart, 2006, p. 977). Critical ethnography prioritizes an analytical focus on the slippages, contradictions and the possibility for political alliances within systems of domination. The method further privileges social practice, rather than analyzing discourse or images in isolation, because it is in social practice that the gap between rationalities of rule and their unintended consequences can most easily be grasped and exploited with the hope of transformative social change (Postero, 2007).

The method of relational comparison lies at the crux of building theory inductively. Relational comparison starts from a commitment to analyze social dynamics from the ground up and attend to the geographical histories of place. A focus on relations suggests connections and practices of mutual constitution between people and places, rather than studying localities in isolation or in terms of differences. Relationally comparing tourism’s territoriality in the two villages allowed me to identify how they are unevenly connected to each other, to tourism development efforts in Guatemala City, to decisions made in offices of the World Bank, and to the design of UNESCO Biosphere programs around the world.

An illustrative example of how this method builds theory inductively is found in the UNESCO Biosphere system. The Maya Biosphere Reserve encompasses both the villages of Juanita and Yamul and Mirador, and is but one of 598 biosphere sites in 117 countries participating in the UNESCO program. The program is defined by a shared conservation ideology based on sustainable development and the designation of three types of land use in the biosphere that directly impacts land tenure and usufruct rights for people living in or around conservation spaces. Despite Juanita and Yamul’s appearance of isolation from Petén’s urban centers, Guatemala City, or the halls of the United Nations in New York and Geneva, in reality, these villages are at the center of several global conservation programs operating in the Maya Biosphere.

These trans-scalar connections enable me to theorize how eco-tourism and conservation work at the global scale, while remaining firmly grounded in an ethnographic approach. Scale and spatial relations conceptualized in these terms allow Juanita to be “local” for a child growing up in the village, and simultaneously “global” in terms of the village’s integration into the UNESCO Biosphere Program. Conversely, this approach also enables me to recognize the global impact the territorial politics the Maya Biosphere have on the UNESCO Biosphere system as a whole. As Chapter Four relates, political organizing across villages in the Maya Biosphere has produced the world’s largest collectively managed forest in the form of community concessions. The political tenacity and battle of a few hundred Petén residents to retain access to forest resources in the face of land dispossession has produced a global model for community forestry efforts around the world.

Tourism’s twin practices of spatial colonization and cultural commodification articulate with the specificity of place. In Guatemala, this means

that the new forms and fault lines of territorial struggle enabled by tourism development are arbitrating long-standing struggles over land and identity left unresolved by the peace process that ended the country's civil-war (Ybarra, 2010). While attending to the particularities of Guatemala's civil war history and insecurity in the present, I suggest national-level social injustices traverse state boundaries through shared colonial legacies, global systems of economic exploitation, and unequal flows of people, goods, and capital. The territorial dynamics explored in northern Guatemala are geographically and historically contingent, but they do not occur in isolation. The tourism-enabled territorial practices of historical and geographical erasure, land enclosure, heritage production and territorial rule explored in this dissertation are connected to other places through the uneven practices of international aid, International Monetary Fund structural adjustment programs, neo-liberal economic ideologies, world heritage and biodiversity conservation, and tourism trends.

Chapter Overview

Chapter Two, "Ancient Natural Places, Tourism Spaces," unpacks Guatemala and Mirador's reproduction as tourism destinations through the Mayan World marketing campaign. Analyzing Mirador marketing materials, discourses, and practices, I argue that national Guatemalan elite, foreign archaeologists, and global heritage organizations are clumsily yet coherently defining and selling a representation – a tourism imaginary – of the area around Mirador, Juanita, and Yamul as an ancient place in a natural, pristine, forested space. This "ancient place/natural space" tourism trope constitutes a practice of *historical and geographical erasure*. It erases the *chicle* village histories from the landscape and defines contemporary non-Maya subjects as "bodies out of place" (Creswell, 1996; Ojeda, 2012).

I then unpack the "Sticky Histories" (Chapter Three) villagers from Juanita and Yamul narrate as a practice of self and space making. I describe how villagers articulate territorial claims in terms of historical claims to land and livelihood. I describe this practice as *territory-based identity production*. For residents, living village histories include the *chicle* past as well as the political struggle to obtain and retain community forestry concessions beginning in the 1990s. Briefly outlining the community forest concessions process serves two purposes. Understanding concession history as a political struggle for territory helps explain why many villagers react so quickly and defensively to Mirador tourism projects that threaten their concessionaire rights. It also illuminates how practices of community forestry and grassroots political organizing have informed territory-based identifications with the area's natural and cultural resources that include forests, Mayan sites, and Mayan antiquities.

The focus on territory-based identity is distinguished from notions of place-based identity described by Escobar in his assertion that "culture sits in places" (2001). This is an understanding of identity production is *routed* in place whereby

the “local” is defined through long histories of uneven global connections and extra-local power relations. In contrast, the *rooted* sense of place at work in Escobar’s description of place-based identity is defined, not in terms of extra-local relations, but in opposition to them. These territory-based practices of identification run counter to blood-based discourses of race characterizing the tenacious, still hegemonic indigenous/not indigenous (*ladino*) divide.

The territorial struggle for what is infamously called the “Mayan Bikini,” illustrates how practices of eco-tourism enabled land enclosure is productive of territory-based identities for many Juanita and Yamul residents (Chapter 4). The Mirador Basin, or “Mayan Bikini,” is a triangular shaped area surrounding Mirador claimed by advocates to be part of an integral social and physical geography of the ancient Maya. In 2004, Guatemalan President Portillo declared this Mirador Basin, or Mayan Bikini, a national park designated for scientific and tourism purposes only. With the swoop of a pen, this practice of *land enclosure and dispossession* superseded 1/3 of Juanita’s forest concession, 1/10 of Yamul’s, and threatened the integrity of the entire community forestry system. Following a three-year legal battle that reached the Guatemalan Supreme Court, the community forest concessionaries emerged victorious and the boundaries and land uses of the concessions were reinstated.

Chapter Five, “Global Heritage in the *Chicle* Worker’s Museum,” moves from large-scale struggles over territory surrounding Mirador development to Mayan antiquities as cultural resources and objects of immense wealth. I describe the territorial practice of *global heritage production* taking place in tourism and cultural conservation whereby locals argue that national and global elites are expropriating local resources from Mayan sites in the name of humanity to further their own professional and financial gain. Struggles over the right to sell, own, display, and benefit from Mayan antiquities destabilizes claims that “global” heritage conservation benefits all of humanity equally, and they illustrate a transfer of control over antiquities as cultural resources from village residents to wealthy elites in Guatemala City and the United States.

The dissertation ends with a return to the living legacies of the civil war to examine how practices of what I call *counterinsurgency eco-tourism* are repurposing wartime tactics of territorial rule in the present through practices of eco-tourism development and conservation. This chapter drives home the political stakes of tourism development and conservation for villagers. President Colom’s “Four Jaguar” eco-tourism the project becomes an entry point into the connections between tourism, conservation, and militarization in the Maya Biosphere

Collectively, these territorial practices of historical and geographical erasure, identity formation, enclosure and dispossession, global heritage production, and territorial rule are interconnected and shape one another in a dialectical fashion. When we zoom our perspective out from one chapter to project as a whole, the bigger picture depicted illustrates multiple, interrelated territorial

practices enabled by tourism development. In doing so, this dissertation seeks to solidify an understanding of the contemporary territorial practices engendered by tourism development, what I call tourism's territoriality, and, relatedly, to understand what it is about the non-traditional tourism industry in this neo-liberal moment that enables these practices.

Chapter 2

ANCIENT NATURAL PLACES, TOURISM SPACES

Mirador in the Mayan World

Multiple, large-scale tourism projects are transforming northern Guatemala into a world-class tourism destination by constructing hospitality and transportation infrastructure, demarcating park boundaries, and legislating land use. These diverse projects led by state, non-profit, and private actors loosely share a partial and politically sensitive *tourism imaginary* of this region as pristine wilderness protecting vestiges of an ancient Mayan civilization. I define tourism imaginaries as socially constructed and transmitted representations of tourism destinations that interact with people's individual imaginations and everyday life experiences to become meaning-making and world shaping devices (Salazar, 2012, p. 864). Existing literature on tourism imaginaries have emphasized their production and circulation (Bruner, 2005; Mercille, 2005; Salazar, 2010), and the ways tourism imaginaries extend and reproduce colonial visions of Otherness (Clifford, 1997; Sheller & Urry, 2004).

I paint the portrait of an emerging and contested tourism landscape by focusing on how Mirador tourism imaginaries underpin economic development initiatives operating at multiple scales that aim to transform Mirador's "ancient natural place" tourism imaginary into a reality. In other words, I show how tourism imaginaries interact with the spatial realm of planning and infrastructure design, and manifest in the material environment in the form of eco-lodges, transportation infrastructure, and national parks

This chapter examines Mirador's tourism imaginary by unpacking how archaeologists and tourism boosters carve out tourism spaces of nature and antiquity from contemporary village landscapes of home and livelihood, and implicitly render alternative geographies invisible. In doing so, Mirador tourism development initiatives rewrite regional history through the erasure of contemporary subjects from the landscape. I identify this practice as *historical-geographical erasure*, which partially clears the slate for national and global elites to articulate new place-based histories, land claims, and notions of heritage out of malleable tourism landscapes in the making. Through analysis of mapping, marketing, and development projects, I show how Mirador tourism imaginaries render nature and the ancient Maya as feminine and isomorphic. I further suggest that Mirador tourism imaginaries infuse Guatemala's northern landscapes with racialized and gendered notions of spatial belonging and exclusion. Specifically, I suggest the "ancient natural place" tourism imaginary runs the risk of portraying contemporary residents as *mestizo*, *ladino*, or indigenous migrant "bodies out-of-place" (Creswell, 1996).

Understanding how tourism imaginaries shape notions of spatial belonging in northern Petén is politically salient at this moment because of the larger contested terrain of land tenure upon which eco-tourism development and conservation projects play out. The commodification of place in tourism can thus be viewed as a territorial practice of historical and geographical erasure that infuses tourism geographies with racialized and gendered ideas about spatial belonging. These imaginaries are inseparable from material practices of development and infrastructure investment explored in this chapter, and contested practices of livelihood and land dispossession in the chapters that follow.

“The Mayan World”

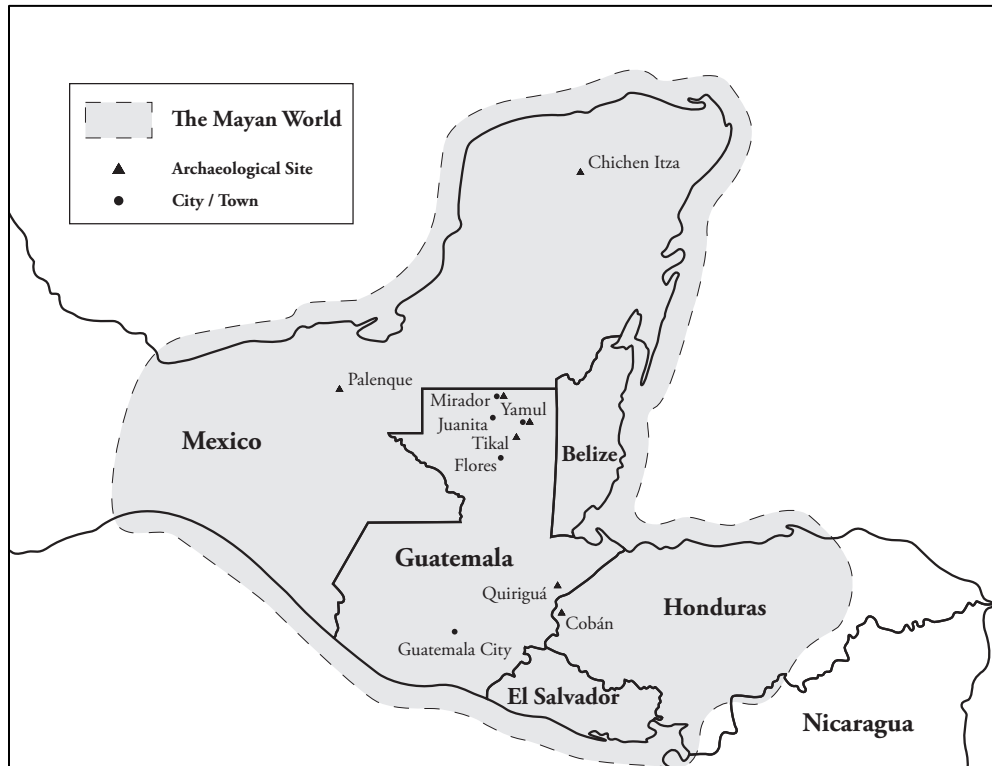
“When we speak of preservation of cultural heritage we are not only considering aesthetic or ethical aspects, but we are also addressing culture as a source of economic activity (IADB, 2000).”

-----Enrique Iglesias, President of the Inter-American Development Bank

In the late 1980s, industry boosters and state officials in Guatemala and across Latin America looked for ways to brand their countries and citizens as tourism attractions. Industry advocates quickly identified indigenous Mayan culture and archaeological heritage as Guatemala and Central America’s competitive advantage in the global tourism industry (IADB, 2005). An official state document detailing Guatemala’s national tourism development plan suggests that tourism is the only sector in which Guatemala enjoys a high level of comparative advantage because the Western Highlands are home to “real” expressions of indigenous culture, and thus, are able to meet the desires of tourists to have “authentic” cultural encounters (INGUAT, n.d.).

In sync with this vision, *National Geographic* published an article carving out a new tourism route in Central America called “The Mayan Route” stretching from the Yucatan to Honduras (Garrett, 1989). The popular adventure piece sparked an idea among the leaders of tourism ministries from Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, and Honduras to create the Mayan World Organization (*Organización Mundo Maya*) and the tourism imaginary of meso-America as the “Mayan World” was born. State and private sector representatives from the five member countries comprise the multi-sector organization that aims to make travel easier among small Central American countries, collectively brand the region, and put the “Mayan World” on the global tourism map. Geographically, the Mayan World Organization defines the Mayan World as 500,000 square miles incorporating Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and the Mexican states of Campeche, Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Tabasco and Yucatan (see Figure 3).

Figure 2.1: Map of the Mayan World



Source: Author

Since its inception, the Mayan World Organization (MWO) has executed several tourism development initiatives publicizing the imaginary and building the infrastructure of the Mayan World. The MWO implemented its largest infrastructure-building project from 2000-2004 with funding from the Inter-American Development Bank that included a multi-million dollar renovation of Petén's airport (re-christened the "Mayan World" airport). The MWO was instrumental in the successful branding of the "Mayan Riviera" as part of the Mayan World that begins in Cancun and extends to Cozumel and further south, stretching tourism enclaves into a vast shoreline stretching almost to the Guatemalan border. In the late 2000s, the MWO focused primarily on marketing, branding, and trying to capitalize on the 2012 Mayan prophecies.

In the last 20 years, the tourism imaginary of the Mayan World has escaped its embryonic confines as a tourism circuit to become a marketing strategy spanning diverse industries such as transportation, retail, and hospitality. For example, in 2010 Petén Congressman Manuel Baldizón funded the construction of a monument in the middle of a busy intersection in San Benito, Petén that reads,

“Welcome to the Mayan World, Mirador: Jaguar Paw.”¹⁰ Baldizón also owns Petén’s largest commercial retail shopping center called the “Mayan World Plaza.”

Figure 2.2: Mirador Monument, San Benito, Petén, Guatemala



Source: Author’s Photo

National level efforts to integrate northern Petén into the “Mayan World” tourism circuit coalesced with the neo-liberal economic and political policies of the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and the Plan Puebla Panama. The controversial Plan Puebla Panama (PPP) (now called the Meso-American Project) holds tourism as one of eight project core areas of focus.¹¹ The PPP funded the infrastructure to make the movement of tourists and other forms of goods and capital possible, while CAFTA provided the legal climate to make foreign investment in Guatemala and other Central American countries more attractive (Grandia, 2007). The Mayan World and Mayan Riviera tourism campaigns form part of these broader initiatives unfolding across the region and hemisphere to promote economic integration through identified key industries like the tourism sector. In effect, the Mayan world is a neo-liberal one.

Guatemala: “The Heart of the Mayan World”

Advocates of Mirador tourism development have identified the archaeology site as an unearthed jewel in this already lucrative tourism landscape. In the early 2000s, industry officials and private sector developers came together to conclude that, if Central America is the “Mayan World,” then Guatemala is the heart of it. The

¹⁰ Jaguar Paw is the name of a pyramid at Mirador that has well-preserved, ornate, masks in high relief depicted on the urban monument.

¹¹ The name change from the PPP to the Meso-American Project reflects a superficial reworking of the project following widespread and sustained protest over various PPP projects, specifically around the construction of a hydro-electric damn in the Petén (Grandia, 2007).

state-run Guatemalan Tourism Commission (INGUAT) identified Guatemala as “The Heart of the Mayan World” in a national tourism campaign from 2000-2004, and then again from 2008-2012. Tourism imaginaries crafted and circulated globally by state institutions like INGUAT provide an opportunity for presidents and their administrations to disseminate their ideal nation identity and the place of the Maya in the body politic (Devine, 2009). Figures 3 and 4 depict examples of promotional materials from the “Heart of the Mayan World” (*Corazon del Mundo Maya*) campaign.

Figure 2.3: “Mujer Maya” in State Tourism Promotion Materials



Source: INGUAT Archives

The politics of branding national identity in tourism has a long history. State involvement in the tourist industry dates back to 1932 when the military government of General Jorge Ubico founded the National Committee of Tourism, renamed the Guatemalan Tourism Commission (INGUAT) in 1967. Today, INGUAT’s impressive, 12 story headquarters in Guatemala City houses over 300 employees charged with designing and implementing sophisticated marketing campaigns, coordinating industry development with state ministries, and hosting prestigious international dignitaries. In addition to these efforts, INGUAT is responsible for producing several cultural events in over 80 (of 332) municipalities throughout the country, such as folkloric dances, marimba performances, festivals, and presentations of Mayan textiles (INGUAT, n.d.).

The Guatemalan government hasn’t always supported tourism so earnestly. During the civil war in 1979, the International Union of Food and Allied Workers (IUF) led a consumer boycott of Guatemalan tourism with the aim of waging an economic embargo and public relations campaign against the Guatemalan state. The effects of the boycott went from detrimental to devastating in 1981 when the U.S. State Department issued a warning against travel to Guatemala. During these

few years, wartime violence escalated under the military state's infamous scorched earth counter-insurgency campaign that strategically targeted and massacred entire indigenous communities presumed to be aiding insurgent guerrillas. During this time, the number of international tourists visiting Guatemala dropped more than 60%, from over half a million in 1979 to under 200,000 in 1984 (INGUAT 1995 p. 6). The boycott and travel warning not only negatively impacted Guatemala's economy, but also drastically damaged the country's international image by rendering visible the horrific, everyday acts of the civil war violence to popular audiences like potential tourists. In response to the negative economic and political effects of the tourism boycott and U.S. State Department travel warning, officials redefined INGUAT's mandate to combat the negative image of the Guatemalan state as a flagrant abuser of human rights and identified tourism as a national priority (Burtner & Castañeda, n.d). During the height of civil war violence, INGUAT executed several marketing and public relations campaigns seeking to redefine Guatemala's national image as safe, relatively peaceful, and home to happy and friendly indigenous people (Devine, 2009).

One of these campaigns emerged toward the end of the peace process (1985 – 1996) and depicted not a *ladino* nation, but a multi-cultural one, spatially represented in the designation of distinct racial and cultural region. In 1995, INGUAT officials collaborated with a Spanish marketing firm to help develop a new advertising strategy that expanded on the regional delineation of tourism activities. In the aim of spatially disaggregating Guatemala's tourism activities, INGUAT officials divvied up the country into seven territorially demarcated regions saturated with racial meaning. These regions include the "Living Indigenous Highlands," "Adventure in the Maya World," "Guatemala Modern & Colonial," "A Different Caribbean," "the Pacific Coast," and a "Guatemala to Discover" (see Figure 5).

INGUAT's national tourism imaginary designates a space for the "living" contemporary Maya in the Western Highlands, which stands in territorial contrast to the "modern and colonial" region encompassing Guatemala City. INGUAT's remapping of the nation renders "modern" and "colonial" as equivalent and definitive of Guatemala City, in opposition to its "natural" and "indigenous" provincial surroundings. While this map purportedly recognizes the body politic's diversity, bounding the Western Highlands as the space of the "living indigenous" relegates Mayans populating other regions to the past, and invisibilizes the hundreds of thousands of indigenous people living in Guatemala City altogether. Likewise, the "Different Caribbean" locates the spaces (and non-spaces) of the minority afro-descendant Garífuna on the eastern coast. Petén is labeled "Adventure in the Mayan World" in this spatial representation that locates the Maya in the past in the form of vestiges of Pre-Colombian civilization. This map illuminates how mundane practices of tourism development infuse territory with racial identity and ideas of antiquity and modernity and notions of racialized belonging.

Figure 2.4: Map of Guatemala, “Heart of the Maya World”



Source: Author

Rather than reflecting the diversity of Mayan subject positions in tourism promotion materials, these representations construct and reproduce an essentialized, feminized, and folkloric representation of Mayan culture. In the Guatemalan context, Diane Nelson (1999) uses the term “*mujer Maya*” (Mayan woman) to refer to this stereotypical portrayal of Mayan identity in the tourist industry, a trope INGUAT has increasingly employed since the early 1990s (see Figure 5). In an historical analysis of the origins of *mujer Maya* representations, Walter Little argues that tourists’ desire to consume a romanticized, feminized, Indigenous other, along with Mayan and *ladino* businesspersons’ responses to that desire, have produced and popularized the prevalent *mujer Maya* representation in contemporary tourism (2008). These carefully crafted images of Mayan people resonate with critiques of development and Orientalist discourses that represent indigenous peoples and the bodies politic of “developing” countries as fun, carefree, childlike and feminized, and in doing so, reproduce power-laden racial hierarchies underpinning colonial and post-colonial “development” interventions (Escobar, 1996; Kabeer, 1994; Mohanty, 1991; Said, 1979).

Figure 2.5: “Mujer Maya” in State Tourism Promotion Materials



Source: INGUAT Archives

Far from apolitical, these images have productive effects and material consequences. Tourism imaginaries so clearly crystallized in the map and representations unpacked here shape notions of what types of people, experiences, and histories are found in destinations like the “Heart of the Mayan World.” Furthermore, these representations of the Maya, Guatemala, and Mirador shape foreign visitors and political dignitaries’ understandings of appropriate (and non-appropriate) practices of Mayan culture. These spatial and cultural representations have profound material effects. Tourists, industry boosters, and development practitioners economically reward “authentic” Mayans who fulfill “*mujer Maya*” representations while explicitly or inadvertently excluding Mayans from the industry’s economic benefits who do not play or look the part. In the lucrative handicraft markets of Antigua and Panajachel, women venders dressed in Mayan *traje* sell more tourism wares than men or women in “western” or “non-indigenous” clothes (Burtner, 2004; Little, 2004, 2008). These images also implicitly and explicitly guide individuals working in aid institutions in allocating millions of international bilateral and multilateral funding in the form of loans and grants.

Mirador and Maya Biosphere Reserve tourism imaginaries are grounded in, and mutually reinforce, broader regional narratives about Guatemala as the “Heart of the Mayan World.” Despite the vast diversity of actors involved in incipient development of Mirador, these efforts coalesce around a shared tourism imaginary of Mirador and the surrounding region as an ancient and natural place. This emerging spatial imaginary paints Mirador as an El Dorado that promises unimagined adventure for tourists and unfathomed riches for industry beneficiaries.

El Dorado: Adventure in the Mayan World

State officials, development agencies, and private sector donors describe the Pre-Classic site as an *El Dorado*, a lost city of gold containing untapped wealth promising to catalyze economic development for local residents, the northern department of Petén, and the Guatemalan nation. The *El Dorado* myth, like any good story, has several versions. Its origins date back to European expeditions in the Andean region in the 16th century. As gold thirsty conquistadores made their way into the Amazonian interior, they heard of stories of a mountain tribe whose chief covered him from head to toe in gold dust. They called him “*El Dorado*” which means “the gilded one.” The name became synonymous with the lost city of gold whose ruler presumably possessed stockpiles of treasures and gold that literally adorned the city landscape. Spanish and English explorers never found *El Dorado*, but many caught gold fever and died trying. Overtime, the myth of *El Dorado* changed meaning and location until it finally came to mean a source of untold riches somewhere in the Americas (Drye, n.d.).

For Mirador, the myth of *El Dorado* is double-edged sword; it’s the reward of discovery for tourists playing Indiana Jones as well as a symbol of immense potential tourism riches. Tourism boosters argue that Mirador could be the next Tikal, Chichen Itza, or Machu Picchu, promising to rake in riches in the form of hundreds of millions of dollars a year. But Mirador is not just the next big thing on *Lonely Planet’s* “must see” list for tourists. Many scientists frame the surrounding region as a reservoir of untapped priceless knowledge about the history of humanity. Proud and wealthy Guatemalan citizens see Mirador and other sites as national patrimony. Biologists and environmental conservationists see Mirador as one of the planet’s last remaining carbon sinks and home to hundreds of endemic and endangered species. For locals, Mirador has been a place of work for chewing gum tappers, excavation laborers, and tour guides (Schwartz, 1990; see Chapter Three).

Mirador: Eco-Tourism as Conservation Strategy

Within this bewildering diversity of Mirador stakeholders, there exists a powerful contingent of foreign and domestic elite advocates that share a grandiose vision of Mirador as a world-class tourism destination and UNESCO World Heritage site. These groups supporting Mirador tourism development do not act in concert, but in conversation, albeit sometimes in a heated debate. Despite surface-level differences, this pro-tourism contingent shares a dynamic but steadfast vision of spatially transforming Mirador and the Maya Biosphere into one of the world’s largest archaeology and eco-tourism destinations. Many organizations within this contingency argue that tourism is the *only* way to save Mirador from apocalyptic destruction at the hands of humanity (Jaramillo, 2008).

Advocates suggest that eco-tourism development of Mirador is the only conservation model that will work. Mirador archaeologist Dr. David Larson makes clear, “The model is correct, it works everywhere you have it. There wouldn’t be a single tree in Tikal [National Park] if it weren’t for the [archaeological site]. I can promise you that” (personal interview, July 2009). The Foundation for Archaeological Research and Environmental Studies (FARES) working at Mirador describes, “The forest in this region is highly threatened, but [tourism] can provide new economic benefits for communities and the Republic of Guatemala through the establishment of world class archaeological parks and natural preserves” (Mirador Basin Project website). President Colom (2008-2012) shared this vision of Mirador conservation through eco-tourism development. His Four Jaguar eco-tourism project originally included an eco-friendly train that would glide tourists through the Maya Biosphere at 16 km/hr to Mirador and an onsite university of biodiversity and Mayan studies. President Colom, like his three predecessors, dreams of capitalizing on Mirador’s untapped tourist wealth. The links between Mirador and Four Jaguar project are evident to Mirador archaeologist David Larson who insists, “El Mirador is the heart of *Cuatro Balam* [Four Jaguar]” (June 18th 2010).

Dr. Larson and President Colom are not alone. Several archaeologists, state officials, development practitioners, and private foundations powerfully argue that tourism development is the only chance Mirador has. This consortium reflects a twenty-year history of pursuing eco-tourism in the Maya Biosphere as part of broader sustainable development strategy for the state of Petén.

State-led efforts

The United States Department of the Interior (USDOI) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) paired with international conservation organizations like The Nature Conservancy, the Wildlife Conservation Society, and Conservation International to implement a mass-scale project to support the Maya Biosphere in its infancy. The various phases of the USAID Maya Biosphere Project (MBP), later called the Maya Resource Management Project (MAYAREMA), lasted for nearly a decade (1990-2000) and invested US\$ 44 million in the region, and dramatically changed Petén’s natural, political and economic landscape (USAID, 1995). MAYAREMA funding supported the infant state organization of CONAP (the National Council on Protected Areas) created during the peace process in 1989. Funds also financed the creation of Petén level non-profit organizations to partner with the global conservation BINGOs (big international non-governmental organizations).¹² The Balam Association is one such organization. This now powerful civil society organization is actively involved in community tourism

¹² At the wane of over thirty years of genocidal counterinsurgency warfare, however, these organizations simply did not exist. Anyone working with civil society organizations was branded as a guerilla or guerilla sympathizer, and was often intimidated or even disappeared (REHMI, 1998; Schirmer, 1998). As such, MAYAREMA funded the creation of several Petén-based non-profit organizations, a few of which are still in operation today.

development initiatives in Juanita and Yamul and organizes the prominent Mirador Roundtable that brings together various stakeholders (including Guatemalan presidents and US ambassadors) in attempts to resolve disputes surrounding Mirador development (Radachowsky & Castellanos, n.d.; Taylor et. al, 2008). MAYAREMA also funded many local social initiatives including technical support to the newly established community forest concessions and eco-tourism projects.

At the same time that the MAYAREMA project carved out newly baptized spaces of conservation, SEGEPLAN,¹³ the state planning organization, took over many of the strategic planning and development plans previously under the charge of FYDEP, the military run institution that governed Petén during the civil war. One of the first achievements of SEGEPLAN in Petén was the completion of the 1992 Program for Integral Development (PDI). The PDI marked the institutionalization of sustainable development ideology and practice in the Petén. “Integral” in the plan’s name signifies comprehensive, region-wide planning at the level of the state’s economy. The PDI served as *the* master plan for state investment and development in Petén. Replicating FYDEP’s economic geography of the past, the southern part of Petén was designated for agricultural development, the central savannas for cattle, and the urban hub for Tikal based tourism (Schwartz, 2012; SEGEPLAN, 1992). FYDEP’s historical economic geographies got doused in the new language of sustainability in the civilian run SEGEPLAN, and the forest reserves to the north became a space of conservation and tourism development.

The Program for Integral Development (PDI) overlapped with and eventually interwove into a third phase of Maya Biosphere international aid distributed between 2002 - 2007, this time in the form of a World Bank funded mega-project called the Sustainable Development Program for the Petén (IADB 1996).¹⁴ The \$20 million dollar loan funded a project with four principal components: land titling, tourism development, institutional strengthening, and community development (IADB 1996).¹⁵ These same components were retooled in a subsequent, second mega-project funded by a World Bank loan designed with a very similar focus loquaciously titled the “Program for the Development of the Petén for the Conservation of the Maya Biosphere Reserve,” or the PDP for short, executed between 2007 – 2013. In continuity with the PDI and the PDS, the PDP promotes conservation in the MBR through the sustainable, participatory, and

¹³ SEGEPLAN stands for the *Secretaría de Planificación y Programación de la Presidencia* in Spanish.

¹⁴ The PDS is called the *Programa para el Desarrollo Sostenible en Petén* in Spanish. A principal PDS loan document states that the program’s objective is to promote the conservation of the Maya Biosphere Reserve through sustainable, participatory and inclusive development of natural resources, cultural patrimony, tourist activity, and adequate environmental management (IADB 1996). Given the longevity of sustainable development programs in Petén, not everyone is happy with the Guatemalan state taking on millions of dollars worth of debt through the current PDS project. A conservation worker explained to me that part of the name change from PDS to PDP during an essentially 12 year continuous loan period reflects civil society critiques of the outcomes of the prior PDS project, “but it’s the same project.”

inclusive use of natural resources, cultural patrimony, touristic activity, and adequate environmental management.¹⁶ The PDP is funded by a \$30 million loan from the IADB to Guatemala, with the World Bank's Global Environmental Facility contributing a US\$ 4.1 million donation. The PDP picked up where the PDS left off, and explicitly targeted Mirador among other sites for tourism development, including US\$1 million to improve basic tourism infrastructure on the trek to Mirador (IADB 2006). These projects established the ideological and material groundwork for targeted Mirador tourism development today.

Saving Global Heritage: Private Sector Foundations

The multiple non-state actors involved in Mirador conservation and economic development rivals state officials and agencies. State bureaucrats and World Bank project practitioners frequently partner with three types of non-profit and non-governmental organizations working in the Maya Biosphere and Mirador specifically: civil society organizations primarily headquartered in the Petén; international non-profit organizations; and global and national private sector foundations. Leading the pack is the Foundation for Anthropological Research and Environmental Studies (FARES). Dr. David Larson founded the organization in 1996 as the financial branch of the Mirador Basin Project undertaking scientific investigations at Mirador and numerous surrounding sites like *Nakbé*, *Wakná*, *la Florida*, and *Tintal*. FARES continues to be the primary sponsor of the Mirador Basin project, often serving as a clearing house for dozens of financial supporters, large and small.¹⁷ While the bulk of project resources go towards the very expensive work of archaeological investigation, the project emphasizes its commitment to improving the lives of “contemporary civilizations” through offering literacy training, eco-tourism classes, and donations to local schools.

Quite an interesting cast of characters makes up FARES' Board of Directors, including actor and director Mel Gibson as former Chairman of the Board (now Chairman of the Board Emeritus). Mel Gibson got involved in Mirador conservation and research through the production of his Hollywood blockbuster *Apocalypto*. Dr. Larson provided Gibson consultation on various details of ancient Mayan architecture, culture, war, art, and everyday life that ultimately, albeit partially, shaped his portrayal of Pre-Colombian indigenous people (see Chapter Four). In turn, Dr. Larson infected Gibson with his contagious passion for Mirador conservation (FARES, 2008). Mel Gibson captures the eco-tourism as a conservation strategy succinctly: “David has created a new model for rainforest and archaeological site conservation through sustainable programs using the *ancient jungle shrouded cities* as the economic catalysts for their own preservation” (Pacunam, n.d. a, emphasis mine).

¹⁷ The Mirador Basin Project previously went by the more laborious title of Regional Archaeological Investigation of the North Petén, Guatemala, (RAINPEG) (Mirador Basin Project, n.d. a). RAINPEG/Mirador Basin Project has been in continual operation since 1987.

FARES works closely with the major actors comprising the Mirador donor community, including the Global Heritage Fund (GHF). The Global Heritage Fund focuses “its efforts in developing countries and regions on preservation and responsible development of the most important and endangered global heritage sites” (Global Heritage Fund, n.d. a).¹⁸ Central to the organization’s premise is the idea that such a thing as “global heritage” exists, and therefore, a few actors at the local scale cannot stake claim the history, culture, and nature found places of global heritage. The GHF began conservation and community development at Mirador in 2003, just one year the founder established the non-profit organization based in Palo Alto, California. Since then, the GHF has since invested at least \$3 million through a gift matching program with the national foundation Pacunam to “help establish Mirador one of the world’s greatest archaeological and nature preserves for the sustainable protection of the area’s natural and cultural heritage” (Global Heritage Fund, 2012).

FARES and the GHF are international organizations run principally by North American conservationists, but there are several powerful non-profit organizations backing tourism development as a conservation strategy at the national scale. These national foundations are headquartered in Guatemala City and funded by Guatemalan’s wealthiest companies and individuals. One of the first national non-profits to get involved in work alongside Dr. Larson at FARES is APANAC, or the Association of Friends of Guatemala’s Natural and Cultural Patrimony (*Asociación de Amigos del Patrimonio Natural y Cultural de Guatemala Balam Kan*). Two politically powerful families, the Novella and the Berger families, founded APANAC in the early 2000s and have been more or less engaged in Mirador conservation since.

In addition to financial contributions to support archaeological restoration, APANAC coordinated and funded a controversial community project in Juanita that built a community tourism center and bungalow accommodation in Juanita. Following the hard felt shortcomings of this project, APANAC has taken backseat to a parallel organization called Pacunam made up of the nation’s wealthiest companies (rather than private individuals). Pacunam is the Spanish acronym for the Foundation for Maya Cultural and Natural Heritage.¹⁹ Pacunam is a private sector foundation comprised of several of Guatemala’s largest corporations “committed to the preservation of Guatemala’s natural and cultural heritage through sustainable development” (Pacunam n.d. b). These corporations include *Cementos Progresos*, Central America’s largest cement fabricator, Walmart Central America, Industrial Bank, Citi Bank, Panteleon Foundation, Disagro, Claro, TELGUA, Cerveceria Centro Americana, and Blue Oil, among others (Pacunam n.d. c).

¹⁸ The GHF’s mission is to “save the earth’s most significant and endangered cultural heritage sites in developing countries through scientific excellence and community involvement”. As of 2012, the GHF has undertaken 20 projects across the Global South.

¹⁹ The Spanish acronym PACUNAM stands for *Fundación Patrimonio Cultural y Natural Maya*.

Pacunam has undertaken and coordinated several studies that examine different facets of Mirador conservation and tourism development. These include a tourism market study, an archaeological management plan, a legal study of overlapping territorial jurisdiction in the Maya Biosphere, and an environmental impact study. For example, Pacunam, the Global Heritage Fund and FARES recently produced the *Mirador Cultural and Natural System Archaeological Development Plan* that outlines priorities for archaeological research and funding, as well as a three-phased tourism infrastructure development plan spanning 2011 – 2026.²⁰ Dr. Larson of FARES refers to the broader region surrounding Mirador as the “Mirador Basin,” while Pacunam leadership calls it the “Kingdom Kan” after Mirador’s longest ruling dynasty. The subtle name changes from Mirador, to Mirador Basin, to Four Jaguar, and Kingdom Kan, reflect different viewpoints of a shared vision of Mirador as a “jungle shrouded ancient city,” a world-class tourism destination, and World Heritage site. Indeed, APANAC’s website explicitly clarifies that there is no difference between the Kingdom Kan and the Mirador Basin (APANAC n.d.). This shared tourism imaginary is encapsulated in Pacunam’s Reino Kan promotion of Mirador and the surrounding region that describes “A Great Past, A Great Future” for Mirador.

The Foundation for the Development of Guatemala (FUNDESA)²¹ is another key player working in the communities of Juanita and Yamul to promote Mirador tourism development. The organization has a much broader scope than FARES, the GHF, Pacunam or APANAC. FUNDESA is comprised of individual Guatemalan businessmen working together “as a Think Tank that strives to contribute to integral, sustainable and democratic development within a market economy and rule of law” (FUNDESA, n.d a). To achieve this aim, FUNDESA works across a wide diversity of projects within a neo-liberal economic development model. One such project is the “Definition and Management of a Touristic Destination in the Northern Cluster Area Cuatro Balam in Petén, Guatemala.” Unlike the Program for Sustainable Development of Petén (PDS) mega-project funded with a World Bank loan, this US \$1.3 million, four-year project is supported by a grant from the Multilateral Investment Fund of the Inter-American Development Bank (Fundesa, n.d. b). The project’s goal is to “contribute to the sustainability of tourism in Guatemala as an icon of Mayan Culture.” The “project aims to contribute to the conservation, development and positioning of Reino Kan as a touristic destination” (BID, n.d.) In practice at the community level, the project translates into a year of 26 offered training programs to develop the tourism capacity of Mirador’s neighboring villages Juanita and Yamul and their residents.

Despite their diversity and divergences, the vast array of state-led, bilateral development, non-profit and private sector foundations, with access to immense power and resources, coalesce around a shared vision of Mirador as a world-class

²⁰ The authors of the plan write that it will be realized with the support of the international donor community and the Guatemalan government (Pacunam, FARES, and Global Heritage Fund, 2010).

²¹ FUNDESA stands for *Fundación Para El Desarrollo de Guatemala* in Spanish.

archaeological and eco-tourism destination. These organizations and the individuals comprising them share a vision of Mirador as an El Dorado, a lost city of untapped tourism wealth that will bank roll biodiversity and forest conservation, making local people better off along the way. FARES, Pacunam, FUNDESA, and GHF collaborate on many projects together, so much so that it seems they often work in concert, ideologically and financially supporting one another's initiatives. At this earliest moment of Mirador tourism development, their work coalesces not so much around the nuts and bolts of building tourism infrastructure, but around building a shared Mirador tourism imaginary that Mel Gibson hit right on the head as "ancient jungle shrouded cities."

The dominant "Reino Kan" or "Mirador Basin" tourism imaginary of these powerful Mirador treasure seekers bellies the existence of contemporary villages like Juanita and Yamul. Despite explicitly engaging with residents and even implementing tourism development projects in the villages, the Mirador tourism imaginary these organizations articulate, share, and disseminate, constitutes an act of historical and geographical erasure of alternative definitions and imaginaries of place defining the history and working landscapes for many Juanita and Yamul residents.

The Mirador tourism imaginary of an ancient city surrounded by pristine nature is reproduced and sold in various forms of global media like travel books and blogs, made for TV documentaries, and national branding programs. I argue that this Mirador tourism imaginary feeds broader debates and territorial struggles over who has the right to live in the Maya Biosphere, and how they can use the land to make a living in a broader climate of enduring poverty and land tenure security.

Ancient Natural Places, Tourism Spaces

In the 2009 CNN Special "Mirador the Lost City" anchor Brooke Burke opens the program by setting the scene with an air of mystery and discovery: "From the air it looks like just jungle, but these forests in Guatemala hide an ancient secret: the city of Mirador often referred to as the Cradle of the Mayan Civilization." She goes on to explain that La Danta, Mirador's (and possibly the world's) largest pyramid by volume, is "currently covered by the jungle and facing several threats." Similarly, the 2004 National Geographic Program "Dawn of the Maya" showcasing Mirador eerily commences the popular show by relating, "Deep in the jungles of Central America lie the ruins of a lost civilization..."

Widely viewed TV programs like these, Hollywood celebrities, scientific publications, tourism marketing materials, and public relation campaigns all discursively construct the Mirador Basin and northern Petén as pristine wilderness home to ancient Mayan civilizations. I argue that the dominant tourism imaginary Mirador eco-tourism enthusiasts espouse paints a picture of a lost ancient Mayan city shrouded in pristine, yet endangered forest. Time and again, Mirador is

described as the place of the ancient Maya surrounded by virgin, pristine forests. The Global Heritage Fund's (GHF) executive summary of the Mirador project concludes in bold blue oversized letters: "Described as the Cradle of the Maya Civilization, the Mirador Basin is the last tract of virgin rainforest remaining in Central America" (Global Heritage Fund, n.d. b). Similarly, Pacunam's "Reino Kan" or "Snake Kingdom" marketing campaign also paints the picture of a lost city awaiting (tourist) discovery. An invitation to a high-cache fundraiser in Los Angeles entices, "For 2000 years, the majesty and the mysteries of the Snake Kingdom have been protected by the forest...NOW YOU ARE INVITED TO REVEAL IT"(Pacunam, n.d. d).

These tourism imaginaries paint a false picture of remoteness, both spatially and temporally, and reproduce western notions of nature and wilderness as devoid of human occupation (Cronon, 1992). In reality, as the next chapter unpacks, this region was settled by *chicle* workers and traders over a hundred years ago working for the US based Wrigley's Chewing Gum Company who continue to make a living from sustainably harvesting forest products like timber, a leafy palm called *xate* used in flower bouquets, and *chicle*. This living history of globalization at the turn of the 20th century is not communicated in dominant tourism imaginaries defining Mirador as a place, but rendered invisible by the "jungle shrouded ancient cities" narrative.

Tourism imaginaries like those fuelling Mirador development often require these silences to sell an ancient experience in a natural place like Mirador. At the same time a map or postcard speaks a thousand words, thousands more are silenced. What is just as interesting about spatial representations in tourism imaginaries are the geographies and places left off the map. The dominant Mirador tourism imaginary not only produces new racial geographies, but it also obscures co-existing and often conflicting geographies of the *chicle* villages of Juanita and Yamul, and the working landscapes of the community concessions. I identify this subtle territorial practice as *historical and geographical erasure*, a practice encapsulated in Pacunam's conservation strategy: "Rewriting history to preserve the future".

Threatened Landscapes and *Ladino* Bodies-out-of-Place in the Mayan World

Threatened Landscapes

Not only does the Mirador tourism imaginary erase *chicle* living histories and village residents from the Maya Biosphere, but local residents are often unfairly blamed for environmental and cultural degradation in the reserve in these narratives as well. There is a sense of urgency driving eco-tourism projects in and around Mirador that comes from multiple perceived threats that place in jeopardy Mirador's natural landscapes and cultural treasures. The Global Heritage Fund lists the following threats to Mirador: deforestation, fires, major logging, poaching,

looting, and narcotics trafficking (Global Heritage Fund, n.d. b). In sync, the Foundation for Archaeological Research (FARES) describes the “relentless march of fires across the largest remaining tropical rain forest in Central America” These fires result from intrusive settlers who follow newly constructed roads built facilitate logging, oil exportation and looting” (FARES, n.d.).

The neo-Malthusian specter often looms large in these renderings. Unchecked population growth time and time again is summoned to back these portrayals of threats to conservation in Mirador and the Maya Biosphere. For example, a Global Heritage Fund photo slideshow warns Mirador e-tourists online: “Regardless of Mirador’s great importance, the site is endangered by threats including annual fires, looting, deforestation, poaching and the depredation of Maya cultural heritage” (Global Heritage Fund n.d. c). A popular *American Archaeology* magazine relates:

“Dr. Larson describes the forces he sometimes refers to as “the dark side” that threaten the region. They include looters, loggers, poachers, and drug and human traffickers. He’s concluded that in order to preserve the archaeology in the basin, he must preserve the basin itself. This means confronting the dark side, which has proven to be dangerous. Due to death threats against Larson, 10 Guatemalan soldiers are guarding his camp. “They thought if they could take me out of the picture it would all go away, so they could log and burn with impunity,” he says.” (Bawaya, 2007, p. 24)

The concerns of Mirador tourism advocates regarding environmental and cultural degradation are well founded. Deforestation is destroying critically important habitats for hundreds of endemic species and dozens of endangered species traversing part of the Meso-American biological corridor. The illegal excavation and sale of Mayan antiquities does take place, and has for decades, dating back at least to when the Guatemalan army organized large-scale excavations in the 1970s. Poor people poach jaguars and many animals on the brink of extinction for pennies. During my field research, two men living near Tikal Park killed a jaguar and sold his pelt for a mere \$30 that they split. The loss of life and the poverty that produced it are heartbreaking. My goal is not to dispute whether or not Mayan sites, biodiversity, and forests are in peril or that deforestation is taking place. Rather my concern is who is blamed for these dynamics, and the territorial practices these discourses of culpability inadvertently engender.

In many renderings of the Mirador tourism imaginary, local residents are implicitly blamed for practices of environmental and cultural degradation in the reserve. The Global Heritage Website reads:

“Establishing sustainable tourism in this area with active local community participation will provide economic alternatives to the currently ongoing destructive activities such as illegal logging, archaeological looting, and

human, wildlife and drug trafficking. This may be our final chance to protect the last remaining forests of the Maya Biosphere from total catastrophe.”

This quote illustrates how environmental concerns are constitutive drivers of the Mirador tourism imaginary. In suggesting local participation in tourism is the solution to these nefarious and illicit activities, this quote, and several others just like it, suggest that locals drive processes like narco-trafficking. Yet practices of antiquities, drugs, and human trafficking are activities defined precisely in terms of their extra-local relations.

Another example of this negative portrayal of village residents caused outrage when wind of a New York Times Article entitled “Ranchers and Drug Barons Threaten Forest” (Schmidt 2010) arrived in Juanita. Dr. Larson is quoted in the article, “There’s traffickers, cattle ranchers, loggers, poachers and looters. All the bad guys are lined up to destroy the reserve. You can’t imagine the devastation that is happening.” The New York Times journalist later describes his own personal experience trekking to Mirador from Juanita: a “local trail guide, galumphing along ancient limestone freeways buried beneath the forest, chain-smokes marijuana cigarettes rolled in notebook paper.” Then, seemingly jumping scales, the writer suggests, “This rapidly deforesting mini narco-state is a far cry from President Colom’s vision of a lush Mayan-themed vacationland.” In this article, the Juanita tour guide stands in for a whole host of communities who, “Willingly or not, they often become pawns of the drug lords.” This article brewed the perfect storm: it directly named the village of Juanita as part of the deforestation and narco-trafficking problems, linked the village to the transnational drug trade, and quoted Dr. Larson as the expert voice on the matter. Even though Dr. Larson did not write the article, and was merely quoted in it, many residents blamed Dr. Larson and the Mirador Basin Project directly.

Ladino Bodies Out-of-Place in the Mayan World

Practices of historical and geographical erasure in the Mayan World and Mirador tourism imaginaries combine with environmental crisis narratives and the ideology of mestizaje to define ladinos and contemporary Q’eqch’i living in the reserve as “bodies out-of-place” in the Maya Biosphere (Creswell, 1999; Ojeda, 2012).

Ideas about the time and place of the Maya implicit in the Mayan World and Mirador tourism imaginaries gain so much traction because they reproduce common sense notions of indigeneity espoused in the racial ideology of mestizaje. Since colonial independence, many liberal non-indigenous Guatemalan governments have sought to address the paradox of forging a single national identity in a place with a large, impoverished, and socially excluded indigenous population. In Guatemala, Mexico, and the Andes, post-colonial liberal governments explicitly pursued projects of sexual miscegenation and cultural mixing, called mestizaje, to produce the ideal citizen who celebrated an indigenous

past, but was in all effects, European (Miller 2004). This discourse of mestizaje forged links between creole and Iberian leaders who sought to ground their claims for independence, distinction, and grandeur in the ancient Pre-Hispanic civilizations like the Aztecs, Maya and Inca (Earle, 2007). In Guatemala, post-colonial liberal ladino nationalism located the culture of the “ancient Maya” as dead and buried in the past, and not to be confused with contemporary indios (Indians), naturales (naturals), cobaneros (from Coban), and so forth (Smith, 1990; Woodward, 1990). This distinction between the “ancient Maya” and contemporaneous indios enabled nationalists to frame pre-Hispanic ruins and artifacts as part of a shared ladino cultural heritage and national identity through the ideology of mestizaje (Chincilla, 1998).

Rather than celebrating diversity, mestizaje purports that ladinos and mestizos, have a mixed heritage of indigenous and Spanish blood and the indios should conform to the ladino cultural norm (Nelson, 1999). In a series gendered hierarchies (Cixious, 1997), mestizaje as an orientalist discourse defines indigeniety as inferior, feminized, childlike, and close to nature (Said, 1979), as opposed to the masculine, civilized Spanish, and to a lesser degree their mestizo offspring (Hale, 2006). In its most pernicious forms, mestizaje has authorized violent practices of indigenous “whitening” (*blanquemento*) through rape and the genocidal practices of the Guatemalan military during the civil war (Grandin, 2000; Nelson, 1999). In other moments and places like mid 20th century Mexico, mestizaje manifested in more celebratory notions of indigeneity, like Vasconcelos’s “raza cósmica” (Vasconcelos, 1966). Sometimes justifying violence against indigenous people, other times, celebrating Latin America’s hybridity and diversity, mestizaje as a concept is hard pressed to escape the teleology of whitening and indigenous erasure the narrative has historically entailed.

The Mirador tourism imaginary and the entire premise of the Mayan World transnational tourism program subtly, implicitly, but problematically, ring of the vestiges of mestizaje. Mestizaje locates a feminized, Mayan identity in the past, an authentic indigenous identity that has been compromised through centuries of miscegenation. So too, do the Mayan World and Mirador tourism imaginaries that render nature and the ancient Maya as isomorphic. Mirador’s surrounding “virgin” forests are feminized in their vulnerability, and framed as needing protection from the plundering and pillaging practices of contemporary populations. These local populations, in contrast, are defined as masculinized, ladino transgressors of the feminine, the natural, and all things Maya.

The temporality and spatiality of the “ancient” Maya painted in Mirador tourism imaginaries precludes contemporary habitation of the region by any ethnic group. “Maya” in the tourism imaginary is firmly located in the past, in the form of remains of ancient Mayan civilizations. Human spatial belonging in the forest is defined precisely in terms of ancient occupation since the beginning of civilization, rather than in terms of contemporary livelihoods and settlement. As such, people who identify or are identified as ladinos (non-indigenous) and mestizos (mixed

Spanish and indigenous ancestry) find no place at all in racial landscape of the Mirador tourism imaginary characterizing the reserve as the place of the ancient Maya.

Several of the communities purportedly squatting on land in protected areas in the Maya Biosphere today are indigenous Maya Q'eqchi' who have long and violent histories of forced migration. The Q'eqch'i do not fit the bill of the "Maya" represented in Mirador tourism imaginaries that have lived in the Yucatan since time immemorial. Conservationists, state officials, and development practitioners view them as recent migrants to the forest (Sundberg, 1999; Ybarra, 2012). The Q'eqchi' have been repeatedly displaced from their lands by cycles of war, forced labor, and now, conservation initiatives (Grandia, 2012). Q'eqchi' communities who often practice swidden agriculture are derogatorily branded as "termites" that eat up the forest (Ybarra, 2012). Thus, Mirador tourism imaginaries often work in tandem with conservation discourses to define the Q'eqchi' as out of place, or displaced within place, in the "Mayan" Biosphere.

Many individuals that tourists might identify as indigenous or Mayan based on their phenotype may not identify as such. In contrast to the story of race, place, and time told in Mirador tourism imaginaries, qualitative surveys and my own ethnographic research suggests racial categories are much more complex (Ybarra et. al, 2012, see also Chapter Three). In the post Peace Accord present when racial categories are in flux and the subject of public debate (Hale, 2006), the racialization of space in Mirador tourism projects subtly, but problematically, reproduces the old way of thinking. Many scholars have unpacked the negative implications of commodifying Mayan indigenous identity in tourism for indigenous peoples (Brown, 1996; Casteñeda, 1996; Medina 2003). The case of Mirador further suggests that selling "ancient Mayan" culture in tourism has negative consequences for individuals who identify along a spectrum of racial and cultural affinities. The Mirador tourism imaginary is subtly reproducing ways of thinking about time, space and race inherent to mestizaje in a moment when racial identities are being reimagined and contested (Hale, 2007).

This seemingly innocuous, merely representational practice of historical and geographical erasure has profound and politically urgent implications. This imaginary pervades decision making in infrastructure construction and development dollar allocation. The \$36 million World Bank mega-project shares the dominant Mirador tourism imaginary as part of a narrow portfolio of sustainable development activities and options. The project's US\$ 1.3 million budget on basic trail infrastructure may seem trivial, but the outlay gleams with inequality when placed in juxtaposition to the living conditions of Juanita villagers who do not even have access to potable drinking water or waste management. At a broader scale, erasing contemporary villagers by constructing ancient Maya eco-tourism landscapes feeds into a much larger, often violent struggle over who can and cannot live in the Maya Biosphere, and how they can, or cannot make a living.

Conclusion

The transnational Mayan World imaginary has trickled down to Guatemala in the form of over \$100 million dollars in mostly loans and a few grants that aim to redefine the Petén and Mirador as the “Heart of the Mayan World.” This chapter has detailed a collectively shared imaginary of Mirador eco-tourism development held by powerful Guatemalan and North American state officials, conservationists, and archaeologists. President Colom’s high-pitched tourism reverie in the form of the Four Jaguar project has lost steam since Otto Perez Molina’s presidential election in 2012 (Valladares, 2012). Nevertheless, the dream of converting the Mirador and the Maya Biosphere into a world-class eco-tourism destination continues.

This collective Mirador tourism imaginary tells the history of “jungle-shrouded ancient cities,” built by the “ancient Maya” and paints a normative ideal of nature as pristine and devoid of people. In doing so, co-existing place-based histories of chicle extraction villages, contemporary forest concessions, and working landscapes are obscured. I identify this tourism engendered territorial practice as *historical and geographical erasure*. Mirador tourism imaginaries form part of broader regional construction of Central America as the “Mayan World” and Guatemala as the “Heart of the Mayan World.”

This chapter argued that the Guatemalan “Heart of the Mayan World” campaign reproduces enduring colonial racial discourses that define the place of the Maya in the past, and the place of the “living Maya” in the Western Highlands. Collectively, these mutually reinforcing tourism imaginaries brand Petén as the place of the *ancient* Maya, and contemporary residents as ladino, mestizo, and/or indigenous migrant bodies-out-of-place. These gendered and racialized constructions of nature, time, and the Maya in Mirador and Mayan World tourism imaginaries re-inscribe the wartime racial and cultural teleology of *mestizaje* onto the landscape and Mirador’s neighbors. The subtle nuances and political possibilities of evolving racial identifications in contemporary Petén are silenced in these racial and temporal renderings of space. Despite their good intentions, the tourism imaginaries of organizations like APANAC and PACUNAM who fund village level development projects erase local people and their histories from the landscape at the same time community projects seek local resident buy in and participation.

My focus here on the articulation and circulation of a dominant shared Mirador tourism imaginary sidelines the multiple opinions, viewpoints, and dynamics of decision-making that occur within and between these multi-sector organizations. These power-laden practices are crucially important, yet I am only been able to focus on the products of these interactions here. I do not attend to the internal debates and dissention within these organizations. However, part of the power of tourism marketing campaigns are the very ways they erase these divisions within and between the institutions that produce them, naturalizing and

depoliticizing representations of race, history, and culture through their dissemination.

The best-laid tourism plans and their underlying imaginaries, however, never come to fruition exactly as designed. They enter in alongside multiple competing place-based imaginaries and geographical histories to shape the often-unexpected paths tourism development often takes. These sticky histories detailed in the next chapter tenaciously keep popping up in everyday development practices to undermine the intentions of project designers, and in doing so, shape the future of conservation and tourism development at Mirador and in the Maya Biosphere Reserve.

Chapter 3

STICKY HISTORIES

The bus to the village of Juanita leaves the bus station in Petén's urban center of San Benito daily to commence its long and arduous adventure almost dead north into the Maya Biosphere Reserve. The trip takes three to four hours, and in the rainy season, sometimes it does not make it at all. Like an old, scarred, and overworked gray whale, the retired U.S. school bus known in this second life as *Piñata* lumbers past several villages, military checkpoints, and seemingly impassable physical obstructions along the way. A military outpost marks the boundary of the Maya Biosphere at the charming lakeside town of San Andres, where the already tired *Piñata* hits the dirt road readying herself for the challenges to come. In the wet season, some four to six months from June to November, the limestone-clay road to Juanita and the villages along the way are filled with holes spanning six feet long, three feet wide, and four feet deep. Aboard the *Piñata*, residents bring back live chickens, sacks of beans, and other wares from the markets of San Benito. The latest *ranchero* song imported from Mexico blares on the radio as riders pass landscapes revealing seas of tropical green colors that are increasingly interrupted by cattle ranches and humble peasant settlements. The *Piñata* provides intrepid Mirador tourists a taste of daily life in northern Petén. Following the crossing of a makeshift, rickety, geriatric wooden bridge, *Piñata* arrives at the end of the road in Juanita.

Despite the feeling of isolation the arduous journey conveys, Juanita has been part of the global economy since its founding at the turn of the twentieth century as a chewing gum resin (*chicle*) extraction camp by chicle tappers (*chicleros*) from the tropical lowlands of Southern Mexico, Northern Guatemala, and Belize. Before roads precariously brought buses like *Piñata* to Juanita, airplanes travelled to the village transporting chicle, supplies, and *chicleros* from the urban hub of Petén and Guatemala City. Chicle is the prime ingredient in naturally made chewing gum and the Wrigley's Chewing Gum Company earnestly extracted this "white gold" found in the *chico zapote* tree of the Yucatán lowlands.

During World War II with the support of the U.S. government, chemical engineers created a synthetic substitute for *chicle* that marked the beginning of the end of the chicle era in Petén, known as the *chiclería* (1890-1970). Chicle production peaked in the 1950s and demand collapsed seemingly overnight. The commercialization of a leafy palm called *xate* used in U.S. floral bouquets took off at the same time the chicle market waned. Many men from Juanita and Yamul have also found seasonable employment in archaeological excavations at the Mayan sites of Mirador, Tikal, Yamul, and Nakbé, since the decline of chicle to make ends meet. However, *xate* production and archaeological excavations never filled the financial void left by the end of the *chiclería*, and poverty deepened in the villages of Juanita,

Yamul, and about a dozen others existing in what is now called the Maya Biosphere Reserve. Like many residents, villagers from Yamul and Juanita experienced the creation of the Maya Biosphere Reserve and the accompanying enclosure of many forest commons as land dispossession. However, over the course of ten years of village level organization and political struggles, the villages, and ten others, obtained community forest concessions to sustainably harvest timber, xate, and chicle.

History is central to identity formation in the villages. The living histories of the *chiclería*, historical practices of archaeological excavation, and the struggle to obtain a community forest concession define the working landscapes of the forests surrounding Juanita and Yamul. In this moment of land tenure insecurity in the Maya Biosphere, many residents leverage these living histories to stake claims to territory, and in turn, inscribe village history and often their own identities into the landscape. I identify this practice as *territory-based identity production*. In excavating these local histories, I illustrate how the practice of claiming territory binds residents of the Maya Biosphere to place, so that a claim to place becomes a claim about group and individual identity. I use the term territory to flag a relationship of spatial contestation, since territoriality as a socio-spatial practice is premised on claiming space to the social exclusion of others.

A focus on *territory*-based identity also emphasizes how past struggles for land and resources within the villages, and between them and other places, is constitutive of people's identities, village histories, and how villagers imbue meaning into the surrounding landscapes. This relational understanding of the production of space and identity insists that relations within the villages are deeply interconnected with forces beyond them. These sticky histories illustrate that most defining moments of village history and identity are produced through relations and connections with the global forces of *chicle* primary resource extraction, conservation, and now, tourism development. Analysis of villagers' cultural landscapes and territory-based identities described in this chapter draws on in-depth interviews and oral histories in each village, in addition to archival analysis of village history. Residents' narrations of history and identity are defined through struggles for land and resources in a place characterized by insecurity and violence.

This chapter foregrounds the defining eras of the *chiclería*, *xate* production, and the community forest concessions, and illuminates how these living histories continue to define everyday life, identities, and affective landscapes of many local residents. To understand local residents' territorial claims engendered by Mirador tourism development in the present, these interwoven histories are a starting point. The shared *chiclero* history, lore, and working forest landscapes bring *Juanateños* and *Yamultecos* together at the same time enduring insecurity, violence, and poverty in the so-called post-war era tear them apart.

Villagers' territory-based histories and identifications directly challenge the claims to regional resources, like Mayan sites and artifacts, legitimized by tourism

development practices described in the previous chapter. Chapter Two examined the creation and circulation of a dominant Mirador tourism imaginary as it manifests in the spatial representations in maps and marketing, and how these imaginaries are tied to material practices of aid allocation and infrastructure construction. I argued that these spatial practices of creating and branding a tourism destination constitute a territorial practice of *historical and geographical erasure*. The counter-histories and cultural landscapes described by residents in this chapter contradict the construction of place and territorial claims espoused by Mirador tourism developers. In recounting and leveraging their *chiclero* past, many residents create a space for themselves in the conservation present.

Identity, Race, and Place in the Forest Society

Do I look indigenous?

Practices of identification intertwined with the sticky histories of territorial struggle often undermine and contradict racial identities based on ideas of blood genealogy. Many residents who do not identify as Maya in terms of a blood-based understanding of race nonetheless culturally identify with the archaeological ruins that surround them. Mid-interview with a lifelong resident of Yamul, Jorge, former excavator-turned-tour-guide at the Maya site of Tikal, made an interesting request. “Guess if I am indigenous [*indígena*],” he said. “I don’t like to guess such things,” I answered. I knew what he was getting at; he had unusually green eyes, balding short dark hair, and might have been easily hailed as a *ladino* anywhere in Guatemala. “My grandfather’s last name is Pop, he was Q’eqchi’, so I am a *mestizo*.” He went on to provide an ambiguous explanation, when asked, in regards to the difference between *mestizo* and *ladino*, or the lack thereof.

Jorge, like most folks who discussed the categories of *ladino* and *mestizo*, said that both of them suggested a mixture (*mescla*) of Q’eqchi’ and Hispanic ancestry. He said that he is *mestizo*, and feels a spiritual connection to the archaeological sites and the nature that surrounds him that not only reflect this shared ancestry, but a connection to the place itself. Jorge speaks to a perspective I heard iterated by dozens of local residents in the two villages, and across different political constituencies. For many, the break between nature and culture between the Mayan sites and the tropical forests does not exist. The Mayan sites form part of villagers’ engagement with the forest. They are inseparable from their interred homes and form part of the working forest landscape. Likewise, the forest is not just a natural artifact; it forms part of village history, culture, and folklore.

The historical evidence of the *chiclería* overlays a dense topography of ancient Mayan structures and sites that also form part of villagers’ affective landscapes. My neighbor, David, speaks to the ways in which these human-ecological geographies overlap and interweave, physically melding *chicle* and ancient Mayan landscapes into one. As he does every year, in 2011 David made

several trips to the *chicle* camps in the forest used by Juanita chicleros and was happy to explain its geography based on the landmarks I passed during a trek to Mirador. Very quickly, through our conversations, I recognized the overlapping geographies of archaeological sites and historic *chiclero* camps. Places close to water and other resources that made great locations for Mayan settlements still make good *chiclero* camps today despite climatic and hydrological changes over the last 1000 years. Like the ancient Maya, the history of the *chicleria* (1890-1960) bears evidence in the forest landscape in the form of abandoned chiclero camps often located near or on top of archaeological remains. The ancient Maya dramatically transformed the landscapes of the Petén lowlands and the Yucatán Peninsula they inhabited by creating an anthropomorphic forest (Grandia 2007). Today, so called pristine nature in northern Guatemala is the byproduct of a complex interaction between natural and social forces; both the ancient Maya and modern day chicleros etched their social history into the topography.

Figure 3.1: Forest Ruins



Source: Author

Guatemala is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in Latin America. There are 24 different ethno-linguist groups that make up the Maya who represent an estimated 55% of Guatemala's nearly 15 million people (INE 2011). In addition to the Maya, there are much smaller populations of Afro-Caribbean *Garifuna* (5000) and Xinka (15,000) (INE 2002). *Ladinos*, popularly identified as "non-indigenous," (Smith 1990) make-up the rest of the population (INE 2002). Despite the depth and breadth of this diversity, one binary persists: *ladino/indigena* (non-indigenous/indigenous). Both the terms *ladino* and *indigena*, have long and complex etymologies. The term *ladino* has pre-colonial origin in Spain where it first signified a Castillian-speaking Jew, and then simply a Jew (Martínez Paláez, 2011). Following its transatlantic passage to the Americas, its meaning evolved in relation

to the dozens, if not hundreds, of identities in the *casta* (caste) system that tried to manage racial difference and hierarchies amid centuries of miscegenation among Amerindians, Iberians, and Africans (Wade, 1997). For the majority of the 19th century, a *ladino* was a Spanish-speaking Indian who had voluntarily or forcefully left the closed corporate Indian communities in the highlands for ladino-dominated areas in the rest of the country.

It was not until the advent of liberal era coffee production in the 1880s that the identity of *ladino* and its relationship to *indígena* took on the meanings they hold today. Carol Smith (1990) argues that coffee labor relations consisted of the exploitative, violent relationship between an indentured *indígena* class, who forcefully migrated to the plantations from the highlands annually, and their immediate supervisors, the Spanish speaking Indian *ladinos*. In the decades that followed, coffee accounted for 96% of Guatemalan exports, and these labor relations characterized life and labor for the majority of highland indigenous communities (Bulmer-Thomas 2003). Through the exploitative relations of *indígena* peon and *ladino* overseer, the hegemonic binary of indigenous/ladino characterizing race relations today took shape.

The term *indígena*, meaning indigenous, in many ways is the product of Guatemala's multicultural reforms legislated during the peace process that recognized national diversity and granted Pan-Mayan and other indigenous groups minority rights (Jonas, 1990; Nelson, 1999; Warren, 1998). *Indígena* is preceded by derogatory terms such as *indios* or *naturales*, among others, and a history of indigenous regional identification. In the past, many individuals called Mayan today first identified with their town or region of origin, and then perhaps by ethno-linguistic group. Today, Mayan ethnic identities still frequently infuse regional identifications. For example, to say that someone is from Cobán, a *Cobanero*, is to identify that person as Q'eqch'i.

In Petén, there exists a cacophony of racial, regional, and ethnic identifications that speaks to the region's historic ties to Mexico and the ongoing history of demographic colonization. On the three-hour ride from Petén's capital to Juanita one afternoon, I picked up a woman hitchhiking with her small child. Arriving to her home in Cruce Los Aguada in the reserve she explained that village residents are *indígena* and *Q'eqchi'*, but not Maya. For her and several other residents that I spoke to, the term Maya designated either the ancient Maya, or contemporary indigenous people living in the Western Highlands identified with the Pan Mayan Movement (Fischer & Brown, 1996; Jackson & Warren, 2005). Mayan identity, for many, is the political articulation of a social movement with its epicenter far away from Petén in another part of the country. Another neighbor used the old fashioned term *naturales* (naturals) to describe Q'eqchi' identity, which he acknowledged had a little "mix" in them, but they are not the Maya that existed long ago. Nevertheless, he argued, these Maya are his and other *naturales'* ancestors who left behind the archaeological sites and coveted antiquities dotting the village's surrounding landscape.

The use of the term *mestizo* to capture the racial and cultural product of indigenous and Hispanic miscegenation is much more common in Petén than in the rest of the country. I suspect this has to do with the region's cultural and demographic ties to Mexico where the term is used much more frequently than *ladino*. The identity of *mestizo* in Mexico differs from *ladino* in Guatemala because it recognizes, and in progressive forms, celebrates, the mixture of the two cultures. In contrast, *ladino* is a rejection of indigeneity, signifying indigeneity's opposite, the non-indigenous. In Northern Petén, *mestizo* identity has multiple meanings. The term is dynamic, sometimes serving as a synonym for *ladino*, other times recognizing indigenous and Hispanic biological and cultural mixture, and sometimes used as an alternative to *ladino* to contest the historical racism embedded in the term (Ybarra et al 2010).

Outside of the Petén, research suggests the indigenous/*ladino* binary is becoming less rigid as well. Charles Hale (2006) relates that in Chimaltenango, just outside of Guatemala City with a large Kaqchikel Maya community, the category of *mestizo* is growing in popularity and being used by many formerly identified *ladinos* as an attempt to break with the racism of the past. This dynamism suggests that the binary category of *indigenous/ladino* that defines dominant national narratives of racial difference is inadequate to describe the complexity of how people self-identify, certainly in Petén, and perhaps in the rest of the country.

This chapter argues that amid the diversity of racial identifications today in Guatemala, territorial ties to place and cultural landscapes intimately shape people's identities and perceived relationships to the "Maya." I think about historical, cultural landscapes in multiple forms. Landscapes are "ways of seeing" (Berger, 2008) that inscribe or contest class, race, and other forms of social inequality and domination into representations of nature (Cosgrove, 1984). Landscapes are not just representations, but also situated practices whereby human interactions with ecologies transform both the physical environment and people's ways of being in the world (Moore 2005, p. 47). Thus, I conceive of landscape not as object or visual representation, but as a process that forms social and subjective identities and defines both nature and culture (Mitchell, 1994).

I combine this understanding of how human-ecological interactions shape identity formation with an emphasis on the role the practice of politics plays in articulations of group identification. I draw on Tanya Li's (2000) reading of Stuart Hall's (1996) notion of articulation to think about identity as a political and spatial practice. Here, the notion of articulation has two related meanings: first, to coherently express a feeling or ideology, and second, linking that particular ideology to an engaged collective of people that form a social force. The idea of articulation defines identity as "a *positioning* that draws upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meanings" that emerge through "particular patterns of engagement and struggle" (Li, 2000, p. 151).

Thinking about identity formation as the situated practice of articulation – always political, contingent, collective – foregrounds how identity emerges through the formation of social movements defined through conflict in which people demand rights and resources based on their shared histories. In this understanding, territorial politics and attendant resource struggles are seen as integral to identity formation. This framing helps explain why certain identities articulate into demands and social movements at certain moments, and not others. Understanding identity through the lens of articulation and as a practice of political positioning is useful for understanding the social forces that pull people apart as well as those that bring them together.

I also return to Stuart Hall's (1996) arguments about the articulation of social forces that produce race and other forms of identity that are observable in the form of concrete, historically and geographically grounded analysis. Hall uses the concept of articulation to suggest that race and racism cannot be simply read off of economic structures, but rather, that analysis of the production of power-laden identities must start from the concrete work that race and other power-laden social differences accomplish under specific historical conditions (1980, p. 338). This approach attends to how identity, as a set of economic, political, and cultural practices, concretely articulates with other social forces and power inequalities in society (Hall, 1980, p.338).

I use the term *territory*-based identity production to distinguish myself from the “anemic geographies” (Sparke, 2005) of Arturo Escobar (2001) reading of place, space, and *place*-based identities. Escobar (2001) asserts that culture “sits in places,” and equate place with the local, and define it as antithetical to the global. This is a different understanding of place than theorized by Lefebvre (1991), Massey (1994, 2005), and Moore (2005) who see place as a nodal point, a temporary articulation of spatial relations, where trans-local influences intermesh with practices and material histories previously etched into the local landscape (Moore, 2004, p. 20). These scholars draw on Lefebvre's (1991) ideas about the production of space to think about processes of subject formation as inseparable from processes of spatial reproduction. Rather than the Escobarian equation of place = local = identity, an analysis of the social reproduction of space vis-à-vis Lefebvre emphasizes how power-laden and often conflict-ridden connections between places produce people's conceptualization of their identity, history, and culture.

Escobar's framing of space and place deeply shapes his political project, which suggests “guidelines for a defense of place-based identities and practices in the context of globalization” (2001, p. 142). In this declaration, Escobar sees a focus on place and “place-based” identities as a “defense” of the global. In contrast, I argue that it is only through a historical reading of Juanita and Yamul's connections and relationships with the rest of the world, frequently defined in terms of conflict and struggle, that we can even begin to understand how “locals” perceive their identities and claims to space.

Only through an analysis of trans-local relations that created the global company *chicle* towns of Juanita and Yamul, the poverty resulting from the end of the *chiclería*, histories of archaeological labor, and the fight to obtain a community forest concessions can we understand “place-based” identities mean. This is not an argument about the defense of place-based identities in the face of globalizing forces. Rather, this is an analysis of how global forces of resource extraction, archaeological investigation, and now UNESCO conservation, have produced Juanita and Yamul as villages. This is a concept of identity as being *routed* in place through these power-laden practices of spatial connection and disconnection, rather than the type of *rooting* in place described by Escobar, and even K. Basso (1996) in his argument that wisdom sits in places.²² I foreground the sticky histories of *chicle* extraction, excavation, and community forestry in this chapter, but the territorial struggles described throughout this dissertation reflect the co-constitutive practices reproducing space and redefining identity simultaneously. These include the struggle over the boundaries of the Mirador Basin (Chapter Four), debates regarding legitimacy of global heritage conservation (Chapter Five), and the remilitarization of the Maya Biosphere (Chapter Six).

Founding Global Villages

“The village of Juanita is the last human settlement located in the extensive forests of Petén; it originated as a center of production of chicle in north central Petén and was founded in 1925 as a chicle camp.”

---“Introduction” Integral Commercial Cooperative Juanita, Autobiography”

Chewing gum has a long and fascinating history. The ancient Greeks chewed a gum called mastiche made from the resin of the mastic tree. The ancient Maya also chewed gum made from the resin of *chico zapote* and sapodilla trees (Mathews, 2009). Native Americans chewed gum and so did European settlers. But it wasn't until North American capitalists began to commercially fabricate and sell chewing gum that a global industry was born. Chewing gum was first sold in 1848, and patented in the United States in 1869. Just two years later, Thomas Adams invented and patented a machine for large-scale production. As commercial demand for chewing gum in the United States grew exponentially at the turn of the twentieth century, so too did demand for its primary ingredient: *chicle*.

Extraction of chicle resin from *chico zapote* and sapodilla trees began in the Yucatán Peninsula in the mid 1860s. As trees got tapped out and demand expanded, production moved into the dense forests of northern Petén in the late 1880s. The first *chicle* tappers, called *chicleros*, came to the Petén to work either by plane or on foot with mules from Mexico, most often along the *Camino Real* (Royal Trail) carved

²² Thank you to Donald Moore for the clarification between place-rooting and place-routing in practices of identity production.

out by Spanish conquistadores and missionaries some three hundred years earlier. Migrant laborers came from all over the Yucatán, Belize, and Guatemala to work chicle some six to nine months out of the year. In the early 1900s, Juanita served as a chicle warehouse and base camp for chicleros working throughout the region during the tapping season. The chicle-harvesting season variably corresponds to the Petén's wet season as the trees require rain to give up their precious sap. Due to climate change and related deforestation in Petén, rainfall has decreased dramatically since then, shortening the chicle season from September to February.

Juanita's conversion into a permanently occupied village had less to do with *chicle* and more to do with the social upheaval of the Mexican Revolution unfolding to the north. The Mexican Revolution (1910 – 1920) and its aftermath motivated Mexican *chicleros* and middlemen contractors (*contractistas*) to settle Juanita year round in attempts to escape the economic and political uncertainty of Zapata's Yucatán. Village folklore has it that one of the wealthy early settlers had a daughter shortly after their arrival, and the village was christened Juanita in her honor.

Figure 3.2: Juanita Landscape



Source: Author

Yamul has a similar, but unique foundational story. Angela, former secretary of the Community Tourism Commission, explained to me that many of Yamul's founding families were Mexicans, like in Juanita, who decided to live in the *chicle* camp year round, rather than seasonally, to escape the insecurity of the Mexican Revolution. Unlike Juanita, however, Yamul's contractors drew on and reproduced labor pools and migrant networks in the indigenous Q'eqchi' capital of Cobán, Alta Verapaz. Yamul's ethnic diversity today reflects this legacy of hiring practices. An estimated 30% of the town's 1,200 inhabitants are Q'eqchi', compared to Juanita where only two families of the town's 330 residents claim Q'eqchi' or indigenous heritage, the rest identify as *mestizo* or *ladino*. These engrained migration networks became part of the region's civil war geography as increasing numbers of

indigenous Q'eqchi's migrated to Yamul as a consequence first of state-sponsored colonization programs, and then as internally displaced people during counter-insurgency warfare (see Chapter Six).

Chicleros in both villages built airstrips in the late 1930s by hand without the use of heavy machinery with the aim of getting chicle out of the village and bringing people and supplies in. Today, Juanita and Yamul's geographies are organized around the airstrip that mostly functions as field for soccer or grazing for the village's estimated 200 mules. Infrequently, military helicopters land in Juanita and Yamul and use the villages as fuel depots for operations conducted in northern Petén and along the Mexican and Belizean border.

For 80 years during the *chiclería* (1890 – 1970), chicle dominated the political economy of the Petén (Schwartz 1990). *Chicle's* apogee in Juanita lasted from 1935 to 1945 when hundreds of chicle workers came to Juanita attracted by relatively high wages and formed a community of around 500 people. During the *chiclería's* zenith, perhaps up to one-half of all people living in the Petén depended on the chicle economy (Schwartz 1990, p. 153). Local middlemen contractors, *contractistas*, ultimately sold their chicle to one of three companies during the *chiclería*, but the Wrigley's Chewing Gum Company had the greatest presence in the village. During this time, Juanita was known as the most important center of chicle production in Petén and a warehouse was built to house chicle extracted from all over Northern Petén in the village before it was flown to Quintana Roo or Guatemala City, and then on to North America. Wrigley's had an estimated 32 chicle camps with airstrips in northern Petén; some became permanent villages, most did not.

Chiclero work is physically and emotionally demanding. *Chicle* tapping requires male *chicleros* and female cooks to spend months on end in the lowland tropical forests of Petén, usually without their families. From July to February, chicleros set off into the forest to live in camps of about 20 men deep in the forests where untapped *chico zapote* and *sapodilla* trees were found. Chicleros established humble camps near potential water sources along well-worn *chiclero* trails. The first week at camp, workers built a flimsy lean-to structure with a straw mat where they sleep and eat a diet of mostly rice, beans, and wild game.

To harvest the resin, chicleros tie metal spikes to their shoes and use a rope to climb the tree and cut a herringbone zigzag pattern into the bark a tree, a process called pricking (*picado*). They place collection bags for the sap at the foot of the tree, and the "white gold" syrup-like resin begins to slowly slide down the deep cut. The tapping process is dangerous work and many chicleros have fallen from trees to their deaths or to suffer a life threatening injury alone in the woods. For several months on end, chicleros have lived, worked, and often bonded under these harrowing conditions. Today, there are only a few hundred men working as *chicleros* who sell their product to two Japanese buyers that make organic, all-natural chewing gum for a boutique, niche market.

Petén: The “Forest Society”

When eminent historian Norman Schwartz (1990) wrote his foundational history of the Petén, *The Forest Society*, he described an economy and a society built around the extraction of forest products. He described a Guatemalan sub-culture in Petén whose social imaginary was dominated by the *chiclería*. This imaginary undergirds what he identified over 30 years ago as “the forest society,” a traditional *Petenero* lifestyle of rural living based on the sustainable extraction of primarily *chicle* and *xate*. *Chiclero* ethnographies examining all facets of *chicle* production further illuminate *chiclero* nature-society relations by pointing out the care that *chicleros* exercise in tapping *chico zapote* trees (Dugelby, 1995, p. i). These tapping norms ensure the tree’s survival for future use. While accounting for previous eras of over-exploitation, Schwartz’s and other academic accounts of the *chiclería* characterize the *chicle* industry in terms of what today would be called environmental sustainability. Schwartz also described a forest society that displayed a certain optimistic or “stoical good nature” toward northern Petén’s harsh environment because, as *chicleros* explained, “the forest is rich and provides for us” (1990, p. 242).

Figure 3.3: Chiclero Cooking Chicle



Source: Author

My experiences of living and working in the villages echo this sentiment. Residents spoke of a deep love and affection for the forest despite the presence of dozens of species of venomous snakes, spiders, chiggers, ticks, and biting flies. Furd-lance pit vipers cohabitate in village thatch roofs, near water sources, and even living under river rocks where the women wash their clothes and bathe their kids. Old and lame jaguars pick off stray dogs in the outskirts of the village at night. Black scorpions are found in nearly every house where tarantulas also take up residence. The latter are often viewed with indifference. My *chiclero* housemate was bemused

by my reaction to his nightly visitor who lived under the concrete slab in front of his thatch-roof bungalow. He explained to me that “she has a right to live, so I leave her there.” At the same time villagers defend the rights of tarantulas free-riding on rent, nearly every little boy in the village has a sling shot and spends countless hours shooting and, when he gets older, killing birds. These include colorful toucans, parakeets, and more common species. These war games teach kids how to hunt and provide hours of amusement outside the house and away from parents. Several conservation programs are trying to break the slingshot habit, but so far, boys continue to shoot birds.

This seemingly contradictory relationship with village fauna, to kill a bird but let a spider live, does not easily map onto dominant North American conservation ideologies. Juanita Sundberg argued that North American conservation organizations arrived in the Maya Biosphere with preconceived and ethnocentric landscape visions that privileged locals who interacted with nature according to conservation ideals, while disqualifying others (1999). Sundberg was right to point out the ways these conservation landscape visions painted villagers in Juanita and Yamul as “ecological natives” (Ulloa, 2005), an idealized primitive people living a harmonious relationship to nature. Notions of northern Petén as a “forest society” project North American visions of nature-society relations onto local histories of forest extraction and the *chiclería*.

Following this line of critique, the caricature of the ecological native, or forest society in this case, is an elaboration of the colonial power relations underpinning conservation. Conservation discourses that define *chicleros* as humble forest guardians draw on and reproduce ideas of third world subjects as racialized others who are closer to nature and further from modernity than their European counterpart (Mohanty, 1988). Sundberg clearly states this was not Norman Schwartz’s intention, but the ways conservation organizations picked up and employed an essentialized trope of the “forest society” stripped Schwartz’s ethnography of its nuances and complexities. At the same time these critiques deal a rightful blow to the ethnocentrism inherent to North American conservation ideologies. Today, many local residents describe historical livelihoods in terms of the renewable extraction of forest products and themselves as stewards of the forest.

While the apogee of the *chiclería* passed over fifty years ago, the living legacy of chicle production continues to dominate the social imaginary of many Juanita villagers. In oral histories, interviews, and in public meetings, I witnessed Juanita and Yamul residents cite and call upon the *chiclero* past to talk about the villages, and their own familial histories and individual identities. With the hindsight of nostalgia and armed with contemporary conservation discourses, many locals recount the history of the *chiclería* as harmonious forest living. In doing so, they identify Juanita and Yamul residents today as the rightful guardians of natural resources based on this past. Time and time again, villagers in both Juanita and Yamul explained to me that the only reason that the forests surrounding the villages

still stand is because of the historical and ongoing work of village residents to protect it. The village midwife from Juanita made the simple connection: “It is because of the community that the forest is there.” On another occasion, a young tour guide from Juanita explained, “If it wasn’t for us, this would be a desert; the forest would be burning.” The Juanita Cooperative’s self-history ties this proffered history of sustainable ecological relations in relation to village identity: “The community has always been conscious of natural resources.” Since the Juanita Cooperative’s founding, the organization explains “the community continued practicing activities like the extraction of chicle and the cutting of *xate* and all spice, and also dedicated itself to work forest products with a consciousness of preservation and conservation of natural resources.”

The *chiclería* in Juanita and Yamul is fondly remembered as a time of relative opulence. Wages in chicle extraction were low, but they were higher than those found in debt-peonage relations characterizing work on coffee, bananas and sugar plantations in other parts of Guatemala. Chicle tapping was recognized as skilled labor and chicleros were among the highest paid laborers in Guatemala and Mexico (Mathews 2009, p. 76). Sometimes, although not often, chicleros were able to work their way up to positions as foreman and labor *contractistas*, allowing them to send their kids to school in the urban area and become professionals (Mathews, 2009). When villagers tell visitors how good things were back in the day, they almost always nostalgically recite the saying, “*El chiclero no pide cambio*” (The chiclero does not ask for change”). In the now poor towns of Juanita and Yamul, to imagine a *chiclero* wealthy enough to not even need change when he buys something is almost unbelievable. Don Carmen from Juanita jokingly told me that during the *chiclería*, people used 1quetzal bills instead of toilet paper, while today, newspaper or leaves are frequently used because most cannot spare the cost for toilet paper. In reality, labor relations in chicle production were much more exploitative than memory allows. Nevertheless, many Juanita and Yamul residents remember the *chiclería* as the heyday of their communities.

A Burst Bubble: The Decline of the Chiclería

In the 1920s in the United States, chewing gum’s popularity reached new heights and the demand for chicle resin from the Yucatán and Central America followed suit. During World War II, the U.S. Army put chewing gum into soldiers’ provisions kits with the belief that chewing gum satiated thirst, settled stomachs, and relieved tension (Mathews, 2009). Yet, shortly after, the Wrigley’s Chewing Gum Co. pulled out of Guatemala. Why? Several factors combined to form the perfect storm bringing an end to the *chiclería*: the creation of a synthetic substitute combined with World War II’s disruption of global trade, the Guatemalan government’s high chicle tariffs, and decreasing availability of supply due to over-tapping of trees to bring Petén’s chicle industry to its knees (Dugelby, 1995; Schwartz, 1990).

The chicle bubble burst seemingly overnight. Within a few years Juanita and Yamul went from boomtowns to ghost towns. Juanita Cooperative's self-published book on community history explains, "In 1950 the chicle companies withdrew from Juanita, and the community entered an economic crisis" (p. 11). Population atrophied and poverty deepened. Soon after, however, North Americans once again arrived in search of gold, but this time oil, "black gold," rather than the "white gold" of yesteryear. Select and lucky men in both towns found work in petroleum exploration combing the forests' subsoil for crude. In 1960, Nanco, one of the four companies operating in Juanita, opened the first road connecting the village to the town of San Andres across Lake Petén Itzá from the department capital of Flores and the urban hub of San Benito. Local historians and non-profit conservation workers suggest that oil has been found subsoil in the immediate area, but it is poor quality compared to the oil currently and controversially being extracted by a French-owned company called PERENCO in the western part of the Maya Biosphere (El Periódico, 2010).

When the oil companies withdrew from Juanita in 1961 to relocate their headquarters in San Benito following the completion of the road, a new extractive industry of forest products emerged: *xate*. *Xate* is used as ornamental decoration in flower bouquets in the United States, especially in funeral and Palm Sunday arrangements (see Figure 3.3). Juanita Cooperative's autobiography firmly situates *xate* production as a foundational practice defining the village as a place: "*Xate* extraction is a traditional activity of Juanita's population."

Figure 3.4: *Xate* for Export



Source: Author

In 2005 the Juanita Cooperative began processing *xate* brought to the village by *xateros* for export with the help of the international conservation organization Rain Forest Alliance. This project only pays *xateros* for *xate* palms selected for

export, thus, increasing incentives for *xateros* to only harvest palms they will be paid for and leave more in the forest. This process of selecting xate palms for export and discarding inferior palms creates jobs and income in the villages, primarily for girls and young women. *Selectionistas* (Sorters) are almost female, and a skilled *selectionista* can make up to 1,800 quetzales a month (US\$225), the average monthly salary in the village. The first time I visited Juanita, the Cooperative put on a quasi-annual event, a beauty contest called “The *Xatero’s* girlfriend” (*La Novia Xatera*). The event is an informal beauty contest in which the *xatero* who collected the most *xate* over the season is awarded a dance with the beauty queen. The contest quickly gets down to the real business of dancing, eating, and drinking. The *Novia del Xatero* event is just one example of how village culture and daily life is tied to primary economic resource extraction dependent on the forest.

From the mid 1960s until the mid 1990s, *Juanateños* and *Yamultecos* survived by cobbling together work as subsistence corn and bean farmers, harvesting *xate*, and a little *chicle*, low levels of tourism, and working part-time in archaeological excavations. Juanita and Yamul are located in a region home to hundreds of Mayan archaeological sites, but have distinguished relationships to the structures. Juanita is the favored entryway to the grand site of Mirador at the center of several mega-million development projects. Yamul is also a starting point for eco-tourism treks into the forest, but unlike Juanita, it is an important archaeology site in its own right. The village lies on top of and is surrounded by Classic-era Mayan ruins that include the most precise observatory of the Mayan World (Coggins, 1980)

Excavation work in archaeology has provided many male *Yamultecos* seasonal, part-time employment on and off for over sixty years. Excavation work is a key source of income for nearly 10% of the village’s workforce, especially when *chicle* work dried up. From 1956 to 1979, archaeologists from the University of Pennsylvania hired an estimated 150 men, for four or five months out of the year, to excavate the Yamul site and surrounding areas. From 1985-1995, Guatemalan teams under the leadership of archaeologist Juan Antonio Valdez excavated Yamul and Tikal, the Classic-Era Mayan site located 26 kilometers away at the beginning of the only road going in and out of Yamul. In 2009, archaeologists from the University of Bratislava commenced excavations in Yamul again. For three years the Slovakian team led a crew of about 30 men during the summer season to unearth beautiful masks in Group H at Yamul, and also conducted excavations in a remote site called Nachtún. More steadily across the years, another 15 Yamul residents have found work year round as excavators in the national park and UNESCO World Heritage site of neighboring Tikal.

Juanita residents also have a long history of archaeological labor dating back to the 1970s when archaeologists from the Catholic University of Washington and the *National Geographic* began excavating the region. Since that time, residents from Juanita have found seasonal excavation employment. Since the early 1980s, lead Mirador archaeologist Dr. David Larson has worked the summer season in the forests north of Juanita, using a village warehouse to store supplies to be hauled in

by locally hired mules and muleteers. The excavation team's size depends on the scope of work and funding for a particular archaeology season, but generally numbers around 100 in total with men from Juanita receiving an average of 30 of those positions. The mule trail commencing at Juanita and ending at Mirador nearly 50 miles later is also the path tourists take each year. Until the early 2000s, there were only a few hundred tourists visiting Mirador each year. This was enough employment for three or four families to make a living off the industry.

Creating Community Forest Concessions in the Maya Biosphere Reserve

On top of these historical geographies of land use and livelihoods, the Guatemalan government established the coordinates and boundaries of the Maya Biosphere Reserve in 1990. As Chapter one described, state-led colonization of Petén and counter-insurgency warfare in the rest of the country contributed to an exodus to Petén and its northernmost forests. The result was dramatic deforestation beginning in the 1970s that continues in many parts of the Maya Biosphere today. Conservative estimates suggest that 60% of Petén's forests have been felled since the colonization of the region began fifty years ago (Schwartz 1990).

In the late 1980s, concerned national conservationists allied with like-minded individuals from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), leveraged personal connections to bring Guatemalan congressional and presidential attention to Petén's ongoing and widespread deforestation. At the same time, National Geographic published a land-satellite image of clear-cut, completely denuded swaths of formerly old growth forests along the Mexican-Guatemalan border in 1989. The combination and timing of these events during stalled peace talks motivated the first civilian president into action (Sever 1998, Ybarra 2011). With the backing of powerful international and national conservationists, President Cerezo seized a political opportunity to create Guatemala's national park system (SIGAP) and the Council on National Protected Areas (CONAP) in 1989 (Decree 4-89). Within the course of a few years, CONAP and the Guatemalan congress allocated over one-fifth of the country and 33% of the Petén in newly christened national parks. The biggest is the Maya Biosphere Reserve at 22,000 sq. km. established along Petén's northern frontier with Mexico and Belize.

Chiclero history found new life in the struggle for local residents to obtain a community forest concession. Decree 4-89 creating the reserve during the peace process legislated that only villages living in the new Maya Biosphere before its creation in 1990 would be allowed to remain the protected area. 1990 was still a time of immense internal displacement within the country and landless poor and civil war refugees were settling the forests of northern Petén now called a park to start anew. With this decision, land tenure, usufruct rights, and legal residency were defined by historical claims to territory. In this context, *chiclero* identity became

equated with legal residency and potential timber and non-timber concessionaire rights.

Legislating the Maya Biosphere into existence is one thing, creating a conservation space where environmental law is implemented and upheld is another. In the first years of the Maya Biosphere's existence, the weak state agency CONAP lacked the ability to enforce the recently inked strict conservation laws. USAID came to the rescue by providing the funding for a massive, non-profit-led aid project to support the Maya Biosphere in its infancy and turn the paper park into a reality. In 1990, USAID, the U.S. Department of the Interior (USDOI), and the Guatemalan government signed an agreement creating the Maya Biosphere Project whose goal was to "improve the long-term economic well-being of Guatemala's population through the rational management of the natural resources" (USAID 1990:1, Sundberg 1998, p. 73).²³ Following the first five years of the Maya Biosphere Project, the initiative was extended for another five years in a second project called MAYAREMA. Combined, the US\$40 million in conservation and sustainable development funds spent over a ten-year period dramatically changed the political landscape of the region. It created numerous local level NGOs, like the Balam Association and Pro-Petén, supported by global conservation organizations like The Nature Conservancy and Conservation International.

Juanita residents experienced conservation in the Maya Biosphere Reserve as an act of enclosure and land dispossession. CONAP, with the limited support of the Guatemalan military, policed the Maya Biosphere in its first five years of existence with an iron fist, a "*mano dura*." CONAP tried and failed to implement new access restrictions to resources historically used by residents as part of the village commons. People felt dispossessed of their forest usufruct rights. They could no longer cut *lena* (firewood), plant *milpa* (corn), or fell wood for building houses. A tour guide from Juanita explained to me, "it was difficult to go from living free to living on the reserve." A Yamul community leader related, "From one night to the morning, we heard we were in a reserve, we didn't know anything about it, and now there was a new legal and institutional infrastructure." In reference to the newly penned restrictions on the forest commons, a community leader from Juanita conveyed the sentiment, "We thought they [state CONAP workers] were crazy, we felt like the owners of the forest."

Juanita and Yamul residents were not the only ones fighting for residency and usufruct rights in the newly christened reserve. 22 communities with historically recognized land tenure rights, and dozens of villages of so-called squatters made up of mostly landless Q'eqchi' peasants found themselves living,

²³ The complex project was initiated with a budget of \$22 million dollars in nearly equal parts of funding of USAID, on the one hand, and the Guatemalan government and international non-profit organizations on the other (Sundberg, 1998, p. 73). The initiative had three primary components under the direction of three NGOs: The Nature Conservancy (TNC) focused on strengthening the Reserve's management; CARE International implemented environmental education programs; and Conservation International (CI) emphasized the creation of economic alternatives to deforestation (Sundberg, p.73).

“from one day to the next,” as one resident put it, in a protected area subject to new laws governing land use and the exploitation of forest resources. Across the Maya Biosphere, often-violent conflicts unfolded as residents protested and demanded a restoration of their rights (Carrera and Prins 2002; Finger-Stich 2003). Perhaps the best-known conflict took place at the Guacamaya Biological Station. Q’eqchi’ residents from a nearby village took state CONAP workers hostage and burned down the station’s buildings. In Yamul, confrontations between CONAP officials and residents occurred regularly, resulting in the fiery destruction of several CONAP outposts surrounding the village. These conflicts motivated CONAP to rethink its strict conservation strategy and its role in governing the Maya Biosphere Reserve. CONAP began to explore the option of sub-contracting areas of the multiple use zone to third parties through forest concessions (Cortave, 2003; Radachowsky et. al, 2012). This historical overview reflects just one chapter of residents’ history of fighting for territory in the forests of Northern Petén and how the creation of the reserve politicized and territorialized village histories. These articulations of identity and politics reveal the ways in which the “local” is defined by power relations and conflict with extra-local sources.

Juanita’s Cooperative: Creating a Community Forest Concession

CONAP originally planned to grant forest concessions to private timber companies, many of which had been logging the forest for years (Cortave, 2003). Commercial logging in Petén initiated before chicle, perhaps as early as the 1820s, but was well underway by the 1860s. When local communities got wind that CONAP was planning on granting timber concessions, the idea of community forest concessions took root quickly. Many industrial timber companies who had historical concessions to log the region argued that local communities lacked the technical and administrative know how to successfully harvest timber sustainably for international markets. International conservation organizations and Petén’s regional CONAP office, however, argued that community forestry concessions were not just a social justice strategy aimed at alleviating poverty. They saw the 30,000 people legally living in the Maya Biosphere as the only hope to enforce conservation law and prevent additional illegal settlement. Advocates rightfully pointed out that locals would also play a key role in preventing and combating wildfire, another key conservation challenge. In the end, Conservation International presented two reports to national CONAP leadership that swayed the decision to grant timber concessions to local communities. Conservation organizations agreed to “accompany” local concessions and provide immense training and technical support funded by the MAYAREMA and related projects to ensure their success.

The idea of the forest concession first arrived to the village of Juanita in the form of a 1992 visit from development practitioners from the regional non-profit organization Pro-Petén. Pro-Petén was a local counterpart organization created by The Nature Conservancy to implement projects funded by the Maya Biosphere

Project and later the MAYAREMA project.²⁴ In a series of community meetings in Juanita from 1992 – 1994, Pro-Petén began to champion the benefits of organizing the community into a cooperative to obtain a community forest concession. Very quickly, Pro-Petén quickly encountered many challenges to community organizing among Juanita residents. Not everyone supported the idea of community forest concession, and in actuality, several were vehemently against the idea. Among villagers and practitioners there are wide discrepancies in people’s explanations as to why so many villagers opposed the proposed concession. Most likely there were several reasons. The Cooperative of Juanita’s institutional autobiography suggests that at the time “Juanita continued with non-timber forest activities and for that reason the community did not accept Pro-Petén’s proposal because they did not want to destroy the forest” through timber extraction (p. 13). Surely many people who made a living from *xate* and *chicle* equated logging with destruction of the forest and their livelihoods, and thus, opposed the concession. Another oppositional sentiment stemmed from the fear that the forest concession would further empower CONAP’s authority in land tenure and forest usufruct rights since CONAP grants and monitors the concessions.

The division among residents between “pro” and “anti-concessionaires,” however, also reflects unequal and uncertain power relations at the local level. Some residents felt those positioning themselves as leaders of the process stood to economically gain from the concession to the exclusion of others. More nefarious readings suggest that anti-concessionaires worried the concession would disrupt lucrative looting operations of Mayan archaeological sites. Feelings of mistrust and animosity among villagers also need to be situated within the context of the Guatemalan civil war. Early organizing among villagers began during the peace process when the wounds of war were still fresh in the village. Through the Civil Armed Patrols, the military forced civilians to participate in tactics of counterinsurgency against their own neighbors in Juanita, and across the country (Schirmer, 1998). In oral histories, many residents brought up a sense of distrust and animosity to feel toward many people in the village because of the violence the Civil Armed Patrols inflicted on fellow villagers. This is to say that any effort to organize at the village level to unite residents confronts the psychological legacy of counter-insurgency that continues to drive villagers apart.

While *Juanateños* hotly debated the merits and dangers of harvesting timber through a cooperative, CONAP granted the first community concession to villagers from San Miguel la Palotada in 1994. Galvanized by San Miguel’s proof that a cooperative could be formed and a forest concession would be granted, Juanita’s community organization efforts gained new wind. Carlos Vazquez, a charismatic community organizer with a conservation spirit, emerged as a grassroots local leader of the process. He worked with Pro-Petén to form a strong constituency within the community, around 30 of 80 total households, who supported obtaining a

²⁴ In 2002, Pro-Petén left the tutelage and political differences of CI behind and became an independent, Guatemalan non-profit that still does immensely important social and conservation work in the Petén today.

forest concession. They formed the *Grupo de Pro-Mejoramiento* (Pro-Improvement Group) from Juanita and submitted an application to CONAP for a community concession in 1994. For three years under the leadership of Carlos Vazquez, the Juanita Pro-Improvement Committee campaigned first for a pilot timber-harvesting plan with the aim of acquiring a community concession.

On November of 1997, after three years of arduous organizing, CONAP granted organizers in Juanita a twenty-five year, 53,000 hectare concession, along with another community concession called *La Pasadita* that received 18,000 hectares. The size of the concession was based on the village's population. The significance of these first concessions was not missed in the Presidential Palace in Guatemala City. In 1998, the Guatemalan vice-president and American Ambassador presided over a formal ceremony marking the creation of the community concessions as a momentous occasion.

At the same time, tensions between pro and anti-concessionaries in Juanita escalated and eventually exploded late that year. The last night of the first timber harvest, Vazquez was in the village chicle warehouse working late into the early morning hours, unloading the timber felled in the name of community benefit. A young local man with established family roots in Juanita poked a pistol through a hole in wood planks in the walls of the old chicle warehouse and shot Vazquez dead, surrounded by mahogany and other precious woods he fought for as symbols of economic hope for the village. Conspiracies abound in the village and among many development practitioners regarding who was ultimately responsible for the murder. Like impunity for genocide during the civil war, the true orchestrators of violent crime in Guatemala always seem to escape justice. Some villagers proffer explanations of a lover's spat, others suggest the young man was hired by the *de facto* leader of the anti-concessionaries in attempts to cover up his illicit activities in the area.

Many "pro-concession" community leaders described Vazquez's death as a turning point in the process of the community concession. The mayor and others describe Vazquez, often likened to Chico Mendez of the Amazon, as a "martyr." The struggle for Juanita residents to obtain a community forest concession that cost the life of a great local leader has now become part of village history of suffering and fighting for territory. Many anti-concessionaries softened their positions following the tragedy, and seemingly despite all odds, the members of the Pro-Improvement Committee were able to move forward collectively to push for the creation of a cooperative to manage the annual community timber harvest. On November 25th, 1998, the *Cooperativa Integral de Juanita* was created and still operates successfully today as one of the Maya Biosphere's community forestry success stories. As stipulated in the concession contract, the 40 residents driving the concession process created a legally recognized Cooperative, the Integral Cooperative of Juanita. The Juanita Cooperative manages and benefits from a monopoly in all timber, chicle, and xate commercial activities in the concession. The Cooperative is a non-profit organization that imparts profits in the form of dividends to its over

250 members, and invests in social projects such as health, education, and basic infrastructure. Any resident of the village can become a member of the Cooperative for a nominal fee, and most residents are, even many who critique the ways the institution reproduces economic inequality at the local level. Juanita, alongside the concessions of Yamul and San Andres, has received international recognition for its conservation efforts in sustainable forestry.

Like the *chiclería*, the community concessions process has produced fewer winners than losers, and many families in Juanita today live in conditions of destitute poverty, living on less than \$2 a day and without access to safe drinking water or waste disposal. Remaining “anti-concessionaires” today argue the cooperative works for the benefit of only a few families who occupy administrative and technical positions in the organization, and disproportionately benefit from the high salaries, educational and travel opportunities, in-kind donations, and transport. There is credence to the critique. Three families are over-represented in the organization’s administration. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these three families are descendents of *chicle contractistas* (*chicle* labor contractors) in Juanita, a minority class of relatively privileged individuals who have experience and precedent serving as community intermediaries in economic and political affairs going back to the *chiclería*. While *chicle*’s economic apogee has passed, inequalities created between *chicleros* and *contractistas* have endured. This class relation reflects inequalities in income, education, and political representation. At a century wide glance, the labor relations and inequalities established during the *chicle* era have been reproduced in Juanita’s practices of community forestry.

Local residents call this “*familiarismo*,” which connotes keeping it in the family. Local non-profits often call this dynamic *caciquismo*, a term that evokes historical governing hierarchies within indigenous communities during the colonial era (Grandin, 2000). As such, I am not suggesting that the Juanita Cooperative or the village is an egalitarian organization or community. Rather, when I use the term community in reference to Juanita in my analysis of the flight for the Mirador Basin in the next chapter, I am describing a contingent of villagers politically articulated as forest concessionaires who are struggling for resources and land tenure through the use of identity-infused claims to territory.

Juanita’s Cooperative heralds many impressive achievements. In the last 12 years, the Cooperative has done many things for its members: provided dividends averaging about two weeks pay for a xate collector or selectionista, set up and dispersed community scholarships, created seasonal jobs, provided members small loans, and financed the construction of a play ground, sawmill, and a carpentry shop. Community forestry in Juanita and Yamul has also been recognized internationally by the United Nations for the role villagers have played in preventing illegal invasion, deforestation, and controlling forest fires.

Power relations and inequalities between pro- and anti-concessionaires are shaped just as much by extra-local connections and political economic relations as

they are by intra-village dynamics. In each moment, villagers' identifications with place, as well as village identity, foundational narratives, and territorial claims, have been defined through interactions with extra-local social forces. From their establishment as chicle villages by the Wrigley's Chewing Gum Company, to the creation of community forestry concessions as part of the UNESCO Biosphere conservation movement, the multiple dynamics and historical geographies defining life and livelihood in Juanita and Yamul are global in nature.

Establishing a tourism destination in Juanita

Recent practices of community tourism development in Juanita illustrate how so-called local conflicts are global in nature. When the private foundation FUNDESA and the non-profit Balam Association came to Juanita to promote community tourism they found themselves in this landscape historically saturated with a rich and complex history. Development practitioners brought with them the Mayan World and Mirador tourism imaginaries articulated and circulated at national and transnational scales (Chapter Two). However, these imaginaries had little to do with the sedimented material histories and lived spaces of village life. Balam Association commenced a training project in Juanita to state certify community tour guides, and financially and technically supported the formation of the Juanita Tourism Commission in 2009. This training process at the local level quickly began to replicate the "pro" and "anti" concession divide.

Regardless of development practitioners' intentions, the end result was that the families historically working in tourism did not finish the course, failed to obtain their state credentials, and thus, were excluded from the Balam-supported Juanita Tourism Commission. The 16 guides who received their credential and comprise the Tourism Commission are Cooperative leaders, their family members, and village allies. The anti-concessionaire families continue to work independently in tourism, but recent tourism development projects threaten to further sideline this already marginalized group. The Guatemalan Tourism Institute is currently constructing a first-class eco-lodge that will provide the only camping and hotel facilities in the village. The Cooperative's Tourism Commission will administer and benefit from the facilities, families working outside the organization will not.

Despite requests by anti-concessionaire families for another community tourism guide certification course, another will not be included in FUNDESA and Balam's plethora of programs. While originally slated in the project design, the director of Balam Association convinced FUNDESA practitioners to not offer the course because, he argued, it would create too much competition and conflict within the community. However, this decision deepened antagonisms among residents, and between the Balam Association and residents working outside of the Cooperative's Tourism Commission. In failing to attend to the specificities of place and history, community development projects are reproducing inequality at the local level by further empowering the few families driving the cooperative process

and excluding anti-concessionaire families who have historically worked in tourism from benefits such as state constructed facilities and training programs.

In addition to reproducing economic and political inequality among Juanita's residents, the abstract community imaginary underpinning local projects threatens to reproduce inequalities between the village and Mirador tourism developers. Discourses of so-called community conflict articulated by state officials and development practitioners emerging from these interventions threaten to exclude all residents from future decision-making forums and investments in Mirador development. While tensions at the local level surrounding tourism development are palpable, these conflicts are hardly confined to the community scale. Juanita's tourism-related conflicts and controversies are produced through local residents' interactions with state officials and development practitioners operating at national and transnational scales. The abstract spatial imaginary of community defining Juanita is an enclosed, homogenous, spatial entity renders invisible these trans-scalar connections and interrelations recreating the village as a tourism destination. This spatial abstraction underpinning Mayan World tourism imaginaries and project design absolves the state, NGOs, and donors from acknowledging the constitutive role their interventions have played in creating conflict at the local level. The livelihoods of Juanita's residents are at stake, as their participation in site development is threatened if projects continue to "fail." As a state community tourism officer explained, "If Juanita doesn't get its act together, it will be left out of Mirador development altogether."

Despite inequalities embedded in the concessions process, many local residents have appropriated the political opening of the community concessions to make themselves powerful political and economic actors in the Petén. For residents who continue to support the concession process, the roller coaster history of the concessions process reflects their territory-based claims and identities literally grounded in practices and shared histories of suffering for territory (Moore, 2005). For those "anti-concessionaries" in the village, the ties to the forest primarily are defined as different working landscapes of forest extraction of *chicle* and *xate*, and the use of forest resources for food, fuel, and building materials.

Donald Moore (2005) uses the concept of "suffering for territory" to explore how overlapping, competing territorial claims and practices that clash in present day Zimbabwe. The historical geographies of pre-colonial agrarian formations, colonial government, and now, post-colonial development projects have historically sedimented in the landscape, forming competing, and often violently conflicting territories. Identify formation for Moore is a central piece of the reproduction of space that emphasizes relationships between place-making and self-making. Drawing on this framing, I foreground practices of territory-based identity production to illustrate how Juanita and Yamul residents contest practices of historical and geographical erasure in tourism.

At the same time global actors reproduce village level inequalities through “community” tourism, local level tourism activities have also become theaters of performance to reiterate, contest, and disseminate village identity and history to groups of outsiders. With the support of non-profit organizations, individuals representing many different community groups in Yamul came together to put on the 2010 and 2011 Equinox Festivals. The festival brought a few thousand tourists each year to watch the sunrise on the day of equinox at the archaeology site’s observatory. The Classic-Era Maya built the observatory so that on the two equinoxes the sun would rise above the structure exactly in the middle when viewed from the top of a pyramid built opposite the observatory, from the perspective of the elites. The three-day itinerary included nighttime cultural events, daytime demonstrations of *chicle* extraction, kids activities, and women selling “*comida típica*,” authentic regional plates. Visitors witnessed chicle demonstrations where tappers would take these adventurers to a near by *chico zapote* tree, show them how to climb and cut the tree, and bring it back to a campfire to cook before placing the resin in blocks to cool and harden.

For an evening full of cultural performances, Gloria, one of Yamul’s most civically active women, organized a women’s group to perform a skit entitled “The Judgment of Man,” whereby tourists watch a court trial held in the forest. The five women, all established teachers and housewives, dressed as four trees and a toucan. The Ceiba tree, the national tree and sacred tree to the Maya, presides as the judge in the skit, and the other species are filing a formal grievance. The trees take turns, one by one, complaining that the wealthiest individuals in town, in a roasting fashion, are greedy and cut down too many trees for fuel and building materials. The toucan similarly laments that man had cut down his entire habitat. The Ceiba tree, orders man to plant trees and reforest the region for the rest of his life to atone for his crimes against nature. This humble skit is just one more example of how local residents in Yamul and Juanita communicate their identities as forest stewards stemming from their *chiclero* legacy. Perhaps easily dismissed as insignificant, these acts are micro-claims to territory enabled by tourism development that subtly and consistently locate the place of the villagers in the forest in a climate of land tenure insecurity.

In tourism performances and narrations of place, territory, and history, Mayan and forestry heritage meld into interweaving ancestral claims that define locals as caretakers of the forest and the Mayan sites they shroud. Mayan archaeological sites, like the *chico zapote* trees, form part of village working and cultural landscapes where nature and culture lack a clear binary division separating forest from ancient structure. During the festival’s evening cultural events, village representatives frequently referred to the Maya and the archaeological remains that pepper and surround the village as belonging to “their ancestors.” Archaeologists working the sites of Tikal and Yamul gave educational talks with visual slideshows teaching “hosts” and “guests” about the archaeology and Mayan social history surrounding them. Locals chuckled as they remarked upon the well-established custom of climbing the structures on Christmas Eve to have drinks and

food with family and friends. In the communities, living *chiclero* histories and landscapes overlap with the geography of the ancient to fuse nature and culture together into the land like a written record of the region's long human history.

Conclusion

In relaying the histories of the *chiclería*, archaeological labor, and the community forest concessions, I have unearthed the histories sedimented into the landscape that define Juanita and Yamul as places to many long-term residents. In unpacking what tourism imaginaries erase, I have relayed a potted history of the villages that defines the narrative arc of many community members' oral histories, landscapes, and claims to space. Many locals describe their identities in terms of ties to the working landscapes produced by decades of laboring in the forest extraction industries of chicle, *xate*, and timber. In recounting these histories of forest care, conservation, and archaeological knowledge, ethnically diverse local residents articulate a collective territory-based identification that challenges blood-based discourses of indigeneity and Mayan identity and represent themselves as the true inheritors and protectors of the region's cultural and environmental resources.

These practices of identification are inextricable from the contested territorial struggles underpinning residency, forestry, and tourism development in the Maya Biosphere. Locals stake claims to territory by recounting and leveraging these histories and identities of labor and care for the forests when campaigning for and defending forest concessions (Chapter 4), contesting notions of global heritage (Chapter 5), and defending their right to live in the biosphere despite ongoing evictions and the militarization of the forest (Chapter 6). In contrast to Mirador tourism efforts that render invisible *chiclero* labor from ancient Mayan spaces, local residents infuse their forest-based identities and histories into the landscape as an ongoing practice of suffering for territory.

Chapter 4

THE FIGHT FOR THE MIRADOR BASIN

““The Maya destroyed their environment,” he said. “They cut down their jungle” and it ruined them forever. “And we’re doing the same thing today.””

----Reporter Blake Schmidt quoting archaeologist Dr. David Larson in a *New York Times* article entitled “Ranchers and Drug Barons Threaten Rain Forest,” July 17th 2010.

Mirador tourism imaginaries and development initiatives obscure and often erase the living histories and working forest landscapes of neighboring villages like Juanita and Yamul (see Chapter Two). Yet local residents contest these territorial practices of historical and geographical erasure. Many of Mirador’s contemporary neighbors stake counter claims to territory by recounting village histories in conservation terms, and by participating in the community forest concessions process created as part of the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR) (see Chapter Three). This chapter explores how these local histories and territorial claims tenaciously reappear in land conflicts over the 2002 Presidential Decree declaring the so-called “Mirador Basin” a “Special Archaeological Zone.” The new boundaries of the Mirador Basin overlapped the geographies of the community forest concessions and threatened concessionaire usufruct rights. Rather than allowing for continued sustainable logging in forest concessions, the establishment of the Mirador Basin would have restricted land use in the overlapping territories to scientific and tourism activities only.

This legislative move sparked immediate critical response from several Juanita and Yamul residents who had lost up to 60% of their hard-won forest concessions. The legal declaration of the Mirador Basin nullified local residents forest usufruct rights, revealing Mirador tourism development as a form of territorial *enclosure* and *land dispossession*. Following three years of political struggle, local residents represented by the Association of Petén’s Forest Communities (ACOFOP) and the Center for Social and Environmental Legal Action (CALAS) achieved a remarkable reversal of President Portillo’s park declaration by his successor in 2005. The repeal abrogated Mirador Basin’s newly christened boundaries, and restored the geography and land uses of the Maya Biosphere and the community forestry concessionaires.

Proponents of the legal establishment of the Mirador Basin as an area of strict conservation identify multiple threats to the region’s forests, biodiversity, and Mayan sites and antiquities. For Juanita and Yamul residents, the battle between Mirador Basin advocates and locals epitomizes the threats Mirador tourism development entails. These competing crisis narratives about Mirador’s future are intimately interwoven with knowledge production about Mirador as a

place, including who has rights to land and for what purposes. These multiple, often-competing crisis narratives describe impending threats to Mirador and dialectically feed into the production of regional scientific knowledge, the (re)making of park boundaries, and the creation of political alliances among residents to defend concession land rights. In conversation with emerging research on green forms of land grabs, the heart of this chapter illuminates not only practices of tourism-enabled land dispossession, but a back and forth process of territorial struggle in which villagers neighboring Mirador participate in the re-territorialization of post-war political and economic power at the regional level by appropriating conservation efforts to achieve unforeseen ends.

The Mayan Collapse: *Apocalypto?*

The Mayan archaeological site of Mirador located near Guatemala's northern border with Mexico in the Maya Biosphere Reserve is an exceptional site because it is one of the oldest known Mayan cities from the Pre-Classic era (350 BC to 200 AD), predating the great Classic era sites like Tikal and Chichen Itza by nearly a thousand years (Hansen 1998). Mirador was possibly the largest urban metropolis in the pre-Columbian world with several hundred thousand inhabitants, extensive transportation and trade networks, and complex systems of agricultural production (Hansen 2002, Hansen & Guenter 2005, Wahl et. al 2007).

For archaeologists, global heritage conservationists, and local residents, the so-called collapse of the ancient Mayan civilization in the tropical lowlands of Petén and the Mexican Yucatan Peninsula provides a powerful parable justifying conservation measures today. Mayan time and history threaten to repeat themselves for those connected to one another through Mirador tourism development. Many stakeholders articulate an apocalyptic narrative of Mirador's future, but individuals and organizations identify radically different threats to the region.

Mirador Basin lead archaeologist Dr. Larson consistently points to one culprit in television specials, professional conferences, and fundraising events: environmental degradation stemming from conspicuous consumption. The magnificent pyramids, causeways, and palatial residences of Mirador and other cities were built using limestone stucco plastered over enormous structures rivaling the size of the pyramids of ancient Egypt. Pyramid *Danta* alone, Mirador's crowning glory, took slaves over 15 million man-hours and 30 years to build (Hansen 2010). The limestone plaster covered the royal structures as adornment, and the Maya painted the smooth surfaces in reds, blues, and yellows. To make just one ton of plaster required ten tons of wood to create a fire hot enough at 600 degrees to turn limestone rock into powder, to be mixed with water. While one ton of plaster sounds like a lot, it is enough to cover just one ten by ten foot section of the *Danta* pyramid that measures 230 feet high and six football fields wide (ibid). *Danta* is Mirador's largest edifice, but is only one of dozens identified so far in a city

spanning over ten miles in radius. To make matters worse, the ancient architects laid plaster more than a foot thick when just a few inches would have sufficed. The reason why, Dr. Larson explains, is “because they could” (ibid). The religious-political pyramids dotting Mirador landscape were symbols of the divine right and rule of Mirador’s theocratic rulers, and the luxury of excess plaster adorning these structures attested to their omnipresent wealth and power (Hansen 2001, 2002). The story Larson tells, alongside others like Pulitzer Prize winner Jared Diamond (2005), is that conspicuous consumption of the lowland forests led to erosion, drought, depletion of soil nutrients, and ultimately, starvation (Hansen et. al 2002, Wahl et. al. 2006). The “collapse” signaled not the erasure of the ancient Maya from the landscape, but an end to complex urban political and economic social systems epitomized at Mirador (Diamond, 2005; Hansen, 1998; Webster, 2002).

Once again, Larson argues, deforestation threatens the ancient cities of the Maya Biosphere Reserve. Dr. Larson recognizes the legality of the community forest concessions, but does not believe the process is sustainable or even the best way to alleviate local poverty. He argues that the forest is worth much more left standing as part of a tourism landscape, rather than felling trees, however sustainably, as part of a timber concession. Powerfully communicating his message to American audiences, Larson explains in reference to the forest concessions, “using the forest in the Maya Biosphere Reserve for trees would be like using the Grand Canyon as a landfill for Los Angeles” (July 22nd 2010 interview).

Dr. Larson has worked in the region for 30 years, and his passion for the Mayan site of Mirador and the forest and biodiversity that surround it is palpable and contagious. As discussed in Chapter Two, Larson has a clear vision of conservation centering on tourism development that he shares with many members of the Guatemalan elite, including several presidents. He sees tourism development as the *only* means of preserving the shrinking forests around Mirador that protect the site from looters. With his characteristic swagger, he explained to me, like so many others, “They ain’t going to save the forest because it’s green and pretty. Tourism is the only option” (ibid). Dr. Larson is sympathetic of the challenges of unemployment and lack of social services facing poor residents of Juanita and Yamul and has integrated education and community development projects into his conservation efforts. Yet, his moral compass falls dead center on protecting Mirador’s structures and artifacts first and foremost. He is utterly convinced that tourism development is the only sustainable development model that can ensure Mirador’s preservation in the long run.

Many conservationists suggest that clashes between Dr. Larson and local residents over forest concession boundaries and the Mirador Basin park stem from mutual misunderstanding and misinformation. This might be true, but I also think Dr. Larson and supporters of the community forest concessions process hold fundamentally different landscape visions, geographical histories, and affective ties to the place he calls the Mirador Basin. Dr. Larson’s tourism vision clashes with the multiple historical geographies and landscapes defining Northern Petén. Chapter

Three foregrounds three key moments defining the working and affective landscapes for many local residents: the living legacy of the *chiclería*, local labor histories of archaeological excavation, and the forest community concessions process. I showed how locals leverage these living histories to stake claims to territory, and in turn, inscribe village history and often their own identities into the landscape. In organizing to obtain a community concession, residents appropriated and interwove conservation discourses and practices into the folklore of *chicle* villages like Juanita and Yamul. Excavating these local histories illustrates how the practice of claiming territory binds residents of the Maya Biosphere to place, so that a claim to place becomes a claim about group and individual identity.

During my first trip to Mirador on the long hike from the village of Juanita, I met local residents and tour guides Diego and Ivan on top of the *Catzín* pyramid at the Tintal archaeology site, where exhausted trekkers spend their first night on the two-day, 60 kilometer trek to Mirador. 3000 people visit Mirador annually and 90% take this route by foot (GDT 2010), walking 23 kilometers from Juanita to the Tintal the first day and then another 27 kilometers to Mirador the following day, and returning by the same route. As in Juanita, conditions at the tourist camp at Tintal are basic. There is no running water, no toilets, and only a few rustic structures called *champas* that provide a few lucky tourists a roof for their tents or hammocks to protect them from the rain. Infrastructure is not any better at Mirador, but there a few more covered areas for campers and for guards to sell bucket showers to sweat-soaked tourists for a dollar.

Ivan, Diego and I sat with two other tourists on top of the pyramid watching the sun set, soaking in the 360-degree views of the surrounding forest canopy. Howler monkeys bid adieu to the sun as nocturnal insects and animals noisily began their day. Ivan pointed out what appeared to be hills in the far distance. “Those are the *Danta* and *Tigre* pyramids at Mirador,” he explained, “tomorrow we will walk on top of causeways connecting Tintal to Mirador built by the Maya over 2,000 years ago.” Diego began to talk about the demise of this once great civilization and the two cities. He explained that the remains of this grandiose civilization evidence the excess of humanity. Diego related with a narrative flare how the ancient Maya cut down all of the trees, and then the rain stopped, and they weren’t able to grow any more food. “We face the same threat today from tourism development of this area,” he warned. “The Maya are a lesson for us.”

Both Ivan and Diego use the parable of the ancient Mayan collapse to talk about the near and present dangers encroaching on Juanita and the surrounding forests their families have worked as *chicleros* and now as tour guides. That night, seemingly on top of the jungle, Ivan and Diego related their fears that large-scale development of the area will lead to deforestation, rather than prevent it, and will signal an end to local guides working at the site. In contrast to the World Bank development practitioners, private sector donors, and the Mirador Basin archaeology team, Diego and Ivan identify large-scale Mirador tourism development as the number one threat to the forest, rather than being its saving

grace. They share their views with the mayor of Juanita who identifies “outside interests” as the number one threat to villagers in light of Mirador development. Juanita and Yamul residents are not opposed to tourism development of Mirador or any other site in Maya Biosphere. They are, however, opposed to forms of development that reproduce enduring histories of racialized inequality, poverty, and uneven development. Many suggest that foreigners from other countries and wealthy outsiders from Guatemala City want to enclose Mirador as a park to develop it for their own economic benefit to the detriment and exclusion of local residents.

Juanita and Yamul locals like Diego, and Ivan suggest that Mel Gibson is one such foreigner. Gibson tells another version of the so-called Mayan collapse in the 2006 blockbuster Hollywood film *Apocalypto*. The film opens with familiar sounds of insects and birds of the lowland tropical forests. Will Durant’s quote “no society can be conquered from without, until it is conquered from within” appears in smoke then retreats from the scene. The movie tells the story of internal warfare, enslavement, and cruelty among the Maya themselves that ultimately led to the self-imploding demise of their great civilizations. According to Gibson, the Mayan collapse, or *apocalypto*, derived from internal warfare rather than environmental degradation. The movie fetishizes violence and embellishes warfare on the one hand, and ignores aspects of ancient Mayan daily life, science, and cosmology on the other.²⁵

Gibson became intimately involved in Mirador research and conservation efforts following *Apocalypto*, even becoming chair of the fundraising branch of the Mirador Basin Project called the Foundation for Archaeological and Environmental Research (FARES) (see Chapter Two). Gibson has donated at least \$500,000 to support Mirador research and restoration (FARES 2009). His advocacy and philanthropic giving is part of a larger trend of celebrity activism for environmental and social causes (Brockington 2008). Gibson’s material support of Mirador research illustrates the complex ties binding popular culture representations of the Maya and scientific knowledge production. While Gibson’s financial support is critical to the sustainability of Mirador research, the global mega star’s personal life doesn’t attract the kind of desired visibility Mirador advocates seek. *Apocalypto* debuted just a few months before Gibson’s arrest and anti-Semitic outburst while he was drinking and driving during the summer of 2006. Many *gringos* have joked with me about the bad break Guatemala always seems to get. “Of all the celebrity supporters, Mirador gets Mel Gibson?” a friend asked. “As if things aren’t complicated enough!”

²⁵ Indigenous and non-indigenous activists and scholars have passionately critiqued *Apocalypto*’s portrayal of the ancient Maya, and these representations’ implications for shaping ideas about indigenous people today (see Grandia 2006). Mayan activists in Guatemala mobilized in protest to the racism they identified in the film and threatened to pursue legal action against Gibson (Maxwell 2007).

Jokes aside, a villager from Yamul explained to me what he took away from Gibson's *Apocalypto*. "What you see in the movie," Lalo argued, "is how Mayan leaders used their knowledge about eclipses, astronomy, and the seasons to manipulate the masses." Opposite Gibson's interpretation, Lalo does not see internal divisions threatening an apocalyptic end to the forest and villagers' way of life. Rather, the real threat is being duped by so called leaders wielding knowledge as a tool to lay claim to territory and resources, like the Mayan kings and priests manipulated the peasant masses. Lalo's reading of the movie *Apocalypto* speaks to the role science plays in modern day territorial claims to Petén's forests and archaeological sites. Today the production of archaeological and other forms of scientific knowledge is enabling practices of territorial enclosure by defining and producing a new geographical entity, the "Mirador Basin." The next section explores debates about the Mirador Basin's geographical integrity, and then shows how Mirador Basin advocates armed with disputed scientific knowledge successfully campaigned President Portillo to legally designate the area as a "Special Archaeological Zone."

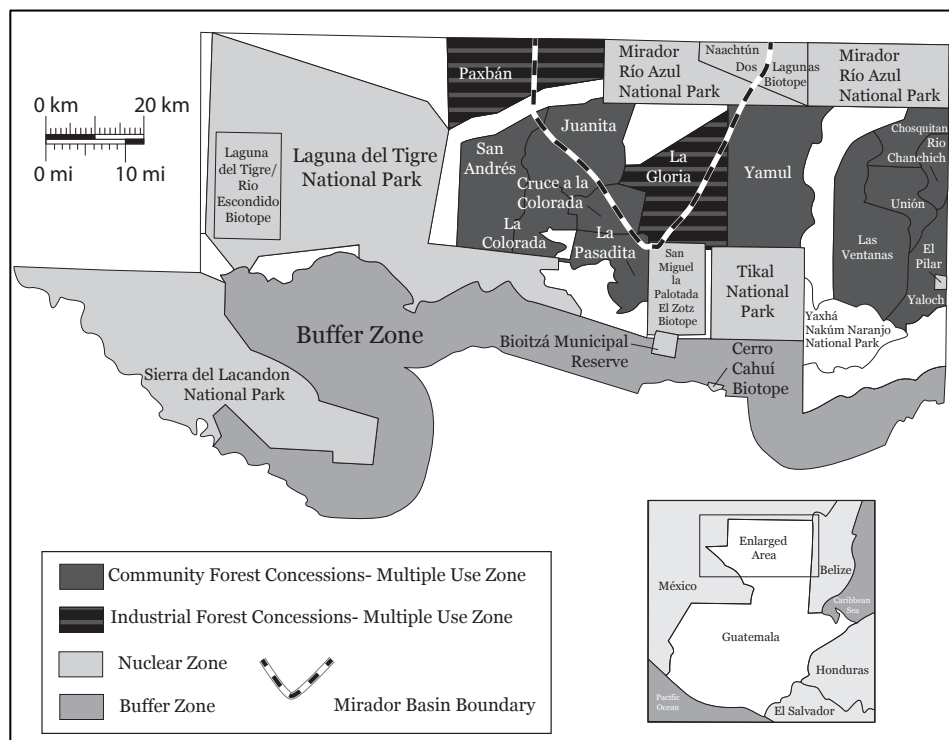
The Making of the "Mirador Basin"

During the Guatemalan peace process (1985-1996), environmental organizations and Guatemalan conservationists came together and galvanized enough political support to create the Maya Biosphere Reserve (MBR) in 1990 (Nations 1996). The Maya Biosphere's creation followed on the heels of the establishment of a national park system (SIGAP) and the Council on National Protected Areas (CONAP) just the year before. The MBR spans just over 2 million hectares and covers more than half of the state of Petén and almost one-fifth of the national territory (CONAP 1992). Like many UNESCO Biospheres, the Maya Biosphere has three zones with differing land uses: a "nuclear zone" where no humans live and only tourism and science take place (36%); a "multiple-use" zone with restricted settlement and sustainable productive activities like forest concessions (40%); and a "buffer zone" of agricultural production (24%). In the geography of the Maya Biosphere, the archaeology site of Mirador is in the nuclear zone of El Mirador – Río Azul National Park. The Mirador-Río Azul national park shares a border with the community forest concessions of Juanita and Yamul, the industrial forest concession called *La Gloria*, the Mexican border to the north, and the nuclear zone of the *Dos Lagunas* biotope to the east (see Map 1).

The Guatemalan government did not originally plan to grant resident communities forest concessions, only industrial ones (Gretzinger, S. P. 1998, Monterroso & Barry 2007). As detailed in Chapter 3 and elsewhere (Finger-Stich 2003, Radachowsky et. al 2012, Sundberg 1998), the creation of the community forest concessions came out of the complex combination of CONAP's inability to enforce conservation legislation, local protests against newly legislated limits on forest usufruct rights, and the requirements of the Peace Accords calling for the

allocation of collectively held lands, among other dynamics.²⁶ Many community forest concessionaires relate the history of obtaining concessions in terms of hardship and internal conflict, and as a political struggle for land rights that lasted over six years in Juanita and almost ten years in Yamul (Reddy 2002). The Association of Petén’s Forest Communities (ACOFOP) emerged from this political process in the late 1990s as an umbrella organization politically articulating concessionaires across individual concession boundaries (Gomez & Mendez 2005). Today, ACOFOP represents 23 peasant and indigenous organizations, manages large-scale development projects, and occupies a seat at political decision-making tables addressing Petén’s conservation, economic development, and security (Radachowsky & Castellanos n.d., Taylor 2010, 2012).

Figure 4.1: The Maya Biosphere Forest Concessions & the Mirador Basin



Source: Author

Dr. Larson staunchly criticizes the Maya Biosphere’s geography that includes the forest concessions, half-heartedly joking it was “designed on the back of a bar napkin in Antigua, Guatemala” (July 22nd 2010 interview). He argues that the rectangular boundaries of the existing Mirador Park are ill conceived, and are at odds with the physical and cultural topographies of the region’s archaeological landscapes. In contrast to the Maya Biosphere’s geography, Dr. Larson and many of his colleagues suggest that hundreds of years of ancient Mayan settlement,

²⁶ An ethnographic history unpacking the complex history of the creation of community forest concessions has yet to be told. See Cortave, 2003 for the ACOFOP’s perspective.

agriculture, and urban life created a physically and culturally distinct and integrated system they call the “Mirador Basin.” Described as a broad, low relief, oval-shaped basin occupying 2,200 sq. km., the area looks like an inverted triangle. This shape led Dr. Larson to affectionately and infamously call the Mirador Basin the “Mayan Bikini.” Figure 4.1 shows the overlapping the geographies of the Maya Biosphere forest concessions and the Mirador Basin.

The interdisciplinary scientific team working at Mirador led by Dr. Larson uses archaeology, paleoecology, cartography and other forms of scientific knowledge to define the Mirador Basin as a clearly demarcated geographic entity. Dr. Larson suggests the Basin’s concentration of Mayan sites clearly evidences the cultural geography of the ancient Maya, which over the course of thousands of years has become part of the physical landscape (2001). He and his colleagues argue the presence of seasonal swamps called “*bajos*” that contrast with surrounding upland forests further distinguish the physicality of the Basin (Mejia and Valle 2006). Furthermore, the Mirador Basin is home to different soil types and *civales*, wet and treeless areas of herbaceous vegetation not found in the dry savannas of southern and central Petén (Wahl 2007 et. al). The team argues that perhaps the clearest proof of the Mirador Basin’s geographical integrity is a surrounding chain of low-relief karstic hills (Hansen et. al 2008). Within the Mirador Basin, Dr. Larson has identified 51 archaeological sites so far, nine of which are larger than the nearby World Heritage site of Tikal (Hansen et. al 2008).

The Mirador Basin Project led by Dr. Larson had collaborated with nearly 200 scientists and technical personnel from over 52 universities across the world, published over 170 academic papers and nearly 500 technical reports (FARES 2009). His vision of the Mirador Basin as a world tourism destination is also communicated in the popular medium of made-for-TV documentaries and interviews. Dr. Larson’s Mirador message has reached millions of people around the world on CNN, *20/20*, *Good Morning America*, *60 minutes* (Australia), the BBC, and documentaries on the History Channel, National Geographic, and the Learning Channel among others.

Not everyone, however, agrees with the Mirador Basin team’s science. Several biodiversity conservationists and development practitioners argue the scientific claim that the Mirador Basin is a geographical basin stands on shaky ground. A Petén based director of a conservation organization dismisses the Mirador Basin as a myth. He and many others suggest the area meets neither criteria of being a geographical defined basin: the area is not surrounded by highlands as claimed, nor does it constitute a watershed basin. The area is actually part of the San Pedro watershed that flows into the Usumacinta. What Dr. Larson claims is a basin, he among others suggest, is actually a plateau. A surrounding ridge of karstic hills does indeed outline the purported basin to the east. To the west, however, there is no topography distinction defining a basin, but a shared watershed reaching all the way to the Laguna del Tigre National Park, far beyond the boundary of the “bikini.” Likewise to the north, the plateau Mirador lays on

reaches far into the Mexican states of Quintana Roo and Campeche.

The biologist certainly supports Mirador conservation and works to promote biodiversity throughout the Maya Biosphere Reserve. He wants the region surrounding Mirador to be protected for purposes of environmental conservation through national and international law, but he disagrees with Dr. Larson's way of achieving this aim. The conservation biologist is a supporter of the community forest concession process placed under threat by efforts to designate the "Mirador Basin" a park with restricted land uses. He feels that by and large the residents of Juanita and Yamul are protecting the flora and fauna within their concessions and must be involved in ongoing conservation efforts for them to be successful. From another perspective, a high-ranking official of the National Council of Protected Areas (CONAP) explained to me his opposing position on the Mirador Basin presidential decree. He stated that setting the Mirador Basin apart from the already existing framework of the Maya Biosphere Reserve suggests that just the Mirador Basin should receive World Heritage designation while he thinks the whole Maya Biosphere should receive the title.

Despite this ongoing debate among scientists and conservationists working in the region, Mirador Basin advocates employ an arsenal of scientific research to spread their message nationally and internationally about the impending threats to the Mirador Basin. In addition to using controversial science to define the Mirador Basin as a place, the Petén based biologist suggests Basin advocates employ two additional strategies to stake their territorial claims. First, they circulate false information about Mirador's ecological importance. For example, the website states, "the Mirador Basin is the *last tract* of virgin rainforest remaining in Central America" (emphasis mine, Global Heritage Fund n.d. d), as does the Mirador Basin Project's site (Mirador Basin Project, n.d. b). In describing the Basin as one of the last remaining pristine forests, these organizations convey the false message that the only thing worth saving and protecting is Mirador. Suggesting northern Petén is a "virgin" forest is also a misrepresentation that denies its anthropomorphic production of the forests over the course of a millennia that has culminated in the working landscapes of *chicle* extraction, and now conservation and tourism development (Grandia, 2007).

Second, the project exacerbates threats from human activity. For example, a Mirador Basin Project document argues "a large quantity of local inhabitants depend on pillaging, forest depredation, the production of marijuana and other illegal and unproductive activities." Basin advocates implicitly discredit other forest management alternatives, like the community concessions process, by constructing local residents as cultural and environmental predators. In a similar tone, a New York Times article outraged villagers by portraying them "pawns of drug lords" (Schmidt, 2010). Villagers blamed Larson for the misrepresentation. The biologist and many residents of Juanita and Yamul argue the only reason the flora and fauna around Mirador still exist today is precisely because of the presence and usufruct practices of local residents that predate the conservation turn during

the peace process. For example, the Wildlife Conservation Society found the highest population of jaguars living within the Juanita forest concession, and that threats from fire largely emanate from outside these two concessions. This information suggests, as locals and biologists do, that residents of Juanita and Yamul play a critical role in keeping forest fires at bay (Bray et. al 2008; Radachowsky et. al 2012).

At stake in these scientific debates regarding the purported existence of the Mirador Basin are territorial claims determining what types of land use should take place in its boundaries. Analyzing the social-spatial construction of the Mirador Basin as a place does not mean neglecting the materiality of the Mayan sites, biodiversity, ecosystems, or deforestation. Rather, I want to show how the production of archaeological scientific knowledge is used to *produce* a geographical entity and then lay claim to territory for the purposes of tourism development to the exclusion of other productive practices of nearby residents.

The Battle for the Mirador Basin

Dr. Larson is not only a world-renowned archaeologist, but he is a gifted spokesperson and charismatic fundraiser for Mirador conservation efforts. These talents have combined with the majesty of Mirador and the surrounding forests to create a high power support network funding Mirador archaeological research and restoration. Mirador Basin supporters include the wealthiest global companies and Guatemalan families, including several Guatemalan presidents. These supporters include members of the politically powerful Novella family who created the private foundation (APANAC) to support Mirador restoration and conservation, and brought President Portillo (2000-2004) out to Mirador by helicopter to receive a tour with Dr. Larson. APANAC stands in good company with other companies and non-profit organizations like the Global Heritage Fund, CitiBank, Blue Oil, Walmart Centroamerica, Claro, and Disagro, among others, supporting the Mirador Basin Project (see Chapters Two and Five for more discussion).

On April 18th of 2002, after years of campaigning, the dreams of Mirador Basin advocates came to fruition when President Portillo emitted Presidential Decree 129-2002 following his visit declaring the establishment of a nuclear zone called the "Special Archaeological Zone Mirador Basin." The problem with declaring Mirador a cultural landscape is, of course, that the region is already a cultural landscape for the hundreds of people who live and work around Mirador. The newly christened Mirador Basin placed in jeopardy the overlapping boundaries and land uses of the forest concessions by limiting land use within its boundaries to tourism development and research only. The Basin's re-zonification superseded the territoriality and usufruct rights of four community and two industrial concessions in total, ranging from 5% to 100% of total surface area. Juanita stood to lose 66% of its community concession, and Yamul 15%. Regardless of the extent of territorial loss, affected and unaffected members of the Association of Peten's

Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP) collectively identified Presidential Decree 129 as a threat to the integrity of the entire concession process.

These competing socio-spatial constructions of nature, forest, and livelihoods between forest concessionaries and Mirador Basin advocates came to a head in a fierce legal battle lasting over three years. On May 2nd 2002, just a few weeks after the decree's publication, ACOFOP's members and allied NGOs signed and presented the Council on National Protected Areas (CONAP) a document of unconformity. Toward the end of the month, legal representatives of the affected and solidarity communities traveled to Guatemala City to present a "*recurso de amparo*," an appeal for legal protection. President Portillo ruled the appeal without merit just a few weeks later. By 2003, ACOFOP took its campaign from the national congressional floor to the offices of the world's most powerful financial institutions. In July, ACOFOP called a meeting with World Bank Representatives planning to fund Mirador tourism development. There they learned of a nascent agreement to finance such a project already existed between the Guatemalan government and the Bank. At this point, ACOFOP made clear that if their legal efforts to appeal the decree were ineffectual, their members would close the streets and take control of northern Guatemala's regional airport.

On Sept 1st 2003, ACOFOP filed a second appeal (*recurso de amparo*) with the help of a non-profit legal team with an office in Petén called CALAS, the Center for Social and Environmental Legal Action. The appeal claimed the decree was unconstitutional based on three accounts. They argued that the constitution, as the nation's highest legal authority, guaranteed the legality of Maya Biosphere Reserve and the community concessions, and therefore, could not be overruled by a presidential decree.

Figure 4.2:
Street Protest against Presidential Decree 129



Source: "In Respect of the Zones of the Maya Biosphere,"
ACOFOP Archives

Two days later, ACOFOP held a peaceful protest receiving national press coverage and marched on the Constitutional Court. For many of the protesters it was their first trip to Guatemala City. Clara explained to me this was just one of many protests she and other Juanita residents attended. “There were tons of people there, we all carried signs we had made. We are not anti-park, but the reserve cannot be saved by expanding parks. Because here, if the people don’t get involved, it will be very difficult to take care of the forest.”

Several months later in January of 2004, ACOFOP published an open letter in the paper to newly elected President Oscar Berger (2004-2008) calling for the decree’s appeal. This action secured an audience between community leaders and the president ten days following. Shortly after, ACOFOP’s “Mirador Cause” celebrated a substantial victory. As a result of the second appeal, Decree 129 and the Mirador Basin’s existence was temporarily suspended for a period of deeper analysis and debate. Perhaps in an act of political tug of war between parties with opposing Mirador visions, the same day the Guatemalan Congress emitted Executive Law 2961. Law 2961 furthered the goals and legality of the Mirador Basin at the same time Berger expressed his concern over its establishment. Law 2961 declared the Mirador Basin a Protected Area with the classification of Cultural Landscape Category II, changed the administration of the area to a small cross-sector committee, and stipulated logging in the area would be banned.

Figure 4.3: Protest against Presidential Decree 129 at the National Palace



Source: ACOFOP Archives

Despite the intentions of Law 2961, April 30th 2004 marked the imminent demise of the Mirador Basin’s legal territorial existence. Two special commissions investigating the Mirador Basin legal controversy presented a joint recommendation letter to congress collating opinions of state institutions ascertaining the merits of Decree 129 and Law 2961. The commission concluded that the decree and law should “be discarded.” Over a year later in May of 2005, ACOFOP, CALAS and their supporters celebrated the victory they spent over three years campaigning for. President Berger declared Presidential Decree 129 and

Law 2961 repealed. The legal and territorial sovereignty of the Maya Biosphere Reserve and the community concessions usufruct rights were restored.

In fighting against practices of enclosure and land dispossession at stake in the battle for the bikini, something unexpected happened. Local residents in favor of the forest concessions process forged a new political movement hinging on the repeal of the legal declaration of the Mirador Basin. Through this political articulation, local residents strengthened their solidarity as concessionaires through the organization ACOFOP by leveraging their place-based histories, identities, and rights as concessionaries to lay counter claims to territory. ACOFOP and CALAS' legal victory was not the only outcome of the battle for the Mirador Basin. Through their land struggle, concessionaries transformed themselves from a loose knit amalgamation of forest concessionaries wading through the bureaucracy and new order of the Maya Biosphere Reserve to powerful actors on the national scene.

In defending their usufruct rights concessionaries forged a political movement that consolidated ACOFOP as an infantile organization and grew it into a powerful player in national and international conservation politics. As Clara from Juanita explained, "ACOFOP brought people together from across all the different cooperatives. The good part of ACOFOP is that if something affects Juanita, Melchor [another cooperative] is united. We felt we had the support of all the concessions. It didn't matter if they were directly affected or not. It was the concessions process that mattered. ACOFOP played a positive political role and invested more than 2 million quetzals in the legal battle."

The Battle for the Bikini, the Sequel: The Baldizón Initiative

In the middle of a hot Petén morning while teaching third and fourth graders in Juanita's school, two pick ups showed up in the village full of soldiers brandishing patches on their shoulders with the image of Temple Four in Tikal. The kids and the teachers all ran outside to catch a glimpse at some much needed excitement. I walked up to the treasurer from the cooperative and stood alongside him and asked, "what's going on?" "They've come to *desalojar* (evict) Juanita," he joked. A moment later with a sense of renewed seriousness and reflection he quietly commented with an air of further contemplation, "it could happen." He's not the only one living with the uncertainty of Juanita's future. On another day, an elderly, life-long resident likewise commented without a hint of humor, "Maybe it'll be our turn next and the state will come here and evict Juanita."

There is a palpable fear among residents that sometimes borders on conspiracy theory that elites, politicians, and businesspeople aim to convert the whole area surrounding Mirador into a nuclear zone where no human residency or livelihood is prohibited. Following the battle for the Mirador Basin, this fear was rekindled by President Colom's Four Jaguar eco-tourism project that coordinated

Petén development projects with the aim of transforming the Maya Biosphere Reserve into the world's largest archaeological park. At the same time, the Guatemalan military has been evicting communities in the Maya Biosphere next to Juanita for failing to comply with their concession contracts (see Chapter Six). Communities like *Limon*, Juanita's nearest neighbor, were turned into a military detachment after the original residents purportedly sold their land illegally to cattle ranchers perhaps involved in narco-trafficking. Rumors abound in Juanita regarding the degree to which members of CONAP, elected officials, and military personnel participated in the sale of land and other illegal activities in *La Colorada*. What is clear to Juanita and Yamul residents is that their future land tenure is uncertain, and they feel the threat of displacement regardless of the relatively healthy status of their forest concession.

Insecure land tenure associated with Mirador tourism development once again looms on the horizon. In July of 2010, word spread like wildfire in the Juanita that Petén congressman and presidential candidate Manual Baldizón was proposing another legislative initiative to make the Mirador Basin a national park. The battle for the Mayan bikini, it seems, is far from over. The Baldizón family is one of the most prominent families in the Petén. Like many wealthy Petenero families with long history in the region (Schwartz 1990), the Baldizóns made their money as merchants and exports of *chicle*, *xate*, and allspice and then later diversified into cattle ranching and tourism. Just a few generations ago, the congressman's relative, Jesus Baldizón, worked as a *chicle* contractor in Yamul. Manual Baldizón owns several transport companies in Petén, fast food restaurants like Burger King, and commercial properties. The Baldizón family is one of the largest property owners in the wealthy tourism enclave island of Flores.

Manual Baldizón's proposed "Law for the Protection and Tourism Development of Mirador National Park" uses much of the same language found in the 2002 Presidential Decree, to the point where the text actually looks copied. The Baldizón initiative proposes to declare the "Mirador Basin" a "Category II Cultural Landscape" (*Paisaje Cultural*) with land use restricted to tourism and scientific investigation. The initiative, if passed, would transfer administrative responsibility for the park away from the Council on National Protected Areas (CONAP) and the Institute of Anthropology to the Ministry of Culture and Sports, thus nullifying CONAP's forest concessions overlapping the geography of the Mirador Basin. Deepening concerns, the initiative references a proposed electric train to take tourists to and from the various regional archaeological sites.

For many local residents, the infamous "*trencito*" (little train) first proposed by Dr. Larson and then President Colom (2008-2012) in the Four Jaguar project epitomizes how Mirador Basin tourism development projects sideline local participation and benefit. Currently, 90% of tourists to Mirador arrive to the site by foot from Juanita with the use of pack mules and local guides (GDT 2010). Pack mules were historically used in *chicle* extraction and the lack of paved roads from Juanita to the Mexican border means many collectors of *xate* leafy palms used in

North American flower bouquets and a few remaining chewing gum resin tappers (*chicleros*) still use mules today. Renting mules, hiring muleteers (*arrieros*), and local guides is the way that Juanita residents make money from Mirador tourism. Many residents view proposed plans to eliminate mules from the trek equivalent to eliminating local participation in the tourism industry.

For many residents, the Baldizón Initiative is the 2002 Presidential Decree redux. Once again, members of ACOFOP organized in response to the Baldizón initiative. Representatives from ACOFOP have allied with state officials from CONAP and international conservationists, like the biologist quoted earlier, who support the geography and land uses of the Maya Biosphere Reserve and the community concessions. This coalition sent a declaration opposing the proposed legislation to the Guatemalan president, Manuel Baldizón, members of the national congress, and Dr. David Larson. Initiative opponents also published a public statement in the national newspaper articulating their position. Despite his denial, ACOFOP's members assert that Dr. Larson is behind the Baldizón initiative. While Baldizón ignored ACOFOP's invitation to meet to discuss his legislation, Dr. Larson agreed to meet with ACOFOP's members with the idea that he would clear himself of any association despite its eerie echo of the battle over the Mayan bikini from ten years prior.

In the outdoor meeting space of the Association of Forest Communities of Petén (ACOFOP) in October 2010, Dr. Larson sat down with an angry group of over 200 ACOFOP members and people from communities living in the Maya Biosphere Reserve. Don Pedro from Juanita saw me enter the meeting and waved me over to sit by a few men from the village's timber cooperative. Next to me sat a woman named Margarita from the community of *Cruce a Limon*. She wore clothes and an apron typical of a *Petenera* housewife. The woman of about fifty-years-old leaned forward intently in her well-worn plastic white chair, feet crossed. The meeting started off with two hour-long presentations, one by ACOFOP and the other by Dr. Larson. ACOFOP's leadership heralded the successes of community forest management, using Juanita as the model concession by detailing the village cooperative's environmental awards, social welfare activities, and conservation practices. Dr. Larson then followed with an enthusiastic hour-long lecture on Mirador's archaeological exceptionalism.

Despite having met to discuss the Baldizón initiative specifically, both parties did not mention the proposal, but reiterated their competing visions, claims, and histories of Petén's northern forests. A Q&A session followed. Margarita rose when she was finally called upon to speak. She began to recite the Guatemalan national anthem, staring Dr. Larson directly in the eye, "If tomorrow your sacred soil should be threatened by foreign invasion, your fair flag flying freely in the wind will call to you: Conquer or die." Her powerful delivery reminded me of many conversations with Juanita and Yamul residents who identify Dr. Larson's presence and politics as a form of neo-imperialism, often using those words specifically. A few minutes later, Enrique, a tour guide from a nearby Santa

Elena, stood up and demanded to know who was funding Dr. Larson's project. He explained that academics have been stealing artifacts from Petén for many years. "There has been over 500 years of conquest through science in Guatemala," he explained.

Behind Mirador Basin conservation and tourism development efforts stand the nation's and the world's wealthiest individuals and companies. Foreign investment and resource extraction in the Petén is nothing new. Chewing gum workers and companies like the Wrigley's Chewing Gum Company founded the so-called remote and isolated villages of Juanita and Yamul nearly a century ago. Despite over 100 years of participation in the global economy, the villages and their inhabitants remain poor and lack basic services such as access to clean water, electricity, and education. While the *chicle* industry is unique to northern Petén, primary resource extraction for the financial gain of foreign individuals and companies in Guatemala is not. As many residents can recount, the United Fruit Company was the largest landowner in Guatemala in 1954 when democratically elected President Arbenz enacted land reform that nationalized unused land with the aim of redistributing it to poor peasants. The Dulles brothers in their dual roles as United Fruit Company board members and leaders of the pentagon and the United States congress culled together enough support within the US government in the name of fighting communism to mobilize a CIA backed *coup d'état* of the Arbenz administration (Jonas 2000, Schlesinger & Kinzer 2005). The *coup* ended the country's decade of democracy and returned power to military dictatorships for almost another 40 years.

For many Guatemalans, the CIA backed *coup* and subsequent periodic funding of Guatemala's army during 36 years of genocidal warfare epitomizes the neo-imperial role the US has played, and continues to play, in Guatemalan affairs (Schirmer 1998). Manny, a young man from Juanita who thinks Dr. Larson is behind the Baldizón initiative, rhetorically asked me, "How can he treat *chapines* [Guatemalans] like this in their own country?"

For residents like Margarita and Manny, the battle for the bikini symbolizes a more implicit neo-imperialist role that *gringos* continue to play in shaping Guatemalan affairs. No longer fighting communism but championing conservation, residents suggest foreigners like Larson are interfering in Guatemalan politics and ongoing struggles for land. Foreigners like Mel Gibson and Dr. Larson and national elites from Guatemala City pose a challenge to the usufruct rights granted to Maya Biosphere residents as forest concessionaires following the failure of the Peace Accords to address extreme inequality in land holding. Once again, it seems that North American foreigners are collaborating with national elite to dispossess poor people of land and other economic resources.

Don Pedro from Juanita echoed similar sentiments to Margarita on another occasion. In an interview he recounted a story about a wildfire that threatened to burn Juanita to the ground in 1994. He woke in the middle of the night to the

sound of shrill shouting from his neighbors. He jumped out of bed and joined assembly line efforts to douse the encroaching fire and dug fire lines to protect the village. The fire came within hundreds of yards of the community from the south. While this fire burns in local memory as the closest call a wildfire came to destroying the village, residents are actively involved in fire management year round and have been for decades. Fire fighting and the sustainable extraction of *chicle* and *xate* are part of the village's history of caring for the forest, and the foundation of resident's claims to rightfully remain and work in the Maya Biosphere Reserve. In the past during the civil war, the army burnt entire villages to the ground as part of a scorched earth counterinsurgency campaign.

Today, fire is part of a powerful symbolic arsenal of potential tactics available to locals to ward off land dispossession. A last ditch option if residents were kicked off their land, Pedro laments, would be for locals to set fire to the forest whose conservation threatens their land tenure. He explained how difficult it would be to do so, but asserted this would ensure the forest "would be not for the rich, and not for the poor." At least this way, Pedro says, the rich wouldn't get richer from kicking the poor off their land. The threat of burning the forests for Pedro signifies a powerful counter claim to territory, and a means to protest the reproduction of poverty and inequality in contemporary development projects.

Like Pedro, many residents in the Maya Biosphere Reserve feel equally as passionate about their rights to live and work in the forests surrounding Mirador. Despite deep and enduring internal divisions within communities like Juanita and Yamul, the Baldizón initiative proposing park declaration for the Mirador Basin is forging solidarity between residents who do and do not support ACOFOP or directly benefit from the concessions. Chapter Three described how the history of chicle extraction produced racialized class differences that fed into the politics of the forest community concessions, deepening already existing divisions within the community. Despite these differences, many residents on opposite sides of the concession divide are banding together in the face of threats posed by archaeologists like Larson and elites like Baldizón. Juana and Jose are what regional non-profit workers call "anti-concessionaries," they are not members of the cooperative and they do not support the community forestry process. The three of us were sitting in their shop, and Ivan, a supporter of cooperative and concession process, walked in to buy some smokes. Juana asked Ivan if he had heard about the Baldizón initiative. Indeed, he had. The three Juanita residents, usually on opposite sites of the community divide around the forest concession, found them themselves passionately agreeing about the threat posed by the initiative. The three quickly identified David Larson as the puppeteer behind the proposal. For Jose, a long-term supporter of Larson and an anti-concessionaire, Dr. Larson's purported involvement signaled a shift in his role and advocacy in the region.

"David was good at first, but now he's involved in the Baldizón initiative. He just wants to expand and expand his park. We are from here, and he is a

foreigner, he doesn't give orders here. We have lived here our whole lives and taken care of the forest. Where else can we go? We don't have titles to sell our houses to find another place to live. We only know how to work the land and the forest. I can't find a job in the central (urban) area. No....the community will only be taken out in coffins."

The conversation immediately fell on concerns regarding not the integrity of the forest concession process, but the rights of residents to live in the Maya Biosphere Reserve all together. This moment of impromptu solidarity between anti- and pro-concessionaries exaggerates the ways in which local residents are able to see past years of divisions between residents produced through the community concession process. Nevertheless, I believe that it does signal shifting scales and sites of political articulation between Juanita residents in the face of increased militarization of the Maya Biosphere since 2008 and the ongoing evictions of communities failing to uphold concessionaire contracts and environmental law (see Chapter Six). Since the battle for the Mirador Basin, important shifts in MBR governance and territorial rule have taken place that give increased gravity to land tenure threats posed by the Baldizón initiative. Like many folks from Juanita and Yamul I spoke with about land tenure threats posed by Mirador development, Ivan also made striking references to Guatemala's 36-year civil war. "It will be just like the war again here," he explained, "we will take up arms, we will not be kicked out." In another time and place, Juanita resident Enrique made a similar comment,

"If Juanita is made into a nuclear zone, it will be because Larson wants there to be just one owner. There will be another armed conflict, it will be like the 80s again. It will be like another war. We aren't going to allow the government to make contracts with foreigners, people will protest against this."

Conclusion

In the incipient stages of Mirador tourism development, everything is uncertain and the future seems up for grabs. The parable of the Mayan collapse resonates for many individuals emotionally and economically invested in the future of the region. The collapse parable, *Apocalypso*, fears of eviction from the Maya Biosphere, and other crisis narratives shape the contours of competing territorial claims, and contest each claimant's presence and place-based imaginaries. Mirador Basin advocates argue that once again deforestation threatens this natural and cultural world heritage, and continue to campaign to declare the alleged basin as a nuclear zone park with land uses restricted to tourism and scientific investigation. For many local residents, proponents of the Mirador Basin threaten the existing geography of forest concessions and concessionaire usufruct rights. For others residents, land tenure is increasingly insecure in villages of the multiple-use zone of the Maya Biosphere Reserve like Juanita and Yamul.

The very existence of the Mirador Basin as a place is under heated debate. Archaeologists and other scientists articulate controversial scientific claims that the Mirador Basin geographically and culturally reflects an integrated system and distinguished topography. These scientific claims about the Mirador Basin quickly transformed into a territorial vision. Dr. Larson, the lead archaeologist and prominent conservation advocate at national and international scales, collaborated with wealthy Guatemalan and North American conservationists to articulate a tourism-based conservation plan for Mirador. This contingency of Mirador Basin advocates used their national political connections to convince then Guatemalan President Portillo to legally redraw the boundaries of the Maya Biosphere Reserve.

The legal creation of the Mirador Basin threatened the integrity the community forestry concessions system by rezoning the region's boundaries and land uses. This *practice of territorial enclosure and land dispossession* through tourism development did not go uncontested by local residents, and concessionaries organized in response. Over the course of three years, members of the Association of Petén's Forest Communities (ACOFOP) articulated a political front in resistance to the 2002 Presidential degree declaring the Mirador Basin a Special Archaeological Zone. This political effort brought together many concessionaries from villages in the Maya Biosphere like Juanita and Yamul. In defending their rights, many concessionaires found themselves in solidarity with one another for the first time.

Today, the threat of land dispossession for villagers in Juanita and Yamul encroaches from many angles. In the last decade, several communities have been evicted from the Maya Biosphere Reserve because residents purportedly failed to comply with their forest concession contracts, illegally sold their land to cattle ranchers or narco-traffickers, or mismanaged their timber cooperatives among other offenses. In contrast, Juanita and Yamul are often heralded as the success stories of the forest concession process. Nevertheless, they feel their rights as residents are threatened from tourism development of the Mayan Mirador archaeological site. Fears about land dispossession in the present reflect the ongoing legal battle for the Mirador Basin in the form of the Baldizón initiative and a broader changing climate of militarization and the eviction of communities from the Maya Biosphere condemned for the violation of conservation law.

As Pedro, Jose, Juana, Ivan, Diego and others attest, what is at stake in these territorial claims are not simply abstract boundaries, but a living civil war legacy of economic and land inequality between wealthy Guatemalans from the capital city and the rural poor. Many villagers suggest efforts to extend Mirador's park boundaries include tourism development plans like the *trencito* that will exclude locals from income-generating activities, or relegate locals to poorly paid, undesired service jobs. These fears are not unfounded, but are grounded in the ongoing histories of foreign, national, and regional elite appropriation of Petén's resources and wealth. Despite ACOFOP's victory in the form of the 2005 repeal of Presidential Decree 129-2002 establishing the Mirador Basin, the struggle over

park boundaries and land uses in northern Petén is far from over. The 2010 Baldizón initiative demonstrates that the territorial borders and contested geographies of the Mirador park and concession boundaries are far from settled, but are being negotiated and arbitrated in the present. Ten years after local residents organized in resistance to the legislation creating the Mirador Basin, villagers are rearticulating new commitments to defend their territory.

Sustainable development and conservation ideologies shaping policy and development practice in the Petén are not monolithic, all-powerful projects. Through an arduous and controversial process, many local residents have appropriated conservation efforts to participate in the creation of the world's largest community forest concession system and to burst open new political arenas of participation. The battle for the Mayan bikini illustrates how local residents articulate counter claims to territory through conservation channels, and how they actively participate in the re-territorialization of post-war power, albeit not always under conditions of their own choosing.

Chapter 5

CONTESTING GLOBAL HERITAGE IN THE CHICLERO MUSEUM

The Maya Biosphere is home to hundreds of archaeological sites entombing countless artifacts, many of which have been taken out, illegally and legally. For many tourists, Mayan artifacts are priceless objects of historical, scientific, and cultural value. In everyday life, however, these objects also live complex lives as commodities and antiquities in black markets and legal private collections. Legality in antiquities excavation and circulation does not translate into legitimacy. There is a fine, porous, and mobile line in Petén between illegal and legal antiquities markets, and thus, between so-called looters and conservationists.

From the historical perspective of locals, who has the right to buy, sell, and possess antiquities, and who does not, appears arbitrary and is a reflection of political and economic power, rather than legal strictures. Debates among Juanita and Yamul residents over who can own Mayan artifacts and what can be done with them reveal nuanced critiques of the reproduction of inequality in global heritage conservation. Rather than truly belonging to the entirety of humanity as “global heritage,” village residents argue that Mayan artifacts end up in private museum collections far from their interred homes for the benefit of wealthy nationals, archaeologists, and international tourists.

Rather than taking the concept of global heritage at face value, this chapter reveals its social production and argues the practice of producing global heritage is inherently territorial, and intimately tied to tourism development of the area. Advocates of Mirador’s designation as world heritage share a tourism imaginary of the site and surrounding area as an “ancient, jungle shrouded city.” This tourism imaginary, and its intimate ties to efforts seeking world heritage designation for the site, threatens to erase living village histories of participation in over forty years of excavations, and even longer histories of buying, selling, and collecting Mayan antiquities. This chapter briefly relates residents’ histories of laboring in archaeological excavation as scouts, guides, and logistics coordinators in and around the sites of Yamul, Mirador, Tikal, and Nakbé among others. I frame archaeologists as many local residents do, as the first tourists to the region arriving in earnest in the early 1970s. Drawing on in-depth interviews and oral histories, I recount how many locals served as the first guides to these “tourists” who later failed to acknowledge local contributions to archaeological “discoveries.”

Redefining Mirador and the surrounding area as global heritage erases the multiple, often-conflicting geographies of life and livelihood of Juanita and Yamul residents. Furthermore, discourses of global heritage and efforts to designate Mirador as a UNESCO world heritage site create new subjects and territorial claims to the region’s sites and Mayan antiquities. Global heritage campaigns strengthen national and global elites’ claims to territory and antiquities by usurping local

resource rights with ancient archaeological evidence of global patrimony. I identify this as a territorial practice of *global heritage production* that is predicated on the “scaling-up” of resource claims to the forest from the local level, to the national level, and the globe.

This chapter argues that global heritage conservation is an emerging medium through which individuals compete for, and lay claim to, precious resources like Mayan artifacts, territory, and international aid dollars. Exploring the controversial lives of Mayan antiquities shows how these treasures embody social relations of territorial struggle that residents, national and global elites, and conservationists wage through discourses and practices of heritage conservation and tourism development. This chapter aims to first unpack local histories of laboring in archaeology and the complex affective ties that Yamul residents have with the Mayan sites and artifacts around them.

In addition to briefly detailing these histories of excavation and archaeological labor, the chapter begins by exploring local histories and practices of antiquities collecting exemplified in the story of the *Chicle* (Chewing Gum Resin) Worker’s Museum, the *Museo Chiclero*. The history behind the antiquities collection at the *Chiclero’s* Museum illustrates the fine line between illegal and legal collecting, how questions of legality do not necessarily match up with understandings of legitimacy, and how the production of global heritage “scales up” local residents’ claims to antiquities by identifying national and North American elites as “global citizens” imbued with claims to the site in the name of world patrimony.

Archaeological History in the *Chiclero’s* Museum

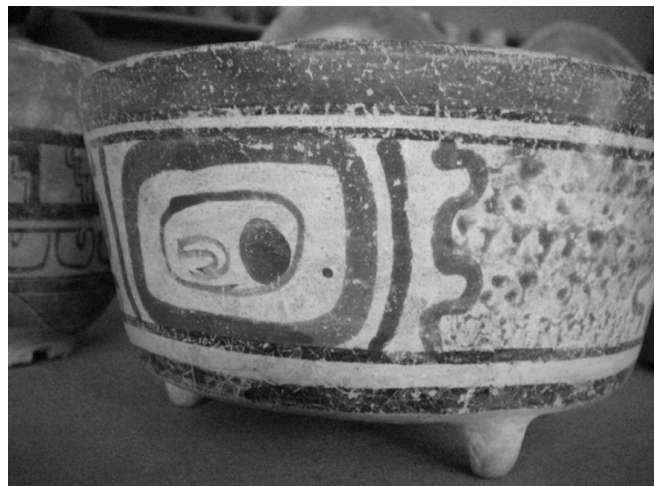
My first time in Yamul in February of 2010, stopping at a small store ran out the living room of a future neighbor’s house, I made my way down a dirt street following signs to the “Archaeology Site, Group E”. About half way down the short road, three young boys around seven- or eight-years-old eagerly approached me asking me if I wanted a tour guide. Indeed, I did. Darting, practically running, from one structure to the next, the boys showed me the wonders of Yamul’s Classic-era archaeology, pulling me behind them in the sweltering, humid heat. Yamul’s archaeology site boasts a well-preserved observatory, high-relief masks flanking large pyramids, and numerous stelae with hieroglyphs detailing the region’s human history 1300 years ago. Among other attractions, the boys pulled a tarantula out of its burrow as part of their tour, a trick that surely got squeals from most *gringas*. They also showed me a narrow entrance to underground cave, vernacularly called the *respirador* (respirator) that refreshingly “blew out” cold air according to the boys. This was surely a sacred site for Yamul’s Classic-era residents who believed caves were entrances to the underworld populated by gods. When these boys weren’t “guiding” the occasional group of tourists that visit Yamul a few times a

week, they would play in the ruins for hours on end. Following my tour, I headed back to my room at the *Campamento Chiclero* (*Chicle Worker's Camp*).

The *Campamento Chiclero* is located at the end of Yamul's airstrip and opposite the town's only entry and exit. The U-shaped compound of three buildings rests on top of what is most likely a Mayan structure dating from the Classic era. To the right of the entrance stands the kitchen with the traditional *campesino* clay oven stove, and a welcoming dining and living space covered by a towering thatch roof where the camp's owner, Gloria, entertains hotel guests and friends. Opposite the Chiclero Camp's wood-gated entrance lie a series of pleasant, adjoined hotel rooms with single beds and mint green walls. To the left of the entrance stands a building joining the owner's quarters and one more guest room, whose function, at first, remains unclear to the visitor. After a few days at the Camp, Gloria, the Chiclero Camp's owner, nonchalantly told me that the building houses the *Museo Chiclero*.

As a newcomer to the northern forests of Petén, I entered the museum and was dumbfounded. Shelf after shelf, case by case, the museum's marvels slowly reveal themselves to the visitor. The museum consists of one room about twenty wide by forty feet long. The ceiling, like the rest of the property's structures and the majority of Yamul's buildings, is made of thatch and palm leaves. The best of the pieces are displayed in four shelves running along the room's walls. Several large display cabinets call attention to a few of the museum's most obvious treasures. An intact terracotta colored plate with an elaborate deer mid jump at the center catches the eye. In the middle of the room is a large display table.

Figure 5.1: Artifacts in the *Chiclero's* Museum



Source: Author

As I soaked all this in for the first time, Gloria continued to narrate the museum's treasures. She stops and turns at the table's edge. She grabs what looks like a tall vase and hands it to me. "Shake it," she said. When I resisted and looked at her like she was mad, she laughed. She grabbed the orange and red artifact, hand decorated with drawn lines running up and down its 18-inch sides. "Shake it like this." She gently but firmly shook the vase and I heard earthy clanking noises emerge. "It is for hot chocolate. Those are rocks in the bottom making that noise. The Maya put the container over fire to heat the rocks to kept the chocolate hot." She handed it back to me. Upon contact, 1000 years melted away and I immediately felt connected to the person who enjoyed a warm sweet treat from this ancient thermos.

In this and several other moments, Gloria related that she has an innate personal desire to protect and take care of the artifacts. "There is something *nato en mi* (inside me) that makes me want to take care of things from my culture, as well as protect the forest, because my culture is so important." Gloria used this moment, and many more, to campaign for the importance of protecting Mayan "culture" as she called it, which is part of her identification with Yamul. Her passion for Mayan archaeology is inseparable from her pride in the history of the village, both as an important archaeology site and a modern town engaging in forest conservation through the concessions process (see Chapter Three). She continued, "The Maya have left great legacies to humanity like the chicle gum they [the ancient Maya] used, the ball game they practiced, the chocolate they drank. They used the zero...all the pyramids they built were so exact without the use of any machinery."

Gloria's passion for Mayan culture and identification with the Mayan structures surrounding her is not unique. Many Yamul and Juanita residents personally identify with Mayan culture, sites and antiquities. From living in and around Mayan sites, local residents claim to be part of Mayan culture even while they recognize histories and ideologies of racial miscegenation that limit non-indigenous or *mestizo* identifications with the Maya. Gloria's pride puffs up and overflows from her body when she talks about the history of Yamul as an archaeology site and contemporary *chiclero* village. Gloria espouses a clear emotional and historical connection with the ancient Maya, our "*antepasados*," (ancestors) she calls them. She says this connection exists because she was born in Yamul, which is a special place for the Mayas, where they studied astronomy and perfected the calendar from the observatory whose restored remnants stand today. She says, "my family is *Petenero* and that also makes me love and respect my culture."

Many town residents suggest Gloria and her husband were active *huecheros* (looters). However, Gloria explains she acquired the pieces left behind by

professional looters who thought they had little value.²⁷ Gloria is certainly one of the wealthier individuals in the village who has had the relative luxury of holding onto pieces. Since Gloria knew the practice of extracting and possessing Mayan pieces was illegal during this time, she light-heartedly explained how she put artifacts in plastic bags and then hide them in a water tunnel. She worried that the archaeologists or large-scale looters would tell the authorities about her pieces and she would be sent to prison. She never imagined she would have a museum.

With genuine admiration and identification with the “Mayan ancestors,” Gloria talks about buying antiquities from unemployed and underemployed *xate* and *chicle* workers and sometimes acquiring them for free. She accumulated so many antiquities that they could no longer be easily hidden on her property – in cabinets, buried in bags, bobbing in cisterns. Gloria did not know what to do with her pieces. In 1995 an American Masters student of Museumology working in Yamul learned of Gloria’s collection. Sofia advised Gloria that she register her collection with the Institute of Archaeology and History. This idea resonated with her incipient desires to create a museum with the pieces she had, but she did not know who she could trust to help her. Over the course of two months, the Master’s student helped Gloria legally register 95 pieces. The *Chiclero* Museum opened on December 9th of 1995. After that, people from the village of Yamul brought Gloria pieces to build her collection to what it is today. Today the *Chiclero* Museum houses 533 registered pieces and is the second largest collection in Petén outside of the museum at the nearby World Heritage site of Tikal.

Yamultecos, like Gloria, learn about the Classic-era Mayan history of Yamul as school children through multiple community festivals, and documentary film screenings held periodically throughout the year. Community certified tour guides in Yamul have received introductory archaeological knowledge about the site from archaeologists working in Tikal. This knowledge combines, for many, with personal histories of laboring in archaeology. For these tour guides, and many people in Yamul who live among Classic-Era Mayan structures, the archaeological sites are part of their childhood, like my first “tour guides,” and sources of relatively well-paid, esteemed, albeit seasonal, sources of employment.

For many Yamultecos, a lifetime of living, working, and studying the archaeological sites around them produces a strong identification with the Mayan landscapes and history around them. One community tour guide, Gabriel, who has not worked in excavations, but is a passionate consumer of regional archaeological knowledge, wears an inch long stone pendant on a string around his neck at all times. I asked him about the necklace. He explained that he found it in the forest, discarded by looters who sought pricier items. That day he started wearing it, explaining that it connected him to his culture, his ancestors, and that he feels that it gives him a sense of power. Not too long ago, Gabriel continued, he lost the

²⁷ The vernacular term for looter, *huechero*, is a Hispanicized Q’eqch’i work *hueche* that means armadillo, an animal burrows in the ground and is hunted for food by Maya Biosphere residents.

necklace in the forest when he was on a trek with some tourists on a trip to Mirador, not knowing where in the 35-mile route he lost it. Miraculously, no, *fatefully*, he corrected, he sat down to take a much-needed break on a subsequent trip, and there lay the necklace, properly returned to its latest, modern-day owner. As a self-identified *mestizo* of shared Mayan and Hispanic ancestry, Gabriel's necklace encapsulates many of the interweaving dynamics of racial, cultural, and place-based identifications with Mayan antiquities that locals articulate in everyday life.

Excavating Northern Guatemala's Archaeology Industry

Figure 5.2 Archaeological sites in the Maya Biosphere



Source: Author

The name of the village of Yamul reflects its modern history as both a chewing gum resin (*chicle*) extraction camp, like Juanita, and a Classic-era Mayan civilization once populated by tens of thousands of people. The present-day village of Yamul is home to approximately 1,200 people and is literally built within the archaeological site. Archaeological excavation began in the nascent *chiclero* village of Yamul in 1916 when Sylvanus Morley began investigations. When Morley's team arrived, the village was named *Bambonal* for the bamboo reeds found in the seasonal watering hole. Prior to *Bambonal*, Mexican *chicleros* called the village San Leandro. Both names were short lived. During his first dig, Morley re-baptized Yamul. Nearly every villager today can easily recount this story of Yamul's christening as an archaeological site. My Yamul born neighbor, Manuel, explained to me, "The inscriptions that are found there [on the stelae] were made by our

ancestors.” For locals, the histories of Mayan antiquity and modern day chicle extraction seamlessly meld in village folklore and foundational narratives.

Juanita’s archaeological history differs from Yamul’s because the village is not an archaeological site in its own right, but serves as a launching point for treks to the archaeological sites of Mirador, Tintal, and Nakbé among others. In the early 1970s archaeologists began arriving in Juanita and hiring *chicleros* and leafy palm collectors (*xateros*) who lived and worked in the forest to guide them to archaeological sites. In 1987, Dr. David Larson began work at Nakbé, one of the oldest Pre-Classic sites in the Petén lowlands neighboring Mirador, and a year later the Guatemalan government invited Dr. Larson to study and excavate the whole region. In 1996, Larson founded the Foundation for Archaeological and Research Studies (FARES), a non-profit entity financing a wide breadth of archaeological, environmental, and social science research in the region. In 2002, Dr. Larson established the Mirador Basin project and has been working in the region since. The Mirador Basin project works at least one season a year, from around July to August, and for more months if funding is available.

Many *chicleros* claim they not only served as guides to the first archaeologists working in the region, but they actually showed archaeologists that preceded Dr. Larson the location of sites they knew of. As such, several *chicleros* resent claims that archaeologists “discovered” archaeological sites of great importance like Mirador and Nakbé. David, my neighbor and landlord in Juanita, tells of such a trip when he led archaeologists to Mirador for the first time. David first travelled to the place now called Mirador as an *arriero* (muleteer) working in the *chicle* trade. He was in charge of transporting chicle and labor supplies by mule to and from Juanita and *chicle* camps in the forests north of the village. He came to Juanita in the mid 1960s recruited out of Coban to work for the Gomez family, a family historically known as chicle sub-contractors, and today, as leaders in the community concessions process.

Chicleros like Luis knew of Mirador not as an archaeological site, but as a *chiclero* camp called Juleque, where he worked as a foreman in October of 1968. *Arrieros* were waiting for the latest batch of *chicle* to cool before taking it back the near 30 miles to Juanita by foot. They had two days to burn time. The foreman on the job, Pedro Martinez, told David he knew of a place where there were beautiful rolling hills where they could kill some time. David explains how he and Pedro climbed to the top of *Danta*, Mirador’s highest pyramid, hacking away at the bush, getting filthy, until they reached the very top and soaked in the majestic views:

“No one had gone up there, no one, no one, no one. We cut down the *monte* (brush) at the top, cleaned it up and sat down to eat lunch. We were like tourists that day. We looked in all directions and it was so pretty and clear, it was a beautiful view. I said, “It is so beautiful, we have to name it.” “Should we name it *Vista Hermosa* or *Alta Mira*?” asked Pedro. “Let’s name it *Mirador*

(lookout),” I said. “*Alta Mira* means there is only one view you can see. This is a *Mirador* because you can see in all directions.”

From that day forward in his reports detailing the volume of *chicle* collected and transported from camp to Juanita, David said he no longer referred to the place as *El Juleque*. “I put we are in the campamento Mirador.”

A few years later, a Guatemalan archaeologist nicknamed “*Choro del Humo*” (Smokestack) began looting the region surrounding Mirador. This larger than life figure in local folklore reportedly looted more than 26 pounds of jade from the site now known as Wakná. Smokestack was a man of many vices and locals and archaeologists presently working on the Mirador Basin project speculate his immense wealth was squandered on liquor and prostitutes in the urban area of San Benito. David described Smokestack not as a looter working under the guise of the professional title of archaeologist, but as a tourist. “That is when the first tourists came in the mid 1970s. They (archaeologists and/or looters) came and asked who knew where the sites were, and people said David Ochoa. That is how I came to take the first groups of tourists to the sites.”

The veracity of village folklore and personal histories like Luis’ is not the focus of my analysis. Part of this story probably reflects what Don David thinks I wanted to hear as a researcher. Don Luis most likely was not the first person to use the name Mirador to refer to the site. However, Don Luis was certainly working in and around archaeological sites including Mirador long before North American archaeologists like David Larson and his celebrity supporters set foot in the jungles of Petén. He and other workers in the *chicle* industry knew of the existence and locations of archaeological sites among the *chico zapote* trees they worked, and often used the ancient remains of buildings, watering holes, quarries and other man-made landscape features built by the ancient Maya to survive in the forest while extracting products like *chicle*, *xate*, and allspice.

In interviews and informal settings, locals, like David, begrudgingly related how knowledge about archaeological sites at the personal or village level was misrepresented as the achievements and discoveries of archaeologists. As Julio from Juanita explained, “The archaeologists didn’t discover any of the sites, not one. It was all people from here.” Julio is not alone in his sentiments. Long-term Juanita resident Oscar tells a similar story of robbed intellectual recognition. He was excavating on the Mirador Basin project in 2008 and discovered a pictograph of the symbol of Kan, Mirador’s longest dynastic ruler. Since then, tourism campaigns have taken in the title to situate Mirador within a broader geography of ancient sites, the “Kan Kingdom.” Oscar complained to me that he received no recognition for this discovery, and instead, a Mirador Basin archaeologist snatched the limelight. He explained, “They are big people, that is why they get the fame.”

These stories of stolen knowledge and failed recognition reveal one facet of a multipronged critique many local residents espouse that describe archaeological

knowledge production as a means of reproducing inequality between locals and outsiders. While the sub-field of critical archaeology carefully engages with the ethics and power relations of the practice (Meskell and Pels, 2005; Nicholas and Hollowell, 2007), and probes the fine line between looter and scientist (Hollowell, 2006; Matsuda, 2005), in Petén, residents describe their experiences with the archaeology industry in unethical terms. They frame local histories of archaeological excavation in terms of unequal relations of power and wealth differentiating chicle workers from North American archaeologists, and tourists from around the globe.

Failing to recognize the contributions of chicleros who first took archaeologists to these sites is just one aspect of the unequal terms of exchange between chicleros and archaeologists. At best, locals charge archaeologists with failing to recognize locals' contributions to the production of regional archaeological knowledge. At worst, locals suggest foreign and elite national archaeologists stole vernacular knowledge through these unequal exchanges. Either way you frame it, many locals suggest archaeological "discovery" in the region has reproduced relations of inequality through these power-laden exchanges of knowledge production.

Looting Fever (Fiebre de Saqueo)

These village critiques suggest that artifacts are not simply material objects of world heritage, but commodities inserted into geographically and historically specific relations of capitalist production, poverty, and inequality. Walking through the forest in route to Mirador today, tourists constantly see the remains of ancient Mayan structures dotting the forest landscape. Tunnels hastily dug into the side of once symmetrical buildings evidence the legacy of the *huechería* (looting) in the Petén. The 1970s – 1980s are infamously known in Petén as the time of the "*fiebre de saqueo*," looting fever, or the heyday of Mayan artifact looting in Petén.

Figure 5.3: "Looted" Archaeological Structure



Source: Author

Experienced *huercheros* (looters) came to Yamul and taught the people the illicit trade. During the apogee of the looting era, Yamul residents describe small airplanes landing on the old *chicle* airstrips hauling antiquities out and supplies in. When the *fiebre* started in Yamul, looters came from other parts of Petén, Coban, and Guatemala City bringing four-wheel drive all terrain vehicles. The ATVs allowed looting teams to go deep into the forest, taking in food supplies to support larger scale looting operations. Looting teams used, and still use, the geography and infrastructure *chicle* and *xate* camps for eating and sleeping, spending days deep in the forest.

Not coincidentally, the *saqueo* was the moment that *chicle* markets dried up, and 60 years of the *chiclería* came to end. In Yamul, the end of the *chiclería* in the late 1970s also coincided with the end of over twenty years of seasonal excavating work. Until archaeological work began again in 1985, many unemployed excavation laborers turned to looting to make ends meet. During the *fiebre de saqueo*, many poor *chicleros* and *xateros* who found seasonal work in archaeological excavation turned to *huerchería* as a means of providing for their families. Many people in Yamul participated in the *huerchería* out of economic necessity. Yamul-born resident Fermina explains, “They didn’t have any money to support their families. People who sell antiquities do it because they have no other way to make money, and there are buyers.”

Contemporary practices of illegal excavation articulate with longer regional histories of capitalist primary resource extraction. More often than not, the labor relations of looting look a lot like *chicle* production. This works primarily in two ways. A brazen *huechero* (looter) with enough money and connections can fund a dig himself, hiring a few hands or working independently. With merchandise in hand, the *huechero* can go straight to the red light district of San Benito where he meets with regional antiquities brokers. More frequently, however, laborers from the village work for a *contractista*, a looting contractor. Sometimes, the contractor fronts the money for the expedition and buys the merchandise from the looters, discounting expenses for food and equipment. Other times, the contractor works as a minor intermediary who takes the objects to the buyer in the central area of San Benito and Flores (Maury 1999 p. 21). An interviewee explained to me that at the time of this research (2010-2012) there were an estimated five or six regional brokers working in the Petén who have national and international connections to black markets of antiquities. These regional brokers interact with some 25 contractors (*contractistas*) who oversee an estimated 200 to 300 *huecheros* working in Petén.

It is easy to condone looting, and the looter easily becomes the scapegoat of an international trade that destroys precious archaeological knowledge and cultural heritage. But, many looters from villages like Juanita or Yamul who work in forest extractive industries loot out of sheer necessity. Poverty in these villages is deep and enduring with 40% of the population living on less than \$2 a day.

Mayan artifacts hold important cultural and historical significance for many locals, but they are simultaneously recognized and valued as a source of immense commercial wealth in an impoverished place. Many local residents who live in extreme poverty and have few other economic opportunities view antiquities as resources, like *chicle* and *xate*, at their disposal in the struggle for survival.

The lack of other options for under or unemployed residents combines with the widely shared view that antiquity conservationists are often hypocritical and act in their best personal interest. Along these lines, discourses of antiquities conservation frequently fall on deaf ears because the bearers of conservation messages are often enmeshed in ongoing histories of illegal excavation and trade. In 1978, the Guatemalan Congress ratified the 1972 UNESCO Convention for the Protection of Cultural and Natural World Heritage, and in 1997, passed strict penalties for looting in the Law for Protection of National Cultural patrimony.²⁸

Despite laws prohibiting the excavation and sale of Mayan antiquities, police officers, state bureaucrats, custom agents, and airport security staff have long been implicated in the trafficking of Mayan antiquities in the Petén (Paredes Maury 1999). “Secure” rooms for confiscated artifacts at the airport became boutiques for black market regional brokers to shop, buy, or exchange a piece of inferior quality (Paredes Maury 1999, p. 25). During the civil war, the state agency FYDEP²⁹ used the army to systemically loot Petén’s archaeological sites. FYDEP, alongside private looting expeditions, used Juanita and Yamul’s airstrips from the end of the 1960s up until the late 1980s to transport supplies and antiquities to and from large scale looting operations in the jungle and Petén’s central urban area (Maury 1999, p. 23). A tour guide who has lived and worked in northern Petén for almost thirty years describes army-led excavations by previous Presidents like General Carlos Osorio at sites near Tikal called El Zotz and Rio Azul. “I know it happened,” he said, “because I watched. He [General Osario] loves Mayan art and has one of the greatest collections of jade in Guatemala.”

Since the war’s official end, army-led excavations have been largely replaced by scientific and conservation projects. Protection of Mayan sites and antiquities are key objectives of conservation organizations working in the Maya Biosphere, yet, to many villagers, excavating Mayan artifacts for conservation purposes does not seem any more equitable than excavating for purposes of personally enriching military officials. Members of the global elite based in Guatemala City and the Global North benefit in both cases. Many residents argue that when antiquities are preserved as cultural heritage by governmental organizations, they end up in private collections or in museums far from the Petén where locals cannot afford to visit or economically benefit from their exhibition. Under the rubric of

²⁸ The 1997 law states those involved in excavations or investigations without the permission of the Ministry of Culture is subject to imprisonment of six to nine years and a fine of 100,000 to 1,000,000 *quetzales* (US\$ 12,500 to 125,000).

²⁹ FYDEP stands for *Fomento y Desarrollo del Petén*, Strengthening and Development of Petén.

conservation and tourism development, antiquities are transported to laboratories and museums far from the Petén for the enjoyment and benefit of wealthy academics and tourists.

The Novella Museum in Guatemala City housing Mirador artifacts exemplifies this critique. The Novella family is part of Guatemala's oligarchy and its members are long-term supporters of Mirador archaeological research. The family made the majority of its fortune in the cement industry and has staggering company headquarters located in Guatemala City. The immense compound houses two small museums heralding the civilizing achievements of the cement industry and the ancient Mayan of the northern lowlands of Petén. Named for the company's founder, the Carlos F. Novella museum is a private institution that "registers, conserves, promotes, and diffuses the patrimony of the cement industry in Guatemala and the cultural and natural patrimony of the Mayan civilization of the Mirador Basin" (Cementos Progresos, n.d.). Yet, accessing the museums is not as easy as it would appear, even for a *gringa*. Visitors are stopped at the security entrance to the compound. If wearing arbitrarily defined appropriate attire, an escort eventually meets tourists and takes them to a museum located past office spaces, several dried up gravel digs, and an onsite Catholic Church. Nearly a century ago, the place looked less like company headquarters than a small village where employees lived with their families and sent their kids to school.

In 2001, the museum's exhibition of Mayan pieces from the Mirador site opened with an agreement with the Ministry of Culture for one year. Following this first year, the Ministry of Culture and the Novella family renewed the contract for another three years. Successive three-year agreements have kept the pieces in the private, yet purportedly open to the public, museum. The museum's curator explains that Enrique Novella Alvarado, son of the company's founder, personally involved himself in selecting the museum's collection. In the past, Don Novella had a direct working relationship with the Mirador Basin archaeological lab also located in Guatemala City. He would visit the lab to see what pieces were available for exhibition and makes a wish list of Mayan artifacts for his museum. After the lab's staff agree which pieces to loan, each artifact is catalogued, photographed, illustrated and then presented to the Institute of Archaeology and History to be entered into the national antiquities database. The Novella museum opened in 1999 at the centennial anniversary of the cement company's founding. Two years later in 2001, the Mirador exhibit opened with 84 pieces. In 2006, another 40 pieces were added to the collection for a total of 124 antiquities on display in 2010.

Not every wealthy family in Guatemala has unfettered access to the Mirador Basin's project. The Novellas are long-term supporters of the project and shape Dr. David Larson's vision of Mirador tourism development as a conservation strategy for the northern Guatemalan lowlands. Dr. Larson reached out to the Novella family at the end of the 1990s and invited several of its members to Mirador for the first time. Like many first time visitors, the Novellas were enchanted with Mirador and its grandeur, and started brainstorming with Larson ways to preserve the

exceptional site at national and global scales. From these initial conversations, a national project promoting Mirador conservation emerged that ultimately led to Mirador's nomination as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2002 and the controversial expansion of the Mirador's park boundaries discussed in Chapter Four. Wife and husband Nini Novella and Francoise Berger subsequently founded the Association of Friends of the Natural and Cultural Patrimony of Guatemala (APANAC) to support conservation at Mirador and other areas of the Maya Biosphere Reserve.

The Novellas aren't the only wealthy family in Guatemala possessing Mayan antiquities. A private collection in the wealthy tourism mecca and world heritage site of Antigua, Guatemala includes 17 vases from the Mirador region depicting the history of Mirador's ruling Kan Dynasty. In Flores, Petén, where the wealthiest families in the state live, the exact number of unregistered pieces held is unknown, but rumored to be extensive (Maury, 1999). Village residents and state bureaucrats critically note the hypocrisy of conservation efforts, pointing out that Guatemala's lead representative to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee displays privately owned Mayan antiquities in her own home.

Contradictions in practices of artifact conservation, such as those mentioned here, engender vociferous local level critiques of so-called global heritage conservation. Rather than truly belonging to the entirety of humanity as global heritage, reserve residents argue that Mayan artifacts end up in private museum collections far from their interred homes for the benefit of wealthy nationals and international tourists. Locals also rightly acknowledge that scientific discoveries in the region have made archaeologists like Dr. Larson famous and further their prestigious academic careers, fetching salaries unimaginable to the average *Petenero*.

One such *Petenero*, José from Juanita, told me about his personal stash of antiquities including jade necklaces and intact polychrome ceramics hidden underground deep in the forest. Unlike many people from the village, he is on great terms with lead archaeologist Dr. Larson. When I asked why he didn't give the pieces to the Mirador Basin Project for conservation he explained, "I am not going to give my pieces to David for his business; he has done well enough." José explained that he planned to keep them and give them to his kids one day. Even Mayan antiquities discovered in the name of science economically benefit academics, while, at best, locals can hope to earn a few months of salary working as excavators.

Do national and foreign elites supporting Mirador research and artifact conservation aim to perpetuate inequality between themselves and local residents through their conservation practices? Absolutely not. Nevertheless, this is how many residents from Juanita and Yamul understand the legal process of antiquities excavation and collection. Everything in the jungle is precious and priceless, yet the majority of villagers from Juanita, Yamul, and surrounding villages live in

destitute poverty without access to clean drinking water, sanitation, or power. Military officials and archaeologists who have excavated Mayan artifacts keep them in private or public collections far from where local residents can socially or economically benefit from them. More often than not, these “legal” channels of mobility and traffic of Mayan antiquities have made generals and politicians wealthy and archaeologists famous. Yet poverty endures at the site where these objects were found, and in the homes of the men and women who unearthed them. In essence, artifact excavation and conservation by government and scientific authorities through legal channels has reproduced inequality in economic wealth and political power between poor *Peteneros* and their elite compatriots in Guatemalan City.

Producing Global Heritage

“Guatemala is a Mayan nation. We are all Maya. That is what it is all about. We have to have a program to preserve the park.... but at the same time preserve the jungle.... Not just for Guatemala, but for the whole western hemisphere and Latin America”

---- Guatemalan Vice-President Raphael Espada in the CNN Special, *Mirador: the Forgotten City*.

There are currently three World Heritage sites in Guatemala. The colonial capital of Antigua and the Mayan ruins of Quirigua are Cultural World Heritage sites, designated in 1979 and 1981 respectively. Tikal, Guatemala’s most famous archaeology site and a national park, received designation in 1979 as both Cultural and Natural World Heritage. Tikal is one of 29 places worldwide to receive dual designation and is the model for Mirador’s proposed designation (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d. a).

In November of 2002, a national task force sent an updated list of 16 sites to UNESCO’s World Heritage Organization to be considered for World Heritage designation. Mirador was at the top of that list. Towards the end of May 2004, UNESCO representatives undertook a preliminary mission to Guatemala to provide the Ministry of Culture preparatory assistance with the nomination process. The mission focused on Mirador, but kept the larger region in view by exploring potential links with other proposed sites and possibilities of extending already existing borders of world heritage sites like nearby Tikal. The mission aspired to “promote an integral reading for the future of Mayan World Heritage in Guatemala, and by extension throughout Central America” (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d. b). The UNESCO website explains that Mirador meets World Heritage criteria because it “presents exceptional natural and cultural characteristics. The site was at the heart of the development of Mesoamerica during the pre-classic and classic periods corresponding to the development of many social practices and the emergence of ruling elite in Maya society” (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d. b).

The Global Heritage Fund (GHF) and the Foundation for Mayan Cultural and Natural Heritage (Pacunam) are non-profit organizations collaborating with the Mirador Basin Project to obtain World Heritage designation for the site and the surrounding forests, and protect the region through tourism development.³⁰ Both organizations explicitly state that their organizations' missions hinge on achieving this goal. The GHF's primary conservation goals for Mirador include aiding the Guatemalan government in this task and "establishing permanent protection for the Mirador Basin" (Global Heritage Fund, n.d.). "Mirador's priceless ancient cities and monuments of the Pre-Classic Maya period" a GHF document states, "are the most spectacular and unique in Central America, and as such it is Guatemala's leading nomination for UNESCO World Heritage Designation" (Global Heritage Fund, n.d. e).

In 2010, Pacunam directly took up the idea of UNESCO designation once again. Following a stalled nomination process initiated in 2002, Pacunam brought together state officials, archaeologists and other experts and stakeholders in 2010 to revitalize the process and revamp the tentative list with the aim of gaining World Heritage status for Mirador as Guatemala's first nominee. While Mirador has yet to officially receive world heritage designation, individuals, organizations, and states employ discourses of world heritage to stake claim to land and resources in Petén. They are tapping into what Di Giovine calls "the heritage-scape" (2008).

Advocates of Mirador's world heritage status leverage the idea that global heritage objectively exists out there in the world, and its preservation supersedes the needs of any geographically or historically specific group. As the UNESCO World Heritage Organization's website explains, "World Heritage sites belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located" (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, n.d. b). Advocates use the language of global patrimony and world heritage to define Mirador as a place before it has actually received UNESCO's designation.

Since 2006, the GHF and Pacunam have collaborated on a gift-matching program whereby the GHF matches any donations by Pacunam's members, totaling at least \$6 million dollars. Alongside the Foundation for the Development of Guatemala (FUNDESA), Pacunam is executing community tourism projects in Juanita and Yamul funded by the World Bank and is engaging in a Mirador public awareness campaign, calling the region the "Kingdom Kan" after Mirador's longest dynastic ruler. Representatives from the wealthiest companies in the world operating in Guatemala and across Central America serve on PACUNAM's board. These include Walmart Central America, *Cementos Progreso*, Pantaleon Group, Telgua, Blue Oil, Citi, Samsung, *Banco Industrial*, Claro, and Disagro among others. Like the GHF, Pacunam keeps UNESCO designation firmly in view, describing the organization in the slogan "United to Protect a World Legend" ("*Unidos para proteger un legado mundial*") (Pacunam, n.d. a).

³⁰ PACUNAM is the Spanish acronym for *Fundación Patrimonio Cultural y Natural Maya*.

Pacunam's leadership works tirelessly to integrate the complex amalgam of efforts led by various branches of the Guatemalan Government, the U.S. Department of Interior, and national and international non-profits to achieve the goal of receiving UNESCO World Heritage designation for Mirador. Mirador's advocates are not limited to wealthy business leaders, but Hollywood celebrities have jumped on board too. Mel Gibson calls Mirador "the greatest archaeological find in the western Hemisphere" (Pacunam, n.d. a). He would certainly agree with the assertion of Pacunam's leadership that "Mirador is a cultural legacy for humanity; protection and international recognition must be guaranteed" (personal interview, July 28, 2010).

Despite the good intentions of these organizations and their collaborators, I argue that the process of symbolically and materially creating a world heritage site destabilizes existing spatialized, territorialized notions of cultural patrimony in and around the Mirador's site. Defining the Mirador Basin as world heritage challenges local *Petenero*, and *chiclero*-based claims to Mayan heritage, archaeological sites, and antiquities by usurping geographically and historically situated claims to sites and antiquities with the ancient archaeological evidence of global patrimony. Through the creation of global heritage, the rightful claims to the forest and its sites are rescaled from the local-level, to the nation, and to the globe. Rather than disempowering the state, the process of world heritage designation has strengthened national and global elite claims to territory and forest resources in ways that undermine the legitimacy of local claims.

This section's opening epithet captures the power of global heritage conservation and the broader heritage industry to constitute subjects and enable claims to resources and territory. The quote comes from a 2009 CNN special "Mirador: the Forgotten City." In the special the former Guatemalan vice-president suggests, "Guatemala is a Mayan nation. We are all Maya." Yet, not everyone in Guatemala identifies as Maya or experiences racial discrimination and poverty. Many indigenous Guatemalan would suggest the nation is hardly Mayan. In fact, the Guatemalan state has been a bastion of white privilege since its inception as a Spanish colony (Grandin, 2000; McCreery, 1994; Smith, 1990). In a multicultural misstep, the vice president nullifies racial difference and its attendant privileges or penalties by claiming we are Mayan. But in claiming, "Guatemala is a Mayan nation," his next assertion seems logical. If "we" are "all Maya" then indeed, the region's resources need to be preserved "*not just for Guatemala, but for the whole western hemisphere and Latin America*" (emphasis added).

Members of Pacunam, Mel Gibson, Mirador archaeologists, Guatemalan presidents and World Bank program officers collectively constitute a new subject position through their advocacy for global heritage – the global citizen. Individuals collectively advocating for global heritage appear to speak on the behalf of the world as global citizens who are the natural custodians of world heritage sites and their resources. Conservation advocates campaigning for "global heritage"

implicitly speak for a global public, a collective humanity, whose territorial claims know no boundaries or periods. But, individuals, not abstract and ambiguous “global citizens,” stand to benefit from Mirador’s world heritage designation and tourism development. The participation of the nation’s and the world’s wealthiest individuals in Mirador conservation leads many locals to suspect these interests stem from purposes that are not entirely altruistic.

As Mirador artifacts are moved to private museums in Guatemala City, local residents identify “world heritage” designation and Mirador conservation as a form of resource and territorial dispossession. Before becoming national patrimony and world heritage, many *chicleros* found and sold these pieces alongside other forest products. Now illegal, this practice has been replaced by the enclosure of the archaeological sites and their forest home as “world heritage” protection. In other words, discourses and practices of world heritage conservation differentiate global citizens from looters. From the perspective of many villages, global heritage conservation is a new chapter in a much longer history of the power-laden practices differentiating “legal” and “illegal” practices of excavation, sale, and ownership of antiquities.

Through the discursive creation of world heritage, we see how “global citizens” depoliticize the territorial practices of tourism development and conservation, and rescale proprietary stakes to the forest from the local level, to the nation, and to the globe. World heritage designation enables a collection of Guatemalan and North American elites to supersede competing definitions of place articulated by Juanita and Yamul residents by “scaling-up” claims to resources, territory and history to the realm of the global, a collective community of humanity. This practice of scaling up heritage from the geographically and historically situated claims of Juanita and Yamul residents to the abstract, ahistorical idea of the “global” in global heritage employs a popular and pernicious understanding of scale as a set of nested hierarchies (Marston et. al, 2005). An understanding of scale as nested hierarchies is captured by the metaphor of concentric circles whereby “the local” is encompassed and encircled by the national, and then the global. In this framing, all “local” spatial relations are encapsulated or enveloped by larger scales. This popular understanding of scale is at work in global heritage discourses that “scale-up” heritage claims from the local to the global where the global presumably encompasses, includes, and speaks for the local.

This critical framing of global heritage conservation runs counter to the influential arguments of Appiah (2006) on cosmopolitanism in his influential monograph *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*. In its most basic sense, cosmopolitanism is the philosophy that humanity is all part of a singular, shared community. Like many readings of cosmopolitanism, for Appiah, this human community is made up of citizens of the world. This is a similar subject-citizen, the global citizen, that I argue global heritage conservation in the Maya Biosphere produces. Despite the progressive underpinnings of the concept, whenever reference to “community” is made, regardless if in reference to the village of Juanita

with 350 residents or the nine billion residents of the world, without careful reflection on the socio-spatial power relations constituting the so-called community, a risk exists of employing an hermetically sealed understanding of the collective, what I referred to in Chapter Three as a black-box understanding of place and community. This black-box understanding obscures, ignores and often renders invisible internal power relations and extra-local connections and practices that define place.

Appiah attempts to navigate this contradiction of speaking for a global “we” in cosmopolitan theory in his framing of “partial cosmopolitanism.” This partial cosmopolitanism celebrates difference, realizes the importance of vernacular cultures in defining identity, and tries to reconcile a celebration and tolerance for difference in a framework of shared global sameness. Rather than critically analyzing the power relations and forms of erasure many versions of cosmopolitanism entails, for Appiah, this looks more like learning how to mitigate cultural conflict, accepting differences, and rethinking the relationship between facts and values. Most troubling is Appiah’s arguments in the chapter “Whose Culture Is It, Anyway?” His relativistic arguments lead him to the conclusion that although many museums around the world have large artifact collections that were looted and stolen from colonial territories, those items should not necessarily be returned to their places of origin. He argues that since artifacts are of potential value to all human beings, as part of a shared human history, they belong to all of humanity. As contributions to world culture, they should be made available to those who benefit from experiencing them, and put into the trusteeship of humanity.

Appiah wants to challenge the argument most famously articulated by Samuel Huntington (1996) that globalization will lead to a “clash of civilizations.” I am sympathetic to that effort, but see striking similarities in the way in which Appiah and Huntington conceive of place, spatial relations, and the “global.” Despite centuries of colonialism and multiple eras of globalization characterizing the human condition, both Appiah and Huntington assume *a priori* that the current moment is about “strangers” or “civilizations” coming into contact for the first time. This understanding runs counter to an understanding of the social production of space that emphasizes the socio-spatial production of difference through shared histories of contact, interaction, and often, domination and exploitation. An aspatial reading of cosmopolitanism like Appiah’s underpins notions of global heritage at Mirador where North American archaeologists, wealthy national elite, and neighboring residents have long histories of excavating antiquities in the Maya Biosphere, sometimes “legally,” sometimes not. These are not “strangers,” but individuals and communities with long histories of interactions, whose identities and sense of place have been shaped by moments of collaboration, and in other moments, by struggle and contestation.

This critique of cosmopolitan theory vis-à-vis Appiah or the empirical dynamics of global heritage production at Mirador does not signify, however, a

celebration of the local as the site of cultural authenticity or legitimacy. Nor am I saying that the local is a site of antithetical resistance to the global as articulated by Escobar's (2001) reference to a "defense of place." Rather, I aim to foreground how ideas about global heritage are socially produced and argue that the process of conserving global heritage, as it unfolds in the Maya Biosphere, is actually a practice of *creating* global heritage, and this social production of space and history is inherently territorial.

In contrast to scale understood as nested hierarchies, I conceive of scale in terms of the scope of socio-spatial relations, connections, and disconnections articulating people and ecologies across space. These trans-local associations can be thought of in terms of uneven, materially grounded networks of relations (and the lack there of) across space. In contrast to theories of the network society (Castells, 2011), or actor-network theories (Latour, 2005), these ties do not unfold upon a smooth globe without a physical geography, reflecting a "flat assemblage" of relations (Escobar 2007). As Leitner and Miller (2007) argue, attempts to replace the concept of scale with an alternative "flat ontologies" (Marston et. al, 2005) in geography runs the risk of marginalizing an analysis of agency in the social construction of scale, and the material practices under which ideas of scale shape life and are reproduced in return. They similarly caution that recent geographical debates over the epistemology and ontology of scale in the mid 2000s were largely abstract and theoretical, and argue for a grounding of conceptual arguments about the spatiality of social life in the study of practices and social relations (Leitner & Miller 2007, p. 123).

In the everyday territorial politics of Maya Biosphere tourism development and heritage conservation, scale conceived of nested hierarchies is underpinning North American archaeologists and Guatemalan elite claims, not only to antiquities, but also to space in the form of archaeological sites and protected parks. My concern here, in contrast to these theoretical debates, is not to argue whether or not *geographers* should use the concept of scale because of the difficulty of extricating it from its nested hierarchies, but to show how the concept of scale as nested hierarchies, as it manifests in global heritage discourses and conservation practices, mediates power relations and the allocation of resources in the forests of northern Guatemala.

The understanding of trans-local processes and globalization I work with employs the metaphor of trans-local networks connecting places, not along smooth lines, but along variegated topographical contours that account for infrastructure, physical landscapes, power inequalities, and power relations producing the materiality of space. In this effort, I draw on Cindi Katz's (2001) notion of contour lines and topographies to think about spatial connections and relationships that define social relations and practices of capitalist development. This concept resonates with Gillian Hart's understanding of neo-liberal globalization as comprised of interconnected trajectories of social spatial change (2004). Both

these analytical metaphors for describing spatial relations run counter to notions of space conceived of as a hierarchy of scale *or* a flat ontology of scale.

The Chiclero Museum in the Mayan World

The territorial practice of *global heritage production* at Mirador has profound material consequences in the form of allocation of aid to promote sustainable development in the Maya Biosphere. At the same time the impressive collection and local history of the *Chiclero* Museum is threatened by poverty and insecurity, Guatemalan development practitioners are building a new museum complex, not in Yamul, but outside the urban tourism hub of Flores. The Museum of the Mayan World, *Museo del Mundo Maya*, has long been a dream of regional development practitioners. With the funding of the Program for Petén's Sustainable Development (PdP) (see Chapter Two), program architects are realizing their vision. The World Bank loan-funded-project, the PDP, provided national development practitioners with US\$ 1.1 million to create a museum. The museum is under construction at the Mayan site *Tayasal* neighboring the tourism and economic hub of Flores.

Despite the blockbuster budget, the museum currently has no archaeological pieces to exhibit. A representative of the PDP program in Petén explained that current efforts are underway to return to Petén artifacts excavated in the region, but exhibited in Guatemala City. From there, private sector investors and development aid workers like him will build tourism infrastructure around the museum and the nearby *Tayasal* archaeology site. In this aim, the Development Council for Petén has approved a "*punto resolutivo*" soliciting the Ministry of Culture and Sports to return 37 Mayan pieces found in diverse regional sites the society of Petén, "*la sociedad Petenera*." While still under negotiation, current Ministry bureaucrats favor the move, which is also supported by a student and faculty-led movement based out of the University Center of Petén (Centro Universitario de Petén, CUDEP), San Carlos University of Guatemala.

Between a rumor and a joke, regional development practitioners mention that discussions are also underway to purchase the *Chiclero* Museum's collection. For those who know the region well, this move seems logical. The privately and locally owed collection in Yamul has hundreds of exquisite pieces held in a derelict building with no security save a rusty pad lock and screens for windows. Gloria complains about the museum's lack of security. The collection is worth a small fortune on the black market and is invaluable in terms of its historic and cultural worth, and is secured by a rusty old pad lock and chain. Gloria rightly laments the decrepit state of the museum in the humid heat of lowland Petén. She knows she doesn't have the proper facilities to store the pieces currently stacked upon one another in large plastic bins of varying sizes. There are a few pieces now gone from the collection that Gloria herself has sold. She explained she didn't want the pieces

to leave Yamul, yet admits during the toughest of times she has had to part with a few pieces to stay afloat.

The future of the *Chiclero* Museum is uncertain. Gloria feels pressure to sell her pieces to the Mayan World Museum or another buyer because of financial pressures and the lack of institutional support to physically secure and preserve the collection. She also feels an immense sense of injustice that millions of dollars are being invested in Petén in the name of tourism development, conservation, and poverty alleviation, yet not one cent will trickle down to her museum in Yamul. Several development practitioners operating under the umbrella of the World Bank's sustainable development program identify Yamul and its residents as targeted beneficiaries of their efforts, yet the opportunity to build tourism infrastructure around the *Chiclero* Museum and further integrate local, grassroots efforts into the project is passing them by. As development practitioners invest millions of borrowed World Bank dollars into Petén's tourism sector, the *Chiclero* Museum is passed over in favor of building new facilities in the urban area of Flores. The funding disparities between these two museums and the implications for local ownership and management of Mayan antiquities illustrate how tourism development projects in the name of global heritage conservation are subtly enabling multiple forms of territoriality and resource control.

Conclusion

This chapter has relayed how antiquities, looting, and excavation have a history in Petén that long precedes the post-war tourism boom. Most of these Mayan artifacts ended up in private collections within Guatemala or sold on the world market. Today, tourism development is commercializing antiquities in new ways. For many proponents of Mirador global heritage designation, obtaining UNESCO recognition and tourism development are inseparable pillars of sustainable development. These proponents include the wealthiest families in Guatemala who administer and financially support the World Bank's Program for Petén's Sustainable Development, efforts to designate Mirador as world heritage, and private sector foundations promoting tourism development and conservation efforts across the Maya Biosphere Reserve. These individuals represent some of Guatemala's wealthiest and most influential families and companies.

Despite Mirador advocates promising they "aren't going to put a Walmart in," to many residents neighboring Mirador, the interest of the nation's and the world's wealthiest individuals and companies in northern Petén sounds like another chapter in a longer history of primary resource and wealth extraction from the region. Like previous colonial and imperialistic interventions, the extraction of Mayan antiquities and their integration into capitalist enterprises serves as a basis for identity production. Through Mirador advocacy, elite conservationists fashion themselves as "global citizens," while local residents challenge hegemonic blood based discourses of Mayan identity by articulating territory-based identifications based on affective ties to landscape and local history (see Chapter Three).

In theory, the idea of conserving, storing, and displaying Mayan antiquities in museums for locals and visitors alike is an attractive option for equitably safeguarding and sharing Mayan antiquities. In practice, however, the political and economic lives of artifacts are embedded in complex histories of dispossession and systems of exploitation. Many archaeologists, anthropologists, and activists suggest that public education is the solution to looting problems like those plaguing the sites of the Petén lowlands. For example, Brian Fagan argues, “if there is a solution to the looting problem, it is changing public attitudes toward the collecting of antiquities” (1993, p.6). Despite awareness of systemic corruption and the commercialization of antiquities across scales, these education-based solutions relegate the “looting problem” to the local scale and individualize “looters” as poor residents of the Maya Biosphere. Yet, the absence of educational opportunities in these villages is the symptom of the systemic poverty and inequality that continues to define Guatemalan society today. The root cause of antiquities looting by locals is also the root cause of remedial education in the villages – institutionalized poverty and racialized systemic inequalities that pervade Guatemalan society. Rather than addressing these carcinogenic causes of human deprivation and suffering that contributed to 36 years of revolutionary war, contemporary efforts to conserve “world heritage” run the risk of reproducing these inequalities in the name of benefiting humanity.

Chapter 6

COUNTERINSURGENCY ECO-TOURISM

In early March of 2010, in the humid, blistering heat of the lowland Guatemalan summer sun, several armed vehicles carrying dozens of military officials arrived in the remote village of Limon in the northern forests of the Maya Biosphere Reserve. Limon once held a community forest concession in this protected area, but the state revoked the concession because of alleged illegal land sales by concessionaires to narco-traffickers and cattle ranchers. That afternoon, in a flashback to the civil war days of counterinsurgency warfare, soldiers burned what remained of the village to the ground. Within weeks the army repurposed the former village's school as a military outpost, one of dozens recently created throughout the Maya Biosphere Reserve. President Álvaro Colom flew to the site by helicopter and addressed the crowd of soldiers, state officials, conservationists, press members, and residents from neighboring villages. He explained to them that Limon was emblematic of efforts to "recover governability" in the Maya Biosphere under the auspices of the Four Jaguar eco-tourism project that he had identified as one of six administrative priorities during his inaugural address (personal observation, July 27th, 2010).

This chapter suggests that eco-tourism plays a vital, yet underappreciated, role in the militarization of conservation. Eco-tourism provides state officials, development practitioners, and investors the opportunity to turn conservation spaces into profitable destinations. As such, eco-tourism has become inseparable from ideas about economic sustainability in conservation efforts that insist you have to "sell nature to save it" (McAfee, 1999). Furthermore, tourism in conservation spaces adds a dimension of security that frequently translates into practices of militarization. Eco-tourism calls for the securitization of space to make it safe not only for fauna and flora, but for people as well. And not just any type of people -- eco-tourism projects come ideologically loaded with normative ideas about what types of individuals (tourists, not landless peasants) and what types of practices (trekking, not farming) should populate eco-tourism spaces (MacCannell, 1992). Making eco-tourism ideals a reality has entailed practices of racialized land dispossession of "hosts" who do not fit the ideal mold (Davis and Monk 2011). Across the globe, practices of accumulation by dispossession serve as a precursor to eco-tourism development and the construction of paradisiac places (Duffy, 2012; Harvey, 2003; Ojeda, 2012). The northern forests of Guatemala are no exception.

In Guatemala, however, tourism-enabled practices of racialized dispossession interweave with the living history of Guatemala's civil war to produce a unique modality of violence I identify as "counterinsurgency eco-tourism." Counterinsurgency eco-tourism is formed through the articulation of tourism's logic of spatial dispossession and colonization with Guatemala's civil-war history of counterinsurgency. While the Guatemalan case is historically and

geographically contingent, counterinsurgency eco-tourism as a modality of violence is not. It can be found in many places throughout the Global South where eco-tourism development projects unfold on the historical terrain and memory-laden landscapes of civil war violence and past counterinsurgency warfare. I detail four manifestations of counterinsurgency eco-tourism: 1) the repurposing of the Guatemalan army to enforce conservation law, 2) the creation of the environmental “predator” discourse, 3) the eviction of peasants from protected areas, and 4) the construction of military outposts. These practices illustrate that eco-tourism development has become a mechanism by which the Guatemalan state is remilitarizing the northern forests in ways that revive and repurpose tactics of counterinsurgency warfare of the past.

This chapter is ethnographically grounded in Guatemala; however, the modality of violence I describe as counterinsurgency eco-tourism resonates with many other conservation and eco-tourism spaces, like UNESCO Biospheres and World Heritage sites, with shared histories of Cold War, civil war, or counterinsurgency aggression.

Violent Geographies of Eco-Tourism and Conservation

Violent Tourism Geographies

There is a long history of violence underpinning the creation of natural, paradisiac tourism spaces. In early 20th century African colonial geographies, the creation of wilderness preserves served to spatially control wildlife and people by fixing recalcitrant pastoral subjects in place, laying the geographical groundwork for African safaris and game parks today (Brooks, 2005; Neumann, 2004). Decades earlier, the US federal and state governments forcibly relocated Native Americans onto reservations and built national parks on their ancestral lands (Cronon, 1996). These violent histories that produced today’s protected parks are reappearing in practices of eco-tourism development and biodiversity conservation in the neo-liberal present (Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe 2008). Neo-liberalism entails new forms of commodifying nature that interweave profit-earning incentives into the design of conservation strategies (Antipode, 2010), and eco-tourism figures prominently in these strategies (Duffy, 2012; Sullivan, 2006).

This chapter contributes to the literature on violent tourism geographies by analyzing how counterinsurgency violence and militarization creates and maintains eco-tourism discourse, subjects, and spaces. This literature details the violent expressions of land dispossession that have characterized the creation of eco-tourism destinations. Brockington (2002) uses the term “fortress conservation” to describe this dynamic at play in Tanzania whereby local residents are forcibly evicted and dislocated from their homes as states and global conservation organizations create people-less parks. Duffy (2010) calls this a “nature crime” that entails the use of state-force and violence against the world’s

most marginalized populations in the name of conservation, practices that often produce “conservation refugees” when displaced people have no where to go (Dowie, 2009).

Counterinsurgency is a modality of violence that is distinct from, albeit related to, practices of land dispossession and other forms of accumulation by dispossession this literature theorizes. Counterinsurgency campaigns identify and target an internal enemy within the body politic, the insurgent, and the enemy of state, who is often an enemy within (Galula, 1964). As a rationale of violence, counterinsurgency necessitates a clearly defined enemy, even if there isn't one, which leads to imagined, exaggerated fears about enemy threats to state hegemony (Kelly et al. 2010). During Guatemala's civil war, the army's target of counterinsurgency tactics was the “subversive,” the *subversivo* (Schirmer, 1998). Despite the war's official end in 1996, the phantom menace of the *subversive* survives in the memories of soldiers and officers of the Guatemalan army that was redesigned as a counterinsurgency force in the early 1980s by U.S. Green Berets (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 1983; Schirmer, 1998).

Counterinsurgency eco-tourism in Guatemala has its own enemy within, the “predator” of natural and cultural resources that threatens the economic foundation of eco-tourism, tourist safety, and therefore, national security. Counterinsurgency eco-tourism further translates into the militarization of space in the form of newly constructed military checkpoints and the creation of the army's “Green Battalion” (*Batallón Verde*). The growing literature on violent tourism geographies has yet to examine the role of counterinsurgency as a distinct mode of violence underpinning and enabling eco-tourism development. This chapter addresses this lacuna through ethnographic analysis of counterinsurgency eco-tourism in Guatemala's Maya Biosphere Reserve.

The Militarization of Conservation and Counterinsurgency Forests

This chapter further contributes to the political ecology literature on counterinsurgency forests that has yet to fully address the role eco-tourism plays in militarizing forests and conservation spaces. Early research in political ecology argued that national governments use conservation efforts as a means of increasing territorial sovereignty and control over people and resources in protected areas (Neumann, 1998; Peluso, 1993; Peet & Watts, 2002). Building on these insights, political ecologists have unearthed the historical roles cold war counterinsurgency operations played in turning jungles on the fringe of state power into governable forests stocked with natural resources to service the state (Peluso & Vandergeest, 2011; Sioh, 1998). In Latin America and Asia, during the 1950s – 1970s, military states used counterinsurgency tactics to colonize forests, exercise contested sovereignty, and tame the jungle by ridding it of revolutionary insurgents (Peluso and Vandergeest, 2011; Ybarra, 2012).

In the neo-liberal present, eco-tourism ideologies and practices overlay these jungles-turned-forests that were once war zones of counterinsurgency violence. Whereas communist subversion enabled past projects of counterinsurgency warfare in lawless jungles, today, tourism development plays a critical role in justifying the militarization of conservation space. In places like Guatemala, where conservation discourses and practices are infused with histories of militarization and counterinsurgency (Ybarra, 2012), eco-tourism brings two dynamics to bear that translate conservation discourse into military action. First, eco-tourism provides the financial justification to expend precious state and military resources to enforce conservation law. Following the logic of sustainable development, conservation necessitates eco-tourism as a twin project to make nature pay its own way, especially in the cash strapped national economies of the Global South (Mowforth & Munt, 2008).

This strategy has been immensely successful in many places, like Tikal national park in Petén, Guatemala. Not too far south from Limon is the world-famous archaeology and nature park of Tikal, a UNESCO-recognized world heritage site. Tikal receives approximately 200,000 visitors a year and generates \$200 million annually, making the site a driver of Petén's economy as a whole (GDT, 2010). To the north of Tikal in the Maya Biosphere, there are hundreds of archaeological sites in old-growth forests home to charismatic species, like jaguars and scarlet macaws, yet, these sites receive only a few thousand tourists annually, if they are lucky (GDT, 2010). It is easy to understand why state officials and national elites have identified the Maya Biosphere as an untapped tourism gold mine. President Colom publicly explained the economic potential of the reserve, "The Four Jaguar [Maya Biosphere] region is 21,000 sq. km. of wealth. If you could do an evaluation of what these 21,000 sq. km. are worth, all Petén's residents would be millionaires because there is your bank, there is your wealth in the Maya Biosphere" (personal observation, February 4th, 2011).

Eco-tourism adds a further dimension of security in conservation space. Tourism necessitates security to convince the coveted global tourist that the wild, natural experiences they desire are not too wild, and not too dangerous, and the only guerillas that might be found are animals and not revolutionaries. For nearly fifteen years, the Maya Biosphere was a park on paper only, and illegal grazing of cattle, settlement by landless peasants, and narco-trafficking continued almost unabated (Allen 2012). It wasn't until eco-tourism development efforts came to the fore of President Colom's agenda that action was taken to "recover governability" (*recuperar la gobernabilidad*) in the Maya Biosphere. "Recovering governability" is the vernacular term, a euphemism of sorts, that the Guatemalan state and its allies use for gaining territorial control and exercising sovereignty in the Maya Biosphere that includes expelling cattle, landless peasants, narco-traffickers, poachers, and other environmental and cultural "predators."

This latest effort to "recover governability" under the auspice of eco-tourism development is the latest installment in a much longer history of territorial struggle

in Petén. As Petén scholars have long argued, Petén and its northern forests have always been politically contested spaces (Schwartz, 1990), where neither the Spanish colonial crown nor the post-colonial state have enjoyed hegemonic territorial rule (Grandia, 2012). This research has examined Petén's history and cultural legacy of *chicle* production (a resin used to make chewing gum) (Schwartz 1990), how North American ideologies about nature underpin conservation practice in the Maya Biosphere (Sundberg, 1999), the demography, patterns of migration, and agrarian practices of settlers in the west of the biosphere (Carr, 2008; Suter, 2012; Ybarra et. al, 2012), and how practices of conservation revive counterinsurgency histories and discourses (Ybarra, 2012) and reproduce legacies of land dispossession among Mayan Q'eqch'i (Grandia, 2012). In conversation, this paper explicitly focuses on the catalytic role eco-tourism development plays in translating militarized conservation discourses into violent practices of counterinsurgency based on the ability to mobilize capital to back eco-tourism projects and the additional dimension of security the industry authorizes.

Post-war narco-trafficking, cattle ranching, and deforestation

Today's geographies of counterinsurgency eco-tourism are firmly rooted in state territorial projects of the past that aimed to tame Petén as Guatemala's wild frontier. The four practices of counterinsurgency eco-tourism discussed here revive and repurpose the logic and tactics of previous state projects of demographic colonization (1950s – 1980s) and counterinsurgency warfare (1970s -1990s) (see chapter one). Spanish colonists, post-colonial nation-builders, and military counter-insurgency officers have described the northern forests of Petén that now comprise the Maya Biosphere as the frontier of civilization and state sovereignty. For Mayan and poor ladino peasants during the armed conflict, the frontier imaginary painted pictures of open land for settlement in the context of enduring violence and landlessness in the rest of the country.

The Post-war period brought landless settlers in hope of a better life to the Maya Biosphere, but also individuals engaged in organized crime. As insurgent guerrillas disarmed and came out of hiding, several state officials and military officers disempowered by the peace process went underground, creating what analysts refer to as a "shadow state" of "hidden powers" (Peacock, 2003). This shadow state retains and exercises power in formal state channels, in addition to running crime syndicates trafficking drugs, people, poached animals, and even Mayan antiquities. Cattle ranching in the Maya Biosphere is linked to these parallel powers in Petén. Cattle ranching and narco-trafficking are symbiotic commercial enterprises because cartels can easily launder drug money through the capital-intensive cattle industry requiring little labor and large tracts of land. Furthermore, traffickers clear isolated swaths of forests to create pasture that doubles as remote airstrips opportunely located near the Mexican border in the Maya Biosphere. Proximity to Mexico combined with little police presence in the reserve, the area's isolation and inaccessibility by road, and the growing power of

Mexican cartels to make the Maya Biosphere not only a conservation space, but a narco-space as well.

While cattle ranching is prohibited everywhere in the reserve, not all cattle owners are narcos. There are legal and illegally residing residents in the protected area who own cattle for dairy, meat consumption, or to raise and sell when in a financial pinch. Villagers might clear small tracts of forest to create pasture and corrals, but the large-scale deforestation associated with cattle ranching in the reserve falls on the shoulders of narco-trafficking cattle ranchers. These individuals are called *finqueros* (farmers) in politically sensitive situations, or *narco-ganaderos* (narco-cowboys) in familiar company.

As this ongoing history of illegal settlement by peasants and narco-traffickers suggests, during the first decade of the Maya Biosphere's existence, the state Council on National Protected Areas (CONAP) lacked the means, and perhaps the political will, to enforce freshly inked conservation laws. Cattle ranchers, narco-traffickers, and illegal loggers undertook their destructive practices of capital accumulation unabated. By the time President Colom entered office in 2008 with a vision for turning the Maya Biosphere into the world's largest archaeological and eco-tourism park, the status quo was no longer an option.

Counterinsurgency Eco-Tourism Development

Shortly after President Colom took office in late July of 2008, state officials, private sector investors, and members of the press gathered at the National Palace of Culture to witness the unveiling of his much anticipated eco-tourism project, Four Jaguar. At the opening ceremony an elaborate promotional video foretold the future of the Maya Biosphere in 2023 when an estimated 12 million people would visit the region annually by small-gauge train, visiting dozens of archaeological sites and a new university specializing in biodiversity and Mayan Studies. From this starry-eyed tourism imaginary, the video turns to the issue of security:

“The creation and position of Four Jaguar at the world level demands the coordination of efforts at all levels. All of the parks that make it up are free of invaders, and traffickers of people, drugs, and animals....[T]he rule of law prevails. There is judicial and administrative justice for land-owners and the state.”³¹

³¹ “La creacion y poscionamiento a nivel mundial de los cuatro balam demanda cordinados esfuezos a todo niveles. Todos los parques que lo conforman estan libres de invasores, traficante de illegals, drogas y animals. Petén ya no es mas un lugar de arbitradidades ...el imperio de la ley prevalece. El catastro ha identificado todas las fincas y predios. Hay seguridad juridica y administrativo para los propietarios y el estado.”

To bring this tourism/security vision to fruition, Colom created a Special Presidential Commission in May of 2008. Following two years of the program floundering in Guatemalan City, the Executive Director of a Petén non-profit publically requested Colom to relocate the program's headquarters to the state. The President publicly agreed to the demand in an event held in Petén's capital in February of 2011 when he ceremoniously identified Governor Alvarez as Project Coordinator. Colom hired a capable and dynamic project liaison that helped restructure Four Jaguar's governing body. Twenty-four high-ranking individuals in Petén working across public, non-governmental, and military sectors came together at the end of August of 2011 to form the Four Jaguar Regional Technical Committee. From September of 2010 to February 2011, the Technical Committee defined short and long-term strategic objectives in the Maya Biosphere in a series of meetings held in Petén and Guatemala City.

The geographical relocation of the project's administration coincided with the rebirth of Four Jaguar as a project focused first and foremost on "recovering governability" in the Maya Biosphere. A few years earlier, many members of the Four Jaguar Technical Committee, alongside other Petén-based state officials, military officers, and conservationists, began to craft a new strategic approach to halt the hitherto unchecked expansion of deforestation and the pastoral frontier in the Maya Biosphere. While these Maya Biosphere stakeholders agreed upon the need to "recover governability" in the region, their conservation and law enforcement efforts were largely uncoordinated, disparate, and piecemeal.

In contrast, the Four Jaguar eco-tourism project provided the coordinating mechanism across actors in multiple sectors to turn conservation rhetoric into practice. The Technical committee proposed short-term goals centered on five strategic axes of action: 1) Consolidation of Governability, 2) Conservation of Natural and Cultural Resources, 3) Valorization and Management of Natural and Cultural Resources, 4) Strengthening Citizen Participation and 5) Infrastructure Development.

The member organizations of Four Jaguar Technical committee prioritized and operationalized the first program objective in the form of the four practices of counterinsurgency eco-tourism the remainder of this chapter details. These actions are largely funded by multiple branches of the Guatemalan government, as well as funds from a \$30 million dollar loan from the Inter-American Development Bank promoting Petén's sustainable development (IADB, 2006). International conservation organizations managing British and United States international aid funds contributed smaller sums of financial support, but played constitutive roles in delineating the Four Jaguar program's priorities and plan of action. The foot soldiers enlisted in the fight to "consolidate governability" in the Maya Biosphere are the aptly named "Green Battalion."

Repurposing the Army: The Creation of the Green Battalion

“The Maya Biosphere is World Heritage: Let’s Protect It”

----Petén’s First Army Brigade Calendar, 2010

On the walls of a popular diner in one of the Maya Biosphere villages hangs Petén’s First Infantry Brigade’s calendar faithfully turned to the current month. Each month describes different yet interrelated objectives of Petén’s army that include reestablishing citizen security defending the Guatemalan-Belize border, fighting narco-trafficking, and recovering governability in the Maya Biosphere Reserve. As this section’s epithet indicates, the army describes the Maya Biosphere as “world heritage” that needs to be protected. Protect from whom and what? The army’s calendar lists a whole host of threats: agrarian pressures, African palm plantations, cattle ranching, narco-trafficking, illegal extraction of wood, hunting, fishing, and illegal immigrants. The calendar sums up that “[they] are all components of the degradation of the Reserve.”

This seemingly banal calendar, produced and distributed by the thousands, alludes to the dramatic repurposing of the military’s post-war project. At the war’s end in 1996, the military needed a new mandate and mission following nearly four decades of fighting internal enemies at all cost.³² USAID officials foresaw the military’s impending transformation in its *raison d’être*. A 1995 declassified USAID document explains that “if as expected, a Peace Accord is signed soon, the military (as the most powerful institution in the region) will be under intensified pressure to justify its size and presence in the Petén, it is likely to present forest protection as one such justification” (USAID, 1995, p. 23). The conservation turn in Petén during the peace process provided the opportune moment for the state to redefine the military’s role as protector of cultural and natural resources. From a counterinsurgency machine focused on snuffing and burning out guerilla insurgents hiding in the forests, the military has self-identified as a type of global citizen, protecting world heritage against environmental and cultural predators, many of whom are impoverished local residents.

Under the auspices of the Four Jaguar project, and in sync with the army’s post-war mission, Vice-President Espada inaugurated the Green Battalion in October of 2010 in a small village in the Laguna del Tigre National Park in the Maya Biosphere. Laguna del Tigre Park spans 716,083 acres and is part of the Ramsar International Convention on Wetlands. The conservation community poignantly describes the park as a lawless region, where deforestation, cattle-ranching and illegal settlement flourish unchecked with impunity (WCS, 2012). That afternoon, the Vice-President addressed a civilian crowd of over 200 to commemorate the creation of the Green Battalion. Facing the Vice-President, the Governor, and military leaders, stood 250 soldiers in formation, dressed in fatigues, with painted

³² The Peace Accords mandated a 40% reduction in the size of the Guatemalan military and reduced its roles to border protection (Jonas, 2000).

guerilla green faces. Armed with AK-47s, sniper rifles, and grenade launchers, the soldiers patiently listened to a series of state and military officials publically introducing their mission. The Vice-President explained that the green faces of the Green Battalion symbolize the specialty of their task, which is to “protect against the depredation of the Laguna del Tigre in the Maya Biosphere” (personal observation, November 5th, 2010). In a similarly spectacular ceremony in Guatemala City in front of the Palace of National Culture, President Colom introduced the Green Battalion to the nation and explained that the special forces are formed of six military detachments to focus specifically on “recuperating in its totality the protected areas in the north of Petén” (Prensa Libre, 2010a) and stopping the “depredation of natural resources, especially Mayan ruins” (Molina, 2010).

The newly established Green Battalion has amplified, transformed and legitimized the military’s territorial presence and surveillance of the region. The Green Battalion partners with other armed forces, such as the Air Force, National Civil Police, and the Council on National Protected Areas, to carry out what are called “high impact operations” that include physically evicting residents identified as cultural and environmental “predators” from villages like Limon.

Environmental and Cultural Predators: Post-war enemies of state

At the Green Battalion inauguration, an Air Force Colonel pithily boiled down the dynamics of narco-trafficking in this western region of the Maya Biosphere Reserve. He explained: “There is a subsistence economy, [but] there are some bad Guatemalans who have large, significant extensions of land they have ... bought from *campesinos* (peasants) like you.” He surveyed the crowd of local residents from surrounding villages, and continued, “People who burn the forests and construct large corrals. This is not a subsistence economy. This is an usurpation of the Guatemalan territory.” He blamed the origin of this problem on “some bad people from a neighboring country,” referencing the Zeta cartel from Mexico. “They bring weapons,” he explained, “and build airstrips and buy the needy inhabitants living in a subsistence economy to move drugs, black market merchandise, and people across borders.”³³

Petén’s governor, the following speaker that afternoon, reminded the observers of the inauspicious beginnings of the noble mission to “recover” the Laguna del Tigre Park. We stood that inaugural day in Santa Amelia, the governor

³³ “Hay una economía de sobrevivencia....pero hay Guatemaltecos malos quienes tienen extensiones grandes de tierra que ellos usurparon y compraron campesinos como ustedes... en lo cual se quemaron el bosque y se hacen grandes extensiones de portera. Esto no es una economía de sobrevivencia, esto es una usurpación del territorio Guatemalteco. A eso se agarra una problemática de gente mala de país vecino quienes traen armamento y construyen pistas de aterrizaje, compran a los pobladores pobres de la región en una economía de sobrevivencia para mover drogas, cegar mercancías, y transportar gente al cruzar la frontera.”

explained, where in late January 2009 a group purporting to represent dozens of surrounding communities kidnapped two state workers from the Council on National Protected Areas and demanded the right to farm the land the state claimed they illegally occupied. The rebels' cause was quickly ended with a violent response from the military, imprisonment of the kidnappers, and the expulsion of the accused squatters. The governor explained that since then, "President Colom decided that the region is an integral part of the Guatemalan territory, and citizens that were sadly manipulated and financed by organized crime were no longer going to depredate nature."

State efforts to recover governability in the Maya Biosphere began with a strategic focus on cattle ranching in protected nuclear zones. In the name of ecotourism development and the Four Jaguar project, President Colom initiated a "Zero Cattle Policy" aimed at removing all head of cattle illegally grazing in Laguna de Tigre Park from January to September of 2009. The newly inaugurated Green Battalion implemented the effective program; more than 12,000 cattle were removed either voluntarily or by slaughter (State of the Maya Biosphere Reserve Project, 2010). Over the course of 18 months, the Green Battalion and its collaborators claim to have regained 118,000 hectares of usurped national park lands from narco-cowboys and their community allies (Escobar, 2010).

During the civil war, the Guatemalan military's genocidal counterinsurgency campaign sought to "remove the water from the fish" by eliminating potential civil support bases of revolutionary forces (Schirmer, 1998). Today, lingering traces of this ideology underpin actions to "recover governability" in the Maya Biosphere Reserve. The "predator" (*depredador*) of cultural and environmental resources today strongly resembles the state's enemy during the civil war (1960-1996), the guerilla insurgent and its civilian support base. As civil war battlefields became post-war parks, enemies of the state have shape shifted from Marxist insurgents to environmental and cultural predators. Ybarra (2012) uses the term "narco-peasant" to explore how landless indigenous Q'eqchi' in the Maya Biosphere are painted as suspect populations, akin to civil war days. I focus on the broader category of environmental and cultural "predator" to capture the diversity of illicit activities attributed to landless peasants that justify their eviction from ecotourism and conservation spaces. The all-encompassing character of the predator melds narco-traffickers, antiquities looters, poachers, and poor peasants into one, and justifies their equal treatment and punishment. In other words, leveling the community purportedly corrupted by and supporting narco-traffickers eerily resembles earlier wartime tactics of destroying entire communities suspect of being guerilla supporters.

The peasant "predator" is not the only culprit allegedly found in bed with *narco-ganaderos*. In interviews, residents confided that they knew state officials who were involved in illegal land sales to narco-traffickers underpinning Limon's downfall. The purpose here is not to investigate these accusations with the aim of connecting state officials to illegal land sales in the Maya Biosphere, or poor

peasants with narco-trafficking cattle ranchers. Rather, the point is to complicate the simple story about the environmental and cultural predator, and show that from the perspective of locals, many military and political figures also shape shift into the untrustworthy enemy.

I take very seriously the trafficking activities destroying the environment and livelihoods in the region. The trafficking of people, drugs, trees, animals, and antiquities in the Maya Biosphere threatens not only the forests and fauna, but the people who live in the protected area as well. Many individuals associated with Four Jaguar and other sustainable development efforts risk their lives daily to confront the cartels and their allies in the Guatemalan military, state, and police forces, and indeed many have made the ultimate sacrifice with their lives. My concern is with the shape this war is taking, and the ways in which landless peasants are once again painted as suspect populations, discursively identified with narco-traffickers as “predators,” and then violently evicted from the reserve.

Furthermore, the discursive subject position of “predator” individualizes lawlessness and blames peasants for insecurity and deforestation in the Maya Biosphere Reserve. Poor, landless, and frequently indigenous peasants become the familiar scapegoat responsible for environmental destruction and violence in Petén, while socially high-ranking connections to cattle ranching, organized crime, and trafficking are sidelined. The face, figure, and narrative of the predator deters political critique away from the institutionalized, transnational forces structurally producing regional insecurity, poverty, lawlessness, and ultimately, environmental degradation. Peasants illegally residing in the Maya Biosphere are ethnically diverse, but were similarly drawn to the protected area in search of land. Some settlers were Mayan Q’eqchi’ peasants with long and enduring histories of land dispossession (Grandia, 2012). Other peasants are *ladinos*, meaning non-indigenous or *mestizo* (mixed Hispanic and indigenous ancestry), but are poor just the same, and came in search of land with their own experiences of poverty, social exclusion, and wartime violence.

At the same time the Colom administration retooled the military’s mandate and policing practices in the name of conservation and eco-tourism, the president renewed a controversial 25-year oil concession to the French company Perenco operating within Laguna del Tigre Park (El Periódico, 2010). Many journalists and activists quickly pointed out the contradictions built into Colom’s brand of environmental conservation and sustainable development (Palacios, 2010). Defending his decision, President Colom stated that the greatest threat to Laguna del Tigre is not petroleum extraction, but “cattle, humans and animals” alike (Prensa Libre, 2010b). He did not mention that the company PERENCO donated \$3 million to the Guatemalan government to help establish the Green Battalion (El Periódico, 2010). In public slips of tongues where cattle represent either humans or animals, we can see the ways that blame for environmental depredation is placed equally at the feet of narco-trafficking cowboys who purportedly manipulate or corrupt so-called simple-minded peasants as their necessary workforce. A

colonel of Petén's First Infantry Army Brigade explained to me in an interview, "many times it is difficult to distinguish the narco-traffickers from the communities." So, in practice, it appears the two get lumped together. However, cattle aren't the only ones getting kicked out by the Green Battalion. Entire communities are being evicted.

Peasant Evictions from Protected Areas

Landless peasants displaced by poverty, acute land inequality and wartime violence founded the humble forest village of Limon in the 1970s. In 1994, CONAP awarded Limon a community forest concession as part of a decade-long process of creating community forest concessions in the Maya Biosphere. The Limon concession was short lived. In May of 2009, Limon became the third community concession of twelve originally established to be revoked. The official story justifying the cancelation of Limon's concession and the eviction of its residents is similar to the story told in Laguna del Tigre. Residents allegedly sold land illegally to wealthy outsiders from the south that initiated a deforestation process to put pasture in for money-laundering cattle ranching and the construction of airstrips for narco-trafficking.

In late January of 2010, a ruling came down from the municipal court of Petén convicting residents of narco-activity and against the environment. The judge ordered the immediate eviction, removal, and apprehension of the people illegally occupying the Limon forest concession. The court set the expulsion date as March 3rd, 2010, at 10:00 am sharp. Authorities assert there were just two original concessionaire families living in Limon when the Green Battalion arrived to destroy the remnants of this once promising village of environmental stewards. The army loaded the remaining dozen people and their few possessions into the back of trucks and transported them out of the reserve. Sweeping through the village in circular fashion, the forty soldiers burned Limon's built structures to the ground (Contreras & Escobar, 2010). In the coming weeks, the army subsequently set up a military checkpoint where a school once stood. A former resident decried, "They burned down our houses and the sacks of corn we had, without explanation. We are not cattle ranchers, but agriculturalists" (Contreras & Escobar, 2010).

The burning of the village, the forced eviction of its residents, and subsequent installment of a military detachment eerily evoke the living ghosts of Guatemala's civil war by illustrating how state tactics of counterinsurgency warfare are being repurposed in the post-war present in the name of conservation and tourism development. Previous to the fiery destruction of Limon, several smaller operations in May and August of 2009 "recovered" nearly a dozen illegal ranches nearby. Military and other state forces destroyed barbwire fences, unearthed corral posts, and destroyed ranches built to provide cowboys and their stock relief from the unforgiving Petén heat. The state boasts that at least 2,400 acres were recovered in Limon before the final eviction (State of the Maya Biosphere Reserve Project, 2010).

Limon is far from the only community eviction in the Maya Biosphere. In 2008, 30 families of Paxbán were evicted. In October of 2011, 15 families living in El Pescadito were expelled. In August of the same year, some 300 people were forcibly removed from the village called Nueva Esperanza in Sierra del Lacandon region (Prensa Libre 2011). The army subsequently established a military detachment in this last village, ironically named “New Hope” to prevent the communitarians for returning for the third time. Daniel Pascual from the Committee of Campesino Unity critically reflected on the New Hope eviction, “We know of these and other cases in Petén where there is narco-trafficking, illegal migration, and other illicit activities, but it is sad that this is used as an argument for evicting residents. The agrarian problem continues without being resolved, and the government responds with persecution, eviction, and arresting community leaders without posing a solution” (Valdez & Escobar, 2011).

Surveillance in the Biosphere: Military Checkpoints

On July 30th 2010, President Colom arrived by helicopter to the military outpost called the Limon Center of Joint Operation.³⁴ On the humblest of white washed stages President Colom explained, “we are in Limon because it is emblematic, it is an example of governability.” He went on to explain that bad administration of the former community forest concession had resulted in many concessionaires illegally selling the land to narco-cowboys. He boasted that the state had recuperated over 30,000 hectares of usurped land and felled forest in and around Limon. For Colom, the Four Jaguar project is part of the Mayan prophesy of 2012, which is not about a catastrophic end, but a new beginning. Tourism, he explained, is the fulcrum of this new dawning era. At the President’s symbolic appearance at the Limon military checkpoint, he announced the construction of six more military detachments in the Maya Biosphere (personal observation).

Figure 6.1: Maya Biosphere Boundary



Source: Author

³⁴ These Centers of Joint Operation are called *Centros de Operaciones Conjuntos* (COC) in Spanish.

One of the first outposts built, called the San Miguel Joint Operation Center, stands at the border between the reserve's buffer zone and multiple-use zone. San Miguel is the name of a small fledgling village that was once home to a community forest concession. In 1994, San Miguel was the first community concession created with the trial size of 10,000 hectares. The concession was revoked in 1999 because of alleged illegal land sales to Guatemalans living outside of the Maya Biosphere. Today, approaching the San Miguel Center for Joint Operation feels like arriving at a heavily militarized checkpoint.

Uniformed soldiers with machine guns sit in sandbag shrouded, tin-roof structures serving as back up to the five or so armed individuals staffing the gate, stopping vehicles as they enter and leave the Maya Biosphere. An oxidized sign announces the traveler's arrival to the multiple-use zone of the Maya Biosphere and displays the long list of prohibited activities from this point on. Where a planter bed of flowers might lie, rocks spell out the word "Kaibiles," the name of Guatemalan Special Forces responsible for many of the civil war's genocidal counterinsurgency campaigns (Archdiocese of Guatemala, 1999). Stern faced army and state officials stop each vehicle, register the driver, and search the vehicle for illicit construction materials going in, and antiquities, flora, and fauna going out. By the end of 2011, the Four Jaguar eco-tourism program celebrated the construction of twelve new Control Centers across the Maya Biosphere.

Figure 6.2: *Kaibiles* at Maya Biosphere Reserve Boundary



Source: Author

The net effect of the checkpoints is the militarization of the Maya Biosphere Reserve in the name of conservation and eco-tourism development. A colonel of the Petén's Army Brigade explained that the Centers of Joint Operation have their roots in the overlapping years of civil war conflict in the region and CONAP's early attempts to protect the newly christened Maya Biosphere Reserve. In 1993 and 1994, during the waning war years, CONAP and the army established the first checkpoint when the state began to combat "invaders," most often landless peasants and civil war refugees. The colonel explained, "The biggest risk in those days was the armed conflict and we would have to provide extra protection against delinquents (*delinquentes*)." Reflecting further back in time, he commented, "when the internal armed conflict initiated, so too, did problems with usurpers (*usurpadores*)." In this moment, the colonel illustrates how easily landless peasants, wartime insurgents, and narco-trafficking cowboys fall into the same category of state enemy.

Conclusion

Through ethnographic analysis of a president-led eco-tourism project, this chapter has argued that eco-tourism development is driving the militarization of conservation in the Maya Biosphere through practices of counterinsurgency eco-tourism. Four manifestations of counterinsurgency eco-tourism examined include the repurposing of the army to enforce conservation law, the creation of the environmental "predator" discourse, the eviction of peasants from protected areas, and the construction of military outposts. Counterinsurgency eco-tourism is a modality of violence replete with ideologies about the state's role in creating and preserving nature and the military tactics necessary to enforce conservation law as a precursor to eco-tourism development. Counterinsurgency eco-tourism has enabled the post-war Guatemalan state to repurpose the military and create the Green Battalion who staff over a dozen newly constructed military checkpoints across the Maya Biosphere.

The Green Battalion sits alongside other armed state agencies working in collaboration to evict illegally residing cattle, narco-cowboys, and their alleged civilian support base illegally living in protected areas. Once legally residing communities have been expelled as well. The army has forcibly evicted communities like Limon with conditional land tenure using tactics that resemble the scorched earth counterinsurgency campaign for failing to comply with their state-issued forest concession contracts. These tactics include using fire to raze villages, removing entire communities from the reserve, building military checkpoints where these villages once stood, and conflating peasants and long-term residents with narco-traffickers, poachers, and looters through the environmental and cultural "predator" discourse.

Conservation and eco-tourism development policy that focuses on prosecuting landless peasants as environmental "predators" to halt deforestation

sidelines unresolved issues of racialized land inequality that produce poverty, marginalization, violence, and lawlessness in the first place. As such, the predator discourse ignores clear connections between landlessness and poverty in the rest of Guatemala and deforestation in the Maya Biosphere regionally. Politicians and practitioners acknowledge that poverty drives the decisions of landless peasants to fell forests in order to eat, and yet, poverty is all-too-often individualized as a personal characteristic rather than structurally produced as part of Guatemala's long history of indigenous land dispossession and economic inequality. In other words, poverty is seen as an individual shortcoming making one easily manipulated by narco-traffickers, rather than the product of historical social injustices and the shortcomings of the peace process.

Parsing out the very distinct histories and motivations of landless peasants and cattle ranching narco-traffickers who engage in deforestation in Guatemala's protected areas would result in very different policy solutions. This might include providing secure land tenure for landless peasants who resort to living in protected areas, many of whom are Mayan, and are returned, but not resettled civil war refugees (Ybarra 2012). By ignoring the region's historical geographies in the present, the Green Battalion's policing, community evictions, and the president's Zero Cattle Policy start to resemble wartime counterinsurgency tactics of the past. While the Four Jaguar program has lost steam since Colom left office, practices of counter-insurgency eco-tourism continue in the Maya Biosphere as part subsequent President Perez Molina's "iron fist" approach to law enforcement across the country (El País, 2013).

The militarization of conservation and development practice taking place in Guatemala is not an isolated phenomenon. Guatemala's empirical and historical articulations are specific; however, they are connected to the rest of world through shared cold war, civil war, and counterinsurgency histories. Furthermore, the Maya Biosphere is ideologically and institutionally connected to over 600 UNESCO Biospheres found throughout the world that employ fundamentally similar models and ideals of land use, land tenure, and so-called green development. These interwoven spatial practices are shaping the cultural politics of contested territorial claims in conservation geographies around the world. Similarly, the Guatemalan Four Jaguar eco-tourism project is connected to tourism development projects unfolding across Central America and the Global South that are pursuing economic growth, global integration, and conservation through eco-tourism development. In spite of the best intentions of conservationists and national leaders, wartime histories of violence are being brought back to life in the present. Recognizing the tenacity of wartime histories to manifest themselves in today's sustainable development practices may help scholars and practitioners theorize and design better solutions to promote environmental conservation, economic development, and social justice simultaneously.

Chapter 7

TOURISM AND TERRITORY IN THE MAYA WORLD

Conclusion

Doña Beatriz is the only female Mirador tour guide working in Juanita. The middle-aged woman makes the sixty-mile round trip several times a month, often in flip-flops, and can easily climb unexcavated sides of the pyramids with the agility of a teenage boy. One morning, when I was buying eggs from the little shop she runs out of her two-room, stick and plaster home, she asked me, “Is it true that there are pyramids in Egypt where there are no trees, just sand? I think that is what will happen here if they put a train in to Mirador.” The train, a stalled idea of an archaeologist-turned-eco-tourism advocate, epitomizes the big development plans for the region that many residents feel threatened by.

A treeless landscape, populated by denuded pyramids, for Doña Beatriz, would signify an apocalyptic end to the village of Juanita that was founded and is still maintained through the extraction of forest resources like chewing gum resin (*chicle*), *xate* palm for floral bouquets, and allspice, among other things. In Juanita and Yamul, a little less than ten percent of people like Doña Beatriz directly benefit from the nearly 5,000 tourists who visit Mirador each year. Despite tourism’s limited economic contribution to villagers’ pockets, tourism development projects have brought big promises and problems in their wake.

There is a loosely knitted, yet coherent, contingency of individuals that share a vision of Mirador as the world’s largest archaeological and eco-tourism park in the world. This vision hinges on a shared tourism imaginary of the archaeological sites in the Maya Biosphere as “jungle shrouded cities” in a natural, pristine environment. These tourism advocates, despite their differences, describe Mirador as the next Machu Picchu: an El Dorado, a world-class tourism destination that will bring immense wealth to Petén at the same time conserves and protects the sites and the forests shrouding them. For tourism advocates, the industry’s enormous economic potential makes conservation possible. This vision is backed by nearly US\$ 40 million dollars in World Bank loans funding work to bring this tourism imaginary to fruition.

This group includes none other than Mel Gibson, the actor-turned-director responsible for blockbuster movies like *Braveheart*, *Passion of the Christ*, and, *Apocalypto*. *Apocalypto* is an anachronistic portrayal of the disintegration of the Mayan empire at the age of Spanish colonial contact. What is the moral of Gibson’s story? The ancient Mayan empire crumbled because of the war, enslavement, and savagery among the Maya themselves that prevented them from presenting a unified front against the bearded invaders from the sea. In some ways, the story reads as a parable for local fears surrounding Mirador tourism development.

Wealthy white foreigners have big aims for Mirador, a modern day *El Dorado*, while locals often disagree among themselves about how to best ensure their individual and collective benefit from development. The battle for the Mirador Basin (Chapter Four) has shown the power Maya Biosphere residents can wield when they band together, but Mirador tourism development seems to have created more conflict than solidarity at the local level.

The creation of the community forest concessions that are home to the villages Juanita and Yamul in the Maya Biosphere was no easy feat. On the contrary, it was a political battle fought for by villagers tooth and nail. It cost Juanita one of their greatest leaders and advocates, Carlos Vazquez. To benefit from forestry in the newly designated Maya Biosphere, residents formed a collective management entity, a cooperative in Juanita and a civil association in Yamul. This lofty task required an immense amount of organizing at the village level. Despite all odds, residents from Juanita, Yamul, and dozens more communities across the Maya Biosphere formed collective organizations that still exist today that sustainably harvest timber and provide a positive financial impact for their members.

The tourism imaginary of the Maya Biosphere as “jungle shrouded ancient cities” clashes with the identity and working landscapes of the forest concessions. There is little room in the Mirador tourism imaginary for the history of the chicle villages and practices of sustainable forestry. As such, dominant Mirador imaginaries implicitly define contemporary villagers as “bodies out of place” in this ancient, pristine landscape. I identify this dynamic as a territorial practice of *historical and geographical erasure* (Chapter Two). Tourism imaginaries across the world entail practices of historical and geographical erasure in selling one version of place, one particular account, as the dominant and hegemonic one. These images and discourses circulate through marketing campaigns, television documentaries and shows, magazines like the *National Geographic*, and in countless micro-instances when firms and people at the local level reproduce and reinforce the branding of a place.

Despite the global reach of this representational *tour-de-force*, in Guatemala and elsewhere, individuals and communities resist hegemonic tourism imaginaries, exploit their contradictions, and rearticulate their place based identities and claims to space in tourism practices. In Juanita and Yamul, these sticky histories relate the history of the forty-year run of the chicle extraction in the tropical lowlands in and around the Yucatan Peninsula, the *chiclería*. For many residents of Juanita and Yamul, these sticky histories include the foundational narratives of the villages as chicle camps, the *chiclería*, histories of archaeological labor, and importantly, the creation of community forest concessions. In articulating these histories, villagers engage in practices of *territory-based identity formation* that are at once affective at the same time territorial (Chapter Three). In recounting chicle histories and defending concessionaire rights in the present, local residents are staking claims to land and the right to manage forest based resources, which include Mayan artifacts, archaeological sites, and the economic wealth that circulates around them.

The struggle to obtain community forest concessions falls firmly on the unsettled terrain of the civil war. The Peace Accords and their partial implementation failed to resolve the cancerous tumor that fueled the conflict – the racialized unequal distribution of land and violent impoverishment and political exclusion of the vast majority of indigenous and poor ladino people. This disease was inherited from the colonial past and still plagues the country today following the abrupt end to Guatemala’s short lived democracy in 1954 with a CIA sponsored military coup (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 2006). Following nearly four decades of civil war that resulted in the killing and disappearance of 200,000 people, the Peace Accords declared an everlasting peace, but failed to address the root of social exclusion in the country. Given this painful history, the achievements of Maya Biosphere residents appears almost miraculous.

Someone once told me an off-color joke that gets at how civil war legacies shape the conditions for social organizing today. The joke goes, “How do you tell the difference between a Mexican pot of crabs and a Guatemalan pot of crabs? The Mexican crabs are forming a ladder to help get each other out of the pot, the Guatemalan crabs are pulling each other back down.” This joke crudely captures the scars of over three decades of civil war that included tactics of genocide, forced civilian participation in army operations, and (often falsely) turning in your neighbor at gunpoint to save your loved ones. These counterinsurgency tactics tore communities apart to prevent people from organizing in opposition to the army and military state. Today, the psychological wounds of wartime violence and destroyed community trust combine with the poverty and insecurity in the present to make social organizing extremely difficult.

Despite these odds, villagers in Juanita and Yamul formed community organizations that are still in operation some fifteen years later. But not everyone is happy with this process or feels included in its financial benefits, on the contrary. “Community” is a word best used loosely as a collectivity of people in a village with immense inequalities and unequal power relations among them. Despite thirty decades of development scholarship interrogating power relations at the local level and critiques of romantic ideals of collective organizing among indigenous and the poor (Mansuri & Rao, 2004), in conservation and development practice in the Maya Biosphere, the “community” remains an unexamined yet problematic site for development and conservation intervention.

Individuals who served as chicle middlemen contractors between harvesters and buyers were in the best position to become leaders in the community forestry process. Those who felt sidelined in the process, or were vociferously opposed to it, like Doña Beatriz, frequently found work in tourism as guides to the Mirador archaeology site. Today, divisions around collective organization among villagers are once again coming to a head. In Juanita, the cooperative holds a monopoly over timber and chicle production and is currently working to bring all Mirador expeditions starting in the village under its umbrella. It seems that if the remaining

local holdouts working in tourism do not get on board with the concessions process, they will lose their jobs, though certainly not without a fight. The concessions process is far from perfect. Nevertheless, it is a remarkable accomplishment that brings economic benefits to many, not all, residents. Concessionaries play an essential role in wildfire prevention and the protection of endangered mega fauna like jaguars from poachers.

When President Portillo declared the area around Mirador a national park for scientific and tourism purposes only, Juanita and Yamul residents lost 36% and 11% of their concessions respectively. From the perspective of concessionaries across the Biosphere, this declaration in the name of conservation and tourism development constituted an act of *land dispossession* (Chapter Four). The three-year political battle that followed over the Mirador Basin tells a story of tourism development as a form of land dispossession, but equally important, illustrates that tourism development as a mechanism of land dispossession is not a *fait accompli*. Despite the wealth and political connections of supporters of the newly delimited park, the villagers were ultimately victorious in reinstating their land rights. Today, leaders from Association of Petén's Forest Communities (ACOFOP) and the individual village concessions relate how this land battle politically solidified ACOFOP as an organization and the concessions process as a whole.

Tourism-engendered claims to territory and resources are far from ancient history. The failed creation of the Mirador Basin as a national park went hand in glove with national efforts to receive UNESCO World Heritage designation for the region. Practices of *global heritage production* are unfolding around efforts to protect and conserve Mayan artifacts and archaeological sites found throughout the Maya Biosphere Reserve (Chapter Five). This practice of *global heritage production* normatively contains territorial ambitions of protecting land and cultural objects from those who might destroy, illegally hold, or sell them. Locals eloquently and critically make connections between today's global heritage advocates who are laying claim to Mayan sites and artifacts, and the archaeologists, tourists, and military officials that precede them. For as long as people have known about the hundreds of archaeological sites in the area, the sites have been looted by military officials, self-identified archaeologists, tourists, and residents living among them.

Recent efforts to build a Mayan Museum outside the tourism hub of Flores, Petén with World Bank funding illuminates how national elites have been able to acquire, often in the form of national loans, millions of dollars to protect the region's so-called global heritage. In contrast, already existing, locally owned museums, like the *Chiclero* Museum, fall into disrepair. Locals identify global heritage as a rhetorical tool outsiders employ to stake claim to resources in and around the forests that encompass Juanita and Yamul.

Practices of conservation and tourism development in the Maya Biosphere have combined with the state's effort to combat narco-trafficking to produce a territorial dynamic I call *counterinsurgency eco-tourism* (Chapter Six). President

Alvaro Colom's tourism development project called "Four Jaguars" brought together several institutions combating narco-trafficking, working in conservation, and/or promoting tourism development in the Maya Biosphere. These stakeholders, including military officials and executive directors from international conservation organizations, identified "recovering governability" in the western Maya Biosphere and the route to Juanita as their most important objective. These ongoing efforts to establish state territorial rule in Petén's northern forests are deeply rooted in civil war histories of the infamous scorched earth counterinsurgency campaign. Counterinsurgency tactics of warfare are being repurposed in the present to implement conservation law and the Maya Biosphere is being remilitarized in the name of eco-tourism development and conservation.

Empirically, this project originated with an interest in why Mirador tourism development has created so much conflict over park boundaries, which led to questions of whose heritage is protected, how these struggles shape identity formation, and how eco-tourism relates to militarization. This led me to confront the question of whether or not tourism is simply a forum for enduring national struggles over land, wealth, and identity that fueled the civil war, or if there is something inherent to the industry that catalyzes these dynamics. While attending to the historical geographies of northern Guatemala and the civil war, I argue that there are properties and practices unique to the industry that make it a powerful, privileged, and contested site of spatial and identity transformation.

By way of introduction, I argued that the tourism industry is distinguished from other industries by two dynamics that intersect and mutually reinforce one another to fuel territorial struggle where tourism development takes place. Perhaps most importantly, non-traditional forms of tourism commodify the identity of a place and its people as the industry's products and commodities. This builds immense power into representational practices and performances in tourism that normatively define the identity of a place, its people, and by default, exclude other definitions of place and spatial belonging. Individuals and organizations like archaeologists, conservationists, and forest concessionaries compete within the arena of tourism development to define their version of history, territory-based identity, and resource claims in the present.

Tourism also plays a leading role in capitalism's colonization of space as a frontier industry that brings geographies and households previously, or partially, out of capital's reach into the global economic fold. Henri Lefebvre (1976) long ago recognized the special role tourism plays in the production of capitalism's space that includes distinguishing and differentiating rural, urban, and natural spaces through connections and processes of mutual constitution. Tourism is not alone in this sense by any means, but unlike extractive industries like mining, or manufacturing in *maquilas*, advocates identify the tourism industry in its non-traditional forms as a "green industry." This has made non-traditional forms of tourism a privileged site of international aid, state, and private sector investment in Latin America. This ideology and pursuit of sustainable development is backed up by a neo-liberal legal

and economic framework epitomized in ratification of the Central American Free Trade Agreement and the infrastructure of the Plan Puebla Panama that integrated the region by way of an international highway. While eco-tourism advocates at Mirador and elsewhere argue that when it comes to nature (and indigenous culture), you have to “sell it to save it” (McAfee 1999), folks like David Harvey (2005) suggest that the commodification of culture and identity epitomizes practices of accumulation by dispossession. Both in terms of the physical landscape and in the realm of intangible culture, non-traditional forms of tourism development are extending capitalism’s reach into previously uncharted terrain.

These twin dynamics of spatial colonization and the commodification of place and culture combine to produce what I identify as tourism’s territoriality. These properties enable and engender practices of naming and claiming space not present in other industries. These insights shed light on geographical and anthropological debates surrounding territoriality, conservation, and militarization. Following Moore (2005) and Ng’weno (2007), my research advocates for a process-based understanding of territoriality that insists, not on limiting our analytical eye to practices of the state, but on identifying the multiple, overlapping, and conflicting territorial claims uneasily overlapping in space that compete to define place. I bring these insights to bear on the study of neo-liberal capitalism by way of returning to Lefebvre’s insights on the dialectical production of state and capitalist space as an uneven project of geographical colonization. I apply Lefebvre’s understanding of the production of space, drawing closely on his insights about tourism in particular, to the post-1980s era of neo-liberal capitalism in Latin America to examine the witches’ brew of dynamics articulating at this moment to drive Latin America’s tourism revolution.

I further advocate that scholarly examinations of the ethics and practice of community participation in the management of UNESCO global heritage sites revisit the notion of scale implicit in global heritage discourse. I argue that the popular notion of scale as nested hierarchies (Marston, 2000) is at play in the concept of global heritage that allows elites from outside the area to usurp and trump nearby villagers’ claims to Mayan sites and artifacts. Conservationists of Mayan artifacts and sites need to approach these objects from a political economy perspective to identify and analyze what Lynn Meskell identifies as an archaeology industry (2005). This is not simply a call for the important work of including nearby populations into management plans of UNESCO World Heritage sites, but to understand heritage as a resource embedded in relations of economic power and inequality that have built a million dollar “Mayan Museum” in Petén’s capital, while the impressive 500 piece collection at the locally owned *Chiclero* Museum remains in an unsecure shack.

The goal of this project has been to understand the ways in which tourism development is enabling new claims and claimants to land and resources in the post-war era, not about how to do development or conservation better.

Nevertheless, I want to reflect on policy related issues by way of conclusion, which leads me to suggestions for further research in this immensely inspirational place.

There is empirical evidence emerging from the Maya Biosphere regarding land use that has critical implications for the global UNESCO Biosphere program. Like the vast majority of UNESCO biospheres, the Maya Biosphere has three types of land use: a nuclear zone where only science and tourism can take place, a multiple-use zone, where in the Guatemalan case the community concessions are found, and a buffer zone with no land use restrictions. Evidence from the Maya Biosphere clearly indicates that the conservation goals of the program are best met, not in the nuclear zone where conservation laws are the strictest, but in the multiple use zone where people live, work, and protect the forest from wildfire, illegal settlement, and poaching. Further research is needed to systematize this analysis, which potentially holds profound implications for resource poor people living in and around the world's already existing 621 biospheres and the many yet to come.

In Guatemala, contemporary practices of territoriality enabled by tourism development are reproducing enduring inequalities in land distribution, economic wealth, and political power that fueled the civil war. In the post-war era, these longstanding struggles manifest in seemingly benign and apolitical practices of promoting tourist attractions, creating natural parks, designating archaeological sites as world heritage, and enforcing conservation law. Through everyday practices of tourism development, identity, heritage, and history are being remade. Far from being merely an economy of leisure, this dissertation reveals tourism development as a complex and powerful mechanism of socio-spatial transformation.

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