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Unthinkable Rebellion and the Praxis of the Possible:  
Ch'orti' Campesin@ Struggles in Guatemala's Eastern Highlands

by

Jennifer Jean Casolo

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Geography

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Gillian P. Hart, Chair

Professor Jean Lave

Professor Louise Fortmann

Fall 2011

Unthinkable Rebellion and the Praxis of the Possible:  
Ch'orti' Campesin@ Struggles in Guatemala's Eastern Highlands

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by Jennifer Jean Casolo

## Abstract

Unthinkable Rebellion and the Praxis of the Possible:  
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by

Jennifer Jean Casolo

Doctor of Philosophy in Geography

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Gillian P. Hart, Chair

This dissertation examines the production of rural struggle in Guatemala's indigenous eastern highlands, a place where after decades of silence, 36 years of civil war and two centuries of marginalization, the seemingly unthinkable—organized resistance and alternative proposals—became palpable. In the face of crisis, attempts to turn rural producers, into neoliberal subjects of credit resurrected the historical specter of dispossession and catalyzed an unlikely alliance to oppose unjust agrarian debt that transformed into a vibrant movement for defense of Maya-Ch'orti' territory. Yet, the contours of that alliance, its limits, and possibilities, its concrete splits and expansion are deeply linked to both place-based histories and memories of racialized dispossession, specific reworkings of 1990s discourses and practices of development and “peace”-making, and the concrete practice of starting from common sense.

I sieve a total of 26 months of participant action research that spanned over four years with this nascent organization through a Lefebvrian method of re reading the past through the light of the present. Through this spatially and historically relational analysis based on critical ethnographic practice, I present an analysis where the present speaks powerfully to the past making three fundamental contributions.

First, I produce an analytic that challenges narratives of spontaneous rebellion and/or seamless neoliberal development, demonstrating concretely how neither adequately address the relationship between racialized dispossession and ongoing rural efforts of repossession and or maintaining possession. Instead I draw attention to how the limits of neoliberal projects shape the contours of rebellion and spontaneous rebellions limit the aims of neoliberal projects: yet how these processes of entailment unfold hinges on particular articulations of past processes of dis/possession, development and difference.

Second, I offer a rereading of the Guatemalan Civil War that hinges on rethinking the connections between the so-called ladino military East and indigenous militant West. In so doing I make break down divisive binaries that pervade Guatemalan common sense and offer a new



understanding of Guatemala's 1980-83 racial genocide and creating openings for future alliances based not necessarily on an abstract sense of defense of territory or pan-Mayan identity, but in recognition of shared experiences and analyses of indigenous repression and resistance

Third, I show how particular articulations of race, class, gender and space are worked and reworked in and through the concrete practices of struggle and acquiescence, reaccommodation and flight that are shaped by the historical production of place. Rebellion past or present is neither unthinkable nor inevitable. And its potential for social change is bound to ongoing praxis.

## **Dedication**

*With the final countdown of turning years of work into the pages that follow, my brother John's cancer returned with a vengeance. In his struggle to live, I have seen a fortitude, patience, faith and ferocious love that I never knew my baby brother had. He has also said to me over and over again: "Jenn, I just want you to finish your paper. Will you do that for me?"*  
*For my brother, John Peter Casolo, his life and his love.*

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## Notes on Currency, Land Measurements, Orthography, and Pseudonyms

### Currency

Until 1987, the Guatemalan quetzal (Q) was pegged to the dollar, exceptional in Latin America and closely tied to the exceptionalism of Guatemala racism. The transition to peace carried high costs in terms of monetary stability. As the first stages neoliberal peace making began (1991 to 98) the quetzal averaged about Q5.9 = USD 1. Between 1999-2000, the average exchange rate continued to worsen for Guatemala but at a less precipitous decline to Q7.3 = USD 1. The average exchange rate during the years of the crisis in international coffee prices (2001 to 2004) showed a greater stability Q7.9 = USD1. For the last 7 years, the quetzal has remained stable with an exchange rate of approximately Q7.8 = USD1. All reporting of Guatemala currency is adjusted for inflation.

Purchasing power of the *quetzal* was significantly greater before the 1954 Coup and the following fifty years of military rule. It suffered a sharp decline beginning in the 1970s. Today, the average daily wage for a rural unskilled worker is Q30 = \$3.85 (approximately \$96 per month). That salary is 67 percent below the minimum costs for food and 82 percent below the minimum living costs.

### Land measurements

1 hectare = 2.47 acres

1 *manzana* (mz) = 0.7 hectares = 1.74 acres (*manzana* is a Latin American land measure)

1 *caballería* = 45 hectares = 111 acres (*caballería* is a Spanish Colonial land measure)

1 *cuerda* or “*tarea*” = 0.11 acres

(*cuerda* is Spanish Colonial and contemporary land measure used to pay agricultural work and to measure tiny plots cultivated by the indigenous campesin@ producers)

### Orthography

When writing Ch’orti’ words, I use the orthography endorsed by the Mayan Language Academy of Guatemala (ALMG). Official Guatemalan place names often render Ch’orti’ words using spellings invented by the colonial Spanish or ladino state officials. I maintain those spellings for clarity.

### Pseudonyms and Place Names

I changed the names of all people from the communities, NGOs and state institutions unless citing their name from another published work in order to protect their identities, with the exception of those whose public notoriety is such that a pseudonym would afford no anonymity whatsoever. I have only named villages occasionally only those documented in reports of violence, other published reports and/or events that achieved public notoriety. No Ch’orti’ first names or surnames are still in use. If the person has a more modern name, I choose a modern

pseudonym: e.g. Tami for Kelsi, and for more traditional names I choose a traditional  
pseudonym: e.g. Hermengildo for Gumerindo (none of those 4 names are in the dissertation)

## Glossary of Names and Places

agrimensor	(Spanish) literally measurer of land, hybrid figure on the cusp of modernity a half-way house profession between an expert in mathematical figures and measure of space, a pilgrim of the fields, an instrument of the law and of government. In Guatemala played a key role en the contested process of dispossession of indigenous land and territory. <sup>1</sup>
ajb'etwa'r	(Ch'orti') debtor, debtors or "guilty one." Ch'orti' speakers frequently link the root word for debt, b'etma'r, not only to guilt but also to prison and to the historic practice of hiding or fleeing debt.
ajchinam	(Ch'orti') townsfolk, town people. A term used in place of ladino (murajtu')
ajk'opot	(Ch'orti') country folk, country people. In practice ajk'opot would be Ch'orti' from the countryside.
ajk'in	(Ch'orti') reader of the days, shaman
Apayak'	(Ch'orti') Name of the Ch'orti' people between post-classic Mayan period and pre-colonial name of the Ch'orti'. Other names that have referred to the Ch'orti': Apay' Chan, Makchan.
aprovechamiento común	(Spanish) traditional Spanish custom of access to common land.
cajas de la comunidad	(Spanish) Community Chests that served as the community's operating/savings funds. After the Bourbon reforms of 1747-50 the Crown sought more direct control over the Community Chests. In 1847 the Bourbons converted Indian tribute from kind to coin... "Repeatedly Crown or Crown officials 'dipped into' village reserves to meet real or imagine state emergencies. This provoked conflict not only with the communities but also with local [creole or ladino] elites who were themselves intent on dipping into these funds." <sup>2</sup>
chich'an	(Ch'orti') great serpent. With mudslides after rains, the people say the great serpent has moved.
ch'en	(Ch'orti') cave
cofradía	(Spanish) lay religious organization or brotherhood
campesino	

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<sup>1</sup> (Gallini, 2009, pp. 85-90).

<sup>2</sup> (McCreery, 1994, p. 18)

- y campesina (Spanish) the term campesino or campesina gained currency in Guatemala as well as in Bolivia with their attempted land reforms in 1952 with the peasant leagues in Guatemala and peasant unions in Bolivia, in which progressive states attempted to assimilate indigenous people into the national economy as farmers rather than indigenous peoples. Campesino thus reflects a definition of identity stemming from a negative identification with the landowner's state and a more positive identification with a progressive state.<sup>3</sup> The term, however, can be used disparagingly by city and town dwellers as in rude, hick, Indian. See Introduction for why I use campesin@.
- colonato,  
colono (Spanish) form of indentured servitude in which the plantation owner or rancher provided residence and a small subsistence plot to a family in exchange for their labor. Normally, colonos became conscripted through over-indebtedness to the plantation owner or rancher or in flight from repartimientos.
- común (Spanish) village common lands.
- común de  
Indios (Spanish) In colonial documents, for instance of Jocotán Parish, indicating crown protected lands where non-indigenous could not reside.
- costumbre (Spanish) local Maya traditions, associated with the civil-religious hierarchy, saints societies, and shaman-priests<sup>4</sup>
- desaparecidos (Spanish) the disappeared, those whose fate from the years of the civil war is not known.<sup>5</sup>
- Decree 900 (Spanish) Arbenz's Agrarian Reform Legislation that catalyzed conflict locally, nationally and internationally and led to fifty years of military dictatorship in Guatemala.
- Don (Spanish) part of name or designation of respect always accompanied with the first y and possibly with both
- Doña (Spanish) part of name or designation of respect always accompanied with the first y and possibly with both
- ejido (Spanish) town común, "Whereas, Spanish laws defined a legal town ejido as one square league, or approximately 38.75 caballerías (4,308 acres), centered on the church or plaza. By the end of the colonial period custom and history had reduced the size of the ejidos.

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<sup>3</sup> (Postero, 2007)

<sup>4</sup> (K. Warren, 1998)

<sup>5</sup> (K. Warren, 1998)

encomienda	(Spanish) Spanish labor grants that gave awardees special rights over indigenous population living under their jurisdiction and consequently access to land and agricultural production. From 1523 in Guatemala, a grant to privileged Spaniards of rights to tribute from conquered indigenous population in the form of forced labor and taxes in kind or in money. The encomendero owed one fifth of those indigenous tributes to the Crown. Due to high levels of corruption in the colonies the encomienda evolved into Repartamiento <sup>6</sup>
finca	(Spanish) relatively large landholding usually carrying in Guatemala connotation of land accumulated through dispossession
finquero	(Spanish) owner of a finca, plantation or ranch owner who does not reside permanently on the landholding but in rural towns or urban areas.
indígena, indío	(Spanish) native, indigenous, Indian refers “to the caste division of Guatemalan society and not to a culturally or politically self-conscious group. During the colony, under the apartheid system of the two republics, it referred to members of the república de los Indios as opposed to members of the república de los Españoles. Today, indío is a term of disparagement used most frequently behind the back of indigenous persons and only publicly to attack and disqualify indigenous persons. Similarly, indigenous today is a term used not to identify oneself but too distinguish oneself from ladinos.” <sup>7</sup>
ixik	(Ch’orti’) woman
ixim	(Ch’orti’) corn
jinaj	(Spanish) milpa (corn, beans and other diverse crops and herbs)
ja	(Ch’orti’) water
jaja’r	(Ch’orti’) rain
kin	(Ch’orti’) sun
kinwar	(Ch’orti’) divination
ladino y meztizo	(Spanish) During the Colony ladino referred to baptized or hispanicized Indigenous persons. Until the twentieth century the term was used by non-Indigenous elites to refer to non-indigenous campesin@s and urban workers. In Guatemala usage the term is not synonymous with the Mexican or Nicaraguan

<sup>6</sup> (McCreery, 1994; K. Warren, 1998)

<sup>7</sup> (Grandin, 2000, pp. 238-239)

usage of *meztizo* where the term came to hold much more self-consciously hybrid (indigenous and Spanish) connotations, a term of honor defining nationhood. In contrast, the use of *ladino* in Guatemala has historically suggested a hispanicized or European cultural identity. From the early Republic on it defined the non-indigenous political elites of the townships.<sup>8</sup>

k'opot	(Ch'orti') mountain, of the hills
ladinización	(Spanish) Ladinization, a theory which holds that social change for Mayas inevitably involves the assimilations of ladino culture and identity <sup>9</sup>
mandamiento	(Spanish) term commonly used, especially after independence, for continuation and evolution of the colonial repartimiento system of forced labor
manzanaje	(Spanish) rent paid for common law access to municipal or ejidal land. Families negotiated with municipal authorities the size of parcels they could rent in the communal municipal lands and the permanence of their usufruct of those parcels of land.
morwar	(Ch'orti') community, meeting, group
mulatto	(Spanish) person with one parent of African Ancestry and another parent of indigenous, caucasian or asian ancestry
mulato libre	(Spanish) freed slave
municipio	(Spanish) township, basic official settlement unit after independence that includes a county seat and the surrounding villages and hamlets.
pa	(Ch'orti') tortilla
pardo	(Spanish) A fluid term of ethnic identification, especially in eastern Guatemala. "One dictionary translation of "gente parda" is simply "common people," but the fact that this idea is expressed by the word meaning "brown" must be considered an important indication of the ethnicity of the common people. Since the documents show that people of various ethnicities populated the District of Mita, some of the people of the region, although poor, were identified as <i>español</i> — it is interesting that a phrase including the word for "brown" was an acceptable self-description for people who today might be considered to have been "White." It may be that the defining factor in identity was not skin color but geographic origin. Furthermore, as a document referenced later in this essay indicates, the term " <i>gente parda</i> " is used with pride by the common people to refer to

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<sup>8</sup> (Grandin, 2000, p. 239)

<sup>9</sup> (K. Warren, 1998)

themselves and to distinguish "us," (*la gente parda*), from "them" (/as *Chapines*, i.e. the people of the capital).<sup>10</sup>

pak'ab'ob'	(Ch'orti') people
populares	(Spanish) the grassroots, Left, often associated with indigenous grass roots
principales	(Spanish) civil and/or religious elders in indigenous communities
pueblo de los indios	(Spanish) forcibly settled indigenous communities in which no non-indigenous person was allowed to reside.
sambo	(Spanish) person with one parent of African ancestry and the other of indigenous ancestry.
realenga	(Spanish) land belonging to the Crown, and later Guatemala State
reducción	(Spanish) Spanish colonial policy of concentrating dispersed indigenous population for labor control and also for evangelization. The policy of concentration, justified as protecting and evangelizing indigenous populations expressed segregationist policy. It also reflected the Spanish military policy of counterinsurgency. This aspect was put into effect by the Guatemala military during the 80s in what were know strategic villages to segregate indigenous population from contact with rebellious indigenous communities.
repartimiento	(Spanish) Spanish system of "forced labor or forced purchase or sale of goods Repartamientos de efectos ó mercancías through which subsistence producers were forced involuntarily into the market. This key economic and governance mechanism of the colonies worked to satisfy underpaid colonial officials but also held contradictions between the Crown, which wanted to charge the indigenous population more taxes and local creole elites who wanted to pay the indigenous population lower wages. Because of labor shortages caused by disease and by indigenous refusal, resistance or flight, the only viable way to conscript sufficient indigenous labor for agricultural production was through payment. In labor repartamientos, for example, if employers cheated the Indians at every turn and commonly abused them, the Crown in Central America depended on tribute revenues [from the indigenous population] and sought reasonable treatment and the payment of adequate wages for its subjects." <sup>11</sup>

The system of forced labor evolved over time and according to local circumstances and conjunctures. "Forms of coerced labor that be called proto-repartamientos existed in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Guatemala, but a royal cédula of 1601 formally erected the system of labor repartimienos in the Captaincy General, and

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<sup>10</sup> (Jefferson, 2004)

<sup>11</sup> (McCreery, 1994, pp. 5,28,42)

a 1609 decree regulated its operation. In the 1660s abuses prompted a major investigation and minor reforms ... by 1760 a century of history and custom had introduced major changes. Above all, the crown had lost control of repartimientos. This became apparent in 1759 when local officials and employers ignored a royal order halting the [labor] drafts. When the new President of the Audiencia, Fernando Alonzo Heredia, took over in August 1761, one of his first actions was to move to regain state authority over repartimientos. The drafts, he reminded what must have been a startled group of local landowners, existed above all “for the well-being of the Indians, to avoid the laziness to which they had a propensity. After 1761 only the Audiencia issued repartimientos.” ... The formula also included a promise to treat the Indians well and too ‘pay them personally and in silver’ for the labor and for travel time to and from the property. The usual pay was one to one and a half *reales* a day.... By law a person not a piece of property received the right to a repartimiento labor draft. .... Indigenous towns were particularly resistant to demands for drafts of women, sometimes requested as cooks to prepare food for free laborers or repartimiento work gangs. Although the Audiencia was solicitous of their moral well-being and made certain that they had proper chaperons, it was not always so careful with the physical safety of the women. In 1799 the Indian officials of Zacapa protested that women sent to cook for the garrisons on the coast and along the Rio Motagua rarely returned. Most of them died of disease before completing the required three months of service, and because they could not take their children, these died of neglect.”<sup>12</sup>

tierras baldias (Spanish) state-owned land, land without property claims

winik (Ch’orti’) man

xoyoyojk’ja’ (Ch’orti’) Lagoon

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<sup>12</sup> (McCreery, 1994, pp. 93-96)



## Acronyms

ALMG	<i>Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala</i> (Academy for Maya Languages of Guatemala)
ASORECH	<i>Asociación Regional Campesina Ch'orti</i> (Regional Ch'orti' Campesin@ Association)
AVANCSO	<i>Asociación para el Avance de las Ciencias Sociales en Guatemala</i> (Association for the Advancement of Social Sciences in Guatemala), a research institution that shares membership with New Day in the Agrarian Platform
ACS	<i>Asamblea de la Sociedad Civil</i> (Assembly of Civil Society), which served as the forum for civilian input into the peace process.
CCCH	<i>Coordinadora Campesina Ch'orti' Nuevo Día</i> (Ch'orti' Campesin@ Coordinator –New Day), part of the full name of New Day. New Day changes its name to <i>Central Campesino Ch'orti' Nuevo Día</i> (Ch'orti' Campesin@ Central–New Day) in 2008.
CEH	<i>La Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico</i> ( The 1999 Guatemalan Truth Commission ) offers the most extensive documentation of historical revolutionary activity and incidents of guerrilla, state and para-military violence with severe limitations in terms of what happened in the Ch'orti' area.
COCODES	<i>Consejos Comunales de Desarrollo</i> (Community Development Councils) are the base organizations of the system of decentralization and citizen participation that began in Guatemala in 2003. In most municipalities the Municipal Development Council (COMUDE) is highly politicized with the Mayor having more power than the assembly of COCODES.
COIMCH	<i>Consejo Indígena Maya Ch'orti'</i> (The Maya Ch'orti' Indigenous Council)
COMACH	<i>Coordinadora Regional Maya Ch'orti'</i> (Ch'orti' Maya Regional Coordinator)
COMUNDICH	<i>Coordinadora de Asociaciones y Comunidades para el Desarrollo Integral de la Región Ch'orti'</i> (The Coordinator of Communities and Associations for Integral Development of the Ch'orti' Region)
COMG	<i>Consejo de Organizaciones Mayas de Guatemala</i> (Council of Maya Organizations of Guatemala)
CONIC	<i>Coordinadora Nacional Indígena y Campesina</i> (National Indigenous and Campesin@ Coordinator)

CNOC	<i>Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas</i> (National Coordinator of Campesin@ Organizations)
CNP Tierra	<i>Consejo Nacional Permanente de Derechos Relativos a Tierra de los Pueblos Indígenas</i> (Permanent National Council on Rights concerning Indigenous Land)
CUC	<i>Comité de Unidad Campesina</i> (Committee for Campesin@ Unity), a grass-roots organization that played a crucial role in the indigenous rebellion in the Western highlands as a mass front for the EGP-URNG. It continues to organize against extractive industry in indigenous struggles. La Plataforma Agraria, CONIC, CNP Tierra, CNOC are all groups that have splintered from the URNG after the Peace Accords
EGP	<i>Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres</i> (Guerrilla Army of the Poor). Established in the mid -1970s, the EGP became Guatemala's most formidable armed insurgent organization. <sup>13</sup>
FAR	<i>Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes</i> (Rebel Armed Forces), one of the first guerilla movements of the URNG. Nominally the armed wing of the PGT, it was organized in the early sixties by remnants of the 1960 military uprising in Eastern Guatemala and young PGT members. Impatient with the party's reform strategies, the FAR founders broke with the PGT in the mid-1960s. During its first incarnation, the FAR operated principally in Guatemala's east, along the Sierra de las Minas, but also in the western coffee region of San Marcos. <sup>14</sup>
FPL	<i>Frente Popular Libertador</i> (Popular Liberation Front) was one the first, cautiously moderate parties to emerge following the October Revolution. <sup>15</sup>
MAGA	<i>Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería y Alimentación</i> (Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, and Food)
MARN	<i>Ministerio de Ambiente y Recursos Naturales</i> (Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources)
MINUGUA	<i>Misión de las Naciones Unidas en Guatemala</i> (UN Verification Commission in Guatemala)
MLN	<i>Movimiento de Liberación Nacional</i> (Movement for National Liberation), a conservative political movement founded by Mario Sandoval Alarcón in 1960 from his political bases in eastern Guatemala. Sandoval Alarcón was active in the overthrow of Arbenz. Organized by the anti-communist activists who led the domestic campaign against Arbenz, the MLN, ....in its first years starting in the

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<sup>13</sup> (Grandin, 2009, p.204)

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 204

<sup>15</sup> Ibid,p.204

1960s became the principal organizer of death squads. It was closely allied with the armed forces, and then brought under the control of the Military. Sandoval Alarcón was Vice-President of Guatemala from 1974-78. Sandoval ran for and lost the Presidential elections three times. His tombstone reads “I will be president.”<sup>16</sup>

- ORPA *Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo en Armas* (Revolutionary Organization of People in Arms), one of the guerrilla organizations of the URNG that attempted to prioritize indigenous struggle in its strategy.
- PACS *Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil* (Civil Self-defense Patrols), a repressive arm of the Guatemala Military in local communities organized first under Ydígoras in eastern Guatemala in 1966 and then formalized in western Guatemala with this name in 1982
- PLFM *Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín* (Francisco Marroquín Linguistics Project)
- REMHI *Informe de Recuperación de Memoria Histórica* (the 1998 Archdiocesan sponsored Report on the Recovery of Historical Memory) The REHMI has virtually no information on the memories of violence in the Ch’orti’ area.
- PR *Partido Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Party) Left-of-center party that legally resisted the 1954 military dictatorship and from which many of its members later supported the first wave of popular armed revolution.
- PGT *Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajadores* (Guatemala Workers Party) Communist party
- URNG *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity), the umbrella guerrilla organization founded in January of 1982 and later active in the peace negotiations, later constituting itself as a political party in national elections.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 204

### **Archives Consulted**

CIRMA Archives. Mesoamerican Regional Research Center (Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica), Antigua Guatemala

SAA Archives. Archives of the Secretariat of Agrarian Affairs, Zacapa Office (Secretaría de Asuntos Agrarios Delegación de Zacapa),

AGCA General Archive of Central America (Archivo General de Centro América), Guatemala City: Land Section (ST) Municipal Government (MG)

## Key Dates in the Ch'orti' Highlands and Eastern Guatemala

### Colonial Times and Proto-Liberal Period

- 1524 Pedro Alvarado's troops begin conquest of Ch'orti' region
- 1530 Ch'orti' leader, Copan C'alel, surrenders
- 1532-34 Small pox epidemic
- 1545 Typhus epidemic
- 1549 Abolition of indigenous slavery. Creation of reservations or *Común de Indios*
- 1550 Creation of indigenous community chests for purposes of taxation of the *Común de Indios* by the Crown
- 1576 Chicken pox epidemic
- 1580 Displacement and disease had decimated the Ch'orti' population from an estimated 120,000 in 1530 to 3,000
- 1580-1630 Economic depression, Spaniards migrated from the crisis-paralyzed capital city, Santiago de Guatemala to the sparsely populated eastern countryside, especially along the Motagua river
- 1600 *Común de Indios*, Yupilingo that encompassed part of present day Olopa and Camotán ceased to exist after the epidemics of the 16<sup>th</sup>
- 1681 Beginning of intensified land encroachment in eastern Ch'orti' highlands
- Flight to Highlands to escape from forced labor (Repartimiento)**
- 1754 *Común de indios* of Jocotán and Camotán both have titles to their townships and Jocotán purchases more land
- 1620-1760 Índigo boom
- 1787 French Revolution
- 1800 Indigo declines due to labor shortage
- 1810-12 Cortes de Cádiz declaration of Spanish citizenship for Spaniards, indigenous, *mestizos*, but not for Africans and caste people descended from them. Decree 29 lays the cornerstone of liberalism legislating the privatization of *tierras baldías* under use by Ch'orti', ladinos and *pardos pobres*.

### Early Republican Times, War in the East between Liberals and Conservatives

- 1821 Independence of Guatemala from Spain, under the tutelage of México until 1824
- 1824 Federal Constitution of Central America, universal citizenship for those over 18 who can read and own land. *Tierras baldías* reduced to individual property. (Second law of the enclosures). Measures to extinguish indigenous languages (October 28)
- 1825 First Guatemalan Constitution declares citizenship for all over 18 years of age who exercise a profession and have recognized means for subsistence, but establishing a citizenship by census in which any person economically dependent on another could not vote or hold office.
- 1822-26 "Triumph" of the mixed municipalities with citizenship by census, prohibition of indigenous dress prior, during and after holding office in order to aspire to election, permission of military officers (all ladino) to hold office.

- 1825 The Constituent Assembly divides the territory of Guatemala into seven Departments, assigning to the new Department of Chiquimula all the townships (indigenous and non-indigenous) and all valleys of the old *Corregimiento de Chiquimula y Zacapa*. Article 6 divides Chiquimula into seven districts: Chiquimula, Zacapa, Esquipulas, Jalapa, Mita, Acasguastlán y Sanarate.
- 1825-28 Presidency de Manuel José Arce (first president of Central American Federation)
- 1829 The Central American Liberal Army led by Francisco Francisco Morazón, occupies the City of Guatemala. The Assembly of the Guatemalan State orders the closure of all monastic institutions and the expulsion of religious orders and the Archbishop from Guatemalan Territory
- 1831-38 Government of Mariano Galvez (second liberal president)  
Galvez assigns one-third for foreign colonization, improving genetic composition, and modernization.
- 1835 Uprising of Ch'orti', ladinos, and castes against the government of Galvez in Asunción Mita.
- 1834 Galvez and Congress authorize ceding almost half the Republic to three foreign companies: Bennett y Meany, Juan Galindo and the Agricultural and Commercial Company of the East Coast of Central American English  
Colonization begins in Verapaz
- 1837 Cholera epidemic. Promulgation the Code of Livingston that prohibited capital punishment, forcing townships to build prisons.
- 1837 Uprising of the "Mountain" in the district of Mita including parts of Jutiapa, Jalapa, Santa Rosa led by Rafael Carrera spreads to the Ch'orti' area of Jocotán and Camotán.
- 1838 Rafael Carrera nearly occupies the City of Guatemala but is defeated in Villa Nueva.
- 1838-40 Creation of independent State of Los Altos en Quetzaltenango
- 1839 Carrera occupies the City of Guatemala. Guatemala separates itself from the Central American Federation. Religious orders reestablished as well as payment of the décimo. Legislation for forced labor
- 1840 Carrera thwarts General Francisco Morazán's attempt to take the City of Guatemala, eliminates the independence of the Los Altos and reincorporates it into the State of Guatemala
- 1839-1844 Mariano Rivera Paz, first president of the State of Guatemala
- 1844-1848 First period of Rafael Carrera as President of Guatemala
- 1847 Foundation of the Republic of Guatemala
- 1847 Jocotán township attempts to establish border limits with Zacapa in response to ladino land encroachment.
- 1847-50 Second uprising of the Mountain (War of the Lucios) against Carrera. Archives with information of Olopa and land claims of Jocotán purportedly burned.
- 1851 Battle of La Arada
- 1854 Red dye export peak, boom began in 1820
- 1851-65 Second Period of Rafael Carrera as President

- 1860 Vicente Cerna, Governor of Chiquimula, sends the Capuchin evangelizing mission to Olopa
- 1860 Beginning of decline of Red dye boom
- 1865 Death of Rafael Carrera. Vicente Cerna is named President
- 1865 Negotiations between Olopa and Jocotán townships about separation and petitions of Olopans to become a township
- 1866 Vicente Cerna's government recognizes Santa Maria Olopa as a separate municipality 1870
- 1866 Jocotán township buys 30 thousand acres to its north in the present area of La Unión
- 1869 Increasing tensions between indigenous Jocotán township and ladino Zacapa townships over border limits
- 1870 Government establishes right of Jocotán township to lands currently be cultivated but does not confirm 1847 border decision.

### **Liberalism and Ubico**

- 1871-73 Invasion de Miguel Garcia Granados Y Justo Rufino Barrios from México. Triumph of the Liberal Revolution. Suppression of religious tithing. Nationalization of the property of religious orders, Presidency of Miguel Garcia Granados
- 1873-1885 Presidency of Justo Rufino Barrios
- 1877 Labor laws increasing plantation owners control over labor through use of the Libreta (pocket book) and strengthening debt servitude mechanisms
- 1885 Constitutional reform returning to 1824 ruling that only those who could read and write Spanish could vote and hold office, because enough city and more wealthy indigenous could then read and write Spanish
- 1904 Township of La Unión created, original name given was Estrada Cabrera township
- 1931-44 Government of Ubico
- 1932 Ubico militarizes townships, replacing civil mayors with military personnel
- 1934 New Ubico Vagrancy laws
- 1935 Township of La Unión transferred from the more indigenous department of Chiquimula to the more ladino Department of Zacapa

### **Democratic Spring and 50 years of Military Dictatorship**

- 1944-54 Democratic Spring
- 1944 June protests of university students, schoolteachers, general worker strike, July 1, Ubico resigns. Ubico and National Assembly name Federico Ponce Valdes provisional president
- 1944 October 20 Revolution overthrows Federico Ponce Valdes Revolutionary Military Junta (Jorge Toriello, Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán y Francisco Javier Arana) prepare december elections

- 1944 Revolutionary Military Junta declares separation de los powers within State, Autonomy of the university from the State, end of forced work and imprisonment for debt, right to vote for indigenous, with exception of illiterate women
- 1944 Electoral process in Ch'orti' highlands
- 1945 Military fires on election celebration in Camotán
- 1945-51 Government of Juan José Arévalo Bermejo
- 1945 Constitution and enfranchisement of male indigenous vote (literate and illiterate) and female indigenous (only literate) March
- 1946 Municipal Decree 226 April 1946. Municipal autonomy that was significant in the East freeing from Military control of municipality
- 1948 Labor Code freeing Indigenous from forced labor
- 1949 Obligatory Rent Law, forcing owners to rent land upon demand from landless
- 1951-54 Government of Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán
- 1951 Decree Campesin@ Leagues
- 1952 Land Reform Law (Decree 900)
- 1952 Decree Agrarian Committees
- 1954–78: Three Decades of Insurgency and Counter-insurgency**
- 1954 May 5 Landlords defeat Arbenz's Civil Guard stopping land reform process in San Juan Ermita
- 1954 July 17, the "Liberation" forces of Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, funded and supervised by the CIA crossed the Honduran border at Camotán quickly taking Jocotán and moving West
- 1954 Restoration of Ubico military apparatus in Ch'orti' highlands and repression of Agrarian Committee and Campesin@ Leagues participants in the four municipalities
- 1954-57 *Movimiento Liberación Nacional* (MLN) functions as the political party of Castillo Armas
- 1957 Death squads become prevalent in the East under Colonel Carlos Ydígoras Fuentes after Castillo Armas' assassination
- 1957 Campesin@o support for the *Partido Revolucionario* (Revolutionary Party) heretofore PR , which despite being explicitly anticommunist had to organize clandestinely in the four municipalities.
- 1960 Mario Sandoval Alarcón founds *Movimiento Democrática Nacionalista* -MDN (Nationalist Democratic Movement) which coordinates death squads
- 1960-1973 First wave of insurgency and counterinsurgency
- 1960 Nationalist military rebellion, *Movimiento Revolucionario 13 de noviembre*. MR-13 (13 November Revolutionary Movement) against Ydígoras takes over military bases in Zacapa, Puerto Barrios, and Izabal.
- 1961-62 Guerrilla operations in mountain corridor from the Motagua river to Honduras corridor that crossed the Ch'orti' East
- 1962 Armed Rebel Forces (*Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes*) [FAR] founded by MR-13 and PGT in December. Refounded in 1964.



- 1964 Guerrilla operations in mountain corridor from the Motagua river to Honduras corridor that crossed the Ch'orti' East
- 1965 First recorded massacre of men, women, and children in Ch'orti' highlands and among the first in Guatemala, (Palmillas, Jocotán)
- 1966 PR sweeps four municipalities, wins national elections, U.S. and Guatemalan military force the PR to accept military autonomy in counterinsurgency operations
- 1967-70 Zone commander in Zacapa, Chiquimula Izabal, Army Colonel Carlos Arana Osorio earned the nickname "the Butcher of Zacapa" and founds system of Military Commissioners who were the predecessors the PAC
- 1966-68 Pacification sweeps in Olopa y Camotán
- 1970 Arana Osorio becomes President in 1970
- 1973-1996 Second wave of insurgency and counterinsurgency
- 1973 EGP begins guerrilla operations in mountain corridor from the Motagua river to Honduras corridor that crossed the Ch'orti' East
- 1974-80 Development of PAC and Military Commissioners
- 1981\_83 Scorched earth policy in Olopa and Jocotán
- 1984–2003: Two Decades of Silence**
- 1985 IFAD begins negotiation of PROZACHI Program
- 1989 PROZACHI I approved by IFAD Board
- 1990 PROZACHI approved by Guatemalan Government
- 1991-98 PROZACHI I execution
- 1994-96 Peace Accords
- 1996 Mayan organizing in Jocotán and Olopa
- 1999-2004 PROZACHI II organizes ASORECH in the four municipalities
- Breaking Silence**
- 2003 No Payment Movement erupts - protests in town plazas of Olopa and Camotán
- 2004 New Day Joins Plataforma Agraria
- 2004-2011 Negotiation of Debt unconcluded
- 2006 Meeting with Cabinet of the Berger Government
- 2006-11 Anti-extractive movements in the four municipalities

## Acknowledgments

A dissertation is only the beginning, a driver's license as such that allows you to explore the roads further and farther from home. Yet it is an ending, a closure to a time with different restrictions and protections. Wherever we are in our journey, the PhD process brings together and distills all we have done and thought before, no binaries—everything jumbled and filtered through the deep study, research and analysis that the process entails.

In that sense, because I have lived long (fifty years) and intensely, my works has benefitted from and relied upon an amazing “h[i]rstory and geography” of wisdom, friendship, intellectual mentoring and emotional, spiritual support without which this dissertation, would never exist. Not only have these relations shaped me, leading me finally to and through the PhD process, but also they have been fundamental to how I have navigated the connection between theory and practice. Moreover, many of these same relations have suffered over the last years as I have had to zoom in on the dissertation and temporarily put on hold so many commitments to dear friends, past mentors, and past struggles. The gratitude I feel is so deep and poignant that it is delicate to touch, opening a whole lifetime of learning. For that reason these acknowledgments are longer than most and journey somewhat temporally and spatially through my life.

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Where El Salvador taught me about faith, revolution and the problems of alliance: urban-rural, ideological. Honduras taught me about gender, campesin@o life and the contradictions of social justice work in the NGO dominated sphere and divided Catholic Church of the post-revolutionary 1990s. Where together we began to discover feminism and think about gender relations, with all of the personal and political conflict that entailed: the campesina and urban poor women who formed the Women's Ministry Team: Elicelda Guardado, Lastenia Mendez, Marina Ramirez and Loly Pineda and Maria de la Luz Sarmiento, and later recruits Norma Garcia and Mariana Mejia and honorary members and dear friends Nely del Cid and Ana Maria Pineda who have also been my house/community mates at times. Especially the ongoing support over these years of Marianela Estrada, Ester Bernaus, Carlos Rodas, Lucia Torres, Mario Argenal, Adilia Castro, Guido Eguigure, Rudy Guerra, Carlos Lopez, Zulma, Hector Reyes, Roque Rivera, Filemon Martinez. Moreover, as I discovered my own feminism Jesuit friends became my Gramscian adversaries to work out shifting ideas of gender and class. Special thanks goes to Andreu Oliva S.J. and Jack Donald S.J.

With Central American and North American activists having filled me with new questions and longings to think and write, I applied to UC Berkeley's Geography Departments doctoral program eighteen years after receiving my undergraduate degree. I am deeply grateful for the advice, some of it quite challenging, from Anne Larson, Millie Thayer, Amy Ross, Elizabeth Oglesby, Ricardo Falla SJ all helped me decide whether and where to apply. You were absolutely right! And I learned what I came to learn.

While I broke my mother's fatalism about "people like us not getting to college" when I finished undergrad, financial support for graduate study was crucial. I am deeply grateful to Mimi Kilgore, who in the name of her father C. Cabanne Smith's kind friendship support for my work in Honduras and El Salvador, provided me with the funds to make the move from a volunteer position in Honduras to the costs of applying and starting graduate school and has remained a dear friend.

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In a letter dated December 15, 1930 Antonio Gramsci wrote

Only sometimes, though rarely, do I lose myself in a determined order of reflections, and find so to speak, in the things themselves, an interest in examining them. Generally I have to place myself in a dialogical and dialectical perspective. Otherwise, I am not intellectually stimulated. As I once told you, I do not like to throw stones in the darkness. I want to listen to an interlocutor or real adversary (Santucci, 2010, p.105).

I understand Gramsci, not only do I not like to throw stones in the darkness, I am virtually incapable of clarifying my thoughts without talking or writing TO SOMEONE. And in my case, I am also deeply fearful of exposing the fragmented nature of my thoughts. For that reason I am extremely grateful to those friends, colleagues and mentors in Berkeley, Guatemala and beyond who made sure I wasn't throwing stones in the darkness.

At Berkeley Geography and beyond, I found a group of brilliant and committed students staff and professors who proved to be amazing, if sometimes frightening interlocutors. Numerous Berkeley professors provided valuable insights and/or encouragement at key moments, "forced me to give shape to my ideas" and/or created exciting seminars that helped shape me: Beatriz Manz first suggested I consider study in Eastern Guatemala, and I dismissed it as easily as others I describe in the introduction. Dr. Raka Ray's course on the Sociology of Gender was crucial to

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Many geographers—ahead of me in the program, took me under their wing. I thank Claudia Leal, Shawn van Ausdal, David Wahl, Mari-Elena Conserva, and especially Elisabeth Lamoureux. Roger Kim and Matt Gerhardt who welcomed my activist past. Joe Bryan and Mark Hunter who offered me crucial counsel in key moments. Ben Gardner who seemed to always know what peace of advice or support I needed. Aaron Bobrow-Strain who carefully read my masters thesis helping me to shed the extraneous theory, and who has continued to offer me encouragement, advice and intellectual challenge over the years. And Jake Kosek who I admired from a distance celebrate his presence now as faculty in the Department. I will not name too many of the newer members of our department...more for fear of leaving some out, but they have my deepest gratitude for having transformed the atmosphere in the Department, making it one of the best places to be. Mary Whelan, Alex Tarr, and John Stehlin. I celebrate the community they have created and the Geography Group on Gender and Difference. Reading the critical reflections, acts of solidarity, timely jokes, sensitive concerns and social invites that fill the terrafirma listserv has been as warm fuzzy on lonely writing days. I especially want to thank Rachel Brahinsky, Teo Balve and Julie Klinger and many others who I do not know well but who have given their time and energy to democratizing the our union and rescuing/occupying academia.

Women's spaces of friendship and reflection have been crucial throughout. Perhaps precisely because of the gendered nature of academic study that many women find so challenging, I have been graced throughout my study with an amazing and ever growing group of women across departments, many of whom overlap in writing groups and lab. I am deeply grateful to geographers Judy Han, Jen Devine, Jenny Greenberg, Laura Anne Minkoff for conversations that helped me work through my ideas, and outside of the department special thanks to Tracey Osbourne for her contagious dreaming and passion and Diana Wu for her bursting spirit. And I am grateful to some special men: Matt StClair, Aaron deGrassi, Matthias Fripp and especially Nathaniel Gerhardt who lost his life in field research in Indonesia, Nathaniel first taught me how to use Web of Science and JSTOR.

Negar Ashtari who shared many of my early dilemmas of linking spirituality with critical theory made the initial connection for me and I asked to join Dr. Louise Fortmann's lab. I found a miracle there: Many of my lasting friends were formed there: I want to thank all in the group who offered me so much more helps than I was able to take. Brinda Sarathy wowed me with her first presentation and after that I was hooked. Combined with lab are Louise's famous potlucks with chocolate lava cake and some of the best "pot luck" faire and sometimes deep conversation around. I give thanks to the lasting intellectual relations and friendships with Brinda, Robin Turner, Beth Rose Middleton Mez Baker, Catherine Corson and many more.

My foray from Honduras to Guatemala was slow and first took me to the western highlands, in this ex-war zone I will only use first names in Guate to thank Javier, Chun and his family, Gabriel and Lu for opening my eyes and ears to the interconnected processes of genocide and dispossession there. Over the years, various Guatemalan institutions offered me use of their offices and libraries. I am especially grateful to the University Rafael Landívar (URL), the Association for The Advancement of Social Sciences (AVANCSO) and the Agronomy Department at the University San Carlos (USAC). So many Guatemalan scholars and activists who are producing exciting work have offered assistance, insights and friendship in my journey. Clara Arenas, Bienvenido Argueta, Ivan Azurdía, José Cal, Edgar Esquit, Alejandro Flores, Anabella Giracca, Felipe Girón, and Jorge Raimundo, Ruth Piedrasantos, and Irma Alicia Velásquez. I also want to thank foreign and national scholars of the Ch'orti' area who have shared conversations and correspondence about their experience and opened doors for future collaboration, I hope I can give much back in the years to come. I thank Cedric Becquer, Claudia Dary, Silvel Elias, Kerry Hull, Todd Little-Siebold, and Violeta Reyna. Special thanks especially to Brent Metz's whose openness to sharing information and concerns and deep ethnographic knowledge of the Ch'orti' people and region have helped me continually to navigate my way. My deepest gratitude goes to our budding community of scholar activist friends with one foot in Mexico: Mario Lopez Barrientos, Alejandra Privada, Lucrecia Garcia, and Sergio Mendizábal. Lucrecia's work training indigenous campesin@ women activists to do field research has been a real source of inspiration pushing me towards the future.

Various Guatemalan and International NGOs have also been extremely open and generous with information over the years as I worked side by side with New Day: especially Father Juan at the Jocotan Parish, the team at Madre Selva, Savia, and Plataforma Agrarí.

I am also extremely grateful for the friendship and generosity I have encountered in all the places I have stayed in Guatemala. In the Ch'orti' region I am not allowed to give names to so many:

but I can deeply thank Doña Celeste, Don Rene, and family at the Hotel Ramiréz. Doña Celeste was always introducing me to the latest expat and on René always gave me a smile. Over the border, in Honduras Flavia Cueva and Argi Diaz at the Hacienda San Lucas offered me women's night out and soul talks when I needed a brief respites. I also want to thank Mo Bleeker, Hugo Beteta, Luis Solano, Paula Worby and Sonia who have offered me their homes as safe haven and great writing space when I was in Guatemala City and lasting friendship. Luis, Paula and Sonia who lent me their home during a full year of research, and Mo has now shifted her "open house" to Switzerland where she continues her work in transitional justice.

Luis Solano, Paula Worby, together with Elizabeth Oglesby, Amy Ross, Liza Grandia and Diane Nelson also form part of the "Guatemala" contingency of scholar activists (mainly U.S.) who travel back and forth. They leave me in awe and have graced me with their intellectual generosity, encouragement, friendship and deep knowledge of Guatemalan processes. I would also like to thank Sharlene Mollet whose critical geography work on Afro-Carib communities in Honduras and whose invitation to collaborate in panels and paper sessions at AAG has kept me part of a wider conversation.

Back at Berkeley, writing groups became the place where I felt I could contribute but also struggled to have the courage to show my work. Ben Gardner introduced me to the Center for Race and Gender working group and I am eternally grateful. In addition to Ben's contributions which were always spot on, the most amazing women formed part of that group at different times and sharing our research in such an interdisciplinary way was essential for learning how to communicate. Special thanks goes to Alia Pan, Kristin Fuhey, Sang Lee, Zeli Rivas, Marie Abe, and Kate Kontokis for their ability to help get my writing in order and ongoing support. Other writing group buddies from other groups who I want to thank include Ivan Arenas, Rita Gaber, and Liz Shapiro as well as Megan Ybarra, Dan Graham, Chris Niedt and Catherine Corson who appear again below for other feats of support.

I also have many "families" related to my many lives and I am deeply grateful to them. In Seattle, I thank Anne and Dave Hall their home and support when I was studying for the GRE to Orals and dissertation writing. In Thomaston, CT, my hometown, Susan and Jim Abbott and children Benj, Seth and Hannah have always welcomed me back with open arms and a willingness to see me hovering over the computer. Susan's parents Margaret and William Berg, and sister Cathy have offered housing, cars, prayer and warmth whenever I needed it. I also thank my "home" in Western Mass, Suzanne Strauss, Scott Kennedy, Cristina and Artur.

In Berkeley, in the last years I rented a room from Westher Hess, who was the assistant in the Geography Department under Carl Sauer, from her and her long whiskered Missy Kitty I basked in a beautiful view of the Bay, listened to stories of Geography past and was "mothered" every now and then in exchange for finding lost glasses.

In my life I left my blood family young to pursue my dreams (in El Salvador, in simple living community, in rural Honduras) almost all of which were extremely low-paying which meant that I could not "help out" at home nor could I afford to visit. I want to thank my family who has borne my absence and ongoing poverty in this process: my father John Casolo, who in his blindness has taught me how to embrace difficulty, my brothers and sister, Lewis, Jeffrey, Scott and Shari and their families who always are willing to celebrate whenever I "drop" in. Most

significantly I give thanks to my mother Audrey Casolo whose thirst for learning made her the only one to graduate high school in her fishing village in Nova Scotia and to my brother Johnny whose courageous battle with cancer and deep faith and love towards all around him has earned him both acknowledgement and the dedication of this dissertation.

At different moments Miriam Lave, Kamal Kapadia, Robin Turner and Sang Lee all became writing partners or co-coaches, that I needed desperately, I thank them for teaming up with me. And Tracey Osbourne brought the ability to dream again into discussion when it seemed that finishing would never happen. Again these are all women whose friendship combined with brilliant intellect I hope will be in my life in the years that come.

As I moved halfway to set up home in Guatemala, our home in the South became a place for scholars, activists and their families passing through, visiting or needing a transitional place to stay—I am grateful to all who have blessed us (yes, best word) with their presence bringing new thoughts and ideas, keeping me connected to Berkeley and beyond: Jen Devine and Eric Lukehart, Anthony Fontes, Laura-Anne Minkoff and Jonah, Sean Tanner, and Megan Ybarra. Megan Ybarra is my “heroína” in her tenacious ability to grasp Guatemalan politics by the tail and see things in new and challenging ways. Conversations with her energized me incredibly and push me to relational thoughts between our work that help sharpen my analysis. I look forward in the future to hopefully collaborating in research and writing, as well as deepening friendship.

As I near the end of this list, words can no longer in any way express what I feel. Catherine Corson, Sapana Doshi, Diane Gildea, Dan Graham, Jenna Loyd and Chris Niedt have each sacrificed their own time at some point to help me get through and have each taught me more than they could ever know. You are my soulmates and gurus in *Phinnishing* and in building scholar-activist *Phutures*. Skyping from Sweden, Diane Gildea has reminded me of the interconnection of spiritual and material that is in my deepest roots and has taught me how to release the fears. Dan Graham and Chris Niedt were constant buddies and “older” in the process seer/guides. Without their generous support, comraderie, extensive vocabularies and knowledge of popular culture, my days would have been lonely and empty—from Dickinson to First Floor. They committed the ultimate act of friendship in an effort to help me birth my first chapter: hijacking me for a weekend where in sitting me down to write we formed the Roseville Triumvirate. Dan also provided critical editing on one of my chapters and my loss was to not have engaged with his work more on another. Catherine Corson and I talked each other through orals and her comments on that chapter that gets in the way proved crucial for me finishing this dissertation. She and I worked out thinking through d/Development together. Sapana Doshi and Jenna Loyd have been spectacular and very special friends and colleagues holding me to intellectual and political commitments as a feminist that slipped through my hands in the desperation to finish. Sapana is my compass for critical feminist theory and has caught and tossed back more stones than virtually anyone as we worked through different ideas of gender, dispossession and development together and Jenna has been my critical compass for scholar activism and my link to Occupy. I look forward to collaborative work with all of them in the future.

My goddess daughter Celia and her parents Todd Jailer and Sarah Shannon bore much of the worst of the process: my tears and forgetfulness, last minute escapades and countless self-doubts. Sarah would share wine and wisdom and Todd would remind me of the clear voice and thinking



I had before theory intimidated me. At the same time Celia and I went from turning Doe Library into Hogwarts and leaving magnets in the stacks to discussions about the challenges of writing a compelling essay...how the years pass. I am hoping to see her children's story published the same year as this work. Dear family in Berkeley, mil gracias. I love you.

Everyone thanks their committee, it is what you are supposed to do. Right? But this is much more than a thanks. My Committee has known from the beginning that I am my own worst enemy and they have each made hard choices and generous action to guarantee that I get past myself and turn what might really be seven jobs into one. There is no amount or depth of gratitude and love that I could express that could adequately speak to all they have done individually and collectively to guide me and challenge me. Dr. Laura Enriquez has accompanied me with life advice, strategic talks, and deep knowledge of Central America. I left her off my final committee list for logistic reasons but she has accompanied me with her keen sense of Central American dynamics since I took her seminar my first year at Berkeley. Moreover, I count her as a lifetime mentor and friend.

From the lab group and potlucks mentioned above to generous office hour time, financial support, house-sitting opportunities and mentoring in gender and participatory research, Dr. Louise Fortmann, has made this dissertation a reality. She visited me in the field in 2006 and met many of the women and men who fill the pages of chapters 5 and 6 (as well as visiting Honduras where I had worked). She and her husband Emory Roe welcomed me on many a day for a hot cup of tea to discuss dilemmas and progress, and as Louise knew the people and had seen the dynamics in my research site, it was easy to feel comfortable. Most importantly Louise unwittingly set the ball rolling for my next project when she created the conditions for women from the team I had worked with in eastern Honduras to come to eastern Guatemala. Their journey was part of an incredible opportunity Louise created to have the women work on a chapter in her book on *Doing Science Together*. Sharing in Louise's edited book project through the women has also shaped deeply how I hope to approach collaborative research with civil scientists in the future. Watching Louise's grace, humor and genuine sincerity with the women and men, especially the women in the countryside was an amazing gift. Louise also created condition after condition to help me to write, and the delays sadly were my own. I am deeply grateful for how she stuck by me moving from challenges to encouragement as she saw I needed them. I celebrate and give thanks to all she has taught me and how she has supported me. Louise's commitment to gender and to participatory research are practices I hope to reproduce the rest of my life.

Then there is the SWAT teammas my partner Peter, dubbed Drs. Jean Lave and Gillian Hart, when they took on the role of "tough cops" to get me past my blocks. How do you hold fear and love together so closely? Where Louise and Laura's research interests resonated with my own, Jean and Gill's critical ethnographic approach and deep commitment to praxis in life and work has been my beacon. Together they have helped me begin to build and use the analytical tools I came to graduate school to find. I am deeply grateful for so much: they shared time, meals, working blocks, and glasses of wine to discuss my work, offer advice on a journal article and plan my baby steps. Jean set me afire during my Masters with her writing on social practice theory. She combined thorough reading and practical hardheaded demands with deep appreciation for my particular style of linking ideas together, and gave me courage to try to find my own voice. Further she read my chapters closely and offered incredible feedback.

I no longer am sure if I simply caught Gill's passion for Gramsci, but I feel like Gill has bonded me to an old friend and changed my life forever. I cannot really touch the thanks I feel. In truth, and I am not the only one who says this but the gift of working with Gill is also the "curse"...her brilliance and passion for justice, her insistence on coherency means you can always hear her voice in your head. I am deeply grateful for that voice and hope it never leaves me. Working with Gill as a GSI and a reader has been the greatest gift in graduate school and convinced me that I want to teach. She is a spectacular mentor. Together with her husband Dr. David Szanton and Jean I have found a promise, a sense of possibility even in the worst of moments. Thank you, thank you. No these pages are not all I would want them to be, the errors are mine alone, but each of those above have been wonderful. I want to thank from the bottom of my heart each of these special brilliant scholars.

My deepest thanks goes to the members and leaders, women and men, Ch'orti' and campesin@s of New Day from the furthest caserios to home of Omar, Kenia (pseudonym) and their children. I thank them for sharing their dreams and their journeys with me and allowing me to walk with New Day. They have taught me lessons that my previous years of activism never touched and have let me share their struggles and hopes and try to navigate a path with them. Omar and Kenia, Don Virgilio (pseud.), Pablo (pseud.), Don Marcos. It only the beginning, whatever happens to the organization I am extremely grateful to the people who formed it. In the last years, I have watched our relationship transform from including me in the organization to including me in family. As the personal and political are inseparable, Kenia and Omar have exchanged with my partner Peter and I, heated debates, long work sessions, deep reflections/critiques on the Guatemalan Left. I thank them for transforming my life.

Last, I have to open my heart and just let gratitude pour out to my family here in Guatemala—a family that is still relatively new to me. Gloria, Mike's caretaker, could not find her way to her bed because of all my books, and dear Mike (our brother) missed many a Saturday movie and desired "rub down" while his dog Q'anil lost out on some robust walks as I forced myself to focus inward against all possibilities. In the process my two furry companions, three-legged, hearing impaired Pantalaimon and Kirjava (who was killed last year) gave me much comfort and laughter...laying on my books, my lap, my papers...demanding play breaks and food. When Panta with her three legs managed to jump up on the garden wall again, two years after her injury, I knew I could finish the dissertation.

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## Introduction

The world? Well, we must uncover all the contradictions, including and especially the most hidden, those that accomplish what is most dear to “us.”

Henri Lefebvre<sup>17</sup>

One evening two Guatemalan friends came for dinner: Javier, a university professor who works closely with Maya people and organizations and Mireya, his wife, a Maya researcher, poet and activist. Both of them had long histories as participants in and critics of the Guatemalan Left. With his usual passion and theoretical sophistication, Javier began to tell a story. The particular day of our dinner, February 20, marked the anniversary of the death of the K'iche'-Maya King and warrior, Tekum Umam, killed in battle by the Spanish Conquistador, Pedro de Alvarado's troops in the valley near present-day Quetzaltenango. Named a national hero by legislative decree in 1960. Maya and non-Maya Guatemalans celebrate Tekum Umam as a symbol of indigenous military valor (R. Carmack, 2001, pp. 194-195). Seeing the excitement in Javier's face as he recounted this history of indigenous resistance, I piped in with what I was learning about colonial conquest battles in the Ch'orti' Area. “In 1530 four years after the Spaniard's had supposedly subdued the indigenous peoples of the eastern highlands,” I told him. “Copan Q'alel, a believed-to-be Ch'orti' warrior rallied some tens of thousands of Pipiles, Xinka, Ch'orti' and Pokomames in the East staving off Alvarado's troops for three months before retreating, and then keeping a guerrilla-like resistance going for years.”

Javier's face went blank. I do not remember him even acknowledging my comment. After a moment he continued with an engaging analysis of how Tekum Umám can speak to present-day indigenous struggles. It is possible that my story fell through the cracks simply because I am a *gringa*, but when placed in the context of mine and Javier's ongoing friendship, I think something different was at play. Indigenous battling Spaniards in the East just did not fit into Javier's mental framework—a framework produced in and through his understanding of Guatemalan history— that made not just past, but *present* Ch'orti' rebellion unthinkable.

This dissertation, then, takes the unthinkable as a starting point to rethink the meaning and practice of rural struggles in post-revolutionary/post war Guatemala. Specifically I trace the production of an unlikely alliance of indigenous and mestizo rural producers, women and men, who in 2003 came together in the face of hostile international market conditions and of not-so-natural disaster.

After their zenith in the early 1980s, when popular revolutionary movements in Central America “threatened” the designs of the Reagan Administration, the cold war drew to a close, Francis Fukuyama began proclaiming “the end of history,” and these movements found themselves vying for position in the scramble for peace (Krznic, 1999; Pearce, 1998).<sup>18</sup> Given that turn around, the question that interests me is, “How do we understand rural struggles in “post” revolutionary times?”

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<sup>17</sup> (Lefebvre, 1991)

<sup>18</sup> Gillian Hart brought this connection to my attention in her work on South Africa. See (Hart, 2002).

To address that question I turn to the production of post-revolutionary rural struggle where it was least expected: deep within one of the most forgotten parts of eastern Guatemala. As the Guatemalan Peace process began to shift the terrain of struggle to civil society, international NGOs and State institutions deluged both east and west with development dollars to fund neoliberal reconstruction initiatives and strengthen civil society. In that process, in the Ch'orti' East attempts to turn rural producers, into neoliberal subjects of credit resurrected the specter of dispossession and catalyzed a fragile movement to oppose unjust agrarian debt.

Concretely this movement, the Ch'orti' Campesin@ Coordination, New Day took shape in when plummeting coffee prices and successive droughts helped turn the State and international Financial Institutions' dream of creating entrepreneurial neo-liberal subjects into a nightmare of debt and dispossession for land poor, mainly indigenous campesin@s. Yet, the process through which New Day's debt-forgiveness campaign emerges and unfolds is uneven and contradictory, and hinges crucially on articulations of race and class with land and nature. Moreover, New Day's divergent practices signal "contradictions in action" that suggest the openings and slippages through which social change may be possible.

Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's method for building a relational concept of the production of space, what he calls the regressive-progressive (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 65) —which I discuss in detail below I analyze how where after decades of silence, 36 years of civil war and two centuries of marginalization, the seemingly unthinkable—organized resistance and alternative proposals—became palpable. As I uncover the localized hi[r]stories and translocal connections that gave shape to this unlikely alliance and condition how it unfolds, I show the past in a different light in ways that speak powerfully to the present. What becomes clear is how the contours of that alliance, its limits, and possibilities, its concrete splits and expansion are deeply linked to place-based histories and memories of racialized dispossession, gendered exclusions and inclusions and specific reworkings of 1990s discourses and practices of development and "peace"-making.

While this study is not explicitly comparative, it is inspired by and it forms part of my deep life-long engagement with Central América. Unlike the Ch'orti' area, these other places and struggles—civil war El Salvador, Communities of Populations in Resistance in western Guatemala, and land rights and citizens rights struggles in the Aguán River Valley of Northeastern Honduras—have reputations as movement trailblazers and magnets of interest and support. In this sense, my previous work, especially in the Aguán, where I have researched and published on re-workings of gender, land rights, and power (Casolo, 2009)—have informed how I think about the production of struggle. It is precisely the spatial gap between the remembered rebelliousness of these other places and the dismissal of the Ch'orti' East that inspires and informs this project.

### **Producing "Forgotten Guatemala"**

The nature of this melancholy [of not being able to master the genuine historical picture as it flashes by] becomes clearer once one asks the question with whom does the historical writer of historicism actually empathize. The answer is

irrefutably with the victor. Those who currently rule are however the heirs of all those who have ever been victorious. Empathy with the victors thus comes to benefit the current rulers every time.

Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, VII (1940; first published, in German, 1950, in English, 1955)

Whereas in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Haiti, revolution “entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as [it] happened”(Trouillot, 1995, p. 70), in the Ch’orti’ region, making indigenous resistance unthinkable has taken a lot of hard work and quite a bit of work on my part to understand that work. That evening with Javier and Mireya was not the first time I had experienced an erasure, dismissal, and/or “situated ignorance”<sup>19</sup> of the East. The tendency to make invisible or vilify the Guatemalan East reflects the historical production of dominant discourses that counter-position the eastern and western highlands such that conceptual and physical boundaries reinforce one another: ladino East<sup>20</sup> indigenous West, military East, militant West. And as historian Greg Grandin noted, literature continues to “code Indigenous as victims and ladinos as villains.”(Grandin, 2000, p. 11) On its own, the resilience of the “Indian/ladin@” binary reflects the hesitancy of historians “to examine the complex relations that bind the Maya to their communities as well as to ladino society... Indigenous culture then remains analytically juxtaposed to and distinct from class and state power (Ibid.)”<sup>21</sup> If we map one binary onto another, indigenous places and people in the “ladino East” (the Xinka, the Poqomames and the Ch’orti’) fall, like my story, through the cracks.

It is crucial, then, to rethink what we know about the *Oriente*, what Todd Little-Siebold calls “Forgotten Guatemala” [Guatemala Olvidada] (T. Little-Siebold, 1995, p. 14) and how we know it. For centuries, in the eastern highlands of Guatemala, indigenous communities, poor mestizo, Afro-mestizo and ladino settlers, and Spanish, Creole and mestizo elites had wrestled each other and central authorities on an uneven and changing playing field.<sup>22</sup> They had defied through evasion, contestation and guerrilla warfare at times both Crown and Independent Republic. But as the East waned in economic importance in the tumultuous 19<sup>th</sup> century, national interest in its people, places and politics waned as well. The making of the postcolonial nation became for politicians and economic elites the story of the marriage between coffee expansion in the West and national state formation(Cambranes, 1985; Taracena Arriolo, 1997) (Williams, 1994), what scholars and activists have recently called the *finquero* or planter state (Flores, 2010; Tischler Visquerra, 2001 [1998]). In this scenario, the articulation of modes of production by which the burgeoning agro-capitalist coffee economy depended upon the maintenance of pre-capitalist indigenous subsistence to lower the cost of labor, “allowed” Western indigenous towns a certain degree of cultural, economic and political survival. Thus whatever underlying ideology informs them, the bulk of national discourses (as well as much national and international scholarship that

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<sup>19</sup> The term comes from (Pred, 2007) in his analysis of acquiescence to the War on Terror post 9/11.

<sup>20</sup> Since (M. MacLeod, 1973)dubbed the term ladino East, the term has gained considerable traction. At the same time recent revisionist histories and ethnographies have painstakingly refuted this oversimplification. See for example (C. Little-Siebold, 2001, 2011; T. Little-Siebold, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> These dichotomies of peoples and places also erase their connections, what Doreen Massey analyzes as their links to forces and dynamics, past and present, within and beyond.

<sup>22</sup> I will explain these shifting racialized and classed identifications later in the introduction and develop them throughout the dissertation but more static definitions can be found in the Glossary of Terms

springs from them), be they on state formation, agrarian transformation and/or race/ethnicity remain fixated on the West as the determinant relation and/or lens for understanding the nation throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The indigenous peoples of the East—Poqomam, Ch’orti’ and Xinka— passed virtually unnoticed in accounts and analyses chronicling processes from the rise of the Liberal State in 1871 to the October Revolution in 1944, and seemingly erased from the historical record after the 1954, U.S.-sponsored coup d’etat (Gleijeses, 1991; Schlesinger & Kinzer, 1982).<sup>23</sup> And even accounts of eastern indigenous participation in the political wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century tend, with few exceptions to conflate the material, cultural and geographical roots of indigenous and campesin@ participation and focus more on the ideological and political disputes between the Liberals and the Conservatives. And common sense and scholarly retellings of the political and social upheavals of the post World War II era—land reform, counter-revolution, popular revolution— have tended to emphasize the sins of the “ladino Military East.”<sup>24</sup> The East, was the stronghold of the “traitorous” Liberation coup that deposed Arbenz and reversed the reform (1952-54) (Gleijeses, 1991), the nascent cold war militarism that put a quick end to Central America’s first guerrilla movement (1960-66)(Gilly, 1965; May, 2001) (Le Bot, 1997 [1992]), and the subsequent build-up of a major counter-insurgency force (1966-1989)(Black, 1984; Schirmer, 2000; Streeter, 2000).<sup>25</sup>

In the dance between academic and everyday discourses and practices of knowledge production, it is hard to grasp the dynamics that shaped the more complex localized terrains of race, class and gender relations in the East. Eastern provinces are empty canvasses on which urban students and intellectuals, and ex-military rebels and recruited non-indigenous campesin@s orchestrate the first phase of the civil war. In the Ch’orti’ area, over forty years (1954-1996) of militarization, including cross border invasions, military sweeps, heavy death squad activity, selective assassinations of leaders, elimination of entire communities, and forced military recruitment in civil patrols and the army speak to the disappearance—both physical and ideological—of subjects and places, their histories and their socio-spatial connections. Produced in and through this expanding silence, post World War II anthropologists first remained focused on what prior to 1978 were the “safer” Western indigenous communities, while historians, sociologists and political scientists turned their attention to the national and international stakes of cold war politics.<sup>26</sup> Then in 1979, national popular uprisings spread throughout Central America, civil war erupted in the Western highlands, and officers and foot soldiers from the east razed western indigenous villages. Suddenly, conditions became favorable for “talking about revolution” (if not doing ethnographic research) —but with the ladino aggressors almost uniformly mapped on the East. The embers of resistance and ongoing processes of dispossession and repression in the

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<sup>23</sup> I draw on most of the exceptions to this pattern of bypassing the East.

<sup>24</sup> A few exceptions are Jim Handy who draws attention to militant action in the eastern countryside in relation to campesin@ support of the Agrarian Reform and most recently Christa Little Siebold who examines indigenous reactions to the coup in the greater Ch’orti’ area town of Quetzaltepeque.

<sup>25</sup> For example the fifth chapter of Yvon Le Bot’s book *La Guerra en Tierras Mayas* is entitled “The Guerrilla Discover the Maya” referring to the Guatemalan guerrilla reconsolidating their forces in the West with indigenous participation in the second phase of the war with no mention of Mayan participation in the first phase of the war.

<sup>26</sup> Carol Smith has written an excellent genealogy of how Northamerican politics of class, race and ethnicity, based in part on the Northamerican experience, shaped how U.S. scholars in the Twentieth Century carried out research in Guatemala and the conclusions they reached. (C. Smith, 2004)

Ch'orti' region could rarely even earn a footnote in history. In sum, knowledge production of the Guatemalan eastern highlands and its people has been sparse, fragmentary and contradictory. With localized historical geographic processes atomized and/or disappeared, the “unthinkabl(ity)” of indigenous rebellion in the East has even informed how postwar attempts to document human rights abuses or “recover” Ch'orti' practices have been carried out and interpreted. (Girón, 2007; Julián López Garcia, 2001; Metz, 2007).<sup>27</sup>

This dissertation, joins with and builds upon a growing but still nascent body of work by historians and anthropologists (post 1995) that attempts to draw attention to indigenous dynamics in the ladino (assimilated and/or non-indigenous) East (Dary Fuentes, 2010; C. Little-Siebold, 2006; T. Little-Siebold, 1995; Julián López Garcia & Metz, 2002; Moran-Taylor, 2003; Rodman, 2009) I also engage with recent work on the historical processes of colonialism, capitalism and state formation in Latin America that do not reproduce the villain/victim code and portray campesin@s, indians, women, popular classes as neither autonomous actors nor silent victims of economic and political transformation. (J. Gould, 2003) (Postero, 2007) (Graham, 2009), and those that critique the material and meaningful work that binaries do to weaken movemments(Wright, 2005) and create internal enemies(Ybarra, 2010)<sup>28</sup>

My contribution lies in the combination of my embrace of critical ethnography with my starting point in relation to the unthinkable of post-revolutionary rural struggles in the “Third-World.” I chose an area and people not only discarded by all sides as possible place/agents of social change or “D”evelopment potential, but where my own first encounters seemed to confirm that perspective. Yet, refusing to take that snapshot as a pre-given, or discrete reality—I address the relationship between rural struggles and the dynamics of neoliberal development, difference and dispossession from a different slant: the of the “no where”, of “no guarantees.”

### **The Ch'orti'-Maya East**

Portrayed by journalists, planners and politicians as a depressed and backwards area, the Ch'orti' region, with its the increasingly arid mountains and lowlands along Río Grande to the Guatemalan-Honduras border, is for many national and international onlookers a wasteland where ecosystems collapse, famine reigns, population explodes and collective action flails. Further in many national arena discussions, the area's inhabitants, the vast majority of whom eke out a living in the fragile countryside — some 130,000 people, 55,000 of which identify as Ch'orti'-Maya — are not left enough for left activists nor Maya enough<sup>29</sup> for Mayan activists or

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<sup>27</sup> Some recent historical scholarship does an excellent job of going deep into the limited archives to fill some of the historical lacunae; still the tendency is to not address the power laden practices and processes through which the archive was produced, and places are treated as bounded units impacted by national and international forces or isolated from them. In a presentation at the Guatemalan Scholars Network in Antigua Guatemala in July 2011, historian Todd Little-Siebold addressed this point specifically.

<sup>28</sup> Megan Ybarra, 2010 draws on (Stoler, 1995) to show how how binaries are used within categories, (she coins the process she documents as the production of Sanctioned and Suspect Maya) to create internal enemies.

<sup>29</sup> The Ch'orti' are not the only Maya indigenous peoples to be judged against the criteria of western highland Maya. They share that fortune with other eastern and or lowland indigenous peoples. See (Megan Ybarra, 2010)on the Q'eq'chi , (Dary Fuentes, 2010) on the Poqomam of Jalapa.

ladin@s. Left intellectuals in the capital suggest that the Ch'orti' are like dry kindling, that will burst into flames with a spark—but who they direct that flame to or when is not a product of a class-based political consciousness. And when a national television program that broadcasts a weekly segment on one of Guatemala's 24 indigenous or Afro-Carib populations, aired the program on Ch'orti' it showed footage of rural men and women, many in traditional dress, but the spokespeople were all non-indigenous town folk explaining what it meant to be Ch'orti': "the clothing, the language."<sup>30</sup>

Nor are the Ch'orti' East inhabitants modern enough for development project "experts. Government, solidarity and international aid offices have ignored its complex and contradictory history, settling instead for easy to grasp human development statistics and descriptive terms of people and place that attract attention and justify expense: fragile ecosystem, over-populated, land-poor, famine prone, without identity, divided, destitute, violent, forgotten. While tourist buses whiz by the eastern Guatemalan borderlands daily, shuttling foreigners and their money between the colonial city of Antigua near Guatemala City, and the Archaeological Park of the so-called real Maya" on the Honduran side of the border and transnational movements support Honduran Ch'orti' struggles for indigenous and agrarian rights, promoters of conservation, development and/or social change quickly throw up their hands in frustration, declaring that the Guatemalan Ch'orti' rural population does not respond appropriately to their interventions.

During the thousands of years before the formation of separate Central American Republics, the Highlands of present-day eastern Guatemala and just over the border in Western Honduras shifted from home of subsistence producers and nomads to cultural center of the Classic Maya Empire, to ecological wasteland, to foci of resistance to the Spanish Conquest, to site of colonial land grants, indigenous labor exploitation and mixed-blood and non-indigenous migration (Coe, 1999; Girard, 1949; Wisdom, 1940). 20th century forced labor laws, threats and repression fueled dispossession processes that established many medium sized holdings for assimilated indigenous and those of mixed or Creole descent while pushing Maya-Ch'orti' to occupy small isolated plots of overworked land and migrate for seasonal labor (Girard, 1949; Metz, 2006; Wisdom, 1940). While the geographic boundaries shift in relation to each chapter and the changing definition of the indigenous eastern highlands, my study springs from and thus focuses on Ch'orti' and *mestizo* producers, women and men from villages and hamlets in four townships in the heart of the Ch'orti'-Maya East: Santiago de Jocotán, Camotán, Santa María de Olopa in Chiquimula province and La Unión in Zacapa Province

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<sup>30</sup> Moreover, a ladina woman in Jocotán was criticized by other ladinas because she actually had the gall to bring "dirty indios" to represent the Ch'orti' to an indigenous conference in Mexico instead of bringing more educated ladinos who could act the part.





Figure 0.1: Research Area: Ch'orti' Townships of Olopa, Camotán and Jocotán, Chiquimula and La Unión, Zacapa.

A 14 mile valley of “stones” broken in two by the Río Grande-Copán River defines this epicenter of Guatemala’s Ch’orti’ highlands. The river flows from the western hills of neighboring Honduras, past the Maya Acropolis, across the border and westward carving the valley before making its way down to the Zacapa plains and emptying into the Motagua River. Counter to the river’s path, the road I take from Guatemala City enters the region from the East, through the Ch’orti’ town of San Juan Ermita. As it descends into the valley (still some 1,500 feet above sea level) a mountain, shorn of all vegetation and jutting out like a stone thumb reaching to the heavens appears on the northeastern horizon. Known today simply as the *Volcano (El Volcán)*, it rises as the landmark of Ch’orti’ highlands. Descending the hill the *Volcán* falls out of sight, and the road passes by the entrances of the two town centers, at the heart of the lowland: Camotán and Jocotán. Less than 2 miles distance apart, the towns share five centuries of neighborly feuds and in modern history symbiotic relations: between merchants in Jocotán and cattle ranchers.

In the slim river basin the farms of non-indigenous, ladinos mainly from Camotán snake across the valley, vivid green with their irrigated vegetable and fruit production. That vegetation clashes eight months a year with the reddish brown of stripped slopes of scree that rise above the north and south of Camotán and Jocotán town centers. These rocky hillsides dangerous to stand on prove even more hazardous to those who attempt to eke out a living planting corn and beans on them. The other four months of the year, the rains pour down (sometimes) and from a distance the hillsides give a deceptively lush impression. But the trees have long been cut down, the brush

that is left cannot protect the soil, It is nothing more than what one leader called *verde de engaño*, Trickster green.

Six thousand feet above these graveled foothills, a majestic cloud forest rises, so humid that its coffee plantations mature almost two months later than in the rest of Guatemala. Once part of Jocotán and Camotán indigenous townships, this cloud forest marks the township of La Union. From the valley, two dirt roads reach into the area (during the dry season). But the only paved entry links La Unión to the non-Ch'orti' areas of the Zacapa province 60 miles away. To the South above the valley, but not visible due to the steepness of the rocky slopes lies the wealthy coffee producing *altiplano* of the municipality of Olopa: once also part of Jocotán. Again, dangerous dirt trails traversed by small pick-up trucks, with bad transmissions and high fares substitute buses between Olopa and its Ch'orti' motherland. While if one bypasses valley of stone: a paved road with bus routes climbs the mountain from neighboring Quetzaltepeque.

# Re-Makings and Representations of the Ch'orti'-Maya Area: Past and Present

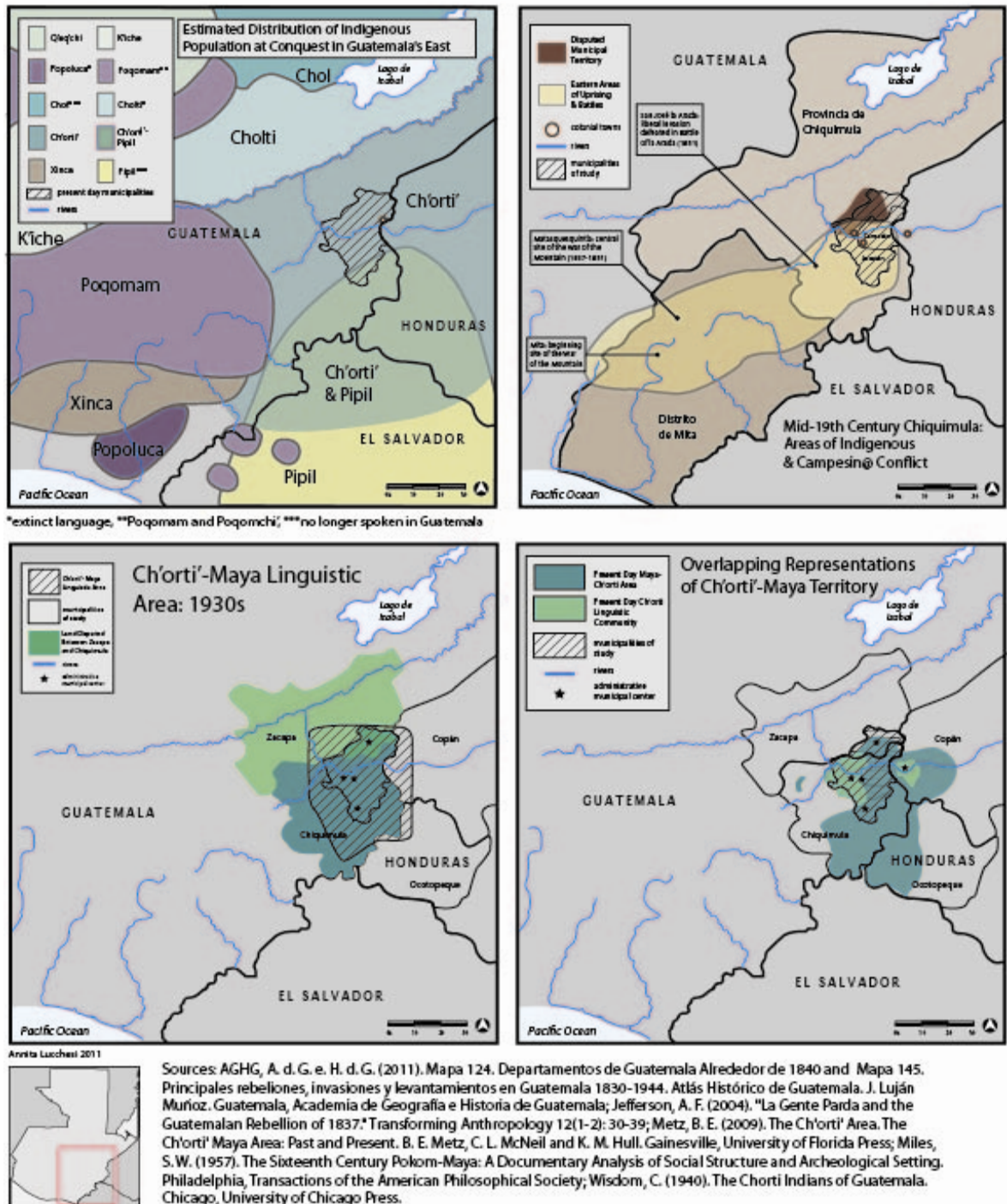


Figure 0.2: Re-makings and Representations of the Ch'orti'-Maya Area: Past and Present (maps contracted by author)

Given this isolation, most people at the national level if they know anything about the Ch'orti' region at all, fold the Ch'orti' region and its inhabitants into the broader imaginary of Eastern Guatemala or label them as the most backward of populations. The delicious black beans produced in the region carry the brand of another municipality, the waterfalls, extinct volcanoes, lush cloud forest, and mysterious trees adorned with hanging Oropendola nests cannot erase the harsh reality of a desert-like dry season. The artisan weavings of palm matt, baskets and bags sell at starvation prices, while the vibrant colored dress of their makers depend on factory-produced cloth. Yet few connect these imaginaries and the power they wield with the situated practices and interconnections of dispossession, dialogue, resistance, repression and most recently recognition that produced the Ch'orti region of today.

There is no way to objectively or authoritatively delineate the Ch'orti' area of this study, past or present.<sup>31</sup> According to Metz, 2009, p. 1 “the very word Ch'orti' is problematic” as is any attempt to define either past or present Ch'orti' populations. Nevertheless, composed of mixed sources, the preceding set of four maps in figure 0.2 tries to show, within the boundaries of postcolonial Guatemala, the decreasing area where identified (by selves and/or others) Ch'orti' populations, or people of Ch'orti' descent have lived and live. Building on Henri Lefebvre's conceptualization of space as a social relation, Doreen Massey argues for a rethinking of places as dense nodes of social relations with identities that are “unfixed, contested and multiple”(Massey, 1994, p. 4). She suggests that we ask not how places differ from one another, but how they are mutually constitutive of one another through social relations. Neither static nor bounded, places form temporally and spatially changing linkages to the “outside;” linkages with constitutive effects on both a “place” and its “outside.”

In that sense, the four quadrant maps presented together here and then separately in subsequent chapters attempt to make visible changing territorial influences in relation to a partial glimpse of the historical geography of struggle in the shifting Ch'orti' area, understanding the area itself as produced through multiple multi-scaled processes of struggle, negotiation, accommodation, flight, etc. Although the first quadrant shows distinct territories for the different populations, recent scholarship suggests that movement between groups was somewhat fluid.<sup>32</sup> In the third quadrant of the mid nineteenth century where data on population is confusing, the area shown under contested struggle still had a high indigenous population: mainly Poqomam, Ch'orti' and Xinka collectively identified by Others as Indians. I return to this quadrant in the conclusion after having analyzed the historical processes, material and discursive practices and related power relations through which these remakings and representations of the Ch'orti' East have occurred.

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<sup>31</sup> See (Metz, 2009a) for a discussion about the pre-conquest population, and the intra-regional trade ties that existed between the different groups.

<sup>32</sup> According to (Metz, 2000, p. 5), one thesis is that the Pipiles in the 13th century displaced Ch'orti' populations northward from present day El Salvador to settle the areas of present-day Jocotán and Camotán.

## **Towards a Critical Ethnography of Struggles against Dispossession in “Post”-War Guatemala**

In this dialectical journey I embark on two intertwined paths. One path looks backwards, seeking relations, critical conjunctures, processes where forces come together to rework, disrupt, transform social and spatial relations, concrete practices. Looking back I examine the assumptions of the region but from what I began to learn in my journey with the new social movement, New Day’s members. On that path seemingly simple questions like how did a Ch’orti’ campesin@ struggle begin? To what extent does it disrupt the unthinkable and alter the politics of place, took on whole new levels of historical complexity and led me to analyze the complex and concrete relations between development, racialized dispossession and divergent responses to dispossession. This complexity only seemed to magnify when I took the other path that journeys forward, accompanying the relatively nascent New Day as it unfolds, living with its members and leaders the contradictions, tensions, divisions that emerge, as well as challenges and transformations, and participating in the concrete practices and processes by which they come into being. As mentioned above, what I am talking about has its roots in the relational method of analysis that Marx lays out in the *Grundrisse* for his project, and that Henri Lefebvre adapts and calls the regressive-progressive. In traveling both paths a relational conception of the production of place and the concept of articulation proves crucial for untangling the shifting connections between development, dispossession and resistance in relation to class, race and gender. Together, these paths produce a critical ethnography (Hart, 2004, 2006) of the Ch’orti’ East. Rather than present a theoretical conversation at the onset about these connections, I attempt to “rise to the concrete” that is to the concrete concepts for grasping and grappling with the historical and geographic complexity of “unthinkable rebellion” and the praxis of the possible (Hall, 2003).

The more I tried to understand New Day, the more I needed to understand it relationally in time and space, to look at the relations within and between villages, and between members in the different municipalities. Yet, I was also drawn back into the past. For how could I understand the representation of the Ch’orti’ Area, the contested designs to “improve” it, and the concrete contradictory practices of New Day without looking to the past. Thus while the chapters flow chronologically from conquest, colonization and township formation, in chapter 1, to New Day’s unfolding practice in chapter 6, I actually conceptualized and wrote these chapters from the middle out and from both ends inward. In this way, I could not only understand the sedimented histories behind emerging challenges, tensions, crises and contradictions: racialized, gendered, place and class-based, but also as I stated above, this process led me to rethink the past in ways that speak powerfully to the present. Fundamentally dialectical, rooted in the concrete in history and based on an understanding of time-space, my research came at Ch’orti’ campesin@ struggles from, as Jean Lave explains in her new book on critical ethnographic practice, both ends (Lave, 2011).

Yet, as Henri Lefebvre (1991, p.66) also points out “[t]he main difficulty arises from the fact that both the “regressive” and the “progressive” movements become intertwined both in the exposition and in the research procedure itself.” Without turning the dissertation into a “who dunnit” detective novel, how do I navigate the reality that the beginning might ... appear at the end or the outcome might emerge from the outset (Ibid)? Rural struggles against dispossession then appear at the beginning but with what Lefebvre (Ibid) calls “free rein”, with no autonomous

reality to knowledge. It is my task, through critical ethnography to demonstrate their “coming-into-being” in Guatemala’s Ch’orti’-Maya East, and how that process speaks to understandings of place, rural struggles and multiple articulations of power and difference; race, class and gender.

Relational understandings of the production of place as described above and critical ethnography articulations – not in the pure Althusserian sense of articulation of modes of production where superstructures are read off of the economic base, nor in the post Marxist fashion of LaClau and Mouffe where articulation occurs first and foremost in the discursive realm such that it is difficult to know when, how or why any one process, practice etc...articulates with another(Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).<sup>33</sup> In this sense attention to historical and spatial processes of contestation and negotiation through which places, identities and interests are produced and reworked is crucial to understanding the limits and possibilities of agrarian processes of social change. In short, critical ethnography is based upon a Gramscian understanding of articulation, as theorised by Stuart Hall (Hart, 2004, 2006), articulation is both an expression and a joining together. But the “connection or link is not necessarily given in all cases as a law or fact of life, rather it requires particular conditions of existence to appear at all, which has to be positively sustained by specific processes, which is not ‘eternal’ but has to constantly be renewed...”(Hall, 1985, p. 113 fn112). The concept of articulation, on the one hand, provides a way of moving beyond pre-given concepts of subjects, places or power. On the other, it challenges both theories of one-to-one correspondence or simple unity, e.g. dispossession produces agrarian and/or ethnic struggle and approaches that list multiple influential factors without explaining how what factors or better-said, processes become determinant on the ground at particular historical conjunctures (Ibid). Hall’s conceptualization also requires a more nuanced understanding of power as pervasive, diffuse and multi-dimensional (D. S. Moore, 2005). As such, power is not a cohesive resource mapped onto sites of domination or resistance or distinguishing pre-given haves and have-nots. Rather, “the practices and processes through which particular identities [and thus interests] are mobilized (Ray & Korteweg, 1999, p. 52) and positioned in unequal relationship to one another are themselves imbued with power (D. S. Moore, 2005).<sup>34</sup>

The dissertation, then traces the articulation of a post-revolutionary rural social movements in the Ch’orti’ East in and through the historical and geographical processes and practices, material and meaningful, by which places and subject positions have been produced, contested, reworked and transformed. Fundamental to this process is Gillian Hart’s understanding of D/development whereby she distinguishes between “‘Development’ as a postwar international project that emerged in the context of decolonization and the Cold War, and capitalist development as a dynamic and highly uneven process of creation and destruction(Hart, 2009).”<sup>35</sup> Throughout the dissertation I show how the “relations of force” (Ibid), shift between places and subjects through shifting processes and practices at multiple scales. I divide the dissertation into three core parts, and in each part a concrete concept begins to take shape in and through two chapters that speak to each other. *In Part I, Beneath the Grounds of Silence*, I focus on the link between ongoing processes of dispossession and the production of ideas about and material change in the Ch’orti’

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<sup>33</sup> See (Hall, 1985) and (Hart, 2007) for thorough critiques of these two positions.

<sup>34</sup> I cite (D. S. Moore, 2005) and (Ray & Korteweg, 1999) rather than (Foucault, 2000), because I draw on the way they bring together Foucault and Gramsci’s conceptualizations of power in relation to race and gender respectively.

<sup>35</sup> See also (Hart, 2001)

East itself. New understandings of racialized dispossession, township formation and rebellion begin to emerge as I trace the processes of Conquest, Colonialism, Capitalism, Counter-Revolution and Counter-insurgency through which silences about the Ch'orti' East have been produced. By silence I refer both to how the production of generalization of the east as ladino and military silences knowledge about its complex racialized, gendered and class-based hi[r]stories of development dispossession, and dissent, and to the silencing by extra-economic coercion, of dissent itself. Focus on the link between dispossession and the production of these ideas of the Ch'orti'. Where Chapter 1 shows the forces at play in reducing indigenous land rights and decision-making power in the region, Chapter 2 focuses on the unseen class and race articulations that fueled repossession and resistance practices and repression mechanisms in the post World War II period.

*Part II: Ch'orti' Reconstruction* puts 1990s processes of D/development in conversation with the legacies of Guatemala's genocidal civil war to suggest the workings and limits of what I call neo-liberal "peace"-making. Specifically I examine the convergence on the local of pro-poor rural development, post-revolutionary indigenous activism, and neoliberal discourses and practices of rights promotion: citizen, women's, indigenous, human. I show how the lasting Cold Warscapes of terror and ongoing crises of development shape how Ch'orti' and campesin@s in the region engage with these discourses and practices of Development in the context of neoliberal economic and cultural projects (Chapter 3). Key to these two chapters is the overlap of new discourses and practices on rights and livelihood with the rise of pro-poor lending through rural directed credit and microfinance, and the uneven geographies of debt credit produced (Chapter 4). Part II shows the production of the terrain of struggle and subjectivities that shapes the potential and limits of Part III.

*Part III: And Never Will Become Already Today* is really the heart of the dissertation, where my ethnographic research makes the processes of articulation and rearticulation of alliances at multiple scales visible. Only through Parts I and II is it possible to understand how and why the Ch'orti' and campesin@s come together in the way they do, and the limits and possibilities that entails. Chapter 5 traces the conjunctural crisis out of which New Day emerges and the contingent gendered, racialized and class dynamics that that led to the cohesion of forces in a nascent struggle. Chapter 6 then focuses on New Day's practices in relation to "common sense" understandings of members and future members as produced through the previous chapters and the concrete processes of reflection and action that rework those understanding and the meaning and practice of the organization itself. Not until the conclusion to I try to lay out the analytical and political stakes of my study of Unthinkable Rebellion.

## The Politics of Position

### *Gringa Positioning, “Post”- War Matterings and Critical Ethnographic Practice*

While this project forms part of a life-time of activism, research and most recently writing about grassroots struggles in Central America, it is the direct product of a year of Ch’orti’ language study in the region and approximately 26 months of field research between 2006 and 2010, although I maintained written communication with the leaders of New Day even when in Berkeley. Though not a path I would recommend to others, I was unable to “let go” after a year of field research, indeed it took me that long to even begin to pry open the past. Critical ethnographic practice does not necessarily require a long engagement but it does require some historical and geographic bearings so that unseen connections might emerge as a learning process, not as a hypothesis to be proven (Lave, 2011). At the same time, positioning ourselves as learners in the process is crucial to participant action research in general (Fortmann, 2008) and fundamental to Jean Lave’s conceptualization of critical ethnographic practice (Lave, 2011).

In this section I offer, without too much self-indulgence I hope, a glimpse the dynamics of power and gender, race and citizenship difference that I navigate in post-war matterings of research and writing.

Gringa (n): a female gringo, hostile, contemptuous term. often disparaging, a foreigner in Spain or Latin America especially when of American or English origin

In Central America I am a gringa, my gendered, sexualized and probably in most central American imaginaries racialized white body, with a blue passport and an empire behind it. My history as an activist, church worker, volunteer is always constrained in some way by that identification. The definition of gringa, above however, maps meaning onto bodies while obscuring the connections between specific places and identities that produce and shift the limits and possibilities of one’s positioning and practice in the field..

With witty description, sharp analysis, a layers of reflexivity Diane Nelson (1999) observes that Gringas in solidarity (and much participant action research insists on solidarity) are practicing a politics critical of their privilege, but we are also attempting to solidify our own identification in a detour through the other. She argues that rather than being "solid," a gringa in relation to Guatemala is overdetermined by complex plays of identification and difference over what Liisa Malkki terms "bleeding boundaries" (Malkki, 1992). And then she suggests that as gringa researchers we think about acting and writing in what she calls “fluidarity” rather than assuming a solid space or identity from which to act.

Nelson makes her proposal, deeply cognizant of the long legacy of US military intervention in Guatemala and the more recent and equally fatal US contribution to economic regimes and immigration policies. Yet, fluidarity opens us to greater responsibility and understanding of the stakes of our own actions as well as the power relations through which our own sense of self gets redefined. Diane Nelson lets us think about being critical gringa researchers in Central America,



but by seeing articulation as radically open, she leaves out what I believe to be a key task if our bodies and practices as gringas are to matter. What are the conditions under which particular articulations of gringa geographies and gringa identities come into being and with what meaningful and material stakes.

To understand the implications and uncertainties of that positioning, I simply offer two vignettes.

I assumed what was correct was to learn the language. I never asked. Then, at my second Assembly meeting in the Ch'orti' region I sat by one of the key leaders who did speak Ch'orti' and excitedly told him I was trying to learn. His face froze and he proceeded to lecture me about gringos stealing his language. I knew that he was an acquaintance of one of two anthropologists who have learned Ch'orti', that the anthropologist had stayed in his village. Later I learned of his experience with "the time of grenades" (Chapter 2): After being trained and armed by U.S. advisors to clean up the early guerrilla insurgency, soldiers threw grenades into Ch'orti' homes, destroying them and sometimes their inhabitants, ultimately placing indigenous land in the hands of others.

In contrast, Omar Jerónimo the Coordinator of New Day whose roots were Ch'orti', but who did not speak it and rejected much of the Maya activism as "divisive", would often introduce me and then use me as an example. "This is Jenni, she says she is a student, but she is really part of the organization and she is studying Ch'orti' imagine that she comes from far away but wants to learn our language, and we are right here and don't learn it."

Contingency in how I was positioned by them and positioned myself was not radically contingent but conditioned by specific structures, experiences and memories. Navigating positioning is continually relational, working with power and language is as well.

### ***Refusals and Embraces: In Conversation with Other Wor(l)ds***

As I have tentatively, ever so tentatively selected words, stringing them together on the computer screen, I have found that my vocabulary practice, especially in relation to what is present-day Guatemala, is full of refusals and reworkings. In line with the kinds of questions of hidden relations and reworkings of power that this dissertation addresses, I engage with a textual strategy that the late Berkeley Geographer Allan Pred brilliantly deployed (Pred, 1990b). Acutely dialectical and concerned with questions of race and gender, Pred stressed the impossibility of "writ[ing] about language and power from a detached vantage point as if one were somehow outside of the realms of language and power" (Pred, 1990a, p. 48). His 1990 essay, *In Other Wor(l)ds* ends with a powerful explication of his practice of disrupting conventional form that seeks

to subvert the taken-for-granted (and thereby ideology-riddled and power-laden) nature of the academic printed word, that seeks to make the taken-for-granted format of representation appear strange and yet comprehensible, that seeks to make the reader understand and mentally see what she otherwise might not understand or mentally see, that seeks, somehow, to push through the filter of

preconceptions and interpretative predispositions deeply inset in the reader's social, biographical and disciplinary past (Ibid, 48).

Shape-shifting devices—misspellings, hyphens, parentheses, slashes—which can spark previously unmade associations and/or to signal nuances, ambiguities, shifting situations, and multiple meanings of lived experience and representation of historically and geographically sedimented power relations. In my view, such “wordplay” also can help make visible, the hidden relations in a differentiated unity (Hall, 2003). For example, I use the term de(bt)velopment in chapter 4 to emphasize the specific ways in which pro-poor rural development in the Ch’orti’ produces an unpayable rural debt. The play also conjures memories of the historical relationship between capitalist development and debt peonage Guatemala, as well as a general understanding of the development of capitalism as simultaneously creative and destructive (Hart, 2001). Such a strategy also “prioritizes polyvalent uncertainty” (Ibid.), as in chapter 1: W(h)ither the Ch’orti’ to question modernizing narratives of backwards withering indigenous places and people and to hold open possible future, a where to go.

Where disrupting language frees the mind, striving for consistency in language with attention to its nexus with power and with inscribed social relations is a lifelong challenge of continuous critical reflection and action. Precisely because the very meanings of words that ascribe cultural and livelihood practices, tenure regimes and social hierarchies are themselves the product of ongoing struggles, I have had to select, change and discard words in a way that I hope brings more clarification than confusion.

In that context, I use Spanish words frequently, and Ch’orti’ words occasionally to convey meanings that English would distort. *Campesino*, *campesina*, *campesin@* is the most common. Rather than use peasant I use *campesino* to indicate a politicized understanding of landless and land poor men and women (hence the @ which I explain below) whose livelihood depends in part on agricultural production in the *campo* or countryside. I use the Latin American term, *campesino* rather than peasant for two reasons, first because my research is directly with people who today refer to themselves as *campesinos* and *campesinas*. Gaining traction as a class-based term during agrarian reform attempts and or processes in Latin America when landless and land poor producers joined peasant leagues or peasant unions, *campesino* became a term of struggle, but also of unification and in that sense erasure of indigenous identity. In the villages and hamlets where I wore (see Glossary).<sup>36</sup>

Still, my own sense of the shifting terrain of meaning and practice around being Ch’orti’ makes it difficult. Throughout the colonial period, I talk about a general group of indigenous people and/or tributaries and limit the word Ch’orti’ to where sources themselves use Ch’orti’. Until the period of national *campesino* organizing, I use the words like country-folk, small producers, farmers to describe all of those who live off the land and are not ranchers or planters.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Nancy Postero describes this process of “*campesin@*” becoming a political term during the Bolivian land reform in the 1950s.(Postero, 2007 )

<sup>37</sup> Maya scholars and U.S. anthropologists studying the East what seems to be a common division between town folk and country folk (Dary Fuentes, 2010; Esquit Choy, 1999; C. Little-Siebold, 2006; D. H. Rodman, 2006; Wisdom, 1940). In Ch’orti’ that would be expressed *ajchinam* and *ajk’opot* with *aj* denoting the person being of the *chinam* (town) or the *k’opot* (country).

One textual strategy that I have adopted to offset the sexism and of the Spanish language and make women openly visible in language is the use of the @ instead of an o or a at the end of campesino. Although the Royal Spanish Academy does not recognize it, the use of the @, which was first adopted by Latin American and Spanish feminists has gained considerable traction throughout the Spanish-speaking world, even within public institutions as an attempt to make the Spanish language less sexist. I have made a choice to use the @ with both nouns and adjectives in order to make visible women unless as an adjective it modifies a clearly sexed subject. In Spanish, the masculine and feminist forms of an adjective actually refer to the noun they are modifying. Economy and struggle are feminine so they are campesina, while *sindicato* (labor union) and riot are masculine so they would be campesino. If the actors involved are clearly male or female I use campesina or campesino. Further I do not deploy it equally to other identifications associated with race and ethnicity: *pard@*, *mulatt@*, *ladin@* more in an effort to ease the reader into seeing it, since the chapters where I can best document women's participation focus on Ch'orti' and campesin@s. While the use of the @ does imply the participation and/or targeting of both sexes. it does not mean, that women and men were united always in their action and positions or that power relations were even.

In many ways this journey in positioning, like my research itself, must be continually rethought in relation to deepening understandings of past and present and the shifting terrains of place, power and difference that they reveal.

## Part I

### Beneath the Grounds of Silence

The East-West dichotomy in Guatemala runs deep. Early on in my fieldwork, New Day was called on to host the National Assembly of the multi-sectoral organization, the Agrarian Platform. Two hundred delegates representing over thirty indigenous, peasant, and research organizations had travelled (for the first time) to the Ch'orti' East for their annual meeting. I was acutely aware of the sacrifice that New Day members had made just trying to prepare the necessary conditions—lodging, food, and meeting space in the town center of La Unión where they had few connections and even less influence. Women and men, indigenous, campesin@s, and professionals from all over Guatemala filled every inch of the large multi-tiered bohemian nightclub that New Day had managed to procure at the last minute. With fake fireplace, ceramic suns, and moons on the walls, avant-garde bar stools, and a stage, the site seemed an unlikely place to debate rural struggle, yet the Assembly began. In the midst of introductions, one indigenous leader from the Western highlands spoke frankly:

I will tell you the truth, I have never been to the East. It is a long ways away and I did not want to come. We have always known that all of the soldiers come from the East, and all of the generals. When I think of the East, I think of the military that has persecuted us. For that reason I did not want to come.

As I looked around, it seemed that many shared the sentiment. The leader who spoke, like most of the men and women in the room, carried with him still-fresh memories of the 1980s, when a Ch'orti' soldier was someone sent to burn your crops, remove you from your land, or even torture and kill you. What neither he nor even some of the professionals knew was that before the genocidal policies of the 1980s wiped out over 150,000 Guatemalans—mainly poor and indigenous—in the western highlands, Ch'orti' campesin@s in the region had already suffered almost thirty years of militarized repression and a much longer hi[r]story of racialized dispossession. While one New Day leader did apologize for his own military role in the war, no other Ch'orti'campesin@ representatives spoke up. Past histories of resistance and repression in the East remained buried in the grounds of silence.

## Chapter 1

### W(h)ither the Ch'orti' East? Remaking Places, Rethinking Dispossession

#### Introduction

Descriptions lending to the imaginary of a withering indigenous east in Guatemala date back at least to the early Republican era. Between 1838 and 1839, three hundred years after the Ch'orti' warrior Copán Q'alel had met his defeat, a U.S. lawyer turned travel chronicler and U.S. government agent from Shrewsbury New Jersey, John Lloyd Stephens, travelled South on the Motagua River, and then Eastward, working his way towards the Honduran border at present-day Camotán.<sup>38</sup> In describing what he saw as he crested the hills that mark the descent into what today constitutes the Guatemalan Ch'orti' area, he wrote,

We saw the mountaintops still towering above us, and on our right, far below us, a deep valley. We descended, and found it narrower and more beautiful than any we had yet seen, bounded by ranges of mountains, and having on its left a range of extraordinary beauty, with a red soil of sandstone, without any brush or underwood, and covered with gigantic pines. (Stephens ESQ., 1949, p. 58)

Yet, he contrasts the breathtaking view with “the miserable hut of an Indian”(58), “one good plastered hut occupied by a band of ruffians” and dilapidated Churches that “gave evidence of retrograding and expiring people (Stephens ESQ., 1949, p. 59).” Stephens became the first to describe the Ch'orti' East as *withering*, but apparently not so weak as not to inspire a bit of fear. As one continues to read Stephens' chronicle, he makes clear that despite the appeal of the valley, his encounters with the population—Ch'orti' elders carrying their silver staffs, leading troops of indigenous and *mestizo* soldiers to detain him—have been so negative that when he returns from Honduras to Guatemala, he takes a different route (Ibid, 58-60).

Stephens passed through the area at a time of crisis: disputes on land and labor, on agro-export and local production, on indigenous land protection and labor exploitation, and on the Central American union itself being settled with guns and troops. Although lacking analysis of these issues, the few pages that Stephens chronicled of his sojourn/ordeal through the heart of today's Guatemalan Ch'orti' area present the forces at play. “Crumbling” colonial glory, local indigenous leaders, Conservative troops that had temporarily crushed the post-Independence dreams of Liberals, and “ruffian” *mestizo* settlers gaining some access to the lushly forested hillsides and fertile river valley—all foreshadowed the political-ecological contests to come.

A century later, pockets of forest would be much more scattered above eroded hillsides; medium-size *mestizo* coffee producers and cattle ranchers would be competing with indigenous communities for land and, along with shopkeepers, would control municipal governance divided

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<sup>38</sup> Stephen's travelling companion, architect and draftsman Frederick Catherwood, made sketches of the trip. On the same trip, Stephens crossed the border to Copán Honduras and “discovered” and purchased the Mayan Archeological Site in Honduras for fifty US dollars. His writings show little patience or respect for the native population in the East, while reveling at the evidence he encounters of the ancient Mayan cities.

into five (not three) separate townships.<sup>39</sup> Still, this narrow valley and the highlands stretching to the North and South along the Honduran Border would be the smidgen that four centuries of colonial and postcolonial rule, four centuries of processes of ongoing racialized dispossession, would leave the Ch'orti'-Maya to claim as their own. On the following pages, Figure 1.1 and Figure 1.3 show just how radical the reduction of Ch'orti' was from the before colonization to the 1930s.<sup>40</sup> As broader processes of colonial and postcolonial agrarian transformation linked to national and international political interests and increasingly international markets took hold, Ch'orti' and other indigenous inhabitants evaded, struggled, and sought redress in myriad ways to guarantee their social and cultural reproduction but ultimately lost some combination of political, cultural, and physical ground.

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<sup>39</sup> I include San Juan Ermita because it marks the entry point into the present-day Ch'orti' area and it is the first descent that Stephens describes.

<sup>40</sup> All the colonial sources emphasize the continual migration and shifting sizes of the various linguistic groups in Central America.

## Estimated Distribution of Indigenous Population at Conquest in Guatemala's East

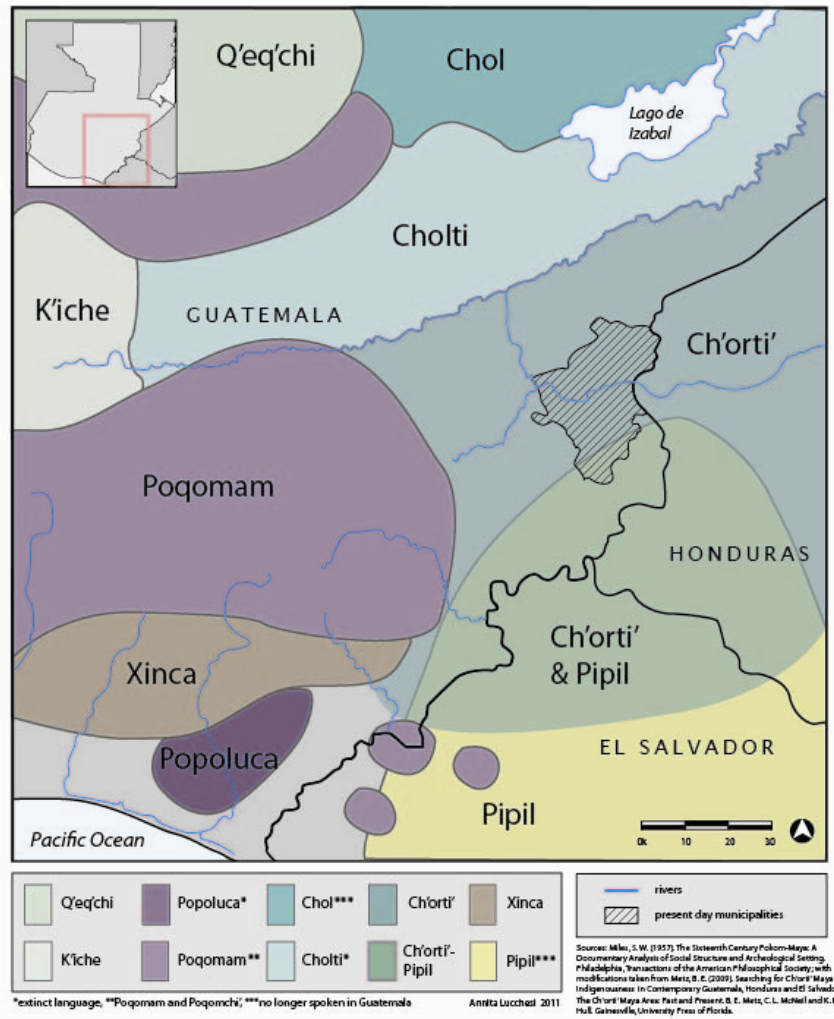


Figure 1.1: Estimated Distribution of Indigenous Population at Conquest in Guatemala's East (map contracted by author).

# Ch'orti'-Maya Linguistic Area: 1930s

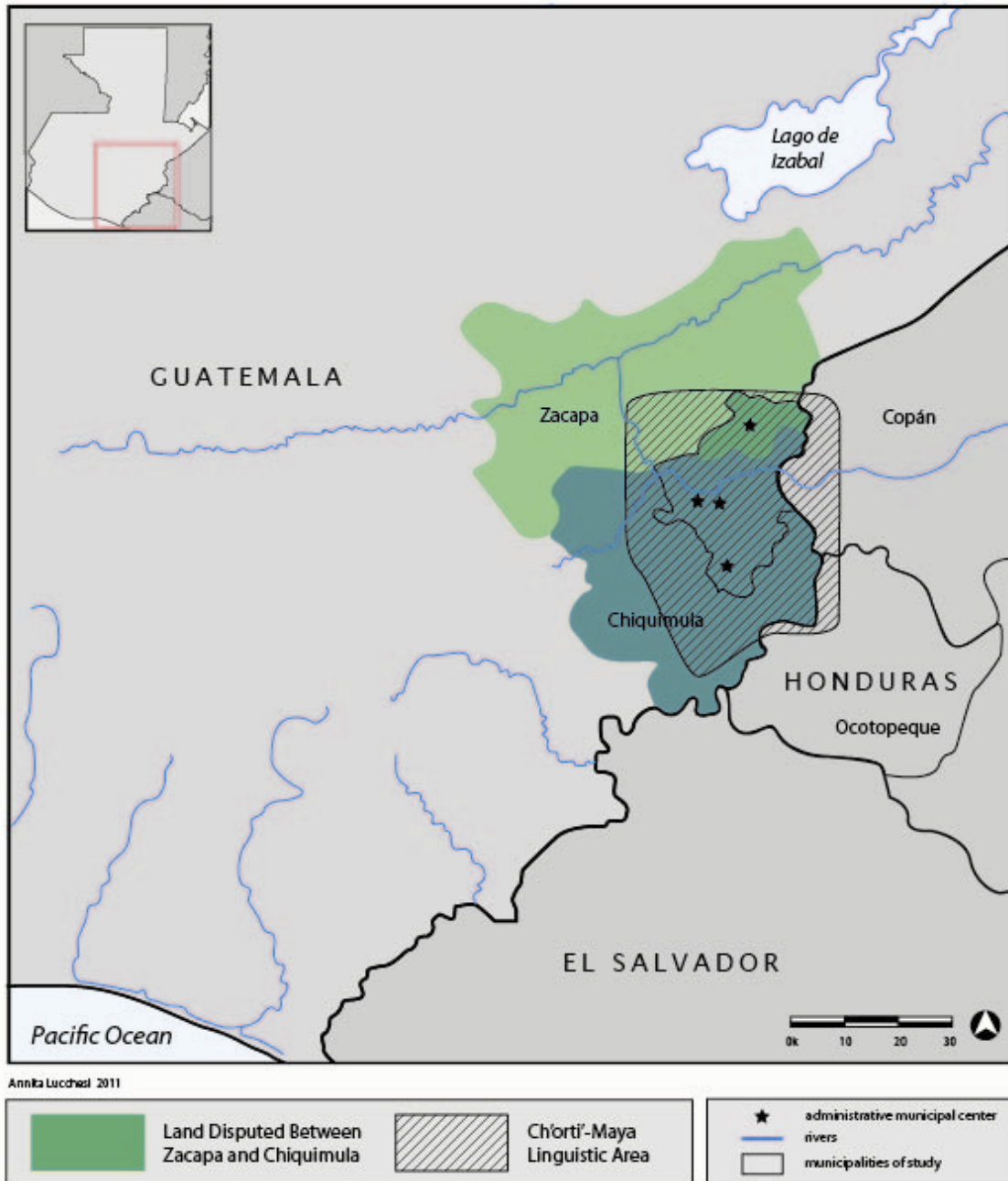


Figure 1.2: Ch'orti'-Maya Linguistic Area: 1930s (map contracted by author).



In this chapter I begin to trace the historical and geographical processes and practices by which the Ch'orti's' onetime stronghold in the East became reduced to a highland archipelago of last redoubts for the remaining indigenous population. As I pull together secondary sources and archives to recount that process, I put forth four interrelated claims that inform and weave into subsequent chapters. First, rather than analyzing the East as a bounded region or as part of the national narrative, I call attention to key connections. The contested ways that dynamics of colonization, postcolonial state formation, and agrarian transformation reworked configurations of land and labor, of place power and difference in the Forgotten East, must be understood through their constitutive relations: local and global, east and west, periphery and center. Second, through these dynamics, the ongoing processes of racialized dispossession continued to shrink the Ch'orti' East, they became entangled with the ways that a diverse multitude of subaltern—ladinos, pardo, mulattos, and mestizo—and indigenous populations attempted to maneuver, manipulate, negotiate, evade and resist those colonial and postcolonial laws and practices that excluded and abused them. Third, as the key site of these contestations, the “pueblo-comuna-township-municipality” becomes the battleground as well for meanings and practices of indigeneity. Fourth, the resolutions of these contests produced divergences within and among townships, which profoundly shape the political ecology of the Ch'orti' East.

To develop these arguments, I have broken the chapter into three sections organized temporally and spatially. The first section lays out those key regional (eastern Guatemalan) contours of colonial and postcolonial rule and agrarian transformation from conquest to 1866 that conditioned contested processes of municipal formation and ongoing racialized dispossession in the Ch'orti' eastern highlands. I draw on secondary sources that discuss processes in the greater colonial East. My reconstruction of the Ch'orti' past in this chapter relies in considerable part on the work of two historians, Steven Brewer and Todd Little-Siebold, who have focused on political and economic change in Chiquimula, during the Colonial/Early Republican and Liberal periods respectively. I also depend on anthropologist Brent Metz's thorough archival research of processes in the Jocotán parish that most altered social and spatial relations there. Last, the scholarship of Michael Fry, though his work centers more on the area just Southwest of present-day Chiquimula Province, provides most historical materialist reading of the dynamics of agrarian transformation in the East. Yet, as these researchers would all admit, we can only approximate the processes of articulation and disarticulation as the sources are written mainly by the victors, and even documents of indigenous protest tended to be drafted by ladino lawyers.

One last word of caution: It is important to note that the distinction between different indigenous peoples in the East is new in the lexicon of scholarship outside of anthropology and absent from historical sources, thus the term *indios* or *naturales* (natural ones) in sources could as easily refer to Pokomam-Maya, Xinka, and Pipil as to Ch'orti'-Maya. As I mentioned in the introduction, this conflation is partly a reflection of the discursive lumping together of the region's heterogeneous parties, partly due to the pre-colonial mobility of the indigenous peoples, and partly the result of colonial processes of territorialization that cordoned indigenous into *concentrations*. I do my best to flesh out and clarify the Ch'orti' thread within these narratives, but some ambiguity is an inevitable consequence of the very processes of dispossession under present discussion.

The second section spans the period from 1866 to 1931 and gives sharp focus to the formation of two new municipalities, Olopa and La Unión, as carved from the historical Ch'orti' common

lands of Jocotán parish. I then make the analytical link between municipal formation and shifting state control over land, labor, and race. I show how despite their geographical and population similarities, different historical conjunctures and discourses alter how ladino elites assemble distinct networks of support resulting in different race-class articulations at work in establishing each township. In section 3, I suggest the political ecological dynamics set in motion by this racialized process of agrarian change and its intensification through labor control and the militarization of township politics during the dictatorship period of rule of General Jorge Ubico.

In both sections 2 and 3, I do a close read of archival material on municipal formation at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> in conversation with Little-Siebold's broader and deeper archival studies of land and labor in Chiquimula province and anthropologists Charles Wisdom and Rafael Girard's deep ethnographic descriptions of Ch'orti' communities in the 1930s and 1940s respectively. Using the present divergent cultural and economic politics of place in Olopa and La Unión to illuminate my analysis, I make visible not only the overarching logic of a Guatemalan society structured in dominance but also the contrapuntal strains of resistance, subterfuge, flight, and geography itself. The seeds of the "ladino" municipality of La Unión and the "Ch'orti'" municipality of Olopa were sown.

### **Section 1—Let's Give Them Something to F(ight) About: The Politics of Dispossession and Difference (1521–1865)**

While dynamics of colonization and forces of agrarian transformation in the colonial East eventually turned the pre-conquest Ch'orti' area into a tiny portion of what it once was, pushed into the northeastern highlands on both sides of the Honduran border, the process took a lot of hard work.

Throughout the colonial and early post independence periods (1521–1865) surviving Ch'orti, other indigenous peoples, various castes of mixed descent—African, Indian and European, ladino and wealthier Creole (second-generation European), and Spaniards—continually sought ways to negotiate, bypass, and/or resist the laws of the Crown and then of the young Republic. Over this one-hundred-fifty-year period various forces combined to rapidly increase non-indigenous and mixed populations and landholdings in eastern Guatemala. Through contestation, political maneuvering, and just plain migration, farmers and ranchers of mixed descent and/or culturally assimilated indigenous people were able to gain footholds in eastern lands at the expense of pre-conquest populations of Pokomam, Chol and Ch'orti' Maya peoples and non-Maya Xinka and Pipil, setting the stage for post-Independence (1821) conflicts over territory, class, and caste.

#### **1524–1821: Caste Politics and Agrarian Change**

Under Spanish colonialism, all land belonged to the king, and—theoretically—the Crown's officials determined access to it. The indigenous populations defeated or co-opted by the Spaniards became subjects of the king and again theoretically deserved protection under the Crown. The genius of this substitute for blatant slavery and occupation lay in the levels of conflict and of negotiation it created between subaltern groups in the colonies (Burkholder, 1990). As mentioned in the introduction, though little recognized in comparison to the battles

fought by Maya in the central and western areas of Guatemala, the Ch'orti', united with Pipiles and Lencas, had first responded with all-out war against the Spanish conquistadores (Fuentes y Guzmán, 1933(1699)). Not only did they inflict serious casualties on Alvarado's troops through creative guerrilla tactics, but even after the Spanish military victory in 1530, many kept fighting. In 1535, the area was "still a land of war and permanent uprisings" (Torres Moss, 1996a, p. 19), and those who retreated with leader Copan Q'alel further into present-day Honduras harassed the Spanish for over two decades (Brewer, 2002).<sup>41</sup> Nor did conquest work as planned for the Spanish: most of the indigenous slaves that Alvarado branded and awarded to his troops as subjects of *encomienda*—a brutal system of forced labor and tribute imposed upon the indigenous populations in the Americas—escaped or simply never complied (Ibid).

At the same time, the horrendous labor conditions of post-Conquest rule combined with dislocation, a slew of epidemics (small pox, malaria, influenza), and further losses in subsequent rebellions to decimate the indigenous populations throughout the Colonial East. Few of those drafted into harsh slave labor as far off as the mines in Honduras or in the northern port on the mouth of the Motagua River lived more than a year (Brewer, 2009; Dary, Gramajo, & Reyna, 1998). The Ch'orti' population decreased by 90 percent of its pre-conquest population to 12,000 in 1550 and further declined to 3,300 by 1580 (Pérez, 1997, p. 106) c.f. (Metz, 2006, p. 42). See also (Dary, et al., 1998) and (Newson, 1986).

With limited finds of gold and silver and a native population facing demographic collapse throughout much of the Americas, Spain had to face the initial failures of its unsustainable "plunder economy" in Spanish America (Burkholder, 1990). In 1550 the Crown ended the *encomienda* system and enacted two new interconnected mechanisms of wealth extraction and governance: tribute that indigenous people were to pay (in coin or production) and indigenous labor drafts (*repartimiento*)<sup>42</sup>. The former depended on an indigenous population able to work the land and pay. The latter depended upon the Crown's ability to grant Spaniards and later Creole petitioners forced indigenous labor in exchange for payment of one fifth of their production or earnings as tributes (a tax) and their economic support of the Catholic Church, that would "evangelize" the native population (Ibid). Together, tribute and labor drafts represented a far greater threat to indigenous subsistence economies than slavery (Federici, 2004, p. 225).<sup>43</sup>

After the epidemics, so many Indigenous had died or fled (to the outskirts) that the pre-colonial population had to be repopulated to guarantee the process of colonization (Torres Moss, 1996a). Thus the Spaniards concentrated the remaining Ch'orti' (and other indigenous populations) in prehispanic settlements and new sites, creating controlled indigenous areas likened today to strategic hamlets, as the key stratagem for control of indigenous bodies. While the opposite of "enclosures" that separated producers from the means of production by enclosing land, this practice of enclosing people to extract tribute and labor effectively constituted a process of racialized dispossession in eastern Guatemala: both in the way it was executed in eastern Guatemala and in the material and cultural costs of trying to avoid it. In relation to competing

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<sup>41</sup> (Fuentes y Guzmán, 1933(1699))'s account describe Copan Q'alel and his troops becoming little more than bandits, but that account like his glorification of the Spanish victory against the huge Ch'orti' army carries more flourish than history.

<sup>42</sup> See the Glossary for a fuller explanation of this institution.

<sup>43</sup> The indigenous laborers were to receive one to one-half *reales* per day (enough to buy a horse with ten years of work).

labor needs and land demands in the East, and intertwined with deep changes in production and governance, the Ch'orti' who remained in these town "concentrations" enjoyed far less protection than indigenous people in the western highlands with a consequent and constant assault on Ch'orti' for their tribute and labor as well as their cultural and spiritual practices (Brewer, 2009; M. J. MacLeod & Wasserstrom, 1983; Torres Moss, 1996a; van Oss, 1986).

These particularities that hastened material and cultural dispossession in the East have to do with the severity of demographic collapse of the indigenous populations in the eastern lowlands where pre-Conquest Ch'orti' population extended, which was much greater than in the western highlands.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the economic designs of the Spanish Crown (based on tribute) had to accommodate the growth of an increasingly mixed population in eastern Guatemala. The attraction of the eastern lowlands with its temperate climate desirable for Spanish settlement and apt for agricultural and animal husbandry and a river (the Motagua) running northeast into the Caribbean Sea brought in the first waves of Spanish migration and resulted in Chiquimula Province (which was much larger geographically than present-day Chiquimula), boasting 11,124 ladinos, the highest number of any colonial province in Guatemala (C. J. Lutz, 1999, p. 130) (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch'orti', 2004, p. ix; Metz, 2006, p. 49). But without a thriving indigenous population, the establishment of productive *encomiendas* was doomed, and even large *haciendas* (basically cattle ranches) based on rotating indigenous drafts (*repartimiento*) simply could not prosper. The absence of rapid economic growth, however, did not diminish demands on Ch'orti' and other eastern indigenous for tribute (goods) and labor nor did it guarantee a reprise from pressure on their lands. Rather, competing labor demands diminished protection for indigenous populations of the East and led to Spanish and *casta* settlement close to indigenous lands, drastically altering the face of the region.

Due to the Crown's limited capacity for enforcing laws to protect the native population from the worst forms of exploitation in the sparsely populated East, Spaniards, creoles, and *casta* easily subverted the laws to their advantage. Thus, even though Spanish law formally prohibited ladino and *casta* settlers from forming their own municipalities or farming land in indigenous towns, local power dynamics rather than law often determined whose "rights" were protected, and ladinos progressively encroached on or invaded indigenous communal land (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch'orti', 2004); see also (Fry, 1988). In 1681 the population of Jocotán Parish had been completely indigenous (Torres Moss, 1996a, pp. 64-70). By 1740, despite prohibitions by the Crown, records register seventy-five Spanish, seventeen *mestizos*, and eleven mulattos; another three decades later, records showed 440 ladinos residing there (C. Lutz, 1988, pp. 24-26, 40-41) c.f. (Metz, 2006, p. 49).

Global economic conditions then combined with the low indigenous population to increase demands on indigenous labor, land encroachment, and expropriation of indigenous crops (corn, squash, beans, cacao, *chile* peppers, and other foodstuffs). In response to the economic depression of 1580–1630, Spaniards migrated from the crisis-paralyzed capital city, Santiago de Guatemala, to the sparsely populated eastern countryside, especially along the Motagua River. There they established *haciendas* for cattle, beginning what would prove to be a constant tension: cattle invading and destroying nearby indigenous crops (Terga Citrón, 1980, pp. 75-76) c.f. (Metz, 2006, p. 43). Further, the *hacendados* (ranchers) also found themselves in competition

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<sup>44</sup> The Ch'orti' population did not recover its 16<sup>th</sup>-century size until the twentieth century.

for the few remaining laboring indigenous bodies because of a third dynamic: the growing labor demands made by secular<sup>45</sup> clergy ((Metz, 2006, p. 45; van Oss, 1986).

Precisely because of the growing labor demands on these larger and mid-size *haciendas* and the lack of state authority, the region slowly became an area of racial mixing and cultural transformation, with new demands on access to land. Early on, in response to increasing indigenous deaths in the face of harsh labor conditions, and in an effort to protect the remaining Indians in the East in order to extract revenues (Herrera, 2000; Luján Muñoz & Cabezas Carache, 1994), the Crown encouraged the exploitation of African slaves. Slaves who survived the plague-infested work on the Motagua or employment on the few larger *haciendas* tending cattle and working in sugar and indigo operations, eventually often gained their freedom. Thus, slowly they became part of the growing pool of poor ladinos and *castas* vying for land often closer to the areas towards which indigenous were retreating (Fry, 1988; Terga Citrón, n.d.).

In the West, where the Crown had entrusted indigenous evangelization to religious congregations like the Jesuits, Dominicans, and Franciscans, many of these missionaries actually refused to implement *repartimiento*. Not so in the East. Instead, the secular clergy of the East was made up of the sons of wealthy Spaniards and later Creoles (direct descendants of Europeans). These men received parishes as prebendary perquisites of the office, and many sought ways to exploit indigenous labor to their advantage (van Oss, 1986, p. 154). The marriage of Church and business was particularly onerous from the outset in the East, given the secular clergymen's positioning as part-time ranchers, part-time priests. The Eastern priests never learned the indigenous languages, unlike the religious clergy in the West, and they abused and exploited indigenous land and labor more than they protected it. One particularly avaricious priest, Padre Escobar managed to usurp all the land and harness all the labor of the thriving Ch'orti' township of Yupilingo (northern Esquipulas extending to Camotán) in 1688, turning it into his own private *hacienda* (Girard, 1949, p. 54; Metz, 2006, p. 48).

Furthermore, by "protecting" indigenous tribute, the Crown sped up a process of agrarian transformation. The Crown was more likely to grant petitions for *repartimiento* labor to the Church than to the *haciendas* (van Oss, 1986). Given the struggle over scarce labor, the larger *haciendas* in the East increasingly had to rely on paid labor, share cropping, and debt peonage arrangements with poor ladinos, *casta*, and mulattos (Brewer, 2002; Fry, 1988; Jefferson, 2000). As the next section argues, with indigenous people in closer contact to other rural poor who found jobs and opportunities at the *haciendas*, the conditions for assimilation, and *mestizo* encroachment on indigenous lands increased, and with them the conditions and practices of resistance changed.

### ***Forms of F(l)ight and Ch'orti' Contestation***

As elsewhere in the "Maya world" throughout the period of colonial rule, the surviving indigenous people in the eastern region found both combative and "everyday" ways to resist and survive. In the East, however, as divergent groups sought ways to profit from conquered land and indigenous labor, many of those forms of resistance often signified forms of self-dispossession of

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<sup>45</sup> Secular is used in the sense of not being in religious orders (Franciscan, Dominican, etc) and being assigned in obedience to a Bishop in Diocese. Secular clergy, in general, did not enjoy the education of religious order priests.

land, political autonomy, and/or cultural reproduction. In the Ch'orti' area, the practice that paradoxically consolidated the Jocotán parish as a stronghold enclave of Ch'orti' population as it contributed to the *ladinization*—indigenous assimilation—was flight (Brewer, 2009, pp. 159-160; Metz, 2006). Flight—removing oneself or one's social group, temporarily or permanently, in response to crisis—is a documented strategy used throughout the Americas by indigenous peoples (and slaves) to cope with any number of demands that they considered abusive, wrong, or threatening to survival.<sup>46</sup>

Whether from forced *repartimiento* labor in disease-infested indigo sweatshops or from high tribute or taxes after severe crop loss wrought by droughts, floods, or plagues, the Ch'orti' found themselves repeatedly facing colonial dictates that resulted in premature death. In response, some Ch'orti' villages completely disappeared, migrating further into the forests to avoid the harsh conditions of tribute and labor (Metz, 2006). Other Ch'orti' fled the valley or trade route centers and sought out the villages in the mountains above Jocotán and Camotán centers far removed from the Spanish influence, retreating to the less beaten paths and higher altitudes where the rugged terrain dissuaded most *castas* from settlement (Brewer, 2002, pp. 159-160) (Terga Citrón, n.d., p. 64) c.f. (Brewer, 2002, p. 57). In these instances, flight also meant the migration of indigenous practices such as swidden agriculture, kinship structures of governance and social reproduction, “you help me, I'll help you” community labor, and the establishment of new sacred sites.<sup>47</sup>

Flight from the townships for other indigenous subjects came at the cost of rapid dispossession of indigenous cultural and spiritual practices as they sought relative refuge on nearby *haciendas*, where they ostensibly had more control over their labor and in consideration of which the *hacendados* took over tribute payments as well as the provision of food, lodging, and so on (Terga Citrón, n.d., p. 64) c.f. (Brewer, 2002, p. 57; Metz, 2006, pp. 48-49). Once these indigenous refugees were firmly situated on the *hacienda*, however, the pressure to assimilate increased; these migrants generally learned Castilian Spanish, changed their dress and became *ladinos*,<sup>48</sup> or intermarried with other caste.

Nor was flight from tribute and *repartimiento* abuses indigenous peoples' only response to exploitation. Significantly throughout this period, indigenous leaders began practices of “state-relations” that they would continue for centuries. In the Ch'orti' area, as mentioned above,

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<sup>46</sup> This insight is a more nuanced interpretation of (M. MacLeod, 1973, p. 385), who simply states that flight helped determine which indigenous were more able to retain their cultural characteristics (in his analysis, those who flee retain them). See (Fariss, 1984a) for a complex, socio-historical analysis of the dynamic of flight among Maya in the Yucatán peninsula.

<sup>47</sup> (Brewer, 2002, p. 160) notes that isolation in flight was such that it allowed Ch'orti' to keep certain practices like using cacao beans for money into the twentieth century. Visiting Bishop (Cortés y Larraz, 1958 [1768], pp. 239 and 250-251) also writes of Ch'orti' men fleeing to the mountains, leaving wives and families behind, but whether that flight was temporary or permanent is unknown. Similar conditions existed throughout the East such that when not serving as *repartimiento* labor on lowland ranches and farms, or on public works projects, Pokomam, Xinka and Ch'orti' retreated to the off common paths and to higher altitudes where the rugged terrain dissuaded most mestizos and pardos from settlement (M. MacLeod, 1973, pp. 343-345; Metz, 2006, p. 47; van Oss, 1986, pp. 45, 109-115) (Brewer, 2002, pp. 210-212).

<sup>48</sup> According to Charles Wisdom, as late as the 1930s an indigenous person who left the village to live in town or live on a ladino farm without being forced was no longer indigenous. At the same time, a ladino who married into a Ch'orti' family, could come to be recognized as indigenous (Wisdom, 1940, pp. 249-253).

Ch'orti' subjects refused to pay tribute to the first recorded land grant made to the Spanish troops after conquest. Repeatedly, when faced with hardship due to plagues, natural disasters, or climate, Ch'orti' leaders in Jocotán parish (at least) made appeals to the colonial government to exempt them from tribute (a total of thirty years in a one-hundred-fifty-year period) (Feldman, 1982; Metz, 2006, pp. 45-47). They also complained about abusive demands on their labor and harsh treatment (Cortés y Larraz, 1958 [1768]).<sup>49</sup> Ch'orti' resisted the evangelization efforts of the Church as well. This resistance took such forms as refusing conversion or hiding the sacraments (Dary, et al., 1998, pp. 47-49; Metz, 2006, p. 48) and refusing to pay for clerical services (Brewer, 2002, pp. 99-119).

But indigenous appeals to Crown authorities, combined with the ongoing threat of indigenous uprisings, still proved a somewhat effective response to abuse, even though it was based on a divide-and-conquer territorialization practice (Grandin, 2000; Pinto Soría, 1998). The processes of dual power (similar to indirect rule), in which the colonial government created separate laws governing indigenous and enclosed them in geographic concentrations, thwarted the possibility of alliances by deepening differences between ethnic groups. But to accomplish this rule, the Crown needed to provide an outlet for frustration and some resolution of frustrations.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, the same Ch'orti' governing bodies/townships created through the forced concentration the Indigenous Communities could appeal and did appeal to the Crown to secure their land holdings and defend them against unjust encroachments, just as they did to defend indigenous against labor and tribute abuse. By 1754 the Jocotán Indigenous Community (*común de indios*) and Camotán Indigenous Community had obtained titles from the Spanish Crown for at least a portion of their *ejidal* lands. Jocotán bought the title to 255 square kilometers and gained legal title to 17.1 square kilometers more. In 1819, the indigenous “Justices, Governor, Major, and Assistant Mayors of Jocotán” denounced the agrimensor (land surveyor), Don Feliciano Marroquín, of having stolen 333 acres of their land and selling it “with a title from the King of Spain to ladinos...”<sup>51</sup>. That the Crown settled in favor of the Jocotán Community, not only demonstrates the ongoing attempts by indigenous elders to make colonial government work for them despite the odds but also exemplifies the complexity of the power dynamics at work on the eve of independence.

All of these processes combined to shape an eastern colonial Guatemala with a complicated social tapestry of agrarian relations that vastly differed from the western highlands. In the West indigenous tribute and evangelization by the religious clergy established less porous boundaries between indigenous and non-indigenous territories. “Chiquimula Province, [however], experienced the early formation of a parallel structure of landholding where indigenous communal lands coexisted with numerous ladino and *casta* smallholders and relatively few

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<sup>49</sup> See (Metz, 2006, p. 52) for a Chronology of Disasters and Disputes in Jocotán Parish spanning 1654 to 1820. See (Grandin, 2000) and (Mendizábal García, 2009).

<sup>50</sup> Tania Murray Li argues that in Indonesia, the protective indigenous policies of colonization were a Polanyian countermovement (Li, 2010). While the Spanish colonization took place before the kind of market forces that led Polanyi to analyze the double movement had been developed, the underlying relation between fear of uprisings, economic dependence on indigenous tribute or labor and the limits of wreaking havoc on society can move us away from seamless depictions of indigenous victims at the whim of colonial rule to a more nuanced interpretation.

<sup>51</sup> The *Común de Indios* of Jocotán accused the ladinos of their illegal trap of wanting “to throw us off our land for not submitting to payment of rent for our own land because the ladino gentlemen want to be owners.” On August 17 the land sales were nullified by Privative Land Court (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch'orti', 2004, p. 213).

*haciendas*” (T. Little-Siebold, 1995, p. 116). By Independence, the East was known as a land of “small hard-scrabble ladino [and *casta*] farms and valleys interspersed with a few surviving indigenous communities and large but for the most part not very productive *haciendas* (McCreery, 1994, p. 44).<sup>52</sup>

Unlike the shifts towards commodification elsewhere, the relative unimportance of the region combined with the continual protest of abuse by indigenous. Labor in East during the 1920s still bore strong resemblances to colonial practices (T. Little-Siebold, 1995, p. 228).

Although by Independence the image of small ladino farms may have predominated in the East, after independence the Indigenous Townships were increasing their commons, using the laws of the new republic to protect their lands (town circle) and extend it (surrounding countryside). Camotán, for instance, had claim to 446 acres by its oldest title dated 1671. In 1835 that title was extended to 1,339 acres (Dary, et al., 1998, pp. 52-53). According to Girard, after the War of the Mountain, Camotán received another title for 1,078 acres. The heading of this last title read, “We the Indigenous People of Camotán possess the lands in the circle of our town (*Pueblo*) with a just and legitimate title as we present with all the necessary solemnity.” (Dary, et al., 1998, p. 52; Girard, 1949) Contrary to McCreery, in the eastern highlands more was brewing than ladinos.

Resistance through appeals to power for the Ch’orti’, however, had always been a double-edged sword. The Crown theoretically protected indigenous lands to guarantee its double requirements of taxes called tribute (in kind or silver coin tax payment) and *repartimiento* labor for public works or for which the *hacendado* paid taxes to the Crown. Nevertheless, the almost cyclical dynamic between forced labor and ongoing indigenous flight continued to intensify the tribute burden and labor obligations on the remaining non-flight Ch’orti’ population (Feldman, 1982, pp. 146-148; 1985, p. 114) c.f. (Metz, 2006, p. 52). Thus, demographic collapse and the flight of Ch’orti’ to the highlands left pockets of fertile land for the taking. The relative absence of state control throughout the colonial period and competing interests in the region further weakened the indigenous population (Brewer, 2002; McCreery, 1994). In the face of ongoing and growing pressures on indigenous labor, tribute payments, and the most fertile lands process, indigenous people found ways to defend themselves that bound them alternatively closer to ladinos, *mestizos*, and *pardos* or the Crown. Although indigenous resistance in the early republic delivered benefits for indigenous people, making alliances and working with the system was wrought with dangers.

### **A Dangerous Alliance: Rethinking the War(s) of the Mountain (1821–1866)**

In 1821 the Central American republics achieved a peaceful independence from Spain, but that would be the last “peace” in the region for a long time, a fact that would shape and be shaped by eastern Guatemala. First, as economic competition and ideological battles between Central American elites began to fracture any elite bourgeoisie dreams of a unified Central American Republic, the East became positioned as a border region besought with interconnected invasions, social banditry, and organized rebellion (T. Little-Siebold, 1995, p. 88). For over five decades (pre-Independence 1818 to post-Liberal-Reform 1873), Guatemalan political disputes between

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<sup>52</sup> No one in San Juan Ermita (part of the Ch’orti’ East), for example, “had 100 cattle or 100 pesos worth of cheese” (McCreery, 1994, p. 44).



small- and medium-scale producers and the state, between Conservatives and Liberals, and between Guatemala and the other Central American republics were settled through military battle primarily in the East. As historian Todd Little-Siebold notes, “[B]eing a buffer state between newly formed units in the 1830s and 1840s ensured that Chiquimula was always one of the first places invaded and the last places evacuated as the region’s power brokers engaged in their deadly brinkmanship” (T. Little-Siebold, 1995, p. 89). More significant, however, in terms of conflict and agrarian change in the Ch’orti’ East were the struggles that arose in relation to liberal assaults on various forms of common property and the Liberals’ promotion of international trade at the expense of national producers and markets (Ingersoll, 1972; Tobar Cruz, 1971). As Todd Little-Siebold argues, “the rebelliousness of the east is among the least understood but most historically important aspects of the Guatemalan history in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century” (T. Little-Siebold, 1995, p. 88). To understand the roots of how, as its economic import dwindled, the East’s insurgent reputation in the 19<sup>th</sup> century grew into “military” renown in the 20<sup>th</sup> and now 21<sup>st</sup> century, I turn to the War of the Mountain (1837–1951) and to Rafael Carrera, a *pardo* who stood at the military epicenter of all the tumult.

I draw on Ralph Woodward Jr.’s tome on Carrera and the political and economic dynamics that shaped his actions. I also scour more recent revisionist histories of the Carrera Rebellion (Jefferson, 2000, 2004; Solórzano F., 1987) that call into question the portrayal of the indigenous and the poor as pawns of the Church and Conservative landowners in a civil war between Conservatives and Liberals. I show the convergence of forces that gave rise in the East to a multi-ethnic/racial and multi-class armed rebellion against the Liberal Reforms in the early Independence period. This convergence, I argue, brought Ch’orti’ communities into a paradoxical alliance with ladinos and mulattos that stymied Liberals’ first efforts at enclosures and universal citizenship (for the few), but in the long run fed into agrarian conflict and increased indigenous vulnerability to cultural and material dispossession.<sup>53</sup>

Significant in understanding the East in this period is the contradiction between national discourse and localized practices. Despite post-Independence legislation that supposedly shifted the complex socio-racial terrain of the late colonial period such that “there were no longer officially any *españoles, pardos, mestizos, castizos, or sambos*” (T. Little-Siebold, 2001, p. 112), the labels continued in local use. “[C]lass, caste, region, and circumstance conspired to produce new discourses of identity several times during this period”, discourses that varied between regions and locales (Ibid.). In discussing conflict in the East, below, I try to make clear the multi-ethnic nature of post-independence rural politics, but it is crucial to recognize that the very categories of race-ethnicity that I am using are not uniform, fixed, or discrete. Figure 1.3 shows the general area of conflict that involved campesin@s and indigenous in the East in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as the area of territorial dispute in the present-day Ch’orti’ East.

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<sup>53</sup> I base my claim primarily on Todd Little-Siebold’s work and a lot of creative research and reading, from the *principales* in John Lloyd Stephens account who accompany Carrera’s troops to the fact that 1847 documents that supposedly favored Zacapa in its land dispute with the Jocotan indigenous community disappeared during the second rebellion, as well as on demographic changes in the municipality during that time. Stephens’ description of indigenous elders with their silver staffs at the beck and call of Carrera’s soldiers in Camotán alone might create the impression of Ch’orti’ leaders as dupes. But Solórzano, Grandin, and Jefferson inspired me to look for connections that might suggest Ch’orti’ support for the rebellion (Grandin, 2000; Jefferson, 2004; T. Little-Siebold, 1995; Solórzano F., 1987).

## Mid-19th Century Chiquimula: Areas of Indigenous and Campesin@ Conflict

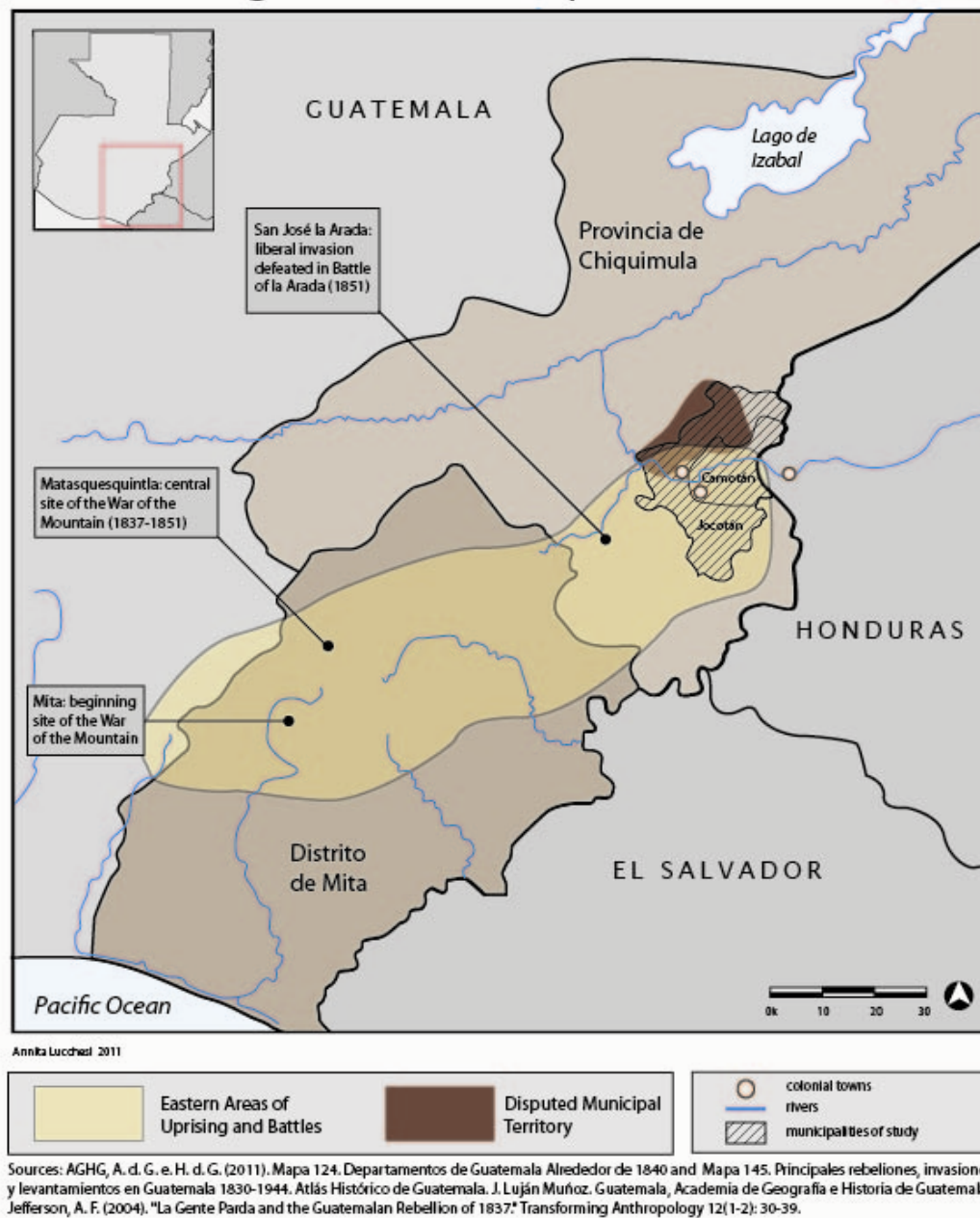


Figure 1.3: Mid-19<sup>th</sup>-Century Chiquimula: Areas of Indigenous and Campesin@ Conflict (map contracted by author).

Even before Creoles achieved Central American Independence in 1821, some Guatemalan elites were becoming enamored with the discourses of the Enlightenment stemming from the American and French Revolutions. Crucial to their vision of a Liberal Guatemala was the question of land policy (Fry, 1988, p. 204). Whereas the colonial government had viewed land policy as

secondary to labor for mercantile and tax revenues, prominent Liberals in the wake of Independence considered private property the foundation of economic and social progress (Fry, 1988, p. 211; McCreery, 1994; Wortman, 1975).<sup>54</sup>

In 1825, with independence consolidated, the newly constituted National Assembly passed a radical piece of agrarian legislation: Decree 27. This Decree required that each landowner present a property title or else his/or her land would return to the government as *tierra baldía* (unclaimed land) and be put up for sale. Second, the decree reserved land for colonization, giving “progressive” foreigners (Fry, 1988, p. 204) investment capital (Weaver, 2009, p. 135) and offering them the same rights as nationals to purchase land. The Decree laid out land on each coast, as well as in the interior, specifically for this purpose. At its center, Decree 27 broke the cornerstone of land use in the East by reducing all *tierra baldía* to private property.

Throughout the colonial period, in contrast to *realenga* land, which most of the population recognized as being at the disposal of the Crown, *tierras baldías* were unused lands that had never been legally defined. Controlled neither by the Crown or the municipalities, these lands soon became common-pool resources that responded to the various designs of ladinos, mulattos, and indigenous producers. Although he does not formally recognize the mixed-caste population in the East at that time, Fry captures the confusion and brewing outrage that this Decree caused:

Neither Indians nor ladinos understood the Liberal enthusiasm for private property. Communal land had always been an element of Indian society. Moreover, the traditional Spanish concept of *aprovechamiento común* had been a part of Spanish agriculture from ancient times. (Fry, 1988, p. 206)

Under the banner of “universal citizenship,” liberal reforms also signified the end to segregationist policies, which had until then set indigenous people apart in their townships, both legally and geographically, from ladino populations.<sup>55</sup> The barriers buffering indigenous communities from dominant sectors had always been selectively permeable; nevertheless, they had provided at least some safeguards to protect indigenous lands from ladino and mulatto encroachment and abuse. Now those protections were gone. The new land laws represented an especially hard blow to the rural poor, whether Indian or Caste, and especially in the East, where city Creoles were beginning to set their sights (Jefferson, 2004). Even if they could afford title to the lands they farmed, smallholders of modest means could not keep hold of access to forest and pasture rights. The laws also struck a crushing blow to municipalities by depriving them of the revenues they customarily charged for usufruct rights to these lands. Historically, municipalities made great use of *tierra baldía*, but with the new laws, “municipalities could neither tax nor defend these lands.” In addition, the new republic passed a law known as the Livingston Code, prohibiting the death penalty and requiring the municipalities to build prisons with individual cells, added one more fiscal burden on municipalities already wrestling with depleted revenues (Solórzano F., 1987, p. 13).

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<sup>54</sup> In the East stretching over into Western El Salvador, the indigo (blue plant dye) boom, with its grueling labor conditions, had been a crucial source of taxes. Yet, by Independence indigo was on the decline (Rubio, 1952; R. S. Smith, 1959; Wortman, 1975).

<sup>55</sup> In the West, where many elites were of mixed blood, the liberal reforms represented an opportunity to break down the racial hierarchy that had excluded them from political participation (Grandin, 2000, p. 85).

Ultimately, the new land policies and changing legal status of indigenous peoples combined with other post-independence legislation in the 1830s in such a way that it sliced into the heart of eastern farmers, cattle ranchers, and indigenous peoples' lives (Fry, 1988; Jefferson, 2004; Solórzano F., 1987). First, the Liberal state created incentives to encourage wealthier nationals and foreigners to purchase land from Am Atitlan to Chiquimula for the production of the export commodity that would purportedly seal the young republic's ties to the global market: a red dye called *grana* or *cochineal*. Produced by the harvesting of red insects from tuna cacti, *grana* production threatened the small and medium cattle ranches and indigenous plots of the dry East. Further *grana* required intensive labor, thus stepping up the same modality of forced labor requirements on indigenous and now also on rural ladino and mulatto poor under a new name: *mandamiento* (a far cry from "Liberal" free labor!) (Fry, 1988; Tobar Cruz, 1971).

Second, thanks to government concessions, foreign companies began chopping down the mahogany forest in the then-*corregimiento* of Chiquimula, which included present-day Chiquimula, Zacapa, and Progreso Departments as well as parts of Jutiapa, Jalapa, and Santa Rosa. President Mariano Gálvez (1831–1838) had granted a huge swath of Chiquimula to two investors to promote European colonization. Unlike many of the other concessions in areas that were largely unoccupied, tropical forests, in the Petén, the Chiquimula concession was home to many ladino, *pardo*, and indigenous communities. While the colonization project never materialized, the companies seeking to colonize the region began to harvest the forest, catalyzing opposition from the divergent populations that laid claim to foraging or logging rights (Solórzano F., 1987, p. 13).

By the mid-1830s, the region was boiling over with conflicts. Experiences like the one that the Jocotán Community of Indigenous had had with the corrupt land surveyor mentioned above, combined with the threat of Decree 27, sounded a firm warning. Throughout the East, indigenous communities and *hacienda* owners were refusing to allow land surveyors to measure their lands in the attempt to enforce Decree 27 (Fry, 1988, p. 206). Moreover, *ladinos*, *creoles*, *pardos*, and *mestizos* in municipalities throughout Chiquimula were protesting the foreign companies. Wealthier ranchers and farmers were upset not with the concessions but with the fact that they had to take a back seat to foreigners; the poor, meanwhile, were threatened by the potential loss of access to communal forests (Jefferson, 2000, p. 35). Adding insult to injury, the Galvez Administration sent in troops to stifle the protests and then levied taxes on the municipalities to pay for the costs of those very troops (Woodward Jr., 1993, p. 110).

Despite these small uprisings throughout the early 1830s, most sources agree that the cholera epidemic that swept down from Belize through Chiquimula in late 1836, reaching Guatemala City in February 1837, was the straw that broke the back of regional stability in the East (Jefferson, 2004; Solórzano F., 1987) and the attempt at a separate Liberal Republic of Los Altos in the West)(Grandin, 2000).<sup>56</sup> Living closest to places with contaminated water, mulattos, *pardos*, indigenous, and poor ladinos died at higher rates. But faced with a deadly disease that no one understood, liberal discourses and decrees put the blame on the bodies that were dying, so

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<sup>56</sup> Greg Grandin's analysis of the articulation of race and class through the cholera epidemic in Quetzaltepeque in the Western highlands is especially telling for understanding how elites in Quetzaltepeque used the failure of the central state to build a separatist movement. In the same time period, liberals within Chiquimula province, recognizing that the tide was turning against the Liberal state, also tried to separate from the republic and join with Western Honduras and Western El Salvador to form a sixth Central American Republic (Brewer, 2002).

dominant-society fingers pointed to indigenous and lower castes as the source of the disease (Grandin, 2000). Between these inflammatory discourses and ineffective government medical campaigns, many of the rural poor, especially those just East of Guatemala City in what is today the Department of Santa Rosa, became convinced that Liberal government was trying to poison them in order to so that it could steal their land when they died (Jefferson, 2004) c.f. (Brewer, 2002, p. 216).

The rebellion, which would eventually bury Guatemala's first liberal regime and shatter the Central American Federation, broke out in Mita, at the southwestern tip of the *Corregimiento* of Chiquimula. Led by a *pardo* landowner, Teodoro Mexia, the initial revolt arose from mulattos, ladinos, and *pardos* (Jefferson, 2004).<sup>57</sup> It quickly spread throughout Mita and Chiquimula (Solórzano F., 1987, p. 14), gaining force under the leadership of Rafael Carrera, a swineherd turned landowner through marriage. Carrera himself was a mixture of *mestizo*, mulatto, and white (Woodward Jr., 1993, p. 57), who had the broad appeal to raise an army. Many of the "hard-scrabble farmers" (Fry, 1988) and "surviving Ch'orti' and Xinka indigenous communities" joined forces with Carrera<sup>58</sup> as the rebellion became a civil war (Brewer, 2002). Indeed, the soldiers described at the beginning of this chapter as being accompanied by indigenous elders to detain John Lloyd Stephens' entourage in Camotán were none other than Carrera's troops (Stephens ESQ., 1949, p. 59).

In the rebellion, two distinct ideas of economic progress linked to spatial formations with concrete material stakes were clashing. An urban elite who looked to Europe and the world market linked agro-exports, while hinterland farmers and indigenous townships who saw progress in self-sufficiency and internal markets as freeing themselves from the exploitative practices of tribute (the indigenous) and debt (ladinos) or forced (indigenous and *pardos*) labor. The passionate defense of eastern territories against the liberal designs in Decree 27, with their largest land tracts in *tierras baldías* used communally under usufruct rights, fueled this multi-ethnic rebellion. The fear of land dispossession united them not only against Decree 27 but also against exploitative labor practices.<sup>59</sup> How indigenous, *pardos*, *mestizos*, and ladinos found

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<sup>57</sup> Jefferson, draws attention to how the state specifically blamed Blacks and barred the entry of Blacks to Guatemala even after the epidemic had ended (Jefferson, 2000, p. 36). See also (Briggs & Mantini-Briggs, 2003) for the workings of the racialized and geographic practices of "medical profiling" of sanitary citizens and unsanitary subjects during the cholera epidemic.

<sup>58</sup> Solórzano (1987) and Fry (1988) offer revisionist readings of the Carrera Rebellion that push beyond elite views pitting Liberal bourgeoisie against feudal conservatives and the Catholic church, with peasants and indigenous as a malleable mass. Solórzano particularly conceives of "the peasant as a conscious actor" (Solórzano F., 1987, p. 1) and notes that historical accounts of the Carrera period are deeply divided along the political divisions of the time. This perspective contrasts with (Jefferson, 2000), who makes visible the *afro-mestizo* or *mulato libre* (freed Black) agency in the rebellion, while Fry and Solórzano see an alliance between Indians and ladinos.

<sup>59</sup> In volume III of *Capital*, Marx included commodification of land/nature along with labor and capital. A perspective that recognizes the triadic dialectic among labor, capital, and land leads to a fuller understanding of the economic, cultural, and political processes entailed in the mutual constitution of Europe and its colonies, processes that continue to define the relation between postcolonial and imperial states. It helps to specify the operations through which Europe's colonies, first in America and then in Africa and Asia, provided it with cultural and material resources with which it fashioned itself as the standard of humanity—the bearer of a superior religion, reason, and civilization embodied in European selves. (Coronil, 1996; Coronil & Skurski, 2006, p. 357) is seeking to do for Lefebvre what (Stoler, 1995) does for Foucault—directing attention from a predominantly European focus to the mutually constitutive processes, practices, and forms of power through which metropolises and (post)colonies make and remake one another. This approach also makes clear how colonial connections continue to account for what the

common cause in the messiness of alliances, and their results, were part and parcel of both negotiation and resistance under the Colony, under the newly formed republic, and even today in Ch'orti' highlands. In a forthcoming book, Michael Fry argues that the lynchpin holding together the multi-ethnic patchwork of townships, villages, and *haciendas* in the East was communal land. Defense of land became a defense of territory with mutual positive dependence between *pardos*, poor ladinos, and indigenous peoples.<sup>60</sup>

As Conservatives and Liberals picked their sides, the war took on Central American dimensions with Honduras and El Salvador Creoles joining the battle against Carrera, making the Ch'orti' boundary in the East a site of ongoing conflict (Brewer, 2002). In 1838 Galvez stepped down. Carrera and his indigenous, *mestizo*, and *pardo* troops descended upon the capital city of Santiago, creating an image of armed indigenous peoples invading urban spaces that would remain seared in the historic memory of Guatemalan elites.<sup>61</sup> For the next seventeen years the young country, and especially the East, would find itself embroiled in political intrigue, war and ongoing rebellion. Ten years after Carrera's first victory, some landowners in the eastern mountains would take up arms against him in a second War of the Mountain (Solórzano F., 1987; Tobar Cruz, 1971). Nor would Carrera be able to politically consolidate his vision of a multi-ethnic, multi-class nation. Still, the most offensive Liberal policies were rolled back, and indigenous and *casta* poor found they had an ear in government (Grandin, 2000; Solórzano F., 1987; Woodward Jr., 1993).

To what extent were indigenous communities actively involved in the rebellion as opposed to being "duped" by discourses to win their favor? While any answer would have to be discerned in and through regional and local dynamics, growing evidence suggests first, that Carrera's populist style of politics was more than just opportunism. Carrera came to represent and reflect a sentiment of rebellion in the East that Fry describes as a unified defense of rural communities over Liberal policies that favored urban and international interests (correspondence, 10/15/11). Referring to the western province of Quetzaltenango or Xela (Mendizábal García, 2009, p. 114) points to the Maya ability to ally with Carrera and the central state in 1840, just 140 years after they were close to extinction, as a "magisterial example of their [the Mayas] will to prevail." And Grandin's nuanced research of that same period and place powerfully demonstrates how and why indigenous leaders appealed to Carrera for help when threatened by local elites, and Carrera's victory cemented the local power of many indigenous elders (Grandin, 2000, pp. 99-109).

In Chiquimula, and especially in the area of my study, once the threat of the more radical liberal laws themselves were not the enemy, the indigenous found themselves confronted with an old threat in new clothes, with negotiation and alliance-building practices leading to ongoing dispossession. Even as Carrera granted land to ethnic communities, and ensured clear title of

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likes of Thomas Barnett interpret as disconnection in the neocolonial/neoliberal present.

<sup>60</sup> Correspondence with Michael Fry, October 15, 2011.

<sup>61</sup> Susanne Jonas argues that campesin@ and indigenous uprisings and the fear they generated in civilian elites was a key element in the creation of counter-insurgent state (Jonas, 1991, pp. 118-119). See (Brewer, 2002, p. 217) for how influences from the oligarchy after the 1954 coup were articulated in the East with a military not completely under the thumb of the western and capital city oligarchs, and his agreement with Jonas that the military were not simply the dogs of war owned and controlled by the fears of the oligarchy.

ejidos to indigenous (T. Little-Siebold, 1995, p. 27),<sup>62</sup> conservative elite landowners who had found breathing space for their regionalism and their rejection of foreign colonization further consolidated their control of the eastern lowlands (Brewer, 2002). The alliance that had begun as multi-ethnic and territorial did manage to keep *tierras baldías* under common use, but it brought indigenous and *casta* into closer proximity to each other and thus stimulated competition. By the 1860s ladino municipalities existed alongside indigenous ones. Paradoxically then, joining forces had increased the potential for land conflicts between the “groups,” while furthering political cooperation and indigenous cultural assimilation (Solórzano F., 1987), increasingly so in the more isolated area of my study. In Section II, I look at the unfolding of these dynamics from the cusp of the second wave of Liberal Reform to the eve of World War II.

## **Section 2— A Tale of Two Towns: From “Común de Indios” to “Municipio” (1866–1944)**

The series of laws that the Guatemalan state enacted (and tried to execute) governing land, labor, and racialized citizenship between 1866 and 1944 as coffee became the leading export, and the Western highlands its preferred land of exploitation, did not pivot exclusively on the Liberal Revolution of 1871. Nor were they as abrupt as scholars originally depicted. But they did progressively bound state formation to a budding agro-export economy (Cambranes, 1985; Mahoney, 2001; McCreery, 1994; C. A. Smith, 1992 [1990]; Williams, 1994). Tied both to elite interests and the shifting world economy, these laws earned Guatemala categorization as both a “Banana Republic” (Schlesinger & Kinzer, 1982) and a “*Finquero* [Coffee] State” (Tischler Visquerra, 2001 [1998]), implying absolute dependence on primary exports, international markets, and cheap, primarily coerced, indigenous labor (Brockett, 1998).

Yet, how these new laws took shape did not model any Western form of liberalism in either the East or the West. Nationally, the Carrera Rebellion taught liberals a lesson about modernization. When they regained control in 1871, they drew on colonial institutions, moved more cautiously, and focused radical transformation in another part of the country: the West. The process that altered the cultural and geographic landscape of Chiquimula province was of a different nature. Calling into question what “national” even meant in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Guatemala, (T. Little-Siebold, 1995, p. 287) explains that the “the meanings of [the post-1871] Liberal reforms in the Oriente [East] took place in the municipalities. Local factors [or localized dynamics] conditioned how “national” policies played themselves out in the departments and pueblos.” This section looks specifically through the lens of municipal formation and municipal politics over land to make visible divergent processes of dispossession in the Ch’orti’ East.

### **The Politics of Legislating Townships and Difference**

Even before the transition to Liberal rule, Rafael Carrera’s death in 1865 ended the alliances that had forged a successful rebellion, giving way to new opportunities for ladino farmers and ranchers to encroach on indigenous communal lands and try to take advantage of the *tierras baldías* that indigenous communities had unofficially claimed (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch’orti’, 2004; Metz, Mariano, & López Garcia, 2010). In the “Ch’orti” hinterlands, with their

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<sup>62</sup> Little-Siebold also points out that Carrera directed Chiquimula Governor Vicente Cerna to resolve the land dispute between Jocotán and Camotán in this fashion: guaranteeing respect for the indigenous land claims of both communities (T. Little-Siebold, 1995, p. 91).

rugged topography, fertile humid mountain soils, and virgin forests, existing tensions were numerous even prior to the creation of new townships. These tensions—among and between indigenous *principales*, other *naturales* (indigenous) and ladino, mulatto inhabitants of the highlands and “outsiders” from other non-indigenous and mestizo groups seeking opportunities—grew as possibilities to legalize landholding became linked to municipal formation.

Post-independence laws established that areas with a certain number of inhabitants should form separate administrative territorial units, and the conflicts that accompanied the petitions and partitions reworked race-class dynamics. Between 1866 and 1927, the Jocotán and Camotán *comunidades de indios* lost their most fertile mountain lands to the establishment of two new highland townships: Olopa and La Unión. For most of the colonial and early independence period, what today constitutes the townships of Olopa and La Unión were sparsely populated highland areas located on the far sides of the northern and southern slopes bordering Jocotán and Camotán. As mentioned above, throughout the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Ch’orti’ communities fleeing Church and state coercion on their labor strategically cleared and settled parts of the higher mountains.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, given the back and forth of wars, invasions, and rebellions that marked much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these less populated Sierra lands also served as refuges and staging grounds for mixed blood, ladino, and indigenous groups who were waging some kind of battle of defense or offense against the state. Moreover, as the battle lines changed and alliances shifted, expressions of both social banditry and blatantly outlaw actions took hold, especially in those same Sierras (T. Little-Siebold, 1995). These material and meaningful struggles over land and township control and class, caste, and race differences reworked both physical and cultural boundaries in ways that constituted dispossession and conditioned the future.<sup>64</sup> Yet, the divergent and counter-intuitive ways by which processes of municipal formation in the Ch’orti’ East connected cultural practices with access and control of land calls into question any formulaic linkage between access to land and indigeneity. In Olopa, ladino and *pardo* accumulation of land rights and wealth was linked to the ongoing practice of colonial Ch’orti’ rituals, while in La Unión, ladinos longed to divorce the township from its Ch’orti’ roots to erase any historic indigenous claims to land. Language describing race, ethnicity, and class becomes difficult to decipher from the archives. To simplify the discussion in this section, I resort to using the official category of ladino, which was operating in Jocotán by the end of this period, recognizing ladinos as assimilated indigenous or mixed Afro, indigenous, or white; on the other hand, I refer to Ch’orti’ either by that name or by the term indigenous people. How municipal formation evolved became a key mechanism for speeding up the assimilation process.

Under Liberal Party rule, the figure of the municipality became tied directly to debates about citizenship, race, class and gender in Guatemala. Beginning on the eve of independence, the municipality became the privileged instrument for forging a “model of differentiated citizenship” in which being a citizen meant being non-indigenous, not being a poor *campesin@* or agricultural worker, and not being a woman. Indigenous, *campesin@s*, and women enjoyed only a second-class passive citizenship without the right to vote or hold office in a municipality

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<sup>63</sup> For a discussion on the planning behind the “spontaneous” colonization in Q’eq’chi’-Maya frontier settlement see (Megan Ybarra, 2010).

<sup>64</sup> (Carney & Watts, 1991; Hart, 1991; D. Moore, 1993) all introduce and/or build upon the insight that struggles over resources are simultaneously struggles over meaning.



(Taracena Arriolo, con colaboración de Gellert, Gordillo Castillo, Sagastume Paiz, & Walter, 2003, p. 175).

The pragmatic position that late-19<sup>th</sup>-century liberals adopted before the colonial legacies preserved by the conservatives regarding the multi-ethnic, multi-race population relied upon criteria such as “must hold property,” “is a professional,” “has employment,” and “provides the means of his own subsistence” as a way of drawing boundaries that were ostensibly not based on race, ethnicity, class, or gender, but in practice, given the social relations of the post colony, this position excluded from public office and electoral participation exactly the “ruffians” who had fought alongside Carrera or who lived on the rich volcanic soils that were soon to be converted into coffee plantations. In other words, even when such laws did not mention the terms indigenous, ladino, or Creole, they left open the possibility of manipulating ethnic and racial differentiation.<sup>65</sup>

In other cases, legal proscriptions and limits on indigenous peoples’ access to institutional power were codified in explicitly racial terms. In the Law of Municipalities of the Peoples of Guatemala of 1879, three type of municipalities were defined: (1) strictly indigenous or strictly ladino municipalities, (2) municipalities with parallel indigenous and ladino authorities, and (3) municipalities with a mixed authority in which the mayor could only be ladino and the assistant mayor could be indigenous. “The third, the mixed municipal township had been gradually increasing the power of ladinos in indigenous regions, was progressively legalized and perfected through a long series of decrees and rulings that culminated in the 1927 governmental accord which rules ‘in townships with predominance of indigenous populations, the mayor and the first selectman must always be ladinos who can read and write the Spanish language.’” (Taracena Arriolo, et al., 2003, p. 178) In the next subsection I show the divergent ways that those changing laws and discourses hooked up with the changing populations in the southern and northern mountains of the Jocotán parish, creating contested processes of municipal formation that consolidated ladino control in the Ch’orti’ East, but through different articulations of land, race, cultural practice, and class.

### **When the Saints Come Marching In: The Making of Santa Maria de Olopa**

The marriage of indigenous beliefs, evangelization, and ladino and *mestizo* aspirations that led to the separation of Santa María de Olopa from Jocotán, also shaped the dynamics of agrarian conflict and wealth extraction in and through indigenous ritual. In the simplest terms, the creation of Santa María de Olopa reflects the politics of place in the Ch’orti’ East on the eve of the 1871 liberal reforms: this was a time and place in which discourses of faith and morality and local markets still held great weight in their mutual constitution.

With the Conservatives still in control of the central state after Carrera’s death, and religious taxes re-established, Chiquimula ladinos used evangelization as a tool to open new markets and gain access to fertile Ch’orti’ soils. In response, indigenous leaders in Jocotán, criticizing the

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<sup>65</sup> Above all, the Liberals consolidated, at least at the national ideological level, an Indigenous-ladino bi-polarity. While (Taracena Arriolo, et al., 2003, p. 175) view this construct as gaining hegemonic acceptance bit by bit, (T. Little-Siebold, 1995), whose research focuses on Chiquimula Province, argues that the colonial caste categories are alive and well, albeit reworked, in many towns and villages in the East.

possible separation, resurrected the image of social banditry that had marked the region for decades. Proselytization and Robin Hood derring-do each carried its own competing, coded “language of contention” (Roseberry, 1994) and evidenced the tensions marking the formation of Olopa. Among the most important and heavily contested “moments” in the Olopa-formation chronicle were those that involved access to Ch’orti’ land and labor and, as I explain below, the institution of ritual rent (through the sale of religious accoutrements).<sup>66</sup>

Olopa became a municipality on the heels of what Torres Moss describes as the first successful evangelization campaign in Chiquimula by Capuchin missionaries, which purportedly converted many indigenous souls to Catholicism in the early 1860s (Torres Moss, 1996b).<sup>67</sup> After their stunning start in the city of Chiquimula, the religious clergy headed out to find souls in the tiny village of Santa María in the southwestern mountains of Jocotán. As a “gift” to the village or as a way to attract new indigenous proselytes, the Capuchins brought with them a statue of the Virgin Mary as the Divine Pastress. The story that ladino Olopans tell is that motivated Ch’orti’ villagers erected a thatched shrine for the Virgin image. According to this telling of events, the shrine soon became a magnet for pilgrimages and settlement, drawing first Ch’orti’ and poor ladino and *mestizo* farmers from outlying areas, then *Ladino* families who smelled an opportunity for business. With weekly holy days and a non-stop stream of pilgrimages, Olopa soon was the ideal market for all those travelling salesmen and those who set up residence to sell agricultural produce, religious candles, artisanal goods, and other light-manufactured items (AGCA). By 1869, the town, which had taken the name Santa María, purportedly was booming.

In a formal request to the government from 22 indigenous leaders, the signatories argued that given the fertility of the soils, the existence of some 628 possible taxpayers (the majority Ch’orti’), and the long distance (seven to eight leagues, about 25 miles) to Jocotán center, the de facto town needed a separate township. Proximity, the claim goes, was a key for asserting the territorial control needed to collect taxes, prevent crime, and generally attend to the needs of the market and the pilgrimage center. On the heels of three decades of mountain rebellions, control of hinterlands was a powerful discourse for municipal formation. Less than a year after the auxiliary mayor and 22 indigenous officials from “el pueblo de María” had made their formal request to separate 150 square kilometers of Jocotán common land to establish a separate municipality, President Vicente Cerna, who had been governor of Chiquimula at the height of the evangelization period, approved the action (Torres Moss, 1996b). During the decade that followed the 1870 founding of the municipality, the populace failed to fulfill their municipal obligations such as erecting public buildings and paying taxes (McCreery, 1994, pp. 145 c.f. AGCA MG 286.123 143, AGCA MG 286.115 302). Separation, however, with or without a municipal building, created the conditions for new social relations based increasingly on ladino access to newly declared municipal *ejido* lands.

A close reading of existing research suggests two conclusions. First, although the request for township formation appears as an indigenous request, a modest number of ladinos (with eyes to

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<sup>66</sup> My argument linking township formation with accumulation through ritual rents and dispossession comes from bringing the analysis of (Diener, 1978) of post-World War II political economy in Olopa in conversation with the archives. My hope is to research into Diener’s insights more deeply in the future through a gender lens.

<sup>67</sup> Before succeeding Carrera as President in 1865, Conservative Vicente Cerna had been the political governor of Chiquimula and had approved and supported the mission (Torres Moss, 1996b). Cerna had deep ties to Creole and ladino elites in the area and was interested in modernizing agriculture in the region (T. Little-Siebold, 1995).

commercial and land opportunities) probably convinced indigenous inhabitants to request that Olopa become a municipality, emphasizing the advantages of a closer marketplace or highlighting the “wishes” of the statue (Torres Moss, 1996b, pp. 2-6). Second, the conservative religious dynamics through which ladinos manipulated the establishment of the new municipality ultimately promoted the “possession” of Ch’orti’ ritual and language as a means of spurring dispossession of Ch’orti’ wealth and ultimately land (Diener, 1978).

The statue of the Divine Pastoress, and the conversion of “Olopan” indigenous people to a syncretic Catholicism—understood as *costumbre*—that “she” elicited, hooked the indigenous into an economy of ritual rent. By *costumbre*, also called Indian traditionalism, I am referring to a much-debated process common in Spanish America. To evangelize, the Catholic Church employed in the Americas a modality much like the one it had used in conquering pagan groups in Europe: the selective incorporation of indigenous rituals and feast days into Catholic practice (Burkholder, 1990). Debates on syncretism focus often on its categorization: while some interpret it as a sign of persistence of indigenous tradition adapted for survival, others treat syncretized cultural forms as absolute colonial constructs.<sup>68</sup> As Watanabe has argued, it is this paradox of “persistence and conversion, nativism and opportunism” that lies at the very crux of syncretism (Watanabe, 1990, p. 132). “And what needs to be analyzed is its relationship to social context: the realm of public community religion more than personal observance or universal cosmology (Fariss, 1984b, pp. 309-314, 324-333 c.f. Watanabe 1990).”

Ritual rent, syncretistic though it may have been, created a possibility for holding on to one’s indigenous language and many beliefs. Still it supported class-race articulations that bolstered hierarchies of exclusion. Specifically, ritual rent required ongoing expenditures for multiple offerings to the Saints and feasts for the Souls: a home altar, offerings to the Pastoress at the Church, and offerings to the travelling Saints.<sup>69</sup> And ladinos continually expanded business in the town center to supply those needs. As wealthier ladinos gained access to municipal lands for cattle and crops in the growing municipal center, they also set up shops in town and profited handsomely from the accelerating sale of ceremonial candles, incense, food, and liquor for indigenous ritual.<sup>70</sup> Thus, “Indian ritual serve[d] as an appropriation process, funneling surplus from Indian peasants to ladino elites; ritual expenditure is in effect a form of rent” (Stavenhagen 1975, 168) c.f. (Diener, 1978, pp. 104-106).

Significantly, ladino wealth extraction from ritual rent became intimately bound to ladino control in complex ways, including subsuming control through renting land from the municipality as long term usufruct right or the new municipality selling them private titles. The creation of a new municipal center led to the redefinition and delineation of *ejidal* (common) land. In accordance with laws around new municipalities, the new municipality of Santa María Olopa declared some of its most fertile soils to be municipal land and opened it up to ladinos as well as Ch’orti’ (Girard, 1949, p. V.I 295), even though Olopa had 98 percent indigenous population at the time

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<sup>68</sup> The traditional view of syncretism, the one that Charles Wisdom used in writing of the Ch’orti’, conceptualizes “Indian religion” as a seamless fusion of native and Christian elements where the “church and the saints are important, but they are adapted to a religious ideology permeated with non-Catholic concepts and deities” (Wisdom, 1940, p. 18).

<sup>69</sup> See (Diener, 1978, p. 107) for a detailed description of the different ritual practices in Olopa as they were exercised in the 1970s.

<sup>70</sup> Ch’orti’ members of New day told me that they would like to do more rituals but could not afford them.

of its founding. Within seven years, under the liberal revolution, the land laws changed. Starting in 1877, municipalities could partition and sell their municipal lands or continue to provide long term rental rights, but now at the discretion of the municipal council (formal state) versus the indigenous *común de indios* structure.

With the 1879 Municipal Law that authorized mixed municipalities, ladinos cemented control over the municipal council: in municipalities with an indigenous majority, the Mayor and the Town Council members had to be ladinos. In so doing, they strengthened their control over who had usufruct rights to what land and how they could use it. While indigenous farmers counted on municipal lands to plant their *milpa* cornfields, many of the growing population of ladinos chose to live in town and raise cattle, grazing them on municipal land. Generations of conflict ensued. The ladino-dominated municipal council would refuse to allow indigenous communities to fence their usufruct land. If, then, Ch'orti' farmers shot trespassing cattle to protect their unfenced crops, ladino ranchers would respond by killing or imprisoning the offending indigenous farmers.<sup>71</sup> Conflicts over cattle increased as ladinos gained expanded access to indigenous land and increased their herds. The practice of ritual rent became an institutional fix to the tensions these conflicts produced. The way it worked was, an indigenous farmer who killed a cow might make a costly offering to the Pastress, buying goods at the store of the offended ladino (Diener, 1978, pp. 105-107). A measure of the high price tag of ritual expenses is the fact that many ladinos augmented their landholdings through Ch'orti' forfeiture of land titles to pay their delinquent churchly debts.

In summary, Olopa township formation created the conditions to further separate indigenous campesin@ families from their means of production (dispossession) and promoted the re-organization of previously communal indigenous land into private Ch'orti' parcels—the “ground” that later could be lost by debt and sale. At the same time, though, the religious catalyst of township formation forged an economic dependency between town ladinos and country Ch'orti' based on ritual rent that kept Ch'orti' in possession of their language and “traditional” cultural practices in most of the villages well into the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Grounds for Separation: La Unión**

As the previous subsection shows, Olopa's quick and Catholic township recognition led to the perpetuation of Ch'orti' tradition coupled with increasing conflict over and privatization of municipal lands. La Unión, by contrast, gained municipal status as the unexpected result of a convoluted and contested forty-year process that would push its Ch'orti' residents further towards assimilation and a different process of “dispossession.” Similar to many of those who had first populated the highlands of Olopa, some one thousand Ch'orti' families had cleared parts of the virgin forest and settled mountainous *tierra baldía* lands north of the Jocotán and Camotán. Yet, as I discuss here, ladino elites, who had failed fifty years previously in colonial times to dispossess the *Jocoteco* Ch'orti' lands, were able to manipulate and subvert the republican legal mechanisms by which the Jocotán *común de indios* attempted to secure administrative rights for the indigenous settlers who depended on these lands. In the context of

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<sup>71</sup> As late as 1970 one ladino townsperson told anthropologist Paul Diener that he made calculations about whether to use his land for *animalitos grandes* (big animals) that is cattle or *animalitos pequeños* (little animals), meaning indigenous (Diener, 1978, p. 107).

changing liberal laws regarding land and municipalities, ladinos secured conditions that would quickly erode Ch'orti' political control over territory and government and eventually eradicate most of the Cho'rti's' diacritical practices of language and ritual.

Even before the indigenous officials of Jocotán began their attempt to overturn Santa María Olopa's attempt to form a different township, they had had deeper concerns about ladino encroachment on their communal lands to the north. Similar to elsewhere in post-independence Guatemala where indigenous communities continued the colonial practice of seeking state recognition of *ejidal* lands, the indigenous officials of Jocotán and Zacapa first negotiated their boundary in 1847. However, the multiple uprisings dotting the East at that time had made any central-government action to finalize disputes impossible, and documents related to indigenous claims went missing, just as they did in the case of Olopa.<sup>72</sup> In 1866 the Jocotán *común de indios* again requested that the state allow the *común* to purchase some 300 *caballerías* (30,512 acres) of unclaimed lands to the north—*Finca Lampocoy* (the Lampocoy Plantation), Montaña Granadillas, and Cari—extending their *ejidal* territory.

By 1869 what had seemed a straightforward request had become a heated conflict between the Jocotán *común de indios* and the ladino-controlled *común* in Zacapa, the province on Chiquimula's northern frontier. Despite an abundance of sworn testimony that the lands were indeed unclaimed, that they had been cleared primarily by the indigenous campesin@s of Jocotán (and a few of Camotán), and that the Ch'orti' families who inhabited the lands supplied the region with an array of agricultural and artisanal product, cattle ranchers in Zacapa wanted part of the land. Wary of indigenous uprisings and appreciative of the Ch'orti's' sense of industry, both the land surveyor and the governor pushed for a position that established rights first to people who had first worked the land, limiting what those from Zacapa can claim.

This second battle in the legal war over Lampocoy provides a baseline for grasping shifts in and between multiple, contradictory articulations of land rights, power, and difference. I turn to their discourse. The Zacapeños premised their claim on Lampocoy on the basis of evidence that was not available: namely, a missing agreement of 1847 that supposedly divided the territory equally between the two municipalities. The only formal, public evidence existing suggests that the agreement was never finalized.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, the Ch'orti' officials of Jocotán; the land surveyor, Daniel Taracena; and the governor [*jefe político*] of Chiquimula, Jose Peralta, each put forth slightly divergent discourses that took into account colonial precedent, everyday practices, and the goals of progress, not just a 20-year-old missing agreement. These latter parties' arguments shifted slightly in relation to audience, but tended to support the Ch'orti' position.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> The rebellion was called the War of the Lucio's (a second "war of the mountain, this time fought against Carrera). See (Tobar Cruz, 1971).

<sup>73</sup> The only evidence from 1847 that does exist indicates that land measurements were never made for the agreement to be finalized, the very agreement on which the Zacapa case rested. The case had been in limbo for twenty years without protest from the Zacapa ladinos (AGCA Sig B Leg 2535 Exp 58283) c.f. (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch'orti', 2004, p. 215).

<sup>74</sup> The discourse of support for the Jocotecos indigenous claim represents a political dance that was taking place between the various actors. It speaks to a desire to prevent any indigenous uprising. First, the indigenous officials of Jocotán, like indigenous officials elsewhere at the time (McCreery, 1990) were savvy enough to hire a ladino legal representative who has some skill at defending their interests through the laws and discourses of the time but also

The fundamental building block of indigenous land claims was the claim to “having had possession since time immemorial.”<sup>75</sup> The Jocotecos Ch’orti’ *común de indios* added to this assertion that they were not trying to “extend their possessions or dispossess anyone”; rather, they only wanted to legalize “what belongs to them.”<sup>76</sup> The statement suggested that the Zacapa claimants were doing the opposite. Siding with the indigenous from Jocotán and using the land surveyor’s reports as his basis, the governor of Chiquimula observed that those from Zacapa “didn’t even know these lands existed because they were virgin mountains, and now that they have seen them cultivated is when they want them.”<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, the discourses of the governor, the surveyor, and indigenous leaders all focused on the industrious Ch’orti’s’ contribution to society and market. The Jocotecos emphasized that they “have always promoted [...] the general welfare.” Their production, both agricultural and artisan, they asserted, met the reproductive needs of the neighboring municipalities “while all the Zacapenses do is make hats.”<sup>78</sup> Little Siebold’s account of the governor as a person concerned with prioritizing the food needs of the province suggests that this was a convincing argument. The governor, however, reframed the productive contribution of the Ch’orti’ when he presented their case before the central government (T. Little-Siebold, 1995). With agro-export already a buzzword for progress in 1866, he highlighted Ch’orti’ farmers’ more commercial production of sugarcane and coffee<sup>79</sup> (which hardly existed at this time).

The position of the governor and even the surveyor also need to be understood in relation to the almost four decades of ongoing rebellions over land in the East as well as the Conservative government’s colonial legacy of protecting indigenous claims and food supplies described in the first section of this chapter. The governor and surveyor both clearly feared indigenous rebellious repercussions.<sup>80</sup> Despite clearing virgin forests, the material practices of the Ch’orti’ farmers at

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knows how to mobilize the Ch’orti’ to pressure the governor if necessary. Second, both the land surveyor and the political governor of Chiquimula make choice after choice to calm tempers and reach compromise but always favor the Jocotecos.

<sup>75</sup> Taracena gives us the full content of “time immemorial” in its legal and agricultural context as follows: “In effect, the Jocotecos have found themselves from time immemorial in peaceful and tranquil possession of the geographical areas that we are measuring today: proof for that is that the areas are all under cultivation and inhabited only by Jocotecos. AGCA, Chiquimula 1870, Paq. 4, Exp. 15 F23v c.f. (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch’orti’, 2004, p. 229). Other references to the time immemorial argument can be found in Ministerio de Gobernación, Dep. de Chiquimula, 1904. Sig B. Legajo 29077, Exp. Sin Número, F1; Chiquimula 1870, Paq. 4, Exp. 15 F.1, F9v) c.f. (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch’orti’, 2004, p. 294).

<sup>76</sup> AGCA, Chiquimula 1870, Paq. 4, Exp. 15 F23v, F25v c.f. (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch’orti’, 2004, p. 330).

<sup>77</sup> AGCA, Chiquimula 1870, Paq. 4, Exp. 15 F. 31v-33 c.f. (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch’orti’, 2004, p. 233).

<sup>78</sup> The archives record the Jocotecan comparison of productive capacities of Zacapa and Jocotán as follows: The indigenous of Jocotán “have always promoted ...the general welfare...that they are true producers ...they make baskets, do carpentry, and pottery with great skill, in contrast with those of Zacapa, who dedicate themselves to nothing more than making hats...surely they do not need land to make hats. Those of Jocotán on the other hand, “produce corn, beans, sugar, other legumes.... providing not just for their own subsistence, but supplying in abundance for Zacapa, Gualan, Chiquimula, Quetzaltepeque ..Esquipulas.” (AGCA, Chiquimula 1870, Paq. 4, Exp. 15 F23v-F25v in (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch’orti’, 2004, pp. 229-230).

<sup>79</sup> AGCA, Chiquimula 1870, Paq. 4, Exp. 15 F31v in (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch’orti’, 2004, p. 233).

<sup>80</sup> The archives have several paragraphs where either the surveyor or governor is mentioning the need to keep tensions to a minimum “that nothing has occurred to disturb public order...but the Jocotecos believe themselves to be dispossessed of what in justice belongs to them by the claimants from Zacapa...The effective possession that the Jocotecos have always had and the general turmoil and unrest that will occur if their rights are not respected are sufficiently powerful motives to do justice for them” AGCA, Chiquimula 1870, Paq. 4, Exp. 15 F22-F23v in (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch’orti’, 2004, pp. 229-230).

that time (living with and harvesting the primitive forests, combined with minimal surplus of maize production and its sale to the cities by carrying corn and herding hogs to the towns), were more in tune with long-term co-existence with nature, not aggressive colonization. The governor's exaggerated representations of the Ch'orti's' commercial-agricultural prowess masked the Ch'orti' argument concerning *spirits* residing in the mountains, rivers, lakes and clouds. The governor's argument likewise obscured the meaning behind the "time immemorial" term that underlay the Ch'orti's territorial claims. The governor deemed that clearing primitive forest for market production, however, was a trump card in the Ch'orti's' favor.

In early 1870, the central government decided in favor of the line judiciously proposed by the land surveyor, which favored most of the Jocotecos' claim but recognized that the municipalities of Zacapa and Camotán did have rights to the few parcels cleared and farmed by their inhabitants. Unfortunately, the decision, which required an inordinate amount of surveying of rough territory and validating productive presence, proved to be a Pyrrhic victory in what would be the Ch'orti's lost war. For most of the next decade, efforts to measure and determine the cost of the land met with repeated foot-dragging: challenges, subversions, and hidden dynamics.<sup>81</sup> By the time that the central state approved the Jocotán municipality's right to purchase the unclaimed lands that they had won ten years earlier, the composition of the municipal government had changed, and poor indigenous denizens of the municipality were not allowed to either vote or hold office.

Liberal reforms had placed the township firmly in the hands of the ladinos and ladinized (heavily acculturated) indigenous subjects. Moreover, the laws had changed, allowing outsiders to purchase community land or usufruct rights without permission from the state (Pineda de Mont, 1979 [1869-1871], pp. 658,663). Thus, no sooner had Jocotán finished paying the price that the state had set for the Lampocoy farm than the town council began dividing the mountain up into plots for anyone (ladino or Ch'orti) interested in renting them from the municipality. When the Ch'orti' campesin@s who had cleared and planted the land protested that the municipality was distributing too much usufruct land to individuals, thus destroying the possibilities of their swidden agricultural practice, the council defended its actions as those of safeguarding the rights of "all the residents of the municipality" [emphasis added], whereas the indigenous farmers supposedly wanted the land all to themselves and remained stuck on the "backwards" notion of communal property.<sup>82</sup>

Ch'orti' leaders, however, heard the subtext. In practice, "all of the residents" referred foremost to the ladinos of Jocotán "and in their shadow many from Zacapa." The indigenous campesin@s protested and signaled the coercion being used against them: "people ... have started to divide up the lots, committing true dispossession against us and threatening us with all kinds of abuse ... to

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<sup>81</sup> The lawyer of the Camotán's ladino mayor in support of the Camotecan claims to property being cultivated by the Jocotecos accused Sixto Duarte, the ladino legal representative of Jocotán, of being a turbulent man stirring up the Indian Population. This way a way of trying to delegitimize the interest and political action of indigenous producer from Jocotán and flies in the face of the Agrimensor's and Governor's fear of just reactions if wronged. (AGCA Chiquimula 1870, Paq. 4, Exp. 15 F.9v) in in (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch'orti', 2004, pp. 229-230).

<sup>82</sup> Despite the fact that the indigenous community had paid for most of the costs of measuring and legalizing the lands, the collective or the community that the municipal corporation defended in 1889 became in their words the property of "all of the residents of the municipality." AGCA Tierra Chiquimula 6:11. F16-18 (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch'orti', 2004, p. 279).

such an extreme that many of our companions have emigrated from their homes to Honduran territory”<sup>83</sup>

In 1847 indigenous authorities had begun their pre-emptive measure to legalize unclaimed lands for fear of a second attempt by the state to deprive the indigenous community of its *tierra baldía*. But in finally gaining recognition of the land forty years later, the indigenous had lost most of it through liberal transformation of township composition and the machinations of ladinos and perhaps some wealthier Ch’orti’. The turn of the century brought about yet another blow to the Jocotecos who had cleared and farmed the lush mountain lands to the north of Jocotán: their separation from Jocotán and its Ch’orti’ heritage, greater state control over their lives, and a push to expand coffee production for future export.

In 1903 the ladinos who had started buying rights to the Lampocoy Plantation requested that the area become a separate municipality from Jocotán. The Chiquimula governor, Policarpo López, supported their request, and convinced the central government to approve it. Tellingly, his argument foreshadowed the years of labor exploitation and gradual loss of land to coffee production that awaited the indigenous settlers. According to the governor, although the indigenous community of Jocotán had purchased the land, the indigenous settlers were underutilizing the rich soil. “[T]he only thing they have dedicated and continue to dedicate themselves to at the moment are their cornfields and small scale coffee production that they just sell [to neighboring towns] ... ; this agricultural branch [coffee] could increase with the support of a local authority established nearby.”<sup>84</sup> The governor also argued that the Ch’orti’s “live isolated from the authorities of Jocotán and thus do not complete their public works obligations or pay their taxes.”<sup>85</sup>

Not surprisingly, the state approved the petition in 1904 to create a new municipality from the Lampocoy lands (a petition which, in the archives at least, goes uncontested). The ladino-controlled Jocotán council agreed to cede the northern slopes of the mountain—all of the Lampocoy plantation (with the exception of 2,780 acres)—so that it became a separate municipality. The area known for years as Monte Oscuro (Dark Mountain) was changed to the municipal name Estrada Cabrera, after the then-dictator and President Manuel Estrada Cabrera. Only after Cabrera was deposed from office (for mental incapacity) two decades later, did the municipality take the name of La Unión.

### Section 3—Racialized Reworkings of Land, Labor and Power

Those reconfigurations of territory and population and how they were achieved laid the groundwork for easier ladino takeover of the commons, control of the inhabitants, and rapid agrarian transformation that would intensify erosion, desertification, and deforestation in the area. Six decades of Liberal rule built on the uneven terrain of colonial legacies and sowed seeds of agrarian conflict that continue to shape politics in the Ch’orti’ area today. By stripping the indigenous population of Jocotán and Camotán of some of their best municipal lands, township

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<sup>83</sup> AGCA Tierra Chiquimula 6:11. F16-18(HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch’orti’, 2004, pp. 278-279 ).

<sup>84</sup> AGCA, Sig. B Legajo 20077, f4v febrero 3 de 1904 in (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch’orti’, 2004, p. 323).

<sup>85</sup> AGCA, Sig. B Legajo 20077, f4v and f5 febrero 3 de 1904 in (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch’orti’, 2004, p. 323).



formation in Olopa and La Unión contributed to conditions that consigned the area's indigenous inhabitants to greater debt servitude, day labor, and migrant labor. In Olopa an alliance between indigenous communities and ladino merchants based on the image of a saint bound them to each other and to the Catholic Church in a way that did not necessarily erode indigenous practices but did curtail Ch'orti' access to land. In La Unión, however, township formation came after twenty years of litigation between Jocotán and its neighbors, and facilitated ladino control of indigenous land and labor.

Thus, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with most of the uncleared land of Jocotán now sectioned off in two new municipalities, a class dynamic arose as well in southern Olopa and La Unión that would ultimately allow wealthy elites to keep tensions alive between poor ladinos and poor Ch'orti', ladino and creole elites and/ speculators obtained rights to large tracts of land and then offered landless or land poor ladinos (and in some cases Ch'orti') a portion of that land to use if they cleared it all: pushing out the original Ch'orti' population. Through these interconnected processes of township formation, racialized struggles over land, and class formation, the virgin mountains and swidden-farmed lands, slowly were being transformed (either through title or usufruct rights) into mid-size ranches and coffee farms, and increasingly tiny and worn plots of "poor Indios" and poor *mestizos* and ladinos.

But those tiny plots, like the land left to Jocotán itself, would eventually be ravaged through a simple reproduction squeeze—higher input costs and lower product prices, diminished resource base (Bernstein, 1982)—that would intensify natural processes of erosion and a tendency to push into uncleared forests.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, within a generation, farmers farming the mid-altitude remaining Ch'orti' lands would already be caught in that simple-reproduction squeeze and forced into debt and labor dependencies. Dividing access to scarce lands among heirs meant that there was no room left to rotate crops and regenerate soils. Soil overuse, erosion, and declining production ensued. Pockets of chronic malnutrition connected to reduced access to land on depleted soils also affected poor non-Ch'orti' campesin@s in highland areas. In the village of La Jigua, where all the residents have non-Ch'orti' last names that trace the village back to one man who the ladinos from Zacapa had brought to clear the cloud forest of La Union for their coffee plantations.

### **The Roots of Terror: Control and Difference in Ubico's Militarized Townships (1931–1944)**

According to Metz (2006, 59), "Ch'orti' political memory begins with [the] 'time of slavery'" that was ushered in with the thirteen-year dictatorship of General Jorge Ubico. Ubico rose to power on an agenda that was simultaneously pro-fascist and pro-U.S.-capital-interests (read: banana company concessions) in the midst of the economic and political turmoil after the great market crash of 1929. Ubico then proceeded to militarize Guatemalan society, establishing

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<sup>86</sup> Dary describes the Lampocoy mountains before the reproduction squeeze set in, quoting (Paz y Paz, 1936), a lawyer from Zacapa who escaped Jorge Ubico's guards and hid in the mountain of Lampocoy. "This mountain is called Lampocoy and belongs to the municipality of La Unión in the Department of Chiquimula. It has not been forested (cut), and it has magnificent vegetation. From the tops of these mountain spring the sources of potable water for Jocotán in Chiquimula and San Pablo in Zacapa. We walked to springs themselves at the very headwaters of the streams. The local authorities have managed to get the Indians not to chop down trees, in order to prevent the drying up of the streams, by convincing them that this mountain is 'the dwelling place of angels,' as Victoriano Dolores Ramírez told us this, completely convinced himself." (my translation) (Dary, et al., 1998, p. 246).

tentacles of control throughout the countryside. He used his centralized military machine to enforce the restructuring of labor laws and forced recruitment in a way that guaranteed public works and rendered plantation owners and other elites dependent on the central state as a guarantor of cheap labor. Together the new laws and structures intensified the distinct but interconnected processes of racialized dispossession, town-country disparities and discrimination, and related ethnic conflict already underway in the townships in the Ch'orti' East. The bottom line was that the new townships that had formed in the Ch'orti' East facilitated ladino and creole control over indigenous labor, while the transfer of local political control to Ubico's primarily mestizo military henchman proliferated the means of dispossessing Ch'orti' of their usufruct rights to communal lands.

Nationally, Ubico's government created the security and ideological apparatus necessary to ward against rebellion. Ubico and his advisers sought to manufacture some level of consent among coffee producers and other elites; to this end, he backed his rule with military and social control forces that could easily be meted out to Indians (Tischler Visquerra, 2001 [1998]). Utilizing the 1932 indigenous uprising just across the border in El Salvador (which resulted in the massacre of 30,000 Pipiles) to raise the specter of "savage Indians duped by communism," Ubico simultaneously instilled fear in and garnered support from ladinos and creoles for his new policies, which pivoted on eliminating local elections and instituting the *intendente* system.

This system replaced mayors with military-affiliated ladinos from other areas (Ubico wanted leaders loyal to him rather than to local elites) (Adams, 1970, pp. 176-177) and dealt with local elites according to place-based circumstances. Further, the system prohibited indigenous people to hold public office unless they could read and write Spanish, which most could not. In the West, the *intendentes* cut deals with indigenous elites to rule, using them as middlemen to supply indigenous labor to the coffee and sugar plantations. In the East, where an elite class of Ch'orti' barely existed,<sup>87</sup> Ubico micro-managed local government through ladino *caudillos* (strong men) and loyal appointed military commissioners (Adams, 1970, p. 179; Tischler Visquerra, 2001 [1998]). The last vestige of colonial protections—indigenous presence in township governance—had disappeared and with it the last protection over land.<sup>88</sup>

In this context, it appears that the *creoles* and wealthier ladinos of Zacapa who were farming land in La Unión finally got their way. In 1935 they repeated the arguments that had convinced Estrada Cabrea's Administration, in language that flattered Ubico's sensibilities, that because of the geographical isolation of La Unión, the Ch'orti' there "do not fulfill their national public works service, nor pay their taxes religiously" (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch'orti', 2004, p. 323). After years of maneuvers, ploys and pressures, the cattle ranchers and aspiring coffee

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<sup>87</sup> The utilization of indigenous elites in the West signifies a crucial distinction in terms of race-class articulation between East and West. Whereas in the East the majority of "Ch'orti" in this period who had achieved some degree of urban wealth (versus rural control of land) were both shunned by their indigenous community and chose to pass or become ladino. Not so in the areas of the west with historical indigenous elites who broker class alliances by controlling indigenous labor.

<sup>88</sup> In effect, Ubico mined the countryside with spies (*orejás*), police chiefs, commanders, guards, and rural military commissioners "*comisionados*" who, by employing arbitrary torture and assassination as "punishment," sowed terror, silenced dissent, and forced many to flee. (Handy, 1984) c.f. (Metz, 2006). At the same time, Ubico created a highly integrated power structure in the sense that lines of power were direct from any member of the population to some immediate authority who was responsible to dictator (Adams, 1970).

producers found quick success under Ubico's patronage. Against the protests of the historic residents of the Lampocoy mountain, General Ubico agreed that La Unión be put under the territorial jurisdiction of the less-indigenous department of Zacapa. This separation from the as yet more indigenous Chiquimula province guaranteed that roads and commerce would all lead to Zacapa, not Jocotán. It is this annexation under Ubico that sealed the fate of the Ch'orti' families in the mountains of Lampocoy, creating the conditions in which survival increasingly depended on cultural assimilation. See Figure 1.4 for the Ch'orti' Maya Area as defined by anthropologist Charles Wisdom in the 1930s. Note that the map also shows the territorial dispute between Zacapa and Chiquimula over La Unión.

# Ch'orti'-Maya Linguistic Area: 1930s

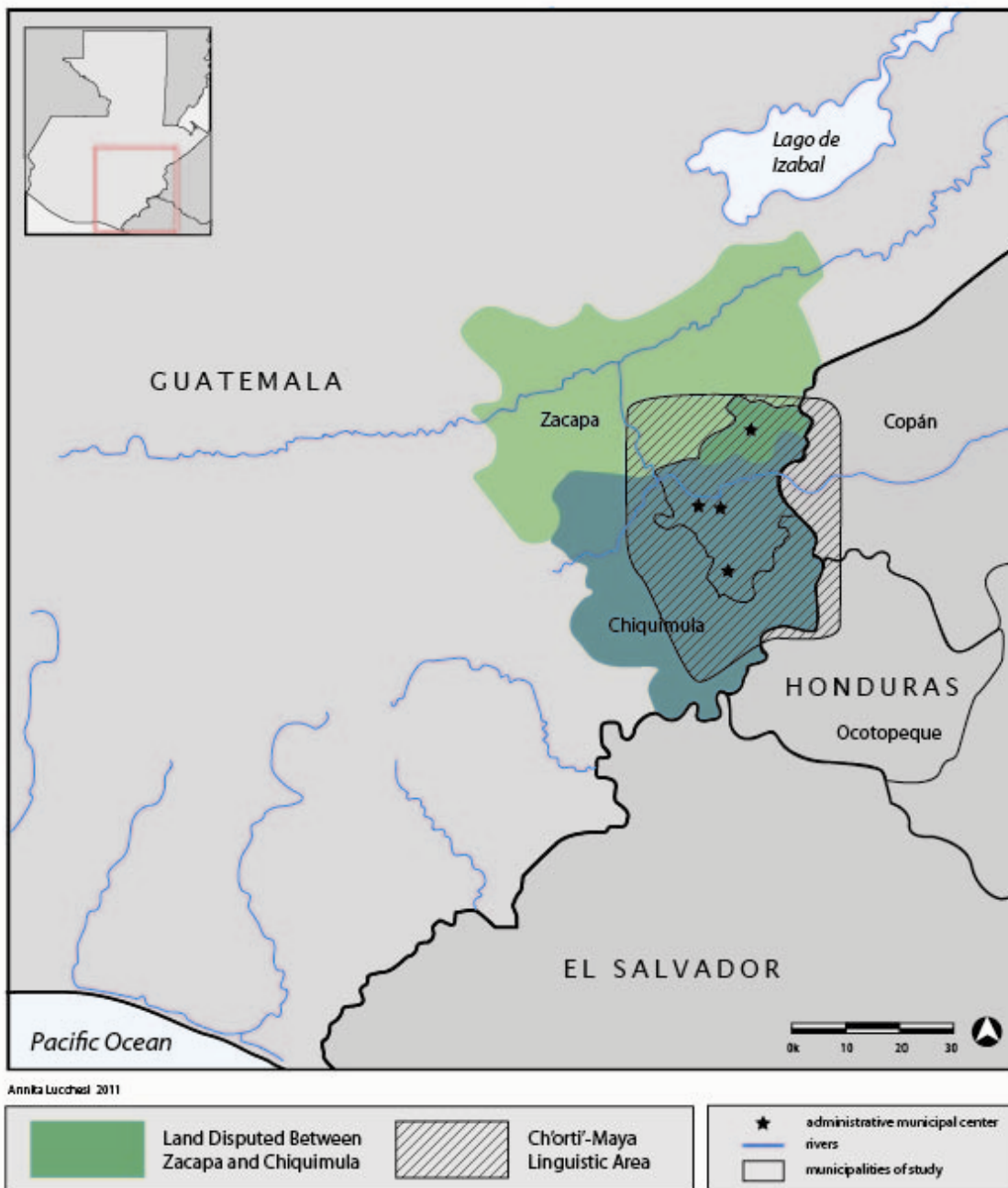


Figure 1.4: Ch'orti'-Maya Linguistic Area: 1930s (map contracted by author).

## Loathing to labor

Both slavery and terror began before Ubico, and their marks are seared into the broken landscapes of the Ch'orti' region. Riding a wave of contradiction between liberal ideas of universal citizenship and colonial legacies of a racialized two-tier system, both Ubico's modernization plan and the liberal reforms that preceded it hinged on a race-class articulation that required leaving the indigenous family with the possibilities of producing their own food in order to keep the salaries low within the systems of coerced indigenous labor. While this arrangement or articulation by which indigenous families subsidized coffee and sugar production was much more elaborate in the West and on the Southern coast, ladino elites found ways to use it in the smaller ranching and agricultural activities of the East.

These forms of coerced labor and debt peonage were mediated like land dispossession through township control by ladinos. *That control was what made the liberal reform enforceable in the Ch'orti' highlands* when the governor in Chiquimula proved reluctant to enforce them (T. Little-Siebold, 2001).<sup>89</sup> The governor's resistance did not mean that debt peonage was not at work in the East because there existed both publicly sanctioned debt peonage and privately managed arrangements where the state was too fragile to keep laws in place (Taracena Arriolo, et al., 2003, pp. 316-321). The latter was clearly the case in the Ch'orti' highlands.

The Liberals introduced a labor law in 1877 that divided indigenous workers into three categories, two of which—resident workers (*colonos*) and workers bound by wage advances (*mozos habilitados*)—hinged on debt. The third, *mozos no habilitados*, referred to workers who were essentially “free labor”; that is, they were workers who did not receive advances (McCreery, 1983). All rural laborers (most of them illiterate) had to carry a *libreta*, small book in which the bosses recorded contract terms, debts, and days worked.

The law also systematized the agricultural labor drafts of indigenous communities, known as *mandamientos*, that in effect were the post-independence form of the *repartimiento* forced labor system (Taracena Arriolo, et al., 2003). The post-independence *mandamientos* essentially meant mass reproduction of *mozos habilitados* who received advances for their drafted labor.

Both the drafting of labor and the indebtedness entailed a high level of economic violence against the indigenous family's capacity to meet the minimum conditions of nutrition. In August 1917, after two months of yearly shortages<sup>90</sup> of corn and beans in the Ch'orti' East, 60 women from Camotán wrote a letter to then president, General Manuel Estrada Cabrera:

We write requesting defense of our husbands because the Mayor is forcing them to work against their wills in the lands of rich landlords, just because they are poor. The forced labor contracts do not permit our husbands to attend to the crops

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<sup>89</sup> “Chiquimula's peripheral nature [had] insulated the towns of the area from the massive labor drafts” that were so burdensome in the West (Little-Siebold 1995, 225). Successive Governors in Chiquimula, whether sincere or fearing resistance, had reported that *mandamiento* drafts were not a priority as the food production supplied by the indigenous was necessary to the region.

<sup>90</sup> Hunger visits the Ch'orti' East every year in June and July until the new corn harvest comes in in August. People frequently refer to hunger as *mal de julio*, *July's sickness*. See chapter 4 for a fuller explanation of the cycles of rain, production, hunger, and debt.

we sow for our families. And then later (April to August), because they are the rich and powerful ones and we are the needy ones, we have to buy subsistence level grains (corn and beans) at jack-up exorbitant prices.... Once again we plead with you that you act with dignity to give orders to whom it may concern that they no longer oblige our husbands to work in the landlords *haciendas* either as resident workers (colonos) and even less as obliged indebted workers (mozos enganchados) so that they may enjoy the rights to freedom and being to help us their wives as nature, morality, and their obligations as our husbands demand of them.<sup>91</sup>

From Jocotán center, you can see Hangman's Mountain, named before Ubico's time—perhaps during Estrada's presidency—for the violence committed to indigenous bodies there. A story told to linguist Cedric Becquey by a Ch'orti' campesino in Jocotán offers grisly testimony that highlights the cruelty of the *mandamiento* system and reveals the meaning invested in the name of the nearby mountain:

This mountain [pointing to a hill in the distance] is called Hangman's Mountain.... They say that there was a time when there was a strong law like communist; it was called *mandamiento*, a government order. It was stronger than Ubico's law. Everyone was forced to work when they said. ... At three in the morning those in charge of waking everyone up would go out with their drum *tun tun tun* .... At the second sounding of the drum, it meant, "Go work"; no one could stay at home, only one woman could stay to prepare the food, but the majority of women and men went to work in the countryside. And they didn't want any lies, no gossip. It was law. They had this whip called the *pikote*, according to what my dad told me, which was made of many layers of animal hide. It was made of leather hide over leather hide, sewn together like a belt, so that it would be strong. There was a wheel, a wheel with a big trunk [...]. The one who was going to be punished had to be there, they would whip the person with the *pikote* as he pushed the wooden bar around [...] They would hit you a little if the error was a small one, a lot if it were a big one. This is the story that the old ones tell [...]. It was considered a punishment of death. You would bleed and bleed until you fell half dead. If someone knew that he had committed an error, he knew what he faced. Like a firing squad in the military, it was a punishment of death. So instead, he would go up that mountain and tie a rope to a tree and jump towards the precipice and hang himself to escape the punishment. People would hang themselves out of fear. Lots of people died. That is why they call it Hangman's Mountain, because a lot of people went there to die.

Story told to linguist Cedric Becquey by a Ch'orti' campesino in Jocotán (personal communication, author's edit and translation)

Such barbarity came to the attention of foreign-state governments, who pressured Ubico to end this brutal practice. In response, the Ubico government in 1934 abolished debt-contract and

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<sup>91</sup> Ministerio de Gobernación, Departamenteo de Chiquimula, 1917, Sig. B., Legajo 29834, Exp. 1, f1v and f2 en (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch'orti', 2004, p. 19).

*mandamiento* labor. Ubico substituted these laws with the much-despised Vagrancy Law that gave indigenous the dubious freedom to choose where they worked, but only so long as they could prove that they had worked at least 150 days per year. Whereas under the Liberal laws the way to avoid *mandamiento* was to hold a debt contract, Ubico's carrots exempting indigenous workers from vagrancy labor were military service and assimilation. The indigenous who could read and write Spanish and who abandoned costume and custom could be exempt, as could those who paid 15 *quetzales* of tax (McCreery, 1994).

The territorial divisions in the Ch'orti' East that ladino elites had achieved in the previous decades made it easier for the Ubico regime, with its military apparatus in every township, to enforce the 1934 Vagrancy Law and to reinforce, through the articulation of race, class, and geography, hierarchies that had been long in formation.<sup>92</sup> Ch'orti' men remember the physical suffering they endured: “[T]hey had to walk from Jocotán, Olopa and Chiquimula to Ipala and Chiquimula (30 miles) bound together by ropes and carrying their food for a week” (Metz, 2006, p. 59). They also recall the race-class relation it reflected as “the brutal ladino *mayordomo* earned 30 *quetzales* a month” (Ibid).” Furthermore, as one of Metz's informants told him, if elites had good relations with the local commanders and caudillos that Ubico instituted, then “[w]hen the rich asked for people if they wanted to build a house, they asked for poor humble peasants like us to go and work for free ... because we always render our sweat for the rich” (Ibid).

Throughout the period from 1866 to 1944, Creole and ladino discourses and practices that linked the hopes of progress and the fears of indigenous rebellion framed struggles over land and labor. Forces of coercion and consent were always at play as local and national state structures sought to consolidate their control over territory and population. The particular balance between them—and the specific, religious, racialized, and class-based practices they entailed—varied over time and space. Governors and surveyors worked to accommodate Ch'orti' concerns during the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but by the 1930s, the consolidation of national state power in the East and the rising strength of ladino elites within the region made force the preferred mechanism for maintaining racial and class hierarchies.<sup>93</sup> Yet, even in the face of militarized exploitation akin to the worst slavery, Ch'orti' were willing to appeal to the state in defense of their historical connection to Chiquimula and what it meant for material and cultural survival.

## **Back to La Unión**

In early 1936, with the notarized support of 3,000 indigenous residents of the still relatively new township of La Unión, seventeen Ch'orti' of the Lampocoy mountain sent a letter addressed to General Ubico, asking that he reverse his decision from the previous year, and that La Unión be re-annexed to Chiquimula. In the face of coercion, violence, and other formidable obstacles, the Ch'orti' in La Unión articulated an argument that linked race and class to their collective struggle against dispossession, which they felt would be the inevitable consequence of their recent annexation. “The transfer of us to Zacapa only favored powerful people of Zacapa who recently established themselves in our township, and who want to gain possession of our small

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<sup>92</sup> For example, in the name of maintaining public order, municipal police would round up “drunken workers” and jail them, guaranteeing their work “service” the next day (Glejises 1989: 26-30 c.f. Metz 2006, 59).

<sup>93</sup> Especially in Chiquimula's second most powerful township, Jocotán (C. Little-Siebold, 2001, p. 172).

plots of land”<sup>94</sup> In a plea against debt collection, they say that these powerful creoles and ladinos are trying to extort them and are...

using coercive measures so that we sell our possessions at low prices to the recently arrived ladinos, leaving us poor and miserable Indians likely to turn into serfs for the powerful, and even into their slaves, because that is what we would be if we did not have our land to grow the food to feed our children. When we were in Chiquimula, they never tried to dispossess us of our small belongings, and they helped us to bear our burdens.<sup>95</sup>

The La Unión contingent’s well-argued appeal to General Ubico fell on deaf ears: no reply appears in the archive. This and other experiences by the highland Ch’orti’ communities of the East confound simple explanations to the question of why such entreaties were even attempted. Viewed with the benefit of selective hindsight, and taken in isolation of their different historical and geographic contexts, such appeals smack of rank naïveté. Only close historical-geographical examination produces a picture of Ch’orti’ communities’ differential positionings vis-à-vis ladino-dominated state and civil society and makes sense of such actions, and moreover allows the significance of appeals, their impetus. Those appeals and the forms of their resolution, make evident the postcolonial legacies in which elites had to balance (and indigenous knew this) their desire for land and power with the real possibilities and their historical fears of indigenous and campesin@ rebellion.

Indigenous producers fought the legal decisions by which La Unión first became a separate municipality from Jocotán and then was designated as part of Zacapa (a much less indigenous province), not just because they understood that those decisions were the first step in alienating them from the land, in this case making them “semi-free” labor at the service of the coffee producers but also because they understood that that process of alienating them from the land was directly linked to cementing the racial hierarchy that would decide questions of land and labor. To deal with the new municipality one had to speak Castellano. Ultimately, when faced with losing access to municipal land, the Faustian bargain of cultural dispossession seemed the lesser evil.

### **Conclusion—The Cunning of Recognition<sup>96</sup>**

This chapter aids such an understanding by showing how ladino and *mestizo* attempts to reconfigure territory and population in the Ch’orti’ East differed in how they were achieved. Consequently, these reconfigurations have also differed in their influences on indigenous practices, agrarian change, and the possibilities for subaltern action across the region. By stripping the indigenous population of Jocotán of most of its best municipal lands and water supply, the constitution of Olopa and La Unión entailed collective dispossession. Jocotán’s growing indigenous population was left to a future bound to what (Bernstein, 1982, p. 116) calls

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<sup>94</sup>Ministerio de Gobernación, Departamento de Chiquimula 1946. S.B, L.32590, exp. 85, agregado 1605, f5 c.f. (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch’orti’, 2004, pp. 375-376)

<sup>95</sup> (Ibid. f5v).

<sup>96</sup> Term taken from anthropologist Elizabeth Povinelli’s book, describing how state recognition of indigenous peoples is a double-edged sword, forcing them to perform particular types of alterity that may counter their material needs and everyday practices (Povinelli, 2002).



the simple reproduction squeeze on the fragile slope, and debt servitude and seasonal migration as survival practices. In Olopa, class hierarchies were mapped onto race by a process that arose from an alliance between indigenous communities and *Ladino* merchants. This alliance bound the groups to each other and to the Catholic Church in a way that did not necessarily erode indigenous practices even as it curtailed indigenous access to land and robbed them of surplus. In La Unión, however, township formation came after twenty years of litigation between Jocotán and its neighbors. There, township formation represented an attempt of non-indigenous to gain control of first indigenous land that Ch'orti' producers had struggled to secure and second indigenous labor for the exploitation of that land.

As anthropologist Sergio Mendizabal (2009 @114) states, “In the three centuries of Spanish dominion, Maya resistance never gave way. This [resistance] manifest itself in rebellions and uprisings, but was also present in scenes of everyday life” (Martínez-Peláez, 1985) (Bonfil, 2006; R. M. Carmack, 1998).” Yet, what is crucial for thinking about the politics of place and the rearticulation of resistances is what concrete structures and subjectivities, landscapes and imaginaries were produced in and through the particular practices and processes of resistance. In 1944, as the nation was on the brink of revolution, the Ch'orti' natives found the openings in the carefully crafted and mutually constituted worlds of dispossession and resistance to it.

## Chapter 2

### Buried Secrets<sup>97</sup> and the Silence of the Lands (1944–1989)

Far from reproducing a national stereotype of the East without Maya and without rebellion, the last chapter made visible an indigenous eastern highland enclave (Adams, 1970) where Ch'orti' and *mestizo* smallholders, in the face of intensifying state and elite efforts to exploit their land and labor, have continually sought to guarantee their rights or defend themselves from abuse. Yet in the next forty-five years, much would change. A generation of women in La Unión would not be taught how to make pottery or weave mats out of reed. Entire villages in Olopa would stop speaking Ch'orti', young men “recruited into the army” at soccer games and Saturday night dances would have the Ch'orti' beaten out of them. And in the midst of ongoing civil war in 1987, many of the wealthiest townspeople in the four municipalities, including the mayor of Camotán, would use neo-liberal reforms and political contacts to turn usufruct lands into their own private property, purchasing titles to vast tracts of previously municipal land and forests. In so doing, they would attempt to nail the coffin shut on five centuries of coercion, negotiation, cooperation, and struggle with Ch'orti' inhabitants—and no one would say a word.

This chapter addresses the multi-arena processes and situated practices through which the histories of collective contestation against and economic and political exclusion and brutal violence are silenced. Rethinking the relationship between violence, silence, and ongoing processes of dispossession in the Ch'orti' East, I show how historical localized struggles against dispossession, incipient guerrilla activity in response to national economic and political crises, and counterinsurgency strategies came together to ultimately produce the grounds of silence that would lead most campesin@s and indigenous campesin@s to bury their hopes along with their dead. More importantly, while in no way diminishing the horror of massive genocide in the West, the social cost of fifty years of perpetual fear and brutality—gendered, racialized, and class-based—in the Ch'orti' area has yet to be adequately examined, especially in relation to practices of resistance, rebellion, and even revolution.<sup>98</sup>

#### *Introduction — What Counts*

"Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts."

(Sign hanging in Einstein's office at Princeton)

Fundamental to rethinking the conditions of possibility for New Day in the post-1996 Peace Accords/post-civil war period is a refusal of frameworks that “measure violence” by body

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<sup>97</sup> “Buried Secrets” glossed from (Sanford, 2003), although I am referring to 35 years buried histories of violence and of struggle, whereas Victoria Sanford is focused on the 1980s genocide and subsequent forensic exhumations.

<sup>98</sup> To date, Brent Metz has gathered the most extensive collection numbers and testimonies of the war-related violence, but the cloak of silence around all that happened and the propensity to think of the Ch'orti' as victims make it difficult to grasp the pattern of violence and resistance and their implications. As part of my next project, I will carry out a deeper and broader study based on oral histories and focal groups in conjunction with New Day.

counts, separate the violence of war from the broader structures of social injustice that produce it, or make invisible what really counts: the racialized hierarchies that shaped death-dealing practices throughout the civil war (Loyd, 2009).<sup>99</sup> Counter-insurgency violence in the East is misunderstood because it has been analyzed only in relation to the early guerrilla forces there, instead of through the historic lens of race-class struggles for political and economic control of the territory. In that context, my purpose in this chapter is to ground—that is, make visible—the historical geographies of the silence that I encountered in the Ch’orti’ area: silence, I suggest, that is not only about the years of violence in which counter-insurgency blended with historic practices of dispossession, but also silence and “silencing about the histories of collective contestatory politics” (Oglesby, 2007, p. 92) that spanned decades. In so doing, I reveal connections with the West long buried and I prepare you, the reader, to understand the limits and constraints of neo-liberal peace-making policies and practices discussed in the next chapters.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 1965, in the hamlet of La Palmilla, in the village of Talquezal, municipality of Jocotán, department of Chiquimula, members of the Guatemalan Army captured, executed and burned some fifty people, among which were inhabitants of Tierra Blanca a neighboring hamlet. After the military installed a camp in the hamlet for two months. Because of the military offensive, this community [La Palmilla] and the one next door, Zarzamora, have disappeared. (CEH Volume VII Appendix II, Case 15107)

The testimony above and the ever-growing number of scattered and decontextualized accounts from the Ch’orti’ area of scorched earth and paramilitary terror against civilian populations connected to the left-wing guerrilla movement for three decades came as surprise to me in a region that had been any thing but revolutionary since 1992. Taken together, they disrupt most preconceived notions of the region and call to question one of the reasons I had originally chosen it as a research site, as a counterpoint to the long history of organized combative struggle in western Honduras. Sure, there were thousands of ex-soldiers and ex-civilian defense patrol in the area; but apparently there were also the charred remains of something else. How could nearly thirty-five years of rebellion and repression virtually vanish like the villages of El Palmillo and Zarzamora? Clearly, the discursive line between East and West in relation to the thirty-six year civil war was no clearer than the one between ladino/a and *indígena*. Yet, like the other, it had concrete stakes.

In the face of over forty years of what in sum I call “perpetual terror,” Ch’orti’ campesin@s hid, abandoned and/or put on hold many of their cultural practices. Along with ladino, *pardo* and *mestizo* campesin@s in the area, they eventually—after thirty years—prioritized daily survival over an organized defense against the historical structures and overriding ecological, economic, and political forces that threatened their lives as family and communities. I do not mean to imply that ALL campesin@s in the Ch’orti’ region experienced these processes in exactly the same way, and had the exact same reactions. Indeed, place-based histories of municipal formation lined to race and class alliances, topography and location all influenced the relationship between insurgency, counter-insurgency, race and place. Still, I am trying to make remotely visible an experience that the writers and tellers of history have interred along with its effects. The

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<sup>99</sup> The 1999 Guatemalan Truth Commission (*La Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico*) report is an excellent example of linking broader social injustice with the violence of civil war and as they relate to racialized hierarchies.

cumulative effects of militarized repression in response to political and political-military participation and the flight and terror it produced created increasingly easier conditions for ongoing dispossession.

But the story I tell is not just one of silencing and forgetting the secrets of terror; it is also about the buried secrets of resistance and refusal. Furthermore, by connecting back to processes of municipal formation, I build on anthropologist Paul Diener's work in Olopa, (Diener, 1978, p. 111) in which he made visible how "[t]he saints which bind the Indian community into a unit provide the basis for unity in revolution [in the region]." I argue that we find in the culturally inscribed conditions analyzed in chapter 1, the conditions that undergirded the divergent ways that denizens of the Ch'orti' area engaged with what Aguilera Peralta 1980 called the "bourgeoisie" revolution (1944-1954) and the "class-based" revolution (1960-1972). Finally, I highlight temporal and geographic continuities and argue that we must consider that the racial genocide (1981-83) and the subsequent "pacification" of the west (1996 onward) had their precursors in the Ch'orti' highlands.<sup>100</sup>

These connections are crucial for rethinking both the contours of Ch'orti' campesin@ politics in the subsequent chapters and the openings for and limits to alliances with post-civil war social movements.

Section 1 points to how and why the Ch'orti' East became the first act in Guatemala's theatre of civil war, highlighting particular conjunctures, dynamics, and legacies of the Democratic Spring (1944-54) and its unraveling (1954-60). Section 2 offers an initial exploration of thirty years of insurgency and counter-insurgency practices (1960-1973) in the Ch'orti' region and how they linked with divergent place-based histories and memories. Section 3 (1973-1989) makes connections between the production of resistance and terror in eastern and western Guatemala, through the practices of both the second wave insurgency and the Guatemalan Armed Forces. Section 4 examines the cumulative effects of terror with an emphasis on how thirty years of "perpetual terror" fuel ongoing processes and paradoxes of material and symbolic dispossession. The timeline below simply points out key international, national, and Ch'orti'-area periods and events to make visible the relationship between international economic shifts, geopolitical cold war/scapes, the phases of revolutionary activity and consolidation of the Guatemala's counterinsurgency state.

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<sup>100</sup> The Guatemalan state ratified the UN Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in January 1950 and the Convention itself entered into force in January 1951. Created in response to the Holocaust committed by Nazi Germany during World War II, the Convention states that "... genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) Killing members of the group; (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. On this basis, the two fundamental elements of the crime are: intentionality and that the acts committed include at least one of the five previously cited in the above article" (Article II). The CEH based its conclusion that the Guatemalan State had committed genocide between 1981 and 1983 in the four geographical regions it studied genocide on two fundamental elements of the crime: intentionality and that the acts committed include at least one of the five previously cited in the above article (<http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ceh/report/english/conc2.html>).

In contrast to (Stoll, 1993)'s conceptualization of civilian campesin@s and their communities as caught between the violence of two armies, (Green, 1999, p. 7)'s ethnography of Maya-Kaq'chikel widows in Chimaltenango, just west of Guatemala City shows the "relationship between political violence and the deeply rooted and historically-based structural violence of inequality and impunity."

## **Section 1— Beyond Ten Years of Indigenous- campesin@ Spring: Lure and Lore of Power and Land (1944–1960)**

### **The Democratic Spring: A Class Act**

The 14 years of a military – oligarchic pact with coffee elites under the "modernizing" tutelage of General Ubico meshed with the harsh years after the Great Depression and then World War II for a country with a highly influential German entrepreneurial population to bring Guatemala to a profound structural crisis as the cold war<sup>101</sup> began.

The 1944 October Revolution that successfully ousted Jorge Ubico from power and doused any claims by his would-be successor Federico Ponce (Grandin, 2000, p. 199) turned the frustrations of an emerging middle class trapped in an antiquated political system, the anger Guatemalan capital over the growing influence of U.S. capital in the economy and a generation of youth with limited possibilities for the future into a strong if not cohesive movement of students, teachers, a rising middle class, and military reformers.<sup>102</sup> The political, social, and economic reforms that followed have collectively come to be known as the ten years of "Democratic Spring." Under the leadership of two democratically elected presidents, Juan José Arevalo and Jacobo Arbenz Gúzman, the Guatemalan congress passed a series of social, political, and economic reforms that sought to democratize and modernize Guatemalan society. Furthermore, these reforms themselves happened in and through ongoing processes of social mobilization. Leaders and organizers, political parties and military together were building a country (Davis, 1983; Grandin, 2000; Handy, 1994). For the next decade, Guatemalans experienced a time of unprecedented progressive political organizing, democracy, and collective hope.

In the broadest sense, the Democratic Spring came in like a lamb but went out like a lion. The reforms that Arevalo's government instituted were extremely moderate, more a continuation of Ubico's attempts at prioritizing state formation and capitalist modernization over planter power than a radical revolution; even the repeal of the hated Vagrancy Laws were not fully enforced

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<sup>101</sup> In examining Cold War politics in Guatemala, in addition to the overviews provided by the two Truth Commission Reports (Arzobispado de Guatemala, 1998; CEH, 1999) period, literature runs across a spectrum of theoretical perspectives from world-system analysis (W. I. Robinson, 2003) (Williams, 1986) to critique of U.S. imperialism (Black, 1984; Gleijeses, 1991; LaFeber, 1993; McClintock, 1985; Schoultz, 1993; Streeter, 2000) and its use of terror (Aguilera Peralta & Beverly, 1980) to a focus on uneven development, agrarian transformation, and colonial legacies in Guatemala (Brockett, 1998; Torres-Rivas, 1983) (Figueroa Ibarra, 2006) or path dependency (Mahoney, 2001). In addition, there are some excellent monographs by historians, geographers, and anthropologists that focus on Cold War dynamics at particular conjunctures, places, or in relation to particular subjects. See for example (Brett, 2007; Falla, 1992; Green, 1999; Manz, 1988, 2004; Megan Ybarra, 2010; Zur, 1998).

<sup>102</sup> The "Spring" itself, however, was not a communist plot, nor was it simply the result of some progressive military officers rejecting *caudillo* politics. The irony of Ubico's militarization of development, combined with his loyalty to U.S. interests, is that they created the dynamics that brought him down (Wasserstrom, 1975).

(Tischler Visquerra, 2001 [1998]). Arevalo maintained a strong anti-communist stance, refusing to legalize the Guatemalan Worker's Party [PGT] (Guatemala's Communist Party). Moreover, the deepening of reforms under Arevalo's successor, Jacobo Arbenz, paled in comparison to the cold war social and economic revolutions taking place in Costa Rica (Dunkerley, 1988, pp. 134-135) and Bolivia (Lehman, 1997).

At the same time, the increasing assimilation pressures combined with the Depression in the 1930s had given rise to a more and more widespread public identification of rural poor and farm workers as campesin@s rather than indigenous. The very rise of the term campesino was part of those increasing assimilation pressures, an invitation for indigenous to deprioritize their ethnic identities for the modern, national ascription of a campesin@ *Guatemalteco*. (See the Glossary for how this pressure for assimilation came most forcefully from progressive forces).

Yet the virulent anticommunist ideology that early on (1930s) had taken root equally in the liberal planter society and the conservative Catholic church found a partner in U.S. foreign capital and cold war ideology, creating a formidable opposition to reform. Discourses linking indigenous protest to communist uprisings (Handy, 1994, pp. 54-55) and racialized local conflicts over land, labor, and power set the conditions for the ten years of Democratic Spring to go out like a lion with a fascist ferocity that has lasted longer than the cold war itself. Yet, the divergent hopes around land and power that the Spring inspired, could no more easily be extinguished than the conflict and fear it spawned.

### **Localized Lore and Lures**

The Democratic Spring provided some Ch'orti' leaders (traditional indigenous and more proletarian) with the platform they needed and a promise of the possible. While like Maya elsewhere (Handy, 1994, p. 133), many Ch'orti' campesin@s were suspicious of government initiatives (Metz, 2006), three of the reforms deeply appealed to Ch'orti' campesin@s: the new labor code, enfranchisement of all indigenous in municipal elections under Arevalo, and agrarian reform under Arbenz.<sup>103</sup> While the first freed Ch'orti' men from the Vagrancy laws and limited the harsh conditions of debt contract, the latter two created the possibility for re-establishing Ch'orti' political dominance and economic well-being: a memory or a dream that still had weight in the region.<sup>104</sup>

As early as 1945, village leaders and activists in different Ch'orti' communities in different townships started coordinating with one another to elect their own municipal authorities (C. Little-Siebold, 2011) (Girard, 1949)(Christa Little Siebold).<sup>105</sup> According to Girard, Ch'orti' in

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<sup>103</sup> One unseen legacy of the Democratic Spring is that a number of older Ch'orti'—men who in the 1990s were in their 50s and 60s learned to read and write through Arevalo's rural schools, while younger men in the same villages (and of course women) were illiterate (Metz, 2006, p. 61).

<sup>104</sup> One of the most controversial reforms of the early years of the revolution (though moderate in many ways) abolished the hated book *libreto* that indigenous had been required to carry to account for the number of days they had worked, the new constitution reduced the onerous conditions attached to vagrancy, did not stipulate a number of days to work, made debt contracting more difficult, and offered worker protections such as minimum wage and guidelines for hours worked (Handy, 1994).

<sup>105</sup> Interestingly, the Arevalo government denied the governor of Chiquimula's request that La Unión be "returned" to Chiquimula province (HORIZONT-3000 & Proyecto-Ch'orti', 2004). In the future I will examine the different interests, discourses, and cultural politics that influenced the decision.

each municipality established “their own general garrison with their own jurisdiction; acting in common agreement but without recurring to a central leadership body, they exchanged impressions and communicated decisions through messengers without one or another group ever appearing dominant”(Girard, 1949, p. 287). Significantly, while campesino unions and political party organizers from Chiquimula and Guatemala City played significant roles in getting out the indigenous vote, Ch’orti’ organized both for the vote and for their candidates through the religious organizations, *cofradías*, or their remnants<sup>106</sup> that carried diminutive saints from village to village. In other words, Ch’orti’ “traditional” civil and religious structures proved crucial. Ch’orti’ won control of Olopa, Jocotán, and Camotán municipalities, as well as others in the area (Little-Siebold C. 2011).<sup>107</sup>

As Christa Little-Siebold documents through her research in nearby Quetzaltepeque, with the change in the electoral law any candidate in the region needed the campesino indigenous vote (indigenous women had to be literate to vote and very few were, so this was basically a male vote) to win; but when indigenous candidates won, they needed the support of townspeople who had political experience. This mutual dependence in some cases, as in Quetzaltepeque, produced new geographic, class, and ethnic alliances (C. Little-Siebold, 2006, 2011). At the same time, throughout Guatemala, as indigenous villagers pushed for the right to vote (1944–45) and political parties began to present slates of candidates for elections to municipal office, municipalities became sites of intense conflict (Handy, 1989; 1994, p. Chapter 6).

Where indigenous leaders won elections, those conflicts were sometimes deeply rooted in privileges and exclusions built on historical racism and linked to town-country divides.<sup>108</sup> Ch’orti’ villagers in Olopa battled Civil Guardsmen who were trying to thwart their organizing goals (*Imparcial* sept 1945 c.f. (Handy, 1994, p. 57). And in Camotán, soldiers had fired upon Ch’orti’ who had come to celebrate the new municipal government with a torchlight ceremony in January of 1945. The Ch’orti’ then retaliated, taking over the town hall. Press reports of these conflicts, however, built on the rhetoric of the 1932 indigenous uprising and subsequent massacre in El Salvador and the 1944 massacre of Kaq’chikel-Maya in Patzicía (chapter one), that had begun to link two elite fears: the historic fear of “savage indigenous rebellion” and 20<sup>th</sup> century fear of “godless communism”(Handy, 1994, pp. 54-56). For example, while the U.S. State Department memo cited the CGT (Guatemalan Worker’s Central) labor federation report of the event in Camotán as described above, the elite newspaper at the time, called *El Imparcial*, claimed that Indians from the hills, spurred by the labor union had attacked the town center, resulting in the deaths of several ladino townspeople (U.S. State Department cable c.f (Handy, 1994, p. 56)).

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<sup>106</sup> According to (Dary, et al., 1998, pp. 47-49), the last *cofradía* in Jocotán ceased activity during the time of Ubico.

<sup>107</sup> (Metz, 2006, p. 215) reports that he could only find evidence of Ch’orti’ mayors being elected in Olopa, but Todd Little-Siebold confirmed that Christa Little-Siebold’s claim referred to Olopa, Jocotán, and Camotán. The discrepancy is probably due to the criteria used at any given time to call someone indigenous.

<sup>108</sup> Describing activity in Quetzaltepeque, the municipality that borders Olopa to the southwest, Christa Little-Siebold notes that in the months preceding the October Revolution town dwellers and rural residents alike followed the news closely to make their alliances that “would build new political parties.” I have no information of alliance building prior to the elections in the four municipalities that I researched, but that people were aware of what was happening before it happened is certain. How do you explain the victories in the three municipalities then? Were the votes from the aj k’opot (the overwhelming majority in every municipality) unaccompanied by votes from the aj Chinam in the cities? That is how much of a multiclass alliance was there?

Yet, it was the 1952 Congressional Decree 900, known as Arbenz's Agrarian Reform, which catalyzed conflict locally, nationally, and internationally.<sup>109</sup> As (Hale, 2006, p. 53) noted, "Whatever the intentions of the universalist reforms, they had the effect of opening space for indigenous mobilization, which in turn quickened and radicalized the pace of change underway." Out of the political and material erosion of their lives and livelihoods over the last decades, some Ch'orti' producers and other campesin@s found a two-pronged opportunity in the reform, and their participation in its promotion and execution has become one of the buried secrets in the region.<sup>110</sup> Passed on June 17, 1952, Decree 900 allowed "individuals or campesin@ organizations to claim unused municipal properties, uncultivated land of farms larger than 672 acres, or of farms between 274 and 672 acres where 2/3 of the land was still uncultivated, as well as national lands." At the same time, its implementation structure—*Comites Agrarias Locales* (CAL) [Local Agrarian Committees]—combined with the state recognition (since 1950) of peasant unions and departmental federations of the *Ligas Campesinas* [campesin@ Leagues], which were particularly strong in the east<sup>111</sup>, reworked racial and spatial relations. Where Ch'orti' and referred to themselves as country folk, *ajk'opot* and/or *naturales*, townspeople had been simply that: *ajchinam* or ladino *ajchinam*. The reform process produced new opportunities for indigenous and land poor farmers and created a universalizing campesin@ identity to link *ajk'opot* indigenous to class struggle, but in so doing it fostered new conflicts that flamed historical disputes (Gleijeses, 1991, pp. 149-164); (Grandin, 2000, p. 200; Handy, 1989; 1994, pp. 74 and 86-100).<sup>112</sup>

The Local Agrarian Committees in particular assumed the role of local authority. They were comprised of five members: one designated by the Department Governor, one by the respective Municipal Corporation, and three by the local campesin@ organization, agrarian workers union, or local rural business association. The CAL had the task of taking an inventory and making a registry of all the land that could be affected by the Agrarian Reform and to handle the paperwork in relation to claims and requests regarding affected land. In the eyes of many, this

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<sup>109</sup> Most analysts see the Reform's provision for the expropriation of United Fruit Companies uncultivated banana lands as the matchstick behind the U.S.-sponsored coup, especially since the U.S. ambassador was a major stockholder in the company. In the context of the Cold War, the U.S. had been distancing itself from and harassing the Arbenz government for its ties to communist party members before the Agrarian reform was on the books. United Fruit Company gave the U.S. a Monroe Doctrine justification, however, for its intervention (LaFeber, 1993; Schlesinger & Kinzer, 1982).

<sup>110</sup> I am not arguing that all Ch'orti' or that only Ch'orti' rallied behind the reform, but that in the possibilities to recover municipal land from ladino cattle and coffee producers, people dared invest their hopes in politics and the state, as witnessed by Todd Little-Siebold's discovery that Chiquimula had the highest number of Local Agrarian Committees in the country [cited in (C. Little-Siebold, 2011)]. Metz, (2006), whose research focused on villages that still preserved Ch'orti' language, reports that many Ch'orti' (he doesn't specify men or women) were wary of the reform.

<sup>111</sup>The growth of rural organizations was rapid on national level, but probably even much faster in the Ch'orti' East. In 1948, there were 23 peasant trade unions and five peasant leagues had been legally recognized in Guatemala. As the democratic spring ended in 1954, peasant trade unions had increased to 345 and the peasant leagues mushroomed to 320 in (Brockett, 1998, p. 103).

<sup>112</sup> The general perception concerning indigenous structures and new campesin@ organization is summarized by Adams, (1970, p. 251) who during the Spring notes a shift in power relations where the patron or the elders no longer had the final word, the campesin@ organization gained strength as the new authority, and for a time at least the existence of these organizations protected campesin@s and indigenous from retribution. The Ch'orti' highlands showed much more indigenous structure involvement in the Spring as we will see it did during the early waves of guerrilla warfare.



kind of local authority was a welcome substitute to Ubico's military henchman. Still, members had particular alliances and interests, and had to navigate uncharted waters such as what to do with claims to historical *ejidal* now municipal land, which was the case of many of the requests in the Ch'orti' area (Handy, 1990).<sup>113</sup>

Ch'orti' and poor *mestizo* in all four municipalities as elsewhere began joining the leagues, taking on leadership roles in the CAL (Handy, 1994, p. 102).<sup>114</sup> For the first time many Ch'orti' identified themselves as *campesin@s*.<sup>115</sup> But those who participated often found themselves at odds with neighbors, while alliances and allegiances crossed ethnic and sometimes class lines. With its longer history of small and medium holders, recent accelerated dispossession processes for cattle-raising, and tobacco production linked to the post World War II agro-export boom (Brockett, 1998; Williams, 1986)<sup>116</sup>, Chiquimula Department – and the Ch'orti' highlands in particular – had the least amount of land eligible for redistribution, but the largest number of organized groups demanding land.<sup>117</sup> This paradox, combined with rumors and misunderstandings about the reform that passed from mouth to mouth, made the Ch'orti' area the site of one of “the most violent confrontations” between CAL and elites, because in the Ch'orti' area elites were trying to protect their usurped control of municipal or collective land. Four hundred armed landowners met the Local Agrarian Committee and two squads of civil guardsman from neighboring communities when they arrived in the San Juan Ermita, the small township bordering Jocotán, to distribute expropriated municipal land to the poorer Ch'orti' *campesin@s* who had lost access to it during and after its creation as a municipality. The Civil

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<sup>113</sup> See (Handy, 1994, pp. 146-157) for some of the conflicts arising in relation to municipal land and CAL allegiances.

<sup>114</sup> In future work I hope to continue the relational comparison between municipalities in relation to the violence. (Metz, 2006) and I have slightly different conceptions of the degree of Ch'orti' involvement, and neither of us have numbers. Metz describes most Ch'orti' as staying on the sidelines and later either being caught between two bands or having no knowledge of the guerrilla. I argue that the degree of violent confrontation against the CALs in the area and the brutal persecution of not just “members” but of Ch'orti' ritual that occurs after the 1954 coup, suggests far deeper active participation in *campesin@* organizing in the Ch'orti' East than generally reported.

<sup>115</sup> Christa Little-Siebold (C. Little-Siebold, 2011, p. 103), writing on a Ch'orti' township bordering Olopa, Quetzaltepeque notes that the “Springtime” term *campesin@* “stuck” in the region even after the fall of Arbenz. Still it would be a mistake to assume that the terms and identifications used in Quetzaltepeque municipality mirror its neighbors to the northeast or vice versa. (Fought, 1969) argues that Ch'orti' indigenous structures in Esquipulas and Quetzaltepeque differed from that in Jocotán, Olopa, and Camotán because in the latter areas, the Ch'orti' separated political and religious authorities and are less “Catholic.” He suggests that this difference was produced because of greater communication between the former and the western highlands. Being on the pilgrimage route to Esquipulas exposed indigenous in Quetzaltepeque and Esquipulas villages to the traditions of the western Maya as well as Catholic pilgrims.

<sup>116</sup> See also (Loker, 2005) for an understanding of how the change in the tobacco industry post WWII changed social and ecological relations along the fertile plains of the Copán/Grande River in Copán, Honduras and Camotán.

<sup>117</sup> To understand this peculiar tension it helps to understand that in the decade before the promised land reform, the Ch'orti' East had not benefited from the Post World War II boom in cotton because of its climate, nor in coffee because the quintessential crop was just beginning to gain ground against smaller cattle farms that produced yearlings or at best young steers for larger cattle ranchers in the lowlands of Chiquimula and Zacapa, nor the boom in meat export which benefitted industrial slaughter house and to a lesser extent the large cattle ranchers outside the Ch'orti' East. On the post WW2 boom in Guatemala see (Brockett, 1998; Williams, 1986). According to Williams, improvements in refrigeration and transportation combined with increasing demands in the US market suddenly made cattle a viable export. While as late as 1933, there were no coffee farms of any recognizable size and only three in La Unión (Guatemala-Oficina-Central-del-Café., 1933).

Guard retreated, and the armed men maintained their control of the land (*Tribuna Popular* May 5,6, 1954 c.f. (Handy, 1990, p. 176)).

### **Out like a Lion: The “Liberation” of Terror**

The confrontation in San Juan Ermita foreshadowed the counter-revolution to come. The combined perceived threat to U.S. capital (expropriation of uncultivated United Fruit land under the Agrarian Reform) and geopolitics (Arbenz’ legalization of the communist PGT) gave birth to a U.S.-sponsored coup just a month later. Bolstered by an entrenched oligarchical Guatemalan elite, conservative Catholic forces, and a divided military, the 1954 coup crushed bodies and hopes, and reversed the clock on progressive social change. Yet, in some ways the response was undergirded by historic racism and fear of indigenous people. As one of the leading scholars of the revolutionary decade concluded,

Fear of ethnic conflict, of violent Indian uprising inspired by the relaxation of centuries of vigilance, helps explain ladino reaction to the relatively moderate reforms of the revolution. It was this fear as much as any other element, that helped prompt the overthrow of the revolution in 1954{Handy, 1989 #198 @204} c.f. (Hale, 2006, p. 53).

In this light, it is not surprising that the indigenous in the Ch’orti’ area bore an inordinate share of the counter-revolutionary vengeance.

On July 17, 1954 the “Liberation” forces of Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, funded and supervised by the CIA, crossed the Honduran border at Camotán, quickly taking Jocotán and moving west. As the troops made their way to Chiquimula and then Zacapa, some activists just hid, but many campesin@s, indigenous, and workers used what they could find, fighting and dying to defend the revolution against well-armed troops. In a tragedy of errors and betrayals built around rumors of an impending U.S. invasion, the Guatemalan Generals at the barracks surrendered, Arbenz resigned and went into exile and with the blessing/pressure of U.S. Ambassador Puerifoy, Castillo Armas became president (Black, 1984; Dunkerley, 1988; Gleijeses, 1991).

In the months following the coup, military, police, and extra-legal groups at the service of private planters or anti-communist committees (Glejeses, 1991; Grandin, 2004) terrorized and or eliminated any perceived Arbenz or PTG supporters.<sup>118</sup> Having been the area of strongest campesin@ organizing and land redistribution, the East received the lion’s share of the post-coup violence (Cullather, 1999; Davis, 1983; Gleijeses, 1991; May). The state-sponsored attacks against civilians had three roots. First the U.S. Embassy had compiled and handed over its list of suspected communist sympathizers like the people who had attended the election rally in

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<sup>118</sup> Key to understanding a shift in discourses and practices around campesin@ organizing in the was the ratification by the counterrevolutionary government in fall of 1954 of the Preventative and Penal Law against communism, which empowered the newly formed National Defense Committee against Communism to create a register “of all persons who in whatever form participated in Communist activities.” The definition for communist was so loose that by November the committee, with the help of the CIA, had compiled a list of 72,000 names. See (Grandin, 2004, p. 66 fn 93 and 94; Handy, 1994, pp. 30-32). The long list meant that whenever the state deemed necessary, “possible sympathizers” could be eliminated.

Camotán. Second, local landowners took vengeance. (Metz, et al., 2010, p. 21) writes, “For 25-year-old ladino sergeant Rufino Guerra, the vengeance was personal as his father’s land had been invaded by Ch’orti’s from Piedra de Amolar in Olopa. He led a military detachment to massacre entire Olopa communities organized in agrarian committees, causing survivors to flee to Copan.”

The third and final root of attacks against civilians was “the cards.” Castillo Armas’ government under close U.S. supervision had restored Ubico’s military apparatus. Military commissioners (the majority resident in the villages) and secret police revoked the Agrarian Reform and started to hunt down campesin@s who had participated in the Local Agrarian Committees.<sup>119</sup> For months afterwards the army, military police, and reinstated military commissioners went house to house arresting, torturing, and sometimes killing those they found with membership cards to the CAL or the campesin@ Leagues. As one leader in Cajón del Río, Camotán testified for the Truth Commission, “When Jacobo Arbenz went, they [the military] did great killing. Cadavers appeared in all of the paths” (CEH, 1999) Anexo I, Vol. II, C47. In the poorest and most feudal villages of La Unión, people talk of house-to-house visits by the military where they arrested, tortured and/or killed anyone who had a membership card to the campesin@ Leagues or the Rural Worker’s Union. Many local CAL and campesin@ League members, PGT activists, and other Arbenzistas did manage to escape across the border to Honduras—“living to fight another day.” But, as I discuss more in the next section, the word *agrarian* became unspeakable in the Ch’orti’ area.

“No less than the Revolution, the Counterrevolution [had] entailed a redefinition of politics” that required the maintenance of a stable investment climate and the elimination of popular organization and mobilization potential (Jonas, 1991, p. 59). But by strangling the possibilities of civilian participation, Castillo Armas and his CIA-chosen Ubiquista successor, Gen. Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, spread the corrupt tentacles of U.S.-supported military rule in the countryside and city.<sup>120</sup> More importantly, they began the consolidation of a counter-revolutionary developmental state increasingly at the service of the economic and political elites, with tutelage more clearly in the hands of the oligarchy and less emphasis on the State modernization processes (Tischler Visquerra, 2001 [1998]).

Between 1957 and 1960, as political positions in the country polarized, a tug of war ensued for influence and control of the countryside. campesin@ women and men, many indigenous, who had begun to exert some control over land and lives during the Democratic Spring found themselves facing the Castillo Armas’ *Movimiento de Liberación Nacional* (National Liberation Movement) [heretofore MLN]. The MLN, formed by anti-communist youth, had become the political party of Castillo Armas between 1954 and 1957. Bringing together elements of Spanish fascism, Catholicism, and modernizing development, the MLN originally tried to position itself as an alternative to both the threat of communism and the history of dictatorships. With Armas’ 1957 assassination and the rise to power of Colonel Carlos Ydígoras Fuentes in 1957, the MLN

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<sup>119</sup> Puerifoy handed the secret police a list of 72,000 “communists” in the months that followed the so called “liberation” army, and police arrested an estimated 9,000 to 14,000 people, and killed 2,000 to 5,000 (CEH, 1999; May, 2001, pp. 5-6).

<sup>120</sup> Analysts argue that the “Liberation” forces won not because of overwhelming opposition to Arbenz or weakness of the Guatemalan Armed Forces, but because the Guatemalan army chose to save its own skin. U.S. support for Castillo Armas convinced them that defeating Castillo Armas would lead to a greater intervention (Gleijeses, 1991; Jonas, 1991).

redirected its efforts to the countryside, building a network between planters, provincial military officers, and paramilitary organizations often led by military commissioners. Chiquimula and Zacapa provinces gave birth to numerous of the first MLN affiliated para-military death squads that operated clandestinely from the military barracks. These squads began reaching deep into villages with strong organizations during the democratic spring and later where the guerrilla movements took hold. These paramilitary organizations such as Eye for an Eye and The White Hand, not only killed suspect subversives (always more when guerrilla activity increased), but they served as private enforcers for the military state of local large landholders (Aguilera Peralta & Beverly, 1980).<sup>121</sup>

Historicizing this period, Guatemalan sociologist, Sergio Tischler Visquerra argues that “[t]he October revolution tried to found a new state based on mass democracy. Its defeat ten years later was the victory of the country’s [coffee] *finquero* project, which as a response gave way to a process of passive revolution and Junkerism, a modernization movement that slammed the brakes on any mass democratization project” (Tischler Visquerra, 2001 [1998], p. 14).

It was in this crucible of the reconstitution of the *finquero* or planter state and the global-national dialectic of cold war development that the first phase of Guatemalan armed revolution crystallized. By 1957 the nation was becoming a tinderbox, a tinderbox that would burst into flames in the early 1960s. The extreme deepening poverty that accompanied the uneven accumulation of capital and export-led growth made social change a growing imperative among the increasingly excluded and impoverished urban and rural majorities. The historical memory of the Arevalo and Arbenz Spring flamed the hopes of social change. The repressive state and parallel State apparatus forged in and through the 1954 counter-revolution alliance of the U.S. government, planters, big business, ultra-right politicians, U.S. capital investment, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, and Armed Forces was closing the possibility of a peaceful path to social and political transformation (Figueroa Ibarra, 2006; Grandin, 2004, pp. 70-71 and 89-93; Jonas, 1991, pp. 64-72).

People in the Ch’orti’ area read this conjuncture in different ways. Many hill and mountain farmers as well as urban poor remember the moment as heralding the violence, terror, military control, and related processes of dispossession that would mark the next four decades. For many wealthier self-identified ladinos who had felt threatened by the reforms of the October Revolution, the end of mass democratization offered a chance for reconsolidation and revenge.<sup>122</sup> Joining the anti-communist committees of the MLN gave some campesin@s a sense of security after the chaos. But for other indigenous and campesin@ survivors who had appropriated the promises of the revolution, (as Grandin noted of Q’eqchi’-Maya in Panzos), “the desire to redeem the democratic process of 1944 [and I would add the 1952 agrarian reform] drove their politics and many of their children’s politics”(Grandin, 2004, p. 70).

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<sup>121</sup> For a list of death squads operating in Guatemala between 1960 and 1979 see (Aguilera Peralta & Beverly, 1980).

<sup>122</sup> According to (Grandin, 2004, p. 89), “In the wake of 1954, revolutionary and counter-revolutionary forces and ideals fed off each other, leading to a downward spiral of crisis and terror. Yet, much more than the left, it was the advanced guard of the right that propelled this cycle, its militant absolutism unbound by a society and polity that allowed no reform.”

In the Ch'orti' area, whether the ten years of Spring had cemented a campesin@ identity tied to class unity, had provided a vehicle for local indigenous struggle, both or neither, it had steered a course for some women and men to engage in another two decades of collaboration and participation in political opposition and the fits and starts of armed revolution. Mounting terror and ongoing militarization, however, eventually proved too overpowering, producing a thick cloak of silence and apparent acquiescence in most villages. In the next section, I trace that process and the secrets it holds.

## **Section 2—Revolutionary Ch'orti'? Scorched Earth and Buried Secrets (1960–1983)**

If it is necessary to turn the country into a cemetery in order to pacify it, I will not hesitate to do so.

President Carlos Arana Osorio, 1971<sup>123</sup>

In this section, I discuss the underpinnings of racialized dispossession after 1954 and how it became dialectically bound to the emerging terrain of terror and to the region's localized interests, historic conflicts, and national and international agendas. I focus on the conditions under and ways in which some campesin@s and indigenous campesin@s came to embrace organized armed struggle as a necessary and viable path in the Ch'orti' East.

The cattle boom hit eastern Guatemala full force during the decade of the 60s after the southern coastal plain had been deforested for cattle and cattle raising then pushed east by cotton with “most important new cattle area was in northeast Guatemala first in Izabal and Zacapa, and later in Chiquimula with the road linking the lowlands of Chiquimula to the major road along the Motagua river, opening up new grazing areas (Williams, 1986). Once again the Ch'orti' highlands were hit last, but the pressures for dispossessing more land for the ladino ranchers' cattle ranchers was the key economic background for understanding insurgency in the Ch'orti' East.

### **Military and Militants**

cold war dynamics in the four historically Ch'orti' municipalities challenge dichotomous understandings of the Guatemalan civil war that map the first phase as ladino in the east, and the second phase as *indigenous-based* and in the west. Between 1960 and 1972, the East convulsed when Guatemala consolidated a military-led national security state at the service of the sometime competing interests of the United States, the Guatemalan elite, and the officers' corps. The closing of political avenues of protest, the deepening gap between economic growth and social misery, corruption in the military governments, anti-communist fervor fueled by the cold war, and U.S. foreign policy dedicated to containing “communism” brought the country to civil war—a war that would last almost four decades, starting in the east and then reappearing in its more focused second phase in the western and northern parts of the country.

Virtually all sources on this first phase of Guatemala's armed conflict describe it as primarily ladino operating in Guatemala City and soldiered by mainly non-indigenous campesin@s in the

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<sup>123</sup>(Dunkerley, 1988, pp. 426 c.f. {Handy, 1984 #1380})

mountains of Zacapa and Izabal (Adams, 1970; Figueroa Ibarra, 2006; Galeano, 1969; Gilly, 1965; Handy, 1994; Jonas, 1991; Schirmer, 2000) (Manz, 2004, p. 49). This perception gained strength with the restructuring of the guerrilla in 1972, when dissidents from the old FAR formed the *Ejercito Guerrillero de los Pobres* (Guerrilla Army of the Poor) [EGP] with the theoretical conviction that there could be “no revolution without the Indian” (Jonas, 1991, p. 136; Payeras, 1987, p. 67).<sup>124</sup> Often repeated as the key cause for the failure of first wave popular revolutionary forces, the myth of a ladino *insurrección* obscures those places in the east where revolutionaries did have contact with and did organize indigenous populations in the 1960s and again in 1972. No doubt ladino or *mestizo* campesin@s dominated the first wave forces in Zacapa and Izabal, but by ignoring the ways in which Ch’orti’ campesin@s embraced the movement, strategists and analysts missed both the nuances and tensions in indigenous guerrilla support and the how the counter-insurgency targeting of Ch’orti’ villages mapped onto historic racialized conflicts. Hence they missed the writing on the wall for what was to transpire in the west from 1975 to 1996. Figure 2.1 on the following page represents an initial attempt to systematize this doubly buried secret, first violently by the military and then ideologically in the work of both strategists and historians. Representing a work in progress that will serve as a starting point for future workshops in the region, the maps have more black holes than pinpoints of light, but the information it contains is overwhelming in the face of the systematic silences about insurgency and counter-insurgency in the Ch’orti’ East. The intensity of the war went missing not just in the first wave of armed conflict, but also in the succeeding ones. In what follows I analyze the production of both the events and the silences.

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<sup>124</sup> A second phase revolutionary political-military organization, formed in 1969, *la Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo Armado*, the Revolutionary Organization of People in Arms [ORPA], considered the incorporation of indigenous in the struggle not only necessary but essential. See (MacLeod Howland, 2008) for a brilliant analysis of the gap between revolutionary documents and revolutionary practice in relation to the Maya in Guatemala’s revolutionary process.

# Reported Incidents of War-Related Deaths and Guerrilla Activity 1960-1983 Olopa, Camotán, Jocotán and La Unión

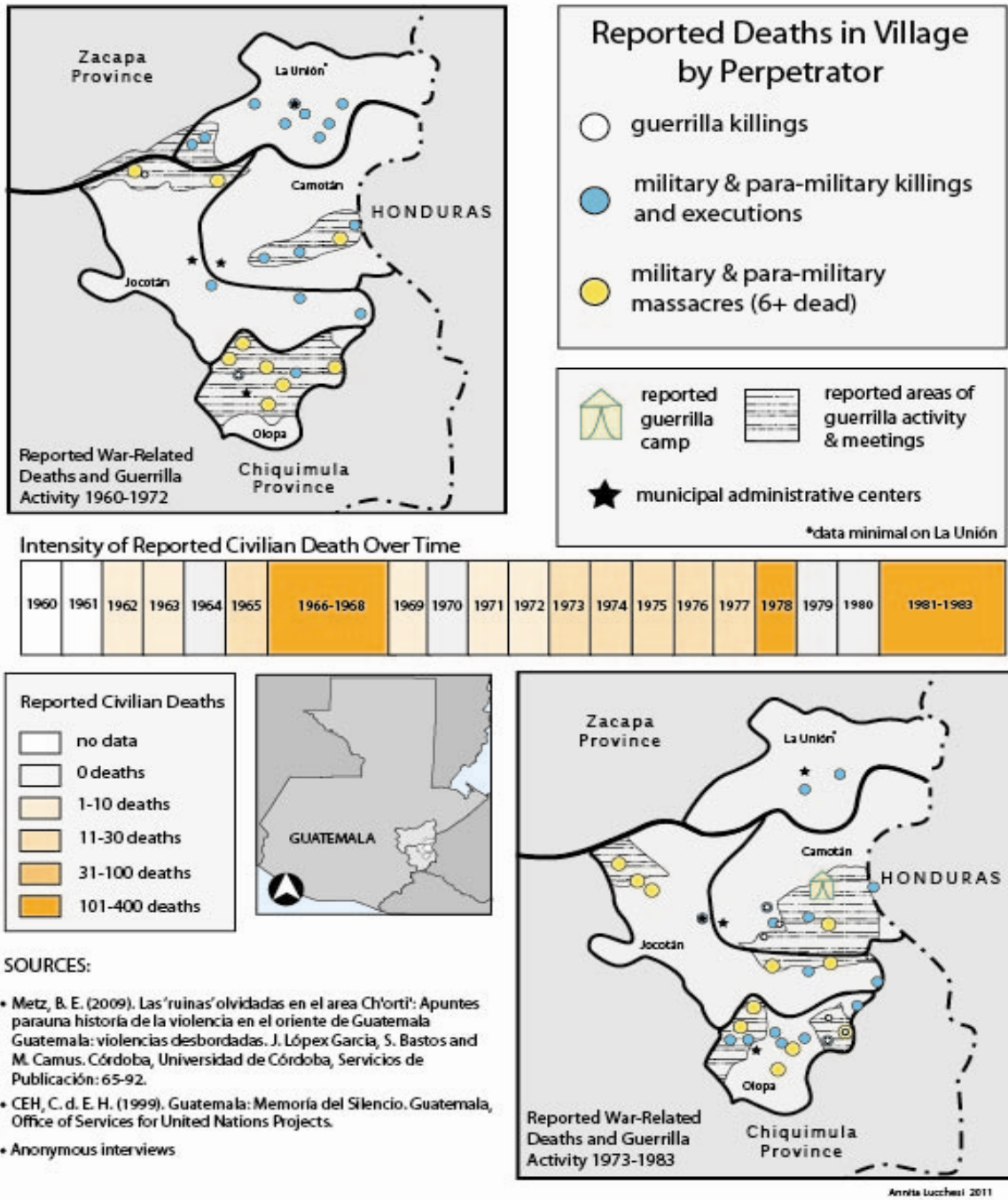


Figure 2.1: Reported Incidents of War-Related Deaths and Guerrilla Activity 1960-1983, Olopa, Camotán, Jocotán and La Unión (Map Contracted by Author).

Class struggle took on armed confrontation for the first time in Guatemala in the 1960s as avenues of unarmed political protest and opposition closed in the increasingly polarized cold war atmosphere.<sup>125</sup> Guatemala had experienced unprecedented economic growth in the late fifties but taxation and government spending ranked last in Central America and all of Latin America. As Beatriz Manz points out, “Not surprisingly mounting social problems combined with shrinking political options proved to be a volatile option that erupted in armed confrontation”(Manz, 2004, p. 49), more than a decade before Nicaragua and El Salvador.

The overall social tensions carved divisions even within the military. On November 13, 1960 in protest of run-away corruption in the Ydigoras’ regime and his old-guard allies, as well as in repugnance at his lending Guatemalan territory to the CIA for preparations of the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, 1,400 younger military officers staged a nationalist army rebellion, taking control of the military bases in Puerto Barrios, Izabal, and Zacapa. While the uprising itself ultimately failed, those who fled into exile formed the first guerrilla army, and influenced the revolutionary movement’s choice to begin organizing among the campesin@ populations of Izabal and Zacapa, where mutinous officers in hiding had encountered support (Grandin, 2004; Jonas, 1991; Rosada-Granados, 1999; Streeter, 2000).<sup>126</sup>

In exile, the rebel officers (especially those who went to Cuba) decided that their only option to restore democracy and autonomy in Guatemala was armed struggle. They found like minds in Guatemala’s communist party at the time, known as the *Partido de Trabajadores Guatemaltecos*, (PGT—Guatemalan Worker’s Party). The PGT had been pursuing a path of support for modernization and capitalist development, with the hopes of gaining electoral victories throughout the 1950s; it was slow and hesitant to embrace armed revolution, with fits and starts throughout the 1960s (Figueroa Ibarra, 2006; Grandin, 2004; Jonas, 1991; Wickham-Crowley, 1991).

Still, in the face of growing repression against students, workers, and right-of-center politicians, the PGT supported the young officers in 1960, offering party youth to the ex-officer’s Revolutionary Movement 13 of November (*Movimiento Revolucionario 13 de Noviembre*) [MR-13 de Noviembre,] and consolidating a first attempt at unity in December 1962: the Armed Rebel Forces (*Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes*) [FAR].<sup>127</sup> Finally, after initial military blows and a series of ideological and strategic debates, alliances, and splits, they regrouped in 1964, forming three-allied guerrilla organizations known collectively again as the FAR.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> (Aguilera Peralta & Beverly, 1980). I do not analyze the complicated and violent process that led to armed revolution in this chapter but rather try to understand its relationship to historical processes of exclusion, exploitation, and dispossession in the East.

<sup>126</sup> As (Schirmer, 2000, p. 15) points out, “[t]he ‘paradoxical legacy’ of the 1944 liberal revolution was, on the one hand, to provide a firm constitutional basis for the army’s political ascendancy and, on the other, to produce an officer-led guerrilla insurgency as the vanguard of social and economic justice.”

<sup>127</sup> Radicalized by the Cuban Revolution and the state and death squad repression of their leaders in late 1960, the ex-military officers, most prominently ex-military officers Marco Antonio Yon Sosa, Luis Turcio Limas, and Luis Trejo Esquivel, the latter from Zacapa, and PGT leader César Montes formed the first armed revolutionary movement, with three incipient guerrilla columns (Gilly, 1965; Jonas, 1991, p. 67).

<sup>128</sup> The three forces that united were the Guerrilla Front Edgar Ibarra (FGEI) and the Revolutionary Movement 13 of November (MR-13) and the Guatemalan Workers Party, PGT (CEH, 1999, p. Chapter 1.; Jonas, 2000). These first-wave revolutionary leaders, a strange mix of U.S.-trained ex-military officers, ex-Arbencistas, PGT intellectuals,



Both in 1961–62, and after 1964, the *first wave* guerrillas began operations in *Sierra de las Minas*, the mountains of Izabal, and the mountain corridor from the Motagua river to Honduras that crossed the Ch’orti’ East. These areas constituted a region where the semi-proletarian base of migrant plantation workers (in Izabal and Zacapa) existed, where the support base for Arbenz and the agrarian reform had been strong,<sup>129</sup> where the mutinied officers had found campesin@ support in 1960, where military support from reformist officers (at the Zacapa base) might be harnessed, and where t(CEH, 1999)he Motagua River, long isolated mountain ranges and Honduran border offered ideal geography to gather force for a Cuban-like *insurrectionalist* strategy(Gilly, 1965; Grandin, 2004). All accounts of that period, however, suggest that the revolutionary leadership was committed to historical class struggle and addressed the Ch’orti’ civilian population from a class perspective. They saw the logistical usefulness of their rural base areas and the mountain corridor, giving little critical weight to indigenous composition, especially Ch’orti’-Maya, there.<sup>130</sup> For the Ch’orti’ campesin@s, however, who became involved with the political or armed struggles in the early 1960s, those who had escaped the terror of the counter-revolution saw and heard new opportunities to reclaim or defend land and life before the right-wing militarization of the countryside.

### **Talking about a REBELution: National Plans and Ch’orti’ Places**

Whatever the class-based ideologies and intent of the first wave (1960–1972) of the armed revolutionary movement were,<sup>131</sup> the support they recruited and encountered in the Ch’orti’ area was primarily indigenous campesin@ in terms of places, self-identification, and I argue, meaning. This section draws mainly on secondary literature to explore how the promises and practices of the guerrilla movement hooked up with and in some ways reworked and was reworked by the material and symbolic experience of exclusion, exploitation, resistance, and rebellion of Ch’orti’campesin@s.<sup>132</sup> By tracing the little that the population has openly

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and Marxist-inspired students with ties to Cuba and the Soviet Union, opposed U.S. imperialism, backed the demands of the urban popular movement for justice (Jonas, 1991, p. 67), promised land to allcampesin@s (Figueroa Ibarra, 2006), split in 1965, then regrouped one more time between 1967 and 1968 before military operations (as I explain below) virtually annihilated them(Aguilera Peralta & Beverly, 1980; Jonas, 1991, pp. 69-70)The 1965 split was based on differences in how to “take power”: the MR-13 of November, ex-military officers favored Cuban-like insurrectionist strategies and PGT-FAR, who promoted prolonged popular warfare: the creation of diverse fronts of struggle, civil society, and political and military fronts of struggle (Wickham-Crowley, 1991).

<sup>129</sup> According to Richard Adams, memories of agrarian reform were strong in east and facilitated early guerrilla organizing (Adams, 1970, pp. 271-272).

<sup>130</sup> In 1963, the FAR also made contact with the Achi-Maya in Rabinal Alta Verapaz, where, as in the Ch’orti’ East, the PGT had established bases with indigenouscampesin@s “who sympathized with the guerrilla discourse.” Many of them formed part of the first guerrilla columns in the east (CEH, 1999, p. C. II: 245) c.f. (MacLeod Howland, 2008, p. 146).

<sup>131</sup> The political strategy of the first wave of the armed revolutionary activity was classically Leninist with perhaps more accent on the peasantry: "...taking political power the working class allied with campesin@s, intellectuals and other revolutionary sectors of the petty bourgeoisie achieve the installation of the dictatorship of the proletariat in a worker-campesin@ state, in order to complete the anti-feudal and anti-imperialist tasks and carry out the tasks of the socialist revolution". (CEH, 1999, p. 117)

<sup>132</sup> In this sense I do not critique or even fully analyze revolution strategy in the region. Whatever openings existed in communities in the four municipalities for guerrilla organizers, whatever instructions those organizers may have brought, promises they may have made, encampments they may have established, collaboration they may have won is less important than how those actions hooked up with Ch’orti’ histories and memories, reshaping subjectivities and terrains.

acknowledged of Ch'orti' participation and collaboration with the guerrillas in particular villages or areas of the southern mountain corridor of Camotán, the northern western hills of Jocotán (bordering La Unión and Zacapa), and in most of Olopa, I suggest some of the localized indigenous roots of revolution that were buried beneath the grounds of silence.

### *Keeping the Dream Alive*

As early as 1957, some campesin@s in the Ch'orti' area began to secretly join the center-left Revolutionary Party (heretofore the PR), which was "the most important reform party allowed to operate after 1954." The PR built upon the clandestine but still existing base of the agrarian reform (Grandin, 2004, p. 88). At the same time, although the PR was a self-declared anti-communist party, its historic ties to the Arbenz government made its members, especially in the rural areas, targets of the Nationalist Liberation Movement (MLN) death squads and military commissioners, which I discuss more below. At the same time the PGT began to regroup and slowly embraced a broad strategy that included armed struggle. Returning from exile in the early sixties, many sought participation in the "legal" Revolutionary Party as a way of building political-military links in the countryside.

In December 1962, the FAR established its first guerrilla front in the region—*Frente Las Granadillas* (The Granadillas Front)—under the leadership of ex-lieutenant Luis Trejo Esquivel. Even though the army discovered and bombed the guerrillas' base camp just four months after it was established, causing the Front to disband, (CEH, 1999)<sup>133</sup>, the very presence of the Front in the mountain corridor from the Motagua River in Zacapa to the border area of Camotán and Jocotán, kept the language of revolution (albeit a different type of revolution) alive. Some Ch'orti' and campesin@ activists (at least in the communities in the southern hills of Camotán: Marimba, Tular, Cajón del Rió, Guayabo) continued to organize as best they could through the PR—a practice that they would repeat through different parties and organizations time and again during the thirty-six years of war. According to most testimonies I heard, words like communism and socialism were meaningless to Ch'orti' and campesin@ (CEH, 1999) producers, but the possibilities of land and the thought of freeing themselves again from the control of the military commissioners and local powerbrokers, in addition to promises of education, health, and development—all still held weight, tempered by fear of reprisals. Most significant is that for those in the hamlets and villages trying to keep that part of the Arbenz dream that they had made their own or defend their communities and land, participation proved increasingly difficult and deadly.

Thus, in 1964 when a regrouped FAR<sup>134</sup> began operating in the corridor again, their discourse promising land and freedom echoed much of what the PR and ex-CAL and campesin@ *League* activists had been saying and what many villagers had supported under Arbenz, with one important difference: they had guns. In the face of persecution for political participation,

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<sup>133</sup> See (CEH, 1999) see Anexo I, Volume II. Caso 47.

<sup>134</sup> With the regrouping, the FAR was originally the armed wing of the PGT, having recognized that all other roads to struggle had been closed. Their July 1965 declaration read "When all possibilities to exercise their legitimate rights have been closed to the Guatemalan people and the dominant classes backed up by imperialism use the State apparatus to violently repress any expression of disagreement with the present situation, the revolutionaries have been left with no other path than to organize revolutionary violence and launch with the enemy an historic war that will lead to the taking of political power." (CEH, 1999, p. 163).

increasingly more people went to hear what the guerrilla had to say. Sometimes (it is impossible to know how often) a growing desire, voiced as “to defend one’s family” and other times “to fight for what belongs to one (*lo suyo*),” led villagers to collaborate or join.

Such was the case of Agustín Perez. Agustín, a Ch’orti’ producer with little land, was originally from the Ch’orti’ community of Tular in the southern Camotán mountains close to Jocotán’s northeastern border. He had cut his teeth on campesin@ activism during the democratic spring and had become a leader in the campesin@ Leagues. In Camotán, the fertile valley lands to the north of Tular had long been occupied by the wealthier criollos and ladinos, some from colonial land grants. But cattle ranchers had slowly pushed the basic grain producing campesin@s off the once *ejidal* hillside slopes. In the early 1960s, Agustín became president of the leadership council of the PR, and by 1964–65, along with fellow PR leader, Cupertino Rivera, from nearby Cajón del Rió, was organizing PR members to support at least monetarily the MR-13 unit known as the *Frente Alejandro de León* [Alejandro de León Front] (CEH, 1999).<sup>135</sup>

Although I do not have the details of Agustín’s experience in terms of how he and others in the Camotán hills became activist of the agrarian reform, three things are clear from the Truth Commission Illustrative Case No. 47 (CEH, 1999). First Agustín, Cupertino, and the population throughout the guerrilla corridor formed part of the indigenous campesin@ Ch’orti’ populations that, as shown in chapter 1 had been pushed onto smaller and smaller plots of more fragile mountain soils, often still with only usufruct rights. Second, villagers had divergent relations to both the PR and the guerrillas. Some stayed away altogether, either having been burned by political activism or never having been convinced by outside promises. Others, who attended the nighttime meetings that the guerrillas called, had participated in one way or another in the agrarian reform movement, but the guerrilla movement, like the 1944-54 reforms, needed to prove to them that they responded to their needs. Third, while Agustín and Cupertino had established organic ties to the MR-13, that connection to them was an extension of their prior activism, an activism that was fundamentally about reclaiming land and local control

In Chiquimula and Zacapa and other areas where the Guerrilla had operated in the 60s, the peasant structures of the Democratic seemed to spring sprang back to life. The MR13 claimed to have 500 families organized in village Committees and “began to establish the organisms of dual power through formation of peasant committees in each village which disputed the real authority of the military officials, vice-mayors, and administered justice outside the framework of bourgeois justice.”<sup>136</sup>

Similar to Charles Hale’s assessment of indigenous participation in the Western highlands during the second wave of the war:

[T]he guerrilla presence probably encouraged local rebelliousness by providing conducive organizational conditions and encouraging people to think in terms of

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<sup>135</sup> See (CEH, 1999, pp. Anexo I, Vol. II Caso 47 ).

<sup>136</sup> Interestingly, Frank, 1974 #496 @182} cited in (Williams, 1986, p. 135) places this type of peasant organizing in the Chiquimula and Zacapa but identifies the areas as ladino. “The guerrillas were operating in a zone with mostly ladino small property owners, who for some time had been struggling against *latifundistas* trying to appropriate their land for cattle grazing.” This, of course is almost an exact description of the Ch’orti’ areas with guerrilla activity in Olopa and southern Camotán.

radical systemic change. Yet the consciousness that people expressed during the ‘insurrection’ and the meanings they assigned to events and actions are far from exhausted by standard accounts of the revolutionary period. (Hale, Arias, Falla, & Wilson, 1997, p. 818)

Moreover, in nearby Olopa, where support for participation in the first insurrectionary movement is much more documented through the ethnographic work of Diener 1978, the more supposedly “traditional” and ritualistic Ch’orti’ campesin@s made the revolutionary process their own: a struggle for Ch’orti’ campesin@ rights in the face of a long history of injustice at the hands of landowners and townspeople.

### ***Ritual and Revolution***

Key to deepening my grasp of place-based dynamics of revolution in the Ch’orti’ East, is the same article by Stanford trained anthropologist Paul Diener that I mentioned in the preceding chapter.<sup>137</sup> Diener’s work brilliantly debunks the various theories of his day that linked radical struggle with modernization. By revealing how ladino townspeople in Olopa exploit and profit from indigenous ritual on the one hand and control where cattle can trample on the other (as analyzed in the preceding chapter), Diener makes a convincing case for how and why, when in 1966 twenty ladino FAR guerrillas accompanied Olopan indigenous campesin@s returning from the plantations in Izabal, villagers overwhelmingly embraced their promises of land and Ch’orti’ control of the township. While all but two guerrillas only stayed a week, indigenous leaders saw the struggle as a way “to achieve no less than complete control of their community [meaning the whole Ch’orti’ community in all the villages in Olopa.]” Largely local and traditional, the indigenous, revolutionary leadership in Olopa developed a revolutionary discourse that emphasized a “return to traditional values of community solidarity and egalitarianism”(Diener, 1978). One of those leaders was Natividad Ramos.

In 1965, soldiers and military commissioners under the cloak of counter-insurgent containment captured and executed Natividad’s father, Gregorio Ramos and five other Ch’orti’-Maya men. Gregorio had been a spokesperson for the community in a longstanding dispute between the Ch’orti’campesin@s of Tuticopote Arriba and the Olopan townspeople, who periodically grazed their cattle in the village, allowing them to trample Ch’orti’ cornfields. A ‘traditional’ Ch’orti’, Gregorio had kept an image of St. Anthony of Fire in his home, and had honored the saint with weekly ceremonies throughout the years. Given his religious and political role, Ch’orti’ throughout the rural area came to link St. Anthony and Gregorio and to view the saint as accompanying their causes(Diener, 1978).

Although the youngest son, it was Natividad who took over his father’s land and assumed his father’s ritual role and position of leadership; it was Natividad who grasped the guerrilla’s invitation to armed struggle and promise of political control; and it was Natividad who, in his inherited role as religious and community leader, articulated the revolution with “Ch’orti’ concerns and cultural practices.” By late summer of 1966, the Ch’orti’ forces controlled almost

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<sup>137</sup> I have attempted through various means to locate Paul Diener for follow-up and have to date not been able to find him. His ex-colleague, Dr. Donald Nonini at the University of North Carolina, described Diener as one of the most brilliant minds in anthropology at the time. He left academia, however, sometime in the 1980s and with the exception of communication on a blog at the turn of the millennium, I have not been able to find a trace of him.

all of the 22 villages and hamlets in Olopa (Ibid, 94). Diener reports that Natividad and the other traditional leaders carried out select executions against townspeople whose actions towards the indigenous communities had been particularly brutal. He adds, “*Ladino* informants described nights spent in terror as they guarded the entrances to the town and watched the campfires of the Indians flickering on the hills overlooking Olopa” (Ibid, 110).

Diener builds a strong case to argue against anthropologists who view indigenous ritual as the antithesis to modernization and Marxist teleological positions that dismiss the revolutionary potential of traditional indigenous peoples. While I would question the generalized conclusion that he draws, which exalts the revolutionary potential of all traditional indigenous people, his analytical weave is extraordinary. He concretely shows the material and meaningful linkages that explain how and why in Olopa traditional Ch’orti’ not only have good reason to fight, but that “ritual, because it binds the community together can serve to unite the revolt” (Ibid,109). The FAR guerrilla may have been orthodox Marxist-Leninist, but the Ch’orti’ participation and support in Olopa, as in Camotán, had deep roots in the processes of municipal formation that had reworked the relationship between race, cultural practices, capital, and land. In Olopa, where ritual had survived, in the 1960s, for some, it became radicalized.<sup>138</sup>

### **Two-Stepping a Deadly Dance: Reigns of Terror and Terrains of Struggle (1966–1972)**

The struggle that began to unfold in Olopa suggests how the meaning and practice of revolution (and counter-insurgency) was conditioned not only by the histories and memories of racialized dispossession<sup>139</sup> but also by a deadly dance between terror and struggle—physical, social, cultural, and psychological, at multiple scales. This dance moved in step to the longstanding melody of “vulnerability to premature death” and thus was not new to Ch’orti’ campesin@s. Nor were indigenous campesin@s always those who lost land and life: sometimes they took it. But in 1966, the conjuncture of U.S. cold war strategy, national counter-insurgency politics, revolutionary armed forces activity in eastern Guatemala, and widespread electoral support in the Ch’orti’ East for the victorious Revolutionary Party (Adams, 1970, p. 208) converged to turn the villages and hamlets in the Ch’orti’ area into killing fields where the army, death squads, and military commissioners worked in tandem to brutally eliminate perceived subversives and terrorize surviving populations.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Metz posits that the militant actions of Natividad and other “traditional” Ch’orti’ may be one explanation for why “Ch’orti’ who gathered for rituals were targets of the military commissioners (Metz, 2009b, p. 72).

<sup>139</sup> Borrowed from Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s state sanctioned group differentiated extra-legal violence that produces premature death.of racism (Gilmore, 2002).

<sup>140</sup> According to the (CEH, 1999, p. CH III:7). Three processes coincide to permit fixing 1966 as the beginning of State Terrorism. First, the forced disappearance of at least 32 leaders of the Left in March made evident the decision to accord increasing importance to the use of clandestine and illegal forms of repression to control and annihilate the opposition. Second, during the second semester of that year, the civil government of Julio César Méndez Montenegro inaugurated a widespread anti-guerrilla campaign that responded to the conception of Contra insurgency War promoted by the United States and in the zones of conflict indiscriminate violence was employed to generate terror. Third, in June the National Organized Anticommunist Movement the White Hand (*Mano Blanca*) began public operations, as the first of more than 20 death squads, which began to surface after 1996. Because of its clandestine nature and of the impunity with which they operated they became an ally of the State in propagating a climate of terror.

Nationally, the new phase of the reign of terror began with the presidential elections of 1996. Two military candidates ran against a civilian candidate, Juan César Méndez Montenegro of the reformist Revolutionary Party,<sup>141</sup> whose campaign promised a partial return to the reforms of the Democratic Spring. The PGT (clandestinely) endorsed the PR, in part in recognition that the people were tired of repression,<sup>142</sup> as did the FAR who had PR members in their bases including in the Ch'orti' area.<sup>143</sup> The left's endorsement of the PR concerned the CIA and U.S. embassy officials (Grandin, 2004, p. 98). The Guatemalan military, stunned by the PR's victory, made the president-elect an offer he could not refuse, forcing Mendez to sign a secret pact: the army would respect the elections in exchange for a promise that he would not grant recognition to the left and that he would give complete autonomy and all the support it needed to eliminate the guerrillas (Grandin, 2004, p. 98).

The signed pact gave a "green light for the Green Berets (Jonas, 1991, p. 70)<sup>144</sup> and North American military advisers proposed a counter-insurgency campaign "crafted on the heady confidence of Vietnam before the traumatic reversals of the Tet Offensive" (Black, 1984, p. 22).<sup>145</sup> Once again, the mountains of the east (though this time a little farther north) became the theatre of U.S. cold war politics. Zone commander, army Colonel Carlos Arana Osorio (to become president in 1970) earned the nickname "the Butcher of Zacapa" for his role in leading the U.S.-supported offensive against a two-year offensive from the detachment in Zacapa, supposedly aimed at decimating the guerrilla population in the arid mountains of Zacapa and Izabal. "Whole areas were swept clean of subsistence farmers as people fled to avoid reprisals. It is estimated that between 1966 and 1968 six to eight thousand persons were killed in a campaign that was designed to defeat a guerrilla force of approximately five hundred." (Williams, 1986, p. 138)

But as Osorio's words at the beginning of this section indicate, he preferred leaving a cemetery to any possible leftist sympathizer. To accomplish his task, Osorio recruited thousands of civilians to function as part-time militia (military commissioners) to function as rural militia, serving as the army eyes and ears (Schirmer, 2000, p. 83). At the same time, the number of paramilitary death squads mushroomed, with local anti-communist groups given protection under the army umbrella to eliminate suspected leftists (Jonas, 1991).

Although most accounts of the counter-insurgency campaign omit the Ch'orti' area because it was not considered battlefield, it still was a site of violence. The omission of Ch'orti' insurgency

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<sup>141</sup> To survive the repressive environment of period, by election time the PR had purged its most progressive members (Grandin, 2004, p. 93).

<sup>142</sup> See (Grandin, 2004, pp. 94-99) for a description of the dynamics of polarization and increasing repression (summary executions, torture) against political activists from 1960 to 1966 with the support and guidance of the United States.

<sup>143</sup> Despite its 1965 declaration that armed revolution was the only path left open to them, the PGT leadership continued to look for electoral openings (Grandin, 2004, pp. 92-93).

<sup>144</sup> According to (Jonas, 1991, p. 70), "U.S. training, bomber planes, napalm, radar detection devices, and other sophisticated technology (much of it transferred from Vietnam) were decisive in smashing the insurgency." She also notes that varied sources report between several hundred and 1,000 Green Beret's were active in the operation.

<sup>145</sup> See (Black, 1984; Cullather, 1999; Grandin, 2004; May, 2001; McClintock, 1985) for different analyses of the articulation of U.S. Cold War ideology and Guatemalan politics. Grandin's account is much more sophisticated in terms of thinking through the cultural politics of place in the town of Panzos in Alta Verapaz and national and international policy.

from the recent extraordinary Historical Atlas of Guatemala shows the persistence and longevity of the myth of the East as non-militant and non-indigenous by leaving the Ch'orti' Highlands off the map once again in late 2011 (AGHG, 2011, p. 314).<sup>146</sup> Hundreds (at least) of villagers, mainly Ch'orti', were killed, and thousands more fled the jungles of the Petén, the southern coast, and neighboring Honduras (CEH, 1999 Appendix 1, Vol. 2 C.I. 47; Metz, 2006, p. 80). The U.S. and Guatemalan military designed the counter-insurgency campaign in the Ch'orti' regions, (as in Zacapa and Izabal), not only to eliminate the insurgents but also to stamp out any possibility of prolonged rebellion on the part of the civilian population. But the ways in which historical Ch'orti' struggle joined with political and political-military organizing and subsequently army and death squad sweeps that cast a wide net over Ch'orti' villages presents an eerie prophecy of what would happen at a much greater scale in the west and north thirteen years later: scorched earth campaigns against indigenous civilians. The two-year counter-insurgency campaign experienced in the Ch'orti' region, and its prequel in La Palmilla, brought together two "national security" ideologies: one cold war and one historical. As mentioned above, the cold war strategy was to eliminate militarily any "subversive" activity in a designated area, with a decidedly broad and vague definition of subversion (Grandin, 2004). The second strategy, which disappears from most accounts of the first phase of the war, was to crush any sign of indigenous resistance in and through institutional terror—which struck at the heart of indigenous practices.<sup>147</sup>

### **When Organization Becomes "Subversion": Vanished Villages, Missing Men**

By the mid-1960s, Ch'orti' campesin@s found themselves in a confusing labyrinth that only became more complicated and deadly over time. Organization, meetings, electoral politics, celebrations, and defense of pastureland disappeared from the social landscape as divided communities, distrust, angst of wandering souls, and flight began to flourish (Metz, 2009b). An Ixil-Maya soldier who arrived in the Ch'orti' area to swell the Butcher of Zacapa's troops almost three years after the burning of La Palmilla, reflected on finding the charred remains of various communities.<sup>148</sup> Although only the Palmilla-Zarzamora razing (described at the beginning of this section) has been documented, my interviews indicate that during the pacification sweeps that followed it (1966–68) other communities disappeared entirely (from slaughter or forced displacement). Others, like Cajón del Río, Camotán were not razed but terrorized and virtually abandoned. In analyzing the production of terror related to these vanishing villages and missing men, I show how Ch'orti' and *mestizo* campesin@s found themselves trying to navigate an increasingly deadly terrain.

#### ***Cajón del Río***

Located on the southern slopes rising above the Rio Grande, just four kilometers from the Honduran border, Cajón del Río men like Agustín Pérez and Cupertino Rivera, who had chosen

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<sup>146</sup> See Map 167 for the approximate localization of the actions of guerrilla fronts 1962-1966-1982-1985.

<sup>147</sup> See (Falla, 1992; Green, 1999) and (D. M. Nelson, 1999) for deep description and compelling analyses of the material and meaningful effects of military practices in the second phase of the war that followed this pattern of leaving indigenous souls to wander.

<sup>148</sup> (Anonymous interview, June 2011). The presence of this soldier is significant. In the new millennium Ixiles would accuse Ch'orti' of having participated in the 1980s counter-insurgency campaigns that destroyed their villages, but indigenous Maya of the west had done the same in the east. See (Schirmer, 2000) for an analysis of the shifting tensions in the Guatemalan Armed Forces in regards to indigenous soldiers.

to collaborate with the guerrilla and join the reformulated political movements of the 1960s, became prime targets of the military clean-up campaign. When Osorio's troops based in Olopa came through the Olopa-Camotán corridor in late 1966, Agustín escaped the sweep. But soldiers confiscated all his documents and notebooks with registries of those who had participated in the PR and in the campesin@ Leagues. The army used this information to capture, torture, and execute people in Cajón del Río and the surrounding villages. In Cajón del Río alone, on the night of February 7, soldiers abducted thirteen men including the auxiliary mayor from their homes and assassinated them.

The details of the case bring the maze of confusions, tensions, and terror to the surface. While the killings appeared to selectively target only those whose names appeared in Agustín's papers as having collaborated with the Revolutionary Party (PR) and the guerrillas, the soldiers also took away one PR organizer who had faithfully served in the army sending the message, "no one is exempt." Second, soldiers tortured locals so that they turn in other community members, setting forth what became (and probably already was) a practice that shattered bodies and communities. Met by gunpoint (at least according to his testimony), one of the local military commissioners was forced to take the soldiers to Cupertino's house. They then dragged Cupertino out of his home and beat him, forcing him to show the soldiers where the other members of the PR and agrarian committee lived. Third, soldiers operated in a way that left confusion with villagers about who was ultimately responsible for these acts. The soldiers dressed in camouflaged uniforms and never identified themselves, creating doubts as to whether they were paramilitary or official soldiers. They also took the prisoners far from the village to assassinate them to avoid witnesses, all giving the army plausible deniability as the military shifted the blame for the massacre to the military commissioners. Finally, the captured men were also forced to dig their own graves before being shot, reinforcing the idea that Indians were, before all else laborers. Together, these dynamics meant that the military did not need to burn down the village as they had done in La Palmilla. Sowing rage, fear, distrust, and desperation, the massacre culminated in a mass exodus, with most of the villagers fleeing first deeper into the mountains<sup>149</sup> and eventually into Honduras where some remain today (CEH, 1999, pp. Anexo II, Vol. I, Caso 47).<sup>150</sup>

### *Olopa*

Whereas in Camotán political-military documents had led the army to Cajón del Río, in Olopa local racialized conflict fueled the bloodshed. In the most immediate sense, as soon as the military set up a detachment outside of town in Olopa, the town ladinos took revenge. The same troops that had found Agustín Pérez's papers immediately began search and destroy patrols, rounding up suspects (mainly indigenous men) from the villages and hamlets, holding them in a cattle pen, and finally executing them in fields nearby. According to (Diener, 1978, p. 110), over 300 Ch'orti' men were shot in the two-year campaign. Among them was Natividad Ramos, the

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<sup>149</sup>One person who collaborated with the MR-13 guerrillas said, "Some supported the guerrilla, others didn't. I was at home the day of the massacre. I fled to save my life. We had to go where we could defend ourselves. If we went into the village the army would find us to shoot us. We were wandering with the whole family just in the mountain, in the pine forest that there is there. We wandered with fear. Those who were with the army went [in our houses] and took our things. Those who went to Honduras lost everything (CEH, 1999, pp. Appendix 1, Vol. II, C.I. 47)."

<sup>150</sup>"A good number of those who left haven't return. Many from here are still in Honduras. Almost half the village left. In Honduras they took out new identity documents (CEH, 1999, pp. Appendix 1, Vol. II, C.I. 47)."



young man who took over prayer rituals and had become a “Ch’orti” guerrilla. The army abducted him and nine others and shortly after shot them in a place near Olopa, which people now consider a place of “spiritual distress and soul loss” (Diener, 1978, p. 110).

Although the two-year offensive included widespread killing by death squads, army personnel, and military commissioners, and the use of napalm and aerial bombings in the mountains of Jocotán, all under the umbrella and protection of the armed forces, guerrillas never fought a battle there (Metz, 1998). Most accounts credit the 1966–68 campaign with decimating the first armed revolutionary force. Metz’s informants told him about other mass graves behind the health center in Olopa, at the crossroads two miles out of town, behind the preschool in Jocotán. Crucially, the brutality of the counter-insurgency campaign was designed not just to eliminate armed revolutionary movement but also to squash political activism, break community ties, and sow terror. Bodies were left tortured and disfigured, dumped in roads and fields.

### *Behind the Smokescreen of War*

The slew of summary executions, forced disappearances, torture, and imprisonment that followed the 1966 to 1968 campaign tightened the web of state control over the countryside while deepening propitious conditions for pursuing personal vendettas and defending elite interests as well as guaranteeing counterinsurgency goals. By 1969, villages and hamlets throughout the Ch’orti’ East were divided between MLN-army collaborators (military commissioners, death squads, and informants)—people who for political, communal, or faith-based reasons believed that the situation must change, as well as those who simply tried to stay on the sidelines. As (Metz, 2006) points out, the anti-communist death squads in the east were particularly insidious. Most originated in the less-indigenous Esquipulas, and they bore the names of families: los Pachecos, los Intinerianos, los Hernandez. Throughout the next decades they recruited supporters among the campesin@s, and served ladino political bosses, the military and feuded among themselves over their own personal interests (Metz, et al., 2010), while remaining protected by the military. At the same time, the structures that maintained the majority of campesin@s, especially indigenous campesin@s in abominable conditions, only worsened.

In Olopa, where Natividad had linked ritual with revolution and which consequently been targeted by the army in 1966, a more well-off Olopan villager suffered the same fate in 1972 because he urged villagers to not waste money on ritual: candles, copal (incense), and other purchased artifacts, when their children were hungry and they needed land. This man, Ricardo Guevarra, who had been influenced by the Quakers in Chiquimula, declared himself a non-violent evangelist. From the small evangelical chapel he established in his village, El Tablón, he preached against the ritual rent described in chapter 1. Olopan town ladinos, feeling their interests threatening, accused Guevara of being a guerrilla and solicited the aid of powerful ladino political boss in Esquipulas. He sent a commission of twenty men (mainly from El Tablón) to seize Guevara and five of his closest Ch’orti’ supporters. Their bodies were found days later forty kilometers away in the Sierra of Las Minas (Diener, 1978, pp. 107-108).<sup>151</sup> The relationship between repression, counter-insurgency, and indigeneity was deeply linked to

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<sup>151</sup> Brent Metz, in an unpublished work talks about the same incident but with multiple variations, the most significant being that the MLN associated death squad *Los Pachecos* had abducted the men and that they had tortured the pastor and other men for forty five days with no success at extracting useful information. In the end the victims were so disfigured *Los Pachecho* “had to kill them.”

preserving existing class and race hierarchies; when indigenous ritual served that purpose, ladinos in town defended it, when ritual fueled rebellion, they crushed it with military support.

The ways in which military and paramilitary forces in the midst of war struck down as subversive exactly those who in one way or the other had histories of seeking justice through political means brings into focus what Jenna Loyd has powerfully called the continuities between “the normalcy of peace” and “the exceptionalism of war”(Loyd, 2009). Elites used war in the 1960s often to settle historic localized disputes as well as new conflicts, all in the guise of counter-insurgency. The next section builds on Loyd’s conceptualization of how militarization and structural violence reinforce one another by signaling how militarization, terror, and silence worked between 1973 and 1983 as the killing fields shifted to the west.

### **Section 3—Erasures and Crossings: The West in the East, The East in the West**

Before the Western highlands and jungles of the Ixcán of Guatemala ever became the killing fields of the 1980s, the people of the Ch’orti’ East had *vivieron en carne propia* [lived in their own flesh] the brutality of both the “Liberation” and U.S.-trained counterinsurgency. Throughout the next decade, 1973–1983, as the geographies of civil war “officially” shifted to the western part of Guatemala, they actually deepened their connections to daily life in the Ch’orti’ East as well. First, contrary to common belief, the second wave of insurgent rebellion that began in the early 1970s in the western Ixil area, Sololá, the southern coast, and the Ixcán jungle had connections as well in the mountains of Olopa, Jocotán, and Camotán. That is, the struggle in the west came east as the recognized site of insurgency went west. Second, as strategy for waging war on possible insurgency, the processes of militarization linked to structural violence in the East sent indigenous and campesinos to the West to fight. Third, given the iron web of militarized bodies and places in the east, the second wave of insurgent activity in the east, and thus the counter-insurgency campaigns to crush it, got erased and remain almost entirely missing from the map.

#### **Missing from the Map: Killing Fields of F(I)ght and Fear**

As I mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, it should not be of surprise that the extraordinarily careful scholar, Carol Smith, did not include insurgent activity in the Ch’orti’ East in her map “Insurgent Regions of Guatemala over Time” (C. Smith, 1990, p. 11). Few accounts of the thirty-six-year civil war mention the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (*Ejercito Guerrillero de los Pobres*), [EGP]’s attempt to organize a front there.<sup>152</sup> When sources do mention this effort, the words that follow tend to be “failed,” or “soon crushed” (Arzobispado de Guatemala, 1998, pp. 193-194). While accurate in regards to the EGP, these limited accounts obscure the history of indigenous and campesin@ political organizing that folded into the EGP’s efforts as well as the increasingly iron web of militarized places and bodies that shaped insurgent development or lack there-of in the eastern highlands. In terms of numbers, “body counts” of dead, tortured persons, refugees, insurgents, the reported numbers, even if you were to add the

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<sup>152</sup> The principle exception is the (CEH, 1999) because of the few testimonies denouncing both EGP and army abuses that it received in relation to EGP activity.

second phase of the war to the first, are exponentially lower in the Ch'orti' East.<sup>153</sup> At the same time, if we take the findings of the Guatemalan Truth Commission seriously, which claims that,

The Army's perception of Mayan communities as natural allies of the guerrillas contributed to increasing and aggravating the human rights violations perpetrated against them, demonstrating an aggressive racist component of extreme cruelty that led to the extermination en masse, of defenseless Mayan communities purportedly linked to the guerrillas – including children, women and the elderly— through methods whose cruelty has outraged the moral conscience of the civilized world. (CEH, 1999, p. 85)

We have to ask ourselves, was this only in the west? Although it is understandable that both military analysis and research on insurgent strategy failed to uncover insurgency in the east during the 1970s and 1980s,<sup>154</sup> the EGP, approximately at the same time it began organizing mainly in the west, dispatched a small group of its militants east. The initiated contacts in 1978 (Metz, 2006) and probably much earlier in 1973–74 (Diener, 1978) to set up a front in the mountainous corridor from Olopa to Honduras along the Jocotán and Camotán borders, also politically organized students and workers in the city of Chiquimula, the department's capital. In other words, the EGP recognized and sought to draw upon both the sedimented histories of organizing in that corridor and the indigenous roots of that history.

As in the west, the army not only targeted EGP's nascent front based in the mountain of Nenoja in Camotán but also attacked the villages along this eastern mountain range far removed from the

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<sup>153</sup> If we do include those counted at the national level, the numbers are horrifying. Between 1980 and 1983, army and paramilitary forces were responsible for 440 villages razed and between 100,000 and 150,000 civilians killed or "disappeared." According to the Truth Commission, 91 percent of all the human rights violations documented by the Commission during the 36-year war occurred between 1978 and 1984 (CEH (CEH, 1999, p. #82) and more than half of the military sweeps and razed villages took place between 1981 and 1983 (CEH, 1999, p. #33). Even if we assume that the numbers between 1960 and 1972, especially those in the east, are extremely underreported, it seems clear that the policy of the Guatemalan Military in the 1980s, which had control of the Guatemalan State at that time, had opted for genocide and war on indigenous communities to separate them from the guerrilla insurgency. In 1988, I was the interpreter for the head of the Salvadoran Chamber of Commerce, Dr. José Antonio Rodríguez Porth, who in an obvious comparison between the Guatemalan solution on the early 1980s and the ongoing conflict in El Salvador said, "It's better [for the country] to kill 100,000 people in one year than 10,000 people a year for 10 years." (Personal conversation in 1987)

<sup>154</sup> The post civil war political-military reading that informs mappings that invisibilize what occurred in the Ch'orti' area goes something like this: the indigenous are the in west, the guerrilla go to the west to elicit support, and the scale of insurgency grew precisely due to greater indigenous participation. The standard research story that informs Smith's map as regards to insurgent strategy is the following: the second wave of insurgent organizing grew out of a realization by the left that revolution and social change in Guatemala were not possible without the active participation of the majority of the poor: indigenous people (Jonas, 1991; MacLeod Howland, 2008). This new position did not signify an abandonment or Marxist class analysis, but it did represent a new center of organizing: the indigenous highlands and jungles in the west. Two of the organization specifically viewed the participation of indigenous people as crucial to a revolutionary process in Guatemala. One of the two regrouped guerrilla organizations that spearheaded this turn to the indigenous, the Guerilla Army of the Poor, EGP, stressed the creation of mass army drawn from indigenous communities. As an offshoot of the first guerrilla organization, FAR, the Revolutionary Armed Forces, the EGP's goal was to consolidate an army drawn from indigenous communities capable of facing the Guatemalan Armed Forces to support an insurrection arising from those communities. The Organization of the People in Arms (ORPA), put its emphasis on strengthening civil society organizing in indigenous communities combined with guerrilla presence (MacLeod Howland, 2008).

jungles and mountain of the west. According to Metz, the army massacred almost the entire population in all of the villages in the mountain range near the EGP camp. Unlike the reported modality of the 1960s army incursions in which people killed were almost entirely adult men, the military attacks in the year 1981–1983 bore the same characteristic as the massive sweeps in the west: to exterminate women and children along with men, guaranteeing in the Army's mind no social reproduction of what were virtually all Ch'orti' villages. Figure 2.1, indicates the places where reported massacres or assassinations occurred. According to (Metz, 2009b), only in the 1990s did survivors or descendents of survivors begin to return to these communities. In the Jocotán community of Tontoles, the military sweep left the community with only about 25 of its original 200 residents.

Killings in the Ch'orti' region seemed designed to destroy the link between the living and the dead, the presence of souls that is at the core of even some of the most assimilated Ch'orti' campesin@s beliefs (interviews).<sup>155</sup> Similarly, in an area where the isolation of indigenous women had historical ties to abuse by townspeople, all brutalities that Metz quotes from a Jocotán testimony, demonstrates how gender was used to symbolize dominance.

The army took a mother and her two daughters from the kitchen, undressed them, and threw them on the ground. In front of their family, the soldiers all raped them and made fun of them. Then they passed over them, stepping on them, and sticking their bayonets in their private parts and breasts. They killed the father in front of the mother and two daughters, but the male children were left alive. They sprinkled the house with gasoline and burned it. (CEH, 1999, p. 54) c.f. (Metz, 2006, p. 82)

The degree of support the revolutionary forces had is unknown, probably even to the commanders who were there. The stories people have begun to tell are, like their stories about the 1960s, mixed and unclear. At a certain level, the insurgent activity definitely contributed to counter-insurgency violence, but at another level it signaled contestation from indigenous community to a profound economic recession after a quarter century of agro-export growth.<sup>156</sup>

What the EGP perhaps was not ready for, and that differed from what it encountered in the indigenous communities in the West, was the terrain of repression, fear and distrust produced after 20 years of militarization. Repressive apparatuses included the first civil patrols and a vast network of military commissioners and death squads, linked not just to the military structures, but to the interests of the wealthiest ranchers and coffee growers in the region. As suggested

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<sup>156</sup> In the late 1970s and early 1980s the crisis of Agro-exports in Central America entered into high gear. With the external shocks of rising oil prices in 1979 and soaring world interest rates, Guatemala's per capita income was driven back fifteen years (Jonas, 1982) compares the crisis of the 70s to that 1930s basing her evaluation on (Bulmer-Thomas, 1987, p. 269) (CEPAL, 1987, p. 87) From the early 1970s, ORPA, *Organización del Pueblo en Armas*, Armed People's Organization, and especially the *Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres*, Guerrilla Army of the Poor, EGP had been slowly accumulating forces. The second phase of the civil war broke out at the end of 1970s just as the economic crisis peaked. The intense incorporation of indigenous struggle in the Western highlands lasted from early 1980 to late 1982. The URNG, an alliance between ORPA, EGP FAR, and PGT, was consolidated in January 1982. Terror against the civilian population, genocide, and the use of civilian population in the Patrols of Civilian Defense were intensified in the early 1980s to stem the guerrilla surge and rebellion of indigenous population.

above, distrust and division ran deep. Chiquimula had more members of the PAC (Civil Self-defense Patrols) per capita than any other department of Guatemala: one *patrullero*, (armed patrol member), for every 12.1 persons including children and infants. El K'iche' department, where the military had followed genocide with the complete five-point civic action program, was not far behind with 12.0 persons for every PAC Member; Alta Verapaz and Huehuetenango were distant third and fourth, with one PAC member for every 9.5 and 8.6 people. Neither the guerrilla presence nor the level of combat had given Chiquimula this dubious distinction; only its longer history of repression and militarization did (AECI/SEGEPLAN, 2003, p. 214; CEH, 1999, p. 663).

In many ways, the presence of the revolutionary forces also contributed to the labyrinth of uncertainty and fear. First, given the web of military control, it is not surprising that the beginning of guerrilla activity was marked with summary executions of suspected village informants or military commissioners in Olopa, Jocotán, and Camotán.<sup>157</sup> Second, villagers found themselves increasingly navigating the minefield between joining and not joining the insurgents and, if the insurgents were operating nearby, facing military persecution regardless of what they did. What is most significant is how this tension came to a head in 1981 not only to wipe out, by all official accounts, the EGP front in the east, but to decimate villages, creating thousands of refugees and *desaparecidos*: disappeared meaning lost or unaccounted for people. According to (Metz, 2006, p. 82), between 1981 and 1983 as the army routed the EGP, soldiers used unrestricted forces against “Ch’orti’ organized for whatever purpose,” just as they were doing in the western highlands.<sup>158</sup> What surprised the EGP was just how finely honed the militarization or perpetual terror against indigenous community organization had become since 1954. The problem in the Ch’orti’ highlands for the military was much more than just the sporadic guerrilla presence, as testified by the extraordinary number of PAC, which without a doubt were twice as robust per capita in the Ch’orti’ highlands than in the lowlands of Chiquimula. The second wave of insurgent activity in the Ch’orti’ highlands, even more than the first, brings into focus what Elizabeth Oglesby and Amy Ross have described as “debates over historical memory and the tensions of narratives framing Maya as protagonists and/or victims” (Hale, 2006, pp. 83-110; Oglesby, 2007).

In this atmosphere of militarization of bodies, counter-insurgency strategies in the Ch’orti’ East the first entanglements of resistance and repression and then the fine, often non-existent or ambiguous line between victims and perpetrators effectively began to silence dissent.<sup>159</sup> These practices, following scorched-earth type killings between 1981 and 1983, finally succeeded in shrouding the region in silence.

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<sup>157</sup> The overwhelming labyrinth of local military commissioners, PACS, and informers of the death squad in the Ch’ortii east made necessary summary executions by the EGP for its implantation in the area. Eighty-five percent of all cases of human rights violations and acts of violence registered by the CEH are attributable to the army, acting either alone or in collaboration with another force, and 18%, to the Civil Patrols, which were organized by the armed forces (CEH, 1999, p. 82).

<sup>158</sup> Jesuit priest Ricardo Falla, who pastored the civilian survivors of some of the most macabre military practices and widespread genocidal sweeps, offers the most stark and telling account of the scope and depth of army tactics during this period (Falla, 1992).

<sup>159</sup> Diane Nelson does a powerful deconstruction of the victim-perpetrator dichotomy (D. M. Nelson, 2009). See also (D. Nelson, 2008) and (Graham, 2009) for analysis of the tensions lived by young men trying to navigate these blurry boundaries.

## **In the (H)Armed Forces Militarizing Spaces, Places, and Bodies**

Although scholars draw datelines and borders to map 36 years of civil war, we must recognize the continuities between “the normalcy of peace” and “the exceptionalism of war”(Loyd, 2009). The structural violence that bounds peace is reinforced as militarization processes and practices articulate with existing structures and social relations. In her study of the Guatemalan armed forces, Jennifer (Schirmer, 2000) documents the historical tension within the institution in reference to indigenous recruits. At the same time recruitment into the army and civilian Auto-Defense Patrols, known as PACS (*Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil*), became the general experience for youth in the 1980s, particularly indigenous youth. While following orders engendered by the marriage of elite interests, U.S. national security and Guatemalan military politics, the people directly responsible for accusation, desecration, depopulation, and disorientation in the east and west were mainly poor and largely indigenous boys and men. Although with the exception of the brief mention by (Schirmer, 2000, p. 83), the precursors to the PACs, the civil patrols in Zacapa, and Chiquimula that Araña Osorio formed after his “successful pacification” of the east were not fore grounded as precursors to what would happen in the west.

Much less subtle than Foucauldian disciplinary power, the civil patrols PACs and military commissioners subordinated village political authority to the local army commander. (Green, 2004, pp. 186-187), in her work on fear and terror in an army-occupied village in the west, suggests that the military also worked to defuse terror and blur boundaries.

Crucial for beginning to understand the long historical and geographic reach of the acts of terror described above, is a recognition of how they formed part of and accompanied an ever increasingly blurry boundary between military and civilian (Hyndman, 2007) and a more systematic militarization of spaces, places, and bodies. While in a world of limited options, some young men found service in the army to be a viable option, illegal forced recruitment was as terrifying and breaking of bodies and souls as much torture.

Nor was it just the boundaries between military and civilian that the recruitment into the army or the PACS confounded but also the boundaries between indigenous and ladino styled as military ladino.

If we talk about forced military recruitment ... it also has a discriminatory role because it is taking people by force, people who weren't willing to join (turn themselves over), but nevertheless they made them train there, they changed their culture or their religion, their cosmovision, all this changes...then it's for this reason that a young man after having done his military service returns with a militarist mentality and a different language, a different way of being (...) he is no longer that young man who went and returned, rather he continues being a young man but now with a different mentality (CEH, 1999) chapter 2, Vol. 3, 272}.

### *How Rural Roads Built by Food for Work: Control—Possess Spaces and Bodies*

Intertwined with the loss of political and cultural ground were the political and material consequences of perpetual terror: more and more campesin@s (indigenous and *mestizo*) in the

four municipalities also lost their homes and the lands they toiled. This dynamic was not exclusive to the Ch'orti' region in anyway, but many dynamics that have been well-documented throughout the country, began first in the east and in that sense, had time to establish deeper roots, borrowing from and lending to the image of the military east. The Army accompanied this shift with a five-point strategy that included (1) increasing the call up of reserves and the forced recruitment of indigenous men for soldiering and para-military civil defense patrols, (2) the initial concentration of troops for intensified "killing zones" (*matazonas*) operations (with later expansion to other areas), (3) Civil Affairs companies that would organize Civil Patrols and concentrate refugees into model villages, (4) expanded legal mechanisms and laws to justify counter-insurgency<sup>160</sup>, and (5) psychological warfare to win popular support for the army (Ibid). The next subsection examines the divergent ways in which localized conflicts, historical power relations, and militarized repression combined to facilitate accumulation by dispossession.

Turning countryside civilians into rural militia and donning usually the wealthier ones with para-military powers created an accusation free for all: fertile ground for vengeance and vendettas and defense of elite interests. (Metz, 2006) (CEH, 1999)

[I]t was accusation only. They all died from accusation. If some military commissioner thought one was a guerrilla, he merely said so. The State was seriously against us. So, the order was given that anyone who was a guerrilla was to be taken out, and just like that the *security forces* did so. And so the commissioners would say "that one there is a guerrilla," and it wasn't so! They didn't kill a single guerrilla. (Metz, 2006, p. 75)

#### **Section 4— The Silence of the Lands: Perpetual Terror and Places of Dispossession**

During a 2008 emergency response workshop, New Day tried to reconstruct a timeline of disasters that one particularly vulnerable village in La Union had experienced over the last century. None of the 56 participating villagers mentioned any event (with the exception of the 1976 earthquake) between 1954 and 1990: no hurricanes, no drought, no mudslides. They had erased natural disasters along with death and dispossession from their public memories.

Later, talking with smaller groups, we heard of men beaten and kept up to their necks in freezing water all night because they did not want to serve in civilian patrols; we heard of mud and wattle dwellings that the military went to one night: "where screams pierced the night air, and the next morning villagers found nothing there but blood on the walls." We heard younger men confess to having served as soldiers in the west during the worst military campaigns but unable to speak about what that meant.

Ultimately, the dynamics unleashed in and through 40 years of militarization and repression produced a cold war-scape of perpetual terror. Terror undergirded all the processes of losing ground (territory and room to maneuver) as well as loss of "political [and cultural] identity and psychic well-being" (Green, 1999). In summing up the 1999 Guatemalan Truth Commission<sup>1</sup> [CEH] report, Greg Grandin argues that it broke from its predecessors (in El Salvador and South Africa) through the scope and depth of its analysis. *Memory of Silence [Memoria de Silencio]*

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<sup>160</sup> These included decree-laws, secret tribunals, and censorship of the media (Schirmer, 2000, p. 35).

produced an analysis “that understood terror not as a result of state decomposition, a failure of the institutions and morals that guarantee rights and afford protection, but rather as a component of state formation, as the foundation of the military's plan of national stabilization through a return to constitutional rule” (Grandin, 2005, p. par. 6). While the report focuses on the 1980s as the apex of terror, it lends little attention to the material and meaningful effects of terror as a perpetual process. The preceding subsection demonstrates how military and paramilitary attempts to combat perceived threats of communism created a crescendo of terror that slowly paralyzed and eventually silenced dissent. In this subsection, I show how certain actors articulated their own interests with the ideological and developmental goals of the counterinsurgency state, harnessing terror to additional processes of accumulation by dispossession. At the same time I point to gender and ethnic or racialized paradoxes, whereby these militarized dynamics of dispassion create unexpected possibilities for Ch’orti’ soldiers to encounter ethnic pride and women to obtain land rights.

### **The “Liberation” of Dispossession**

Crucial to my claim is an understanding of the temporal consequences of what I call perpetual terror. As stated above, in the east, the *Liberación* in July 1954 gave a free rein not just to anti-communist forces but to all who stood to lose through mass democratization or land redistribution, as it produced conditions for an ever more militant opposition from the left. The right wing mobilized vengeance and political witch-hunt that followed the coup was just the first of a series of ever more violent and brutal attempts to maintain the status quo or settle local conflicts. On the one hand, the repression reached across all those who had benefitted from or participated in the political and agrarian reform organizations of the Arbenz era. On the other, two decades of Guatemalan press linking indigenous people with communism, like the *Imparcial*'s account of what happened in the Camotán election of 1945, created the conditions for wholesale reprisals on indigenous communities. For those reasons, to the extent that people I met spoke about dispossession of land or cultural practices, they tended to conflate 50 years of threats, persecution, and loss. It is this conflation coupled with the depth of cultural and material dispossession that speaks to the power of perpetual terror.

In the four municipalities, with the 1954 coup, and especially after the 1966 elections (with their strong support for the Revolutionary Party), the Ch’orti’ participation in local governance that had been a sign of belonging and of political recognition became a cultural death sentence. Military persecution in the east, immediately after the coup when the MLN turned to the countryside, led many Ch’orti’ villages to abandon historic ritual. After the coup and subsequent literal “witch” hunt, the rain callers (ritual groups) in Las Flores (Jocotán), Cayur (Olopa), and Guayabo (Camotán) disappeared (Metz, et al., 2010, p. 25). One man told Daniel Palma’s investigative team that men arrived in the villages asking who the ajk’in and rainmakers were, thus causing great fear. According to that interview:

I am going to tell you something a little delicate, o.k.? Sometimes when one has lived, one knows what has happened. Before [19]54, before what they call “the Liberation,” there were more prayers and rituals. But in that time of the Liberation; it was all forbidden, because he who did those things they made disappear. A lot of people arrived to investigate, checking out those things. And he who did [the ceremonies], they treated as a sorcerer. Maybe this is why they



[the traditions and rituals] disappeared or are hidden, for fear. Those values [prayer and ritual] still exist, but they [people] are frightened of what happened in 1954. Well, that's what happened, and that's why people are scared here (Palma-Ramos, 2001, p. 93).

Anti-communist military and paramilitary forces seem to have recognized a relationship between the cohesiveness of traditional Ch'orti' practices and the ability to organize long before Diener carried out his research. Indeed, in the face of ongoing persecution and the accumulative effects of terror, assimilation became a survival skill. Today, government documents categorize Piedra de Amolar, one of the villages in Olopa with the highest number of recorded assassinations by the armed forces and death squads between 1962 and 1982, as a ladino village. Yet, as late as 1970, it was a vibrant indigenous center (Girard, 1949). Moreover, women whom I interviewed in Corozal Abajo in La Unión (one of the still identified Ch'orti' villages) talked animatedly about artisan crafts: soap and pottery making and mat and basket weaving that their grandmothers had done, but lowered their voices when reflecting on how they had forgotten how. As one woman expressed to the nodding heads of the others, "here we don't know how to do anything, just eat."

### *Militarized Bodies of Dispossession*

Terror not only buried Ch'orti' ritual and artisanry, but remade bodies no matter where one stood in the military hierarchies. Everyone was a PAC. Everyone was in favor of the Military Commissioner. But everyone was wearing two faces depending on how extreme the makeover on the body was.

In texts that cover the war period, one frequently finds demonizing adjectives before the words military commissioners: "the hated" military commissioners, "the feared" military commissioners, and "greedy" military commissioners. In my conversations with many New Day members, a lot of those adjectives held. Nevertheless, military commissioners were members of communities, their children attended school with the others, they went to the same churches, and until the 1990s communities proposed to military detachment men who should be named as military commissioners (Palma-Ramos, 2001, p. 7). When development projects linked to military rule started arriving, a rule of thumb for deciding to participate in a committee for the project was to see whether the military commissioner or auxiliary mayor was participating, although neither was a sure guarantee of not being persecuted for becoming active in the community.

Military commissioners committed 108, or 45 percent of documented war-related assassinations in the four municipalities, often in conjunction with the armed forces. The military commissioners participated in massacres at the same level as the army assassinating on average in the four municipalities nearly the same number of people for each documented case (CEH, 1999, p. 633). Yet, military commissioners walked the thin line between perpetrator and victim. As described above, the military commissioner who had indicated the house of Cupertino Rivera in the Cajon del Rio massacre portrays himself as coerced by the military, claiming that he, in a sense, suffers the fate of the aldea, too:

When the soldiers arrived at my house, the chief said: You are the military commissioner, you will place us at Cupertino Rivera's house. You will bring us there and you won't say a good word for anyone.

Alternately, he places himself on the side of the victims, by disobeying the soldiers and trying to warn a man, as he said in his testimony to the CEH:

Ignacio Vasquéz had been advised by one of the commissioners as to the intentions of the soldiers, but the victim refused to flee saying, "I'm clean. I did my service in the army. They won't do anything to me." But they took him.

More than likely, this person, "one of the commissioners," was the same person giving the testimony, but even that identity was covered. I doubt that he really did try to save Ignacio Vasquéz, but these smokescreens in the discourses speak volumes and were probably used in self-defense by military commissioners who did not want vengeance coming from family members of the people massacred.

This testimony to the CEH, suggests the two faces that he was wearing, not just during testimony in which he tries to separate his own action (forced to show the house) from the beatings and brutal murders (committed by the soldiers), but also by putting on the mask of trying to warn members of the community who did not listen to him and were assassinated.

The stories of military service shared with me by campesin@s (indigenous and mestizo) were anything but uniform. For years military recruitment (legal and illegal) served to "encourage Ch'orti' to abandon their cultural practices, especially language. As indicated in the last chapter, during Ubico's time, indigenous passed from laborers to soldiers in the army, if they gave up their "traditional ways" (chapter 1). As explained above, once the war expanded in the indigenous west, recruitment focused more in the so-called ladino east. Ch'orti' campesin@s were simply being uprooted and placed in a multi-ethnic environment that forced recruits to prioritize Spanish. On the other hand, speaking an indigenous language was deemed cause for punishment. One of the most common comments that people made to me when I asked them if they spoke Ch'orti' was that either they or their parents had stopped speaking the language because they had not wanted their children to suffer. They then explained to me specifically how young recruits suffered in the army; literally, they had the Ch'orti' beaten out of them, receiving blows any time they spoke of their native language. Worse were the systematic way that military training dispossessed Ch'orti' soldiers of their own identities and dehumanized the other, in this case largely other Maya in the west. The end product sought was "hardened soldiers to cruelty and torture" (Metz, 2006, p. 80).

### ***The Time of Grenades: Land for the Taking***

In Olopa in 1978, in a dispute over access to the municipal commons in more than a hundred peasants were killed by the mobile military police, villagers said, "Our situation is desperate, and we don't know who to turn to because the public authorities are in complicity with the landowners...They drown the men in the

rivers, they hang the women, they break the spines of the children, they beat up those who remain and confiscate their land.<sup>161</sup>

The attacks were due, according to the peasants, to their dispute with two local landowners over a zone of common land belonging to several villages. Spokesmen for the armed forces denied the accusation. (Nuevo Diario, November 23, 1978)

The spiral of campesin@ political and militant participation and military repression described above created multiple conditions for land grabs. Military and death-squad persecution left two options for those who had supported Arbenz or participated in the rural workers unions, the CALS, the *Ligas Campesinas* in the 1950s, those who later joined the *Partido Revolucionario* in the 1960s, and those who spread progressive Christian messages in the 1970s: flee or be killed. Either way, the accused “relinquished” whatever claims he (yes HE) had—public or private—to land in the Ch’orti’ region.

One of the most emblematic usurpations of Ch’orti’ resources was the takeover of the Tuticopote sacred lagoon by a local military commissioner. Documented by both Girard and Wisdom, the Tuticopote lagoon was a historically sacred site, home of the great *Chichan* (water serpent). In Ch’orti’ cosmology, serpents play a key role—they bring storms, floods, and earthquakes. They are not worshiped but are respected through ritual.

When I asked Mateo, one of Ch’orti’ leaders in New Day, how his village of Tuticopote in Olopa had lost its rights to the land around its sacred lagoon, he simply replied, “It was during the time of grenades.” I later learned that in the scorched earth campaigns, first 1966–68 and then 1972–75, soldiers or military commissioners would simply throw a grenade into a house, either killing all of the people there or forcing them to evacuate quickly. With the resident family arrested or dead, their home and land would be left for the taking. In this way, the military commissioner had acquired the land around the lagoon, selling it to another ladino from town, when he had a financial crisis. By the time Paul Diener arrived in Olopa to carry out his research in 1971, he describes ladinos as having control of almost all the land in the municipality (through titles or usufruct control of municipal land).

In the midst of ongoing death squad activity and military sweeps, many villagers stayed silent as they watched the lagoon and the land around it change hands, certain that any protest about historical claims to the land or the lagoon would lead to deadly reprisals.

In January, in the village of Paternito [Olopa], Marcos Vasquez Ramos and Gregorio Vasquez Ramos and another person were abducted, each one from their respective house at six in the morning. Military commissioners of the community, accompanied by approximately 25 soldiers, led the operation. The Vasquez Ramos brothers were accused of being guerrilla, but a witness declared that that accusation was false and that they were killed either because someone desired

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<sup>161</sup> The news story gives details: “On September 26 the Military Police took away fifteen peasants. The next day the assistant mayor, Francisco Garcia, went to the courthouse of Olopa to testify to this and ask for the whereabouts of the bodies in order to bury them. That same night he was taken from his house and assassinated” (Nuevo Diario, November 23, 1978).

their land or for personal vengeance, since one of the brothers had a debt of ten quetzales with one of the military commissioners. The victims were taken to a place close to the village Cerrón and were executed with shots through the head.(CEH, 1999, p. 3331) See Caso 1175.

The Vasquez Ramos brothers may have actually participated in the guerrilla activities, but what is important about the testimony above is that the discourse linking land, debt, and persecution rings true for people and thus travels. When people did speak to me about the violence, their accounts tended to reflect elements of the account above. Land envy and debt served as plausible reasons for being accused of communism—accusations that placed the anti-communist state at the service of local power-holders described to me as “townspeople,” “planters,” “mayors,” and military commissioners (Metz, 2006, p. 68). Military commissioners who wanted the land of Angel López Hernández of El Cumbre, Olopa denounced him as a guerrilla and killed him(CEH, 1999).<sup>162</sup>

Death squad members themselves were particularly agile at using accusations to expand their landholdings. The *Pachecos* death squad of Esquipulas was perhaps the most notorious in using the anti-communist counter insurgency smokescreen to expand their landholdings. According to Metz, los Pachecos, using threats and killings, eventually annihilated two bordering villages el Amatillo, Olopa and Carboneras, Esquipulas, both known for their “flat, well-watered pasture lands” (Metz, 2006, p. 68). In 1974, the Pachecos sold 1,112 acres of land to the army, land they had acquired through threats and murder (from a competing death squad, los Hernández) (interviews). In this case the stolen pastures became a site of torture and execution (CEH, 1999).<sup>163</sup>

Indeed, throughout the four municipalities the violence that unfolded after the coup, waves of revolutionary struggle and “brutal” pacification provided the ideal smokescreen to intensify land concentration, especially the privatization of historical *ejidal* lands: the municipal commons in La Unión, Olopa and Camotán, unevenly affecting Ch’orti’ campesin@ households. In La Unión grenades were not even necessary. Just the threat of being accused of being communist silenced villagers while townspeople stole their historical usufruct rights to municipal land.

As one producer from one of the remaining Ch’orti’ villages in La Unión explained to me in 2008,

Before the land was municipal, and many people, especially those from town were grabbing land. But when those of use in the villages tried to do so, they said they were guerrillas and they [the army or police] even killed them. So many people prefer to do nothing, in order to avoid...they are afraid. Now people rent their little plots where their shacks are. Now we are slaves for the rich. Many people have gone fleeing in 55, 60 up to now.

Thus, ladino townspeople, military commissioners, larger landowners, and sometimes neighbors with a grudge took advantage of the cold war—scape of terror, largely racialized terror, levying false accusations that indigenous people and poor campesin@s were communist not only as

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<sup>162</sup> Anexo 2: Caso 1025.

<sup>163</sup> Anexo 2: Caso 1017.

personal vendettas, but as a means to access coveted land, reworking productive relations and sedimenting racial inequalities.<sup>164</sup>

### **Paradoxes of Dispossession: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Survival**

Even as the everyday and systematic practices that perpetuated terror in the Ch'orti' East fueled processes of loss—lives, land, cultural practices, and communal relations—they provoked paradoxical dynamics that opened pathways for campesin@ and *indigenous* campesin@ women and men to rework claims to land and ethnicity. In this subsection, I introduce three inchoate re-workings that suggest paradoxes of dispossession. Although these paradoxes do not necessarily challenge the “grounds of silence,” they do point to processes that will influence the effects of future discourses in the region.

#### ***Re-Discovering Indigenous Identity the Hard Way***

While military service tried to beat the Ch'orti' out of new soldiers, participation in military service exposed recruits and volunteers from the east to areas of western and northern Guatemala, where a Maya middle class still flourished with all of its cultural markers and where many indigenous villages still held firmly to diacritical markers and cultural and religious practices. Many New Day members from La Unión, the most ladinoized municipality, told me with admiration and respect about the *gente indígena* (indigenous people) they had encountered when they were deployed as soldiers in the Western highlands of Guatemala. They presented their experience of dominant indigenous languages, dress, market activity, and production and artisan practices in embattled parts of the Ixcán and Ixil areas as “*algo bien bonito*”—“something real nice” in what otherwise remained experiences they chose not to speak about. Just as when Ixil soldiers had found the charred remains of Ch'orti' villages in 1968 and had realized that there were indigenous people in the east, people from villages in the four municipalities sent to participate in military sweeps in the west in the 1980s and 1990s sensed with pride indigenous dignity and strength, even when military practices conveyed the opposite.<sup>165</sup>

#### ***Where have all the men gone?***

cold war–scapes reworked gender relations in contradictory ways. In his much acclaimed book, *Open Veins of Latin America*, Argentine journalist and writer Eduardo Galeano referred to post-massacre Cajón del Río, as the village that was left without men (Galeano, 1980, p. 184). Indeed, “pacification” processes, military recruitment, and summary executions targeted men and produced war widows, orphans, and sometimes abandoned families.<sup>166</sup> How did the

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<sup>164</sup> (Williams, 1986, p. 139) also notes this connection between military repression and cattle raisers accumulating more land.

<sup>165</sup> One army interviewee quoted in the CEH portrays the Guatemalan Armed Forces as respectful and proud of its indigenous composition, but everyone I spoke with said that the military service is what had convinced them to not teach their children much about their Ch'orti' past. (Schirmer, 2000) suggests some changes in the armed forces in the late 1980s, as they prepared for the transition to civil society and peace, which may help explain this discrepancy.

<sup>166</sup> See (Green, 1999) for an in-depth dialectical study of how Mayan widows navigate the material and meaningful intricacies of violence in the Central Highland Department of Chimaltenango, where, as in the Ch'orti' region by the

disappearance—temporary or permanent—of men rework material relations and subjectivities and create opportunities and deep problems for women and families? While more research needs to be done by community and township, my interviews indicate that because selective killings over 30 years tended to single out men, and because of the mechanisms for usurpation of land during the years of terror, inheritance practices appear to have changed.

Charles Wisdom noted during his fieldwork in the 1930s that in Ch'orti' families daughters inherited the house and household items, while sons inherited land. *Mestizo* families varied, but sons tended to inherit everything (Wisdom, 1940). Yet, when I began my research, many men in the less indigenous villages in La Unión told me, "I don't have land, but my wife does. She inherited it from her father." In Olopa, women from villages with the most documented number of military assassinations, like Doña Angélica of Piedra de Amolar, were landowners themselves. While I am using the term ownership in a broad sense, extending from a registered plot of land to usufruct rights on municipal land, my research suggests that at least in some cases the persecution of men shifted property rights to women. Given how selective killings over thirty years tended to single out men, and how perpetual terror became a tool to act on land envy, campesina women sometimes obtained access to and control of land. In some instances, fathers thought it safer to leave some land to their daughters (who were less likely to be persecuted), and in others all of their sons were dead or gone, having been assassinated in the region, having been killed in battle as soldiers, or, as mentioned above, having sought refuge in the jungles of the Petén or across the border in Honduras.

Besides the paradoxical place-based dynamics through which movement between struggle and repression occurred, cold war-scapes reworked gender relations in contradictory ways. Both the repression of pacification and military recruitment unevenly targeted men: men who then died or fled (sometimes never returning to their family).

### Conclusion—The Meanings and Materiality of Silence

In a half-century of cold war politics, Guatemalan campesin@s and indigenous campesin@s participated in some of the most vibrant democratic practice and most horrific racialized slaughter in the hemisphere.<sup>167</sup> By the mid 1980s, campesin@s attempts to pursue the promises of the October Revolution became increasingly sporadic and subterranean, as did any local efforts to seek redress. Most villagers in the Ch'orti' area had conflated into a single blur some fifty years of political organizing, guerrilla activity, landowners' vengeance, scorched earth military tactics, selected torture, and assassinations by soldiers, military commissioners, and death squads.<sup>168</sup> Further generations had reduced survival during the cold war to the same take-home message: "Don't go near anything with the word *agraria* (agrarian) or *común* (common):

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mid 1990s, the military presence had diminished. Her gendered focus on the "micro-social of social and cultural change, their relationship to political violence and militarization, and how fear became a way of life" (11) draws connections between the violence of the war and the systemic violence of everyday life.

<sup>167</sup> As Grandin (Grandin, 2000, p. 173) says of the Latin American Cold War in general, it was a time of revolution and counterrevolution.

<sup>168</sup> In reflecting on the Cold War period in the east, other scholars have also reflected on the ways in which 40 years of violence blur together in the peoples' memories, or at least their public memories. See (Dary Fuentes, 2010; C. Little-Siebold, 2006; Julián López García, 2009) or are completely denied (Rodman, 2009).

you will be accused of being a communist, like during the time of Arbenz, and will be killed.” Remembering had proven dangerous.

In 1987, as the Guatemalan state passed a new municipal code in keeping with neo-liberal reforms on decentralization, mayors and their elite supporters in the east and elsewhere where communal lands still existed, were handed an opportunity. Using the new laws, five people privatized almost 10 percent of La Unión municipal land; the mayor of Camotán and his family took control of almost all of the land surrounding what had been the 1972 guerrilla corridor to the south, and one landowner there bought 1,112 acres of municipal forest. In Olopa and Jocotán, not much land was left for the taking, as the usurpation under threat for three decades and the privatization that preceded and accompanied it left little land to take. Given the perpetuation of terror and the well-oiled mechanisms of military-political control no one said a word.

Before you heard that one couldn't meet with others, that whoever went to meetings did so in order to study how to be a guerrilla. Well for this reason there was fear, because meeting for development meant being accused of being a guerrilla. Resident of Tisipé cited from (Palma-Ramos, 2001)

In the next chapter, I return to these last stories of Dispossession an analysis of how national and international rural development, citizen participation, and indigenous activism discourses and practices articulate with these produced grounds of silence.

## Part II

### Ch'orti' Reconstruction

In his work *Black Reconstruction* W.E.B. Du Bois shows how when constitutional reforms in the U.S. extended the body of citizen rights to new bodies, powerful actors scurried onto the shifting terrain of market–state–civil society relations to make sure the exercise of citizenship and the practice of “freedom” would be at the service of capital. Similar to Du Bois’ account, Ch’orti’ Reconstruction hinges on contested postwar redefinitions of the relationship between citizenship and capitalism and of the meaning and practice of citizenship itself. Postwar (re)articulations of racial capitalism do not foreclose the liberating possibilities of struggle; rather, they alter the terrain of struggle.

While not limited to Du Bois’ particular expression of Black Marxism, the next two chapters make visible the divergent and interconnected forces at play in the four municipalities from 1990 to 2002: the period I call Ch’orti’ Reconstruction. Per Du Bois’ formulation, reconstruction is not simply the restoration of some prior reality; nor can a postwar period wipe away the hi[r]stories and memories of the past. Chapter 3 focuses on how discourses and practices of rural development and rights—indigenous, women’s, citizens’, and human—forged in the crucible of neo-liberal “peace” making converge on the “grounds of silence.” There, these policies, programs and practices shape and are shaped by their “targeted” soils and subjects in unexpected and contradictory ways. Chapter 4 zooms in on the dynamics of one key development practice designed to re-embed economy in society in this period: directed rural credit and micro-finance for the rural poor, making visible the uneven geographies of debt and difference it produces.

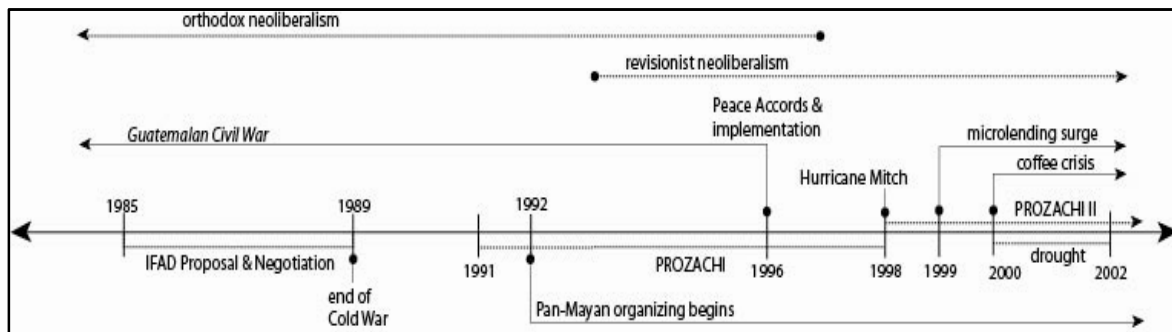


Figure 3.0: Timeline Ch’orti’ Reconstruction.



## Chapter 3

### Fixing Soils and Subjects: Overlapping Places and Spaces of Resources, Rights, and Recognition (1991–2002)<sup>169</sup>

#### Introduction

Between the end of the Cold War (1990) and the beginning of the new millennium, three overlapping and competing sets of discourses and practices—pro-poor development, indigenous activism and citizenship/human rights promotion—stormed into the four municipalities and beyond. With millions of U.S. dollars, hundreds of “outside” technicians, trainers, and activists engaged in a non-declared struggle to see who could “fix” the soils and subjects of the battered region. Where a decade before not one of the four townships of my study could be reached by a paved road, by 2002 all of them were connected to each other, to the Department capitals of Zacapa and Chiquimula and to nearby Honduras by two lane asphalt “highways.” At the same time, four-wheel drive pick-up trucks brandishing international and national government and non-governmental organization (NGO) logos—PROZACHI-ASORECH, UNDP, AECI, Plan International, MAGA, INAB, Action Against Hunger, Save the Children, CARITAS, CALDH, ALMG, Office of Human Rights, National Civilian Police—and a fleet of off-road motorcycles, reached mountain areas the military jeeps and convoys of the previous decades never could enter thanks to roads built with local labor and international food subsidies.(Metz, 2007; P. Warren, 2006).<sup>170</sup> All of this “development” created new demands in the towns: office space, supplies, hotel rooms, food. Business flourished. But another change came as well: the “Indians” had descended from the mountains” and not just for workshops.<sup>171</sup>

Supported by national and international institutions, indigenous and campesin@ households (though not the poorest ones) were producing and selling coffee, they belonged to organizations with local offices with computers, paid staff and sometimes even one of those 4X4 trucks. New associations and spaces of rural representation abounded. Thousands of men and women from isolated hamlets—vast numbers of whom could not read or write and whom a decade earlier feared opening their doors slowly—began to stick their heads out, and to attend meetings. Meetings led to projects: coffee, irrigation, reforestation, artisanry. Indigenous people started speaking Ch’orti’ openly in the town centers. And project inaugurations and civic events began with a greeting in Ch’orti’. Further Ch’orti’ and non-Ch’orti’ campesin@s, townspeople, organizers, and politicians were deploying (in their own ways) a whole new vocabulary of

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<sup>169</sup> As I explain below, my use of the word fixing is in dialogue with Diane Nelson 2009; nevertheless, in 2011 Tania Li Murray presented a paper on February 14, 2011 at the UC Berkeley Ethnic Studies Department entitled “*Fixing* Non-Market Subjects: Land, Law and Identity in the Global South.” I did not attend Li Murray’s presentation, but given the title and resonances with her work, I assume she is examining the contradictions of “fixing” at least in some of the ways I am.

<sup>170</sup> I use the acronyms rather than explain them precisely to recreate the impact of the alphabet soup impression. They include United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Spanish International Cooperation (AECI), Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Food (MAGA), National Forestry Institute (INAB), Catholic Charities (CARITAS), Center for Legal Action and Human Rights (CALDH), and Academy of Maya Languages of Guatemala, (ALMG).

<sup>171</sup> Reference to (Hale, 2006) and the historical fear (linked to 500 years of Indigenous uprisings) that the imaginary of Indians coming down from the mountain” has on non-indigenous elites in much of Guatemala.

citizen participation, gender equity, indigenous dignity, social inclusion and ecological awareness terms linked with the multitude of new programs and practices (P. Warren, 2006).

The above description of the transformation of rural towns in Guatemala is not unique to the Ch'orti' region (see for example Hale, 2006; Manz, 2004; D. Nelson, 2008; Stoll, 2010), nor to much of the Third World at the New Millennium. Further, the common rejoinder to the description above is to contrast it with material conditions in the countryside where indications of improved ecological, economic or social conditions are far less visible (P. Warren, 2006) and real change in the lives of poor rural households, women, men and children is uneven and ambiguous (Brewer, 2009; P. Warren, 2005).

Giles Mohan and Kristen Stokke posit that such overlappings of programs and practices as the end of the century indicate a convergence of the “New” Right and the “New” Left on the local (Mohan & Stokke, 2000). They suggest that in the 1990s a shift occurred within neoliberal strategy to “revisionist” neo-liberalism and within Marxism from reductionist treatments of politics subsumed by structure to a shift to local political actors and the possibilities found in a politics of difference. Where the former moves from “a singular emphasis on market deregulation to an added emphasis on institutional reforms and social development,” the latter promotes “collective mobilization of marginalized groups against the disempowering activities of both the state and market (Ibid, 248).” Both shifts, Mohan and Stokke argue, zero in on civil society, participation and empowerment at the level of the local.<sup>172</sup>

This chapter takes the convergence on the local as a starting point to examine how the overlapping discourses and practices of a multi-lateral, multi-million dollar, rural development program, citizen participation and human rights promotion, and much less-funded “popular” and “culturalist” Maya activism reworked the ecological and political terrain of the Ch'orti' area. This chapter then examines how divergent and shifting national and international forces seeking to influence neoliberal governance and “peace”-making processes throughout the 1990s were reshaped and reworked through negotiation and everyday practices in the Ch'orti' East. Specifically I trace how government workers, international project staff and civil society activists tied questions of livelihood, gender and race to competing understandings of citizenship, rights and rural development. I show how in that process they subordinate or ignore place-based historical legacies of structural and repressive violence and racialized dispossession, but give birth to new spaces and places of rights, resources, and recognition. These overlapping and sometimes competing efforts to “fix” soils and subjects in the Ch'orti' region (as market integrated entrepreneurs, Maya, citizens and/or political opposition link to localized terrain produce new I push beyond a typification of these policies or an evaluation of the gap between between programs and practices. Tracing the production of these overlapping places and spaces, I stress the place-based contradictions, tensions, openings, and slippages that emerge to make three interrelated claims.

First, as rural development, popular and cultural Maya activism, and citizenship and human rights programs and projects attempt to address particular gendered, racialized and geographic exclusions in the region, they reproduce or rework others. Second, where, how and to what

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<sup>172</sup> See also (Hart, 2008) and (Jessop, 2002) for useful elaborations of how the very forces designed to re-embed economy in society can serve to strengthen neo-liberal goals.

extent this occurs, depends upon place-based memories and landscapes of dispossession and war. Specifically, these discourses and practices hook up with the grounds of silence in ways that delink class relations from land, subsume race relations as kinship, and rework gender relations in uneven ways. Third, targeted subjects, then, hear and engage with these new discourses and practices in their own different ways. Their interpretations combined with new places and spaces to meet and talk and the limits and possibilities of revisionist neoliberal development, multiculturalism, post-Marxist identity politics, citizen participation, and rights discourses created the material and subjective conditions for a new struggles to arise.

Section 1 situates this localized convergence of the “New” Right and “New” Left within the broader national and regional dynamic that I call neo-liberal “peace”-making. I draw attention to the underlying paradoxes of rural development in the context of “peace”-making, as local, national and global actors vie to “fix” as in “secure” territory and subjects through the Zacapa-Chiquimula Smallholders Project, PROZACHI I to their own needs. Section 2 focuses on the concrete activities of “fixing:” the execution and evolution of the multi-lateral funded, state-guided PROZACHI, Program for Smallholders of Zacapa and Chiquimula. In Section 3, I contrast how PROZACHI I subsumes race relations under kinship with the “arrival” of two different Pan-Mayan efforts to “fix” the broken bodies (individual and politic) and spirits of indigenous peoples (D. M. Nelson, 1999, p. 131). Section 4 examines the concurrent implementation of the 1996 Peace Accords, the 1998 multi-lateral Hurricane Mitch Stockholm Accords, the second phase of PROZACHI and national and international programs designed to domesticate pan-Mayanism and promote human rights. As new civil society institutions take root, so do new meanings of “human rights” and “participation,” but not as “fixers” had necessarily planned.

In conclusion, I suggest the stakes of these overlapping processes. The convergence on the local gave rural poor women and men new languages and spaces of cooperation as well as contention (Roseberry, 1994), but also often buttressed, masked, and/or reworked existing historical and geographical silences, vulnerabilities and exclusions. The stones were beginning to speak, but they were choosing their words carefully.

### **Section 1— Neo-liberal “Peace”-making: The Politics of Fixing and the Fixing of Politics**

In this section, I introduce and unpack what “fixing” soils and subjects means in the context of the 1990s as Guatemalan social forces vied for a way to gain an upper hand as the terrain of struggle shifted to civil society. I call this process neo-liberal “peace”-making and suggest that as one of the first “pacified” indigenous regions, the Ch’orti’ area became an ideal place for this process.

#### **Cold War D/developments and Neo-liberal “Peace”-making**

While foreshadowed by three sessions of Central American peace talks in 1985, 1987, and early 1989, the end of the Cold War in 1989, made “peace”-making non-negotiable for the Central American nations, and its contours became increasingly neo-liberal in terms of the production of market-friendly agreements. Based on an unspoken consensus that while neither side could win

militarily, the socialist option as represented by the Eastern Bloc no longer existed, this “end of history” (Fukuyama 1989) had defined the parameters of the Guatemalan peace to the incorporation of rebel fighters, political dissidents and “civil society” into free market economies and liberal democracy. Reforms: military, judicial, agrarian, indigenous could be made, agreements pacted, but only those approved by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Yet these parameters did not automatically produce what Lipschulz and Alvear describe as “neoliberal peace” — the given end-product of these negotiations under market liberalization (Alvear C, 2008; Lipschulz, 1998). Rather, the end of the cold war began a process of neoliberal “peace”-making, a process shaped by the inseparability of war and peace where even as the terrain of struggle shifted to civil society, hi[r]stories and memories of war and conflict conditioned the discourses and practices designed to build or contest a neoliberal peace. Further, I put “peace” in quotations because as Megan Ybarra has brilliantly argued in relation to resource conservation in the Northern lowlands of Guatemala, the battles of the war have not disappeared; rather postwar politics are deciding civil war battles, with equally high and precarious stakes (Megan Ybarra, 2010). In this sense there is no solidified and immovable neoliberal peace; rather Guatemalan society in the period leading up to the Peace Agreements had been involved a hegemonic dispute where the contours of neoliberalism as well as peace were enshrouded in conflict. Neo-liberal “peace”-making, then has no guaranteed outcome, or fixed meaning.

The winds of change that swept across the Americas—neoliberal counter revolution (Bulmer-Thomas, 1996; W. I. Robinson, 2003), the rise of new social movements (Alvarez, Dagnino, & Escobar, 1998; Dagnino, 1998) especially indigenous (Hale, 2004, 2005; Postero, 2007) and women (Schild, 1998) shifted the relations of force in different ways within and between nations, regions, and localities. And with these shifts, the discourses and practices of contestation and the conditions of possibility for social transformation also changed (Hale, 1997; Pearce, 1998; Topik, Talbot, & Samper, 2010).

In Guatemala, this “global revitalization of interest in civil society” led to the positioning of activist groups struggling to express their “popular” and civilian identity against that of the military who dominated their society (Howell and Pearce 2001). Once actors realized that neo-liberal “peace”-making would entail experiments to determine the dimensions of peacetime rural development, they scrambled to (re) create civil society institutions and occupy civil society as the key terrain of struggle (Fischer 1996; Edelman 1998; Pearce 1998; Brett 2008). At the same time, this process catalyzed interest and action on the part of the international financial and development institutions (Pearce 1998) to incorporate “civil society strengthening” into their agendas. Most importantly in Guatemala, divergent activists, military, URNG guerrilla leaders and the state battled over who constitutes civil society and what voice civil society should have in and through the process of neo-liberal “peace”-making, a battle that in some ways continues today (Megan Ybarra, 2010).

The direction of these 1990s development discourses and practices and the contours of new and old social movements shifted in and through the Guatemalan Peace Process that had begun in 1987. National actors articulated competing and converging versions of official development discourse and/or rights (cultural, women’s, human) agendas with their own platforms as they

vied to alter the relations of force at the negotiating table and ensure their interests ‘in the postwar period. Further, unlike the 1992 Salvadoran Peace Accords that had been crafted and signed without taking into account the position of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or World Bank (WB), the Guatemalan Process, these institutions oversaw the Guatemalan process. Thus, the specific ways that development projects (NGO and State) and grassroots activism converged on the local was conditioned. The dynamics of the negotiation process between the State and URNG and at a second level, by the agendas of the divergent members in the Civil Society Assembly (ASC)’s as they sought to strengthen their relative positions in the Peace process and in the postwar milieu shaped who arrived in the Ch’orti’ East and what they tried to do (Krznicaric 1999; Brett 2008).

The key agreements reached in the Guatemalan Peace Process through the mediation of the United Nations, were signed over a period of three years. Figure 3.1 below lists the most substantive agreements. Analysts tend to agree that in their theoretical expression they were promising reaching far into the corners of social, political, economic, and cultural violence, inequity and injustice that had spawned the war. The Achilles heel, however, was that negotiators left the reimplementation of their implementation to be agreed upon after the disarmament process in 1996 (Brett 2006). Nevertheless, as I describe below, the process itself created for a brief period, a multitude of possibilities and interpretations that reached the local population as filtered by NGOs and activists.

Substantive United Nations – Mediated Peace Accords in Guatemala <sup>173</sup>
03-94 Comprehensive Agreement of Human Rights
06-94 Agreement on Resettlement of Population Groups Uprooted by the Armed Conflict
06-94 Agreement for the Establishment of Commission to Clarify Past Human Rights Violations and Acts of Violence that Have Caused the Guatemalan Population to Suffer
03-95 Agreement of the Identity and Right of Indigenous Peoples
05-96 Agreement on the Strengthening of Civilian Power and the Role of the Armed Forces in a Democratic Society
12-96 Agreement on a Definitive Ceasefire
12-96 Agreement on Constitutional Reforms and the Electoral Regime

Figure 3.1: Substantive United Nations—Mediated Peace Accords in Guatemala (Courtesy of Synthesis by Megan Ybarra).

### Overlapping Fixes: Ch’orti’ Bodies and the Body Politic

In her critical montage, *A Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala*, Diane Nelson (D. M. Nelson, 1999, pp. 131-135) also focuses on the word “fixing” to deconstruct the discourses and practices of pan-Mayan activists in response to how colonialism and the rapid changes post WWII had “atomized, “broken” and “mutilated” Mayan culture. She posits that while cultural activists might “fiercely disagree” on what constitutes the culture that

<sup>173</sup> Table from (Megan Ybarra, 2010)

they are fighting to repair; their common goal is “to fix...this culture, to renew people's pride in their indigenous identity” (Ibid, 132). Further, she “charts the violent exclusions and **fixings** [*my emphasis*] involved in essentialized notions of identity [sexualized, gendered, racialized] as they are deployed against the Maya” (135), insisting on their historical-situatedness.<sup>174</sup>

Maya activism “arrived” in the region through two distinct organizations that overlapped with forty villages and hamlets where PROZACHI’s also was working. Educating Ch’orti’ on how to be Maya and how to defend themselves as Maya, was part of a coherent national strategy by both indigenous organizations with links to the URNG guerrilla and those born out a revival of cultural activism in the late 1980s. Their underlying goal was two-fold: yes, they wanted to raise consciousness in terms of indigeneity (in competing ideological ways), but most importantly western Mayans sought to extend the movement nationally in order to strengthen the hand of indigenous civil society in the Assembly of Civil Society at the peace negotiations table. Organizing grassroots support throughout the country, they felt, would strengthen the hand of the then united Maya organizations in the peace negotiations. In so doing, they hoped to achieve structural changes towards indigenous rights (including land rights), and political autonomy (Brett, 2006; Fischer 1998).

In 1992, two organizations representing different expressions of the growing Pan-Maya movement, the Academy of Maya Languages in Guatemala (ALMG ) and the Maya Coordinator, Majawil Q’ij (“New Dawn” in Mam-Maya) sent representatives to establish links in the Ch’orti’ area at almost the same time that PROZACHI’s entrepreneurial and productive initiative hit the ground. The organizations formed part of the Guatemalan process of resurgence of indigenous activism in the 1980s. This resurgence had its roots in the dynamic between the inadequacies of the revolutionary Left to adequately address questions of the material and symbolic exclusions of Guatemala’s race regime on the one hand and professional Mayans attempt to take advantage of the democratic opening to achieve pro-Maya political reforms on the other (Bastos & Camus, 1992; Cojtí Cuxil, 1997; Esquit, 2004; Fischer & McKenna Brown, 1996; K. Warren, 1998).

### **Negotiating a Laboratory for “Peace”-time D/development and Participation**

When situating the Zacapa-Chiquimula Smallholder’s Project, PROZACHI I within a) the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD’s) historical trajectory of cooperation with the Guatemala state and b) the explosive politics of the transition to civilian rule and then neo-liberal “peace”-making, the Project appears as a laboratory both for IFAD which within ten years would expand its operations to all the once-conflictive areas of the country, and for the State to extend “ladino territorialization.”<sup>175</sup> Just as counterinsurgency techniques born in the indigenous East intensified and multiplied in the indigenous West, so too did ways of incorporating the rural poor into a “peace-time” development processes built on a foundation of

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<sup>174</sup> Nelson suggests that the Maya movement is community bound, not in the sense of being “fixed” to specific local communities, but bound in terms of future movement, heading towards the construction of community defined in a Pan-Mayan vein. Yet, one of the key Maya intellectuals, Edgar Esquit, Esquit posits that while the term Maya can unite across ethnic groups, it also divides indigenous people between activists and non-activists (Esquit, 2004). Writing more recently, Santiago Bastos has argued that Pan Mayanism’s inability to ground its discourse and vision in local territories led to its present-day demise (Bastos, 2010).

<sup>175</sup> For (D. M. Nelson, 1999, p. 325) “[t]he ‘laboratories of modernity’ created by the war's militarization of the countryside, and the plans for bureaucratic decentralization, are examples of ...ladino territorialization.”

racialized repression that could be practiced in the Ch'orti' East. Yet, this “experiment” rested on a strange paradox: developing an indigenous region of the East that had been violently “pacified” without acknowledging (at least on paper) either the indigenous roots of many of the subjects or the thirty year deadly dance of militarization and albeit waning, contestation.

PROZACHI I was the international community’s response to a 1985 request made by Guatemala’s transitional government for a decentralized State project directed towards the rural poor. IFAD documents describe the first phase of PROZACHI as a technological modernization project that FAO and IFAD planners constructed in conversation with IFAD’s previous experiences in Guatemala and elsewhere in the “developing” world (IFAD, 1997). Under the auspices of the new civilian government, an IFAD-sponsored project had the built-in potential to fulfill the dual purpose of serving as a laboratory for postwar rural development along market mechanisms and helping secure the long border with Honduras for the present counter-insurgency and future economic integration interests of the Guatemalan state and economic elites as well as of investors in the Global North.<sup>176</sup> How deeply the 1986 Food and Agricultural Organization Mission (FAO) or the IFAD planners understood the pilot potential of the project is unclear, but military and local elites recognized the stakes and wanted to guarantee their long-term dominance.<sup>177</sup> Indeed, to even tap that potential, national disputes had to be settled and localized interests taken into account. From initial request to groundbreaking, six years passed before the divergent sectors had agreed upon the scope, execution structure and mechanisms of the project. What IFAD evaluators termed “repeated delays because of the reorganization of the public sector under the newly elected constitutional government” (IFAD, 1997) actually signaled “the vulnerability of a politico-military project riddled with internal contradictions of a democracy born of counterinsurgency” (Schirmer, 2000, p. 206).<sup>178</sup> In dispute was not only the direction of “rural development”, but its funding and execution under civilian rule—that is who would be able to use development dollars and territorial control to get political support (read electoral votes) out of poor indigenous campesin@s (Ibid). Finally in 1990, the IFAD-FAO proposed rural development project finally won (at least in national circles) political AND military approval and began operations under the joint administration of the Dutch Project coordinator and the Guatemalan State in May of 1991.

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<sup>176</sup> The precise project site provided a balance for the competing U.S. objectives laid out in the 1984 President’s National Bipartisan Committee Report on Central America (known as the Kissinger Commission Report): increase small farmer production for domestic consumption, keep territory secure against insurgency and prepare for peacetime free market initiatives (Kissinger-Commission, 1984) Interestingly, as Secretary of State under Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger had proposed the creation to IFAD to the UN General Assembly in 1975 in order to mobilize some of the new resources enjoyed by the oil-producing countries for development (Ruttan, 1995, p. 28).

<sup>177</sup> Within IFAD and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) that funded IFAD operations there were continual tensions between what social scientists and technicians considered to be necessary for rural development in Latin America and what shifting geo-political and global economic concerns, the United States with its influence in OPEC laid out as priority. At what levels and to what extent planners and later country coordinators understood these tensions, and the extent of U.S. dominance in the organization are uneven and unclear (Berdegué, et al., 2004) (Anonymous Interviews).

<sup>178</sup> The project’s gestation period extended for years. Instead of the envisioned **cooperation** among military, government and private sector within and between the Central American countries, project planners in Guatemala, found that competing interests of different sectors and power blocs made concrete policies incoherent, divergent, contradictory and often just impossible to execute.



Figure 3.2: Area of Zacapa-Chiquimula Smallholder's Project PROZACHI I (1991–1998) and PROZACHI II (1998–2003) Source: International Fund for Agricultural Development, IFAD; <http://operations.ifad.org/web/ifad/operations/country/project/tags/guatemala/251/project%20overview>.

The final PROZACHI project proposal presented a way for the Guatemalan State to practice how to incorporate indigenous rural poor into a “peace-time” development process that was built on a foundation of racialized militarization and genocide (AVANCSO, 1990). The choice of the extended Ch'orti' area as the project's site seemed an attempt to balance economic and political objectives: increase small farmers' production and export possibilities, defeat insurgent forces and prepare rural populations for peacetime free market initiatives.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Ostensibly, FAO and IFAD planners in conjunction with the Guatemalan State agreed upon a geographic area that overlapped with an IFAD seed technology project in Guatemala and laid out a technological modernization proposal based on IFAD's previous experiences in supporting smallholder's in Guatemala and elsewhere in the “developing” world. Although as I pointed out in chapter 2, in the East the army did not execute an integral development pole strategy of counter-insurgency, many of the development pole strategies to control civilian population: installing civil patrols, food for public works had been both present and prior in the Ch'orti' East. For critical discussion of the underlying interests, conceptual strategy and implementation of the development poles in the West and North, see Petén, Quiche, Verapaces and Huehuetenango 1980s, see AVANCSO, 1990 #244} (Manz, 2004; Schirmer, 2000; Megan Ybarra, 2010)



## Overlapping Representations of Ch'orti'-Maya Territory

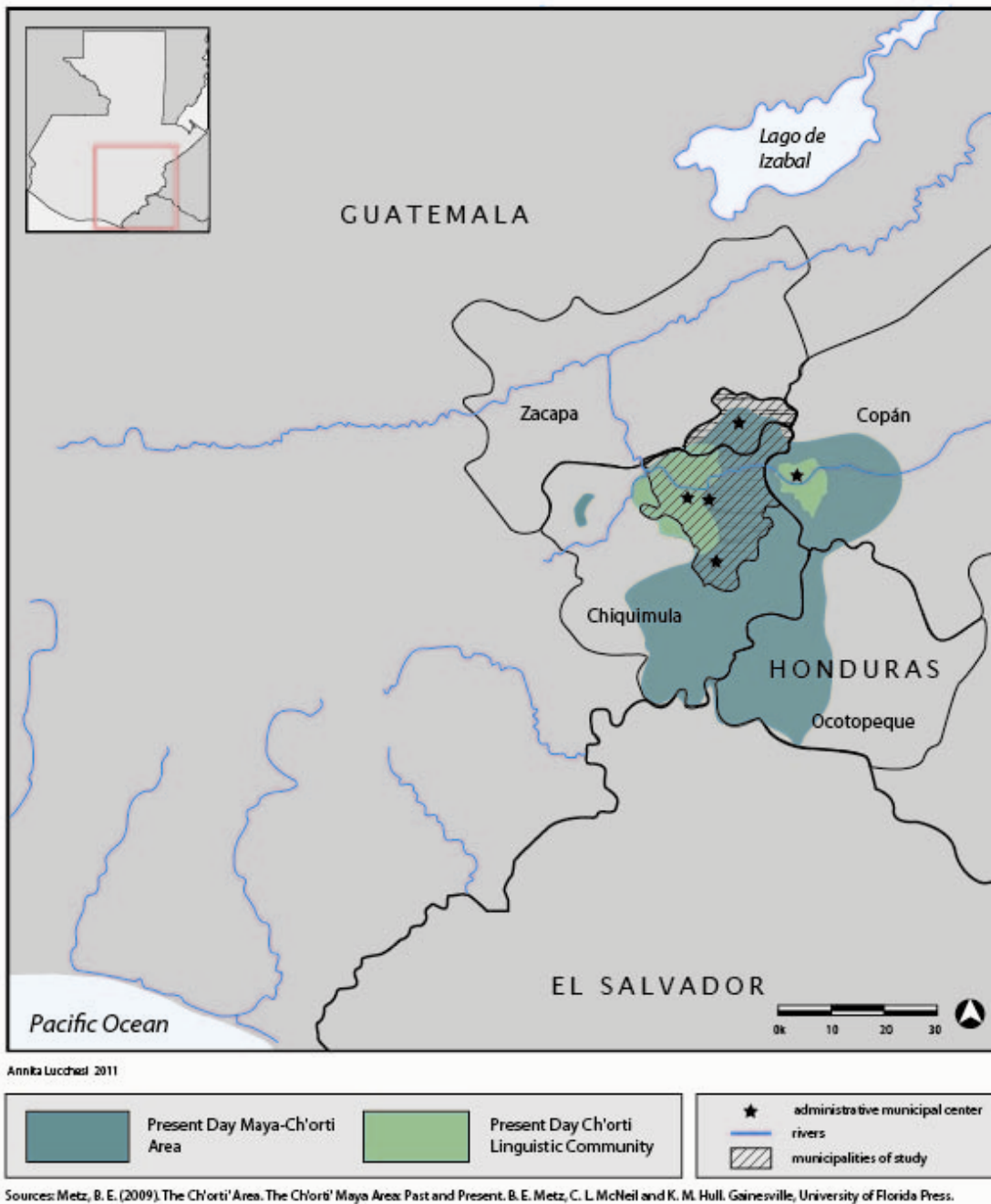


Figure 3.3: Overlapping Representations of Ch'orti'-Maya Territory. Area of Zacapa-Chiquimula Smallholder's Project PROZACHI I (1991–1998) and PROZACHI II (1998–2003)

Source: IFAD;

<http://operations.ifad.org/web/ifad/operations/country/project/tags/guatemala/251/project%20overview>.

Although the IFAD Proposal Recommendation to the Board in 1989 reduced any mention of the civil war to “widespread rural disturbances and loss of life until the mid-1980s” and made no mention of indigenous people in the region (IFAD, 1989), from a military perspective, the eight contiguous eastern *municipalities* selected for the project shared many characteristics with the still deeply embattled Western highlands. In addition to targeting the “grounds of silence”—Olopa, Jocotán, Camotán and La Unión—the project extended to four other bordering areas recognized as historically Ch’orti’ and/or as sites of “successful” military pacification: the mountain villages of Zacapa where the guerrilla had operated in the 1960s and early 70s, and three *municipalities* where campesin@s and indigenous campesin@s had been active in the 1952 agrarian reform to the municipalities just south of western Jocotán: San Juan Ermita, San Jacinto and Quetzaltepeque. Moreover, similar to western Guatemala, all eight municipalities had high concentrations of small-scale agriculturalists, the majority of Maya descent, who produced basic grains on hillsides with extensive erosion and environmental damage, and who migrated to coffee and banana plantations for seasonal labor. Lastly, all and all the political, economic and cultural landscape of the region offered a glimpse of what the Western highlands might look like after the civil war ended.<sup>180</sup>

## Section2—In Search of Suitable Soils and Subjects

PROZACHI’s program, whatever its recognized roots and objectives were, depended upon three criteria that according to the 1989 Recommendation to the IFAD Board were readily available in the region: viable state institutions for project implementation, associations of organized small producers, and secure land tenure. The terrain that the new project encountered, however, offer none of the above. In this section, I show the tensions and openings that emerge as PROZACHI juggles international discourses and changing project practices in its attempt to even find suitable soils and subjects for fixing.

### Dilemmas of Participation

As regional power-brokers had understood when they negotiated the State-led project, for those who could control its course of action, PROZACHI represented a goldmine of political opportunities: currying favors, “buying votes” through populist strategies, shaping discourses. Speaking from a wide variety of positions (beneficiary, staff, evaluator, outside observer), every person I interviewed agreed that clientelism had driven many project decisions and/or co-opted project activities. While neither exclusive to the region, nor new historically, this process of politicization deeply shaped the meaning and practice of participation in the area. As the area’s first extensive rural development program reaching out to then virtually disenfranchised women and men who had kept their doors and ears closed for most of the 1980s, PROZACHI sent strong messages about what kind of participation was allowed, expected and rewarded.

Armed with technology, credit, and food, a growing PROZACHI I staff set out—some with great zeal and all with comparably great salaries—to bring small-scale producers into the fold of

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<sup>180</sup> In 1993, IFAD sponsored its first smallholder project in the Cuchamatan Mountain Corridor in the Western highlands. By 2000, it was sponsoring projects based on “Lessons Learned” in most of the ‘pacified’ areas of the West and today IFAD is working with smallholders everywhere in the Guatemala **except** the Chiquimula-Izabal area and the Petén. See

agrarian modernization. What they lacked in their “arsenal” however was a grasp on the politics of participation. Planners had understood when they targeted the poorest townships of eastern Guatemala that PROZACHI would be addressing a fragile ecosystem and a fragile campesin@ (in their words “peasant”) economy. Nevertheless, they had not considered what they reportedly encountered: an extremely thin gruel of civil society<sup>181</sup>—what the memories of the quasi-illegal status of campesin@ organizing and the war-scape of betrayals and distrust that almost forty years of counter-revolution and civil war in combination with centuries of exploitation, exclusion and/or rebellion had produced (interviews)(Durston, 1999).<sup>182</sup>

Given that thirty years of military pacification had effectively silenced the land question while intensifying dispossession, no villager could or would participate in any civic committee or community organization in the 1980s without the sanction of the Guatemalan military or its local stand-ins: auxiliary mayors, military commissioners, and committee presidents (Ruiz, Barillas Klee, & Chamalé Marroquin, 2004, p. 3). In 1991 the region was “largely devoid of significant grassroots organizations” (FLACSO & Lands, 2002) c.f. (Durston, 1999, p. 106; IFAD & Lundius, 1998) (interviews) and “a lack of local commitment on the part of national government institutions”(IFAD, 1997). Local staff would visit villages and convoke meetings only to have one or two people come. Municipal governments were suspicious of supporting any effort that might counter the interests of the military or local elite and as one campesino from a Ch’orti’ village in Camotán reflected:

The head of the military commissioners of Camotán doesn’t want development for anyone, not even [his own] municipality. The commissioners say that one shouldn’t participate in the meetings that are held. For that reason they make us need the authority. I ask myself, isn’t the army part of the government? Why do they take away from the communities their initiative to meet and obtain their development. (Palma-Ramos, 2001, p. 153)

It took two years and an evaluation mission to finally get a “working project off the ground.”<sup>183</sup> With some temerity PROZACHI staff and MAGA supervisors approached the colonels in charge of the military detachments in Zacapa and Chiquimula and obtained permission for the promoters and technicians of PROZACHI to form groups and for villagers to participate in them(Ruiz, et al., 2004). Yet, even after the local military gave their good housekeeping seal of approval, and PROZACHI officials had ameliorated resistance from the Agricultural Development Bank to their project, the Program faced its single most important threat: villagers were reluctant to come near it. As one field staff from PROZACHI I explained: “We’d knock on doors, and the people wouldn’t even open them.”

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<sup>181</sup> By civil society, in this sentence, Durston is referring to the revisionist neo-liberal way of understanding the sphere of society as bounded and separate from state and economy, rather than a Gramscian concept that examines the power laden dynamics through which state and society reshape one another.

<sup>182</sup> A leading research institute in Guatemala, AVANCSO, maintains the neoliberal democracy in Guatemala was birthed by genocide and counter-insurgency violence. The clientelisms of all the postwar “democratic governments have been unable to escape their military and elite authoritarian origins.

<sup>183</sup> According to (Lauritto, 2003, p. 15 fn 16) PROZACHI unfolded amidst the debate between productivists and humanists, the former seeking economic results and the latter a more holistic development of rural people. In this sense, the planners themselves were in disagreement and thus negotiation about goals and activities (I use those terms as the ones’ employed by the planners themselves, not as categories for analysis to which I necessarily subscribe).

The question, staff slowly realized, was not whether or not grassroots organizations existed in the area, but who could or would participate with whom else in what organization. The existing threads of association that staff detected were either completely under the control of local military and political power brokers or “underground” and not accessed easily by the public sector (in light of the history of systematic repression) (Cleveringa, 1994, p. 14). Many villagers remembered the price that they or other family members or neighbors had paid for joining committees over the last forty years. As for the participation of women, most male heads of household (in patriarchic fashion) directly forbid their wives from opening doors or attending meetings. Their actions were rooted in part from some historical experience that outside promoters would steal their children and rape their wives, while gendered fears were more in line with someone sweet-talking the woman into “cheating.”

PROZACHI coordinators decided to “initiate strong actions in the field of organizing in order to make viable its execution given the lack organizations with the potential to become involved in the process” (IFAD, 1997). Though not planned as such, PROZACHI’s actions became dependent upon the “thickening of civil society”—that is the creation of groups and organizations compatible with PROZACHI’s goals of participation and modernization. Who constituted civil society, and what constituted participation, however, were questions that continually were being contested and reworked by the State, multi-laterals, national NGOs and local “beneficiaries.”

PROZACHI hired Guatemalan anthropologist, Hugh Zelaya, to solve its civil society dilemma. Hugo Zelaya, did not, look for organizational signs in the region’s combative past, nor even acknowledge that past. Rather to bypass the deep levels and multiple scales of distrust at the village and township levels, he approached the “organization problem” through the lens of kinship. Recognizing that while place (township, village) and ethnicity still signified some sense of belonging to indigenous and non-indigenous in the Ch’orti’ region, ties of blood and union within a village were crucial. At Zelaya’s recommendation, PROZACHI targeted those units within villages where ties already existed: local descent groups. PROZACHI technicians began identifying and forming core kinship groups (Grupos Núcleos) comprised of 7-12 households united through lines of descent.<sup>184</sup> These core groups became the foundation for both reproducing and reworking socio-spatial relations in the communities: and as such became the intended sites for the production of campesin@ subjects and organizations suitable for the transition to neo-liberalism. By 1994, the project claimed 400 core groups in 131 villages (PROZACHI 1995 c.f. Durston 1999). This “solution” would provide the grist for civilizing civil society discussed in the next section, and the constraints and contours for dealing with gender and development.

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<sup>184</sup> PROZACHI contracted Guatemalan anthropologist, Hugo Zelaya, who together with Professor Mario Chamale designed a strategy of creating groups based on those relations where existing trust seemed most likely: local descent groups (Durston, 1999) correspondence with Rudolph Cleveringa 25/10/2010). Field staff ferreted out support from deactivated Agricultural Representatives in every village who, because of their previous ties to the MAGA, might be willing to help dispel distrust. These Agricultural Representatives were part of the military controlled “development” linked to pacification in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

## A Not-So-Quick Fix: Land Rights and the Politics of Food

In many ways promoters and technical staff had as much difficulty finding suitable soils as suitable subjects. The processes of deforestation and desertification especially in the mid altitude areas where indigenous campesin@s had been progressively forced to concentrate in was among the worst in Central America. Indeed from the onset, IFAD planners had recognized the relationship between deforestation and the simple reproduction squeeze in the area (IFAD, 1989).<sup>185</sup> Yet, as mentioned in the introduction the solution for IFAD, was agricultural diversification, soil conservation and food aid, rather than addressing what its report called “the skewed agrarian structure” in the region.

The silence of the lands mentioned at the close of chapter 2 combined with the program’s failure (within neo-liberal productivist guidelines) to deal with the roots of that silence—collided with the sensibilities of both those included and those excluded from the program. Coffee (with its high price on the global market) became the technicians’ darling for the highland municipalities and marketable vegetable production in the lowlands, soil conservation on dry hillsides and reforestation along watersheds was the combination of technologies PROZACHI proposed to generate income in order to decrease seasonal out-migration and improve soil quality. However, just as the approved five-year proposal had neglected to take into account the ways in which over thirty years of war and more of repression had disarticulated or buried deep underground campesin@ organization and many Ch’orti’ collective practices, it had also misrepresented, misunderstood or just missed the unstable and often non-existent land tenure arrangements that was in the minds of producers a prerequisite the transformation of soils and related production strategies.

Participants’ perceptions and experience of land tenure and what it meant was much more tenuous than IFAD’s original estimate that only 9 percent of the target population was actually landless, the majority enjoying “recognized ownership” (IFAD, 1989). Thus project plans for the development communities poster child solution: sustainable development (Sarageldin, 1996) clashed with the reality of limited access to land. Approximately 80 per cent of the land being farmed by smallholders was municipal *ejidal* lands to which they claimed usufruct rights (IFAD, 1997), access to which was dependent on the “good will” of the urban classes controlling the municipal government. Having watched for years how municipal governments had sold the lands that campesin@ indigenous families had farmed “from time immemorial” or transferred the use rights to wealthy ladino or *mestizo* cattle ranchers and coffee growers (chapter 1 and 2), participants constantly resisted soil conservation and reforestation practices. “Why should we improve land that we don’t own?” was the most common justification. And the lack of legal title (as I discuss in the next chapter) put a wrench in crop diversification plans since those plans hinged (at least in the first years) on deeded land as collateral for rural credit.

Yet, when PROZACHI’s coordinating staff (and IFAD’s 1992 evaluating mission) finally admitted the relationship between precarious situation of soil quality and insecure land tenure, the question they asked was how do we meet project goals, not how do we address landlessness and land insecurity. Instead they adopted the monetary carrot (agricultural credit and/or food for

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<sup>185</sup> With 80 percent of the population farming less than 3.5 hectares of land, primarily small plots of land deemed not apt for annual crops (IFAD, 1989).

work) and stick (exclusion from other programs) practices. Amidst all these incentives and threats, the discourses and practices hailing environmental conservation, diversification of production and entrepreneurial agriculture kept the real land question off the table while clearly responding to its ominous presence. The inner rationale for promoting diversification and soil conservation may have been technically coherent but, without sufficient land, the credit carrot acted to erode soils rather than fix them. Producers who accepted the fixings, reduced the area of land they used for organically grown basic grains while intensifying chemical inputs, in order to create room for market crops. Land dedicated to basic grains were reduced in area through the use of chemical agriculture promoted by PROZACHI to make way for coffee and vegetables, further binding families to the cash economy.<sup>186</sup> At the same time, providing land poor campesin@s with European food surpluses through Food for Work programs so that they plant trees and terrace soil might have helped root some soil, but it also built upon the food for work wartime road building programs, designed to win support by providing food, but more often than not deepening resentment about inequities.

By focusing on the transformation of individual producers' subjectivities, practices and relationships to state and market, the plan took off its radar structural inequalities such as unequal land tenure and political limits like state-sanctioned repression of small-scale producer organizations and the long-term effects of militarization on grassroots organization and government institutions. Ultimately, in this historical period and this geographic place where land reform wasn't just off the development project table, it had become unspeakable: the project needed less foreboding ways to broach questions of equity and equality. In line with the 1990s being the Decade of Women and Development, gender replaced class.

### **Gendered Citizenship and Patriarchal Power**

PROZACHI's formula for incorporating women into the transformation of soils and subjects hinged first on Women in Development (WID) principles of involving women in mainstream development processes and putting productive resources in women's hands and then on gender mainstreaming, which attempted to incorporate issues of power, conflict and relationships in order to address women's subordination.<sup>187</sup> In this process promoters and technicians began with WID activities like supporting time saving and eco-friendly technologies that eased the tasks of social reproduction, freeing women for income-generating activities, and making women credit worthy citizens to finance these activities and "improvements." Nevertheless, getting credit to women hinged upon them being recognized by state and financial institutions under the

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<sup>186</sup> This practice proved especially detrimental in the places where desertification was imminent— the mid-altitude slopes inhabited primarily by self-identified Ch'orti' families. As Cleveringa put it in 1996: "Easier access to credit and the introduction of agro-chemicals (not apt for fragile ecosystems) in areas unsuitable for agriculture and without the necessary soil conservation practices because of insecure land tenure...brings about an irreversible imbalance in poor hillsides." See also (Dary, et al., 1998, p. 131 and 155; Metz, 2006, p. 256).

<sup>187</sup> The UN Economic and Social Council defined the concept in the following way: Main-streaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality (United-Nations, 1997). See (Connelly, Li, MacDonald, & Parpart, 2000) and (Moser, 1993) for historical lineages of Women in Development, Women and Development and Gender and Development frameworks.

PROZACHI-BANDESA accord.<sup>188</sup> In other words, potential lenders needed to be state recognized citizens with an official identification card.

Over 90% of the targeted female participants did not even have birth certificates, and thus no identity documents, making the tripartite plan of credit, technical assistance and training virtually moot for women.<sup>189</sup> In response, PROZACHI negotiated with mayors about facilitating fast track birth certificates and identity documents for women, producing 2,338 new female “citizens” by 1996 and 3,036 by 1998.<sup>190</sup> Rudolph Cleveringa, IFAD appointed co-coordinator of PROZACHI I (email correspondence, 2009), described this process as crucial for altering gender dynamics:

The more important point is that PROZACHI was able to enter in a programme that gave women their legal recognition. I forget how many women got 'registered' as citizens with voting rights and all! It was a smash success in giving non-people, basically illiterate women, a chance to life and citizenship. A better empowerment tool has still to be born.

Yet, what this newfound economic citizenship meant for women was disputed and contested. In the next chapter, I look more closely at the slippery relationship between “economic citizenship”, credit and debt, for now I focus on the political considerations. First, unlike Cleveringa’s view from outside, technicians from the region saw the procurement of identity documents as just one more ploy by the local politicians who had had their hands in the PROZACHI process from the beginning. The logic was that if municipal officials worked with PROZACHI staff to document campesina women (largely indigenous and illiterate) as “citizens” then they could control the women’s vote. While this view suggests a preconceived notion that “women cannot think for themselves”, it also reflects peoples’ experience of this new iteration of Guatemalan “democracy” where politicians did whatever they could for votes and personal gain (interviews).

Second, PROZACHI’s provision of independent identity documents making women eligible for credit clashed with the ways that core groups tethered women’s participation to the patriarchal controls of the kinship groups, and met with varied forms of resistance from male promoters. To counter the limits of what I call “patriarchal participation” the project brought in gender “experts” to sensitize male staff and make the projects women quota. As Gregorio, a passionate and critical ex-PROZACHI animal husbandry technician from the Ch’orti’ area told me,

Another rotund success [of PROZACHI] was the inclusion, the making visible the actions of women. Before, there hadn’t been any women’s participation. [This was] a region that was eminently *machista*. The first gender experts came from the University of Peru to talk to us about gender. [He shrugs] We men said, “What’s that? What do you mean?” and we started to promote gender in a really screwed up way because the project plan said gender had to be transversal; gender equity had to be in all the components. The credit component had to talk about

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<sup>188</sup> BANDESA agreement

<sup>189</sup> In the first two years of the project only 290 loans went to women as opposed to 1,268 to men (IFAD, 1997). Later data shows that the majority of those women who received legal documents were illiterate and/or Ch’orti’ (MAGA, 2003).

<sup>190</sup> (Metz, 2006) and comparative documents (Polishing the Stone) where gender change in PROZACHI seems better than others.

gender. I had to do gender. We had to put women everywhere. When we couldn't ... Well, really they [the "experts"] were feminists, they said that men had to help women even with the housework and the whole thing. That was a problem. At first it went badly [a face of embarrassment]. But with the passing of time, we had more training workshops and we started understanding it and transmitting it. To such a degree that today women are seen in all spaces, you see the Ch'orti' woman everywhere. (Interview 11/2/2011)

Yet as I have written about in relation to Gender and Development in eastern Honduras, the fact that you can "see women everywhere," does not necessarily translate into changing power relations in the household, project groups or communities, or to a shift in access and control of resources (Casolo, 2009). For many male coordinators and technicians, abstract analysis of the social construction of gender or learning to disaggregate information by sex had little to do with the material stakes involved in their work and would not help them make their women participation quotas (Berdegué, et al., 2004; IFAD & Lundius, 1998; IFAD, 1997) Reflecting on his own experience, Gregorio made evident the contradictory forces at play and the limits of "gender awareness" workshops.

We made *la mujer* [the woman] visible. We took her out [of the house]. We said, "Here is your place." At first, it was as if she were an ornament, why should we lie? We'd say, "Let's add her and her here in the list, ," and then turn it [the list] in: "Here is my report, see the required fifty men and fifty women." But who made the decisions? The men. The women were secretaries or just there as decorations, *floreras* [vases of flowers] we called them. (Interview 11/2/2010)

Gregorio's reflection was in answer to my question: What do you feel best about your years (over 10) of working in PROZACHI? And his bursting pride about the incorporation of hundreds of women into the project responded to a personal transformation as well as an obtained project goal. Yet, in turning multiple women into the singular: *la mujer*, and his sense of male agency: "we made *la mujer* visible" indicates his ongoing view of gender relations. Furthermore, the majority of male directors and technicians never reached Gregorio's degree of awareness.

The projects' heavy reliance on kinship groups as the organizational lynchpin deepened dynamics that systematically countered gender workshop goals. Perceived as stable endogenous networks of trust through which PROZACHI could build new campesin@ organizations (Durstun, 1999), the kinship core groups depended on peoples' comfort with existing socio-spatial relations that embodied a hierarchy of bodies. As Gayatri Spivak argues in her exploration of subaltern communities, the solidarities of kinship themselves are structured predominantly through sexual differences "the figure of the woman moving from clan to clan and family to family as daughter/sister and wife/mother syntaxes patriarchal continuity even as she herself is drained of proper identity" (Spivak 1988 p. 220 c.f. Nelson, 1999). When the 400 core groups elected their two leaders, they almost invariably elected those whom they perceived as authorities and who had both greater economic and language facilities to leave their communities i.e. men. In 1994, when PROZACHI promoters formed all women solidarity



groups, the male leaders of the core groups still exercised influence in the activities the women elected to pursue.<sup>191</sup>

When combined with this ongoing patriarchal domination in the core groups, the promotion of gender awareness as a dangling intervention disconnected from critical analyses of class or race prompted technicians and promoters to adopt parts of the gender discourse while continuing to rely on existing gendered hierarchies to defend “their habitual attitudes and professional practices” (IFAD & Lundius, 1998, p. 37). Throughout the over-a-decade-long dual phase project, PROZACHI professionals as well as male beneficiaries continually reasserted their right to “give women orders.” Further, as intimated above, technicians and male beneficiaries sought to constrain women’s participation and set their parameters to nurturing roles. “Several men technicians came to consider the WID component a “club for women”, taking care of everything related to the ‘women’s sphere’” (Ibid, p. 37). Many husbands supported their wives’ participation as long as there was a direct material benefit to the household: food for work, credit. Looking back, one younger New Day leader, Eduardo, who hadn’t participated in PROZACHI said to me: why after all those gender workshops that PROZACHI imparted, is it still so hard for women to leave their homes and attend meetings, trainings and events outside their communities? He then offered his own response: because now no one is handing out food or *pisto* (slang for money).

Eduardo’s resolution of his question points to the ambiguous and contradictory ways that enormous efforts to incorporate women, reworked the everyday practices and organizing structures in the region and created new spaces for women to gather and meet participate but not necessarily in ways that PROZACHI had planned.

### Section 3—E/rac(s)ing Difference

The tensions and shifts produced in relation to discourses and practices around gendered citizenship not only helped obscure the land question, but also contributed to the erasure race. At the same time, PROZACHI I’s willingness to sidestep the land question and opt for technological “fixes” worked in and through existing racialized subjectivities and racial hierarchies, themselves linked to place and class. Yet, like the land question that silently shaped in toxic ways how small producers-men and women, embraced and how elites perceived PROZACHI practices; so the unspoken articulation of indigeneity, class and place in the region hinged in part on key era(ce)sures of indigeneity and violence.

At the same time, two organizations representing different expressions of the growing Pan-Maya movement, the Academy of Maya Languages in Guatemala (ALMG) and the Maya Coordinator, Majawil Q’ij (New Dawn in Mam) had sent representatives to establish links in the Ch’orti’ area at almost the same time that PROZACHI hit the ground.

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<sup>191</sup> Among the men themselves, it was those members of core groups (and solidarity groups) with greater resources, “the rich among the poor”, who controlled decision-making in their groups. When I started research in 2005, I found villagers in La Unión continued to refer to what was once the PROZACHI I core group as Antonio’s or Domingo’s group, that is, named after the dominant family member and made up of only kin.

## **“El Indio” No Percibido: Hidden Places and Spaces of Racism**

Although the very detection of the spatial dimensions of kinship connections had to do with indigenous/non-indigenous patterns of hillside settlement (through forced removal, flight and/or migration) of clans in specific neighborhoods and villages, the project plans treated all groups and communities as campesin@, with no recognition of more or less indigenous diacritical markers or self-identified interests or practices.

To the extent that staff did recognize the uneven terrain of indigenous difference, they manifested it through small “concessions” linked to achieving gender goals such as asking then, anthropology graduate student, Brent Metz or a male participant to translate for the women who did not speak *Castellano* (Castilian Spanish) well see (Metz, 2006, p. 250) or promoting Ch’orti’ artisan production and sales as a credit worthy activity. In spite of PROZACHI coordinator Rudolf Cleveringa’s 1994 recommendation that the project take into account “Ch’orti’ practices and interests”, I could find no evidence that any workshop in the first six years of the project focused on or even included Ch’orti’ history or cultural practices. Further Lundius commented: “What struck me when I visited [1996-97] the central office was the absence of material about and interest in the cultural aspects of Ch’orti’ existence...” Rather, he reported hearing the phrase: “Now we are on the path to development and should abandon our traditions.” (Jan Lundius, Personal correspondence 2009). Because of the ways that project discourse hooked up with past messages, many participants had come to understand “development” as synonymous with “progress”, the antithesis to “backward” Ch’orti’ cultural practices (Julian López Garcia & Mariano Juárez, 2006; Metz, 2006).

Ignoring or attempting to erase cultural difference is itself a power-laden practice rooted in postcolonial assumptions about modernity and “improvement” (Gordillo, 2004; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; D. S. Moore, 2005)(Li, 2007; Wainwright, 2008). IFAD consultant, Juan Carlos Schultze points out that it wasn’t until the decade of the 1990s that IFAD in Latin America came to fully embrace the idea that *mestizo* or ladino smallholders and indigenous smallholders are not necessarily the same group, even though they have many elements in common (Berdegué, et al., 2004). While officially ignoring ethnic difference and the uneven effects of racialized dispossession, the promoter practices described above as patriarchal and elitist were often linked to race: by omission or commission. In one interview, an ex-PROZACHI technician openly admitted that he favored working in the non-indigenous villages because the people there “know how to work hard.” In contrast in one particular village he told me, “ the people are *bien indio* [very Indian in a disparaging way]. We gave them seeds and when I came back a week later, they still hadn’t planted them. They have the reputation for being lazy, they drink a lot of natural alcohol, corn liquor that is.” His comment struck me, because many of the Ch’orti’ producers I know follow the cycle of the moon to decide when to plant, and in a week’s time the moon might not have reached the proper place in its cycle.

Moreover, the ways that race and class work together, whether recognized or created constraints and contestation. Reforestation could only be done with larger producers with more land than the originally planned 7 hectare ceiling for participants, few if any were Ch’orti’. Even with producers outside their social target, PROZACHI met resistance. As Fernando, one ex-PROZACHI technical staffperson told me, “The rich (none of whom were Ch’orti’) didn’t want the roads paved either, as they wanted to maintain control of who could get coffee in an out of

the strictly controlled coffee farms. The wealthy wanted a *colono system* similar to what existed in the western highlands of El Salvador in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century!”

What is striking about PROZACHI I is how its policy documents and promoter practices systematically erase race even while cultural rights activism erupted in the Ch’orti’ region as well as throughout Guatemala and other countries with indigenous populations. Only after the Guatemalan government signed the March 1995 Accord on Identity and Rights of Indigenous People, did IFAD documents proclaim their efforts to “mainstream, marginalized groups, especially rural women, and the indigenous populations most affected by the internal conflict” (MAGA, 2003, p. 6). Only in and through the second phase of PROZACHI II, which I discuss in Section 4 did the project risk provoking elites in the East by recognizing the needs and rights of indigenous peoples as distinct.

### **Ch’orti’ Crossroads: Converging Trajectories of Mayanization**

Majawil Q’ij and the Academy of Mayan Languages of Guatemala burst onto the Ch’orti’ scene hoisting the flag of Maya identity at a moment when there was an absolute void of any positive feeling of belonging to that collective [identity]. (Metz, 2007, p. 321)

By the time I arrived in the region the two Maya activist/indigenous rights that Brent Metz mentions above had both set up Ch’orti’ shop: forming the Maya Ch’orti’ Coordinator and the Ch’orti’ Maya branch of the Academy respectively. The void that Metz describes is both hard and easy for me to imagine.<sup>192</sup> Metz carried out his field research during the “hey day” of Ch’orti’-Maya cultural activism and participated directly in many of the workshops, meetings and other events. His work, which I draw upon in this subsection documents some of the tensions and thrills of that moment. Today the buildings in Olopa, Camotán, Jocotán and San Juan Ermita boast a multitude of signs written in the Ch’orti’, while the highway that passes through proclaims in Spanish “This is Toyota Territory.” Something had changed, but what and what did it mean?

Prior to the late 1980s, efforts linked to the Catholic or Protestant churches managed the introduction of concepts around Ch’orti’ or Maya identity and practices, using the Ch’orti’ language to primarily communicate their own interpretations of desired behavior and valid concerns. While these efforts in the Ch’orti’ region included the Catholic Radio Ch’orti’, nascent bilingual education, the Wycliffe Bible translators and the Francisco Marroquin (Maya) Linguistic projects, the efforts were more about using Ch’orti’ to communicate, not communicating the worthiness of being or speaking Ch’orti’.

In order to take seriously the stakes behind these different expression for fixing, binding and bound, I examine how two different trajectories of Mayan struggle mentioned in the quote above hit the ground in the Ch’orti’ area. Both Majawil Q’ij and ALMG did begin the hard work of repair—disseminating the alternative history of the Conquest, making connections between the Ch’orti’ and the Maya who had built the nearby ancient city of Copan and revitalizing Ch’orti’

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<sup>192</sup> See Metz (Metz, 2007) (Metz, 2006) for a detailed and lively description of the concrete practices of Maya activism in the Ch’orti’ area between 1992 and 2007.

language and traditions. While they also had some problems winning people's trust; even more so in town events than in the communities (Hull, n.d.), the novelty of meeting Maya from the West dressed in traditional *traje* and talking with pride about indigeneity opened a lot of doors. Majawil Q'ij leaders, who had their roots in the revolutionary movements, linked the alternative past with the counter-insurgency present, criticizing the army and oligarchy as the invaders of today who abused human rights, calling for "a reduction in the size of the army, the abolition of Civil defense patrols and redistribution of wealth" (Metz 2006, 278-279). Majawil organizers described and denounced the army massacres that had taken place in the West and sent two Ch'orti' representatives to the returned refugees resettlement in Playa Grande where for the first time Ch'orti' heard first hand accounts of the genocidal campaigns in the Quiche in the early 1980s, stories that they had before been reluctant to believe (Ibid). ALMG focused more on showing how centuries of economic exploitation and social exclusion were to blame for the decline in Ch'orti' language and spirituality.

Often times, these Maya from the West spoke over the heads of many Ch'orti' and expressed dismay at what they perceived of as the backwardness and brokenness of some timeless Ch'orti' culture. Still, while PROZACHI I was working to create suitable subjects for the market economy, these Mayan activists were loosening the bonds that had fettered Ch'orti' cultural and political practices. In 1993, ALMG founded the local office for the Ch'orti' Linguistic Community and held elections for a local Board of Directors. By 1994, Majawil Q'ij had done something similar, establishing the local Regional Maya-Ch'orti' Coordinator that would become known as COMACH (Metz, 2006).

What is especially significant for understanding the future of articulation of subjects and demands in the Ch'orti' region is the relationship between these two Mayan activist initiatives and how they (and their national counterparts) influenced a shift in PROZACHI. These institutions/organizations which at the national level had come to represent two very distinct and often mutually exclusive strategies (K. Warren, 1998), in practice in the Ch'orti' region engaged in very similar discourses and practices. It is the possible reason behind that convergence that are significant—the dynamics that divided *populares* and *culturalistas* at the national level had little traction in the Ch'orti' region (Metz, 2006, 2007). Unlike the experience of ALMG in the capital city and with linguistic groups in the West which have significant elite populations in town centers, the Ch'orti' virtually had no elite class. Those few with a high school or university education represented the first generation to no longer depend on land for the livelihood. In terms of Majawil Q'ij, the organizations historic ties to the URNG and on going ideological confluences created a chasm between their vision of Maya struggle and that of educated indigenous people in the capital. Those ties, however, were meaningless in the Ch'orti' region where most of the participating members had been forcibly recruited to the military or had served in the military-backed Civil Defense Patrols (PAC). If anything, the local Maya-Ch'orti' Coordinator (COMACH) and local ALMG promoters felt more at home with one another than with the Western Maya who came to "teach them how to be Maya."

Indeed, as Ch'orti' campesin@s who for generations had not identified as Ch'orti' attended Maya-Ch'orti' and indigenous rights workshops and gatherings, classes and celebrations, as their local organizations took shape, the clearer it was that no "fixed" Maya would be "rescued nor singular body politic "repaired." A friend across the border in Honduras who worked with the combative Maya-Ch'orti' organization there, expressed dismay at the non-existence of a land

struggle (i.e. class consciousness) in eastern Guatemala, commenting to me: that those in COMACH “are culturalists, only concerned with ritual.” Had the leaders of Majawil Q’ij heard this comment, they might have pulled their hair out. Neither were Majawil Q’ij leaders, with their genealogical connection to the guerrillas, sympathetic to soldiers and ex-PAC. Still, it was the experience of meeting Western Maya as a soldier fighting in the West that led some to embrace cultural activism. As one non-Ch’orti’ speaker told me:

The Cobanes [undifferentiated Ch’orti’ name for Western Maya] haven’t forgotten their history, haven’t forgotten their language are not ashamed. Seeing them made me want to know my roots, that is why I joined COMACH.

However they detoured from the intentions of national organizations, the two movements were crucial for raising ethnic pride, and revitalizing certain cultural practices. Further in conjunction with one of the first Peace Accords signed, the Human Rights Accord signed in 1994, they showed rural people that one can critique the military, the politicians, the wealthy, the Church—whoever discriminates or acts against them. (Metz, 2007), gaining critical political space for reflection and discussion. The United Nation’s Mission in Guatemala, MINUGUA even carried out their early human rights workshops in the region in conjunction with Majawil Q’ij—a kind of quid pro quo lending of legitimacy. Metz, (2006), who observed some of these workshops noted that attendees quickly grasped the violation of rights by the Army and the guerrillas and with the prompting of MINUGUA made connections to present-day violations by the police and security forces.

By 1998, the Maya Ch’orti’ Coordinator, COMACH promoters were giving “formation” workshops in history, culture, spirituality in 29 villages in all four municipalities plus San Juan Ermita and Maya Language Academy, ALMG had bilingual education programs in 18 villages in the three Chiquimulan municipalities but not La Union. Yet, the vast majority of villages targeted were in Jocotán, deepening the spatial difference in self-identification. Moreover, like PROZACHI, neither semi-autonomous Maya Language Academy nor the Maya-Ch’orti’ Coordinator formed by Majawil Q’ij were able to find a way to address the land question, even though local leaders of both organizations believed (and continue to believe) that land is *the* crucial issue.<sup>193</sup> One Ch’orti’ campesino leader, Don Marcos, who I came to know well during my research with New Day had participated for years with different expressions of the Maya movement. He was frustrated both with the daily practices and long term goals of both organizations. For him, none of the national organizations could build a force behind concrete demands and all of them “discriminated” (a term he had learned from all of the workshops) against indigenous peoples in the East. National discourse and practices fell short of finding a way to concretely address the material and meaningful effects of 500 years of dispossession and almost a century of militarization in the Ch’orti’ area.

Bound by membership fees and a shrinking budget provided directly or indirectly by international organizations, these organizations rose and fell with the wave of neo-liberal “peace”-making. People did not necessarily choose to “be Ch’orti’” in the ways that the national leadership (or even local leadership had envisioned). Threats and backlash abounded, and in

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<sup>193</sup> In terms of everyday practice (Metz, 2006, p. 279) reports that some participants of Majawil Q’ij workshops in Camotán began to denounce ladino/as trying to take their land.

many communities membership in a Maya-Ch'orti' required much more courage than participation in PROZACHI. But the organizations continue to exist; they did alter subjectivities, territorial understandings, practices around language and ritual, and weighed in heavily on the conditions affecting who and where "chooses" to be Ch'orti', including some ladinos (Metz 1998, interviews).<sup>194</sup> And the discourses and practices of Mayanization hooked up with shifting rights language related to neo-liberal citizenship in ways that would not be apparent until a crisis demanded it.

The next section moves chronologically to the juncture of two sets of agreements the historic December 1996 signing of the Guatemala Peace Accords and a second set of international accords signed in May 1999, to support Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction.

#### **Section 4—Civilizing Civil Society: The Partial Peace of Participation**

Separately and together, the implementation of the 1996 Peace Accord and wed international economic and political support from Europe and the United States to defined processes of economic, political and social "transformation," with the intention of securing territories and subjects for the "free"-market.<sup>195</sup>

neoliberal notions of citizenship are tied to such rationalities as efficiency, economic modes of leadership, and responsible participation. (Postero, 2007, p. 6)

#### **Double "Trouble": Dis/Accords of Peace and Reconstruction**

Both the Guatemalan 1996 Peace Agreements and the Stockholm Accords were double-edged swords. Neither were simply "top-down" dictates of higher echelon negotiation. Combative civil society groups had mobilized and pressured first to be at the negotiating table (in Guatemala) or close by (in Stockholm) and then to influence the content of the final agreements. In this sense, both Agreements proffered some wiggle room not just for reconstruction, but also for transformation: after 36 years of war in the first case and relief after natural disaster in the latter. Nevertheless, both relied upon international and national straight jackets that bound funding to neo-liberal economic, social and cultural goals. Unlike during the Salvadoran Peace Accords signed in 1992 when the IFIs had no role, the international community, especially the IMF and World Bank had tremendous influence over the whole Guatemalan peace process and the European Community over post-Mitch reconstruction. This involvement meant that no Accord could establish policies outside of those recommended by the Fund and the Bank (Jonas, 2000)<sup>196</sup>.

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<sup>194</sup> See (Hale, 2006) for a discusión of racial ambivalence as a ladino practice.

<sup>195</sup> In other words, the transformations made possible by the crisis of Hurricane Mitch and the imperative of peace, were from the get-go relegated to what Antonio Gramsci calls transformism whereby the political opposition is incorporated into the "conservative-moderate 'political class'" (Gramsci, 2007 [2011], p. 257).

<sup>196</sup> For example, despite unequal land distribution being one of the fundamental causes of the war, the only land reform discussions allowed had to do with market-based land reform. Yet, if all sides played by the rules, the international community would fund over 70% of the implementation costs of the Peace Agreements (Jonas, 2000).

The Consultative Group for Reconstruction and Transformation of Central America, that signed the Stockholm Accords with five Central American nations, made clear the convergence with the Guatemalan Peace Accords in laying out its commitment to “Development to help guarantee development, that is the strengthening of the mainstream capitalist economy in Guatemala:

The highest long-term returns for the economy are likely to come from increased social spending. A national consensus on investing in human capital is growing, helped by the Peace Agreements, and could be further strengthened if a Fiscal Pact is agreed. Sustained implementation of social investment programs will develop the large untapped Guatemalan resource, the rural indigenous population, and promote its integration into the mainstream economy to the benefit of the society at large. (IADB, 1999)

Together in line with the Peace Accords (especially the Agreement on Socioeconomic Aspects and the Agrarian Situation and Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Agreement on the Strengthening of Civilian Power and the Role of the Armed Forces), the Stockholm Accords focus on citizen participation, decentralization gender equity (note there is was no special Peace Accord on Women’s Rights) and identity/ethnicity reshaped.

As anthropologist Charles Hale writes in relation to how what he calls neo-liberal multiculturalism in Guatemala:

The core of neo-liberalism's cultural project is not radical individualism, but the creation of subjects who govern themselves in accordance with the logic of globalized capitalism. The pluralism implicit in this principle-subjects can be individuals, communities or ethnic groups-cuts against the grain of *mestizo* nationalism, and defuses the once-powerful distinction between the forward-looking *mestizo* and the backward Indian. (Hale, 2004, p. 17)

### **PROZACHI Redux: Sanctioning Citizens and Reconstructing Exclusion**

During the cusp years transitioning between PROZACHI I and PROZACHI II, the program took an “extraordinary leap” in the structure, practice and meaning of participation. Tethered to the discourses of decentralization, citizen participation, equity and ethnic and gender inclusion sealed in the both the Guatemalan Peace and Stockholm Accords, PROZACHI incorporated over four hundred local productive groups into a four tier regional association, la *Asociación Regional Ch’orti*, ASORECH. By 1999 PROZACHI had promoted, accompanied, and organized 440 local descent groups and 487 specific interest groups into 129 community level organizations and united those community-based organizations into 8 municipal level associations, inviting into the fold of ASORECH.

Chiquimula and Zacapa: Growth of Campesin@ Organizations through PROZACHI, 1991-1998		
Territorial Level	1991	1998
Local descent Groups (village level)	-	440
Specific interest groups	380	487
Community level (inter-village level)	-	129
Municipal level	-	8
Regional level	-	1

Figure 3.4: Chiquimula and Zacapa: Growth of campesin@ organizations through PROZACHI, 1991–1998 (Source: Support Project for Small-Scale Producers of Zacapa and Chiquimula, PROZACHI cited from Durston, J. (1999). "Building Community Social Capital." CEPAL Review 69: 104-118(Durston, 1999)).

This strategy which one PROZACHI I technician had told me with great pride grew from a desire to better manage the burgeoning number of credit, specific project, and core groups pre-Mitch, ended up birthing the script and action that PROZACHI used to rewrite its past and its future. In so doing it redefined the region’s landscape of inclusion and exclusion. On the one hand, PROZACHI and its offspring ASORECH produced campesin@ organizations where the war had virtually decimated. On the other, ASOTECH sought to constrain campesin@ organizations and their practices within the sanctioned spaces of neoliberal governance. Somehow, despite the lackluster performance of PROZACHI I’s credit, economic and ecological goals, which become more apparent in the next chapter, ASORECH earned PROZACHI I the reputation of “building community social capital” —a reputation that became the banner for PROZACHI II.<sup>197</sup>

In discourse, structure and action, PROZACHI II and the civil society associations that it had begun to form seemed destined by omission and commission to (re) construct exclusions. First,

<sup>197</sup> In 1998, when ECLA (Economic Commission on Latin America) anthropologist John Durston presented his first paper showcasing PROZACHI I as a case study for “building social capital (Durston, 1998),” PROZACHI evaluators, planners and staff somehow de-prioritized the agrarian modernization goals of PROZACHI “D’velopment-speak phrases like social capital and citizen participation came to define the Project’s “achieved and ongoing objectives (MAGA, 1999).” Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, (1993) introduce the idea of social capital in a comparison of development northern and southern Italy, creating an analysis that explains lack of development by lack of social capital. North, 1990 builds a new institutionalism perspective. See Evans, (1997) for a more sophisticated analysis of social capital from state-society synergy. See Wilson (1997) on building social capital and Fox, (1996) on social capital to thicken civil society. Mohan & Stokke, (2000) note that none of these perspectives take seriously the uneven power relations in groups, communities, the local.



with far less funding, a post-Accords framework, and a hangover from Hurricane Mitch emergency spending that had siphoned off its budget to assist wealthy producers along the Rio Grande (see chapter 4), PROZACHI II had to radically reduce the spending frenzy that had characterized PROZACHI I. Directing the bulk of its diminished resources to strengthening ASORECH—“a new modality of co-management with the different associations of producers that it had created”(MAGA, 2003), signified that PROZACHI II had to limit the number of direct beneficiaries.

We always chose the same leaders. Another project would come at the same time and we would choose the same leaders. Animal husbandry, coffee, corn, income generation for the woman—if someone had all the projects they would have a diversified farm. They had to pass on their knowledge to others. But they didn't. If they passed on anything they had learned at all, they passed it to their relatives, those they trust. The benefits of a project never reached most people in a community. We knew this; but as technical staff our job was to guarantee the success of the project. Just choosing the most dynamic leaders tends to guarantee that the project not fail; but not that it reach others. (Interview, September 2010)

The ex-PROZACHI II technician who shared the above reflection was responding to my question, “What from your experience leaves you with a bad taste in your mouth?” In his mind, this trickle-down process hadn't worked, however, and PROZACHI II had created an elite tier of campesin@s with more outside support for access to municipal power.

In the process of prioritizing the completion of quantifiable project goals over deeper transformation of smallholder relations and practices, PROZACHI II had reified or created new village hierarchies still based on the one community glue that the project had drawn on since the beginning: kinship. Further, these elites had become what (Mendoza, forthcoming) describes as gatekeepers poised to capture the resources offered by international cooperation.

Second, as seen in section one, PROZACHI's position as a project under the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Food forced its coordinators into constant compromises with regional and municipal economic and political elites. While overt pressure to serve local elites seemed to decrease in the wake of the international agreements, the very content of those agreements positioned PROZACHI through ASORECH as an emblem of the potential decentralization and citizen participation. The legacies of military rule and elite control in the area, however, twisted the meaning and practice of citizen participation such that “active citizenship and representation” more often than not signified bowing to the will of local mayors over promoting the demands of one's community or organization. It is in this context that I turn to how ASORECH quickly became both product and producer of PROZACHI's turn to civilizing civil society.

In a recent comparative study of social capital and community development in Mexico and Guatemala, Miguel Angel Marquez Zárte writes that the implications [of PROZACHI] for regional development went well beyond productive organization; a major step forward was ASORECH promoting the Mayan Ch'orti' Indigenous Council (*Consejo Indígena Maya-Ch'orti'*, COIMCH) one of the most influential organizations in the region(Márquez Zárte, 2009). Whether most influential or not, ASORECH did indeed with the help/funding/prodding of

PROZACHI II staff create the Maya-Ch'orti' Indigenous Council, COIMCH (bringing together “22 Ch'orti' organizations” in the region to “unif[y] common interests and objectives that have to do with indigenous Maya-Ch'orti' culture” (Márquez Zárte, 2009). In the same way, the Association of Campesina Women of Oriente (*Asociación Campesina de Mujeres de Oriente*, AMCO) invited the participation of a multitude of women's groups that PROZACHI had formed over the years (Note: the Women's Association of Olopa, AMO was a precursor to AMCO) (MAGA, 2003).

As Marquez Zarate suggests, these regional organizations' activities extended far beyond a productive role. The Women's Association and The Indigenous Council as it was called (I never heard anyone attach the words Maya or Ch'orti' when mentioning it, and rarely did people say COIMCH), had a clear *raison d'être*: to motivate women and Ch'orti' population respectively “to take an active part in community matters and local politics”(Hull, n.d.; interviews). Given international priorities, both received tremendous additional funding to do this: *more workshops* in citizen participation, laws pertaining to the Community and Municipal Development Councils, gender, human rights, Peace Accords, the UN Convention Rights the International Labor Organization conventions on Indigenous rights as well as economic development.

Whereas “gender” had been on PROZACHI's radar since 1993, with the formation of ASORECH, PROZACHI II had just “discovered the Ch'orti.” Yet, missing from any written or spoken discourse of this *created* citizen-participation movement is the relationship between the pan-Maya organizing processes in Jocotán, Camotán, Olopa and San Juan Ermita and PROZACHI's desire and ability to produce organizations of small producers. Interestingly, PROZACHI even formed its first Municipal Associations in the same municipalities where the Academy of Maya Languages and the Maya Ch'orti' Coordinator were operating. “Somehow” ASORECH grouped together 22 “Maya-Ch'orti' organizations”—but what they were or had been in relation to the Maya-movement is unclear. One could say that the Indigenous Council More research needs to be done, but most likely PROZACHI I both benefitted from and reacted against the discourses and practices of the Maya movement.<sup>198</sup>

The bottom line was that in a region where historical campesin@ organizations and small producer cooperatives had been decimated by state-sponsored military and para-military repression, PROZACHI planners (Guatemalan State and International Funders) now played a decisive role in creating what constituted sanctioned rural producer, indigenous and women's organizations and what the sanctioned (fundable and acceptable) arenas of action were. While creating new possibilities for participation: both who participated and how was constrained even as it broke with past exclusions.

### **Awaitings and Awakenings: The “Arrival” of Rights**

Right now I do not know anything about human rights, because I haven't even met them, I don't know what kind of people they have meetings with because I haven't had any conversation with them. I have wanted to know something about them, but I don't know how they work, if they go out to the villages or not, maybe

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<sup>198</sup> The PROZACHI I and II technical staff that I interviewed had different opinions on the role of the Maya movement in the region, but they all heralded COIMCH as “an improvement.”

they just meet in town, I don't know. From what I have heard on the radio, human rights is something that we all have, as Guatemalan citizens [my emphasis], we have the right to work in an honorable fashion and to not be isolated or that some be worth more than others. All of us would have to have equal value for our rights. But I don't know. These people haven't arrived yet (Don Simeon, Ch'orti' villager Tablón, Olopa) in (Julián López Garcia, 2001, p. 194). *Author's translation*

Critical of the Toyota four-wheel drive delivery of a universal discourse, (Julián López Garcia, 2001) aptly captures the abyss between the imagined human rights promotion of the peace accords and the experience of local villagers. Deconstructing the key points in a MINUGUA manual he compares the universal rights discourses that MINUGUA staff taught local trainers to reproduce: the rights of children, women's rights, indigenous peoples rights, environmental rights, the rights of those with VIH/SIDA. He then describes the abyss between those rights and how Ch'orti' communities processed some of them as "violations of costumbre" for example, village members would invoke human rights redress if someone stole their chicken (even though the UN manuals had no special section on chicken's rights).

By the time I first visited Olopa in 2005, human rights apparently had arrived, at least to the leaders of producer-based associations. I sat at the dining room table in the "more comfortable" cinder block home of New Day's then President, Don Tomás—a home equipped with television, stereo, and multiple bedrooms and running water; while his two high school daughters grilled me on human rights. They brought out a slew of manuals, some of which they had received at school, some brought home by their father or mother from workshops, all with multiple logos: MINUGUA, UNDP, SEPAZ, CALDH, Rigoberta Menchu Foundation. They told me that many human rights had been violated in Olopa, but now those rights had to be respected. That before you could not criticize the military, and that you could hit your children or wife, but not any more. For these clearly curious and bright young women, saying that we now had human rights meant it was so.

As we talked I kept glancing over to Don Tomas. I had known that he had worked closely with the military during the war. One anthropologist had named him as a land-stealing ladino who had shot a Ch'orti' farmer over a piece of property. A man who had been a loathed collaborator of the military, what did he make of his daughters staunch defense of human rights?

### ***Reworking Rights, Shifting Sensibilities***

The 1996 Peace Accords uncorked years of repressed feelings and claims. Somewhere between Don Simeon's anticipation of the arrival of human rights in Olopa, the Indigenous Council's (COIMCH)'s promotion of neoliberal multi-cultural citizenship, and the creation of PROZACHI's regional offspring, ASORECH, those women and men, Ch'orti' and campesin@s who had been targeted as subjects found ways to rework the meanings of rights and discriminations. Despite and because of how post (dual) accords, discourses and practices attempted to define the parameters of participation and the agendas, those who "participated" reworked them to meet their shifting needs and emerging demands.

In my previous research on post-Hurricane Mitch activism in eastern Honduras, attempts to engage with the onslaught revisionist neoliberal policies after the Stockholm Accords had signaled confusion and fragmentation for the militant campesin@s there. The reverse happened in the Ch'orti' region. The convergence on the local cleared a trail for the repressed producers of the Ch'orti' region to begin to speak out. In 2005 when I first heard members of New Day's leadership assembly stand up and make declarations such as "we can take the highway now and they cannot kill us" "with the peace we have the right to fight", I thought that the phrases indicated the articulation of New Day's organizing strategies with peace accords discourses of rights and reconciliation. I later learned, however, that villagers started re-interpreting indigenous rights, human rights and Peace Accord language through their own experience much earlier. As New Day Coordinator, Omar Jerónimo put it "while Western Guatemala was being 'pacified', the people in the Ch'orti' East were getting mobilized. The 1996 Peace Accords uncorked years of repressed feelings and demands." Indeed, despite the convergence of State, NGO and CSO efforts to "civilize" society in the East, the ways in which Ch'orti' and non-Ch'orti' campesin@s began to adopt and own for themselves the rights discourses of indigenous activism, peace education, gender and citizenship.

Because *of* the way Hurricane Mitch and the Peace Accords converged on ethnicity, gender, and environmental citizenship, the promotion of human rights, and civil society construction were backfiring in their attempts to steer the course of post war civil society in the region away from being more combative.

### **Conclusion—Turning the Path to Peace into the Road to Resistance**

In its attempt to "fix" soils and subjects, PROZACHI I and II infused the region with money, technology and "experts" for over a decade, PROZACHI ultimately fixed, in terms of retaining (rather than reforming or transforming) the class-based, racialized and gendered hierarchies in the region in ways that made them more vulnerable to financial and environmental crises, even as it produced new leaders, altered grassroots expectations, cast a wide net of inclusion and created new spaces and places of dialogue and problem solving.

In that lived conjectural and contradictory history, somewhere between 1992 and 2003, a small part of eastern Guatemala bordering Western Honduras publically became Ch'orti' territory of some sort. No one disputes the borders, but they shift with the intent of who is speaking. For ALMG, the Ch'orti' Linguistic Community includes all those people who speak Ch'orti' and the places where they live (almost exclusively Olopa, and Jocotán). The phrase the Ch'orti' Area can mean anything from historic/cross-border area.

These efforts to "civilize" nascent civil society attempted to define the parameters of discussion and action regarding rights, resources, and recognition. In this process multi-scalar tensions emerged: (1) between the shifting objectives of national and international efforts to foment different expressions of national citizenship even as the state pulled-back the traditional services of citizenship (Dagnino, 1998) and localized power relations dependent upon reinforcing clientelism and fear; (2) between official discourses of inclusion based on middle class, urban, liberal-inspired values (be they feminist, Mayanist, multicultural or universal) and the subjectivities-in-practice (Lave, 2003) of rural women and men, Ch'orti' and campesin@ ; and (3) among the different efforts to "fix" soils and subjects themselves as they compete for the

same rural base for participants and within the rights activism sphere for the same semi-urban Ch'orti' with some formal education.

Converging and colliding, these tensions contributed to a multitude of paradoxical articulations of race, gender and class. At the most basic level, development practitioners racialized their uneven results, fixing "failure" on Ch'orti' subjects. They blamed the fact that "the majority of rural household economies continue[d] to be based on the dual relationship between rain fed maize and bean farming (*milpa*) for self-consumption, and seasonal wage labor for cash", on Ch'orti'" "cultural qualities": their fatalism and lack of entrepreneurial spirit(P. Warren, 2006, pp. 12-13).

Rural development discourses made race invisible while prioritizing women's participation and gender equity. Yet practitioners often reproduced and sometimes reinforced racial biases and exclusions as much as gendered ones. Cultural rights activists attempted to make visible Guatemalan histories of racialized dispossession, military repression, cultural and political exclusion and indigenous resistance to each; while reproducing a cultural and geographic bias that valorized Western Maya experience over that of the Ch'orti'. Peace process NGOs attempts to introduce citizenship and rights discourses conducive to the goals of neo-liberal multiculturalism and liberal democracy relied upon and sought to strengthen municipal structures of citizen participation that operated in and through situated racial, gendered, class and spatial privileges. In other words, neither critique nor erasure nor valorization nor "improvement" could remove or supplant the prejudices (urban, patriarchal, ladino/criollo and/or Western Maya) that different project staff had of the region and its people. Most significantly, the contradictions and paradoxes drew attention away from the one common silence, "elephant in the room:" land redistribution and the class-based, racialized, and gendered dynamics that informed processes of possession and dispossession. Thus the discourses and official policies, and even the Maya activist organizations, no matter what liberating potential they might have held, were often limited and even reshaped by existing subjectivities and structures as "experts" engaged with the silences, fears, and spaces of difference in the Ch'orti' East. Even so, these programs and associated tensions created a plethora of new public spaces and political possibilities to discuss and denounce past and ongoing experiences of violence, dispossession, and social exclusion. Further, as the next chapter will make more evident, by offering all sorts of material incentives for participation, they created opportunities for every-day acts of subversion.

Moreover, they produced the conditions for new "language(s) of contention" (Roseberry, 1994) to emerge and gain force, but not with the words or meanings one would expect. Some activists in Olopa began to use the word "discriminate" indiscriminately: one was discriminated against when someone perceived to be positioned higher in a race-class hierarchy did not agree with one's perspective. Discriminate also was the word, Ch'orti' campesin@s started to deploy for criticism and malicious gossip. If someone said something bad about you, they were discriminating against you. Similarly, as mentioned above the convergence of human rights discourses with the statements like "with peace, they [military, death squads] can no longer just kill us" and "with democracy we can all have our opinion," produced and gave traction to the "right to fight" (without being killed). The subjects targeted for "equitable sustainable development," "mayanization," "citizenship," and "peace" as bridges to market integration, read and lived the discourses, practices, and policies of intervening State institutions and non-governmental organizations through their own histories, memories and situated practices. The

silence of the lands on the land question was still intact, but fear was waning in other ways. A new terrain of struggle was in the making when the international coffee crisis hit the region. (Julián López García & Metz, 2002, p. 242) link the loss of the Ch'orti's ethnic self-esteem to the inability guarantee sustenance of their families.

## Chapter 4

### Disastrous De(bt)velopment: Chronicle of a Crisis Foretold

#### Introduction

I didn't go looking for money; it came looking for me. [The credit promoter] saw my little shack and asked some questions about what we ate, how much land I farmed, and how I paid for fertilizer and seed. Then he said he could help my family get out of this situation. (Don Pedro from El Molino in Olopa)

When PROZACHI started offering loans, there were whole communities *que no conocían el dinero* (literally...that didn't know...were unfamiliar with money). Can you imagine what it was like for them? (Omar Jerónimo, Coordinator)

To the surprise of poor Ch'orti' and other campesin@s in the area, a year or so before the Zacapa-Chiquimula Smallholders Project (PROZACHI I) was launched, money "started looking for" them, beginning with a few isolated projects (Palma-Ramos, 2001). Deeply entwined with the overlapping and competing efforts to "fix" soils and subjects, state and private neoliberal peacemaking initiatives in the 1990s unsheathed credit as their sword to slay rural poverty in the region. Although not unique to the Ch'orti' East, to Guatemala, or even to Central America, the contradictions that arose as divergent pro-poor credit crusades attempted to transform divergent subjects, landscapes, and ultimately what I call *lendscapes* in the area reveals how credit for development can become dangerously linked to debt and disaster.

Taking as a starting point PROZACHI I's attempt to produce "modern" agrarian subjects and landscapes as analyzed in the preceding chapter, this chapter turns to the specific development practice of providing credit to the rural "poor." The IFAD strategy, which led the way in adapting the paradigm of Integrated Rural Development to neoliberal free market priorities (de Janvry & Sadoulet, 2000, p. 9) put technological transformation at its core with pro-poor rural credit at its service. The rural projects that PROZACHI I and, to a lesser extent, PROZACHI II staff promoted—small scale coffee production, animal husbandry, women's participation in market activities, vegetable production and intensification of basic grain production—all depended as much on financing as on technology, and maybe more. In a compilation of official and unofficial evaluations of IFAD's programs from 1979 to 2004, a group of seven professionals from IFAD admitted that the servant (credit) had assumed the role of master with more limited success in its goals of technological transformation.

In the strategy of technological modernization the principle ingredient is the technological message in that credit is an instrument that is applied to reduce or eliminate the restrictions that were limiting the process of adoption of technology; it is taken for granted that credit is always necessary for modernization. In practice however, credit turns out to be such an attractive political instrument that it continues occupying a privileged seat of honor. (Berdegúe, et al., 2004, p. 16)

This chapter is about events in four municipalities when, in the context of neoliberal peacemaking, credit came to occupy the seat of honor at the banquet of rural development.

Despite project objectives to the contrary, PROZACHI's planned link between technological modernization and the credit mechanism seemed to follow the World Bank's stricter neoclassical approach to agrarian development, which subordinated or ignored local municipal histories and the power-laden dynamics that had produced the Ch'orti' area. As the previous chapter argues, PROZACHI began its work with few clues about the area's racialized political histories, land tenure structures, and the restrictions these both presented to its attempt to create neoliberal producers. Nor were they aware of existing *lendscapes*: the divergent views of the material and meaningful ways in which concrete lending and borrowing practices shape and are shaped by non-market practices linked to social reproduction, cultural reproduction, and histories and memories of dispossession.<sup>199</sup> It is by examining the contentious and contingent process of *lendscape* transformation from PROZACHI I to microfinance that I reveal the multi-arena production of an unpayable agrarian debt. Further, PROZACHI's decentralized state-led rural credit program for smallholders hooked into and reworked *lendscapes* in such a way as to *set the stage* for a post-Hurricane Mitch flood of microfinance and savings and loan cooperatives' initiatives, using non-subsidized credit as a central strategy for reducing regional poverty in the midst of disasters.

Not all credit is necessarily disastrous, but pro-poor credit in the Ch'orti' area was. The particular way that institutions and programs, especially PROZACHI I, used credit as the lynchpin to transform agrarian landscapes shaped by dispossession heightened farmers' vulnerability to natural phenomena and market fluctuations. This transformation, when combined with the fact that through Hurricane Mitch borrowers and lenders made credit not just a tool of pro-poor development but also a panacea for crises. In this sense, rural lending programs to small producers in the Ch'orti' East become a likely "mode of accumulation by dispossession" even as they speak "the language of empowering the poor" (Elyachar, 2005, p. 29). Most importantly, I argue that the ways that these processes of de(bt)velopment worked in and through differently constituted gender, class and race relations within and between municipalities, and the subject and soil fixing processes of chapter 3 created a highly uneven geographic, gendered, and racialized *debtscape*.

Through an examination of the interplay between credit and crises, in this chapter, I lay out the key institutional dynamics and everyday practices that produced an uneven and unpayable *campesin@* debt in the Ch'orti' area. First, the programs and practices established by both lenders and borrowers created new material and meaningful practices in the region. Linked to histories and memories of racialized dispossession and everyday demands of social reproduction, these practices shaped the production of uneven geographies of debt itself. Second, questions of gender, race, class, and place of lending and borrowing are crucial to mapping the explosive relationship between credit and crises that I call disastrous de(bt)velopment. Finally, where, when, how, and why land got tied to access to credit and the production of debtors foreshadows the brewing relationship between disastrous de(bt)velopment and collective struggle examined in chapters 5 and 6. Through this analysis, I push beyond questioning the slippery attraction of credit as skeleton key for technological modernization or magic bullet for poverty reduction, to make visible the concrete and constrained ways by which different actors negotiate changing

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<sup>199</sup> If "scape" means: scenery view (n.) "scenery view," 1773, abstracted from landscape (q.v.); as a new comb. element, first attested use is 1796, in prisonscape." Cited from: Online Etymology Dictionary (<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=scape&searchmode=none>).



formal credit opportunities, and their concrete political and ecological stakes in the four municipalities where New Day emerged. The chapter is a chronicle of a crisis foretold,

*Janus-faced lending: Rural credit and Pro-poor microfinance in the 1990s*

To build this argument, I trace the connections and continuities in the gradual shift from state-led directed rural credit born on the cusp of decentralization and state cutbacks to the microfinance revolution. Analysts, critical or not, often treat directed rural credit and pro-poor rural microfinance as discrete development paths, seeing the latter as intending to solve both the constraints on clients and the financial unsustainability of lending institutions (Bastiaensen & Marchetti, 2011b). The tendency to regard these initiatives separately and in mutual opposition obscures both the glaring contradiction in microfinance among developmental goals, pro-poor mission, and the financial sustainability of lending institutions (Bastiaensen & Marchetti, 2011a, pp. 466-475). What happened in the Ch'orti' region exposes important historical and geographic connections and continuities between directed rural credit and microfinance. Uncovering continuities between these initiatives while flagging divergence is crucial for understanding the relationship between credit as a tool for neoliberal development and the reproduction of exclusionary and oppressive linkages of place, power, and difference—and everyday practices to rework them.

My purpose is not to evaluate directed agricultural credit and microfinance as such but to make visible the Janus-faced, contradictory dynamics that set a process of de(bt)velopment in motion, and fueled it through “natural disaster” and social, cultural, economic, and geographic difference. And most importantly, I seek to show how these processes began to shift the terrain of struggle in the Ch'orti' East. As Julia Elyachar so powerfully asks in her ethnography of micro-finance in Egypt:

What happens when cultural practices of the poor become raw materials for market expansion? “What happens when cultural practices of the poor are financialized through debt and tapped as a source of profits for banks? What is the outcome to instill new economic subjectivities conducive to neoliberal markets through the establishment of NGOs that teach people to conceptualize their lives in terms of profit and loss? (Elyachar, 2005, p. 191)

Understanding the historically and geographically specific processes and practices at play, their connections to national and international designs and their uneven material and meaningful results in the four municipalities is crucial for grasping who joined New Day—and from where—and provides a clue about why.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> In that sense while clearly important, my intent is not to do an analysis—either qualitative or quantitative—of the economic, racialized, or gendered effects of the loans themselves or the overall effects of credit or the social performance of financial institutions—what (Bastiaensen & Marchetti, 2011b) calls the three holy grails currently being heavily financed and used in debates between those who critique and those who celebrate microfinance. Rather, I examine the divergent processes and practices that created an unpayable rural debt that cut across class, gender and race lines and what the process of de(bt)velopment tells us about disaster, dispossession, and difference.

## *On Method*

This chapter in essence reconstructs history backwards: missing are the celebratory stories of Calypso from Corozal Arriba in La Unión or Santos in Quetzaltepeque, or Doña Juliana from Pacren and many others showcased by PROZACHI or the lending institutions as entrepreneurial successes. Rather, I am interested in how thousands of people found themselves with debts they could not pay. I also try to sketch a picture not of the entire *embodiment* of debt in the region, but of *those bodies* that chose (with all the conditions choice entails) to organize against the debt. In this sense it is a chronicle of a crisis foretold in two ways: first because I show the concrete articulations through which “impending crisis” is itself produced, and second because we are rereading the process of lending through the lens of those who announced the crisis of unpayable debt.

To tell this chronicle of debt, then, I use the database constructed by New Day<sup>201</sup> and the national multi-sectoral alliance *Plataforma Agraria*<sup>202</sup> and semi-structured interviews and participant-observation, returning to PROZACHI documents to grasp the intent and contradictions that set smallholder credit in motion. I do neither a textual analysis nor an evaluation of the credit program. Unless otherwise stated, the numbers and percentages shown in every table, chart, and graph relate solely to the people who between 2003 and 2004 joined New Day and provided information about their loans in arrears.<sup>203</sup>

I also want to cast a shadow of doubt around the usefulness of counting loans and debt, even as I show how they do count in forging the terrain of struggle. In chapter 2, sedimented silences and political limits tied to counting bodies mark particular geographies of forgetting. In this chapter, the conceptual and technical limits of a survey done by an underfunded grassroots organization, the subjective conditions that shaped the information provided, and the capillary power through which particular numbers gain force all suggest that on its own the database can point to certain trends and influences, but the numbers themselves are not exact like the confidential records of

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<sup>201</sup> As explained in the next footnote, the survey data had lots of errors. I did not try to redo the survey for three fundamental reasons: (a) I would have been challenging the integrity of the original survey; (b) I would have been subjecting families to one more survey at a moment in their lives when surveys represented false promises; and (c) it would have required hiring a local team (as the answers given to a *gringa* might differ), and I did not have the resources.

<sup>202</sup> I discuss *Plataforma Agraria* more in chapters 6 and 7. *Plataforma Agraria* emerged in an effort by NGOs and some of the grassroots campesin@ indigenous organizations with whom they worked to construct an alternative agrarian proposal for the country.

<sup>203</sup> In 2004, after New Day joined *Plataforma Agraria*, the alliance assigned a research team to carry out a quantitative study of the original members of New Day members in six municipalities, with 99 percent of the loans concentrated in La Unión, Olopa, Jocotán, and Camotán. The team gathered information on members' family situation, their economic activities, their income level, family nutritional quality, and their credit situation. The database tabulates 3,339 cases of debt (1,346 women, approximately 40 percent, and 1,993 men, approximately 60 percent), with unfortunately a number of holes and indecipherable repetitions in the information gathered. The study reported the debt of members as totaling Q40,196,496.00; a sum that, given mounting interests and penalties, reflected a higher level of indebtedness than that existing when people started joining New Day. At the same time, while the study was able to pinpoint more than a thousand people who had debts with more than one credit institution, it did not group household members to understand both family survival strategies and the complicated dynamics of the snare of multiple debt. I could not quantitatively address all the errors in the data. Yet, my interviews, participant observation, and cross referencing of family data for which I knew the names of both spouses (generally community leaders) confirms that multiple debt is a family phenomenon that must be understood in the context of the feminization of credit and the couplings of power and difference that shape family dynamics.

the financial institutions that later faced a non-payment movement. As I draw on the database in support of a claim or sub-claim, I do so either because I have supporting ethnographic material<sup>204</sup> or because I am highlighting contradictions or inconsistencies that invite future research.

### *The road (map) to disaster*

This chapter has five sections. The first three focus specifically on the practices of lenders and borrowers in and through PROZACHI I (1991–1998). Section I concentrates on the contradictions between project goals and lending conventions, section II shows the paradoxes and subversions of nature, land rights, and social production as project goals and promoters' quotas hook up with the demands (material and symbolic) of life and the ensuing borrowing practices. Section III examines the same time period in terms of how the lending and borrowing practices described in sections I and II begin to produce uneven geographies of debt. Together, these sections show how in an attempt to successfully implement its sustainable development program, PROZACHI I catalyzed a dynamic of lending and borrowing that began to transform *landscapes* in the Ch'orti' area and unwittingly sowed the seeds of debt and the reproduction of debt for landless and land-poor men and women.

Section IV, 1998–2004, then shows how borrowers take advantage of the storm of new loans, deepening the uneven geographies of debt. I analyze both the relationship between disaster and credit and the continuities and changes in the uneven geographies of debt that are taking shape. Section V reflects on the insecurity that over a decade of lending has fostered, drawing special attention to individuals and households with multiple debt, and the danger of tying loans to the little bit of land that people have. Together they elucidate the chapter's title: Disastrous De(bt)velopment.

### **Section 1—Sowing the Seeds of De(bt)velopment: Burgeoning Practices of Pro-poor Credit**

What existed in the [Ch'orti'] region were unofficial economic structures. Each town had maybe five families who acted as coyotes (usurious moneylenders). They were the ones who bought up the little bit of coffee that others produced, with the weight scales in their favor of course. Over time a whole dynamic had developed where these families lent money to smaller producers at critical moments. They gave money, they gave fertilizer, they gave pesticides, they rented land at exorbitant interests. They gave for the quinceañera dress, the dress for the fifteenth birthday [like a sweet sixteen coming out party], they gave for the tape recorder, they gave for everything—in exchange for the harvest. (Interview with Gregorio (pseudonym) ex-technical staff of PROZACHI I and II, 11/2/1010)

The harvest mentioned by the ex-staff above who I will call Gregorio refers to both crops and labor. Gregorio went on to explain what a number campesin@s had told me, that the interest rates for these informal loans were exorbitant. While he did not have details, we later calculated that on coffee farms, people with loans from coffee growers worked for half the wage rate of those without. Further, credit helped tie the poor to the rich, and country indigenous people to

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<sup>204</sup> I include quotes from debtors gathered by Luis Galicia for the Agrarian Platform in 2004, cited either as the study or as Galicia's interview transcripts.

town ladinos, in clientelistic ways that reproduced existing social, racial, and economic hierarchies

Of course, neither the usurious lending structure that Gregorio described nor the pro-poor development that attempted to address it was unique to the Ch'orti' region, to Guatemala, or even to Central America.<sup>205</sup> Increasing ties to the market economy (through needs produced by economic freedom or ideological *desire*) made access to capital an ever-increasing necessity, even for subsistence farmers. Yet, how this purported necessity and development responses to it hooked up with histories and memories of racialized exclusion and exploitation provides a window into understanding how the terrain of rights, resources, and recognition described in the last chapter becomes a terrain of resistance in the next.

To counter the social relations of traditional landscapes described by Gregorio, between 1991 and 1998 PROZACHI I provided access to credit to an estimated 7,156 landless and land poor campesin@s in the Ch'orti' area. This expansion of formal credit to “fix soils and subjects” represented an unprecedented privileging of rural poor in general and of women and indigenous specifically—a monumental help for small producers and artisans to escape the usurious jaws of local loan sharks or the perilous and painful reality of outmigration. Nevertheless, the borrowing and lending dynamics that emerged in relation to structural constraints, historical geographies, and other development processes in the area turned PROZACHI's directed rural agricultural credit scheme into a seedbed of debt.

### **A Tenuous Engagement: Wedding Entrepreneurial Citizenship to Formal Institutional Credit**

Crucial to transforming these exploitative *landscapes* was the marriage of entrepreneurial citizenship to formal institutional credit first and foremost through PROZACHI I. As mentioned in the last chapter, the original 1989 PROZACHI design proposed to use credit as a tool to incorporate participation, entrepreneurial subject-making, and local institution building into customary state-led technology transfers. The project established a fund of USD 8.63 million (later reduced to USD 5.1 million), earmarking it to support its 5,200 beneficiaries with holdings of less than 12.3 acres (5 hectares) of land. In IFAD tradition, the credit established two credit mechanisms: Grameen-like solidarity groups (see below an explanation of this mechanism and the tensions arising from making it work in practice) and individual credit. The project plan set ceilings of USD 1,800 per solidarity group participant<sup>206</sup> (with USD 450 the average per member for short-term credit) and USD 2,600 per individual credits (with 75 percent of credit going to short-term loans). Accordingly, the state-owned National Bank for Agricultural Development (BANDESA) would execute (with the support of PROZACHI staff) a creative participatory credit design providing working capital and productive investments including agro-processing enterprises, forestry recovery areas, and soil conservation within the individual farms (I. F. f. A. D. IFAD, 1989).

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<sup>205</sup> See (Bastiaensen & Marchetti, 2011a) for a concrete analysis of how with the great Central American microfinance crisis (2008–2011) usurious lending practices have actually increased to pay off debts to microfinance institutions.

<sup>206</sup> In the first years BANDESA insisted that someone in the solidarity group put up a land title for collateral. This requirement officially changed in 1993.

The plan to use BANDESA carried with it the neoliberal inspired goal of getting the state institution to reduce transaction costs and become more market oriented. Credit extensionists formed local credit committees with the participation of a project-appointed village representative and representatives from the BANDESA management and technical divisions. These committees supervised the credit process executed by local associations to reduce public bureaucracy and lower BANDESA costs.<sup>207</sup> Loan repayments were to go directly into saving accounts for beneficiaries that could serve to fast-track disbursement of future loans. Eventually the loan committees themselves would be able to prepare and process credit requests and credit operations so that beneficiaries would eventually achieve complete independence from them (I. F. f. A. D. IFAD, 1989).

As described in chapter 3, the project established seven farm models for different agricultural niches in the area's three ecological zones—humid, sub-humid, and dry—to which smallholders had access<sup>208</sup> and put together technological and credit packages for each model. As the preceding chapter suggested PROZACHI I tied virtually every activity it promoted to access to credit—with the initial assumption that the combined offer of credit and technology would not just be a tool for, first, agrarian modernization and, later, community development<sup>209</sup> but also a carrot for inducing participation into the modernization process.<sup>210</sup> This hand-in-glove relationship between technological modernization and credit meant that PROZACHI's search for suitable subjects sketched in the preceding chapter was a first step in the search for suitable borrowers.

### ***The best loan is the loan not granted (to the indigenous poor)***

Both the search for borrowers and the transformation of *landscapes* proved more difficult than IFAD planners had imagined and PROZACHI staff had hoped. During the first two years, project objectives to transform the region's traditional lending and borrowing practices and to put BANDESA at the service of smallholders rarely found common ground, with BANDESA protocols and regulations concerning registered land tenure as a loan requirement. With the credit component, as with rest the PROZACHI activities, PROZACHI coordinators and staff had navigated an institutional and organizational minefield to launch the program. IFAD deposited USD 8.3 million into BANDESA, and credit promoters employed by the bank were the privileged staff, going out to villages in their four-wheel drive jeeps, which propelled clouds of

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<sup>207</sup> Because this proposed credit methodology differed from that used by BANDESA at the time (I. F. f. A. D. IFAD, 1989, p. 9), IFAD agreed to collaborate in the restructuring of BANDESA in the Departments of Zacapa and Chiquimula (Ibid, 18). This new modality reflects the kind of structural changes that were precursors to the neoliberal overhaul of national development banks that occurred in the mid to late 1990s, with which the banks became mixed-capital institutions relatively unfettered by state bureaucracy.

<sup>208</sup> These are the labels that PROZACHI-IFAD uses. The richer soils along the Rio Grande and Jupilingo rivers were the property of wealthy non-indigenous townspeople and even some Hondurans. See detailed description of agro-ecological conditions in chapter 3.

<sup>209</sup> Insert here changes in IFAD

<sup>210</sup> In the framework of technological modernization “credit is an instrument that is applied to reduce or eliminate the restrictions that were limiting the process of adoption of technology; it is taken for granted that credit is always necessary for modernization” (Berdegue, et al., 2004, p. 16). Within the framework of “modernization,” the time lag between the tortoise of technological change without adequate market access and the hare of credit bedeviled the public agrarian development programs worldwide (Bastiaensen & Marchetti, 2011b) PROZACHI I's initial smallholder credit program that channeled financial resources through the National Agricultural Development Bank, BANDESA, the Ch'orti' region was no exception.

dust that engulfed PROZACHI technicians on motorcycles.<sup>211</sup> Yet money and vehicles notwithstanding, a constant struggle existed between PROZACHI coordinators and BANDESA managers to insert agreed-upon changes in lending policies, with BANDESA winning all the first rounds.

The obstacles faced by PROZACHI I in its search for suitable subjects (chapter 3) increased exponentially in relation to the credit program. First, BANDESA promoters demanded that land be put up as collateral; families that might have farmed the same land for generations or at least decades still possessed no legal documents proving ownership. Second, campesin@s with formal deeds to their land were not inclined to risk losing it by using it for collateral. The historic memories of punishment associated with state-sponsored debt peonage and villagers' fears rooted in long-standing links between debt and dispossession configured a grueling process for developing a viable rural credit program. That process was particularly salient for long-term credits, which PROZACHI deemed necessary for effective technological transfers and increased income. As one campesino reported, "I prefer short-time loans with people I know, even in if the terms are bad. I do not like debts that stay with me for many years" (Lundius, 1999, 33). Indeed, some small producers even preferred the usurious but familiar conditions linked to patron-client relations imposed by larger landowners to the more reasonable interest rates of a distant state institution.

Even when smallholders could meet and were willing to submit to BANDESA requirements, they rarely acquired loans, despite PROZACHI project goals. BANDESA technical staff set up the credit committees in each village (four people who reviewed the lists of loan requests) in such a way that no one knew who was included in them. Ostensibly, "[t]hey were hidden so that no one could take reprisal on them or bribe them. They knew the people on the list and would say 'not this one, he's a drunk; not this one, he has three women and won't be able to pay'" (Interview 11/3/2010). But local feuds and power dynamics could certainly influence credit committee recommendations. More to the point, committee members did not want to make mistakes for fear of being held accountable in case of default (even though no such accountability path existed). Between the beginning of the program in 1991 and the visit of the IFAD Mission in 1993, only 12 percent of the portfolio had been lent—25 percent of the target goal for that period, mainly to the "wealthiest of the poor" (L. A. a. t. C. D. o. IFAD & Lundius, 1998, p. 33). Indeed, as one ex-PROZACHI I staff person asserted, "The Bank was happy having the money just sit there. That was part of the BANDESA people's *tacache* (operating style). [The BANDESA credit coordinator] would say, "the best loan is the one not granted." He omitted the unspoken "to the poor."

### **Opening the Faucet: Credit Frenzy and Coffee Mania**

Everyone knew they were going to give money. Everyone said afterwards: "The money is a gift, the President [when he announced the program in Chiquimula] said the money was a gift." What a fool, how politically stupid! (interview "Gregorio" 11/02/2010)

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<sup>211</sup>Interestingly the PROZACHI loan promoters were the "elite" of PROZACHI. They drove 4 wheel drive jeeps while the other technical staff had motorcycles, letting villagers know "which program, which discourse" was more important.

After almost two years of the project struggling with village members and the bank, a 1993 evaluation visit from an IFAD mission turned BANDESA's credit policy on its head. By forcing BANDESA to change its credit requirements designed for existing entrepreneurs to facilitate transforming rural poor into entrepreneurs, IFAD effectively "opened the faucet" for a credit frenzy and coffee mania. In so doing, IFAD/PROZACHI effectively altered lending and borrowing practices in the region, though, not perhaps in the ways they had envisioned. On the one hand they set in process what Gregorio called credit frenzy—giving loans to everyone with little or no attention to their capacity to pay or to how the use of the loan might effect the borrowers' lives, social relations, or soils. On the other, by pushing below-market loans together with technological and marketing assistance for coffee on those who had been historically excluded and dispossessed in the transition to coffee production, PROZACHI rocked the foundations of the Ch'orti' highlands.

### ***Grameen goes to Guatemala (Sort-of): Microfinance Technology in a State Owned Agricultural Development Bank***

The project went from one extreme to the other. First BANDESA was turning everyone down; then they couldn't lend the money fast enough. People who had never had access to that kind of cash before suddenly had money. All they had to do was show their identity document (Interview PROZACHI II and ASORECH technical staff, 11/2/2010)

First and foremost IFAD used its trustee-owner card to push BANDESA to accept *domino pleno*, unregistered land titles, as collateral and to adopt a micro-finance inspired, Grameen-like method of pro-poor lending.<sup>212</sup> People no longer needed legally titled property to access credit; they could borrow money if they joined a solidarity group of 10–20 members among which at least one possessed an identity document.<sup>213</sup> About 23 percent of the loans were made up to 1998 under this flexible microfinance approach. With peer pressure or support taking the place of collateral, lack of formal land ownership was no longer a barrier to participation. Rather, for anyone in the group to receive a loan again, all members had to pay. Based on women's reported experience in Bangladesh, it was assumed that the groups would build social cohesion and guarantee solidarity—two assumptions that I confront later in this chapter.

### **Bending the Credit Lynchpin**

But the solidarity groups and individual loans did not work as planned. Promoters and technicians sometimes failed to provide the promised accompaniment of investments or sidestepped project guidelines of group formation, payment capacity, and investment viability to make loan quotas and skim off part of the money loaned. Particularly in the period 1994–95, when the work was still relatively new and the pressure to loan was great, promoters formed

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<sup>212</sup> IFAD had given Mohammed Yunus the seed capital for Grameen bank, and its 1989 design for the credit component was one of the first attempts to transform agricultural state development banks before their massive worldwide privatization (Roy, 2010, p. 48) cited by WN: Add two references on Grameen Bank plus Ananya Roy's evaluation in *Poverty Capital*

<sup>213</sup> IFAD had given Mohammed Yunus the seed capital for Grameen bank (Roy, 2010, p. 48), and the 1993 Mission insisted that BANDESA implement a Grameen-type model where participation in solidarity groups (mutual responsibility and/or peer pressure) be—when land titles were not available.

solidarity groups by “*dedocracia*” [finger-pointing democracy], in which they assigned people to a group even if they did not know each other, making it hard for members to actually support one another or build social cohesion. At best, “if one person didn’t pay, everyone else would pitch in to make the payment; then they’d say good riddance to that person, never wanting to see him or her again.” The ways in which promoters cut corners to meet goals led to an “almost generalized rejection” of solidarity groups in the region (I. F. f. A. D. IFAD, 1997). Also, as I discuss more fully in terms of their gendered ramifications, the dynamics within the solidarity groups tended to mirror existing social relations rather than to transform them.

Moreover, to distribute funds more quickly, PROZACHI trained all technical staff to fill out the long and complicated BANDESA loan applications. But the project goals of technical staff members were different from those of the bank. As Gregorio reflected,

After the visit from IFAD (1993), [the directors] told us...o.k. everyone does credit. We all had courses on how to fill out the credit forms. They taught us all to bring these formulas to the communities and [moving hands as if filling out a ton of papers and making sound of papers passing rapidly] we made the projects viable...we were under great pressure to allocate the money. Then, when we brought all the papers to BANDESA, they said ‘ahh what are we going to do with these?’ PROZACHI had to bring in its own staff to process the loans (Interview, 11/2/2010).<sup>214</sup>

The possibility of access to credit made coffee the passageway to the market that planners had intended it to be. Gregorio continued:

Once loans became possible, the coffee-mania came in; prices were high, suddenly everyone wanted to plant coffee. PROZACHI signs an accord so that the private National Coffee-growers Association ANACAFE, provide assistance, the program contracts more field staff, a very famous agronomist from Gualan (Zacapa) gets put in charge and they start to train everyone about coffee, how to select seed, how to start a nursery, how to fertilize...it didn’t matter where, everyone had to learn about coffee (Ibid).

Indeed, PROZACHI’s zeal to disburse loans meant that many extensionists or promoters got involved in approving loans with very little knowledge of the rules of the finance system and without any sense of responsibility in terms of loan repayment (Ruiz, et al., 2004, p. 10). Often this zeal mixed with coercion and deceit in the effort to make rural pro-poor credit a reality in the region. Promoters sidestepped project guidelines for solidarity group formation. To make quotas, they fudged information on collateral, payment capacity, and investment viability, and subtly coerced men and women into accepting loans with insinuations that the loan was not like past loans. The loan was for their family’s good, not for the good of BANDESA or PROZACHI. In the worst cases, extensionists presented loans as a mutually beneficial opportunity and skimmed off part of the money loaned in agreement with the beneficiary. In the next section I examine some of the effects of these dynamics on land, class and power.

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<sup>214</sup>Nor did BANDESA staff in general ever fully buy into doing the paperwork and footwork for the size of loans for which most small producers applied.



## Section 2—The Political Ecology of Borrowing (1991–1998)

With its priority of market integration PROZACHI became part of and reinforced the longer history of debt-disaster cycle, reducing productive diversity and depleting soils as coffee mania took hold. Don Seferino from an *aldea* in La Unión evokes the meaning of prioritizing coffee:

I do not have title to any land of my own. But my wife and I thought that maybe we could get a loan to work the land her father had left to her. In 1999, coffee prices were high. A promoter from PROZACHI arrived. He said, “Coffee prices are high, why don’t you cut down your fruit trees, take out a loan and plant more coffee?” All I had to do (besides put the land (freehold) up for collateral) was to cut down the fruit trees we had on the land. Well, I did what he said, put up the land for collateral and planted the coffee. You should have seen it before. We had a big mango tree, grapefruits, oranges...

While Don Seferino had his doubts, he fell prey to the combined sirens of coffee and credit.<sup>215</sup> I originally thought that Don Seferino had exaggerated the story to convince me of the errors of the savings and loan cooperatives. But, I soon heard the same story from different participants during a New Day workshop in a Camotán village, where people had participated in PROZACHI. “Look around, everywhere that your eyes can see there used to be fruit trees,” one community leader said, “now we have none.” Finally, I spoke one day with Don Seferino’s wife Luz, wondering what she thought, since the land had been hers. Her eyes betrayed no disagreement with Seferino, but she did regret the decision: “We put all our hope in coffee,” she said sadly shaking her head.

### The Politics of Loan Sharks and the Historical Structures of Debt

Whereas coffee mania led promoters to push smallholders into planting coffee where the soil was not apt or where fruit trees once abounded, it also meant uprooting the status quo. Indeed, as the program began to accomplish its goal of putting both coffee and credit into the hands of the indigenous poor, it cracked the symbolic and to some extent material foundation of power and difference in the region. In the historical coffee growing regions of Olopa and La Unión, it ignited controversy when campesin@s, mainly indigenous, who knew coffee as something they drank from the few bushes around their homes, or who picked under horrible conditions to pay back loans or earn some cash, suddenly could *both* bypass loan sharks and become coffee-producers. For Olopan ladino coffee growers who had historically tricked, stolen, coerced, and bought indigenous producers “off of their land” to expand coffee production (chapter 2), that campesin@ producers grow coffee was unthinkable and unacceptable. Even Ch’orti’ and *mestizo* campesin@s had their doubts. Gregorio explained how townspeople had questioned them:

Coffee is for the rich, What do villagers know about planting coffee?” they [the town ladinos ] said. The change was hard for both. People from the villages also used to be afraid of coffee. They had dedicated themselves to picking coffee at the price the growers wanted. They were the labor, it was feudalism in the 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> In the next chapter I discuss the crucial role that Don Seferino’s testimony plays in perhaps the most important negotiation that New Day had with the government to propose alternative solutions to the regions’ debt crisis.

century. So when we appeared wanting to lend people money to plant coffee, they [the traditional loan sharks] got mad.

Whatever the actual material effects of turning rural, often indigenous, men and women into credit-worthy subjects, the traditional loan sharks did not want new fish in their waters. The threats that *finqueros* and loan sharks made to PROZACHI staff and to project participants also shaped the way credit was understood and used in the region. Not surprisingly, elites in the highland areas of Olopa and La Unión both felt threatened, but the historical antagonism between town ladinos and the indigenous villages in Olopa made the backlash there more racist and dangerous.

In Olopa, the mayor was one of them [a loan shark and coffee planter]. He called us in and yelled, “Why are you organizing those stupid Indians, they are drunks, *chicheros* (people who make corn liquor)? They are going to steal that money! Get out of here,” he said. That was a threat against us. (interview with Emilio, ex PROZACHI II and ASORECH staff, October, 10 2010)<sup>216</sup>

### **The “Nature” of Loans: Tightening the Simple Reproduction Squeeze**

While challenging political relations, the convergence of coffee-mania and credit frenzy entailed a reworking of landscapes that often contributed to the depletion of fragile soils. Watersheds were contaminated and the simple reproduction squeeze intensified as many producers shifted basic grain soils to coffee production while following the technical plans of PROZACHI to increase chemical inputs in reduced acres dedicated to basic grains. Disastrous De(bt)velopment was equally intense in arid and semi-humid non-coffee producing terrains of Jocotán and Camotán, where PROZACHI I loans increased basic grain-producing families’ dependence on fertilizers and chemicals, thus increasing the vicious cycle of depletion of socials, the reproductive squeeze in the market, and indebtedness, which would turn climate events into disasters in 1998 and chronic malnutrition with spot famines in 2000.

As shown in the last chapter, PROZACHI I reworking of landscapes often contributed to the depletion of fragile soils, the contamination of watersheds, and the intensification of the simple reproduction squeeze as many producers shifted basic grain soils to coffee production. Planners’ logic in promoting coffee was not only market oriented. The idea that coffee fixed hillside soils while the slash and burn method of campesin@ and indigenous basic grain production destroyed hillsides helped fuel the booster campaign for coffee.<sup>217</sup> Their logic obliterated centuries when crop rotation combined with slash and burn added up to sustainable agriculture, and that the combined multiple processions of dispossession, and dividing now meager landholding among offspring had produced the simple reproduction squeeze, not farming practices. Nor did it take into account the historical patterns of indebtedness in coffee areas and how credit was for the poor fatally coupled with a scarcity of non-eroded land and wet and dry cycles. Nor did it take into account that, before and after the introduction of coffee, most Ch’orti’ campesin@s needed

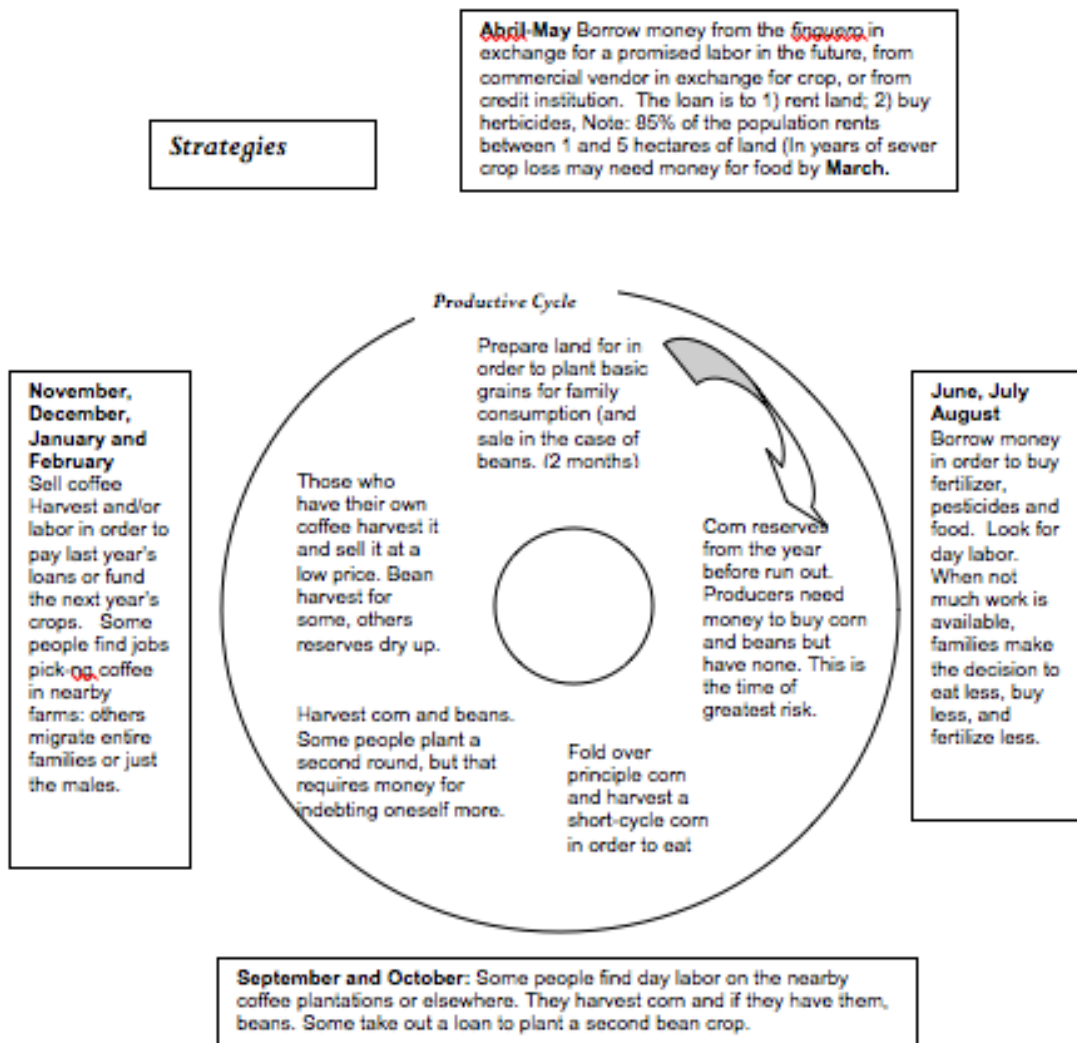
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<sup>216</sup> Because PROZACHI was “state led” and in the party politics way thus a “political” project, documentation of threats to staff and beneficiaries throughout were repeatedly omitted from written reports (Anonymous Interviews).

<sup>217</sup> See Ybarra (2010) for a different reading of the ecological implications of slash-and-burn agriculture in relation to the simple reproduction squeeze.

to borrow money or exchange their labor (as a loan with high interest) to rent land to plant some of their basic grains.

By introducing small coffee plantations, PROZACHI tried to move producers in humid coffee areas past the cycles of de(bt)velopment that was firmly in place. The following graphic was developed over time by New Day and members during workshops in some of the most self-identified Ch'orti' communities in the La Unión.<sup>218</sup> It illustrates the relationship between the coffee-labor situation in the area and needing to rent land for basic grain production and perhaps purchase agricultural inputs. It creates a generalized view of the debt production squeeze in which poorer producers were caught prior to and during the new directed credited program.



<sup>218</sup> The circle of debt was put together first with regional Assembly members in relation to cycles of hunger and then deepened in relation to coffee in 2008, when heavy rains and mudslides led to nine deaths in the area.

Figure 4.1: Cycle of Production and Debt. Source, New Day.

On paper, PROZACHI's subsidized direct agricultural credit was designed to break this cycle at every turn by transforming small holders from basic grain producers and seasonal harvest workers into entrepreneurial campesin@s. Relatedly, with one-size-fits-all solution, promoters and some technicians set out to use credit as the carrot to rework soils. Promoters and technicians often did let the belief that increased market integration was a panacea (and their own quotas of extending credit) determine the fate of landscapes. They pushed credit onto producers for chemical fertilizers and insecticides and/or cash crop production, when both soil conditions and family food needs would have benefitted from diversified production and sustainable agriculture practices.

The next section shifts to an analysis of how PROZACHI began the production of divergent geographies of debt and difference, with promoters targeting more women and/or not targeting indigenous in certain municipalities.

### **Section 3—Uneven Underpinnings: Nascent Geographies of Debt and Difference**

The path that borrowers tread to receive loans under PROZACHI I—and what that meant—was uneven, irregular, and fraught with hairpin turns. Where and how PROZACHI I technicians promoted loans varied, and it is hard to make any specific generalization about PROZACHI I's credit process based on loans reported in arrears, which is the information New Day had. But in interviews with New Day members and ex-project staff, certain gender dynamics seemed to accompany the credit frenzy—dynamics that I see as shaping increasingly uneven geographies of debt in the region. If we think of Jocotán as the center of the project area marked by the severest poverty and highest concentration of indigenous and picture the project radiating outward, the peripheries—the highlands of La Unión to the North, the river valley of Camotán that ran down from the Honduran border to the East, the highlands of Olopa that border Esquipulas to the South, and San Jacinto and Quetzaltepeque to the West—held a lot more opportunity in the eyes of development practitioners and micro lenders. While chapters one and two showed that it would be inaccurate to map race onto these municipalities, in general PROZACHI staff came to map race onto geography. They saw the dry areas of Olopa, Jocotán, and Camotán as more indigenous, drawing a distinction as mentioned in chapter 3 between “those non-Indians coffee producers” living on the southeastern highland border of Olopa where the best coffee land was and “Indians’ who produced corn.” In this section, I show how the lending strategies and borrowing practices examined in the previous sections drew on and reproduced this racialized idea, in combination with varied gender dynamics producing uneven geographies of debt in the four municipalities and between them.

#### **From Woman Citizen to Indigenous Entrepreneur?**

PROZACHI'S “smashing success”, described in the last chapter, in obtaining identity documents for 1,368 women (1996) created the dual opportunity (and threat) of recruiting rural women, particularly Ch'orti', as citizens and borrowers turned entrepreneurs. Increased participation and access to resources or markets did not necessarily translate into significant changes in individual or family well-being or alter gender relations in the household or community. First, the majority of PROZACHI interventions promoted or provided assistance based on women's gendered role in social reproduction: 21,873 chickens produced for eating, seven bakeries, many artisan crafts

and rural stores, 794 manual corn grinders, and 3,336 fuel-wood saving stoves (Lorenas), the latter two to liberate women from the time consuming work of grinding corn between stones and fetching firewood. Second, staff members convinced groups or families to take out loans for these reproductive-role “time-saving” projects made without a clear understanding of gender dynamics in village households. Julian López García noted that:

[Promoters who ] wanted to introduce *nixtamal* motorized [corn] mills would ask beforehand: Do you want *your* [my emphasis] women to spend so many hours grinding? Evidently, the answer was yes, but it turns out that the corn ground from a motorized mill does not come out «*suficientemente repasada*» [finely ground enough], which is a primordial value to making a good tortilla and thus acquiring social value as a woman. (Julián López García, 2001, p. 193)

The disconnect between the priorities of villagers and the priorities of PROZACHI staff, often led promoters to introduce costly and economically unviable activities into economic environments not apt for them in an effort to meet gender and lending goals. For example, in communities in Olopa, Ch’orti’ women were encouraged to take out loans to purchase gas-operated refrigerators to sell cold soda pop, when (a) people would gladly pay less for a warm one and (b) few villagers had enough money to even purchase the warm pop. (Correspondence with ex-PROZACHI coordinator, Rudolfo Cleveringa). The fact that it was a credit strategy destined for defeat is secondary to its legacy: groups of women, incurring debt but also showing their husbands that they were financially “fit.” An image that would assist in the snowballing effects of lending and eventually to the gendering and racialization of victim discourses in relation to the growing debt (chapter 6).

Furthermore, as we saw above, PROZACHI I’s adoption of the micro-finance Grameen model of solidarity groups, made rapid growth in woman borrowers possible by naming one woman with an identity document as the “loan recipient” in representation of 5 to 20 women. At the same time, once PROZACHI relaxed its requirements on land documentation to include eminent domain, it became clear that contrary to visible gender inequalities, many women, as a result of the militarization and repression that the communities had suffered in the previous decades, held titles to land and were eligible for credit. As Doña Berta told me, so many brothers, husbands, and fathers were killed or fled that many of us inherited land (see chapter 2).

Despite technicians’ and promoters’ defenses of indigenous small-holders’ rights to become coffee entrepreneurs, their own racialized biases, as discussed in the last chapter, often combined with project demands and the historical subjectivities of beneficiaries to differentiate lending and borrowing practices within and between the four municipalities.

With externally defined project goals defining success, a credit pattern began to emerge, at least in terms of who ended up indebted to PROZACHI I. The program’s gender equity requirement (25 women and 25 men per community) and its goal to distribute loans, if not loan amounts with equity to the different municipalities appeared relatively gender balanced, but with more debt and more loans made in Olopa. As Table 4.1 shows, women in Olopa accounted for 43 percent of all PROZACHI I loans in debt in their municipality and twice as many as in the other three municipalities.

<b>Table 4.1 Uneven Geographies of Debt 1991 to 1998 (en USD adjusted for inflation)</b>			
<b>Debtors in 4 Municipalities PROZACHI 1</b>			
<b>INDICATORS</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>MEN</b>	<b>% WOMEN</b>
<b>No of Loans</b>	254	633	29%
<b>Portfolio</b>	330,918	744,306	31%
<b>Average Loan</b>	1,303	1,176	1,212
<b>INDICATORS</b>	<b>WOMEN in Municipality as a % of all female debtors</b>	<b>MEN in Municipality as a % of all male debtors</b>	<b>Municipality as % of whole program</b>
<b>Olopa</b>			
<b>No of Loans</b>	43%	39%	40%
<b>Portfolio</b>	37%	45%	43%
<b>Average Loan</b>	1,138	1,370	1,299
<b>La Unión</b>			
<b>No of Loans</b>	17%	14%	14%
<b>Portfolio</b>	41%	20%	27%
<b>Average Loan</b>	3,206	1,758	2,233
<b>Camotán</b>			
<b>No of Loans</b>	20%	21%	20%
<b>Portfolio</b>	15%	22%	20%
<b>No of Loans</b>	20%	21%	20%
<b>Portfolio</b>	15%	22%	20%
<b>Average Loan</b>	982	1,237	1,234

	<b>Jocotán</b>		
<b>No of Loans</b>	20%	27%	25%
<b>Portfolio</b>	7%	13%	11%
<b>Average Loan</b>	426	553	523
<b>Totals %</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4.1: Uneven Geographies of Debt 1991–1998: Indebted individuals in Four Municipalities PROZACHI I.

Feminization of directed rural credit was clearly reflected in average size of loan by gender. On average for the four municipalities, women’s average loan surpassed men’s averages by 11 percent or just over a hundred dollars. Internationally, very few developmental agricultural credit efforts have ever even achieved average women’s loans that were even half that of men’s. If in the first years of PROZACHI women averaged over 1 in 4 as loan recipients (29 percent in Table 4.1) even as BANDESA made it extremely difficult to provide credit to anyone, much less to women, what explains this shift in the gendering of loan distribution? I have concluded that it had nothing to do with the structure of repayment and debt and everything to do with two unrelated borrowing phenomena. PROZACHI staff members’ attempts to prioritize social equity and geographical loan disbursement gave way in the face of other structural dynamics. Table 4.1 shows the concentration of clients and loan portfolios in highland coffee producing areas with their more favorable ecologies and more intense mercantilization.

A closer look at the uneven geographies of debt in terms of social class revealed that the average loans to both women and men in highland Olopa were nearly three times those of loans to their counterparts in lowland Jocotán. Loans to women in highland La Unión were three times those of loans to women in lowland Camotán. Men’s average loans were 50 percent higher in La Unión than men’s loans in Camotán and nearly 8 times those in Jocotán. These striking differences are related not just to the presence of coffee but to the history of dispossession of the indigenous communities of Jocotán and Camotán analyzed in chapter 1. Small-scale Ch’orti’ producers living on the dry hillsides of Camotán and Jocotán, upon request or spontaneously received loans for basic grain inputs, land rental, artisanry, and small enterprises averaging far below the loans in the more humid and fertile highlands of Olopa and La Unión. As discussed in chapter one, historical processes of municipal formation and racialized dispossession relegated them to these less fertile dry hillsides. The geographies of indebtedness were strongly influenced the histories of dispossession.

### **Between Lending and Indebting: A Fin(e)ance Line**

Over-financing —lending to clients above their capacity to pay— was perhaps the practice that most marked the uneven geographies of debt from which people, who later joined the non-payment movement came. Most rural finance technocrats assert that rural loans should not



exceed 25 percent of a family's capacity to pay<sup>219</sup>. But throughout PROZACHI I over-financing ran rampant with vast unevenness between men and women, between highlands and lowlands, and, correspondingly, among municipalities. Between 1991 and 1998, even though the average loan had been much lower in the dry lowlands of Camotán and Jocotán, over-financing that led to debt reported by New Day was astronomically high: ranging 1,300 percent to 1,700 percent of borrowers capacity to pay. No wonder borrowers thought that PROZACHI was giving money away! How could producers ever possibly pay? At the same time, with these levels of over-financing, the 33 percent subsidy on interest<sup>220</sup> carried by PROZACHI credits meant little. In Olopa and La Unión PROZACHI over-financed clients at an overall lower percentage than in Camotán and Jocotán, but the gender difference was striking. Women in Olopa received loans 242 percent over their capacity to pay, while the size of men's loans was only 20 percent of their capacity to pay. In La Unión, women's loans were 132 percent over their capacity to pay while men's were only 78 percent over their capacity to pay. Heavy financing of women was linked with concentration in highland coffee areas, but with a key difference that I build on in the sections below: indebted women in La Unión tend to have received larger loans and to have come from less indigenous villages.

Over-financing was the result of complex dynamics, perhaps in the first instance due to PROZACHI's need to convince people to take loans. The bigger and more appealing the credit was, the better. But once started down the path of over-financing, men and women in equal numbers started taking out second and third loans to either pay part of the first or to keep open access to chemical inputs for their production needs. Marguerite Robinson argued in her "red book," *The Microfinance Revolution*, published by the World Bank Institute, that local elites capture the resources of state-led development while development of financial markets is a "reclaiming of finance for society at large—the true democratization of capital" (M. Robinson, 2001, p. 25) c.f (Roy, 2010). In the Ch'orti' region what was democratized was de(bt)velopment with disastrous consequences for the non-elite majorities.

### **The Subversive Side of Social Reproduction**

The patterns of over-indebtedness and uneven geographies of debt that began to emerge, however, were not only the responsibility of overzealous staff members or historical processes of exclusion, debt, and dispossession. Rather, these histories and practices linked with longstanding survival skills and the subversive side of social reproduction: in trying to make ends meet or fulfill perceived needs, borrowers often subverted the intent or rules of credit.<sup>221</sup> More than one person told me something similar to the claim of one ex-PROZACHI staff member: "credit with just the identity card—they went crazy with the money, to buy radios."

The dire situation of survival, especially for Ch'orti' campesin@ families on the fragile hillsides in the months of June, July, and August (planting season) also made it hard to choose to use all of a loan for seed, pesticides, or fertilizer when one's family was hungry. Medical expenses (see

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<sup>219</sup> (REDCAMIF, 2011, p. 11)

<sup>220</sup> The interest rates that PROZACHI charged were 33 percent lower than market rates at the time.

<sup>221</sup> See (Shakya & Rankin, 2008) for a comparison of "subversive practices" of borrowers in Nepal and Vietnam and their typology of transgressive practices.

Doña Margarita below) and special occasions also warranted detouring loan destinations. Furthermore, both staff members and borrowers admitted a dynamic in which on the one hand promoters pressured women to pay off their husbands' debts by taking out a loan, and on the other men pressured their wives to take advantage of the gender policy to get loans for them. Neither of these instances is a simple example of women being used within a patriarchal system because, as many expressed to me, they had to find a way out for the household. At the same time, a family that could not pay the first loan probably could not pay the second: loan swapping practices had begun.

Indeed, as I discuss in the next section, the combination of promoters' zeal and borrowers' needs created both the experience and the conditions to deepen this process of destabilization. It is possible that people also lied, exaggerating their estimated income to get larger loans. Over-indebtedness destabilizes this type of program. Either PROZACHI staff members were incapable of gathering correct income information (which is extremely difficult to do even in award-winning programs), or the people were playing them (at which they are adept). Both of these conditions were true. PROZACHI promoters knew that people created false titles to get second and third loans from other institutions once the PROZACHI-BANDESA had their original titles.

While PROZACHI I's credit program set many of these dynamics and their uneven outcomes in motion, it would be the deluge of microfinance in the late 1990s that would show just how dangerous a globally promoted credit dance between promoters and beneficiaries really was on an uneven dance floor of racialized dispossession and patriarchy. The next section shows how Hurricane Mitch in 1998, arriving a year and a half after the final signing of the Guatemalan Peace Accords, not only swept in discourses and practices of equity and citizen participation as I discuss in the preceding chapter, but also heralded hurricane microfinance.

#### **Section 4—A Tale of Two Storms: From Hurricane Mitch to Hurricane Micro-finance**

On October 31, 1998, Hurricane Mitch crossed the Guatemalan-Honduran border just North of La Unión.<sup>222</sup> Public attention tended to overlook or underestimate Hurricane Mitch's effects on the region and focus more on flooding in the lowlands along the Motagua River Valley (CEPAL, 1999, 2004). Yet, FLACSO reported the unseen damage that Mitch did to watersheds and subsistence farmers on the dry hillsides of the Ch'orti' Area and documented how the storm exposed and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities more than it caused major damage (Gramajo & Reyna, 1999). As elsewhere in Central America, Mitch opened the floodgates to resources and discourses in the region (Bradshaw, 2001; Casolo, 2009; Gitter & Barham, 2007; Jeffrey, 1999). Although these floodgates opened, not to major governmental and non-governmental reconstruction aid, but to microcredit and, as mentioned in chapter 3, one more injection of food for work assistance and support for citizen participation.

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<sup>222</sup> Mitch entered Guatemala from the Caribbean in late October 1998. The worst effects were felt in the eastern coastal department of Izabal, the neighboring department of Alta Verapaz, and the Amatlán River basin. Direct and indirect damages were estimated at about USD 750 million, including destruction of banana plantations. The death toll was at least 268, with another 121 missing, some 300 injured, and 106,000 persons displaced, 55,000 of whom were still living in shelters a month later. The storm destroyed 37 bridges, 90 sections of major highways (633 km), and 34 sections of rural roads (718 km). It also destroyed 27 schools and severely damaged another 175. (IADB, 1999).

## The Invisible Duo: Hillside and Highland Damage and Debt

To understand how hurricane microfinance took hold, I first review the related ways in which six years of work on the region's ecology, agriculture, and artisanship slid to a halt and PROZACHI beneficiaries found their investments destroyed and their debt growing while local elites managed to co-opt relief aid and PROZACHI resources.

The official CONRED (National Coordinator of Response to Disasters) Report declared that the most affected areas in the east were the productive areas along the rivers and irrigation channels in Jocotán and Camotán (Gramajo & Reyna, 1999, p. 3).<sup>223</sup> Certainly, the fragile soils could not absorb the rainfall, and the lowlands of the Jupilingo and Grande rivers overflowed, destroying the tomato and pepper crops and infrastructure of the larger farms along the lowland riverbed that belonged to influential townspeople from Jocotán, Camotán, San Juan Ermita, and even Chiquimula. Yet, precisely because the report did not break down the destruction by productive sectors, gender, or race, most of the victims of damage and subsequent debt remained invisible (Gramajo & Reyna, 1999).

Hurricane Mitch washed away much of the PROZACHI terracing and other soil conservation measures that were too new and too thin to make a difference.<sup>224</sup> The rains also wiped out the native *tul* reed, the primary material used by many Ch'orti' women to weave *chiki*, (baskets), *poj* (straw mats), and *mesyob* (brooms) individually and in the women-only artisan enterprises that PROZACHI loans had financed (Gramajo & Reyna, 1999). Also, contrary to analysts' assumption that most basic grains escaped the late storm, differences in harvest time and limited storage options spelled loss and endangering food security for many. As one producer said, "Since we don't have silos to store the corn, we just had it in our makeshift shed, but the water got in and it all rotted." Even more producers lost their bean crop (which they often use to sell when short of cash), "because the grain got wet fast; and the second crop was too young and just fell from the vine" (Gramajo & Reyna, 1999).<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> The Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Food estimated the total losses to agricultural production in the Ch'orti' region at 2.6 million dollars with Jocotán and Camotán accounting for over two thirds of those losses. In those two municipalities 17 bridges were swept away leaving 13 thousand people isolated. Estimates for damages to productive infrastructure and social infrastructure were around a quarter of million dollars while those to roads were slightly over 300 thousand dollars. Most of the damages calculated in productive infrastructure were those of better off producers along the river (Gramajo & Reyna, 1999, p. 20).

<sup>224</sup> Precisely because I had lived through some of the worst of Hurricane Mitch in Honduras in 1998, and had been aware of the magnitude of Mitch in many places, I originally committed a mistake similar to state and NGO officials of the time: I underestimated the devastation that Mitch caused in the Ch'orti' region. In an effort to raise awareness of the Ch'orti' plight, a 1999 FLACSO study cited in the above footnote argued what we had argued in the Aguán: that a disaster cannot be measured solely by infrastructure destroyed or export dollars lost. The toll of heavy rains, winds, and other effects on subsistence and small-scale farmers often goes unseen (Gramajo & Reyna, 1999).

<sup>225</sup> The 1999 FLACSO report also states without any financial estimates the destruction of springs and creeks by landslides that probably had more far reaching effects on the poorer communities on the dry hillsides than the destruction along the riverbed. "Over 70% of the campesin@ families on the dry foothills already suffered food shortages as they harvested yearly less than 20 hundred weights of corn and 3 hundred weights of beans. ... In some of these areas, over 60% of the production was lost. 'If the little corn we harvested before Mitch wasn't enough, now that we have lost almost everything, we have no recourse but to buy our food. The worst is that we don't have the money to buy it.' The loss of their seed and the above mentioned destruction of the fragile water systems meant that the year after Mitch would entail continuing food shortages." (Gramajo & Reyna, 1999, pp. 24-26).

Further, when Mitch hit, the coffee in the highlands had just begun to ripen, so the coffee harvest was drastically reduced, along with seasonal employment opportunities that coffee afforded to poor hillside farmers, affecting other commercial activities related to the harvest. Perhaps most significant for altering *landscapes* in the region, however, was how staple grain loss, combined with the blow to the coffee harvest, devastated the small-holders who had drunk the credit “kool aid.” Producers who rented land or purchased inputs to start or expand coffee production had acquired larger loans, and their double loss in both coffee and basic grains spelled deeper debt.

But the directors of PROZACHI were not paying full attention. Pressured by both local and national politicians, PROZACHI stepped in to help the visible hurricane victims, whether or not their material conditions fit PROZACHI’s profile. Just entering its second phase with a much-reduced budget,<sup>226</sup> PROZACHI channeled (once again) World Food Program food aid, this time to people in shelters and those who participated in the repair of secondary roads. More shamefully (in the opinions of many people including former staff members), the project put its human, material, and economic resources at the service of the large-scale vegetable and tobacco farmers along the Grande and Jupilingo rivers. Thus, while PROZACHI staff members were busy extending themselves and project resources to many of the wealthier inhabitants of the region, *campesin@s* who had been sweet-talked into borrowing money for basic grains, coffee, or artisan production found themselves in trouble.

### **Opening the Floodgates of Microfinance**

Hurricane Mitch signaled an important turning point in the Ch’orti’ area. As the state, through PROZACHI, turned its head and resources momentarily towards the elites, neglecting small-scale coffee and basic grains producers, and then restructured with a focus on citizen participation and a reduced number of direct beneficiaries, Mitch opened the floodgates for the key millennium palliative: microcredit.<sup>227</sup> I use the term microcredit or microfinance to describe the array of lenders from savings and loan cooperatives, to the Catholic Church, to self-proclaimed microfinance institutions that appeared and initiated or intensified efforts to lower transaction costs for small loans and provide open credit at non-subsidized market rates in the Ch’orti’ area after 1999. See Appendix 3 for an analysis of the different institutions providing micro loans. By micro loan, I lump together loans up to USD 1,000 dollars, independently of the type of financial institution. Although I mention some medium holders who also clearly took advantage of the “opportunities of subsidized credit,” more important is how the dynamics of making credit easily available to previously excluded or already-indebted families thwarted development goals and deepened the link between debt, disaster, and dispossession.

PROZACHI I, using BANDESA as its financial window, had opened access to swaths of excluded families with no experience in formal credit, and no chance for formal access. The only other financial actors from 1990 to 1998 were four saving and loan cooperatives (Chiquimuljá, COOSAJO, COODIPA, and San Miguel), ANACAFE, the national coffee association, and Caritas, a small Catholic social pastoral program, together representing only 5 percent of the delinquent debts from that period. In other words, PROZACHI had provided smallholder

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<sup>226</sup> IFAD and OPEC do not fund PROZACHI II, only Dutch (USD 900,000) and Guat gov (USD 100,000).

<sup>227</sup> See Ananya Roy’s compelling analytical overview of microcredit at the millenium with critical attention to the tensions of discourses and practices at multiple scales(Roy, 2010) .

indigenous women with new opportunities and training, collective processes, and credit, but in the crunch of crisis much of seven years' work resulted in debt.

As PROZACHI I drew to a close, IFAD ended its financial commitment and the project's million-dollar loan trust showed heavy arrears, the second phase, PROZACHI II, virtually abandoned directed rural credit in favor of citizen participation and market-oriented technical services (chapter 3). Nevertheless, as the PROZACHI program retrenched on rural credit, a veritable array of 27 microfinance initiatives of all types took its place with hurricane force. A veritable alphabet soup of cooperatives and institutions stepped into the void. Two more savings and loan cooperatives joined the first four; four microfinance institutions addressed clientele similar to that of CARITAS; three public trusts took on support of coffee growers similar to ANACAFE; six communal bank initiatives grew out of PROZACHI; and four private banks opened microfinance windows.<sup>228</sup>

These new players quickly found themselves enmeshed in the power-laden dynamics of lending and borrowing practices similar to those of the previous seven years. Producers and artisans indebted or de-capitalized by the crisis and invisible to emergency aid quickly sought relief in the new or expanding credit opportunities that rode the wake Hurricane Mitch. This "Hurricane micro-finance,"—purportedly the path out of poverty—helped many farmers but intensified the lending and borrowing relations discussed above and deepened the nascent uneven geographies of debt and difference. In the following subsection, I unpack some of the subjectivities and practices that deepened with the deluge of new credit opportunities.

### **Credit Frenzy Redux: Need Meets Lure after Hurricane Mitch**

Who took advantage of the widening array of credit opportunities, how did they do so, and why? The needs of indebted poor families after Mitch led them to continue to seek credit beyond any possible capacity to pay: the possibilities presented by credit were irresistible in the face of destroyed crops, higher prices, and fewer opportunities for wage labor: they simply over-indebted themselves even more.

Look, what I want to know is why when you want to hook people [with loans], you look for humble people, downtrodden people. Why don't you look for the savvy ones, (*astutos*), the ones who understand that they have to find a way to pay back, who know that it is hard to make money. That money appears to be great but it can bite you in the back. No you hook the timid people and then when they can't pay, you want to steal from them what they don't even have. If I were a businessman, I would investigate before lending money and ask will this person be able to pay back, but you just care about sweet-talking the people till they are hooked. (Interview Olopan Villager, June 19, 2009)

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<sup>228</sup> The only other financial actors besides PROZACHI I from 1990 to 1998 were four savings and loan cooperatives (Chiquimuljá, COOSAJO, COODIPA and San Miguel), ANACAFE, the national coffee association, and Caritas, a small Catholic social pastoral program. After Mitch, two more cooperatives (COTECU and Flor de Montaña), joined the first four microfinance institutions (Genesis, BANCRISOL, ADIC, and PRODER), addressed clientele similar to that of CARITAS, three public trusts (DICOR, FEDECAGUA, and FIS), and took on support of coffee growers similar to ANACAFE.

In the Ch'orti' communities of Olopa, microfinance followed PROZACHI's lead and focused their initiatives on the "less-Ch'orti' –more assimilated" farmers on the Esquipulas and Quetzaltepeque borders to the South over the Ch'orti' basic grain producers on the Jocotán border. In this sense, microfinance's promise to poor through opening the doors to women was highly conditioned by both class and racial terrains and further enhanced them. The way in which Caritas brought its housing loans to Olopa also mirrored—at least in the minds of some ex-PROZACHI promoters—the seductive offers of President Serrano's speech announcing the PROZACHI program as gift.

My case was different. It is with CARITAS of the Diocese of Zacapa and Chiquimula. A promoter arrived in Olopa offering housing. He said that all of us who formed part of the leadership that worked with CARITAS were going to be beneficiaries of a house. Well we agreed to participate. Two years later, they served us a notice saying we each owed 13,200 Q [USD 1,600].

Inducements by CARITAS—and other microfinance institutions—to take loans during the emergency period jump-started what (Shakya & Rankin, 2008) has called creative borrowing or "loan swapping": borrowing from one microfinance institution to pay the interest (at least) on loans at another. In the next section, I draw on New Day's database to shift from a focus on dynamics to a snapshot in order to suggest some initial patterns in lending and borrowing under PROZACHI. I try to point to the processes and practices analyzed in the last chapters and how they shaped these processes.

### **Deepening the Divides**

Comparing the entire period of lending (1991-2004) in Table 4.2 with the patterns set under PROZACHI I (1991-98) in Table 4.1, the uneven geographies of debt became accentuated. Credit followed and deepened the divides produced through the historic processes of municipal formation that linked dispossession to difference (chapter 1). Hurricane microfinance and the debt it produced, as evidenced in the tables below, show incremental borrowing by some of those first bitten by the credit bug under PROZACHI I. The strongest initial overlap, of course, were loans extended through the groups and associations that PROZACHI I had formed, especially women's collectives. The new population increasingly included some middle-sized producers especially in Olopa and La Unión that skewed the portfolio data into higher average loans. Ultimately, with the decline of PROZACHI in loaning operations, virtually none of the burgeoning new credit opportunities (supposedly destined for the rural poor) ever made it to the most fragile dry land communities of Jocotán and southern Camotán. As Table 4.2 shows Olopa concentrated 54 percent of the portfolio and La Unión another 24 percent, leaving producers in the dry land municipalities with a total of only 22 percent.

**Table 4.2 Uneven Geographies of Debt 1991 to 2005 (en USD with weighted exchange rate)**

<b>All Debtors Rural Directed Credit and Microfinance</b>			
<b>INDICATORS</b>	<b>WOMEN</b>	<b>MEN</b>	<b>% WOMEN</b>
<b>No of Loans</b>	1,070	1,541	41%
<b>Portfolio</b>	1,039,608	1,865,770	36%
<b>Average Loan</b>	972	1,211	1,113
<b>INDICATORS</b>	<b>WOMEN in Municipality as a % of all female debtors</b>	<b>MEN in Municipality as a % of all male debtors</b>	<b>Municipality as % of whole program</b>
<b>Olopa</b>			
<b>No of Loans</b>	70%	49%	57%
<b>Portfolio</b>	62%	50%	54%
<b>Average Loan</b>	853	1,244	1,048
<b>La Unión</b>			
<b>No of Loans</b>	10%	16%	14%
<b>Portfolio</b>	26%	23%	24%
<b>Average Loan</b>	2,428	1,713	1,929
<b>Camotán</b>			
<b>No of Loans</b>	12%	23%	18%
<b>Portfolio</b>	9%	21%	17%
<b>Average Loan</b>	742	1,116	1,015
<b>Jocotán</b>			
<b>No of Loans</b>	7%	12%	10%
<b>Portfolio</b>	3%	6%	5%
<b>Average Loan</b>	448	582	543

<b>Totals % Loans</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Totals % Portfolio</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4.2: Uneven Geographies of Debt 1991-2005: All Debtors Rural Directed and Microfinance.

Due to the particular spatial histories of dispossession and their ecological in legacies in the two most indigenous municipalities (Jocotán and La Unión) end up at opposite ends of indebtedness. Table 4.2 shows Olopa with the highest number of delinquent loans (57 percent) and the highest percentage of the delinquent portfolio (54 percent) while Jocotán lagged far behind with 10 percent of the loans and only 5 percent of the portfolio. Table 4.2 further shows 70 percent of all indebted women were from the highland municipalities of Olopa, while only 7 percent were from Jocotán.

Table 4.3 shows how the pattern of lenders preferences for the highland villages and for women clients set by PROZACHI I, first accentuated by the avalanche of microfinance, continued to grow between 2001 and 2005.



<b>Table 4.3 Increasing Concentration of Indebtedness in the Highland Municipalities of Olopa and La Unión</b>						
<b>Period</b>	<b>% Loans</b>			<b>% Portfolio</b>		
	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>1991-1998 PROZACHI I Ag Directed Credit</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>70%</b>
<b>1999-2000 Initial Microcredit Hurricane Mitch Reconstructio n</b>	<b>85%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>82%</b>
<b>2001-2005 Consolidated Microcredit</b>	<b>88%</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>84%</b>

Table 4.3: Increasing Concentration of Indebtedness in the Highland Municipalities of Olopa and La Unión.

Coffee mania continued to concentrate microfinance in the highland municipalities. Of the microfinance debts reported between 2001 and 2005, 81 percent of all clients were from Olopa and La Unión, constituting 84 percent of the total debt portfolio. And, focusing solely on women, the concentration of debt in the highland municipalities was even more extreme. Highland women accounted for 88 percent of the feminine loans in debt and a full 94 percent of the total portfolio for women in debt in all four municipalities. Table 4.3 shows the historical progression. Until Hurricane Mitch in late 1998, 59 percent of women with loan delinquency lived in the highland municipalities; by the end of 2000 after the hurricane, 85 percent of woman-held delinquent loans were concentrated in the highlands, primarily Olopa.

Figure 4.2 shows the concentration of debt in villages in relation to the highland coffee areas. Four possible interconnected dynamics help explain that shift. First, PROZACHI staff in Olopa had involved more women in solidarity groups, projects, and individual loans than they had in any of the other three municipalities; thus, Olopa had a large pool of women who were increasingly aware of the pros and cons of accessing credit. Second, many of those women or

their spouses were unable to pay their PROZACHI loan after Mitch, so as stated above many took out loans from a second institution to pay the interest (at least) on the PROZACHI loan. Third, in 2001, one microfinance institution, GENESIS EMPRESARIAL, with a clear objective of providing loans to poor women started operating, but only in Olopa. Fourth, the link to coffee—either as employment or as productive possibility—increased women’s (even indigenous women’s) perceived capacity to pay.

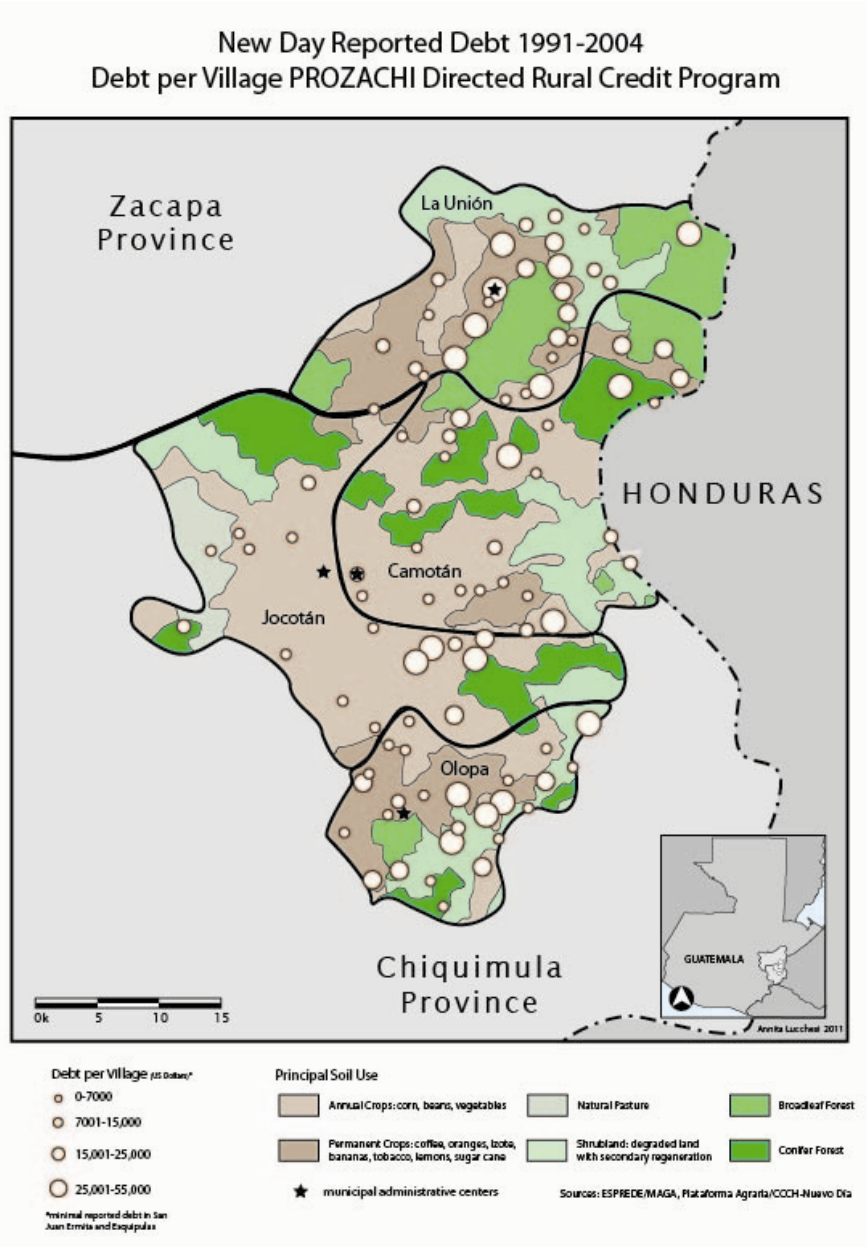


Figure 4.2: New Day Reported Debt 1991–2004. Debt per Village PROZACHI Directed Rural Credit Program (map contracted by author).

Microfinance did not abandon PROZACHI's policy of feminizing credit, but it prioritized women in the highlands and discriminated against women in the dry low lands. Microfinance was seeking better-off families. Supporting the latter explanation is the fact that the average size of loans continued to rise as microfinance institutions sought to insure their bets with those who had higher capacity to pay. Nevertheless, just as repayment rates had dropped drastically after Hurricane Mitch, they plummeted even further from 2001 to 2005, basically due to the practice of multiple lending. What do I mean? As I will explain more fully below, for multiple reasons of social pressure, ongoing perks, access to new programs, and the maneuvers of loan promoters so that they appear successful, multiple lending or what Shakya and Rankin call loan swapping, rapidly increased.

The entry of microfinance to solve the disaster of Hurricane Mitch not only intensified the focus on highland coffee areas but also increasingly feminized Ch'orti' debt. The rise of discourses flagging "women's altruism" as some inherent quality and international accords hailing "gender equity" as a transversal goal of development transformed the PROZACHI WID option into Gender and Development (GAD)(Vargas Lundius & Ypelj, 2007). Moreover, some microfinance institutions made a special effort to target indigenous women as beneficiaries.

Table 4.4 shows the increasing feminization of the Ch'orti' debt.<sup>229</sup> The percent of delinquent loans belonging to rural women jumped from 29 percent before Mitch to over 40 percent in two years after the Hurricane Mitch and then to 53 percent by 2004. The new wave of microfinance was feminizing credit and engendering the net of debt it cast. In their rapid incorporation of women, however, these new institutions even further skewed credit opportunities to favor the better-off highland coffee municipalities of Olopa and La Unión, leaving families in the more vulnerable dry corridor (Camotán and Jocotán) with declining support. As the sustainable and more profitable practices of microfinance gained their foothold in the region, it appears that the number of loans to women (at least to women who couldn't pay) increased and the average amount granted per loans to women declined as microfinance became aware of just how much PROZACHI had engaged in over-financing them.

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<sup>229</sup> Only 2,611 loans are included in the statistical tables because one or another piece of information on date, number of loans, gender, amount of loans and amount of repayment was unanswered in 689 cases of New Day's debtor survey.

**Table 4.4 Increasing Feminization of Delinquent Loans (in USD with weighted exchange rate)**

# Loans	Women	Men	Total	% Women
<b>1991-1998 PROZACHI I Ag Directed Credit</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>633</b>	<b>887</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>1999-2000 Initial Microcredit Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>732</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>2001-2005 Consolidated Microcredit</b>	<b>524</b>	<b>468</b>	<b>992</b>	<b>53%</b>
<b>1991-2005</b>	<b>1070</b>	<b>1541</b>	<b>2611</b>	
Loan Portfolio	Women	Men	Total	% Women
<b>1991-1998 PROZACHI I Ag Directed Credit</b>	<b>330,918</b>	<b>744,306</b>	<b>1,075,224</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>1999-2000 Initial Microcredit Hurricane Mitch Reconstruction</b>	<b>272,175</b>	<b>504,873</b>	<b>777,048</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>2001-2005 Consolidated Microcredit</b>	<b>436,515</b>	<b>616,591</b>	<b>1,053,107</b>	<b>41%</b>
<b>1991-2005</b>	<b>1,039,608</b>	<b>1,865,779</b>	<b>2,905,378</b>	

Table 4.4: Increasing Feminization of Delinquent Loans

I understand this simultaneous process of feminization of credit and the distancing of credit opportunities and debt from men and women in the lowlands and towards women in the highlands, especially Olopa (a pattern that intensifies even more after 2001) to be the result of a complicated articulation. Political posturing, borrowing, and productive practices catalyzed by

PROZACHI I, international pressure to privilege indigenous women, the selected operational territory of financial institutions related to membership at times, and expected repayment combined to make indigenous women in Olopa the ideal borrower. The level of poverty and indebtedness in indigenous Jocotán, for example, meant that credit for smallholders virtually ceased after Mitch; no promoter looked to entice anyone in Jocotán. In Olopa, where people could pick and grow coffee more easily, taking risks on indigenous women seemed a safer bet.

In chapters 5 and 6, I unpack these dynamics more to understand how New Day's membership and demands evolved. Most importantly right now, the uneven geographies of increasing women's participation obscured the racialized regional historical geographies described in chapter 1 where migrants continually pushed Ch'orti' producers to the worst lands and carved new coffee-growing municipalities.

## Section 5—Financing (In)security: Multiple Debt and Collateralized Land

### The Spiral of Debt

By 2001, the burgeoning opportunities for microcredit were creating a spiral of debt. Families had two, three, and more loans with different credit agencies as people tried to pay at least the interest on their existing debt by taking on new debt. The story of Doña Margarita, from one of the most indebted communities in Olopa, underlines many of these dynamics.

The first bank where I took out a loan was PROZACHI [note she understands PROZACHI to be a bank], where some technicians came and said they were going to give us loans...I was the representative of a group of 17 women who wanted to take out loans, and as the representative of the group I gave my identity card number. I went to receive the money for these 17 women, where each of us received a thousand Quetzales (USD 145.00). Afterwards, they were paying [into the account under Doña Margarita's name according to procedure], but in my case when they [some masculine they] went to check my account in the bank if the debt had been paid off, the payments do not appear. The collection notices come to me, sometimes court notices. So we have the big problem that our debt is not cancelled.

After I took out a loan at the Chiquimuljá (savings and loan cooperative), where I owe 8,000 Quetzales (USD 1,100.00)...I took it out for my yearly coffee production needs, but what happened? The problem is that when we took out the loan (in March of 2000) coffee was still worth something, then the coffee prices dropped in the crisis and we could not sell our harvest...the coffee was worthless. There is where the problem came to us; we couldn't pay anything, we were left owing our debts, where we couldn't pay the interests even; nor could we do anything with the crop.

After that in 2004 I took out a loan with *Génesis Empresarial*. What did I do that loan for? Where I had to pay interests every month, so what I did with that loan was just return to paying interest (on both the Genesis loan and her back interest on Chiquimuljá).

Afterwards, I went and took out another loan in the cooperative COODIPA. This one was so that my family and I could half survive. We no longer knew which way to turn; we had no idea how we got mixed up with such a big debt problem. Up to this moment we have felt sad, and that is the problem.

(Interview done by Luis Galicia, AVANCSO-Plataforma Agraria in 2004)

When I read Luis' interview, I looked her up in the database. She had paid 73 percent of the capital she had borrowed, and she still owed over twice what she borrowed (without penalties).

**Table 4.5 Multiple Debt: Doña Margarita's Case (in USD adjusted for inflation)**

Creditor	Date	Amount signed for	Amount received	Amount paid	% of Principal Paid	Amount owed	Interest rate
PROZACHI	9/11/1996	4,801	4,762	4,053	85%	11,684	19 percent
Cooperative Chiquimuljá	3/29/2000	1,100	908	344	38%	1,678	24 percent
COODIPA Coop Divina Pastora	NS	275	275	73	27%	206	22 percent
MFI Génesis Empresarial	3/10/2004	254	254	32	13%	254	30 percent
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>6,431</b>	<b>6,199</b>	<b>4,502</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>13,823</b>	<b>-</b>

Table 4.5: Multiple Debt: Doña Margarita's Case

In Doña Margarita's case her husband had died, and she actually held title to her land. The gendered dynamics that conditioned the choices she had made had more to do with being a single head of household with five children and having male collection agents and loan promoters alike badger her, the former to pay and the latter to borrow. In her case, her choices to take out other loans, while clearly partially coerced by aggressive loan promoters trying to make quotas and driven by necessity, were not tied to male pressure in the house. Yet, for every Doña Margarita, there were two Doña María's: women whose husbands either pressured them or together they decided to take advantage of lending opportunities targeting women to try to dig the family out of debt, or at least keep up appearances. In Olopa, where *Génesis Empresarial* came in with a relatively viable microcredit plan to benefit urban and rural women, men sent their wives to take out loans supposedly for income generation, only to use them to cover household expenses or pay at least the interest on existing loans.

Questions of gender and literacy worsened this situation. Figure 4.3 below shows a map of the number of reported loans in arrears (from 1991 to 2004) and their amount per village, by gender and literacy. The soil use of the terrain highlights the way in which coffee-producing opportunities, gender, and illiteracy worked together to produce concentrations of debt.

New Day Reported Debt 1991-2004  
Total Number of Debts by Gender, Literacy, & Municipality

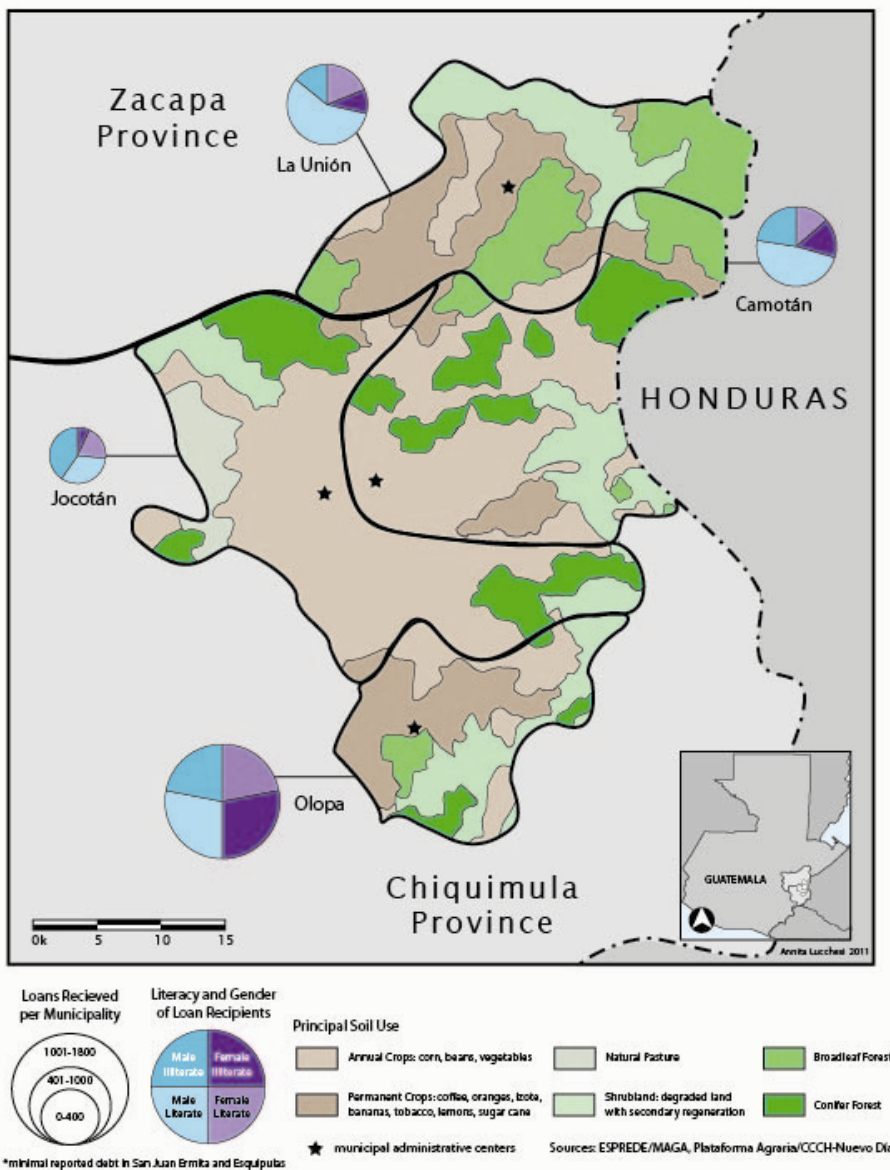


Figure 4.3: New Day Reported Debt 1991–2004. Total Number of Debts by Gender, Literacy, & Municipality (map contracted by author).

### The Politics of Loan Swapping

Doña Margarita’s story also introduces the next-to-final blow in the production of Ch’orti’. By early 2001 (with the combined effects of Hurricane Mitch and the droughts of 2000) the weight of debt became so crushing and the families’ need for survival so strong that people in debt turned first to the only avenue they could think of—the road shown them by the finance

dynamics of the 1990s and encouraged again and again by the employees of the finance institutions themselves: another loan.

To show how over a decade of financing in/security worked, the process of multiple loans or loan swapping is key.<sup>230</sup> I look beyond the practices of individuals or the patterns of municipalities to explore what had been the catalyst and cost of PROZACHI's touted promotion of collective community participation. The post-hurricane Mitch lending institutions, like their predecessor PROZACHI I, had set out in search of suitable borrowers with ideas already in mind. By 1999 development discourses targeting women as more responsible clients (Rankin, 2001) and social capital, that is trust and organization, as a prerequisite for successful investment (Rankin, 2002), were steering institutional practice toward villages and communities with stronger existing formal organizations, especially women's groups. This tendency met with the savvy of group and association leaders who over the last years of external projects had learned how to sniff out opportunities. Furthermore, as suggested in the last section the effects of Mitch and declining coffee prices (see chapter 5) had already begun to create a specter of debt. Borrowers began to see obtaining second and third loans (loan swapping) as a solution.

In the four municipalities 30 percent of all reported loans in debt were multiple loans, meaning that a single person owed to multiple institutions. Fourteen percent of the indebted producers had engaged in multiple loaning or loan swapping. Two thirds of those individuals were concentrated in the highland coffee municipality of Olopa, and the overwhelming majority of the other third in the coffee producing areas La Unión and Camotán. Most significant is that where financial institutions had targeted stronger embryos of community organization and women's groups (thus concentrating loans there), the level of multiple loaning was two to three times more prevalent than the aggregate level. In Olopa, 53 percent of individual indebted producers in the *aldea* of Piedra de Amolar (area of heavy organization and repression during the cold war) had multiple loans; 43 percent had multiple loans in nearby Tituque. In the *aldea* of El Volcán in Camotán, 48 percent of indebted borrowers had multiple loans. In La Unión, 38 percent of the borrowers in the three villages in the Capucal Sector and 25 percent in Taguanyi were loan swappers. All of the above were strong centers of PROZACHI I and later of PROZACHI II organizing activities (MAGA, 2003) (MAGA, 1999), and Piedra de Amolar was one of the poster children for women's projects (IFAD & Lundius, 1998; Vargas Lundius & Ypelj, 2007). See Appendix 3 Tables 1.9.1, 1.9.2 and 1.9.3 for a fuller analysis of these and other *aldeas*. On an uneven field of lenders and borrowers, where the former sought quotas and the latter survival, loan swapping took shape as a strategy of neither and both. Eager financial institutions did little to investigate loan histories, and needy borrowers only thought of keeping food on the table and creditors away from the doors of their mud and wattle homes. And loan swapping became a common practice.

Repayment rates were also tied to loan swapping. Women in the indigenous municipalities of Olopa and Jocotán (where multiple social and lending programs targeting indigenous women existed) paid their loans better than women in the less indigenous municipalities of La Unión and Camotán. In the latter municipalities, men actually paid a higher percentage of their loans from 1991 to 1998 than did women (Table 4.6). In the boom of microfinance after Hurricane Mitch,

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<sup>230</sup> The deluge of institutions with finance capital to invest enabled borrowers to continue what Shakya and Rankin call "loan swapping," "sustaining long-term debt financing by drawing on multiple lenders and repaying past credit with debt (otherwise known and sanctioned, in more elite, urbanized contexts as refinancing your indebtedness)" (Shakya & Rankin, 2008).



women paid less than men in three of the four municipalities, with La Unión, the municipality with more highly capitalized families, as the exception. In the final period from 2001 to 2004, the repayment rates continued to fall under the influence of multiple debts or debt swapping. Indeed, the logic of higher repayment in the early phases is simply that people were paying off past loans with new ones—often with the encouragement of PROZACHI promoters.

### **The Hidden Cost of Credit—Land**

While credit promoters and officials were extremely liberal, if not aggressive, in pushing credit and creating multiple debts during and after the bonanza of microfinance in the Ch'orti' region, they were equally strict in collateralizing land for those loans (handing over land titles to creditors as guarantees if loans were not paid). PROZACHI I backed 77 percent of its loans between 1991-1998 with collateralized land, for both collective solidarity groups and individual debtors. The New Day database indicates that 2,163 acres had been collateralized against PROZACHI I's loans, another 1,271 acres with the boom of microcredit and cooperatives after Mitch, and yet another 2,261 acres during the period between 2001 and 2005. Once again, the geographies of collateralized land were uneven in the region, centered on the highland coffee regions: Olopa with 44 percent of all collateralized land and La Unión with another 20 percent. Jocotán had only 9 percent of the collateralized land (See Table 4.6). Moreover, while men overall had more land collateralized, women's loans were just as collateralized as men's in the two highland coffee municipalities. Between accumulating interests and penalties when faulting on payments, and having one's land tied up as collateral, borrowers could not dismiss the specter of dispossession.

MUNICIPALITIES	OLOPA				La Unión			Camotán			Jocotán		
INDICATORS	Women	Men	differential or with men	% Women	Women	Men	differential or with men	% Women	Women	Men	differential or with men	% Women	
<b>1991 to 1998 PROZACHI Directed Rural Credit</b>													
% Loan Repayment	34%	18%	15%	6%	32%	-27%	25%	41%	-16%	57%	13%	43%	
Acres in Collateral	338	361	48%	154	209	42%	68	598	10%	127	307	29%	
Average Acres in Collateral	3.1	0.8	-	2.1	1.4	-	0.8	2.7	(1.9)	1.4	1.0	-	
<b>1999 to 2000 All Financial Institutions after Hurricane Mitch</b>													
% Loan Repayment	13%	15%	-2%	20%	18%	3%	19%	28%	-9%	8%	20%	-13%	
Acres in Collateral	346	320	52%	113	153	42%	112	206	35%	12	10	54%	
Average Acres in Collateral	1.6	1.3	-	3.0	2.1	-	3.2	2.0	-	1.5	1.0	-	
<b>2001 to 2004 All Financial Institutions after International Coffee Prices Crisis</b>													
% Loan Repayment	8%	12%	-4%	11%	10%	1%	29%	18%	10%	9%	5%	4%	
Acres in Collateral	482	689	41%	257	241	52%	107	438	20%	17	29	37%	
Average Acres in Collateral	1.1	2.8	-	8.3	2.5	-	2.4	3.8	-	0.9	2.9	-	
Total Acres in Collateral	1,167	1,370	46%	523	603	46%	288	1,243	19%	156	346	31%	
% of Collateralized Land by Municipality and Gender	20%	24%		9%	11%		5%	22%		3%	6%		

Table 4.6: Loan Repayment and Collateral in Land by Gender 1991–2005

Further, similar to what we saw in chapter 3, PROZACHI's directed rural credit practices and the micro-finance programs that followed them were shaped in part through the "perceived" histories and ideas of local places. Thus PROZACHI's over-financing of producers in the lowland indigenous municipalities, as well as microfinance virtually ignoring them both reflect a underlying narrative of exclusion of particular places from "D"evelopment—deserving only assistance. The emphasis in collateralization in the coffee producing areas must also be understood in relation to the exclusion of access to credit in the lowlands.

### Conclusion—De(bt)velopment and its Discontents

How was the Ch'orti' debt produced and what does it mean? In the broadest sense, the debt was produced in relation to shifting international and national technologies designed to “incorporate” the rural poor into neo-liberal development (Roy, 2010; Elyachar, 2005). But crucial to understanding its gendered, racialized and geographic differentiation in the region as well as its snowballing growth from the successive booms of directed agricultural credit for small producers to the micro-finance surge after Hurricane Mitch, is its concrete articulations. Bolstered by

shifting international discourses discussed in the last chapter that increasingly attached questions of equity and efficiency (especially gender equity and efficiency) to credit, lending and borrowing practices swept up small holders in the mid nineties, making them subjects of credit and ultimately of debt and disaster. While global market prices were high, coffee mania (with its underlying ideology of integrating poor producers in the international market chains) produced an overwhelming majority of the debt centered in the highland coffee producing municipalities. Second, the boom of available resources and pressure on loan promoters to meet quotas resulted in the financing of families beyond their capacity to pay.

Underlying this over-financing of producers were many of the practices outlined in the first section. PROZACHI used credit as the magic wand for undoing century-old structures of exclusion, racism, and dispossession analyzed in chapter 1 and of the 30 years of counterinsurgency terror (chapter 2). In this process, however, both credit promoters and beneficiaries —each partially shaped by their own pasts and practices—distorted the lynchpin of the development program: small-scale credit for productive projects. Credit promoters often failed to provide the promised accompaniment of investments and sidestepped project guidelines of group formation, payment capacity, and investment viability to make loan quotas and skim off part of the money loaned. Some took advantage of borrowers' illiteracy; others targeted areas based on how indigenous the inhabitants were or how fertile the soil was. Recipients, in relation to past experience and present needs in some cases, did not understand, and others found multiple ways to ignore or bypass the logic of lending—guaranteeing social reproduction, subverting the plans of the planners, and digging themselves in a hole.

The fragile wand of credit snapped. As it broke, all the institutions shied away from poorer families and the average loan grew, incorporating with each passing phase families with more land and income, and leaving poorer families, solidarity groups, women and men to dig themselves out of the hole that development had offered them. The Ch'orti' campesin@ producers silenced by war, impoverished by dispossession, marginalized by race and gender, and "fixed" by neoliberal "peacemaking" found themselves caught in a web of disastrous de(bt)velopment, where the tools that they used to free themselves only bound them tighter.

Yet, as this chapter has tried to emphasize, the borrowers, although operating on an extremely uneven playing field were not the simple pawns of de(bt)velopment processes. They shaped as they were shaped by directed rural credit and the onslaught of microfinance. Borrowers took advantage of gendered, racialized or class-based openings, they subverted the use of loans, and they brought to their understanding of borrowing the all of the overlapping discourses of resources, rights and recognition mentioned in chapter 3. Neither lenders nor borrowers acted under conditions of their own choosing.

By the end 2003, the Ch'orti' debt revealed itself as multi-class. Finally, the siren of financing women heard first by IFAD and then made dogma in microfinance feminized the Ch'orti' debt to levels beyond any other agricultural microfinance program in Central America with the exception of programs exclusively for women.<sup>231</sup> The ways in which loans were both zealously

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<sup>231</sup> In countries like Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Honduras, where the majority of inhabitants continue to survive through smallholder agrarian production and petty trade, "the prevailing neoliberal orthodoxy has assumed a distinctively feminized character, [with] development interventions increasingly target[ing] women as the desired beneficiaries and agents of progress"(Rankin, 2001, p. 19). On the one hand, critics and proponents of pro-poor

extended by promoters and ingenuously and/or cunningly accepted by borrowers signaled the strong possibility that rural lending and borrowing practices were producing an insurmountable debt, a debt that unequally burdened indigenous and women.

No doubt microfinance in the Ch'orti' East has all the stripes of a new form of accumulation by dispossession,<sup>232</sup> but what is significant is specifically *how* credit combined with other discourses and practices produced not only the conditions for ongoing dispossession, but also the possibilities for struggles against dispossession. In the next chapter, I explore these connections at a conjunctural moment of crisis: where the geographies of disastrous de(bt)velopment and neoliberal “peace”-making in the Ch'orti' East hook up with past with histories and memories and ongoing threats of dispossession igniting the possibilities of unthinkable struggle.

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credit debate the extent to which access to (and control over) credit improve women's material well being and empowerment in the household, community, and beyond. On the other, development literature argues that whether or not credit programs are good for women, women, with their stewardship role over household expenses and social reproduction, are the best guarantor of repayment, and thus good for entrepreneurial subject making and institutional financial goals (Ackerly, 1995; Goetz & Sen Gupta, 1996; Kabeer, 2000; Rahman, 1999; Rankin, 2001; Roy, 2010). Roy (2010, p. 69) posits, however, that this feminization of agency under neoliberalism indicates a shift: “If as feminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991) once argued, the Western eyes of development constructed the Third World woman as the victim, now she has become an icon of indefatigable efficiency and altruism.”

<sup>232</sup> New work is being done linking microfinance to ongoing accumulation by dispossession in multiple ways. In addition to (Elyachar, 2005) see Rene Mendoza's forthcoming dissertation on the Segovian region of northern Nicaragua which argues for the importance of seeing microfinance as a vestibule for accumulation by possession and the importance of networks of gatekeepers in articulating dispossession.

## PART III

### And Never Will Become Already Today, 2001–2009

Today, injustice goes with a certain stride. The oppressors move in for ten thousand years. Force sounds certain: it will stay the way it is. No voice resounds except the voice of the rulers. And on the markets, exploitation says it out loud: I am only just beginning. But of the oppressed, many now say: “What we want will never happen. Whoever is still alive must never say “never”! *Certainty is never certain*. It will not stay the way it is. When the rulers have already spoken, then the ruled will start to speak. Who dares say “never”? Who’s to blame if oppression remains? We are. Who can break its thrall? We can. Whoever has been beaten down must rise to hi[r] feet! Whoever is lost must fight back! *Whoever has recognized hi[r] condition—how can anyone stop hi[r]?* Because the vanquished of today will be tomorrow’s victors. And never will become: already today!

Bertolt Brecht, In Praise of Dialectics

Certainty is never certain: The excluded and the oppressed are neither necessarily condemned to silence and premature death nor necessarily guaranteed victory over their condition. Complicating the binary field of victors and oppressed are the multiple articulations of exclusion and the sedimented histories and everyday practices that reproduce hierarchies: racial, gendered, and class-based in and through the very policies supposedly designed to confront them.

The preceding two chapters tighten the focus of the lens and sharpen the ethnographic voice as they work together to show who recognizes hi[r] condition, how s/he does so and with what potential and limits. Chapter 5 analyzes how a conjunctural crisis sparks the emergence and unfolding of the unlikely alliance called the Ch’orti’ campesin@ Coordination, New Day, 2002–2003. Chapter 6 explores how this nascent movement in construction addresses its own contradictions and limits and in the process transforms its “membership” and its struggle...with the future shaped by and shaping praxis.

## Chapter 5

### Brewed Awakenings:<sup>233</sup> Coffee Crisis and the Dawn of New Day

It may be ruled out that immediate economic crises of themselves produce fundamental historical events; they can simply create a terrain more favorable to the dissemination of certain modes of thought, and certain ways of posing and resolving the entire subsequent development of national life...The specific question of economic hardship or well-being as a cause of new historical realities is a partial aspect of the question of the relations of force, at various levels.

(Gramsci, Hoare, & Smith eds., 1999 [1971], pp. 184-185)

As the morning fog shrouding the valley lifted, men and women with their children in hand or arm filtered into the labyrinth of concrete and palm trees that formed the central plaza of the lowland municipality of Camotán. Sandwiched between the Catholic Church to the East and the town hall to the West, the small park served as temporary way station for campesin@s with business of some kind to attend. Unlike Jocotán across the river, Camotán's center lacked the bustle of market day and tended to fill only for Election Day and the town's annual celebration of its patron saint. This hot July day in 2003, however, it slowly packed with people whose dress and hand-written signs indicated to bystanders that they were probably not from the town centers of either Camotán or Jocotán.

Indeed, the vast majority of people gathered came from *aldeas* scattered over the eroded lower-valley slopes and coffee studded mountains to the North and the South of the Río Grande. The majority of the women, some self-identified as Ch'orti', others as campesin@s, wore the bright colored "semi-traditional" Ch'orti' dress: ruffled skirts and blouses in bright fuchsia, bubble-gum pink, sunshine yellow, turquoise, and jungle green, with glittering colored beads and long gemlike glass or plastic earrings.<sup>234</sup> Some older women had kerchiefs on their heads, the younger, bright satin bows, beaded elastic bands or plastic *mariposa* clips arranging their long hair in ponytails or buns. The men—also many self-identified as Ch'orti'—carried hand-sewn backpacks or multi-colored plastic or maguey woven bags. Older men used button-up shirts and straw sombreros, while most of the younger generations wore t-shirts and caps with English words or NGO logos advertising everything from political parties and U.S. sports teams to food security campaigns and new prescription drugs.

Many of those in the plaza had walked since before daybreak on village paths and dusty roads, some eventually hailing a pick-up truck (the equivalent of rural bus) that would bring them to town or at least to the newly paved *carretera* (highway), where they could board an overcrowded mini bus. While those from La Unión had paid up to the equivalent of half a day's wages to get to Camotán, coming to town for a gathering was not in itself a new experience. Over the last 12

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<sup>233</sup> It is not certain who coined Brewed Awakenings in the specialty coffee trade. I took the term from a coffee shop on Euclid St. outside the North Gate of Berkeley.

<sup>234</sup> As early as the 1930s and 1940s, Ch'orti' women began buying manufactured clothing rather than wearing the indigenous weave and blouse because of the high price of materials. These are now often considered "semi-traditional" dress: the bright colored dresses that *mestizo* manufacturers produce and sell (Girard, 1949, p. 72).

years, in representation of their village groups or campesin@ associations, many had participated in myriad workshops, leadership training sessions, celebrations, meetings, and marketing fairs associated with a deluge of development, anti-poverty, human rights, health care, Mayanization, indigenous rights, resource conservation, gender training, and famine relief projects and programs analyzed in the preceding chapters. These projects, sponsored by national and international institutions and NGOs (chapter 3), had encouraged rural dwellers to define what they needed and wanted: health care, water, land, schools, roads, Ch'orti' language education, electricity, and many other demands. In general, however, most project “beneficiaries” or “co-participants” had not associated their participation in any of these projects with the word struggle. Furthermore, most had limited their political participation in recent years to casting votes and attending political rallies, often simply to get a ride to their town center, a free cap, or a t-shirt.

This day was different, however. First, no NGO would pay their *viáticos* (travel expenses); the cost of the trip came out of their pockets, or the pockets of those whom they represented. Second, no one was providing lunch or refreshments. Third, after years of “gratefully” receiving what others deemed they needed, they had come to make demands—visibly, with pressure.<sup>235</sup> In reality, they had come with one overriding demand: that their debts—debts incurred through a decade of rural credit and micro-finance programs, debts that after two years of drought and all-time low coffee prices they could not pay, debts that had doubled or tripled through interest and penalties, debts on which hung their claims to their last bit of land—be cancelled.

This gathering—one of two such mobilizations, the other having taken place a month earlier in the central park of Olopa—served to introduce the newly formed campesin@ Ch'orti' Coordination, New Day. Further, speakers at these gatherings also announced to the region their rejection of a decade of policies and practices that had sought to “fix” soils and subjects in eastern Guatemala. They accused lending institutions of being charlatans, vultures, and thieves. They proclaimed that “with human rights the military cannot kill us” and called on all present to join the fight to defend themselves, their families, their homes, and their land from the jaws of collection agents, the financial institutions that employed them, and their backers in the police. In so doing, the speakers, all indebted, mostly Ch'orti', mostly men provoked fear in the hearts of those who most threatened them.

Building on recent analyses of how economic and cultural neo-liberal policies and practices “operate on terrains that always exceed them” (Hart, 2008, p. 680) see also (Li, 2007; Postero, 2007), in this chapter I trace the relationship between the “dawn” of New Day and the divergent and interconnected processes of rural credit, “sustainable development” and the promotion of human rights, and citizenship participation discussed in the last two chapters. Rather than simply

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<sup>235</sup> In chapter three I discuss how (Metz, 1998, p. 341) described Ch'orti'campesin@s as making demands much earlier, citing meetings that the Rigoberta Menchu Foundation had held in several *aldeas* in 1997, where facilitators asked participants to make a list of problems to be remedied by the Guatemalan state. He defined this list as demands, noting that years ago their response to the question would have been “nothing” or “to be left alone.” I recognize the distinction that Metz is making, and suggest that these kinds of meetings led participants to hold the Guatemalan state more accountable for their welfare. Nevertheless in my view, the laundry lists that Metz describes reflect more a recognition of needs than an articulation of demands. Patrizio Warren, in an analysis of what he calls campesin@ detachment in the Jocotán highlands (P. Warren, 2006), suggests that the deluge of projects in the 1990s generated frustration as often as gratitude. IFAD consultant Rodolfo Lauritto warned that beneficiaries' expression of gratitude for a project was not a sufficient sign of its success or even usefulness (Lauritto, 2003).

label the emergence of New Day as a Polanyian countermovement provoked by the deregulation of coffee and/or a spontaneous response to the threat of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2005), I argue that what seems like the “spontaneous” reaction of subjects to the threat of losing their lands can only be understood in relation to the particular historical geographies of the Ch’orti’ region and the conjunctural moment that produced it.

Central to this story is the commodity that drove state and township formation and racialized dispossession and formed the cornerstone of PROZACHI I and II: coffee. As mentioned in the closing of the last chapter, in the Ch’orti’ area the coffee crisis formed part of a “Perfect Storm” —a “disaster of such magnitude that it left virtually no one untouched and tore asunder existing social formations and relations.”<sup>236</sup>

Tracing the fall out of this storm on the regional economy as well as on village and individual lives, I make three interventions: First, the global coffee crisis *is* a world economic phenomena born from a contentious process that both led to the dis-embedding of coffee prices and production quotas from the costs of social reproduction of those who produce it (and those on whose labor its production depends) and arose from a shift and concentration of profits and control over coffee to the Global North. Yet, how a bottoming out of market prices articulates with concrete subjects and places can only be understood through historical geographic specificity and a relational analysis of its connection to other processes and practices in multiple arenas. Histories and memories of dispossession, the everyday practices of “life’s work” (Mitchell, Marston, & Katz, 2003) and the encounters of recognition (Gilmore, 2007) create the possibilities and limits of struggle. While the demands of New Day in the face of crisis are unique, the emergence and development of New Day as an organization that makes demands is deeply entwined with movements brewing elsewhere in Guatemala.

Second, gender and race are crucial to understanding the conditions of “spontaneity.” A decade of neo-liberal peace making and disaster de(bt)velopment had produced gendered and racialized landscapes and landscapes that conditioned how campesin@ and Ch’orti’campesin@ families were able to weather the perfect storm. This in turn catalyzed material and symbolic connections between dispossession and social reproduction. These connections spawned and shaped the unexpected alliances that are part of this conjunctural account of the rise of a struggle against the effects of neo-liberal “D”evelopment by those whom it had targeted.

In this chapter, then, I make visible how the divergent ways that rural producers experienced and confronted a conjunctural crisis was articulated, as in joined together and expressed with the region’s historical processes and everyday practices. Section I examines how and why drought, coffee market collapse, and borrowing practices converged in a Perfect Storm that tears apart the regional economy. Section II suggests the material and symbolic consequences of that storm, and shows the spaces and places where through mutual recognition shame begins to shift to action. The third section then looks at two key trajectories (one initiated by people in Olopa and the other in La Unión) of concrete action and the limits and possibilities they encounter in seeking to address the problem of debt. The last section shows the birth of New Day as bringing together the journey from guilt to recognition with particular understandings of neo-liberal peace-making and the accompaniment of two organic intellectuals—one national and one local. A particular

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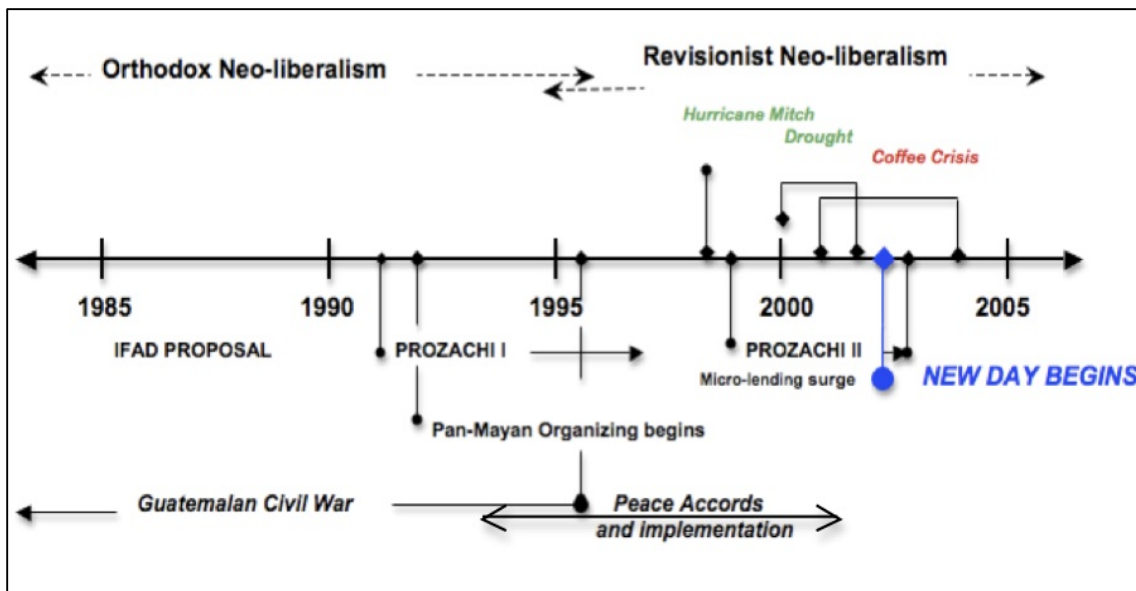
<sup>236</sup> (Newman & al, 2008)



discourse on struggle, then, hooks into the particular histories and memories of militarized silence and post-revolutionary promises of indebted people and begins to gain traction. The following timeline situates the steps that led to the dawn of New Day in relation to the broader processes of that period.

Figure 5.1: Time Line: "Dawn" of New Day.

**Section 1— Trouble Brewing: The Coffee Connection and the Ch’orti’ Campesin@ House of Cards<sup>237</sup>**



The world economy may run on fossil fuels, but it also runs on coffee.<sup>15</sup>

John Talbott

*Pa que la realidad no se sufra tanto  
Ojalá que llueva café en el campo*

*So that one not suffer reality so much  
I hope it rains coffee in the countryside*  
Juan Luis Guerra

**Good to the Last Drop?**

When I ask people in the Ch’orti’ region, “How did you end up in the central plaza (of Olopa or Camotán)?” their first response is: cuando se cayó el precio del café; cuando el café perdió su

<sup>237</sup> Thanks to Daniel Graham for the house of cards metaphor.

valor (when the coffee prices fell; when coffee lost its value). Indeed, between 2000 and 2003 world coffee prices dropped spectacularly to levels lower than they had registered in 50 years (Nevins, 2007; Oxfam-International, Gresser, & Tickell, 2002) and the composite world coffee price 1999–2003 constituted less than half of its 1984–89 price (Bacon, 2005; Daviron & Ponte, 2005, p. 88).<sup>238</sup>

In addition to gutting coffee-producing nations' gross national product, the drop in coffee prices struck a paralyzing blow to producers—small, medium, and large—who left their coffee rotting on bushes rather than lose money harvesting it. It also devastated the economies of rural laborers (permanent and temporary) who counted on plantation wages to feed their families, meet their financial obligations, and fund their next agricultural cycle.

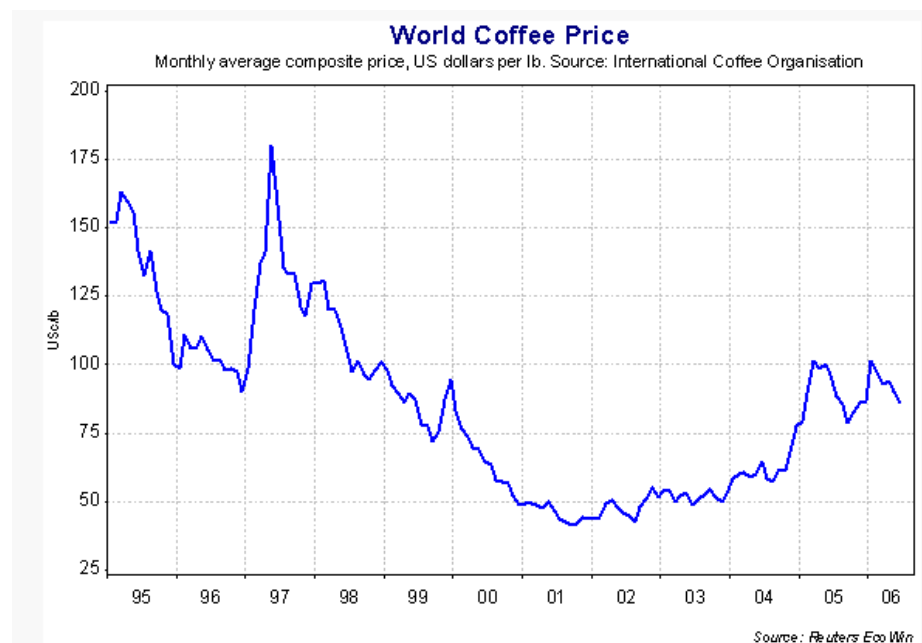


Figure 5.2: World Coffee Prices

The drop in prices catalyzed crises throughout Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia. The contours through those crises differed between and within nation states (Bacon, Meléndez, Gliessman, Goodman, & Jonathan, 2008; Plataforma-Agraria, 2003; Velásquez-Nimatuj, 2005) (Eakin, Tucker, & Castellanos, 2006; Nevins, 2007; Oxfam-International, et al., 2002). In Guatemala nationally, the drop in prices meant a serious reduction in foreign currency. This effect rippled through the economy, further shrinking the already miniscule social budget and creating one more opportunity for the state to defend capital. Yet, the drop affected sectors differentially. Producers (small and large) were hit first. Unable to recover their costs of production, they took measures to reduce operations. Nationally coffee producers fired over 65,000 permanent laborers in 2001 and did not contract another estimated 84,000 seasonal workers. In 2002 the numbers rose when another 98,000 workers were dismissed and a total of 126,000 seasonal workers left without work. Those who kept their jobs suffered a serious drop in

<sup>238</sup> Yet, what the chart does not show are the contested processes through which the fate of coffee prices and quotas was wrested from the hands of producer countries and thrown to the market. See (Nevins, 2007; Ponte, 2002).

wages, with no one earning even \$3.00 a day. Referring specifically to violent hardship that this reality brought to seasonal and permanent workers and their families in Western and Southern Guatemala, K'iche' anthropologist Irma Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj argues that unlike the past, when agrarian capitalism was built on the backs of indigenous labor, in the present "crisis in the countryside doesn't occur because of the desperation of the exploited *campesinado* (campesin@ population) but because the system of their exploitation suddenly stopped (Velásquez-Nimatuj, 2005, p. 53) (*author's translation*).

Indeed, the Portillo government (known for its populist tendencies) bustled to enact a rescue plan that only recognized the plight of large producers, and even then mainly those with second-tier ties to agro-export. The bailout plan extended no remuneration or relief for fired or non-contracted labor (Velásquez-Nimatuj, 2005) and little institutional assistance and no financial support to small and medium-holders (Eakin, et al., 2006; Plataforma-Agraria, 2003), including those whom PROZACHI-MAGA had spent 10 years training and financing.

In 1989, IFAD researchers and technicians were formulating and negotiating the final draft project that would hinge on small producers diversifying into coffee production. But at the same time, the Guatemalan government was voting along with the U.S. to dissolve the International Coffee Agreement (Johnson, 2010). The ICA had been a series of international agreements set in place in 1962 that had "led to the establishment of a regulatory system that set a target price for coffee and assigned export quotas to each producing country" (Nevins, 2007, p. 235) see also (Goodman, 2008; Ponte, 2002; Topik, et al., 2010). While problematic in many ways, the ICA had created some semblance of a level playing field for producer nations. Taking into account the increased possibility of price volatility, the 1989 IFAD Recommendation to the Board asserted that project goals and participants' success would still be viable with a substantial drop in prices (IFAD, 1989). Perhaps small coffee producers in the Ch'orti' area could have weathered the drop in prices, as calculated, but they could not weather "the perfect storm."

What shaped the ripple effect of the coffee crisis in the Ch'orti' region was its head-on collision with an historical phenomenon in the region: drought. Between 2000 and 2003, three seasons of drought, three years of abysmal prices, and an unsustainable credit dynamic converged, toppling the Ch'orti' campesin@ house of cards and tearing the regional economy apart at the seams.

### **Rethinking the Perfect Storm: Geographies of Crisis**

While the Ch'orti' area was only one of many Central American coffee producing regions that suffered the convergence of *el Niño*-cycle droughts and the plummeting of coffee prices between 2002 and 2003, it was the place that received international attention to assuage the famine the crisis provoked—(debt, however, remained off the international radar). Besides overlooking the ways in which coffee expansion in the region and the market dependencies influenced land use, environmental degradation, and subsistence food production, intensifying drought effects and hunger, the emergency aid failed to address even the short-term effects. It did leave two last traces in the region: the grinding image of the Ch'orti' region as an impossible and tragic case of people who cannot help themselves and who experience deepening dependence on Food for Work programs as the only safety net.

In analyzing the U.S. foreclosure crisis, Kathe Newman pushes beyond the immediate visible causes of the crisis that “fall short of illuminating the broader context in which [these elements] were possible” and calls attention to the structural forces that conditioned the rules governing banks and borrowers as well as the general economic landscape (Newman & al, 2008).<sup>239</sup> Similarly, the “elements” of the perfect storm in the Ch’orti’ region—coffee crisis, drought, and irresponsible lending and borrowing practices—must be understood in the face of broader historical and geographic dynamics. Agro-export expansion based on unequal, racialized land tenure regimes pushed people further into the mountains, stripping the area of its forest cover (chapters 1 and 2). The production of entrepreneurial citizens furthered the neo-liberal project by advancing credit to people in ways that almost guaranteed indebtedness (chapter 4), and in some places actually increased the vulnerability of soils and food systems (chapters 3 and 4). Furthermore, the regional economy had deepened its dependence upon a crop whose fate was tied to the uneven terrains of North-South politics and the global market—themselves both products of national and international restructuring over the last forty years. Most significantly, the coffee connection short-circuited as three of the four municipalities were bracing for their second consecutive years of drought (2000–2001), intensified specifically by a century of progressive deforestation. In other words, the regional cash economy collapsed at the same time that food—corn and beans—production possibilities were literally drying up.

## **Section 2—Debt Threats: the Social Re-production of Dispossession**

The machete vendor, the fertilizer and seed supplier, the woman who goes door to door selling used clothing, the corner store owner, the whole local economy went to pieces, because it was connected to coffee. I call this the coffee circuit.

Omar Jerónimo, Coordinator CCCH-New Day

Deeper structural analysis on the one hand makes clear that there is nothing “natural” about the convergence of drought, coffee market volatility, and debt and on the other opens up the political stakes of its reverberations. The task is more complex. Rather than mapping the devastating effects of the drought on Jocotán, Camotán, and indigenous parts of Olopa or coffee crisis on the *fincas* of La Unión and Olopa, it is important to address the devastating ways in which the interconnected global, national, and localized dynamics linked drought with the coffee and debt crises. As the next pages reveal, I have not been able to detail how the multiple linked crises that devastated production led to threats of dispossession without also laying out tight relations among the economies of production, social production, and social reproduction.

Unlike Hurricane Mitch, which wreaked its first damage in a swift blow lasting at most a week, the combined effects of the coffee crisis and drought took their toll slowly, progressively squeezing the life blood out of medium and smallholders, permanent workers, and *colonos*. As early as 2001, borrowers could not make their payments. As discussed at the end of the last chapter, in an attempt to avoid default on their loans or to at least keep up with the interest

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<sup>239</sup> A relational comparison of a particular place where the U.S. foreclosure crisis has been particularly disastrous with the pro-poor lending crisis in the Ch’orti’ East could highlight some important connections in relation to process of dispossession and related struggles, especially now as people left with homes in the foreclosure crisis are joining the Occupy Wall Street movement.

payments, even though “they knew they were digging another hole, without having filled the first”(Plataforma-Agraria, 2004, p. 6), those in debt took out other loans to pay off the first ones. Most producers of coffee or basic grains who could produce some sort of deed or join a solidarity group to take out another loan did so. Yet, like Doña Margarita, whose story of multiple debts is analyzed in chapter 4, they found themselves caught between watching their children go hungry as they tried to stave off creditors, making payment on the interest, or spending the loan money on food to survive, while interest and penalties on multiple loans mounted.

Clearly, these relations are deeply gendered. Families in which only the male head of household had accessed credit up to the crisis in the past began taking advantage of gender-friendly loans, especially in the coffee-producing parts of Olopa and all of La Union. Furthermore, the wives of even mid-size producers found themselves standing in line with the poorest of the poor for sacks of donated corn, beans, and cooking oil to lessen the debt toll. In this sense, the deadly meeting of drought, coffee crisis, and debt simultaneously threatened the very nerve of social reproduction and created the conditions for playing off (and eventually reworking) existing power-laden gendered dynamics (in the household, emergency relief structures, and finance institutions) while providing gender-informed opportunities for survival.<sup>240</sup> When the court-issued collection notices started to arrive, usually delivered by menacing agents who acted more like thugs, their threats of jail, foreclosure and expropriation of goods, mortgaged or not, raised the specter of dispossession.

### **Raising the Specters of Guilt and Dispossession**

I tell you I couldn't pay because of the big crisis with the coffee plantations; they lost money so our money didn't stretch. We couldn't buy fertilizer (for basic grains); we began using the loan money just to survive.

Almost in a daze, villagers surveyed the wreck of the storm. Without any means of income on the horizon and the previous year's meager harvest of corn and beans gone, the soon-to-be coined “Ch'orti' debt” loomed more ominously in the region than in national discussion. In what follows I analyze the final steps of the route that was to put “the Ch'orti' Debt” on national agendas. Less than a year earlier, the winds of “cooperation” had changed. The same banks, cooperatives, government trusts, micro-lending institutions, and even Catholic Charities (CARITAS) that had been providing the rural poor with seemingly unending credit possibilities as development or emergency assistance over the last decade had begun sending collection agents and notices to people's homes, trying to force loan repayment out of them. Ultimately, these visits—of paper and persons—threatened to blackball clients as credit unworthy, foreclose on mortgaged homes and productive land, and even imprison debtors. Coming after two years of drought and record low coffee prices that had dried up crops, markets, and many seasonal labor opportunities within and outside the region, the perfect storm provoked panic and shame among a population whose lives and livelihoods depended on access to land. Many families could barely feed their children; for most, finding the cash to pay their loan was a utopian dream. Yet, neither

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<sup>240</sup> The only silver lining to the crisis, as University Professor and agronomist, Silvel Elias explained to me, is that “on the one hand the famine made visible the absolute failure of international cooperation and on the other, while PROZACHI had catalyzed coffee expansion in the region, the coffee crisis put brakes on it.”

loan officers nor collection agents had the institutional backing to consider these circumstances. Their job was to scare people into paying.

Indeed, the real stakes for almost 7,000 rural families<sup>241</sup> having delinquent loans and receiving pressure from financial institutions for repayment were much higher. In the wake of multiple crises, these debts combined with threats to pay constituted the next likely land grab in a region riddled with histories and memories of declining access and control of land and forest resources. The pressure they were experiencing was only the tip of the debt iceberg. With USD 6.6 million owed in loan principal and another USD 8 million<sup>242</sup> in interest, fines, and penalties on loans dating back as far as 1991 and with coffee production in decline due to falling prices and consequent neglect, the whole region had entered upon a recession. Moreover, with unprecedentedly poor soil fragility due to pro poor green revolution development schemes, and prices for coffee, basic grains, and agricultural inputs tethered unevenly to global volatility, small producers rightly surmised that the situation would only get exponentially worse.<sup>243</sup> In a period of three years, some 1,276 families in the region received foreclosure notices, putting at risk 6,786 acres of land. Four hundred and fifty-seven of these notices were sent to female-headed single parent households. Those who owned some agricultural land or the lot where their house stood reasoned that even if they had not mortgaged their property in the first place, they would have to sell it now if faced with imprisonment. Landless producers who depended upon inherited usufruct rights to *manzanaje* (municipal land) would have to surrender those rights to large landowners in exchange for a loan to pay their debts. It seemed possible that loans made in the name of addressing the “social exclusion of the rural poor” would culminate what gendered and racialized processes of municipal formation, counter-revolution, counter-insurgency, and militarized democratization had begun: dispossession.

As the threats became more ominous and the penalties and interest mounted, people who had participated in the various projects and solidarity groups described in the last chapters did not know what to do. For those who spoke Ch’orti’ and for those whose generation had lost the words but not the practices and for all those *mestizo* producers who had heard the stories of Ubico’s time, debt and guilt were synonymous and carried with them the historic threat of jail, beatings, dispossession, and even death.

The question was how to deal with the subjective and material weight of debt. The spiraling effects of the debt and the chronology of organizing for that year are unclear. The memories of those I talked to about *when* they borrowed, *what* amounts, from whom they received threats, and *when* and *how* they decided to look for help are blurry and sometimes contradictory. In this section and the next, I try to piece together the story with a focus on how the feminization of debt described in chapter 5 combined with threats of imprisonment and dispossession to tear at the very heart of families.

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<sup>241</sup> See Appendix 3, Table 1.2 for this estimate.

<sup>242</sup> See Appendix 3 Table 1.2 for the estimate of the USD 6.5 million in the principal owed by all debtors and Table 1.3, extrapolated from the USD 3.2 million in principal recorded in the New Day survey.

<sup>243</sup> A few loans date back into the 1980s, but they tended to belong to larger landowners who managed to get their names included in the survey by New Day. The overwhelming majority faced a high intensity simple reproduction squeeze.

## From Debt be not Proud to Now, We are Debtors<sup>244</sup>

I am embarrassed because they have already told me that they are going to take my land and in spite of the fact that it isn't a lot of land, it is where I live, it is all I have and if they were to take it from me I would be lost, I don't know where to turn. (Plataforma-Agraria, 2004)

As discussed in chapter 2, while debt peonage and racialized dispossession have their origins in colonial times, credit/debt as a mechanism of coercion, shame, terror, and material loss intensified and spread quickly over the last hundred years. Whether by bayonet, Liberal regulation, or counter insurgency “pacification,” the Guatemalan state’s bitter brew of racialized and gendered debt, development, and dispossession had turned borrowing into a stigmatized and dangerous necessity. The discourses and practices of postwar reconstruction in the Ch’orti’ region only deepened most sedimented histories and memories of the meaning and materiality of debt. Historically, debt had been a scarlet letter blazoning guilt, a chain to forced labor or imprisonment or military service, or a key cause of increasing land scarcity. In the phrases that Linguist Kerry Hull recorded in villages to construct his Ch’orti’ language Dictionary in 2000–2003, the Ch’orti’ word for debtor, *ajb’etwa’r*, appears to be the same as the word for “guilty one.” Ch’orti’ speakers frequently link the root word for debt, *b’etma’r*, not only to guilt but also to prison and to the historic practice of hiding or fleeing debt: “The man is hiding because of his debts”; “The debtor was taken to prison because he didn’t pay his debt.”; “Juan is also guilty (using root word debt) in the affair.”

Indeed, New Day members told me many stories about themselves and others becoming ill from debt. Some spoke of the debt as if it were an evil spirit that possessed them; others, like Doña Margarita (chapter 4), reflected on the consequences of trying to stave off collection notices, unemployment, and hunger by continuing to borrow.

In my case I got sick...I was sick for a year and I stayed sick ...maybe I misspent the money on medicine, I let two family members die because of this crisis and I ended up in the hospital because of this crisis, because all I could think of were the debts.

Interview, by Luis Galicia, AVANCSO, 2004

As late as 2005, those with whom I spoke still gave me the impression of debt as both mystified demon and material threat. But indebted producers, men and women, indigenous, and campesin@s had started to recognize each other in and through their concrete fears.

Oh yes, we still have the Multiple Use Centers (*Centros de Uso Multiple*) that the project built, now we use them to talk about the debt. They have become Multiple Abuse Centers [*Centros de Abuso Multiple*].

Indebted Ch’orti’ campesino from Taguayni, La Unión

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<sup>244</sup> I gloss on (Postero, 2007) with a sense of irony precisely because in both the Ch’orti’ East of Guatemala and the Guaraní East of Bolivia, the discourse and practices of neoliberal projects inform new struggles. The irony is that “citizens” connotes an “improvement” in indigenous status while “debtors” in the first instance implies the opposite.

With the coffee crisis in its second year, the fragility of the shell formed by the multitude of divergent credit policies and sustainable development practices over the last decade became obvious. From larger-scale coffee growers to landless women in artisan groups, the domino effect of low coffee prices made it impossible for borrowers to pay. In this context men and women started using the core groups, and peasant and indigenous associations that PROZACHI had formed, to discuss the threats they were receiving and to share the magnitude of the debt.

The meaning of “Now we are debtors” in the first instance was simply a conscious leap from “I am in trouble” to “I am not alone.” As Don Fernando from Camotán explained,

You would go to the bank to explain why you couldn’t make a payment, and there would be someone else with the same problem, you would go to a workshop, and everyone was talking about debt, when you would find some short-term work on a larger farm, you would meet others who were in debt.

And when one person began to talk about the debt, it gave others the courage to talk. As people started talking to one another, they also began to recognize in each other a common plight. Part of what helped people make connections was “the big surprise.” The big surprise for many, especially for those with less formal education, was how much they owed. Angela, a member of a solidarity group in a Piedra de Amolar, Olopa, said, “we took away 3,000 Q and thought we owed 5,000. The big surprise came when they told us we owed 20,000 Q!” One thing was to owe and feel shame; the other was to realize that everyone owed too much and to feel ripped off. The Multiple-Use Centers scattered throughout the countryside, which PROZACHI beneficiaries had built with PROZACHI supplies and Food for Work payments, became sites for exchanging fears and budding indignation.

Sharing their plight in small groups, workshops, coffee plantations, and bank lines, men and women in La Unión, Camotán, Olopa, and parts of Jocotán started reaching the same conclusion: for over a decade local, national, and international governmental and non-governmental organizations had spoon-fed them promises of development, hundreds of tons of food aid, myriad technical schemes, micro-credit opportunities, and multiple discourses of rights and responsibilities: indigenous’, women’s, and citizen’s. Proof of this “D”evelopment adorned the countryside: new roads, new community buildings, individual grain silos, hundreds more hectares of coffee and vegetables, and signs and posters in every *aldea* boasting some NGO or governmental project or campaign. Diverse project staff had provided (even if accompanied by supercilious or condescending attitudes) food aid, loans, projects, and training workshops for years. All of the disasters—Mitch, the collapse of the coffee market, drought, and heavily publicized famine—had simply multiplied international interventions. By 2003, some fifty organizations had Toyota and Mazda 4 X 4 pickup trucks brandishing their presence in a region. “Surely,” those in debt reasoned, “some institution or agency would be willing to help resolve this problem of the debt. We just need to find it.”

Their efforts led to unexpected changes and reconfigurations of relations that challenged both the objectives of neo-liberal subject making and indebted women and men’s own understandings of themselves and their possibilities. The divergent experiences of “looking for help,” whereby indebted campesin@s, the majority of whom were of Ch’orti’ ancestry, from La Unión, Olopa, Camotán, and Jocotán attempted to use first the channels of citizen participation and then the



channels of popular organizing to “educate” in the good sense. At the same time, the process and resolution of “looking for help in all the wrong places” foreshadows a tension in the meaning and practice of organizing that New Day leaders and members would constantly navigate, oftentimes in contentious and divisive ways but also in ways that permitted learning.

### Section 3— Looking for Help in all The Wrong Places

Below, I present a tapestry of the stories I have pieced together, as perceived by those in La Unión and Olopa who shared their frustrations with me as they tried to call on the organizations that had emerged from ten years of civil society strengthening to help them resolve the whirlpool of indebtedness in which they found themselves trapped and spinning.

#### The Limits of Associations

In La Unión the savings and loan cooperative that had convinced Don Virgilio to cut down his fruit trees now wanted to collect. Faced with foreclosure notices and the threat of losing his twelve acres of land, Don Virgilio joined with others from the five villages on his side of the mountain who also owed back payments to one or many of the financial institutions. Most of those who came together had little experience in what Don Virgilio now defines as “organization.” But, they did decide “to try this idea that [ASORECH, the regional ‘sanctioned’ association of PROZACHI producers was promoting] of forming an association.”<sup>245</sup> So, they paid the required fees, established a governing board, and completed the legal paperwork to have their association recognized by the state, and they set out to resolve the problem of the debt. As Don Virgilio explains,

We went to talk with all different entities (the different national campesin@ to see how they might help us to pay the debt. They all told us to form a popular organization [*a coordinadora*]. But it was difficult. Someone else was the legal representative of the association, I was just representing him, I didn’t have that authority...how could I organize a *coordinadora*? We stayed together until 2003 [when] the legal representative gave up... He said, “I am not going on” and since he abandoned the association that was it.

But that was not “it.” Don Virgilio had a history of persistent patience. According to him, he had never looked to become a leader; he simply had always been curious, had always wanted to learn things. Of partial Ch’orti’ heritage, he was born in a mountain village in Camotán that borders La Unión. His family had little or no land, and he barely finished second grade. Like most in his village, he planted corn and beans and went to the *fincas* to pick coffee. When he and his wife Doña Tina (who also has some Ch’orti’ roots) got together, they settled in a village in La Unión where his wife’s father had left her land.

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<sup>245</sup> According to Don Virgilio, before that, with the exception of collectives, like water committees, church committees, or getting together for agricultural projects until the project was completed, Don Virgilio and most others living on his side of the mountain had little or no experience “with organization.” Health programs tended to form women’s groups, but they only met when the promoter came and even the COCODES were not *real organizations*, just people appointed by the mayor who generally represented the mayor’s interests, not the villagers’. In other words, in his mind what PROZACHI evaluators began to boast of as strong civil society (Durstun, 1999; Márquez Zárate, 2009) did not amount to anything that could deal with “the problem of the debt.”

In 1971, when he was only sixteen and had no cattle of his own, Don Virgilio took the animal husbandry course the Belgian priests were offering. The course wet his appetite for learning. After that Don Virgilio had jumped at every chance to learn and participate that emerged in the region within the ebb and flow of terror and development. He joined a military-approved sustainable agriculture committee in 1975, and received leadership training from a Jesuit-run training program in the 1980s. He survived the scarlet letter of “communist” by being more observant than vocal, a man of few words unless asked in confidence. He served in the PACS without public complaint, and withdrew from activities when military and death squad repression increased. His change in religion (he joined an evangelical Church of the 7<sup>th</sup> day Adventists), though not a strategic move, also helped keep in safe during the period in the early 1980s when “Be a patriot, kill a priest” was the mantra in Guatemala and El Salvador.<sup>246</sup>

Over the years he had kept his ears and eyes open but his mouth shut until the time was right. So when the Association fell apart, Don Virgilio shook the association dust off his feet<sup>247</sup> and headed down to Jocotán (a two-hour walk at his fast pace).

In Jocotán, there were lots of associations [those formed through PROZACHI] and I went looking there first, but ....no one gave me an idea. I would tell them my problem and they would say “nothing can be done.”

## **Prioritizing Debt**

Whereas in La Unión, indebted campesin@s formed a small association to address their problem and then went knocking on doors, leaders from three villages in Olopa who in their own communities had been talking about the debt decided to make it public. In March 2003, they brought their problem to a consultative workshop in Jocotán sponsored by two of the organizations that PROZACHI had created: the Maya Ch’orti’ Indigenous Council (*Consejo Indígena Maya Ch’orti’*) [COIMCH] and ASORECH, with facilitation by the Foundation for the Technical Support of Projects (*Fundación para el Apoyo Técnico de Proyectos*) [FUNDATEP]. The workshop brought together leaders of all the NGOs and Associations in the region that had been involved in Ch’orti’-Maya rights and citizen participation within the parameters of neoliberal multiculturalism, including indebted campesin@s from Olopa who been participating in the Indigenous Council.<sup>248</sup> When the workshop facilitator, a professional from the capital, a *Licenciado* (a term for university graduate) with historical ties to the revolutionary left, asked as part of the ice-breaking protocol, and those of you from Olopa, how are you doing? Don Benjamin, Don José, and Don Francisco from two villages in northwestern Olopa replied, “We are *bién fregados* (really screwed). We have debts, and the only thing the future holds for us is that we turn over our land to the banks.” As they explained their situation, others nodded their heads (Anonymous, n.d.) (Anonymous, n.d.).

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<sup>246</sup> See (Melville, 2005) (Dunkerley, 1988) for two perspectives on persecution of Catholic Church clergy and laity in Central America.

<sup>247</sup> I use the phrase shake dust off, as a reference to the way as given the strong evangelization campaigns in the region, many Ch’orti’campesin@s understand their lives through images from the bible.

<sup>248</sup> The Maya Ch’orti’ Indigenous Council (COIMCH), the Association of Maya Languages of Guatemala (ALMG), *Proyecto Ch’orti’*, and a Ch’orti’ women’s World Bank funded microenterprise organization, AJPATNA’R.

The next day the workshop focused on the diagnostic of needs of the Ch'orti' people, working in groups of six with representatives from Olopa, Jocotán, Camotán, and San Juan Ermita. The orange card (highest priority) went to the coffee crisis. In response the workshop facilitators from COIMCH told them that the state had 300 million quetzals to pay the debts of small producers, all they needed to do was organize and document it. After years of heavily funded projects the words “300 million *quetzales*” [USD 40 million] fell on “fertile” soil.

Don José, Don Benjamin, Don Francisco, and many others from the workshop left that day in March of 2003 with a hope and a purpose. What Omar Jerónimo, the young professional who now coordinates New Day, calls “the NGO” effect—that is, the promise of a handout—moved them to organize. They went from community to community, gathering people together and saying, “Look, there is money to pay the debts, all we need to do is document our situation and form an organization.” Community groups and leaders spent the month painstakingly recording in their own way who owed what to whom: names, identity card numbers, amount borrowed, debt holder, amount owed.

When the Indigenous Council and FUNDATEP had its next workshop the following month, a group of ten leaders showed up with a pile of papers, each one representing a person's debt and announced to the Council, “O.K. we have the organization, now what do we do?” Stories vary; some say another period went by while FUNDATEP “sat” on the papers. What is clear is that at that workshop or the next the workshop, a facilitator told the group of leaders the last words they had expected: “Good,” he said, “now you are organized. I gave you the response. You see what you can do. Why don't you check with some of the *campesin@* organizations in Guatemala City: CNOC, Plataforma, CONIC...” rattling off a list of organizations and names without addresses.

Intentionally or not, Indigenous Council and FUNDATEP left them holding the bag. Not only did the leaders of FUNDATEP never do anything with all of the documentation that the group had collected, but the promise of government money had been a fiction. Don Benjamin and the others found themselves caught in a bind—they could not just walk away. Unlike Don Virgilio's association, which depended only on its small number of members, they had the pressure of having organized “an army” of people throughout Olopa and Camotán. Their plight combined with the pull of “recognition” played a role in their choice to establish alliances that bridged class divisions. They asked Don Tomas, the mid-size coffee producer, cattle rancher, and ex-military commissioner from Olopa, whose daughters had the human rights manuals as discussed in chapter 3, to help organize all the documentation.

Between Don Tomás' wife, Doña Marta, and Don Tomás himself, they had seven loans totaling over USD 24 thousand, and stood to lose some thirty acres of land. In an attempt to hold on to their land, they had sold most of their cows and after years of a balanced diet, were reduced to eating just tortillas—no eggs, no beans. Yet, Marta had kept putting coins into the offertory basket at Sunday mass to keep up appearances. When Don Tomás, who had assumed the Ch'orti' part of his heritage in the 1990s, started talking with other indebted producers at the meetings of the Maya Ch'orti' Indigenous Council, he and Doña Marta realized that many were actually in worse shape, and he saw the possibilities of working together. For wealthier and poorest alike, the first step was not to hang one's head in shame. When Don Tomás saw the Indigenous

Council fail to follow through, he quickly offered to organize the documentation, gaining himself and his family a possible end to their nightmare.

So with a mid-size producer and ex-military commissioner at their side, they made “pilgrimages” to Guatemala City to meet with the different national campesin@ and farm worker organizations with ties to the historic insurgent left,<sup>249</sup> just as Don Virgilio’s association had done earlier. The result was not much different. The major campesin@-indigenous organizations, as mentioned earlier, were busy supporting salaried farm workers as they occupied abandoned coffee farms in demand for back wages. Each one passed the buck, “not here try the other.” What possibly could these historically combative organizations do with a bunch of “debtors,” many of whom had some land, did not talk about agrarian reform, and had ties to the military and Civilian Auto-Defense Patrols?

“Look,” the representatives of each national campesin@ organization told the indebted pilgrims in one way or another, “it’s your problem you fix it.” While that was not the answer that the leaders wanted to hear, it pointed them back home to look for help from one another. In the next section I show what they did there.

#### **Section 4— From the Perfect Storm to the Dawn of New Day**

Within the next few months, as the indebted leaders went back to their villages and off to the neighboring municipalities to talk about the debt, much would change. Two intellectuals, one national and one local, would weigh in on the future of those looking for help. Yet, as one New Day leader later remarked, “That’s the point: there were no technicians (*técnicos*). That’s what folks call intellectuals, right? There were no technicians that created the organization.” Rather, as this section next shows, it was the unpredictable movement of people, threatened, frightened, desperate, and determined, that found one another. They recognized their plight in one another, despite their multiple differences and perhaps out of desperation, but certainly not divorced from buried pasts, these women and men, small and medium producers did not give up when doors were closed. It was the gathering groups that approached “the technicians,” who in turn reflected back the possibilities they saw in the people. In that process, the perfect storm gave way to the dawn of New Day.

#### **Like Gasoline on Fire**

What New Day members and leaders have told me about the months between when they gave up on the Indigenous Council with its promises of citizen’s rights and participation and began strengthening ties between one another is as confusing as it is animated. My best grasp of all I heard is that two levels of talking and organizing were going on simultaneously and fairly somewhat spontaneously. At one level some of the self-started leaders like Don José and Don

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<sup>249</sup> CNOC, the National Council of campesin@ Organizations, the postwar rural organization of the EGP after CUC, the Committee for Campesin@ Unity, had separated themselves from the EGP. CONIC, the National Indigenous and *Campesi@o* Coordinator who had originally formed part of the Plataforma Agraria but later split taking a much more culturalist, NGOized, and less critical route on neoliberal peacemaking. CNP-TIERRA, The Permanent Coordinador of the Indigenous People’s Right to the Land. Like CONIC and CNOC, he sat on the board of the neoliberal market-based land reform while the Plataforma Agraria demanded land reform without indebting the reform’s beneficiaries.

Benjamin from Olopa whose debts were larger and were with the cooperatives spreading the idea of organization to those in Camotán. Camotán also began to form its own group, and those indebted campesin@s from Jocotán joined them. At the other level, the buzz spread in the villages and hamlets. There was an organization starting to form to confront the debt. Solidarity groups with debts, women's groups with debts, the products of PROZACHI and micro-finance with their local leaders were hooking up: in Olopa and in Camotán coordinating groups were taking shape and they were talking to one another.

Don Virgilio explains the journey of those from La Unión:

I kept looking for help to resolve the debt problem until I came upon the group of debtors in Camotán that had recently formed the organization and I found the leaders and they said: "And you what are you looking for?" "Look, what I am out looking for," I said, "is how to solve the problem of the debt. And you?"—"We also have that problem, and for that reason we are organized here." And we began to talk with one another [dialogar].

Talking quickly shifted to material practice—collective action in both Olopa and Camotán, and with indebted campesin@s and Ch'orti' campesin@s from all four municipalities plus a few from neighboring San Juan Ermita and Esquipulas. Somehow all of the workshops on human rights, democracy, peace, and participation began to take on real meaning. The cooperatives and PROZACHI were discriminating against them. "These vultures" they said had pushed the money on them; had come collecting when only women and children were home. It wasn't the producer's fault if the crop died or the prices dropped. This threat to their land and livelihood surely was a violation of the *human rights* of every indebted producer. And one had to speak up against human rights violations.

Furthermore, they reasoned, now, there was peace, now they had the right to fight for their land, for their lives. Had not some of them from Olopa occupied the town square two years earlier, insisting that the road be repaired? An idea began to form: why not denounce the institutions that had indebted them publically, why not demand that the debts be cancelled. They may not have yet been a formal regional organization, but together they planned two *plantones* or occupations—the first would be of those Olopa, and two weeks later a second in Camotán. Producers could attend one or both.

As the idea of the occupations gathered force, one of the Olopa leaders (everyone takes credit) suggested inviting a national leader to come to the Ch'orti' region for the first concentration of the fledgling group in town square of Olopa in June 2003. During the series of Indigenous Council-FUNDATEP workshops, *Licenciado* Miguel Angel Sandoval from the Center for Legal Action, CALDH was one of the those who "had brought human rights" to the region. And while the Olopans wanted nothing more to do with the "traitorous council" some leaders had been impressed with the *Licenciado*. In truth he was not just any national leader. Known by his nickname *El Zurdo* (the left-handed one, which had the double-entendre of being a politically left one), Miguel Angel had been a student leader in the 1960s and had formed part of the early urban guerrilla. At the height of the repression, he sought exile in France, finished his sociology studies there, and returned to Guatemala as one of the co-founders of the second wave guerrilla organization, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor, *Ejercito Guatemalteco de los Pobres* (EGP), the

same organization that had been active in the Ch'orti' Area in the early 1980s. The Licenciado had also been a key negotiator for the URNG revolutionary alliance in the peace process. "If anyone could speak in defense of human rights", Don Benjamin told me years later," he could.

To their surprise *El Zurdo* came, and his fiery speech, as Omar Jerónimo later reflected, "was like gasoline, it set them on fire." Don Tomás, who became President of the Board of New Day, would tell the story many times: "Miguel Angel told us *mucha* [guys] how great would it be to have organized Ch'orti', to have you struggling. Don't let those blood suckers take your lands away, burn the cooperatives down if it is possible, but don't let them take your land." Whereas at *Licenciado* Sandoval's role was both timely and incendiary, a much younger professional-in-training, from the region and without ties to the historic left had a different organic intellectual part to play. To understand his role, I need to introduce the Little Group (*El Grupito*), which was busy meeting in Jocotán in the eye of the storm.

### **The "Still" in the Eye of the Storm**

As NGOs flooded the region with Emergency Assistance in response to the Ch'orti' famine in 2001, a loose group of young intellectuals began meeting. They were children of poor families in the area who had managed to get an education, combined with a few youth who had migrated to the region for "technical" employment. The seven were all college students—one woman and six men, one self-identified Ch'orti', and the rest, who identified themselves ethnically in a variety of ways: of Ch'orti' descent, *mestizo*, and ladino. Together, they represented the fields of Law, Sociology, Anthropology, Agronomy, Engineering, and Public Administration. They all lived in the town centers of Camotán or Jocotán, many had attended secondary school together, and most had gained employment with one of the local or international NGOs.

From their experience and observation, they had become extremely disenchanted with state and non-governmental interventions. In response they had formed *El Grupito*, the "Little Group"—a meeting space for reflection, critique, and the cobbling together of proposals. They lambasted how different organizations had poured money into the area and critiqued how these interventions reinforced structural inequities and uneven power relations within the region and between the region and the urban capital. Dreaming of the possibilities of a platform produced by campesin@s and professionals, Ch'orti' and ladinos, women and men, young and old working together, they began to discuss ways to build a multi-class, multi-ethnic, multi-sectoral alliance in the region. Somewhat reminiscent of Fanon's (Fanon, 1967, p. 177) "honest intellectuals, who have no very precise ideas about politics, but who instinctively distrust the race for positions and pensions" in the advent of independence (or "peace"), the members of *El Grupito* were not linked organically to any of the movements arising to support or reform revolutionary political currents. Yet, they all had some knowledge and constructive critique of the revolutionary struggle as well as its post-revolutionary vestiges. Aware of the limits of national popular organizations and development NGOs, they "conspired" [breathed together] with the dream of creating an alliance of community leaders, students, and professionals who would give birth to strategies for local economic, ecological, cultural, political, educational, health, and human rights

alternatives.<sup>250</sup> To do so, each student or young professional would enter (read infiltrate) some organization or institution in the region, accompany its development, and try to sway its objectives and resource management toward a unified regional agenda.

The seven members of *El Grupito* were as critical of the “alienated” urban left and Mayanist intellectuals in the capital as they were of state and international governmental and non-governmental “D”evelopment initiatives. Like Fanon (Fanon, 2004 [1961], p. 68), they were wary of intellectuals from the urban center descending on the region to solve its problems. At the same time they carefully watched and analyzed the flare-ups of popular resistance in the area, trying to discern what burgeoning association or organization might have the potential of uniting the region in an independent alternative. In their eyes, PROZACHI-formed organizations like ASORECH and COIMCH were part of the problem, serving national and international agendas before the concerns of their members. Furthermore, in discussions they saw themselves not as potential leaders of a new movement but as people who would provide the technical support for community-born initiatives. When they saw New Day beginning to take shape, *El Grupito* assigned Omar Jacobo Jerónimo to offer his “technical expertise” to the nascent association with the hope that “it was the one” and promised to filter resources to the young organization.

Thus, in 2003–2004 as other members of *El Grupito* had or were finding paid employment within different structures—human rights, municipal development, and ALMG—Omar started to accompany the mishmash of rural indebted women and men who were slowly pulling together what would, with Omar’s participation come to be called New Day.<sup>251</sup>

Raised by his mother, the oldest son in a poor family in the town center of Camotán, Omar learned early and firsthand the hardship of rural labor and the precariousness of land rights and agricultural production. He accompanied his mother to the Southern coast to pick cotton. He earned money for school picking coffee and tending the cattle of an ex-mayor, and virtually used the streets as his school when not in the countryside. His memories of the war years are running in the house in fear when the Civil Defense Patrols would march down Camotán’s main road every evening at six pm.

Still landless and poor, in 2003, what separated him from the indebted women and men was that he had acquired a high school education through a scholarship to a Quaker Evangelical school in Chiquimula, and a kind of freedom that baffled New Day members. When *el Grupito* failed in meeting its promise of financial support, Omar’s wife, Kenia, a university student originally from the western city of Quetzaltepeque who was doing her undergraduate research in nutrition, agreed to find a salaried job to support their small family and Omar’s activism so that he would not appear to be just another well-salaried technical staff member.

In the next chapter I show that the unfolding of New Day is tightly entwined with the coming to age of Omar as a young organic intellectual and the tensions it provoked at home, in the

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<sup>250</sup> *El Grupito* had a well-developed critique of who profited from “D”evelopment and the way ex-revolutionary leaders were vying to get their piece of the pie, but *El Grupito* did not, as a group, theorize about the relationship between interventions in the region and capitalism.

<sup>251</sup> *El Grupito* had bantered around different names for their group, including New Day and New Dawn in Ch’orti’. Omar brought the suggestion from *El Grupito* to the nascent *coordinadora*.

organization, and nationally. For now I return to the beginning, the journey of those in debt and the gathering in the park in Camotán.

### **All You Will Find Here Is Struggle**

Within two weeks of the protest in Olopa, Don Virgilio was leading groups of indebted women and men from villages in La Unión down to the gathering in Camotán described at the beginning of this chapter, a two hour walk by foot that he would come to make frequently. But Don Virgilio had found New Day; he had come a long way—and not just the walk from his village in La Unión.

After the second occupation, the move to join together all of the indebted campesin@s and Ch'orti' in the region was underway. Omar was accompanying their meetings and from their experience with NGOs for a decade, in the first years they described him as their technical staff. Next steps were confusing. The park occupations had caught the attention of the savings and loan cooperatives, of elites –frightened of so many “*indios*,” and of the NGOs. But typical accusations of years past—that non-indigenous outsiders were stirring up rebellion of the “ignorant ones” were also in the air. The group knew they needed to reach out, to show the grassroots membership that they could respond..but where? Well, the *Licienciado* had extended an invitation of sorts the day he visited Olopa and urged the group to struggle.

Besides working for the Center for Legal Action he occupied the post of Secretary General of the multi-sectoral alliance of religious, research and human rights institutions with campesin@ and indigenous campesin@ organizations, called the *Plataforma Agraria*, the Agrarian Platform. And if Don Benjamin and Don José remembered correctly, one of the other campesin@ organizations had negotiated 300 million *quetzales* of government emergency money to address the plight of agricultural laborers in the coffee crisis.

With nothing left to lose, the group, including Don Tomás, showed up at the *Plataforma's* meeting in the Western highland town of Santiago de Atitlán, *Sololá*. Various members of the commission responded to the group from the East, but in the end it was the words of *El Zurdo* that they remembered: “Let’s be clear. There is no money here, *compañeros*. Organize yourselves to get what you want. You’ve made a mistake if you came looking for money. Look, I am sorry, you were deceived. But here you will find no money, only struggle. That is what the *Plataforma* can offer and what you can offer to the *Plataforma*.” Sandoval also raised the question of land, which was central to the agenda of many members of *La Plataforma*, urging them to “join the struggle for land.”

This second moment of incite and insight could not have been more unexpected. Here were a handful of community and association leaders, virtually all of whom had served in the military and/or as ex-civil defense patrols, and Don Tomás, an ex-military commissioner, talking to militant indigenous campesin@s, Left intellectuals and a man who had been a top URNG (guerrilla unity) commander. The Political Commission of the *Plataforma*, was not entirely convinced. The very reasons that the other national organizations had rejected the first group of leaders from Olopa had not changed. Yet, they eventually accepted New Day, an alliance that as I show in chapter 6 would make visible the contradiction within and between the local and the national organization.



With debt in the shadows, Miguel Angel's words in their hearts, and Omar at their side, those campesin@s and Ch'orti' campesin@s, landless, small holders, and mid-size holders from Olopa and La Unión, from Jocotán and Camotán, found struggle. As Omar puts it, "Maybe Miguel Angel didn't know whom he was talking to." Rather than look for NGOs or anything like that, they would learn "to work together to get out of a problem." This, he said, "is the experience that we take from this, that organizations should be built from what there is. In this area what you have are people trained by the military, people who *have been violent*, people who *have suffered violence*."

For over a decade international and national NGOs and local, national and international state actors had literally dropped bodies and funds into the Ch'orti' area in search of suitable subjects, ready to garner resources to produce them if none could be found. In 2003, a still shell-shocked gathering of people who ostensibly fell out of "suitable" grace set out on a search of their own. The likely candidates of "the convergence on the local" said organize; the popular organizations in the capital said, "there is nothing for you here." When upon following a tall tale to *Plataforma Agraria*, as Don Tomás repeats whenever he tells the story, all they found is struggle.

### **Conclusion: The Right to Fight** <sup>252</sup>

Throughout other coffee-producing regions of Guatemala, homogeneous<sup>253</sup> groups of unemployed coffee workers (organized in groups with historic ties to the left) were occupying over 100 abandoned coffee farms, demanding both back pay and access to land (Plataforma-Agraria, 2003; Velásquez-Nimatuj, 2005). But in the Ch'orti' region an unlikely alliance of ex-PAC, campesin@s with ties to the first and second wave of guerrilla, and ex-soldiers—small and medium holders, families, and single-parent households—came together in a different struggle.

The central square gathering in Camotán and its predecessor in Olopa were the fruits of this conjunctural crisis. In the Ch'orti' area the coffee crisis hailed the perfect storm that stripped away the mask of pro-poor development. I have been showing in this chapter how the bottoming out of global coffee prices, overlapping with two years of drought, ripped apart the fragile web of socio-economic relations on which small producer livelihoods in the Ch'orti' area depended. In the ensuing contest of immanent dispossession, and with it a deepening crisis of social reproduction, the meaning and practice of organization and resistance shifted, giving birth (slowly and unevenly) to a collective non-payment movement that they eventually christened: the Ch'orti' Campesin@ Coordination, New Day.<sup>254</sup>

When faced with crisis, Ch'orti' and campesin@s linked the discourses and practices of gender equity, indigenous and human rights and participation with the buried secret hi[r]stories and memories of dispossession, primarily racialized dispossession and resistance. When the

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<sup>252</sup> Omar had never read Gramsci or Fanon when he started accompanying New Day, but his words seem to embody the imperative voiced by both Gramsci and Fanon to take the understandings of people at the grassroots level very seriously, to engage with those people, to understand where those people are coming from, and to let that process of engagement transform them as intellectuals.

<sup>253</sup> The groups themselves tended to be ethnically homogeneous and were all wage laborers.

<sup>254</sup> The very first name was the Regional Coordination of Ch'orti' *Campesin@* Organizations, New Day, but they changed it quickly to include individual members and informal community-based structures. In 2008 the organization changes its name again to the Ch'orti' *Campesin@* Central, New Day.

institutions that brought “rights” and “development” to the region refused to respond, the civil society in training, rejected the spaces that Hale suggests are to produce “the permitted Indian” *el indio permitido* (Hale, 2004), but where the journey would take the women and men who had chosen to struggle was unclear.

In the next chapter I follow New Day as its non-payment struggle unfolds. Both Ch’orti’ and campesin@ and/or one or the other (no two members ever explained it the same way), the nascent movement sets out to make its path I was not present during the organization’s first years and could only reconstruct that hi[r]story by interviews and by listening as members remembered. From pre-dissertation research in 2005, to Ch’orti’ language study in 2006, to ongoing participant-action research for different periods from late 2006 through 2009, I witnessed and participated in the new organization’s process of articulation and re-articulation in the region. I show how members and leaders draw on, reject, and rework the discourses and practices of “civil, civil” society as they navigate the obstacles, exclusions, threats, and new challenges of nascent rebellion, personal and political—limits whose roots were present in the very conditions that began to break open the silence.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> This sentence reflects a Fanonian idea as expressed recently by Richard Pithouse (Pithouse, 2004); it originally became clear to me as I accompanied the struggle.

## Chapter 6

### Defying Dispossession, Defining Praxis

Here we have no rights, we are enslaved. The rich don't pay us what is fair, the community doesn't have rights. We need to wake up.

Ch'orti' campesina woman from a hamlet of coffee-workers in La Unión

Two years had passed since ex-URNG leader Miguel Angel Sandoval offered nascent New Day an umbrella for their struggle: the Agrarian Platform. New Day had differed from the majority of NGOs and campesin@-indigenous organizations that formed the Agrarian Platform both because of its heterogeneous make-up in terms of class, race/ethnicity, gender, and past political-military affiliation and because of the virtual singularity of its initial and sole demand: non-payment.<sup>256</sup> The *Plataforma Agraria* put the Ch'orti' debt on its national agenda, but the hard work of moving the issue fell almost solely to New Day. Nor did New Day resemble most popular and indigenous organizations and movements in the Ch'orti' area (or even Guatemala) at the time. It was not the “brain-child” of NGOs, the state, or activists in the region or elsewhere and was not a strategic ploy to woo project funding or take control of an already existing organization.<sup>257</sup> In 2005, when I first spoke with Omar Jerónimo from the *Grupito*, who had been accompanying the ragtag group of desperate indebted indigenous and campesin@s primarily from four municipalities, at first from a distance and then by its side, he called New Day a “movement-in-construction.”

Every other Friday in 2006, New Day's Assembly of Leaders,<sup>258</sup> between 25 and 65 women, men, and children from as many as fifty villages and hamlets gathered in the back patio of a cinderblock house. The house, located halfway up a steep dirt street in Camotán's town center, belonged to the Evangelical Quaker Church but was the newly rented home of Omar, his partner Kenia, and their two-year-old daughter.<sup>259</sup> First in the back patio under open sky and later in the

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<sup>256</sup> Omar Jerónimo reported that some non-debtors joined the movement from the very beginning with the hope of meeting particular village needs, thus strengthening the movements' numbers and showing the first signs of solidarity. Still, as New Day began to participate in the Agrarian Platform, the demand they cared about was non-payment.

<sup>257</sup> In 2003, in addition to those state-sanctioned and/or cultural rights organizations discussed in chapter 3, two grassroots organizations gained agency in the area: the Association of *Camotecan* Producers and Cattleman AGACH, a spin-off from an Ecological Association spearheaded by a public health worker and the Coordinator of Communities and Associations for Integral Development in the Ch'orti' Region, COMUNDICH, which was formed in response to divisions within and between COMACH and a Catholic-associated NGO Proyecto Ch'orti' (The Ch'orti' Project).

<sup>258</sup> Throughout this chapter when I use the word Assembly I am referring to the changing body of New Day, association and/or village representatives who met regularly as the Assembly of leaders. When I use assembly in lower case I am referring to a particular meeting of the Assembly.

<sup>259</sup> Throughout the text I use Don and Doña, before the names of campesin@s as I did in a preceding chapter because they use the title when speaking to and about one another, but I refer to Omar Jerónimo and his wife Kenia, younger members and leaders Pablo by their first name with no educational titles or honorifics. This distinction reflects two considerations: (1) when consulted, Omar, Kenia, and Pablo they did not want the distinction of Don or Doña because of their age (under 35) and (2) it helps keep the age distinction of everyone Don or Doña would be over 35. At this point I am only using Omar and Lucas' real names. Along with the mayor of La Unión, all the rest are pseudonyms.

same patio under a thatched roof (built by Assembly members to protect themselves from rain and sun), they would meet to inform and be informed, to reflect and judge, to debate and decide. Prior to 2006, they had used the initial membership dues they had collected (approximately \$3.00 per member) to rent a house in town as their office; in later years project money would let them rent their own space again. But, it was that year in that patio/makeshift assembly hall that New Day representatives made the decisions that would significantly expand the organization's membership, agenda, and strategies.

A whiteboard, stained from using permanent markers, hung crookedly from a single nail. Each week, Don Virgilio, the man who had singlehandedly organized the indebted producers in La Unión, took out his notebook and copied onto the board the agenda that the leadership council proposed. No one took official minutes and no vote approved the agenda; anyone could add an agenda item, and Omar, Don Tomás, or Don Virgilio would address the Assembly: "What do you think?" Don Bernardo, who had participated in agricultural cooperatives for a brief less violent period in the 1970s, was frustrated by the lack of structure and what he called formality, but he was still in the minority. On any given Friday, the ratio of men to women varied from three to two, to almost even; but in late 2005 and early 2006, for the most part only a few men in the leadership council spoke. Like the agenda, membership, and strategy, that too would change.

Before 2006, throughout that year, and throughout the years that followed, New Day's agenda did not just magically expand; nor did the organization intentionally grow from recruitment and campaigns. Real people shaped by past experiences came together in all their fragility and tenacity. They brought their problems and those of their groups or communities, and often through attitudes and action they provoked new problems. They clashed with government, elites, and popular organizations in multiple arenas, and they forged alliances as well. Somewhere, somehow in and through that process, the group went from being a multi-class, multi-ethnic anti-debt movement to a lightning-rod force for multiple struggles, slowly articulating a burgeoning defense of land and livelihood.

This chapter shows the messy, painful, yet often yearning and exciting process by which New Day unfolded, how some relations unraveled and others were woven, how its "brewed awakening" created the spaces and places that linked past and present "unruly nature(s)"—people, mountains, rivers, and land—in ways that call into question common understandings of gender, race, and class in grassroots movements. Weaving together a semi-chronological narrative with shifting themes and dynamics, I trace how New Day changed in composition and cause, procedures and practices, intimate subjectivities, and far-reaching politics in and through a series of interconnected conflicts, contradictions, and crises. As I reveal these hooks between the tiniest everyday practices and the transformation of national agendas, I lead us to the brink of rethinking fundamental questions about development, dispossession, and social change.

The chapter is divided in a way that makes visible the articulation of different agendas and struggles, subjects and discourses, strategies and tactics in this same movement-in-construction. Each section addresses a particular dimension of New Day's praxis with overlapping timelines. The first section traces the first shaky years of New Day (2004–2007) as it took shape in terms of the everyday practices of leadership and membership, mobilization and negotiation, and the changing meanings they entail and stakes they hold. The second section spans virtually the same period chronologically and details the process and practices of collective reflection and analysis

process through which New Day shifted from an anti-debt agenda for members to an economic reactivation proposal that envisions in some ways the whole region. The third section shows the breaking of silence around questions of land security and defense of water and forests protection in from mid-2005 through 2008, in La Unión and Olopa, with very different discourses and strategies. The final section stretches from 2006 through 2009, and makes evident how New Day leaders' persistent openness to the problems that arise shift their relationship to land and people and thus to themselves.

### **Section 1 — Life after Debt: A “Movement in Construction,” 2004–2007**

Forming and or joining New Day sparked the tiniest hopes in the indebted women and men of the region that life after debt might indeed be a possibility. Still, Miguel Angel Sandoval's admonition/call to struggle could not immediately erase the years in which Ch'orti' and non-Ch'orti' campesin@s had acted in relation to the produced perception of a powerful pecking order in which “Others”—the state, NGOs, the wealthy, and politicians “make life” (or death, for that matter)<sup>260</sup>. For that reason, in March 2005, a year and half after the “dawn” of New Day, Omar Jerónimo still had called the organization a “movement in construction.” As a movement in construction, New Day began a process of reworking the practice that had become the banner of PROZACHI's efforts “to build social capital”: participation. Where participation for PROZACHI had ultimately been supported and nurtured only to the extent that it strengthened project goals, participation in New Day—participation's meaning and practice—changed and deepened in and through crises, contestations, and challenges.

#### **At the Crossroads of Crisis: Rethinking Participation**

It is necessary to start from the practices of the people, even if they are practices installed by the military, the Catholic hierarchy, and [international] cooperation.

Omar Jerónimo, Coordinator, New Day

Some people think that to be a member is to be a slave.

Don Mateo, New Day leader, Cajón del Río, Camotán

“One must start with the people's concerns, build at the rhythm of the people”: those are the words that Omar Jerónimo used to describe his view of how he could best accompany New Day. This strategy designed to rework the practice of participation did not, however, stop New Day from facing its first serious internal crisis; rather, it made it possible. In late 2004, a challenge to the traditional relationship between money, membership, and leadership led twelve leaders and their some three hundred members to walk away from New Day and straight to the national offices of the Agrarian Platform. These leaders, including some of the original founders who had

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<sup>260</sup> In Guatemala, throughout the civil war, the state navigated at the interstices of “make live and let die,” and “make die and let live” such that while practices based on the latter seemed more prevalent, those based on the former were always operating simultaneously. This is especially telling if we think of the relationships among counterinsurgency, development, and what Giorgio Agamben would call states of exception (Agamben, 2000, 2005).

knocked on so many doors (chapter 5)—Don Porfirio from Camotán, Don Benjamin, and Don Fernando from Olopa—refused to accept that the Assembly had called an election to renew the leadership council of the organization and requested that the *Platforma* recognize their group as the legitimate organization of the Ch’orti’ region. They asserted that the elections should not have taken place, that the man elected president, Don Tomas, the ex-military commissioner mentioned in chapter 3, was corrupt and dangerous, and that the previous President, Don Porfirio was their rightful leader.<sup>261</sup>

According to the members who stayed in the organization (and Omar), what the assertion of Don Porfirio and the others obscured was their own “vices.” Most of those who had given birth to New Day, those who had joined New Day, brought with them the leadership practices and assumptions that civil war militarization and economic cooperation/neo-liberal “D”evelopment had ingrained in the region: whereby a few know and control and the rest fear and follow.<sup>262</sup> Most often in Guatemala, these anchors with the past are met with a shrug of the shoulders, resigned pragmatism, or militaristic expulsion for infraction of rules.<sup>263</sup>

Under the guidance of Omar, New Day tried to rework the practices, not get rid of the leaders. Thus, when some leaders like Don Virgilio from La Unión and Don Marcos from Olopa, who continued his activism with the Maya Language Academy and human rights trainings, realized that Don Porfirio had (1) lied when he had accused the prior elected council of stealing money; (2) stacked a non-elected “emergency council” with allies including his wife as secretary and his daughter as treasurer; and (3) used the position for personal gain, they did not ignore the charge or purge him.<sup>264</sup> Rather, the Assembly decided to hold elections to replace the coordinating council [*junta directiva*] that Don Porfirio had heavy-handedly installed, with the hope that he would lose his position, not his membership.<sup>265</sup>

At the national level, in the eyes of the political committee and NGO representatives in the Agrarian Platform, the leaders-turned-dissidents’ charges against the newly elected president, Don Tomás, had weight. Don Tomás, a former military commissioner, could be considered an unsavory character. Possessing cattle and nearly fifty acres of land, he had actually coerced or stolen land from poorer indigenous campesin@s during the war and could hardly be said to represent the interests of the poorest. Still, he had won the election for regional president. His victory was due in part to the fact that he hailed from the municipality that produced 75% of the families in the No Payment Movement, but so did Don Francisco. Don Tomás had an extra advantage: large numbers of women and men from the less indigenous villages and families of Olopa had ties to him through traditional patron-client channels.

More importantly, Don Tomás epitomized an inclusionary right to fight that New Day members (whatever their past) were beginning to claim. He linked the symbols of old style leadership—

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<sup>261</sup> Interview 4/11/05.

<sup>262</sup> WN: Tim Mitchell, Nagar et al. on experts.

<sup>263</sup> This insight came from Peter Marchetti’s reflection on his six years of accompaniment of the Agrarian Platform.

<sup>264</sup> The accusations of manipulation and theft were not unique; a history existed in the region that equated leadership with the right to personal gain.

<sup>265</sup> One of the many changes that New Day made between 2004 and 2010 was a change in governing structure from the traditional *junta directiva* [directorship consisting of a President, Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, and a number of *Vocales*] to a Central Coordinating Council chosen by Special Assembly.

broken down truck, military strongman history, expensive cowboy style *sombrero*, leather boots, and Polaroid sunglasses—with new subjectivities of “we the historically trampled Ch’orti” and the debt as a “violation of our human rights.” (It was Don Tomas whose daughters had shown me the human rights literature, discussed in chapter 2). Even more salient, he openly repented his military service at every demonstration and assembly meeting, asserting that the army had deceived him, but now he relentlessly would “bombard the traitorous military and the state with words.”<sup>266</sup> For the indebted women and men, many with ties to the military and civil defense patrols, supporting Tomás made good “common sense.”

The call to elections, the victory of Don Tomás, the division, and the Agrarian Platform’s subsequent recognition of one, then two (as Don Porfirio’s group split), other Ch’orti’ campesin@ organizations in the region highlight the contours of New Day’s struggle to rethink participation. Omar’s understanding of movement-in-construction meant not throwing out sedimented practices of participation, but starting from them—no matter how contaminated they were by an oppressive past. As we saw in previous chapters, regardless of workshops that promoted the contrary, military controlled committees and rural development projects relied upon and or fostered one-way participation with members enslaved to the leadership of organizations, agencies, institutions, and NGOs. In the best scenario, participation in the 1990s under state-run PROZACHI or even the popular Maya-Ch’orti’ movement organization, COMACH, had become an extremely narrow two-way street where participants generally “obeyed” leaders and could only prioritize needs and approve plans. The leaders and delegates who had searched far and wide for a way to resolve the debt problem had been formed in and through that process. They respected and reinforced racial, class, and gender hierarchies of “obedience” and still believed that a good leader is one who knows how to “manage his or her base and deliver on promises.”<sup>267</sup> Ironically, the *Plataforma* recognized the split-off groups because, as one intellectual with the alliance put it, “Omar had not known how to manage the situation.” In other words, Omar had not adequately controlled the second echelon leadership to prevent the division.

But New Day not only survived the split, it tripled in membership in three years—though not without problems, of course. Rethinking participation meant that even the undesirable tenor of political subjectivities of the majority of delegates/leaders must be respected. Although Don Tomas was not the most democratic of candidates, his election reflected exactly what the majority of people in the Assembly of Leaders looked for and respected. Inserting that perspective into a dynamic process of communication meant the slow opening up of a broad boulevard with key nodes of exchange. Omar did not intervene in the dynamics that led to the split, but he did encourage a continual reflection on the practice and meaning of leadership in New Day and how it could differ from past experiences. By mid-2006, with Omar and Don Virgilio’s urgings, more and more leaders brought the concerns and demands of their base to the semi-monthly assemblies and returned to their groups with information, calls to action, and consults generated at assembly meetings. Similarly, representatives of New Day’s coordinating

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<sup>266</sup>See Diane Nelson for a dialectical analysis of the idea of duping and how it is practiced and perceived to be practiced in Guatemala. Nelson theorizes duping and being duped as one of the unseen practices of dealing with and fundamentally surviving the sedimented violences and betrayals of colonialism, capitalism, and counter-insurgency (D. M. Nelson, 2009, p. 11).

<sup>267</sup>It was the belief that a leader has to deliver that forced them to continue to seek aid after the Indigenous Council, COIMICH, closed the door (chapter 5).

council brought Assembly concerns to the Political Commission and sub-committees of the Agrarian Platform, and returned to the Assembly with updates on national strategies of political incidence and struggle.

As leaders began to broaden and deepen their understanding of their own role, they started working to change the expectations of their groups and associations through ongoing community group reflection. While the temptation—and certainly the practice—of many leaders was to simply collect dues, download information, convoke for protest, and maintain the loyalty of their membership through small material gains, the challenge debated and discussed, assembly after assembly, was how to forge a dynamic of leaders and members, resolving problems together.

In this process, the contentious relationship between money and membership continued to spur and stymie the practice of transforming participation. For me, coming out of Northeastern Honduras where international cooperation had generously funded rural organizing, New Day's ability to survive primarily on the contributions of its members seemed one of the most powerful aspects of it, almost guaranteeing that it not clothe itself in the NGO trappings so typical of this post-revolutionary period.<sup>268</sup> The dynamic of self-financing, however, I learned, was more uneven and unclear than it had appeared. First, many leaders and the majority of members continued to believe as late as 2007 that monthly contributions had as their ultimate object the goal of guaranteeing concrete benefits to the contributor. Although members at first took pride in using dues to purchase visible regional office equipment—turquoise plastic chairs, desks, a file cabinet, and whiteboard—less evident to people was that organizing and advocacy took time and travel money, whether one saw an immediate result or not. The early experience with Don Porfirio overcharging on dues and pocketing money for himself, repeated itself numerous times with other leaders. In other cases, leaders like Don Virgilio footed his own costs. Omar was able to give his time to the organization precisely because his wife Kenia worked for an NGO. When Kenia later sought to quit her job to spend more time with their daughter and help with New Day's economic reactivation projects, Omar separated himself from most of the organization's daily activities so that he could take consulting jobs to make ends meet.

In late 2006, New Day devoted two full assemblies to discussing the relationship between membership and money with leaders committing to consult with their base between the two assemblies. The fundamental questions were (1) should there be monthly dues; (2) how much dues, and (3) how much of the dues should New Day use to support the expenses of local leaders, as opposed to financing the regional organization? In theory, everyone supported monthly dues, but they debated whether the dues should be differentiated in form and amount. Ernestina, a smallholder in her late twenties from La Unión, pointed out that many women depended on their husbands' income to supply dues. Her husband did not want to keep giving her money, she said, if he did not see results. One Ch'orti' member without any debt, Don Gildo, from a dry hillside community in Jocotán, who joined New Day simply because it had an agenda of struggle, noted that dues excluded the poorest of the poor. Still when Omar proposed that people could pay with beans or labor, hardly anyone picked up on the idea. As different leaders laid out their arguments supporting a uniform amount across the board, I saw how their idea of

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<sup>268</sup> See (INCITE! , 2007), the revolution will not be funded, and *Playing with Fire* for divergent analyses of how NGO funding waters down struggle and places leadership at the service of international or national funders rather than of the people they supposedly represent. In chapter 3 I lay some of this out in relation to PROZACH's NGO offspring: ASORECH.



justice was deeply linked to a fear of privileging some over others, as well as to acknowledging money as the only legitimate form of payment. At the same time no one objected when Don Marcos announced at the next meeting that the impoverished Ch'orti' (largely female) groups (some 150 members) he represented had decided that they could only afford to pay three, not five, *quetzales* [USD 0.65] monthly. Underneath the discussion of dues, were key questions of gender and race and how they articulate with class. Although the gender question had been raised (if not responded to), neither Don Marcos nor Don Gildo mentioned that their concerns were in any way linked to the indigeneity of their communities.

In practice, two contradictory distortions arose after the 2006 decision, both linked to the experiences of “citizen participation” in the 1990s. Some leaders like Don Marcos eventually refused to continue collecting monthly dues from his base because after two years the only thing he “had delivered” to them was a few hundred pounds of fertilizer. Don Tomás, in contrast, did not turn in the agreed percentage of collected dues to the regional organization, arguing that he needed the money to cover his transportation, provoking the now-sedimented idea that he was another leader “getting rich off the organization.” Through these opposing words and practices, assembly representatives and the broader membership saw divergent images of what it meant to lead and participate. The tensions that the contrasting positions evoked never disappeared, and often sharpened, but in so doing, they eventually contributed to the organization’s ability to file down some longstanding exclusionary practices and assumptions about short-term struggle. In the next subsection, I return to 2004 to show the different ways that these shifting practices of participation entwined with the multiple and changing meanings of mobilization.

### **The Meaning(s) of Mobilization(s)**

I march so that people in the capital city know I am hungry, they think nothing is happening here.

New Day member quoted on Radio Sonora 3/29/2006

In the year that followed the gatherings in the park (2004–2005), New Day members responded en masse to each of the three national mobilizations called by the *Plataforma*. Women and men, often with children in tow, participated in nation-wide transportation stoppages, blocking highways at the Vado Hondo crossroads, seven miles from Jocotán, thus closing border crossings to El Salvador and Honduras. They stood for hours in front of the national Congress with thousands of other campesin@s and indigenous campesin@s from the South, North, and West. They even convoked an inter-municipal Ch'orti' campesin@ festival with music and tamales—the largest popular event of its kind in anyone’s memory.

In the broadest terms the March 2004 mobilization, combined with committee work, lynch-pinned the Ch'orti' debt onto the Agrarian Platform’s national agenda. Together, these practices began to reshape how New Day members and leaders saw themselves and their struggle. They also provided a mirror for local elites, other Ch'orti' campesin@s, and other members of the Agrarian Platform (heretofore the *Plataforma*) to see and reposition themselves.

Nationally, the politics of mobilization began to quell some of the reservations that member groups in the *Plataforma* harbored about the “militaristic” and “apolitical East.” Many

*Plataforma* and New Day members recall and retell how Don Tomas, the ex-military commissioner and Maya Kaqchikel ex-guerrilla commander, Juan Tuyuc, considered by many to be the Guatemalan “Ho Chi Minh,” joined hands in protest in front of the national congress. Together they proclaimed, “We were tricked for years into fighting against each other as enemies, now we stand together East and West, ex military and ex-URNG leader, to struggle for a dignified life for all indigenous and campesin@s.”

As national mobilizations and transportation stoppages brought the newly elected government of Oscar Berger (2004–2008) from the GANA party<sup>269</sup> to the negotiation table and catapulted the *Plataforma* spokespeople to media notoriety, on-lookers in the Ch’orti’ region had divergent reactions. Regional actors of all stripes differentiated New Day from the state-sanctioned small producer and indigenous associations of ASORECH and the Indigenous Council, and even from the increasingly project-oriented off-shoot of the Maya-Ch’orti’ Movement organization COMACH called Ch’orti’ Project, PROCH’ORTI’. Elites and local politicians, who perceived the increasingly combative organization as a threat, began to raise the specter of communism by associating the word Agrarian in the *Plataforma* with the 1952 Arbenz Reform.

While the resurrection of Arbenz and the memories of repression that accompanied it served to scare off some would-be supporters, New Day’s growing visibility as an organization practicing “the right to fight” (along with its connection with a Platform seeking emergency relief) attracted hundreds of other indigenous and campesin@s (indebted and non-indebted) still reeling from the combined crises of chronic drought, the rising prices of agricultural inputs, and the collapsed coffee market. In response, New Day leaders with their growing awareness (through the *Plataforma*) of broader agrarian questions, reflected upon and accepted new members and new demands, allowing the “movement-in-construction’s” agenda to grow.<sup>270</sup>

Perhaps most crucial, however, was how the meaning of mobilization shifted in practice for those involved. During the park protest in Olopa, people went to the streets to be seen, to make known their situation. Many Ch’orti’ and campesin@s still associated the renewed practice of struggle with some expectation of “outside help.” Yet, even as members and leaders held threads of this belief that “help” comes from the outside, the unfolding relationship between mobilization, negotiation, and proposal that New Day encountered with the *Plataforma* sparked deeper political reflection.

Mobilization within and outside of the region sowed the seeds of solidarity as non-indebted Ch’orti’campesin@s joined those with debts in protest even though the non-payment movement did not yet reflect their interests. Mobilization also entailed new sacrifices that required agency not dependence: hunger, cold, thirst, sleepless nights, rain in the streets, and even death as one young mother who had never previously been in the capital city was killed by a speeding car while crossing the street to board the bus home. Moreover, mobilization both allowed isolated campesin@s from the Ch’orti’ region to feel like they were part of something bigger and to come

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<sup>269</sup> The GANA party was most simply a representative of CACIF, the public organization controlled by the oligarchy and including all major industrial, agricultural, commercial, and service associations. The party had shown before being elected some openness to the participation of intellectuals and technocrats as well as second-echelon oligarchic families.

<sup>270</sup> New Day has no exact numbers of its membership that first year, only counted people, written as the need to do so arose—first debtors, then recipients of short-term emergency programs.

in contact with indigenous and campesin@s from around the country with experiences of more tightly coordinated organization.

Still, mobilization was only one side of the coin, the other being proposal and negotiation. New Day members learned (along with the others in the *Plataforma*) that the Government in turn would make concessions to most national protests within twenty-four to thirty-six hours just to get them off the street. “Winning” struggles depended on their leaders’ ability to make viable proposals and counter-proposals at the negotiation table and to back those proposals with the threat of returning to the streets if and when negotiations broke down. Thus, as the movement-in-construction expanded its demands locally and participated in Agrarian Platform strategy and planning sessions, members began to understand the value of and need for negotiation and proposal, as well as their pitfalls, at multiple levels. In the next section, I show how in the process of creating a concrete proposal for negotiation, New Day leaders found themselves having to deal with difference—based on class and gender—even if they had not wanted to do so when discussing dues.

## **Section 2 - Discovering Differences: From Anti-Debt to Economic Reactivation, 2004–2007**

The organization must have both *mística* and *mástica*; you can’t have one without the other. If you have *mástica* (something to chew on) then you never achieve social change. But if you have mystique without something to chew on, the people can’t survive. *Mística* is like mass because one relieves; *mástica* is like struggling for fertilizer subsidies.

The challenges that New Day members and leadership faced as the movement unfolded were (and continue to be) intricately entwined with the movement’s adherence to a responsive agenda and expanding vision. This section revisits virtually the same period (2004–2007), but focuses on how New Day leaders begin to deal with questions of dependence and difference within the organization: place, class, gender, and race. Between 2004 and 2007 New Day shifted its focus from a broad, undifferentiated demand of debt condonation to a more viable, differentiated, and inclusive proposal of economic reactivation (a term that the movement-in-construction would define through careful consideration, debate, and discussion) for the Ch’orti’ region. Three dynamics influenced this change: (1) the changing composition of the organization with more and more campesin@s and Ch’orti’ campesin@s who had no debts but did have immediate and long term demands; (2) the Assembly of Leaders’ reflection on the debt that shifted understandings of power and difference; and (3) the relationship between the interconnected and changing analyses and strategies of mobilization-negotiation and economic reactivation at the national, regional, municipal, and local levels. I found no well thought-out process of strategic planning in the move towards economic reactivation. Rather, as I show in this section, New Day got caught in a whirlwind of forces that took it where it had not dreamed of going. Together, these dynamics reworked subjectivities and practices in the organization, making this new proposal of economic reactivation possible. In so doing, they challenged years of members’ self-perception as victims, dependent “children,” or clients and brought to surface fundamental questions of vulnerability, power, and difference that provoked new knots of tension and conflict.

## Barebones: Dynamizing Campesin@ Economies and Deconstructing Debt

As landless and land poor producers without debts—including 75 organized women from one village in Camotán—joined the rank and file of New Day, the coordinating council members were deepening their commitment to adapt the broader agenda of the Agrarian Platform to the Ch’orti’ region, especially the national demand to *dynamize* campesino economies. Before New Day had joined it, the *Plataforma Agraria* had proposed and executed in 2003 under the Portillo government their “Solidarity with Renters” program with productive subsidies for families in extreme poverty. The Berger’s government (2004–2008) launched an all-out attack on the *Plataforma*, cancelling the subsidies and transforming “Solidarity with Renters” into a credit program.<sup>271</sup> In response, the *Plataforma* asserted that credit in place of subsidies would break fragile campesin@ economies, only further indebting those who rented land. Through the mobilizations (2004–2005) in which New Day participated (described in the last section), and an ongoing political incidence campaign, the *Plataforma* successfully secured a state-sponsored agricultural *reduced* subsidies program for the *dynamization* of 80,000 campesin@ families nationwide alongside the Berger neo-liberal credit-based plan.<sup>272</sup>

In the region, the promise of subsidies—fertilizer, pesticides, and support—for land rental tilled common ground for the “non-debtors” and “debtors” in the movement. The first non-debtors who had marched alongside the indebted Ch’orti’ and campesin@s from the beginning saw that at least some small relief to their precarious situation might be possible, while debtors, especially the leaders, saw the “Solidarity with Rentals” as a way to keep their debtor membership engaged for the long struggle. Soon leaders were putting together lists of names of possible beneficiaries, and more non-debtors were flocking to join New Day. While swelling New Day’s ranks, reinforcing the value of mobilization and opening the organization to poorer, mainly Ch’orti’ campesin@s in the region, this intense focus on fulfilling an immediate need fed right into years of dependent clientelistic structures of feeling that bound grassroots members to leaders.<sup>273</sup>

What offered a counterweight to the patron-client and immediacy-oriented “Solidarity with Renters” program was the process by which New Day achieved a deep political-economic analysis of the debt. New Day leaders sought the assistance of the *Plataforma* to build an airtight case for the non-payment movement based on the fraudulent and exploitative lending practices they had experienced. Shortly after New Day managed to position the Ch’orti’ debt on the *Plataforma*’s national agenda, leaders requested that the Association for the Advancement of the Social Sciences (La Asociación para el Avance de las Ciencias Sociales) [AVANCSO], the only research institute in the alliance, provide technical support to document the debt and its significance.

New Day leaders who could read and write travelled from community to community talking with families and filling out forms that included everything from general family income, expense information, and specific loan data to educational levels and the quantity of land facing threat of

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<sup>271</sup> Unpack corruption charges associated with President Alfonso Portillo (2000-2004) as part of defamation against the *Plataforma*.

<sup>272</sup> Name other organizations that benefit even though the *Plataforma* did most of the incidence.

<sup>273</sup> WN: To understand this dynamic throughout—not much difference East and West Guatemala see DRP study.

foreclosure. Although the study had numerous procedural and content limitations,<sup>274</sup> the fact that the organization itself collected the data for its own purposes meant that people provided far more accurate information than they had ever given to the multitude of outsiders' attempts to create baseline studies for projects. By sharing with the leaders who did the survey the details of their situation, members' sense of ownership over their struggle also deepened, as shame and guilt associated with debt further waned.

As the study results became evident, Assembly leaders—especially Don Tomás and Don Marcos—issued long speeches that harnessed human rights and indigenous rights language, filled with a good dose of righteous indignation. While reproducing the model of vertical leadership, these first “discussions” served to add fuel to the fire of non-payment. The study unveiled the collective threat of dispossession that people had only felt individually before: over 5,000 acres of land were at risk from foreclosure in a region where lack of access to arable land already condemned rural families to premature death. One of the issues that became a hot topic in multiple assemblies was the number of women in debt and their insistence on the ways in which loan promoters had coerced and deceived them, often pocketing part of the money by having people sign for one amount and giving them another. Interviews showed that many loan promoters had led illiterate Ch'orti campesin@s to believe that they would not necessarily have to pay. None of the lenders, not PROZACHI or the cooperatives nor the other microfinance institutions, had taken into account the capacity to pay of campesin@s in the Ch'orti' region. “They discriminated against us, they tricked us!”<sup>275</sup> became the dominant rallying cry, rather than simply, “we don't know where to turn.”

As Assembly members deepened their understanding of the debt and of the coercive, deceptive and wrongheaded policies and practices that had produced it and the Coordinating Council expanded their strategies (they even visited the managers of the cooperatives to make their case), loan collectors grew more aggressive. By late 2005, coffee prices had begun to rise, and lending institutions argued that producers could now pay. Their assumption did not, however, take into account that micro, small, and medium-sized growers' production had dropped drastically over the last three years because growers (unlike the wealthiest coffee producers who had received government bailouts and support) had neither the money to invest nor the incentive to tend and maintain their farms. Moreover, as the savings and loan cooperatives recognized that the state might actually intervene (due to New Day's advocacy) to push for debt condonation, they sent out technical staff with a promise to pay bonuses for every signed foreclosure notice or promissory note for restructuring that they obtained. The institutions knew that a compilation of campesin@s willing to pay would weaken New Day's hand at negotiations. At Assembly

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<sup>274</sup> As mentioned in chapter 4, the study and the database done by the campesin@s offered a benefit in terms of reliability over NGO and government studies. Nevertheless, worth noting is that the instrument did not ask any questions about loan purpose or use, nor did it indicate spousal or other familial relations that could indicate total household debt. Most borrowers guessed on their household income and expenses, as they have no firm monthly budget nor accounting records. Furthermore, many people did not know the date of their loans or they confused the name of the institution that made the loan. Data entry was also a problem. The AVANCSO staff thought it would be easier for New Day to use an Excel database, even though an SPSS program would have facilitated much more complex data analysis of nearly four thousand survey questionnaires. Finally, the people who entered that data often did so incorrectly—repeats, misspellings of names of people and towns, and so on—which again skewed data sorting and analysis. Most of the data and charts referred to in chapter 4 consists of information I sorted from the database much later, not what New Day received as AVANCSO processed the study.

<sup>275</sup> “*Nos discriminaron, nos engañaron.*”

meetings one leader invariably shared a tale of attempted (and sometimes successful) coercion while another added the following:

Tell your members, “don’t sign anything, don’t even give your thumbprint, that means you support what they say. Be careful, they will try to come to your house when only your wife [implying mistakenly that women were less able to resist] or child is at home. And stick, together, if they try to take you or something from your house, everyone should surround that person, that home. If we are alone they can knock us down; if we are bound together they cannot move us.”

By the beginning of 2006, debt analysis and discussion around *dynamization* led the Coordinating Council to link non-payment and economic reactivation. But the contours of that—what economic reactivation was and how it related to non-payment—seemed very unclear. Still, when word came at the end of February that Guatemala’s Vice President, Pablo Stein would be in Chiquimula for one of his “Mobile Cabinets”<sup>276</sup> to listen to the concerns and proposals of civil society on February 17, 2006, New Day leaders rushed to create a barebones proposal for both debt condonation and economic reactivation in the Ch’orti’ region.<sup>277</sup> In subsequent reflections on the proposal, leaders began to recognize how those scenarios connected to divergent configurations of place, class, gender, and race. Three concrete questions began to emerge: Should no one pay? If not, how do we decide who pays or not and when? Is condonation of the debt enough? Those without debt would help define the answers.

### **Gender, Class, and the Politics of Non-Payment**

Almost immediately, leaders sent out the word. On February 17, hundreds of women and men converged at the large parking lot outside the hotel in Chiquimula where the Mobile Cabinet was meeting. Carrying makeshift signs and the silkscreened New Day–Agrarian Platform banner, they pressured for entry, but there was no room for all of them. After an hour of negotiation at the door, Ernestina (La Unión), Don Tomas (Olopa), and Omar walked through the door with five copies of the preliminary proposal.

New Day’s political incidence at the Mobile Cabinet meeting in Chiquimula with the barebones of their reactivation proposal and, more importantly, at the first assembly that followed two weeks later marked an important turning point for New Day. Together, they set in motion a multi-arena process for linking the non-payment movement to a broader regional proposal of economic reactivation and made a qualitative jump in terms of reflection or action of how to think about and address difference—class, gender, place, and race—in the organization.

Women and men alike expressed how valuable being at the meeting had been. Don Hermenegildo from La Unión beamed, “Now in the communities even those who were our

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<sup>276</sup> The Administration of Oscar Berger held a total of nine Mobile Cabinets, covering all of the provinces of the country. According to MAGA, a Mobile Cabinet is a permanent activity that allows for closer interchange between national government functionaries, governors, mayors, Local, Municipal and Regional Development Councils, community leaders, and the population in general to find viable solutions to the social problems that afflict the population. The Mobile Cabinet for Chiquimula actually covered three provinces: Chiquimula, Zacapa, and Izabal (MAGActual 2006, No. 21 Anyo 3).

<sup>277</sup> Putting together a proposal was not their only problem. New Day had not been invited to attend the meeting.

enemies will believe what we are going to achieve.” In relation to the exchange that had occurred with the Vice-President, both Doña Antonia, who led one of the largest women’s groups in an Olopan village, and Doña Celia, a single mother from one of the villages that had been the site of much counterinsurgency violence in Camotán, emphasized how important it was “to hear almost firsthand what was happening” so that “no one could add or take away from our experience.” As women became closer to the action, their dependence on male reporting became thinner.

The first concrete step New Day took to recognize difference returned to gender. In almost every Assembly, Doña Antonia, Doña Laura, or Doña Tina, each representing some 30–50 women in different villages in Olopa, recounted either a past deceit or a new threat that someone in their group had experienced: women who had received 800 *Quetzales* (USD 100), who now owed Q3,000 (USD 385) and women whose husbands had taken off (with another woman), leaving them with the debt. Between their stories and the study, the demand crystallized. “ALL women’s debts should be completely condoned, their land titles returned, their record cleaned for future credit and subsidies provided so that women be able to adequately meet their families’ subsistence needs.” The proposal combined common sense notions of women as more needy, vulnerable, and easily deceived with the recognition that PROZACHI and later Génesis had “preyed” on women. What had been promoted as gender-friendly lending, they argued, was actually de-capitalization when one took into account how the amount lent to individual women vastly surpassed their capacity to pay and the pressing demands of social reproduction in conditions of poverty that often absorbed the loan itself (see chapter 4).

Yet, even as this demand took shape, just a glance at the women leaders in the Assembly exposed a crucial complication: not all indebted women faced the same precarious situation. Marisol, a single mother with a high school education, lived in the town center of La Unión. Ernestina, also from La Unión, owed debts on her medium-sized coffee farm, but her husband did not. In contrast, Doña Tina, from a village in Olopa, was an illiterate landless widow with four outstanding loans while Maria belonged to a whole solidarity group of land-poor Ch’orti women also in Olopa, whose single debt had increased tenfold. In the next months, as negotiations and pressure mounted, leaders began to address these questions of class and place.

The increasing exchange at New Day Assemblies between people with and without debts compelled New Day to simultaneously keep the threat of non-payment on the table while pushing forward on its reactivation proposal. Working on how to guarantee an “alternative regional development process” that starts from the incredibly divergent capacities, sensibilities, and vulnerabilities of member families forced the hard discussions to determine who could pay, how much, and under what conditions.

Don Tomás (Olopa) and Don Jacobo (La Unión) openly admitted that they thought they could pay, but everyone agreed, “No one would pay the cooperatives [or other institutions] until they knew where the money would go.” Building upon a growing consensus to limit the full exoneration of debts to those whose age, lack of productive land, or condition of impoverishment as single woman head of household made payment impossible, New Day’s Coordinating Council moved their proposal one more step. “Give us our economic reactivation proposal for the region, make sure debts paid return to us as seed capital,” they proposed to President Berger’s Administration (2004–2008): “If the state supports reactivation, we will collectively pay off 25 percent of the PROZACHI capital from the income generated.” In other words, the council

shifted from strict non-payment demands to a combination of non-payment, debt reduction, and state investment in rural producers to build a different future based on solidarity among rural families in the region. Those who could pay would use that promise as leverage to strengthen New Day's hand at negotiations.

To achieve this innovative proposal linking debt condonation, class and gender differentiation, and economic reactivation, the council needed a well-informed and mobilized grassroots, a viable concrete proposal that the grassroots understood and supported, and a savvy negotiation team to participate in national meetings. Still, what the economic reactivation proposal would actually entail in terms of programs and projects remained amorphous. The first "lists of reactivation projects" that leaders brought to the Assembly after consulting with their community groups differed substantially from the agro-ecological solidarity economy program still largely in Omar Jerónimo's imagination. Member groups simply parroted NGO and government projects that had "failed" over the last fifteen year: chickens, irrigation, vegetable hothouse production, processing coffee, and so on.

The Assembly decided that they needed to deepen reflection among Assembly leaders and in communities to flesh out the proposal, strengthen leadership, and prepare an advocacy team. To do so, they began to formalize the back and forth process that had been evolving: (1) formation ("giving form to" as in developing critical reflection) of community leaders, (2) replication and transfer of information and generative questions to orient the grassroots, (3) grassroots production of new ideas and concerns as they process information, and (4) re-orientation of Assembly of leaders and ultimately the advocacy team. Furthermore, in choosing the advocacy and negotiation team, the Assembly for the first time put their trust in a formal structure based on municipal representation and selected two representatives per municipality.<sup>278</sup>

The process began in June 2006 as families' grain supplies ran out. At one Assembly Omar facilitated an analysis of members' capital seeking, production, and commercial practices to make visible the cycle of debt and hunger in the region (chapter 4). The process drove home the point that the proposal rested upon: debt condonation is not enough; "How do we prevent new debt? How do we break the need to sell labor and indebt ourselves to the *finqueros*?"

The second step involved "rescuing the Ch'orti' past." Omar asked me to assist in facilitating two workshops that we entitled "Breaking the Chains" referring to the enslaving production cycle.<sup>279</sup> In an attempt to counter what New Day viewed as "development brainwashing" and hammer out a concrete long-term vision for reactivation, we asked the approximately 80 participants, "why after 10 years of PROZACHI and other donor-driven projects the communities had found themselves in 'the same misery.'" Three unexpected themes rose to the surface: land rights, indigenous cultural and economic practices, and domestic violence. The workshops evoked an astounding resurrection of productive and artisanal practices as well as

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<sup>278</sup> How they chose these representatives was still completely uneven and informal. La Unión and Camotán chose their representatives on the spot while Olopa and Jocotán (the more indigenous municipalities) said they needed to have a meeting to consult the communities.

<sup>279</sup> The process pivoted on getting participants to reflect on every aspect of campesin@ life using a comparative dynamic between memories of the oldest participants and current experience. A second key task involved an inventory of skills and knowledges of what members or anyone in the village could do from traditional medicine to making compost or processing sugar cane.



memories of less capitalist economic relations. Participants walked a fine and fuzzy line between romanticizing a less-than-happy past (“when we could discipline our children and cure our own illnesses”) and reclaiming skills and natural resources.

New Day took two and half years to produce its final proposal, ultimately reworking the *Plataforma*'s position about *dynamizing* campesin@ economies and condoning the Ch'orti' debt into a *Plataforma*-supported demand for reactivation of the Ch'orti' area. In the process, the physical composition of New Day, the dynamic of leadership and participation, and its self-vision of its role in the region changed powerfully, with reverberations. Members and leaders came to recognize that the springs of subsistence economy had been broken and that mere forgiveness of debts or provision of subsidies would not change the situation of poverty. In this process, those slightly better-off producers who had spearheaded the initial anti-debt movement began to realize that their short-term material interests might be subordinated in the struggle. At the same time, even as proposals articulated pro-women demands on the basis of gendered victimization and historical exclusion, the discussions in assemblies and workshops sparked women's participation in a way I had never seen before.

The immediacies of members' demands combined with the memories of 1990s “D”evelopment to alter the proposal from Assembly discussions to what New Day leaders brought to the negotiating over 2007 and 2008, and later sectioned into tiny pilot projects that they could solicit from NGOs. While condonation of the debts of the most marginalized—single women heads of households and others—remained in the proposal, no plan for “activating” economies for those most vulnerable, especially women, was in the plan. In many ways, the economic activities that New Day proposed, and even some of the methodology for carrying them out, mirrored PROZACHI I projects (small loans, intensive ranching, sustainable agriculture, and reforestation through the introduction of a new crop—Tahitian Noni) but with the WID component cut out.

When during a shorter visit in 2008 I pointed this out to Omar and Kenia, the discussion that ensued was telling. As Tania Li Murray (2007) signals in her work in Indonesia, farmers' proposals are constrained by the schemes of improvement that have shaped their desires. When I shared Li's observation, Omar and Kenia agreed. PROZACHI had shaped people's desires, but, they emphasized, it had also provoked what they called “allergies.” Gender, as a concrete criterion, had disappeared from the New Day proposal in direct response to how artificially PROZACHI had promoted it. New Day leaders, not just Omar and Kenia, felt deeply about gender inequity, and were enraged at the devastating way that financial institutions had en/gendered de(bt). But they (and the community members) blamed gender equity policies and practices for the situation. They found themselves paralyzed, unable to propose women-specific or gender equity projects. Even while aware of unequal intra-household relations,<sup>280</sup> New Day's economic reactivation proposal focused on “campesin@ families” as unified households devoid of unequal power relations. Leaders argued that precisely because PROZACHI had influenced Ch'orti' campesin@s “D”evelopment desires, New Day had to at least start in economic reactivation, as it had in political mobilization: “from where villagers were.”

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<sup>280</sup> See (Hart, 1997) for feminist analysis of the problems with household models, as well as WID attempts to address them through the strengthening of “bargaining positions.”

But as in its political work, the crucial dynamic was combining “common sense” roots with ongoing critical reflection. “It [New Day’s economic reactivation program] will be different,” Omar told me, “because it is coming from the organization and the organization is the people, we can change it, we can critique it.” At the root of many of these contradictions, or at least the organization’s ability to address them, was the tension between what Omar called *mística*, mystique for long term struggle and *mástica*, something to eat in the meantime. For most members, economic reactivation and debt condonation were primarily about short- and mid-term goals. New Day leaders were struggling to keep these efforts connected to an unfolding political practice. The next section examines how in the midst of developing its economic reactivation proposal (2005–2008) and dealing with internal tension, New Day took on issues that began to break the silence of the lands.

### Section 3 — Breaking the Silence of the Lands (2005–2008)

*Anyone who demands land [in the Ch’orti’ region] gets killed.*

Omar Jerónimo, Coordinator New Day, Interview 02/05

Land is the issue no one will talk about. This is something we are trying to understand. People have lost land, people do not have enough land, but people do not want to talk about land. When the NGOs try to bring up land, people are silent.

Lucas López, Coordinator, Association of Mayan Languages of Guatemala (ALMG) in Ch’orti’ Linguistic Group, 03/05

In early 2005 when I first asked local activists about land in the Ch’orti’ area, Omar and Lucas López, the local Maya leader (quoted above), shared the same assessment: post-revolutionary struggles over land and nature were absolutely necessary in the region but fundamentally impossible. On the one hand, most people, paralyzed by the ripple of memories stemming from the 1954 counter-revolution, feared the repercussions of even whispering land reform. On the other, given that historically whenever the state “clarified land rights” the Ch’orti’campesin@s suffered dispossession, postwar neoliberal attempts by the state to register properties “to guarantee secure access for land markets” (Gauster & Isakson, 2007) ran into serious problems.<sup>281</sup> In the region, land registry (*Registro de Información Catastral*) workers who had tried to enter villages in Camotán, Jocotán, and La Unión in 2003 had to flee for their lives. While for the thousands who organized against the debt in large part out of fear of ongoing dispossession, land as a demand was unthinkable, for the plans of the neo-liberal state, it was largely untouchable. Yet, by September 2005, as this section shows, Ch’orti’campesin@s both within and outside of New Day were talking about land—just not as either Omar or Lucas had imagined.

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<sup>281</sup> Along with the Petén, the Ch’orti’ area was designated one of the first sites for the implementation of Guatemala’s Land Administration Project, a Project that because of its uneven, ahistorical design has sparked more insecurity and conflict than security in rural communities. See (K. A. Gould, 2006; M. Ybarra, 2008) on some of the debates around the Land Registry. The pilot project eventually reduced its focus to just the Petén.

## Double Trouble in Global Times: Challenging the Protection and Exploitation of Land and Water

The people saw what was happening and they started saying, “they [outsiders/wealthy] want to take the land below the surface, and also the land on top. Where do they want us to go? When we were down in the valley where the river runs, they forced us up to the mountains. And now in the mountains, mining is starting. Where do they want us to go? That is the question.

Omar Jerónimo, interview with Felipe Girón, 11/2006.<sup>282</sup>

New Day emerged in a period when throughout the developing world the freeing of markets coincided with new processes of accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2004). Diverse forms of collusion between conservationists, extractive industries, landed families, and state ministries were placing land and water at the service of national and transnational capital and “freeing” original users and inhabitants of their access to and control over those resources (Anthony Bebbington, 2007; Bury, 2005; Damonte, 2007).<sup>283</sup> Neo-liberal policies establishing protected areas as new enclosures, also promoting conservation and the establishment of parks, carried on where the war left off, provoking struggles against dispossession (Sundberg, 2006, 2008; M. Ybarra, 2008; Megan Ybarra, 2010) and sparking widespread opposition to mining, hydroelectric dams, and other mega-projects (Pasos, 2010; Reina, 2008). Of course, the tentacles of these post-Millennium global, regional, and national plans to protect or exploit land and nature reached the Ch’orti’ region. In La Unión, reports documenting the biodiversity in the Merendón Mountain cloud forest led to a proposed USD 339, 922.00 Central American Economic Integration Bank (Banco Centroamericano de Integración Económica) Border Zone eco-tourism project to protect 3,627 hectares (i.e. to enclose) of the municipal-communal cloud forest.<sup>284</sup> Whereas in the fragile hillsides of Camotán, Jocotán, and Olopa different mixed capital corporations were soliciting or had received rights for mining exploration (gold, lead, or uranium) covering 80 percent of the territory.<sup>285</sup> Furthermore, companies and state officials were engaging in the groundwork for a three-part plan related to Plan Puebla Panama (now the Meso-America Project) to harness the

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<sup>282</sup> As mentioned in chapter 5, I was present at this interview and took notes. Felipe Girón shared his transcript with me (Girón & AVANCSO, 2006).

<sup>283</sup> I thank Guatemalan scholar Mario Estuardo Barrientos López for pointing out the collusion aspect of these new processes of accumulation by dispossession. See also (Bakker & Bridge, 2006) for an important reconceptualization of natural resources beyond their role in commodification.

<sup>284</sup> See <http://www.bcie.org/spanish/zonas-fronterizas/documentos/guatemala/proteccion-del-bosque-nuboso-la-union.pdf>. Megan Ybarra’s research of conservation and development projects for a powerful analysis of how “the creation and enforcement of protected areas and neoliberal land policies (projects to map, title, and register land that privilege private property) articulate in a single territorial project that facilitates the contemporary dispossession of small land holders” (Megan Ybarra, 2010, p. abstract). Catherine Corson criticizes the international biodiversity conservation agenda as it “carve[s] out new physical territories for capitalist accumulation through both the physical demarcation and enclosure of common lands as protected areas but also through the growing capitalist enterprise that is forming around the concept of biodiversity conservation.” She further challenges state territorialization as a state controlled projects which...reveals the state as a vehicle through which numerous *non-state* entities sought to expand their control over Madagascar’s forests... (for capital accumulation) thus a form of primitive accumulation for ongoing capital accumulation by dispossession (Corson, 2010, p. 579).

<sup>285</sup> An independent researcher who had received maps of all of the plans of the Ministry of Mining and Energy shared this information and the maps with New Day leadership (in a meeting that I attended). I do not reproduce them here because of copyright. The information is now unavailable in a way that shows its territorial expanse.

already depleted water supply for three to six hydro-electric dams, and set high energy pylons throughout the Ch'orti' borderlands (Jurídicas & Sociales, 2003; Pickard, June 2004).

Each of these new Millennium “development” plans depended in some way upon the last decade of “fixing soils,” which had attempted to prepare the terrain for the paradoxical protection and exploitation (read destruction) of nature. New roads guaranteed easy access to construction teams for proposed hydroelectric dams and mines in the dry hillsides, while ecological discourses and Food for Work for reforestation had supposedly manufactured consent around the protection of the La Unión cloud forest. Citizen participation and decentralization had supposedly established the political mechanisms of “cooperation” and “control” between mayors, town councils, and “civil” civil society that would facilitate transnational acquisition of natural resource rights and smooth the pathway for these large-scale projects. Unspoken was the more than likely possibility that if successful, mega-projects that were building social, economic, and ecological landscapes of exclusion would simply accelerate deforestation and deepen the misery of the land-poor majority while financing municipal governments and lining the pockets and boosting the political prospects of a few.<sup>286</sup>

In 2005, most campesin@s in the Ch'orti' region knew nothing of the links between conservation and enclosure, or the voracious appetite of megaprojects; nor were they very aware of anti-mining, anti-hydroelectric, and protected area conflicts erupting elsewhere in Guatemala and the Americas.<sup>287</sup> What they knew is that in villages of La Unión some residents had reported that another organization, COMUNDICH, was aggressively opposing the mayor's cancellation of 200 landless families' usufruct rights to municipal land, and in Camotán and Jocotán some villagers were selling land (whose boundaries or ownership itself were often in dispute) to “outsiders” for rumored reasons. Some Ch'orti' campesin@s also had participated in or at least remembered efforts (what the President of ALMG–Ch'orti' 's words at the beginning of this subsection refers to) in the late 1990s by international cooperation (Oxfam UK, the Austrian Cooperation) to push discussions about indigenous communal land rights in the Ch'orti' region (Grünberg, et al., 2000). Offering projects, they did a participatory study on ejidal or communal lands and connected eastern Guatemalan Ch'orti' campesin@s with their more land savvy counterparts across the border in Western Honduras.<sup>288</sup> With these crumbs of information opening perceptions and a lot of fear, members and new groups seeking solidarity began to bring their concerns about the future of their lands, forests, and waters to the movement-in-construction that had closed highways and denounced de(bt)velopment.

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<sup>286</sup>Since I began my research, a plethora of studies have emerged documenting the damage provoked by extractive resource industry and hydroelectric dams and the infrastructure they require as well as the conflict they provoke. In Guatemala a study presently being done by activists in the West shows the overlap of extraction and megaprojects, indigenous populations, and previous civil war zones. In the East, my work will contribute to a similar mapping in the four municipalities. For some recent peer-reviewed research on these processes, see (Dougherty, 2011; Holden & Jacobson, 2009; Imai, Mehranvar, & Sander, 2007).

<sup>287</sup> See (Anthony Bebbington, et al., 2008; McCormick, 2010; Rothman, 2001). For the most recent explosion of anti-megaproject conflict in Guatemala, see <https://nacla.org/news/guatemala's-new-civil-conflict-case-ramiro-choc>.

<sup>288</sup> Across the border in Western Honduras, Ch'orti' Maya with far fewer diachronical markers of indigeneity had won a battle in 1997–98 for rights to 7 thousand hectares of land claimed from the historical indigenous rights. See (Fernández Pineda & Grimany Vinent, 2006; Loker, 2009).

## Indigenous Places versus Gendered Spaces: Contesting Municipal Land and Forest Rights in La Unión

In November 2005, two key leaders from La Unión, Don Virgilio and Don Alberto, told the New Day Assembly that a war-like situation was brewing in their municipality between the mayor, large landowners, and the communities located in the foothills of the cloud forest. Worse, within the communities, people found themselves divided both over how to best protect their secure access to land (collective indigenous title or individual title) and how to best obtain those guarantees from the municipality. Many members of the Local Development Councils that supposedly represented their villages before municipal government were lackeys of the mayor. Some had already lost part of their land in the eighties when the municipal government divided up municipal land to some wealthier producers. Moreover, almost every able-bodied man had served in the armed forces at some time or another, and was not reluctant to pick up a gun. Virtually everyone had strong opinions, and rumors were running wild. These divisions hinged on experiences could not be taken lightly, Don Virgilio warned: “They will be killing each other over the mountain—uncles against nephews, brothers against each other.” For the next year and a half addressing the complex and volatile situation in La Unión occupied a major part of New Day’s assembly agenda and activities. New Day found itself trying to navigate between the mayor and large land owners on the one hand and a smaller Ch’orti’ campesin@ organization in the region on the other, to avoid an all-out explosion. In the process, New Day developed new skills in negotiating with local and regional government, broadened the debate on land and *la naturaleza* (nature) or, as most people said, *la montaña* (the mountain). The organization’s leaders also sharpened their own analysis of and posture on issues related to land, natural resources, local government, and post-revolutionary politics. At the same time, New Days efforts to quell tensions in certain arenas provoked them in others: with the other Ch’orti’ campesin@ organization, among New Day’s members and leaders within La Unión, and between leaders from different municipalities—tensions that hinged in large part on race, class, and gender.

Most New Day leaders and members in La Unión were well aware of their own history of militarized dispossession, deforestation, and subsequent land concentration, as well as their municipality’s unique land structure based on municipal concessions of usufruct rights to what were once indigenous communal lands (chapter 1).<sup>289</sup> Still, they had not expected to have to address the dangerous “land question.” Between 2004 and 2005 two things changed. First, the newly-elected mayor, Gildo Sosa, in preparation for the large-scale BCIE-funded eco-tourism project, manipulated Local Development Council representatives, declared the cloud forest a Protected Municipal Area and evicted 200 families from communal lands at the edge of the forest. Second, the mayor started to collect back payments of *manzanaje* (usufruct rights of municipal land), cancelling the historical contracts of those who refused to pay.<sup>290</sup>

The situation exploded in September 2005 when a second spin-off group from what in chapter 3 had originally been the Majawil Q’ij Maya movement, and then the Ch’orti’-Maya Coordination,

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<sup>289</sup> As examined in chapter 1, the majority of land in the La Unión was still officially part of the mother matrix of the transfer of municipal lands from Jocotán for the establishment of the new municipality in 1902. For three generations large, small, and micro landowners alike obtained usufruct rights to the land from the Municipality through contracts know as *manzanaje*, converting tropical forest into coffee lands and pasture and basic grains.

<sup>290</sup> While the charge, a nominal 25 *quetzales* for 1.727 acres, was far less than what people had to pay to rent privately, paying years of back pay was something that the poorer families could not afford.

COMACH. This new splinter group, which called itself the Coordination of Associations and Communities for Integral Development of the Ch'orti' Region, (*Coordinadora de Asociaciones y Comunidades para el Desarrollo Integral de la Región Ch'orti*) [COMUNDICH],<sup>291</sup> responded with a hard-line position of direct confrontation with municipal authorities (complete villages descending to town with machetes in hand) and started forming armed village security committees to “defend” against any military aggressors or development transgressors. Foregrounding International Labor Treaty 169 and the Peace Accord on Indigenous Rights and Identity (chapter 3), this Coordination, COMUNDICH's argued that the cloud forest and its future rightly belonged in the hands of the Ch'orti' communities, and accused the mayor of secretly letting his patrons illegally harvest wood from the mountain. These last accusations particularly irked local elites who had worked long and hard to *ladinize* and or make invisible La Unión's Ch'orti' roots and who by most accounts were benefitting from timber trafficking opportunities.<sup>292</sup>

Although they agreed with COMUNDICH's fundamental defense of Ch'orti' campesin@ rights to land and nature, as well as many of the accusations, Don Jacobo and the other members from La Unión who brought the conflict to the Assembly did so because they feared the consequences of COMUNDICH's methods. COMUNDICH had allied with one powerful coffee grower rumored to also be trafficking timber and who had wrangled control of a large number of poorer families' *manzanaje* rights.<sup>293</sup> Furthermore, COMUNDICH's members were threatening non-members in the villages to coerce support for their collective proposal. To the concerned New Day members, COMUNDICH's inflammatory accusations and direct assault on the mayor, police, and local elites were like sparks on kindling wood in a municipality with a history of violent repression.<sup>294</sup> Finally, they argued that COMUNDICH's demand that *manzanaje* be divided and titled as communal indigenous would create new lines of exclusion, punishing those whose usufruct rights were not in the same village as where they lived or who carried the

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<sup>291</sup> The projects funded by international cooperation to push the land issue ultimately helped provoke divisions in which COMACH morphed into three organizations with completely different agendas because of conflicts between local leaders and the technical staff assigned to their projects. See Metz (Metz, 2007, pp. 293-294) for some details of this conflict. The Austrian project required a technical staff which its chosen counterpart did not have, so in 2001 it founded a bi-national project called *Proyecto-Ch'orti'* to fill that void. By 2003, however, tensions and accusations between leaders of COMACH and technical staff in *Proyecto-Ch'orti'* caused a split that left COMACH a shell of itself. In 2004/05, one young ladino technical staff person from Proyecto Ch'orti' who was born and raised in Central Guatemalan, together with some community leaders for the La Unión, separated from Proyecto Ch'orti', taking the land study with them. By mid-2005, Proyecto Ch'orti' had limited itself to state-sanctioned work that collaborated with the national land registry process and the structures of citizen participation, while COMUNDICH, whose young coordinator sported Zapatista T-shirts and a Che Guevara beret, had deepened alliances with groups with historic ties to the URNG and adopted a militant discourse that combined 1980s Marxist analysis with indigenous rights.

<sup>292</sup> COMUNDICH's demands included (1) the indigenous communities, not the municipality, should determine the future of the cloud forest, (2) the two hundred families displaced from the cloud forest should be given back their lands under collective indigenous title, and (3) all of the villages surrounding the cloud forest should legalize their land under collective indigenous title.

<sup>293</sup> COMUNDICH established the alliance with the landowner, believing that could take advantage of his opposition to the mayor, and in the end they would manipulate circumstances in favor of the communities. The landowner supposedly had *manzanaje* rights that overlapped extensively with 5 villages. COMUNDICH'S position resonated with that of the Honduran Ch'orti' campesin@ land movement in that both organizations accepted that making deals with land owners was a necessary and acceptable evil for obtaining their immediate demand for land without taking into the material and meaningful stakes of such a tactic.

<sup>294</sup> WN lists violent attacks against COMUNDICH members by security forces and land owners.

disfavor of the new collective, or subordinating women who had usufruct rights to the decisions of a male-controlled indigenous collective.

Within six months New Day's Assembly not only had incorporated the La Unión conflict into its agenda; it had redefined it. Through reflection and analysis with members and non-members in multiple arenas, New Day brought to the surface a number of sedimented practices that COMUNDICH had not taken into account. Independently of the cultural roots of campesin@ families for the last fifty years, (1) coffee owners had used landless families to topple the forests to increase their landholdings for the cash crop's expansion; (2) campesin@ families, when indebted or coerced, had sold their *manzanaje* rights to larger owners, and (3) the combined pressures of *ladinization*, militarization, and repression had disarticulated collective indigenous practices and village cohesion. Thus, no matter how sinister the mayor's underlying intentions might be, a proposal that simply turned over municipal land collectively to six villages ran a high risk of increasing intra-community conflict, facilitating further land concentration in the hands of a few coffee-growers and guaranteeing the continual deforestation of the cloud forest. Leaving the land solely in the hands of the municipality was even more risky on all three points.

The challenge, according to Omar, was to establish a legal path and a political agreement that would guarantee that neither the municipality nor the villagers could sell, rent, or cede land to other producers or make concessions to foreign investors, tourists or any other outside entrepreneurial initiative that would endanger the cloud forest or dispossess families of the land they were presently using.<sup>295</sup> Making public their support for COMUNDICH's demand for secure land titles over the vulnerable and politically charged practice of *manzanaje*, New Day leaders proposed a grounded solution in which negotiation trumped confrontation, campesin@ land and forest issues in the whole municipality trumped those of just 12 communities, and gender trumped indigeneity.

At public and private negotiations with the different parties involved, New Day leaders shared many of COMUNDICH's concerns but took a less adversarial approach. Their proposal advocated an integral and multi-arena process of reflection to reach consensus on three main points: (1) land security for campesin@ families, (2) protection of the cloud forest, and (3) plans to address the land demands of future generations. Drawing on the various laws pertaining to land, nature, family, and indigeneity in the country,<sup>296</sup> New Day tried to spark discussion specifically on the mechanisms of co-property and family patrimony, placing ownership in the hands of men and women (to protect against transfer and sale) and tying it to practices that protect nature.<sup>297</sup> In so doing New Day leaders attempted to rework the past decade's discourses on gender equity and sustainable development to counter land market mechanisms and green neo-liberalism, move past the politics of imposition, and make legitimate future demands for

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<sup>295</sup> New Day's concrete position was that the land security mechanism should bring together different laws—environmental, indigenous identity, and family—so that the titling of municipal land protect (1) families' future (that it not be used as collateral and that it be transferred only among family members and be sold only to other community members); (2) campesin@s rights to water and forage (but also the watersheds and commons themselves); (3) all members of the family respecting the needs and interests of women, men, daughters, and sons; (4) communities from the concentration of land (establishing a limit to the amount of land any one family can have); and (5) the land and forest from other actors such as national and transnational business and the central government.

<sup>296</sup> A forthcoming analysis of the legal argument that New Day began to construct will be done.

<sup>297</sup> New Day carved out a proposal that differentiated itself from COMUNDICH before the mayor, while insisting that COMUNDICH was a necessary player in any negotiations.

land. New Day was breaking the silence on land by entering through the back door of municipal negotiation.

By 2008 changing priorities in COMUNDICH<sup>298</sup> had defused (but did not resolve) the conflict in La Unión, the proposals and dynamics that the situation spawned overflowed into general debates in New Day at workshops, assemblies, and community visits. Women's property rights, future access to land, the double-edged sword of municipal politics, and criteria for relating to other organizations all signaled points of contradiction or contention within the movement. Don Virgilio (La Unión) and Don Tomás (Olopa) argued in favor of joint property rights, while Doña Antonia (Olopa) insisted that men squander land, and she would never share the little land her father had left her with her husband. When talking about the need to address landlessness, Don Gildo, from a deforested hillside community in Jocotán, asked, "Who is going to give me land?" not because he believed someone would, but because he still was subject to thinking in terms of hand outs, rather than struggle. While some leaders in La Unión proposed combining forces with COMUNDICH and secretly joined both organizations, others like Doña Catarina, from one of the most divided villages in La Unión, argued that COMUNDICH had mounted death threats against them. Don Bernardo, from the same village as Doña Catarina, accused Don Jacobo, whose village did not support COMUNDICH, of being a dupe for the mayor of La Unión. Moreover, leaders from villages in the other municipalities, especially from Olopa (which did not share a border with La Unión) rebuked Omar, Don Virgilio, some university volunteers, and me for dedicating so much time to the land-rights conflict.

Furthermore, similar to what I documented on the contradictions of promoting joint property rights in eastern Honduras (Casolo, 2009), New Day's way of linking women and co-property land rights built upon the gendered view that women were more likely to protect land or nature. New Day did so even as they refuted similar essentialized claims about indigenous people and land and water. This disconnect between how New Day members conceptualized the politics of difference in relation to race or ethnicity versus gender appears repeatedly as New Day assumes new struggles and new positions in relation to commonsense understandings and new threats in the area.

### **A Rivers Runs Through It: Common Sense and Converging Threats in the Ch'orti' Lowlands**

We've been going along with development, but there is no advantage for us here.  
We don't want a desert

Don Chencho, Camotán

In mid-2006, non-indebted villagers from Tisipe, Cajón del Río, Guayabo, and Candelero, some of the poorest, most war-scarred villages of Camotán and Jocotán, began arriving at Omar's door and directly to the Assembly with related tales and questions: "Engineers" [the term they tended to use] were arriving to take samples, or "business people" were trying to buy land for an energy

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<sup>298</sup> COMUNDICH put more energy into following up an historic Ch'orti' land claim in La Unión that already had a legal process under way. With the immediate pressure from COMUNDICH removed, the New Day members also gave less energy to what they knew would be a long and hard struggle.



or mining project. In Tisipe, a company had purchased land from one ladino landowner within the village boundaries and was reportedly hiring men with historic associations to death squads to guard their interests in establishing a lead mine there. In the other cases, representatives of these ventures were promising help for the school and health, clinic and credits for women in exchange for an easy sale. They would pay well. They would give jobs. Don “Somebody” had already sold. The mayor was pressuring them to sell. The community had divided. Some people say the projects are good, “this is development.” “What,” they wanted to know, “is going on?”

In responding to the threats and answering their questions, New Day again opened itself to new members, new struggles, and new practices, again breaking the silence around land and nature. Beginning in mid-2006, on top of an already overtaxed agenda, New Day began opposing three transnational “promises to bring development” to the region: mining exploration, hydroelectric dams, and the related connection to the Plan Mesoamerica electric grid. This new path, similar to one opened in La Unión, led to local government as a key (though not the only) arena of struggle, but in this case in two very different municipalities, Jocotán and Camotán, with widely varied political configurations.<sup>299</sup> This time, instead of entering into conflict with other popular organizations, New Day built alliances with other organizations in all four municipalities, in the broader Zacapa-Chiquimula region, and in national and international forums of NGOs and popular groups struggling against megaprojects including the National Front Against Mining and the Central American Alliance against Metallic Mining. Within the Ch’orti’ region itself, New Day became not just a point of reference for many threatened communities but the glue that held together an unlikely initial oppositional movement that included both New Day’s land rights adversary, COMUNDICH, mentioned above, and the remnants of the organization it split from, the Maya Ch’orti’ Coordination discussed in chapter 3, COMACH.

Coordinated activities between June and December 2006 pushed in two directions: (1) forums directed towards local and regional government as well as the general urban and rural population and (2) workshops to inform communities under threat and offer formation on tactics for opposing investments. In the former, the alliance convoked and set the agenda. In the latter, the communities invited New Day and coordinated activities. While the governor, mayors, and town and development council members avoided as many events as they could, those who attended the forums and workshops learned every detail available about concessions and plans, their structural economic underpinnings, and their likely devastating environmental, health, productive, social, and gendered effects in the region. Visiting experts and local activists building upon and giving meaning to the discourses that had flooded the region in the 1990s also informed participants of the laws governing such projects, including the 1995 Peace Accord on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the International Trade Organization Accord 169, which protected indigenous people’s rights in relation to natural resources. One regional representative of the Procurator of Human Rights office tied a memory and drew a distinction both between past struggles and present ones stating, “Fifty years ago, they [the state, the military] would have killed us if we had gathered to talk about human rights and mining.” Workshops included role-play where participants dialogued with “mayors,” confronted “representatives from mining and hydro-electric companies” and convinced “neighbors” to oppose the projects.

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<sup>299</sup> My future research and writing will include a relational comparison of local government as a site of struggles over land and nature in the four municipalities of the Ch’orti’ region, breaking down the traditional highland-lowland comparative divide.

Community members, especially women, made immediate associations between their recent experience with electrification projects where the promise of electricity produced outrageous bills that they could not pay and a service they could not afford to keep. “These hydroelectric dams will make businesses rich, what will they give us?” Men and women combined victimization discourses with angry rejection as the threat of contamination and ongoing dispossession became clear. Moreover, women and men denounced the fact that channeling water to these projects would unequally affect women, whose gender roles (cooking, cleaning, and washing) depended upon access to clean and abundant rivers, streams, and springs. When they learned from a video on the San Martín Gold Mine in Western Honduras that to filter cyanide an open-pit gold mine can use over 225,000 gallons of water a day—the same amount an average family in the region consumes in 22 years, it confirmed their worst fears.

The more participating villagers understood that water was the driving force of both open-pit mining and hydro-electricity and that more water for these projects meant less for their already drought-ridden communities, the more opposition seemed the obvious path. Added to that, at least two of the villages threatened had been home to the no-longer practiced rainmaking cults. Within historical memories, reverence for water went far deeper than its utility as a natural resource. Still, history had also taught villagers to fear the power of cash. Interested enterprises and their allies in local government were swaying some community members with promises of social projects, short-term employment, and quick money for land. Some local government officials, ecstatic about the thought of sharing with the national government even 1% of the mineral sales, bribed some Community Development Council (COCODES) representatives for their cooperation in winning community acceptance for the projects.

As New Day members and leaders informed themselves and others and took positions on these threats, their understandings of themselves, their region, and their struggles shifted, deepened, and expanded. They began to embrace the Ch’orti’ question, the gender question, and the land and nature question in new and unexpected ways. Indeed, this change came hand-in-hand with new groups—some 350 families—from eight different villages in Jocotán and Camotán that joined in just six months, making New Day increasingly engaged with and representative of the poorest, most indigenous, and historically most dispossessed and repressed sectors of the region. Figures 6.2 and 6.2 show New Day’s geographies of resistance and proposal between 2006 and 2009. Note that in Olopa where the debt is most highly concentrated there are no economic reactivation proposals. This absence has to do with the departure of Don Tomás from the organization (along with the groups he represented) as well as with the northeastern Olopans prioritization of protecting the Tuticopote Lagoon. At this writing (2011) Olopans are about to start a process of economic reactivation with the reincorporation of many of the community-based groups that had left.

In taking on these new agendas, New Day did not single-handedly break “the silence of the lands” in the Ch’orti’ Area, but the divergent ways New Day responded to burgeoning place-based attempts to defend land and nature in 2006, positioned New Day to become the key reference point for articulating campesin@ Ch’orti’ struggles in the region and beyond. New Day’s proposal and strategies proved the organizations’ growing ability to root its actions in common sense, to “make critical” material and meaningful practices. In this process, however, it also made visible and sometimes deepened ongoing tensions and contradictions that pushed New Day into new crises and beyond them.

#### **Section 4 — Towards a Defense of Ch’orti’ Territory: Tangles and Tensions**

From the Ch’orti’ territory, center of the millenary wisdom of the Maya, from these lands hammered by constant food crises and utilized over and over under pretexts of investment and economic development, we raise our voices to make known...that this people impoverished by social, economic, and political exclusion are being subjected to constant social conflicts [produced by] the voracious hunger of businesses who at this moment are waging war against the people to take control of the only important hydro sources in our territory: the rivers [Grande and Jupilingo], the source of our employment and our patrimony. (Communiqué July 2, 2009 signed by residents of thirty villages and hamlets in Jocotán and Camotán)

Even though from the first months of my work with New Day in 2005 leaders and coordinators peppered their public discourses and everyday language with references to “Ch’orti’ area,” “the awakening Ch’orti’ people,” “500 years of Ch’orti’ exploitation,” and “discrimination against the Ch’orti’,” they did so more as a reworking of the cultural rights discourses that had deluged them in the mid 90s. No one articulated a clearly delineated sense of a Ch’orti’ territory—land, nature, and people—in independent relation to the Guatemalan nation-state. Just four years later, as the communiqué above shows, villagers were connecting the concepts of Maya, Ch’orti’, territory, and nature in ways that suggested a defense of a unified place and people. The communiqué also exemplified a shift taking place in the meaning and practice of membership: where New Day gained legitimacy from its willingness to facilitate the actions of independent groups and communities, instead of just speaking for and signing in their name.

How this move occurred can only be understood dialectically. The more New Day demonstrated its openness and willingness to begin to address villagers’ experienced dilemmas, help elicit practical proposals, and link communities with efforts at multiple scales, the more new groups and new agendas showed up on New Day’s doorstep. The very ways in which New Day continued to negotiate debt condonation, propose economic reactivation, and debate land policy compelled members to think increasingly in terms of a region rather than an organization. Furthermore, New Day’s growing defense of communities from mining and hydroelectric incursions both increased its contact with the most indigenous villages—those that had begun remembering their historic communal legacy and trajectory of exploitation and dispossession. This in turn led long-term New Day members and leaders to bring New Day coordinators into the fold of indigenous practice (language ceremonies) that had been underground in a sense even within New Day. At the same time, these new struggles propelled new alliances within the region, as seen in the last subsection, but also nationally and internationally, increasingly with ecological and indigenous people’s organizations that had started to define and defend indigenous territory. All of these articulations leading to a defense of Ch’orti’ territory happened in and through the wasps’ nest of historically and geographically produced structures and subjectivities and new practices that New Day had housed from its onset, continually provoking new challenges.

#### **No Trespassing: When Land Becomes Territory**

The anti-mining and hydroelectric dam alliance forged between New Day and three other organizations showed signs of fraying by the end of 2006. Within the region COMACH and

*Camoteca* Association, especially their leaders Don Rigo and Don Carlos, were uncomfortable with COMUNDICH's framing of the struggle in anti-imperialist, revolutionary language as well as what they criticized as COMUNDICH's vanguardist posture. Although I am unsure about whether COMACH or the *Camoteca* Association were any different from COMUNDICH in terms of vanguardism, I do know that in my interviews with COMUNDICH, they did describe themselves as "the region's compass showing the people which way was North." Moreover, at the National Front Against Mining participating groups were dedicating the bulk of their meeting time to vying for leadership and resources, with COMUNDICH and New Day usually lining up on opposite sides. So, when the alliance decided to convoke a pilgrimage to oppose megaprojects, with villagers from all points of the lowlands converging on Jocotán, COMUNDICH was no longer in the equation.<sup>300</sup>

Then, two days before the pilgrimage in January 2007, the ground under New Day shook and shifted. In an area of Jocotán where previously only a few villagers had been participating in the growing campaign against megaprojects, a crisis erupted. Three mining engineers who had made the mistake of entering the village of Las Flores to gather rock samples found themselves surrounded and their vehicle confiscated by angry Ch'orti' women and men who not only refused to let them collect their samples but locked them in the school. The villagers then sent out word of this perceived aggression on their land and soon hundreds of women and men (machetes in hand) from the neighboring villages and hamlets had joined them. As the situation grew more heated, women, many of whom barely spoke Spanish, held sticks in their hands threatening the engineers who sat "hostage" on tiny school benches. At 1:00 PM, Omar received a call from one of the few New Day members in the area, "You better get up here before things explode."

Thrown into an extremely volatile situation that included holding police out of the area, demanding the presence of the mayor (who unfortunately was still drunk at midnight), and disbanding the Local Development Council (COCODE) for being lackeys of the mayor and outside interests, Omar and a young New Day leader from the area, Pablo, walked a fine line. Ultimately, they won the trust of the crowd and helped negotiate the release of the engineers (at 3:00 am) in exchange for a signed injunction by the mayor promising no mining and the recognition of a new COCODE elected by the villagers. In a period of less than 24 hours, four things had crystallized: (1) New Day became associated with machetes in the eyes of Jocotán townspeople;<sup>301</sup> (2) Ch'orti' in one of the most isolated areas took charge of the structures of citizen participation in the fashion they saw best; (3) together, New Day and these villagers set the foundations for the new dynamics of relationship described above; and (4) the die had been cast for future conflict with the Mayor of Jocotán while the mayor of Camotán took note and decided not to forge a conflictive relationship with villages in his municipality.

While not yet signifying a conclusive defense of Ch'orti' territory, what happened in Las Flores differed from earlier campesin@ Ch'orti' reactions to the 2001 land registry and to a state

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<sup>300</sup> What sealed the fate of COMUNDICH's membership in the alliance is that while not part of the planning and execution of the pilgrimage, they took photographs of it and posted them on the Internet, identified as their activity—something the assembly leaders especially could not tolerate.

<sup>301</sup> Not only the townspeople began to criminalize New Day. COMUNDICH used the moment to take advantage of what they saw as a contradiction. At the National Front they accused New Day of the kind of tactics, adding fuel to fire, as New Day had suggested they used in La Unión.

attempt to build a hydroelectric dam in the late 1980s.<sup>302</sup> This time, instead of merely chasing technicians out of the area, villagers used the incident to negotiate their collective interests. The power of this local struggle and fed into the pilgrimage two days later and rippled through the ranks of New Day, influencing especially those in the Ch'orti' villages of Olopa.

### **All You Will Find Here (Olopa) Is Struggle (Amongst Us)**

From my first weeks with New Day, dynamics in Olopa, the heart of the anti-debt movement, hailed my attention. Not only did I encounter hundreds of indebted women, women who could alternatively be shy and silent at workshops or chastising and angry if one arrived late to a meeting, but they seemed to be grouped loyally behind two fearless leaders: Don Tomás, whom Miguel Angel had inspired with his newly acquired Ch'orti' "consciousness," and Don Marcos, a Ch'orti' micro coffee grower whom every politician invited to inaugurate projects with a few Ch'orti' words. By mid-2006, amidst an expanding membership and agenda, Don Marcos and Don Tomás were making both the Assembly of leaders and particular villages in Olopa their terrain of struggle. Although the fact that community leaders were divided on COMUNDICH caused tensions, this not-so-silent war between Don Tomás and Don Marcos brought New Day to the brink of new crisis.

The conflict between them had its roots in the civil war and in diverse clientelisms—economic on the part of Don Tomás and ethnic on the part of Don Marcos. The details are complicated, confusing, and probably more obscure than they show. What is important is that as with the earlier struggles between leaders, Omar and the other council members did not try to completely control the fire. New Day used the conflicts in both La Unión and Olopa to deepen reflection on leadership, vision, and organizational practice through municipal-wide two-day workshops, but in Olopa they did not opt for one leader or the other. The belief was that by collectively constructing the organizations' values and vision, eventually those who did not share them would leave; in practice it was a bit messier.

As the distrust between Don Tomas and Don Marcos grew, it fed into the choices they made. They each accused the rest of the council of favoring the other. In mid-2007, the situation ultimately exploded. Don Tomás left the organization with USD 12,000 that he had collected in quotas while accusing Omar and Don Virgilio of corruption. Don Marcos had been close to doing the same but stayed. Don Tomás' departure constituted another split, both in form and content, as hundreds of mainly women members from eight more *ladinized* villages left with him, confining the Olopa membership in New Day to the more Ch'orti'-identified villages of Tuticopote, Agua Blanca, and Roblarcito. It was under this new configuration of forces that women and men in Olopa came to the defense of land and nature, doing so as Ch'orti'.

In August 2008, when construction machinery appeared on the shores of the Tuticopote lagoon, the villagers were not going to take any chances. Don Marcos and Doña Maria had attended most of the workshops and forums on mega-projects as well as the pilgrimage, and they had shared all they had learned with New Day members in the three villages and anyone who would listen. The machinery of some unknown enterprise for some unknown project clearly, they surmised, signaled a threat to the lagoon. And the lagoon—its shore land originally stolen from Ch'orti'

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<sup>302</sup> Anonymous Interview, 10/2020.

families during the “time of grenades” (chapter 2)—was not just a source of water, but a sacred Ch’orti’ place, home of the *Chichan*, great water serpent.<sup>303</sup> While the villagers had not been able to reclaim the land, they would not accept any project there. Defense, however, meant cleansing the violation of this space and could only be done in conjunction with a Ch’orti’ ceremony. Similar to the situation in Las Flores, they called Omar for New Day’s support.

With his deep evangelical upbringing Omar had never actively participated in a Ch’orti’ ceremony, much less one linked to political struggle. The ceremony at the lagoon deeply affected him. Before the ceremony, publically and privately, Omar had always oscillated in his personal and organizational identification with “being Ch’orti’.” At times he would distance himself using the third person “the Ch’orti’” or geographically uniting everyone as inhabitants of “the Ch’orti’ area; at other times, he would exhort members to recover Ch’orti’ practices. Often, he used my study of the Ch’orti’ language as provocation: “Even Jenni, who is not from here, is learning Ch’orti’, why aren’t we?”

When Omar recounted to me what had happened at the lagoon, I was struck by the significance and almost reverence he gave to the linking Ch’orti’ ritual with Ch’orti’ defense of nature. His role there, unlike in Las Flores, had been completely that of observer. After the ritual (in which participants asked for “the angels” to intercede), the villagers torched the construction machinery, thus completing the cleansing and eliminating the threat. For the enraged hundreds who had gathered to heal the violation of the lagoon, there was nothing to negotiate. While Omar would not have recommended or opted for burning backhoes; he knew that Don Marcos was throwing down his gauntlet to Omar and the organization. Would New Day be willing and capable of really respecting Ch’orti’ campesina families’ right to choose how they departed from their dispossession-trodden path? Don Marcos had invited another human rights organization in which he had participated to come. Their failure to appear spoke a thousand words.

In the months and years that followed, I watched Omar’s relationship to his Ch’orti’ roots change, in constant relation to the continued Ch’orti’-ization of New Day in the practices of defining and defending Ch’orti’ territory.

### **Intimate Projects and Territorial Politics: Contradictions in Action**

By the time Don Marcos called Omar to witness the ceremony and intercession in Olopa, New Days’ integrity was cracking under multiple tensions and contradictions that often but not necessarily mapped onto one another. New Day leaders continued navigating the now historical tension between short-term *mástica* and long-term *mística*, with members frustrated by mounting list of incompletes: PROZACHI loans forgiven but not wiped off the books and pilot projects started, only to lose staffing and funding. The government had promised to negotiate the debt, but technicians and judicial police kept knocking on doors to collect on micro-finance or cooperative loans. Amongst the people who had first organized around the debt, few wanted to pay dues, and fewer yet dared collect. At the same time, they saw members of the coordinating council in the newspapers, heard them interviewed on radio, and gathered around storefronts to see them on TV. While fewer villagers attended community meetings and fewer original leaders attended Assembly, those who did take the time and resources to come spoke with greater clarity

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<sup>303</sup> See Girard (1949) for an extensive análisis of the role of the serpent in Ch’orti’ cosmology.

and continually brought information from their villages and municipalities: what the COCODES were doing, what they mayor had said, what financial institutions were trying to collect, how a project was progressing. Trust among leaders, as I show below, was still weak, but their ownership of the Assembly and organization had altered enormously.

In addition to the short-term–long-term tension, New Day faced an intensifying contradiction between being a membership organization with state and NGO funded pilot projects that would exemplify the viability of the economic reactivation projects and being an open-door movement that was both a lightning rod for concerns and a glue increasingly uniting the Ch’orti’ region. Although the latter was absolutely necessary for achieving the former, what villages, groups, or people received pilot projects; which leaders received salaries to accompany them; who funded the projects; and how they related to the broader political struggle were all questions that played on existing frictions and whose answers deepened fractures.

In 2007, negotiations around the Ch’orti’ debt advanced even as talks broke down between the *Plataforma* and the Berger government. When New Day accepted the Ministry of Agriculture’s offer of the remaining funds in the PROZACHI trust for economic reactivation, it sparked conflict both between New Day and the *Plataforma*, and within New Day itself.<sup>304</sup> In the former, some *Plataforma* members felt that taking the money was consummate of treason. In the latter the possibility of projects or salaries hit the jugular of exclusion: in every arena someone felt “discriminated against” or left out.

One project led to another, so that at different times between 2007 and 2009, Omar; Kenia; Don Virgilio; Don Catarino from La Unión, who had been a Catholic lay leader; Omar’s brother, Pablo; Vitalino from Camotán; and two different administrative staff had received salaries for the accompaniment of pilot projects. These *mástica* projects focused on sustainable agriculture, intensive cattle husbandry, and the planting and transformation of Tahitian Noni—a coffee like plant known for its medicinal properties, soil recovery capacities, and deep tap root that allows it to survive droughts and help prevent erosion. New Day members from the most active villages or with the strongest leadership and/or greatest need in La Unión, Camotán, and Jocotán were the first to participate Olopa members, although contemplated when project proposals were written, always ended up being “too far away” to guarantee a successful pilot—a decision that Don Marcos constantly criticized. The concentration of salaries (higher salaries) in Omar’s immediate family in 2007 was another sore spot, though no one would say a word to Omar or Kenia.<sup>305</sup>

In all appearances Omar and his wife Kenia personified the contradictory and complementary divisions in distinctly gendered ways. At home Kenia was concerned that she and Omar could not pay bills; at New Day she took on the job of overseeing the economic reactivation projects and training the New Day leaders and new employees who were suddenly working as promoters, including Don Virgilio. New Day leaders’ deep-seated rejection of the NGO-ization processes of

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<sup>304</sup> New Day also negotiated that the state turn over to them the remaining non-designated loan funds, 500,000 Quetzal (USD 70,000), for a pilot project for agro-ecological production and intensive cattle raising. The “project” created enormous identity, time, and resource tensions in New Day that hinged on new articulations of class, race, and gender.

<sup>305</sup> When I returned to New Day’s offices in Summer 2007, the team (outside of Omar’s family) spoke to me together and individually on numerous occasions, expressing their concerns with the discrepancies in salaries, the fact that both Omar and Kenia were earning salaries, and their rejection of Omar’s brother as a member of the team.

the 1990s thwarted their well-stated discourse of creating a viable mix between politics and project administration. Omar downplayed the technical while Kenia mirrored back to him the equation “weak administration = weak organizational coherence.” If since joining New Day in 2003 Omar’s earning power had been sporadic and his time away from home more than Kenia liked, by 2009 he and young Pablo had taken almost complete charge of the national political work and regional alliances, trusting local leaders to work with the grassroots, and Kenia, a Honduran volunteer, Don Catarino, and Don Virgilio to handle projects. The tensions that Kenia and Omar faced in their relationship between victuals and vision also reflected the continuing and often painful chafings between projects and politics, between building alternatives and mobilizing pressure.

When the *Plataforma* called for a transportation stoppage in June 2009 to push once again their broad agenda, this time with the “populist in social democratic clothing,” the administration of Álvaro Colom (2008–2012), it brought to the forefront New Day’s force and fragility. In the days before the planned stoppage, the *Plataforma*, with Omar on the negotiation team, was trying to reach an agreement rather than take the streets. But the grassroots needed to be prepared to close the borders for days if necessary. Pablo and I accompanied Don Marcos to four different villages, three on the other side of Olopa (where Marcos did not live or work), where we greeted hundreds of women and men from nearby hamlets and villages who congregated in soccer fields, schools, and churches. I hugged Doña Tina and Doña Antonia, two of the most vocal women leaders, whom I had not seen since they left New Day with Don Tomás. Don Marcos explained the situation, welcomed anyone who wanted to join the stoppage, and set up a communications system to let them know if it would happen.<sup>306</sup> Two days later, many of the indebted women and men who had followed Don Tomás’s departure two years earlier joined New Day’s ranks to block the highway leading to and from three border points. Don Porfirio and Don Francisco, who had split from New Day in early 2005, were there as well with their groups.

While the return of old members and the participation in a joint activity without incident spoke to New Day’s growing force, the fact that every municipal leader—Don Daniel, Don Bernardo, Don Virgilio, and Don Marcos, as well as project staff member Don Catarino—was phoning Omar separately for updates from the capital and had trouble making joint decisions or sharing information showed that competition among leaders still plagued the organization.

Where public mobilization made visible the struggles as well as the openings within New Day, the movement-in-construction’s role in setting a new precedent for stopping hydroelectric dams in Guatemala won it national recognition among indigenous groups articulating a defense of Maya territory. In mid-2009, two enterprises submitted three Environmental Impact Assessments to the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (MARN) (see endnote for the Orwellian details of that process).<sup>307</sup> With some effort and cash New Day and *Madre Selva* obtained copies

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<sup>306</sup> One of the most fascinating dynamics of the day was how at every gathering in the villages, the “more ladinized” Olopa men and women spoke out that they needed a new leader, that they had been disorganized since they had left with Don Tomás. The spatial division in the municipality had been clear when they left: the more self-identified indigenous Olopans had stayed with New Day. That day, at least, they committed themselves to join with Don Marcos.

<sup>307</sup> In Guatemala a company that wants to exploit a natural resource is responsible for the execution of an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). The company decides who will do the study and funds it. While the assessments have to follow MARN guidelines in terms of content and organization, they read like justifications for



of the studies, but they were “under the gun.”<sup>308</sup> Guatemalan law allows only a month to challenge a study, and all efforts to get a geologist or water expert to look at the documents failed. Omar sat with Don Rigo (COMACH), Don Carlos (Camoteca Association), and a technician from Madre Selva to find holes and contradictions in the studies, while Pablo and community leaders spread out to reach the to-be affected villages and gather signatures opposing the projects. The wealthier vegetable producers along the river even added their signatures, having realized that it would do them no good if, as Don Carlos said, “the Rio Grande (Big River) [were to] become the Rio Chiquito (Small River).” On the last possible day, a small group from the alliance in the Ch’orti’ region traveled the four hours to Guatemala City. With representatives from Madre Selva and press in tow, they presented three letters to the Minister of the Environment and Natural resources, one refuting each study. They based their refutation on (1) negative socio-economic impact, (2) geological instability; (3) fraudulent presentation of community consent, and (4) violation of indigenous territory and the right to be consulted: OIT 169. The letters were signed (or thumb-printed) by thousands of Ch’orti’ and other campesin@s from thirty hamlets and villages, including every adult in Las Flores and even the mayor of Camotán, in opposition to the project that would affect his municipality.

New Day’s strategy to oppose megaprojects by organizing community resistance to and scientific deconstruction of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA) differed significantly from the municipal and regional referendums that indigenous (and non-indigenous) groups were using to oppose mining, hydro-electric dams, and other enterprises that contaminated or dispossessed people elsewhere in the country (El-Observador, 2010; Yagenova & Garcia). Thus, when a few months later New Day learned that they had won, at least temporarily, other indigenous and campesin@ groups took notice. For the first time in its history, the MARN had rejected an EIA—actually all three. Through alliances and a lot of worn out shoes, New Day had connected concrete information with the historical memories and more recent discourses of indigenous rights that shaped many villagers’ sense that the land and rivers were theirs (or in their care) from “time immemorial,” taking one more step towards a consolidated defense of an idea and a place: Ch’orti’ territory.

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projects and guidebooks on how to bribe communities into acceptance. In future work I deconstruct one of the EIAs presented for the Puente hydroelectric dam in Jocotán.

<sup>308</sup> Thanks to a tip from a Guatemalan scholar-activist, New Day learned of the studies, and with my help and that of the ecological collective, Madre Selva, New Day obtained the copies. The EIA were each hundreds of pages, cost \$12.00 USD a page, were provided as computer floppy disks and required a written request to obtain, making it an almost impossible process for a village committee to navigate on its own.

## Conclusion: Un/thinking Rebellion

Crisis is not objectively bad or good; rather, it signals a systemic change, whose outcome is determined through struggle.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Gilmore, 2007, p. 54)

### “Like They Do in the East” Coming Full Circle

“Compañeros, we need to learn to struggle like they do in the East,” declared one leader of a national campesin@ federation based in the western highlands when Omar, Pablo and Don Carlos (from New Day’s ally, the Camoteca Association) finished their presentation. This leader’s exhortation at a meeting in Guatemala City in late October 2010, came a little over a year after the Ch’orti’ and *mestizo* campesin@s initial defeat of the construction of three proposed hydroelectric dams at the close of the last chapter. Events on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2011 that had catapulted Ch’orti’campesin@ struggles to front page national newspapers and top international human rights action alerts, had subsequently prompted leaders in the capital to change the meetings agenda to feature New Day’s experience

On the 12<sup>th</sup>— the Day of Indigenous Peoples’ Resistance (Columbus Day)—some 500 villagers from northwestern Jocotán had tried to present the mayor with their formal rejection of the proposed largest single mega-investment project in Central America: the “technological corridor.” Part of Plan Mesoamerica (like its predecessor proposals in chapter 6), this corridor resurrected one of the defeated hydroelectric dam projects and “connected it” with a half-mile swath of super highway, oil and gas pipelines and high voltage energy transfers through Guatemala that would connect the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. Not only was Jocotán one of the 44 municipalities in its proposed path; the project specifically targeted some of the poorest, most ecologically fragile, indigenous countryside of northwestern Jocotán. Indeed the project area included those very villages and hamlets that in 2007 had detained the engineers, and the year before had presented their rejection of the hydroelectric project.

In other words, local government had not proven very effective in responding to the population, and so once again the *ajk’opot* (country folk) had gathered to make their position known. Unfortunately the mayor was out of town. When late in the day still no one from the municipal council had listened to the groups concerns, an unknown subject fired into the crowd. The event spiraled into mayhem with press not allowed to come near. What then followed was a plethora of dis-informing internet and press stories spotlighting the smoldering remains of Jocotán’s town hall, the death of a policeman and subsequent accusation of and arrest warrants issued for Omar, Don Carlos Hernández, the Belgian parish priest, Father Juan Boxus, numerous community leaders and one human rights worker who tried to calm the situation. Those reports combined with New Day and the Camoteca Association’s appeal for solidarity had pushed national organizations to take the possibilities of struggle in the East seriously.

At first glance the counterintuitive twist that the national leader’s acclaim evidenced above, turns the problematic of unthinkable rebellion planted in the dissertation’s introduction on its head. Not only is Ch’orti’campesin@ rebellion now thinkable but it embodies practices from which those in the West can learn to boot! This dissertation, however, is not a story of “romancing

resistance” (Sparke, 2008) in the face of a global giant. Since its “dawn” eight years earlier, New Day has split three times, lost key leaders to other organizations, dealt with corruptions, deaths, and disablement of leaders and members. Dominant gender, class and racial formations inform and fuel ongoing tensions within and between representatives from different villages and municipalities, and many “members” still “belong” to see what they can get. Yet, in the midst of contradiction and conflict, New Day has sometimes spearheaded and sometimes accompanied actions that have slowly shifted the terrain of struggle in the region. Ch’orti’ and mestizo campesin@s have closed highways, negotiated debt, elaborated economic reactivation proposals, administered emergency aid programs (with great cost to the political mission), established unexpected alliances, and creatively confronted ongoing threats of dispossession in the area. In the process New Day has become a magnet for men and women to organize against transnational, national and local efforts to exploit land, water and forests on which their fragile existence depends. In relation to accusations and criticisms, contradictions and openings from all corners—grassroots members, mayors and elites, national organizations, and international capitalists—New Day’s commitment to what I call “reflection and action” in the process of struggle slowly articulated in its leaders and through them a growing sense and defense of Ch’orti’ territory.

Thus, far from employing the opening vignette to punctuate a simple reversal of the valorization of the East/West binary as site of combative struggle, I present it to return to and rework my original question: how do we understand rural struggles in post-“revolutionary” times? It seems that the deeper question is how to un/think dichotomous and disabling geographies of development, dispossession and rebellion.

The “dawn” of New Day in the wake of NGO-mania, citizen participation panaceas and “new” left indigenous activism on the heels of counter-insurgency exposed the contradictions and fissures of neoliberal technologies and rationalities and indigenous rights activists’ efforts designed to “fix” the broken bodies (individual and politic) and depleted soils of the Guatemala’s eastern highlands. Yet, neither emergence of this struggle nor its the contours, constraints and possibilities as a movement-in-construction, can be understood simply as “the strengths and weaknesses” of a “spontaneous” reaction to neo-liberal policies that further accumulation by dispossession. Rather, through the concrete articulation of new discourses and practices about rights and participation, with historical geographies of colonialism, agrarian transformation, township formation and counterinsurgency themselves deeply racialized and gendered, that related but not identical conditions arose in the four municipalities, such that a diverse group come together. As Gramsci noted, “‘pure’ spontaneity does not exist in history: it would be the same thing as ‘pure’ mechanicity. The elements of ‘conscious’ leadership in the ‘most spontaneous’ of movements cannot be ascertained, simply because they have left no verifiable document (Gramsci, 1992 [2011], pp. 48-49) c.f. NB 3, §48.<sup>309</sup> To counter the notion of spontaneity, as either a response to be dismissed or exploited by the intellectual Left and crushed or co-opted by the Right, we must reconstruct the “verifiable document” in the sense of rereading

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<sup>309</sup> Gramsci argued this point against those who labeled the Turin movement in the factories in the 1920s spontaneous because of the ways in which organized support in the neighborhoods played a crucial role. Those Communist party members who (like some Marxists today) saw the workplace and the proletariat as the focus and locus of revolutionary process criticized the Turin movement because the neighborhoods, the communal “houses of the people” played, whose support was not visible product of vanguard organizing, were crucial to the movement. See (Harvey, 2010, pp. 242-244) for a present-day critique of that perspective.

the past with critical attention to moments of articulation, disarticulation and rearticulation, connections to practices and processes in multiple arenas, that are simultaneously meaningful and material.

The fall in coffee prices became a crisis, a differentiated crisis not just because of practices of lending and borrowing in the 1990s, but because of what informed those crises, both discourses and the uneven racialized geographies. Second, the economic crisis of debt itself formed just part of what proved to be the limits of 1990s “interventions” in the name of rural development, peace, indigenous rights. As I have shown, PROZACHI and Hurricane microfinance practices built on and reworked places, men and women already shaped by specific place-based hi[r]stories of cultural and material dispossession, violent repression, buried resistances.

Indeed specific historical geographies had produced the processes of dispossession and contestation that had reconfigured places and the very power-laden meaning and practice of indigenous and ladinos, poor and rich, country folk and town folk in highly uneven and divisive ways within and between the four municipalities. In that sense, the women and men who risked forming New Day, came together in a particular way, spanning townships not just because of the debt that was incredibly varied from amounts to lenders to targeted borrowers. They found each other because of how the discourses and practices of market-centered rural development, indigenous rights activism, and a multitude of rights promotion all in the context neo-liberal “peace”-making had created spaces and places where those in debt might find and recognize one another, even while failing to respond to the debt crisis itself. Last, that recognition and its limits were bound to histories and memories of racialized dispossession and township formation, cold war-scape dialectics of repression and resistance, as well as a decade of contested discourses and practices tied to neoliberal “peace”-making. When the rest of Guatemala and Central America in general were taking to the trenches of civil society, Ch’orti’campesin@s were (re) discovering the right to fight.

By reading the past in the light of the present, rebellion itself historically may not have been so unthinkable. What could appear as reaction to processes of disembedding and/or dispossession on its own: joining General Carrera’s forces in the 19th century War of the Mountain, reestablishing protections of indigenous lands, Ch’orti’ producers joining the campesin@ leagues during the October Revolution or participating in with the revolutionary forces (or even counterrevolutionary) reveal themselves to be produced through specific conjunctures linked to place-based histories and memories and everyday practices of dispossession and difference, all neither divorced from nor simply determined by some form of “conscious” leadership. In this historically contingent dance between extra-economic policies to free “land and labor” and myriad strategies, individual and collective to maintain or regain possession, the struggles themselves reworked both material and meaningful practices of production, social reproduction and cultural reproduction in ways that partially transformed and/or reified structures, landscapes and subjectivities.

Taken together the maps on the next three pages place in relationship the past and the present in a new light. Figure 7.1, the four quadrant map that I presented in the introduction now sheds light on Figures 7.2 and 7.3 which show New Day’s geographies of struggle and proposal between 2006 and 2009. The areas of continued Ch’orti’ linguistic communities are leading many of the struggles in defense of land and water while La Unión continues to be a site of township

contestations over municipal land rights. At the same time, these maps of the Geographies of Struggle speak back to the still unclear processes and practices that remade Ch'orti' territory.

# Re-Makings and Representations of the Ch'orti'-Maya Area: Past and Present

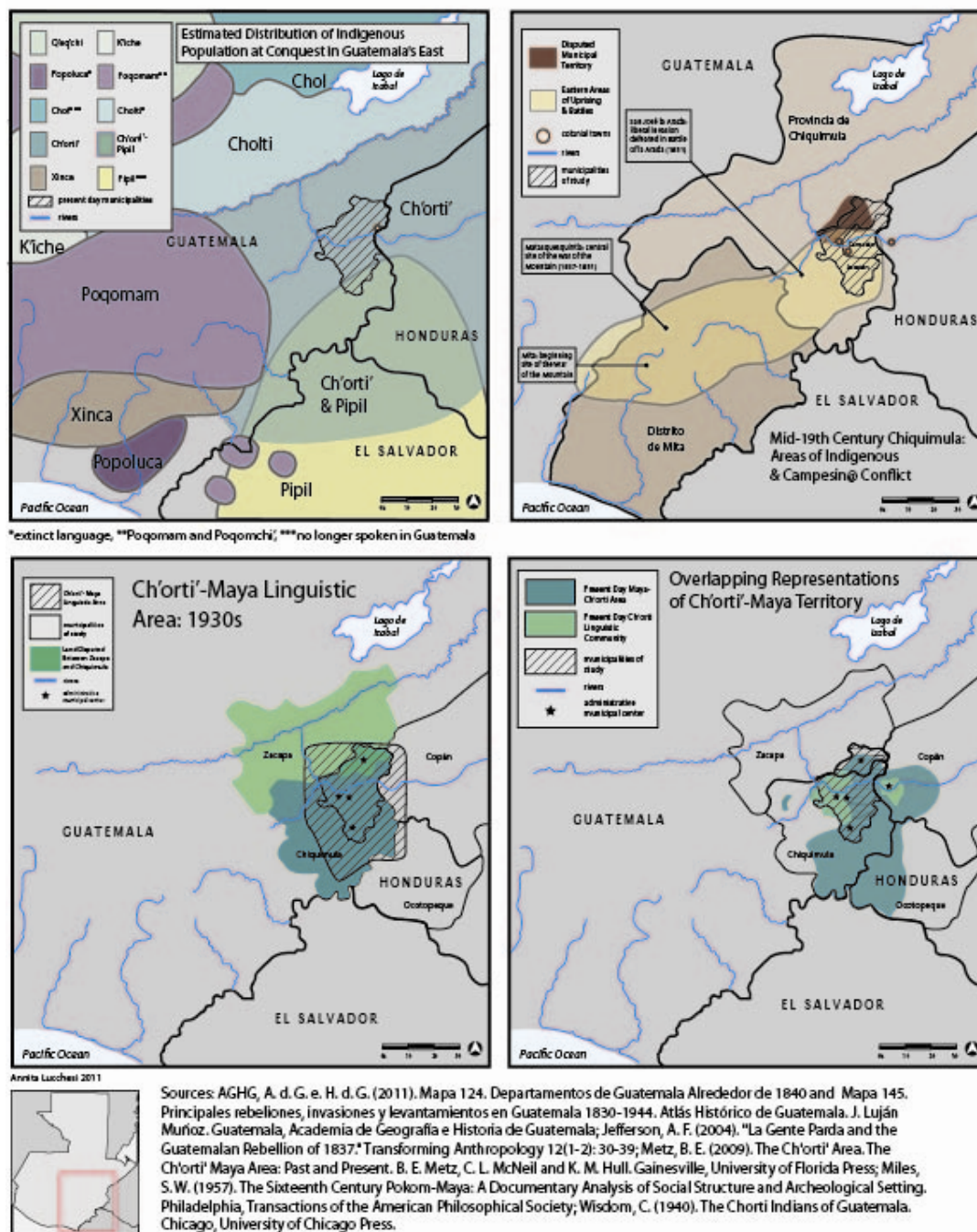


Figure 7.1: Re-makings and Representations of the Ch'orti'-Maya Area: Past and Present (maps contracted by author).

# New Day Geographies of Struggle: Debt Conversion and Economic (Re)Activation 2006-2009

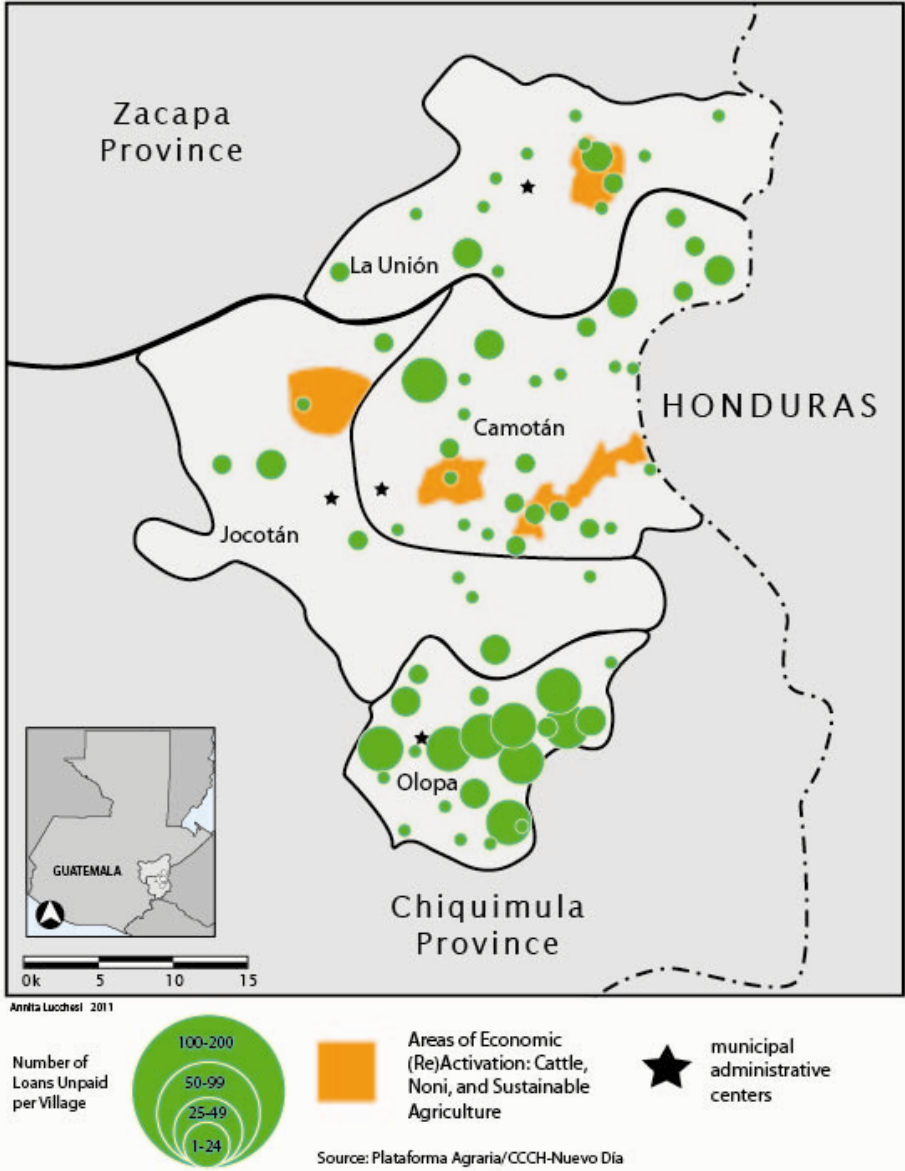


Figure 7.2: New Day Geographies of Struggle: Debt Conversion and Economic (Re)activation 2006-2009 (map contracted by author).



## New Day Geographies of Struggle: Defending Land and Water 2006-2009

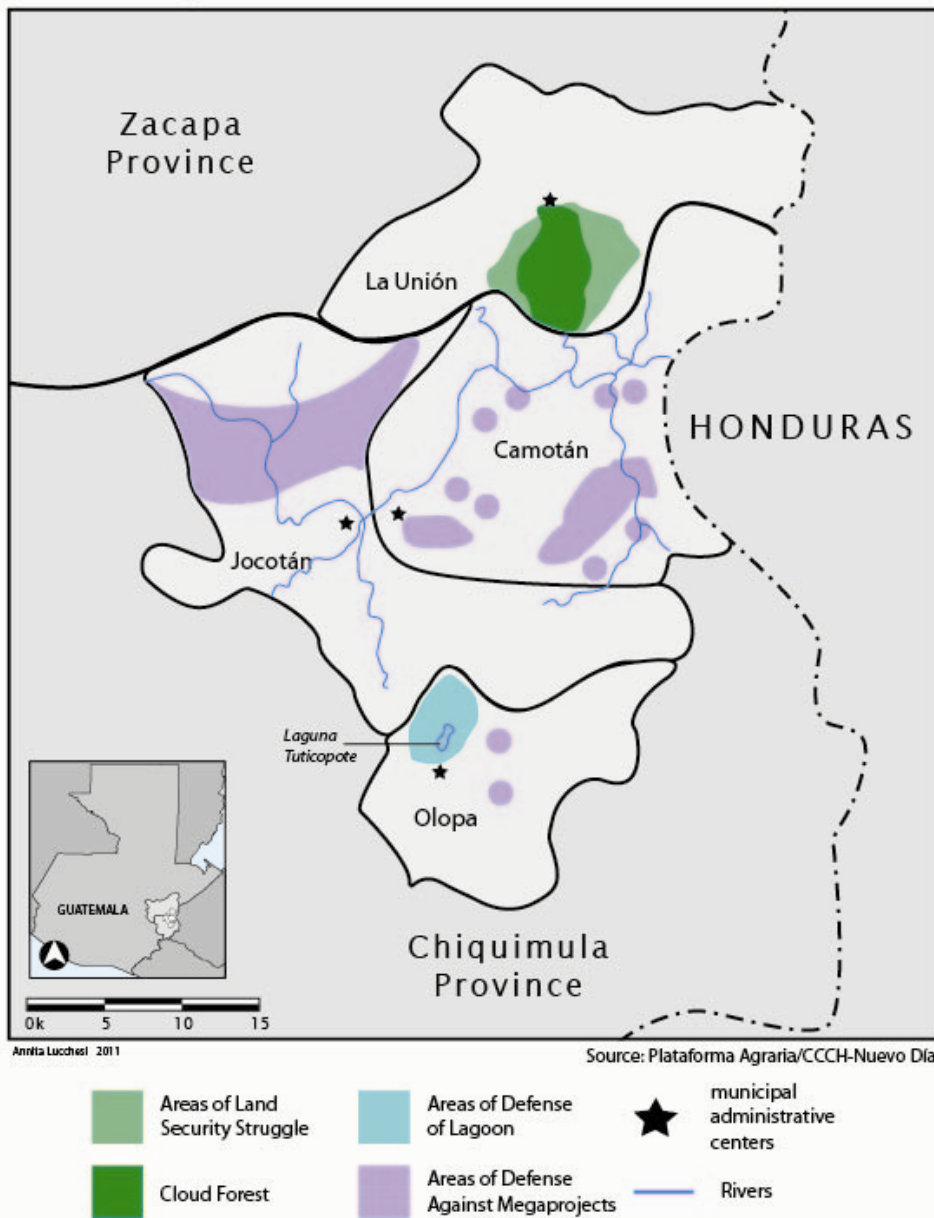


Figure 7.3: New Day Geographies of Struggle: Land and Water 2006-2009 (map contracted by author).

While I take seriously the beckoning statement, “compañeros, we need to learn to struggle like they do in the East,” I do so for reasons less related to the uprising in Jocotán than to the dynamics and relations I have traced throughout this study. It is precisely the work of this dissertation, to “think” the analytical and political stakes of the protest? uprising? provocation?



set-up? in Jocotán— its criminalization, and its resolution in progress—in relation to historical and geographic connections. Whether in the context of neo-liberal processes of economic and cultural “fixing” or in the midst of counterinsurgency terror, or liberal land claims, Ch’orti’ campesin@ “rebellion”—is neither unthinkable nor inevitable. Nor are the potential or limits of “rebellion” pre-ordained, or fixed. Rather the tensions and contradictions produced as particular articulations are unhinged and reworked can signal future possibilities.

### **Dis/possession and its Discontents**

The story of dispossession in the Ch’orti’ region is not a simple one of enclosures: state-sponsored removal (through laws or coercive force) of people from their means of production in order to free land and labor for capitalist accumulation. Rather, the process of material dispossession—“losing ground” in a literal sense—is intricately linked to “losing ground” in terms of room to maneuver (Hart, 2002). In the Ch’orti’ East, struggles over township formation are intricately bound to processes of racialized dispossession. Further, struggles against dispossession—to “keep ground” under particular historical conditions become constitutive forces in the production of new processes of primitive accumulation. Alliances made between larger landowners and small producers, ladinos, indigenous, mulattoes and pardos in the War of the Mountain (Carrera Rebellion), 1837-1851, provided a temporary reprieve, turning back the laws that would have permitted dispossession. Yet, that alliance created the conditions for increased migration (in the midst of social unrest and banditry associated with the uprisings) that led to non-indigenous clearings of and “justifications” for claims to ch’orti’, xinka, and poq’omam lands in the East. One could add, though more research is needed, catalyzed intermarriages and processes of assimilation in the chaos wrought by those years.

In that sense, as others have recently argued, processes of accumulation by dispossession are inseparable from the production of difference—gendered, racialized— in multiple ways.<sup>310</sup> In the Ch’orti’ East, hierarchies of power and difference are constituted not just in the “freeing of labor” but in struggles over dispossession themselves. The concrete articulation of processes of accumulation by dispossession —exclusionary land titling and electoral laws, transfer of indigenous commons to the ladino or mestizo municipalities, repeal of land reform and resistance to those processes —the War on the Mountain, participation in the first wave guerrilla were constituted through and constitutive of new articulations of land, race, class, place, religion. In other words accumulation by dispossession and the attempts to resist it were productive of difference: creating land rich and land poor, often mapped on race or gender; but not in any pre-determined way. Ch’orti’ campesin@s in the *comuna* of Jocotán, lost rich forestlands to the formation of two new municipalities, La Unión and Olopa. But whereas in the former maintaining indigenous syncretism (paying ritual rent) helped stave off dispossession of access to communal lands, in the latter, Ch’orti’ homesteaders had to shed their “Indianness” to maintain access to now ladino municipal lands. Thus dispossession and struggles against it under certain historical and geographic conjunctures also mean “losing grounding” in terms of giving

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<sup>310</sup> Silvia Federici who in following Rosa Luxemburg conceives of the continuous character of primitive accumulation more as a product of imperialism in line with Rosa Luxemburg, argues that it was not simply an accumulation and concentration of exploitable workers and capital. It was *also an accumulation of differences and divisions within the working class*, whereby hierarchies built upon gender, as well as “race” and age, became constitutive of class rule and the formation of the modern proletariat. (Federici, 2004)

up, forgetting—in other words, “deciding” (under conditions not of their own choosing) to jettison historical cultural practices in order to avoid "losing ground" in the material and strategic senses given above.

Further in Guatemala, dominant state and social practices have increasingly tethered dispossession to the production and reproduction of "fatal couplings of power and difference" (Gilmore, 2002).<sup>311</sup> However, the dialectic between resistance and extra-economic forces of dispossession here is not merely an outcome of legal avenues of discursive slotting; integral to those processes has been the threat of violence linked to deep terror. And as Karl Marx wrote and chapter 2 showed, “[r]esistance stretched over an unusually long period of time in a besieged location has itself a demoralizing effect. It compromises suffering, lack of rest, disease, and the constant presence, not of acute danger, which steels, but of that chronic danger which breaks wo/men down” c.f (Gramsci, 2007 [2011], p. 97). Neither the erasing of race from the recounting of divergent race-class articulations of struggle in the region, nor the silencing of violence were simply imposed: they were produced in and through the dialectic of material and cultural dispossession and the multiple processes of ongoing struggles against it. Thus, through critical ethnography we come to see “struggles against accumulation by dispossession” and “countermovements to policies that try to disembed economy from society as much more than undifferentiated hydraulic responses (Hart, 2009, p. 131). This analysis, though not my own, is one to which my research clearly speaks and contributes.

Two analytics that have gained much traction in the last years in relation to rural resurgences — indigenous, peasant, environmental: Karl Polanyi’s ([1941] 2001) understanding of protective counter-movements and David Harvey’s (2004) reconceptualization of ongoing struggles against accumulation by dispossession. While both contribute enormously to understanding the creative-destructive process of capitalism, as Gillian Hart has argued both have also “served as the handle for a mechanistic hydraulic model in which “top-down” neo-liberalism automatically calls forth “bottom-up” resistance (Hart, 2009, p. 131) see also (Hall, 1988).

In contrast, my study shows that, accumulation by dispossession is not necessarily constitutive of the “spontaneous” will to rebel. “No one” (or hardly anyone) said a word when mayors began to sell off the commons in the late 1980s; but a decade and a half later, in 2003, just the threat of dispossession posed by foreclosures on unpaid loans proved explosive, leading to a four municipality rebellion against the region’s financial industry. While it may be the condition of the double movement for society to always seek to protect itself, that counter-movement does not necessarily translate into a struggle against dispossession. Indeed protection may be a collective shedding of indigeneity by joining the army or a political party to avoid discriminatory laws. Building on Cindi Katz’s (Katz, 2004) poetic differentiation and gradations of contingent expressions of agency, stretching from “revolutions , rebellions and retorts at one end, through diverse forms of resilience, rearticulation and reworking , all the way on to the reverberative formations of retaliation, repression and as a reworked name for the rescaling of geopolitical revenge and reprisal” Matthew Sparke (Sparke, 2008, p. 424) engages the repetitive ‘re’ to drive

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<sup>311</sup> Through his análisis of articulation Stuart Hall draws attention to the ways in which different couplings of power and difference are produced and reproduced and/or reworked in and through concrete processes that are simulataneously meaningful and material (Hall, 1992). In her study of racism at work in the prison industrial complex, Ruth Wilson Gilmore uses Hall to begin to develop her understanding of racism as a fatal couplings of power and difference (Gilmore, 2002).

home his point: resistance is but one of a myriad of responses. Further, as Massimo de Angelis has argued, these divergent efforts to maintain or regain possession of land, water and their fruits are constitutive of new processes of so-called primitive accumulation (De Angelis, 2001). Over the last two centuries, attempts by indigenous producers in the shrinking Ch'orti' East. (of struggle, resistance, resilience and/or reaccommodation) to keep land, forests, water rights, even cultural practices in their hands, have often led to new laws or other forms of extra-economic coercion to "dispossess." What my work brings to the table is how attention to the concrete conjunctures that produce particular struggles over Dis/possession, make visible the conditions of the articulation between racialized dispossession, development, and resistance, and thus the possibilities and contradictions that can lead to new openings and alliances.

Moreover, these processes are deeply connected to reworkings of indigenous identification and everyday practices. In an effort to regain room to maneuver even as one loses access to the means of production, one may do what under other circumstances Diane Nelson describes as "self-dispossession" or wearing "two faces": one that acceptable to the authority and another for the community (D. Nelson, 2008). While Nelson's study focuses on practices of hiding part of one's political positioning during war, the concept of self-dispossession can equally illuminate the ways in which Ch'orti' men and women hide or dispossess themselves of their indigenous practices as well as their politics. Indigenous attempts to "pass" as members of dominant society have often been portrayed as a putative desire to avoid the humiliation of racist practices. As I have shown Ch'orti' cultural Dispossession—the tactical abandonment of language, dress, ritual, and other markers of difference—was at times a practice for saving life, not just face. Yet such self-dispossession, when it occurs, must always be understood relationally in time and space. In La Unión the specific process by which ladino and creoles ranchers, coffee growers and merchants from neighboring municipalities managed to take over the township and have it placed under the jurisdiction of Zacapa, tied Ch'orti' and campesin@ access to municipal lands with self-dispossession in Nelson's terms. Whereas in Olopa, town elites depended on ritual rent and thus depended on Ch'orti' possession of culture and land until the cattle boom, thus the form and meaning of dispossession changed. Rather than Ch'orti' farmers and artisans losing some essentialized "culture" or "identity" in and through violent onslaught of agrarian modernization, divergent struggles of Dispossession linked to municipal formation as much as agrarian change reconstituted configurations of land rights, race and culture, reworking exclusion in different and continually contested and contingent ways.

Yet, my argument of "no guaranteed rebellion," does not mean a victory for divergent technologies of economic and cultural rule nor the completion of hegemony. Unthinking "unthinkable rebellion" rather invites a reexamination of "spontaneity" in two dialectically conjoined directions. In moving off the terrain of hydraulic relations between "D"evelopment and bottom-up struggles against it—I have shown that there is nothing purely spontaneous in either moments of apparent consent to liberal and/or neo-liberal policies designed to rework subjects and places (and the power laden relations between them). Nor, can we accept as purely spontaneous the myriad attempts (in my work by landless and land poor indigenous and campesin@s to contest them. As I have shown above the very concept of spontaneity when confronted with the concrete articulations of places, subjects, and practices from which struggles against dispossession arise calls for attention to historical contingency. Neither structures of dominance and/or dispossession nor efforts to resist are produced completely spontaneously.

What my work shows, in conversation with Nancy Postero brilliant book on postmulticultural politics in Bolivia, is that how the neoliberal cultural and economic projects' ability to "fix" subjects is contingent upon how concrete discourses and practices articulated with sedimented histories of exclusion(Postero, 2007). In Postero's account of the Law of Popular Participation in Bolivia, how indigenous, Guarani peri-urban dwellers turn it into a tool for economic as well as cultural redress highlights the ways in which the historical production and reproduction of race and class hierarchies shape how people engage with neoliberal discourses and rationalities. In so doing she demonstrates the limits of neo-liberal multiculturalism and evidences how when those targeted bythe very processes designed to constrain the parameters of participation were confronted with those limits, helped shape new struggles based on much more radical understandings of citizenship and participation.

This dissertation then engages with and begins to builds upon Postero's work in three ways. First, like Postero's work, my work shows how past histories and memories memories shaped the very meaning that Ch'orti' and campesin@s gave to neoliberal discourses and practices: in my study "peace"-making and rural development. But rather than focus on neo-liberal multiculturalism, I try to make visible the contradictions and convergences in overlapping discourses and practices (neo-liberal and post-Marxist) and how they differed in relation to different townships. Thus in my study questions of gender complicate when and how new alliances are formed, challenged, reworked.

Second, as in Postero's study, my work shows how these discourses and practices of neoliberalism when confronted with the legacies of colonial, capitalist (and counter-insurgent) exclusions fueled the conditions of struggle and reshaped its rules. Precisely because of the buried secrets of the war, race and class first gave way to a unified corporatist struggle against debt. Yet the roots of that struggle, the fear of dispossession that catalyzed it, proved to be the same dynamic that slowly changed New Day into a magnet for struggles over land and water, for development alternatives and slowly for a place: "Ch'orti' territory" that campesin@s shared. Third, as I explain below my work draws out a second layer of connection between the "will to improve" (Li, 2007) and the "will to rebel" less evident in Postero's ethnography, and crucial for rethinking rural struggle in Guatemala: Praxis.

### **The Politics of Praxis: Navigating the "Will to Improve" and the "Will to Rebel"**

This dissertation, by making visible the historical underpinnings of the dynamics of "spontaneity," has signaled the challenges that New Day faced as the movement unfolded and examined how they work to resolve those challenges and tensions. It is in the latter contribution that I take Nancy Postero's analysis of how activists rework the domesticating tools of neoliberal reforms into a new area: highlighting the praxis of resolving the contradictions-in action that those re-workings produce.

"Contained" within those processes, discourses, and practices that catalyzed New Day are the historical subjectivities and structural constraints that challenged New Day from the outset. From navigating diverse membership riddled with class, municipal, race, gender, and educational hierarchies to negotiating the debilitating dependencies and fears, strong man tactics and mini-corruptions, New Day unfolded while wrapped in the contradictions and tensions produced over years of neo-liberal peacemaking, militarization ongoing processes of dispossession, resistance

and re-accommodations. This insight that was a crucial building block in Fanon and Gramsci's rejection of revolutionary or anti-colonial politics that simply tried to control or use the popular classes in general and especially of peasants.

What this study foregrounds is that this relationship between the conditions that produce rebellion and the conditions that limit it are not sealed in stone. But to grapple with contingency analytically and politically, we need to address what Richard Pithouse signals as crucial to Fanon: "For Fanon, the paradox created by the fact that the conditions that produce a spontaneous will to rebel amongst the excluded are also the conditions that produce the limitations of this rebellion must be resolved dialectically via chosen acts of will that take the form of the reflective and dialogical praxis of struggle (Pithouse, 2004). To me the political stakes of my research are bound to what my work says about praxis and the role of the intellectual.

More often than not New Day resolved or sought to resolve its tensions, accusations, competitions through reflection: in Assemblies and workshops. In part the very process of reflecting on the practice of struggle, new possible agendas, tentative proposals, relationships with other allies and "enemies," brought about transformations in decision-making structures, representation, positions on gender, class and/or indigeneity. In part, a dynamic of "if you don't like the majority decision you do not have to stay" emerged, which stood in stark contrast to some of the "political sanctions" practiced by other organizations. I watched this praxis of reflection and action, discussion and debate on internal issues, political strategies and future direction slowly produce small imperceptible changes that ultimately altered the conditions of possibility for liberating social change in the region. According to Gramsci,

A philosophy of praxis must initially adopt a polemical stance, as superseding the existence mode of thinking. It must therefore present itself as a critique of "common sense" (but only after it has based itself on common sense in order to show "everyone" is a philosopher, and that the point is not to introduce a totally new form of knowledge into "everyone's" individual life but to revitalize an already existing activity and make it "critical."(Gramsci, 2007 [2011], p. 369) NB 8, §220 }

Significantly, the staying power and liberating potential of the shifting articulation of New Day struggles over land, water, development and dispossession conditioned are by the contested politics through which they come into being and have been sustained.<sup>35</sup> As women and men, indigenous and non-indigenous rework "common sense" meanings of land, water, campesin@, Ch'orti' and rights: land rights, human rights, women's rights, indigenous rights and ultimately citizenship, the unstable configurations of symbolic and material struggle they produce signal "contradictions in action" through which new goals, responsibilities, alliances and politics can arise.

Omar's own words say it best:

So this has been a process of provocation, not merely because in an assembly it is decided that something is going to be a banner of struggle, but because the communities, through the reflection process that they make, because our

assemblies are more than anything else a process of reflection, that they make decisions. With this process of reflection the blindfold over the eyes start to fall off and of course...that is just the beginning, next one can speak and one can see beyond (Girón & AVANCSO, 2006).

The political stakes of this dissertation are bound precisely to how the regressive-progressive together with a detailed ethnography of the reflexive and dialogical praxis of struggle make evident what I call the praxis of the possible. The past takes on new meaning even as it makes visible constraints and a clear contrast of the role divergent roles of the intellectual emerges: the technical staff who makes women visible to fulfill requirements, the facilitator of workshops who washes hands, the national rabble rouser, and the one who starts with “common sense.” I am not speaking of ideal types, but of subjects (in this case all men) shaped in and through their explicit experience.

During a different place and period of war and “peace”-making, Fanon sent out a beacon of warning for the future of the independent Algeria as well as a critique of the unfolding struggle, denouncing urban intellectuals who

“do not got out to find the people...do not put their theoretical knowledge to the service of the people...Rather they bring their own agenda, framework and time lines to the people. Thus from the capital city they [the party] will “parachute” organizers into the villages who are either too young or too unknown and who armed with instructions from the central authority mean to treat the douar or village like a factory cell. The traditional chiefs are ignored, sometimes even persecuted. The makers of the nation’s history trample unconcernedly over small local disputes.”(Fanon, 1963, p. 113)

In contrast to activists and intellectuals who “do not got out to find the people,” Omar together with some of the leaders, early on, had developed a different practice, one produced partially in reflection with *El Grupito* in rejection of the “parachuting” practices of NGO intellectuals and activists in the previous decade. As Omar shared in an interview in late 2006, “Something that we have bet on, we don’t know if we are wrong or what, is that the communities be the ones that decide the direction that the Coordinator [New Day] take. And this has been a very rich experience.” At the same time, New Day in practice New Day leaders constantly recognized (although did not easily deal with) disunity and unequal power relations in the “communities.”

A second thread of political contributions when we navigate BEYOND governmentality and spontaneity, is the unearthing of historical and geographic connections heretofore unseen that could deepen understandings of the internal armed conflict and its legacies. My research helps breaks down the militant-military binary prevalent in Guatemala as well as its geographic overtones of Military East and Rebel West. By making visible the concrete conditions under which Ch’orti’ and non-Ch’orti’ campesin@s join or end up in the ranks of the military, the civil self-defense patrols, militant campesin@ organization or the guerrilla, I show that the dichotomizing categories and their “mapping” onto East and West are ahistorical.

Moreover, the targeting of the most indigenous villages in the Ch’orti’ East for repression. Some analysts argue that one of the objectives of much of the Pan-Maya organizing was to build the

case for racial genocide: that the victims of the war identify as Maya. I am less concerned with the veracity of that interpretation, as I am with understanding when in the armed forces, some officers, began conflating indigeneity with subversion, or racial cleansing with peace. This dissertation suggests that not just more research, but more dialogue between organizations on the constitutive connections of place could shift the grounds on which alliances are formed. Rather than joining together based on abstract ideas of defense of Maya territory or Pan-Mayan identity or on a class-based claim for land, campesin@s and indigenous in the east and the west, in the northern lowlands and the southern coast might recognize each other in shared processes and practices rooted in rethinking the past and the present.

Lastly, in postwar Guatemala, both the “old” and “new” left live in a type of resigned pragmatism vis-à-vis the highly successful military-entrepreneurial pact that has defined politics in the country after the 1954 coup d’etat with the exception of the years 1979-83 (Rosada-Granados, 1999; Schirmer, 2000). The emergence and unfolding of New Day speaks to the not-so-firm-and-lasting Peace Agreements (Megan Ybarra, 2010), the collapse of the popular revolutionary alliance in 1996, and the chameleon-like practices of many fragments of the opposition to accommodate themselves to the shifting neoliberal projects and programs.

This research has its simplest relevance in showing concretely showing how one of the regions where significant change was extremely unlikely could surprise TINA (There is No Alternative) and NRTM (No Room to Maneuver) malaise with much more than critical discourse about the negative impacts of neoliberal globalization.<sup>312</sup> This study points politics in another direction: looking not where the central leaders are standing, but along side hopefully will encourage scholars and activists to look beyond their ahistorical affinity to sexy struggles attracting international support and to look for and work with the people and places that APPEAR or seem to define the hopelessness of post civil war era.

Nigel Gibson, in his discussion of how Fanon approached the problems of his time, says that Fanon emphasizes “a dialectical process, a deepening spiral rather than a straight line, a working through contradictions rather than a static subject/object identity.” It is in following the spiral that I return to where my question first began...signaling the contradictions that illuminate my next step in research.

### **Engendered Entanglements and Future Research Frontiers**

Lastly I would like to speak to the gender implications of my dissertation and where this research project leads me. In laying out the analytical and political stakes of my research, up to this point I have stressed the class, race and place dynamics of my research, moving in a sense in sync with New Day’s own realizations and practices. Yet, my previous research on the articulation of gender, land rights and power in Northeastern Honduras, has guided me throughout this process.

Indeed, my first trip to the Ch’orti’ countryside revealed one of the key gendered contradictions in New Day and begged the question: why were so many women seemingly being led by two men. A week after my first New Day Assembly meeting, I travelled to Olopa at the invitation of Don Tomás who had invited me to speak with what he described as “a few of the women in the

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<sup>312</sup> (Hart, 2002) is precisely a response to the dangers of impact models of globalization.

organization” in New Day. When I arrived, two hours late, having underestimated how bad the road was, some 100 Ch’orti’ and campesina women awaited me. Don Tomás, New Day’s exmilitary leader was presenting me as the *gringa* who would help them with debt while Don Marcos, staunch defender of Ch’orti’ culture, was haranguing me for disrespecting them, explaining that the women from his side of Olopa had already left because it was a long trip and they needed to start dinner.

Throughout this dissertation, most clearly in Parts II and III, different gendered discourses and practices of progress, development, counterinsurgency, citizen participation, and credit and how they hooked up with questions of dispossession, debt, resistance and reactivation have given shape to New Day’s experience of “Ch’orti’ rebellion.” While Chapters 3 and 4 draw out the contradictions and uneven terrains produced as rural development initiatives attempt to shape women as efficient entrepreneurs for a market economy, chapter 5 makes evident how threats to social reproduction and dispossession are deeply entwined. In chapter 6, the very pro-women and gender and development policies that produced New Day’s high female membership and uneven geography of feminized debt, produces contradictory responses in the evolution of New Day’s agenda, strategy and discourses. New Day leaders are clear that they have to respond to multiple dynamics reproducing women’s political and economic marginalization in the organization and in the region, but they only know what they do not want: the discourses and practices of the 1990s. And even then, what they voice is more of a visceral response to how women have suffered from those projects that reproduces a victimization narrative. At the same time, leaders point to the combative spirit of women in the struggles to defend land and water. Still the gendering in language, power relations in households, community, and organization, and as mapped onto indigeneity reproduce in New Day existing hierarchies, even as New Day Assemblies confront the problems.

In exposition I have kept gender somewhat on the sidelines, letting drop multiple opportunities for theorization and have done little to reconstruct pre-1990s herstories and memories of dispossession and how contestation, assimilation and flight in the context of structural and state-sanctioned violence reworked gender relations in connection with race and class. Yet, my previous research on gender, land rights and power in the Bajo Aguán Valley in eastern Honduras, has shaped my ability to tease out the contradictions, tensions, shifts and openings presented here. Indeed, it is precisely this “gender stone” in New Day’s path that leads towards future research action.

I propose to carry out a relational comparison between New Day and the new campesin@ movements in the Bajo Aguán Valley. Like my East/West vignette at the beginning of the dissertation, general accounts of the Ch’orti’ region of eastern Guatemala and the Bajo Aguán of Honduras conjure up poster child opposites. In contrast to the portraits of economic, environmental, political and cultural demise that the Bajo Aguán with its fertile plains covered with African Palm and low hills with ample rainfall follow that the Aguán River up North as it empties into the Caribbean stands out in a country often labeled backward even in Central America. “Capital of the Agrarian Reform” “oasis amidst crisis” or “hotbed of campesin@ struggle,” the Bajo Aguán is where agrarian modernization thrives and the poor continually wrestle with elites, foster mass organizations and channel new issues and proposals to the forefront of Honduran Left politics. The Aguán is a bastion of hope for the Right and the Left— or so it seems.



As in the Ch'orti' area, in the mid 1990s, post-revolutionary identity politics promoting gender and radical democracy converged with revisionist forms of neo-liberalism giving birth to policies and movements targeting civil society in "the local" domain. Specifically, in the wake of the Guatemalan Peace Process (1996) and Hurricane Mitch in both countries (1998), international NGOs and State institutions deluged both regions with development dollars to fund reconstruction initiatives and strengthen civil society with contradictory consequences. When the founders of New Day were just beginning to look for help in all the wrong places, in the Lower Aguán River Valley, an extraordinary experiment in gender, land rights and citizen participation spearheaded by progressive Catholic activists fell apart in unexpected ways. Now, however, as New Day begins to make national alliances and gain the attention of indigenous and Left activists nationally and internationally, the Aguán has become the focal point for the Honduran resistance and the site of the most combative and militarized struggle over land (with 39 assassinations of campesin@ activists in 2011) in post-revolutionary Central America.

By placing these struggles in relation to one another through critical ethnography and re-engaging the regressive progressive method with attention to the gender analytic in my original research and the new understandings of development, racialized dispossession and divergent practices of contestation that have risen in this dissertation, three intertwined lines of research related to gender and post-revolutionary struggles over land and water emerge. First is the relationship between counter-insurgency, agrarian reform and women's land rights: many of the very Ch'orti' campesin@ families that fled repression in the region between 1954 and 1978, found their way into the campesin@ associations or groups struggling for land in Western Honduras and eventually migrated to the Aguán under the agrarian reform. Preliminary research counter-intuitively suggests that these interconnected processes strengthened women's access to the little land available in the Ch'orti' region of Guatemala, while they excluded women's land rights in the process of colonization in the Bajo Aguán. Second, a relational comparison will allow me to better think through the divergent articulations of race, class and gender in relation to emerging struggles over land and water, and to return to specific herstories of the war and ongoing processes of dispossession. Last, this comparison based on the mutually constitutive production of places, can shed light on the relationship between production, social reproduction, and cultural production and reproduction in relation to ongoing processes of accumulation by dispossession, the constraints and possibilities of struggles against them as well as the openings for new alliances.<sup>313</sup>

### **Back to the Stones**

In a letter to Comandante Marcos of the Mexican Zapatistas, author John Berger reflects on Antonio Gramsci and the Italian "colonial" island he came from: Sardinia. Like the Ch'orti area, with its Valley of stones, where the *Volcan* juts out like a sore thumb on the horizon, Sardinia is an island of stones— walls, ruins, viaducts and cairns. Berger describes the different stones in a

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<sup>313</sup> I owe insights on this last thread to conversations with Sapana Doshi. See also her own work on gendered struggles against dispossession (Doshi, 2011)

dance with time: a cairn constitutes a kind of naming. “Perhaps, he reflects, “the proverbial nature of stone changed when prehistory became history.” (Berger, 2001, p. 238) And he suggests that “Stones propose another sense of time, whereby the past, the deep past of the planet proffers a meager yet massive support to human acts of resistance, as if the veins of metal in rock led to our veins of blood.”

He finishes his essay with a story that Gramsci told in a letter, for his two children. The story he tells of a mouse trying to make amends, for having drank the milk of a young boy, reaches deep into the past...sending the mouse from step to step until she must address the mountain, stripped bare from deforestation for stones. And for the mountain to give him the stones, the mouse makes a promise...that the boy, when he grows, will plant pines and chestnuts the mountain slopes when he is grown. Soon the boy has so much milk he washes in it, and when he is grown he keeps his promise, plants the trees and the mountain slopes grow lush and fertile.

Like the mouse, in trying to resolve an immediate problem, indebted campesin@s embarked on a journey that led them to organization, which led them to understand deeper, historical problems, which changed not only their understanding of the past, but their vision of the future. Even if in these post-revolutionary times, activists in the west are now willing and ready to look to the east, real rebellion is not “thought” in a these momentary conjunctures, but in ongoing praxis.

As Berger writes:

His [Gramsci’s] special patience came from a sense of practice which will never end. He saw close-up, and sometimes directed the political struggles of his time, but he never forgot the background of an unfolding drama whose span covers incalculable ages. It was perhaps this which prevented Gramsci from becoming like many other revolutionaries, a millennialist. He believed in hope rather than promises and hope is a long affair (Berger, 2003 [2001], 233-234).

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## Appendix 1

### Demographic Information Ch'orti' Highlands

This appendix first provides official demographic and ethnic information. Second, it provides information from New Day that presents a more realistic view of the ethnic balances in the four municipalities analyzed in this thesis. Third, it presents information concerning the extension of New Day in the communities in the same municipalities.

As Table 1 indicates 91 percent of the population of the 128 thousand people in the four municipalities reside in rural areas. Sixty percent reside in the low land municipalities of Camotán and Jocotán. According to these official statistics 42 percent of the population is indigenous. The two municipalities with the highest percent of indigenous population show the highest population density.

Municipalities	Territorial Extensión (km2)	Total Population	% of Populaton of 4 Municipalities	Non indigenous Population	Indigenous Population	% Indigenous Population	Population Density per Km2	Urban Population	Rural Population	Rurual Population Density per Km2
Jocotán	148	40,903	32%	7,669	33,234	81%	276	4,544	36,359	246
Olopa	113	22,994	18%	8,002	14,992	65%	204	1,800	21,194	188
Camotán	232	36,226	28%	30,127	6,099	17%	156	1,475	34,751	150
La Unión	214	28,113	22%	27,976	137	1%	131	3,725	24,838	116
<b>Total</b>	<b>707</b>	<b>128,236</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>73,774</b>	<b>54,462</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>182</b>	<b>11,544</b>	<b>117,142</b>	<b>166</b>
								<b>9%</b>	<b>91%</b>	

*Source: Municipal Planning Documents, 2011*

If were to return La Unión to the Department of Chiquimula and add the square kilometers of the municipality of La Unión to the total area of Jocotán, Camotán, Olopa, the and La Unión, the four municipalities would represent 30 percent of the territory in the Chiquimula Department.

Chiquimula appears as the most unequal of all departments in Guatemala in every single indicator.<sup>314</sup> That unwanted first place did not stem from the extraordinary wealth of the Chiquimulan elites but from the grinding extreme poverty of Ch'orti' highlands, particularly Jocotán and Camotán. Chiquimula showed the worst equity indicators in Guatemala:

1. income distribution Gini 61 percent,
2. .38 ratio of agricultural salaries to non-agricultural,
3. income of the richest 20 percent of the population registered at 26 times that of the poorest 20 percent,
4. the Thiel Coefficient for concentration of consumption stood at 35.4.

While it is probably certain that the Ch'orti' are overrepresented in New Day, the organization analysis of its ethnic composition provides a clearer idea of ethnicity by municipality than the official statistics.

<b>Table 2 Ethnic Composition of New Day Four Municipalities</b>					
	<b>JOCOTAN</b>	<b>Camotan</b>	<b>OLOPA</b>	<b>La Unión</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Number of Families Total</b>	<b>615</b>	<b>522</b>	<b>2097</b>	<b>757</b>	<b>3991</b>
Number of Ch'orti' Speaking Families	246	52	734	76	1108
<b>% of Ch'orti' Speaking Families</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>28%</b>
Number of families that identify themselves as Ch'orti'	246	209	944	227	1626
<b>% of Families that identify themselves as Ch'orti'</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>41%</b>
Number of Families that do not identify themselves as Ch'orti'	92	261	315	227	895
<b>% of Families that do not identify themselves as Ch'orti'</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>22%</b>
Number of Ladino Families	31	183	105	227	546
<b>% Familias Ladinias</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>14%</b>

Finally, Table 3 indicates how New Day's organization covered nearly half of the communities and nearly a fifth of the number of families in the four municipalities. In 2009 participation was by far the highest in Olopa where the vast majority of indebted women had been so key in organizing New Day.

<b>Table 3 New Day Coverage by Municipality - 2009</b>					
<b>Indicators</b>	<b>JOCOTAN</b>	<b>Camotan</b>	<b>OLOPA</b>	<b>La Unión</b>	<b>Total</b>
Number of Communities	31	29	28	33	121
Number of Communities Organized in New Day	12	7	28	11	58
% of Comunities Organized in New Day	<b>39%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>48%</b>
Total Population	40,903	36,226	22,994	28113	128236
Total Number of Families	6817	6038	3832	4686	21373
Number of Families Actively Participating	615	522	2097	757	3991
% of Families Actively Participating in New Day	<b>9%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>19%</b>

## Appendix 2

### Reported War-Related Violence in the Four Municipalities, 1954–94

Appendix 2 Reported War Related Violence in the Four Municipalities 1954-94								
Year	Camotán		Jocotán		Olopa		La Unión	
	Village	#	Village	#	Village	#	Village	#
<b>1954-55</b>	<b>Counter revolution: (1) invasion, (2) repression</b>							
<b>1954-55</b>					Piedra de Amolar and other villages with agrarian committees		Corozal, La Jigua and other villages with agrarian committees	
<b>1962</b>					El Carrizal	1		
<b>1963</b>			Zarzamora Guayabillas	1	Piedra de Amolar	1		
<b>1965</b>			Zarzamora, Guayabillas	5	El Carrizal	10		
<b>1965</b>			Zarzamora, Guayabillos FAR	2				
<b>1966</b>	Guayabo	2	Palmillo, Talquezal, and people from Tierra Blanca	400	Tuticopote Arriba	10		
<b>1966</b>		1			El Cerrón	1		
<b>1966</b>					El carrizal	2		
<b>1966</b>	Cajon del Rio	2			Piedra de Amolar	4		
<b>1966</b>	Dos Quebradas							
<b>1967</b>	Limon				El Carrizal	4		

1967	Cañon Tisipe				El Carrizal	1		
1967	Cajón del Río	14			El Cerrón	2		
1967					Piedra de Amolar	3		
1967					El Carrizal	3		
1967					La Cumbre	1		
1967					La Cumbre	1		
1967					Piedra de Amolar	2		
1967					Carrizal (FAR)	2		
1968								
1968			Colmenas	2	Piedra de Amolar	1		
1969					Piedra de Amolar	7		
1971					La Cumbre	1		
1971					Piedra de Amolar	1		
					Pacren	1	Piedra de Amolar	
1972								
Year	Camotán		Jocotán		Olopa		La Unión	
	Village	#	Village	#	Village	1.1.1.1	Village	#
					Tablón	6		
1973			Colmenas death squad los Pacheco-MLN and military	10	La Cumbre	1		



1974					El Carrizal	2		
1974					La Prensa	2		
1974					Piedra de Amolar	1		
1974					Cayur	1		
1974					Piedra de Amolar	1		
1974					La Prensa (Valentín Ramos)	2		
1974					Paternito, Carrizal	2		
1975					El Amatillo	1		
1975			Naranjo	8				
1975			Naranjo	2	Tituque	1		
1975			<u>Cruz de Charmar</u>		Carrizal	7		
1975			<u>Loma de Paja</u>					
1976					Tituque	2		
1976					El Amatillo	1		
1976					Paternito, El Carrizal	1		
1976					Tituque	1		
1976					La Prensa, el cerrón	1		
1976					El Cerrón	2		
1977	Limon		Colmenas	1	El Carrizal	1		
1977					El Carrizal	5		

1977					<i>El Carrizal</i>	1		
1977					<i>El Amatillo</i>	2		
1977					<i>El Amatillo</i>	2		
1978	<i>Marimba</i>	1	<i>Colmenas -los Pacheco-MLN</i>	1				
1978	<i>Marimba EGP</i>	1						
1981	<i>Marimba</i>	2			<i>La Cumbre</i>	1		
1981	<i>Marimba</i>	1			<i>Piedra de Amolar, Los pachecos</i>	1		
1981	<i>Cañon de Tisipe</i>							
1981	<i>Chaguiton, dos quebradas</i>	3						
1981	<b>Cerro Nenoja *** (see coordinates)</b>	31						
1982	<i>Marimba</i>	2	<i>Tansha, (EGP)</i>	2				
<b>Year</b>	<b>Camotán</b>		<b>Jocotán</b>		<b>Olopa</b>		<b>La Unión</b>	
	<b>Village</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Village</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Village</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Village</b>	<b>#</b>
1982	<i>Marimba</i>	1						
	<i>Cañon de Tisipe</i>							
	<i>Quebracho, guayabo</i>	5						
1983			<i>Jocotán, Cabece ra</i>	3				
1983			<i>Naranjo</i>	1				

<b>1994</b>					Piedra de Amolar	1		
<b>TOTAL</b>		66		479		118 *		

### Coding of Armed Forces

**Color**      **Armed Forces**

**Red**            **Death Squads**

*Red italic*    **Military Commissioners**

**Black**          Security Forces (murder) Police, Army

**Black Bold**   **Army Massacre**

*Black italic*   *Military Forced disappearance*

**Blue**            **Guerrilla**

*Blue Italic*    *Guerrilla Forced Disappearance*

**Green**          **Armed Group—unknown side**

**Orange**        **Armed men associated with elites**

\*Occupation by revolutionary armed forces in 1966 according to (Diener, 1978) cover all of the villages of Olopa.

\*\*Army Massacres included testimonies not documented in CEH for Corozal Abajo and Corozal Arriba in La Unión

### Appendix 3

#### PROZACHI I Co-Financing

<b>Zacapa-Chiquimula Smallholders' Rural Development Project Summary</b>		
<b>Source</b>	<b>Millions USD</b>	<b>%</b>
<b><i>Project Total</i></b>	<b>18.812</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b><i>Loans</i></b>		
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) <i>20 years with a five year grace period and 4% per annum interest rate</i>	<b>6.73</b>	<b>36%</b>
Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)	<b>2.29</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b><i>Co-Financing Donations</i></b>		
Kingdom of the Netherlands	<b>6.5</b>	<b>35%</b>
World Food Program (WFP)	<b>.33</b>	<b>2%</b>
<b><i>Borrower's Contribution</i></b>		
Government of Guatemala	<b>2.97</b>	<b>16%</b>
<b><i>Appraising Institution: IFAD</i></b>		
<b><i>Cooperating Institution: United Nations Development Program/Office for Project Services (UNDP/OPS)</i></b>		

Source: MAGA, M. d. A., Ganadería y Alimentación (1999). Proyecto de Desarrollo Rural para Pequeños Productores en Zacapa y Chiquimula (Prozachi), Memoria de labores 1991-1998. Ciudad de Guatemala, MAGA.

## Appendix 4

### The Ch'orti' Debt in Numbers

I based this appendix on a survey carried out by New Day in 2005 as part of their strategy for negotiating alternatives arising out of their non-payment movement. It provides information only from those who did not pay their debts to the financial institutions not about those who did. According to New Day's estimates, nearly half of the indebted families in the four municipalities joined the movement and responded to the survey.

Because of the non-payment movement, the confidentiality not only of names of the borrowers but of all the official data was increased by the private banks, the savings and loan cooperatives, the microfinance institutions, and diverse state trusts for support of productive activities. As result of years of negotiation, BANRURAL facilitated a minimum of information concerning the PROZACHI Trust, which allows an evaluation of the survey's significance and utility.

The survey was carried out New Day with technical assistance from AVANCSO, a research center that was a member of multisectoral alliance to which New Day belong, the Agrarian Platform.

Nevertheless, the quality of the information from the 3,025 interviews can be considered substantially high if we compare to the figures provided by BANRURAL with regard to the public trust fund of PROZACHI with the survey of New Day. BANRURAL provided information that in April of 2006 Q 13, 372,600 of loans were in arrears in the 4 municipalities of Olopa, La Unión, Camotán and Jocotán with 2,282 loans in arrears. The New Day Survey included 1,042 of those delinquent loans with a reported portfolio in arrears of Q 6,559,237. The chart below through its extrapolation shows that New Day overestimated the size of the Portfolio in Arrear by only 0.7 percent. The advantage of surveys done by organizations of the poor for the interests of their members is that reliability of the information increases, when those who responded to the survey had made a decision to enter New Day and struggle for their rights against the financial institutions to whom they were indebted.

Quality of New Day Survey Data		
DATA Source and indicators	Portfolio en Arrears	Loans in Arrears
Banrural	13,372,600	2,282
New Day Survey Coverage	6,559,237	1,042
	49%	46%
Extrapolation	13,472,839	2,282
% error	0.7%	

The survey's 3,025 validated interviews contain information on debts from 25 other institutions besides the PROZACHI Trust. Extrapolating once again from information from both PROZACHI and BANRURAL information, we can estimate the Ch'orti' Debt at the end of 2005 totaled \$ 6.5 million with 6,626 delinquent loans. The survey also permits an estimation that the financial bubble created in the region between 1991 and 2004 entailed over 19 thousand loans for the amount of 19.4 million dollars with a default rate of 46 percent. PROZACHI's default rate was substantially lower than other institutions, only 38 percent, because of loan swapping practices of loaning from other institutions to pay prior debts to PROZACHI. PROZACHI made 47 percent of all loans with 41 percent of the amount loaned, by far the most important financial actor in the four municipalities. Despite its higher credit recovery rates, PROZACHI also concentrated a full third of the portfolio in arrears and 38 percent of delinquent loans. PROZACHI was not only crucial in establishing practices in institutionalized lending and setting trends for other financial institutions in relation to excluded campesin@s but financially was the key actor.

This appendix has three sections

1. The Financial Architecture of the Ch'orti' debt which analyzes the role of the 26 different lending institutions
2. The Geographical Distribution of the Debt which analyzes the debt in each of the four municipalities
3. The Dynamics of Indebtedness and Foreclosures (Case Studies of Communities).

Each of these sections studies the Ch'orti' Debt in different time periods and conjunctures between 1991 and 2004 (promoting directed rural credit 1991-98, opening the flood gates of microfinance with Hurricane Mitch 1999-2000, and finally the four year period in which the crisis of the financial industry in Chiquimula became evident (2000-04).

### The Financial Architecture of the Ch'orti' debt which analyzes the role of the 26 different lending institutions

Public financial institutions and savings and loan cooperatives were the key institutions that indebted medium, small and subsistence producers in the Ch'orti' region and ultimately suffered severe financial losses. Together they accounted for 87 percent of Portfolio and 81 percent of the loans that came to be known as the Ch'orti' Debt. PROZACHI was by far the most important actor with 47 percent of the loans followed by the S & L Cooperatives with 23 percent. BANDESA and BANRURAL accounted for 12 percent of the loans. The overall portfolio during the financial bubble created for small and subsistence producers was USD 14.1 million. The Average loan was USD 727. The three major actors had average loans (between USD 1,073 in the case of the Public Banks and USD 629 in the case of PROZACHI) that characterize a small producer clientele; nevertheless the majority of their loans went to subsistence producers. Self-identified microfinance institutions and the communal banks had average loans of USD 296 and USD 123 respectively, which were destined to subsistence producers.

**Table 1.2 Estimation of the Financial Architecture of the Ch'orti Debt 1991 - 2004**  
( in US\$ adjusted for inflation)

Financial Institutions	Totals	PROZACHI I PROZACHI II	Comunal Banks	Public Development Banks (BANDESA y BANRURAL)	S and L Cooperatives	Self- identified Microfinance	Coffee- Specific	Private Banks
Portfolio	6,533,192	2,161,843	12,050	1,521,020	1,923,090	454,027	209,276	263,089
Loans	6,626	2,499	74	1,078	1,625	1,168	145	37
Average Loan	986	865	162	1,411	1,183	389	1,448	7,065
% Portfolio	100%	33%	0%	23%	29%	7%	3%	4%
% Loans	100%	38%	1%	16%	25%	18%	2%	1%

\* Extrapolation from New Day Sample of 49% of PROZACHI and BANRURAL financial Information

**Table 1.1 Estimation of Portofolio and Number Loans Made during Financial Bubble:  
Olopa, La Unión, Camotán y Jocotán 1991-2004 (in US\$ adjusted for inflation)**

Financial Institutions	Totals	PROZACHI I PROZACHI II	Comunal Banks	Public Development Banks (BANDESA y BANRURAL)	S and L Cooperatives	Self- identified Microfinance	Coffee- Specific	Private Banks
Portfolio	14,099,666	5,744,940	24,474	2,443,377	4,027,208	941,360	256,583	661,724
Number of Loans	19,401	9,137	199	2,278	4,479	3,185	233	123
Average Loan	727	629	123	1,073	899	296	1,100	5,369
% Portfolio	100%	41%	0%	17%	29%	7%	2%	5%
% Loans	100%	47%	1%	12%	23%	16%	1%	1%

The following charts portray the architecture of the Ch'orti' Debt. Table 1.2 reflects the extrapolation from the New Day Survey and Table 1.3 shows the actual information generated by the survey. The changes in the average size of delinquent loans with respect to the loans made (Table 1.1) reflect the high probabilities that the poorer subsistence producers paid more of debts than did the small and medium producers. As analyzed in chapter 5, leaders of New Day, who were medium producers, actually paid their loans while maintaining the subsistence producers in New Day's movement shouldn't have to pay theirs. While

PROZACHI concentrated 41 percent of loans (Table 1), it remained with only 33 percent of the delinquent portfolio due to loan swapping practices of families taking loans from S&L cooperatives and microfinance institutions to pay PROZACHI as described in chapter 4.



Table 1.4 gives an overview of the entire Ch'orti' Debt from New Day Survey. The thumbnail sketch of the fourteen-year period portrays the different financial actors as follows:

- Borrowers repaid only 28 percent of the principal on all delinquent loans
- The average delinquent loan was USD 1,051.
- Women represented 29 percent of the borrowers
- A full 51 percent of the delinquent loans had been collateralized with an average of 2.4 acres per loan.
- During 1991 to 2004, PROZACHI I represented 38 percent of all delinquent loans and 33 percent of all delinquent loans. The S&L Cooperatives were the second most important loan providers with 29 percent of the portfolio and 25 percent of all delinquent loans. The public bank, BANDESA, and BANRURAL, (the mixed public, private, and cooperative held bank) was the third most important actor with 23 percent of the portfolio and 16 percent of all delinquent loans. The weight of the other financial institutions can be appreciated in Table 1.4.
- Although PROZACHI opened the door for the feminization of the Ch'orti' debt, only 28 percent of its loans were made to women. The other financial institutions that became increasingly more important in the four municipalities

### 1.3 Financial Architecture of Ch'orti' Debt 1991- 2004 (in US\$ Adjusted for Inflation from New Day survey,

Financial Institutions	Totals	Prozachi Related	Comunal Banks	Development Banks (BANDESA y BANRURAL)	S and L Cooperatives	Self-identified Microfinance	Coffee-Specific	Private Banks
Portfolio	3,180,677	1,052,491	5,866	740,507	936,254	221,043	101,886	128,085
Loans	3,025	1,141	34	492	742	533	66	17
Average Loan	1,051	922	173	1,505	1,262	415	1,544	7,534
% Portfolio	100%	33%	0%	23%	29%	7%	3%	4%
% Loans	100%	38%	1%	16%	25%	18%	2%	1%

prioritized women more than PROZACHI. Women held 67 percent of the delinquent loans in the Communal Banks, 53 percent in the Self-identified Microfinance institutions, 51 percent in the S&L Cooperatives, 35 percent in the Private Bank, 33 percent in the Coffee Specific promotion initiatives. Only the public banks prioritized women less than PROZACHI with 25 percent of their loans.

- In terms of the percent of loans under \$1,000 dollars, the different types of institutions fall into three groups: 1) the communal banks, self-identified microfinance, and PROZACHI with 100 percent, 94 percent, 70 percent respectively.

2) S&L cooperatives, Coffee Specific, and Public banks with 66 percent, 48 percent, and 39 percent respectively. The private banks only half-heartedly opened their microfinance programs with 12 percent of their loans below \$ 1,000. In general, microfinance project of the other became very significant after Hurricane Mitch

- In terms of the percent of the principal paid on loans, PROZACHI recovered 54 percent, the public banks 21 percent, and the rest of the financial institutions around 10 percent.
- In terms of the collateralization of loan contract, the private and public banks stood out with 94% and 90% respectively. Other institutions collateralized high percentages of their loans. Major actors like PROZACHI and the S&L Cooperatives both collateralized 68 percent of the delinquent loans. The Coffee specific initiatives with 80 percent. Only the Communal Banks and the Self-identified microfinance institutions used the more typical microfinance procedures of guaranteeing their loans through non-legalized control of the borrowers' debt.

**Table 1.4 Financial and Social Indicators of Ch'orti' Debt by Financial Institutions 1991-2004  
(in US\$ adjusted for inflation)**

Financial Institutions	Totals	Prozachi Related	Banco Comunal	Public Development Banks (BANDESA and BANRURAL)	S and L Cooperatives	Self-identified Microfinance	Coffee-Specific	Private Banks
<b>Totales</b>								
Portfolio	3,180,677	1,052,491	2,009	740,507	936,254	221,043	101,886	128,085
Loan Repayments	894,774	569,700	254	160,066	107,707	26,272	27,957	3,072
% Loan Repayment	28%	54%	13%	21%	11%	12%	0	3%
# Loans	3025	1,141	9	492	742	533	66.00	17
Average Loan	1,051.46	922.43	223.21	1,505.09	1,261.80	414.71	1,543.72	7,534.39
% Micro Loans		70%	100%	39%	66%	94%	48%	12%
% Micro Portfolio		33%	100%	13%	20%	70%	15%	1%
# women	890	324	6	123	375	283	22.00	6
% Women	29%	28%	67%	25%	51%	53%	33%	35%
# Loans Collateralized	1854	774	0	444	505	55	5300%	16
% Loans Collateralized	61%	68%	0%	90%	68%	10%	80%	94%
Acres in Collateral	4442	521	0	1770	1790	70	216	75
Average Collateral in acres	2.4	0.7	0.0	4.0	3.5	1.3	4.1	4.7
Pre Mitch	1,265,286	833,464	-	281,317	44,645	3,316	12,403	90,140
Mitch 1999	318,610	102,906	-	60,056	126,427	15,909	5,456	7,444
Drought 2000-2001	697,261	58,307	-	169,134	348,746	89,882	13,523	17,668
Post Coffee Crisis 2002 -20	899,521	57,814	2,009	230,000	416,436	111,936	70,504	12,832
Total	3,180,677							
<b>% DISTRIBUCION SOBRE TOTAL 1991 - 2004</b>								
Before Mitch 1991- 1998	40%	26%	0.0%	9%	1%	0.1%	0.4%	2.8%
Mitch 1999	10%	3%	0.0%	2%	4%	0.5%	0.2%	0.2%
Drought 2000-2001	22%	2%	0.0%	5%	11%	2.8%	0.4%	0.6%
Post Coffee Crisis 2002 -20	28%	2%	0.1%	7%	13%	3.5%	2.2%	0.4%
% Total Portfolio	100%	33%	0.1%	23%	29%	7%	3%	4%
% Total # of Loans	100%	38%	0.3%	16%	25%	18%	2%	1%
<b>% DISTRIBUCION FOR EACH PERIODO</b>								
Before Mitch 1991- 1998	100%	66%	0%	22%	4%	0%	1%	7%
Mitch 1999	100%	32%	0%	19%	40%	5%	2%	2%
Drought 2000-2001	100%	8%	0%	24%	50%	13%	2%	3%
Post Coffee Crisis 2002 -20	100%	6%	0%	26%	46%	12%	8%	1%

Table 1.4.1 shows changes in the financial and social indicators of the different types of financial institutions first in response to Hurricane Mitch with other institutions replacing the leading role of PROZACHI in their attempt to utilize microfinance as a solution to crisis produced by Hurricane Mitch. Table 1.4.2 shows the evolution of financial and social indicators of different types of financial institutions during the years of Drought and then after the crisis in international coffee prices.

- The percentage of payment on the principal of delinquent loans was extremely low for all types of financial institutions. Only PROZACHI in the primer period (1991 -98) recovered more than half of the principal of delinquent loans. Over the four periods analyzed the financial institutions recovered lower and lower percentages of these delinquent loans.
- Average delinquent loans for all institutions, after an initial drop in 1999, rose in their amount from 2000 to 2004 as the financial institutions attempted to face their crisis in arrears on loan collections by financing more well-off producers.
- The percentage of micro delinquent loans also dropped progressively over the four periods analyzed, even for the microfinance institutions.
- The percentage of delinquent loans to women increased significantly over the four periods analyzed except for the public banks whose delinquent loans to women declined slightly.
- The percentage of delinquent loans guaranteed with land as collateral remained high over the four periods with the exception of microfinance and communal banks. The average number of acres taken as collateral for loans increased for all type of financial institutions over the four year period.

In response to crisis, the financial institutions moved away from smaller loans and moved toward making loans to women.

**Table 1.4.1 Financial and Social Indicators of Ch'ort' Debt by Type of Financial Institution before and after Hurricane Mitch 1991- 1999 (in US\$ adjusted for inflation)**

Financial Institutions	Totals	<i>Prozachi Related</i>	Banco Comunal	Public Development Banks (BANDESA y BANRURAL)	<i>S and L Cooperatives</i>	<i>Self-identified Microfinance</i>	<i>Coffee-Specific</i>	<i>Private Banks</i>
<b>1991- 1998 Before Mitch</b>								
Portfolio	1,265,286	833,464	-	281,317	44,645	3,316	12,403	90,140
Loan Repayments	585,878	514,940	-	61,759	3,566	-	5,613	-
% Loan Repayment	46%	62%	-	22%	8%	-	0	0%
# Loans	1,110.00	919	-	144	35	7	3	2
Average Loan	1,140	907	-	1,954	1,276	474	4,134	45,070
% Micro Loans		71%	-	44%	63%	100%	33%	0%
% Micro Portfolio		34%	-	15%	24%	100%	9%	0%
# women	313	262	-	38	10	1	-	2
% Women	28%	29%	-	26%	29%	14%	-	1
# Loans Collateralized	850	684	-	129	33	-	200%	2
% Loans Collateralized	77%	74%	-	90%	94%	0%	67%	100%
Acres in Collateral	2,491	1,821	-	524	110	-	28	7
Average Collateral in acres	2.9	2.7	-	4.1	3.3	#DIV/0!	14.2	3.5
<b>Mitch 1999</b>								
Portfolio	318,610	102,906	-	60,056	126,427	15,909	5,456	7,444
Loan Repayments	89,796	34,294	-	27,608	23,197	2,768	1,526	403
% Loan Repayment	28%	33%	-	46%	18%	17%	0	5%
# Loans	358.00	135	-	34	133	50	3.00	3
Average Loan	890	762	-	1,766	951	318	1,819	2,481
% Micro Loans		69%	-	71%	68%	100%	33%	33%
% Micro Portfolio		42%	-	19%	36%	100%	3%	6%
# women	124	44	-	10	61	5	1.00	2
% Women	35%	33%	-	29%	46%	10%	0.33	67%
# Loans Collateralized	256	103	-	30	114	5	200%	2
% Loans Collateralized	72%	76%	-	88%	86%	10%	67%	67%
Acres in Collateral	591	171	-	116	289	9	5	2
Average Collateral in acres	2.3	1.7	-	3.9	2.5	1.7	2.6	1.1

**Table 1.4.2 Financial and Social Indicators of Ch'ort' Debt by Type of Financial Institution during Drought Years and International Coffee Price Crisis (in US\$ adjusted for inflation)**

Financial Institutions	Totals	<i>Prozachi Related</i>	Banco Comunal	Public Development Banks (BANDESA y BANRURAL)	<i>S and L Cooperatives</i>	<i>Self-identified Microfinance</i>	<i>Coffee-Specific</i>	<i>Private Banks</i>
<b>Drought 2000-2001</b>								
Portfolio	697,261	58,307	-	169,134	348,746	89,882	13,523	17,668
Loan Repayments	113,041	11,912	-	42,014	43,328	12,164	1,999	1,624
% Loan Repayment	16%	20%	-	25%	12%	14%	0	9%
# Loans	744.00	61	-	117	297	249	7.00	8
Average Loan	937	956	-	1,446	1,174	361	1,932	2,209
% Micro Loans		55%	-	54%	58%	93%	43%	0%
% Micro Portfolio		23%	-	17%	16%	77%	5%	0%
# women	315	13	-	42	151	103	5.00	1
% Women	43%	21%	-	36%	51%	41%	71%	13%
# Loans Collateralized	408.00	57	-	111	196	31	3.00	8
% Loans Collateralized	55%	93%	-	95%	66%	12%	43%	100%
Acres in Collateral	1,284	195	-	455	549	31	17	38
Average Collateral in acres	3.1	3.4	-	4.1	2.8	1.0	5.8	4.7
<b>Post Coffee Crisis 2002 -2004</b>								
Portfolio	899,521	57,814	2,009	230,000	416,436	111,936	70,504	12,832
Loan Repayments	106,059	8,555	254	28,685	37,615	11,341	18,820	1,044
% Loan Repayment	12%	15%	13%	12%	9%	10%	0	8%
# Loans	842.00	60	9	197	277	227	52.00	4
Average Loan	1,068	964	223	1,168	1,503	493	1,356	3,208
% Micro Loans		70%	100%	21%	65%	93%	37%	25%
% Micro Portfolio		20%	100%	7%	17%	60%	18%	6%
# women	402	25	6	33	153	174	16.00	1
% Women	48%	42%	67%	17%	55%	77%	0.31	25%
# Loans Collateralized	451.00	37	0	174	162	26	4600%	4
% Loans Collateralized	54%	62%	0%	88%	58%	11%	88%	100%
Acres in Collateral	1,897	156	-	675	842	31	165	29
Average Collateral in acres	4.2	4.2	-	3.9	5.2	1.2	3.6	7.2

### **The Geographical Distribution of the Debt**

Tables 1.6, 1.7, and 1.8 present the overall geography of the Ch'orti' Debt in its three historical phases. Tables, 1.6.1, 1.7.1, and 1.8.1 on the following pages present the institutional coverage of different types of financial institution by municipality and historical phase of the debt.

<b>Table 1.6 Uneven Geographies of Debt 1991 to 1998</b> (en US\$ adjusted for inflation)			
INDICATORS	WOMEN	MEN	% WOMEN
No of Loans	254	633	29%
Portfolio	330,918	744,306	31%
Average Loan	1,303	1,176	1,212
<b>Olopa</b>			
No of Loans	43%	39%	40%
Portfolio	37%	45%	43%
Average Loan	1,138	1,370	1,299
<b>La Unión</b>			
No of Loans	17%	14%	14%
Portfolio	41%	20%	27%
Average Loan	3,206	1,758	2,233
<b>Camotán</b>			
No of Loans	20%	21%	20%
Portfolio	15%	22%	20%
Average Loan	982	1,237	1,234
<b>Jocotán</b>			
No of Loans	20%	27%	25%
Portfolio	0%	0%	#DIV/0!
Average Loan	426	553	523
Totals %	100%	100%	100%

<b>Table 1.7 Uneven Geographies of Debt 1999 to 2000</b> (en US\$ adjusted for inflation)			
INDICATORS	WOMEN	MEN	% WOMEN
No of Loans	292	440	40%
Portfolio	272,175	504,873	35%
Average Loan	932	1,419	1,062
<b>Olopa</b>			
No of Loans	73%	58%	64%
Average Loan	967	1,320	0
<b>La Unión</b>			
No of Loans	13%	17%	15%
Portfolio	26%	26%	26%
Average Loan	2,397	2,229	0
<b>Camotán</b>			
No of Loans	12%	24%	19%
Portfolio	11%	19%	16%
Average Loan	0	0	0
<b>Jocotán</b>			
No of Loans	3%	2%	2%
Portfolio	0%	0%	#DIV/0!
Average Loan	0	0	0
Totals %	100%	100%	100%

<b>Table 1.8 Uneven Geographies of Debt 2001 to 2004</b> (en US\$ adjusted for inflation)			
INDICATORS	WOMEN	MEN	% WOMEN
No of Loans	524	468	53%
Portfolio	436,515	616,591	41%
Average Loan	833	1,318	1,062
<b>Olopa</b>			
No of Loans	82%	53%	68%
Portfolio	80%	52%	64%
Average Loan	816	1,297	992
<b>La Unión</b>			
No of Loans	6%	20%	13%
Portfolio	14%	25%	20%
Average Loan	1,958	1,605	1,692
<b>Camotán</b>			
No of Loans	8%	24%	16%
Portfolio	4%	21%	14%
Average Loan	370	1,141	927
<b>Jocotán</b>			
No of Loans	4%	2%	3%
Portfolio	2%	2%	2%
Average Loan	458	1,096	678
Totals %	100%	100%	100%



**Table 1.6.1 UNEVEN GEOGRAPHIES OF DEBT 1991 to 1998**  
(in US\$ adjusted for inflation)

Financial Institutions and Indicators	OLOPA			La Unión			Camotán			Jocotán		
	Women	Men	% Women	Women	Men	% Women	Women	Men	% Women	Women	Men	% Women
<b>No. Of Loans</b>	109	247	31%	42	86	33%	51	130	28%	52	170	23%
<b>Portfolio Loans</b>	124,008	338,331	27%	134,672	151,176	47%	50,082	160,756	24%	22,155	94,043	19%
<b>Average Loan</b>	1,138	1,370	-	3,206	1,758	-	982	1,237	(255)	426	553	-
<b>% Loan Repayment</b>	34%	18%		6%	32%		25%	41%		57%	13%	
<b>Acres in Collateral</b>	338	361	48%	154	209	42%	68	598	10%	127	307	29%
<b>Average Acres in Collateral</b>	3.1	0.8		2.1	1.4		0.8	2.7	(1.9)	1.4	1.0	
<b>% Foreclosures</b>	36%	27%		45%	33%		0%	0%	0%	0%	28%	
<b>Distribución by Varied Financial Instituciones</b>												
<b>PROZACHI</b>												
% of Loans	88%	91%		95%	94%		100%	97%		100%	100%	
% of Portfolio	78%	62%		38%	88%		100%	91%		100%	100%	
<b>Cooperatives</b>												
% of Loans	7%	4%		2%	1%		0%	0%		0%	0%	
% of Portfolio	5%	9%		1%	3%		0%	0%		0%	0%	
<b>Self-Identified Microfinance</b>												
% of Loans	2%	3%		0%	0%		0%	0%		0%	0%	
% of Portfolio	1%	1%		0%	0%		0%	0%		0%	0%	
<b>Public Banks</b>												
% of Loans	3%	0%		1%	1%		0%	1%		0%	0%	
% of Portfolio	16%	0%		61%	2%		0%	4%		0%	0%	
<b>Private Banks</b>												
% of Loans	0%	1%		0%	3%		0%	0%		0%	0%	
% of Portfolio	0%	27%		0%	6%		0%	0%		0%	0%	

**Table 1.7.1 UNEVEN GEOGRAPHIES OF DEBT 1999 AND 2000**  
(in US\$ adjusted for inflation)

Financial Institutions and Indicators	OLOPA			La Unión			Camotán			Jocotán		
	Women	Men	% Women or	Women	Men	% Women	Women	Men	% Women	Women	Men	% Women
<b>No. Of Loans</b>	212	253	46%	37	73	34%	35	104	25%	8	10	44%
<b>Portfolio Loans</b>	165,756	270,088	38%	71,716	131,578	35%	30,152	97,581	24%	4,551	5,626	45%
<b>Average Loan</b>	782	1,068		1,938	1,802		861	938		569	563	
<b>% Loan Repayment</b>	13%	15%	-2%	20%	18%	3%	19%	28%	-9%	8%	20%	-13%
<b>Acres in Collateral</b>	346	320	52%	113	153	42%	112	206	35%	12	10	54%
<b>Average Acres in Collateral</b>	1.6	1.3		3.0	2.1		3.2	2.0		1.5	1.0	
<b>% Foreclosures</b>	24%	24%		30%	22%		17%	16%		75%	0%	
<b>Distribución by Varied Financial Instituciones</b>												
<b>PROZACHI</b>												
% of Loans	9%	14%		41%	29%		49%	52%		0%	70%	
% of Portfolio	6%	14%		27%	20%		37%	56%		0%	48%	
<b>Cooperatives</b>												
% of Loans	59%	51%		30%	25%		17%	10%		75%	10%	
% of Portfolio	70%	57%		24%	19%		10%	14%		60%	18%	
<b>Self Identified Micro-Finance Institutions</b>												
% of Loans	23%	19%		2%	7%		17%	29%		0%	0%	
% of Portfolio	9%	7%		1%	5%		9%	13%		0%	0%	
<b>Public Banks</b>												
% of Loans	5%	16%		2%	18%		9%	7%		25%	20%	
% of Portfolio	9%	23%		46%	47%		8%	10%		40%	34%	
<b>Private Banks</b>												
% of Loans	3%	1%		3%	4%		9%	3%		0%	0%	
% of Portfolio	5%	3%		1%	4%		35%	7%		0%	0%	

# Table 1.8.1 UNEVEN GEOGRAPHIES OF DEBT 2001-04

(in US\$ adjusted for inflation)

Financial Institutions and Indicators	OLOPA			La Unión			Camotán			Jocotán		
	Women	Men	% Women	Women	Men	% Women	Women	Men	% Women	Women	Men	% Women
No. Of Loans	430	249	63%	31	95	25%	44	114	28%	19	10	66%
Portfolio Loans	350,830	323,050	52%	60,703	152,454	28%	16,281	130,129	11%	8,702	10,958	44%
Average Loan	816	1,297		1,958	1,605		370	1,141		458	1,096	
Loan Repayments	233,419	305,330		51,003	114,730		36,837	187,311		6,292	4,300	
Average Loan Repayment	2,764	3,302		541	1,242		412	1,987		82	53	
% Loan Repayment	8%	12%	-4%	11%	10%	1%	29%	18%	10%	9%	5%	4%
Acres in Collateral	482	689	41%	257	241	52%	107	438	20%	17	29	37%
Average Acres in Collateral	1.1	2.8		8.3	2.5		2.4	3.8		0.9	2.9	
No. Of Foreclosures	91	56		2	14		3	9		9	-	
% Foreclosures	21%	22%		6%	15%		7%	8%		47%	0%	
<b>Distribución by Varied Financial Instituciones</b>												
<b>PROZACHI</b>												
% of Loans	0%	3%		13%	13%		0%	3%		21%	10%	
% of Portfolio	0%	1%		19%	13%		0%	4%		8%	3%	
<b>Cooperatives</b>												
% of Loans	35%	43%		26%	21.1%		59%	11.4%		63%	50%	
% of Portfolio	73%	67%		13%	14%		46%	11%		87%	65%	
<b>Self Identified Micro-Finance Institutions</b>												
% of Loans	56%	33%		29%	47%		27%	59%		16%	10%	
% of Portfolio	19%	7%		20%	30%		23%	25%		5%	1%	
<b>Public Banks</b>												
% of Loans	7%	19%		29%	14.7%		14%	25%		0%	30%	
% of Portfolio	8%	25%		40%	39%		31%	58%		0%	31%	
<b>Private Banks</b>												
% of Loans	1%	2%		3%	4%		0%	3%		0%	0%	
% of Portfolio	1%	5%		7%	4%		0%	3%		0%	0%	

## The Dynamics of Indebtedness and Foreclosures (Case Studies of Communities)

Tables 1.9.1, 1.9.2, and 1.9.3 analyze 3 Villages that were among the epicenters of multiple debt, relatively strong community organizations, and leading areas in the organization of New Day. All three Villages are in coffee producing areas. El Sector Capucal (Table 1.9.1) has the largest average loans, especially for women, which indicates female debtors with larger coffee plantations. Women had the lowest repayment rates in Capucal. More land was collateralized, and foreclosures were massive for poor and better off families alike. Fear of foreclosure worked to increase payment of debt as the maturity of the debts were half in Capucal of what they were in the other two villages.

### Table 1.9.1 Sector de Capucal, La Unión Indebtedness

Years	# Loans		% Fem	Loans Portfolio (in US\$ adjusted for inflation)		% Fem	Average Loan		Loan Repayments		Repayment %		Average Months in arrears	
	Women	Men		Women	Men		Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
<b>Hasta 1998</b>	8	12	40%	84,345	19,612	81%	10,543	1,634	2,159	11,145	3%	57%	72	46
<b>1999-2000</b>	15	23	39%	49,581	66,080	43%	3,305	2,873	11,477	27,223	23%	41%	35	32
<b>2001-04</b>	14	28	33%	26,162	45,720	36%	1,869	1,633	2,425	3,890	9%	9%	19	16
<b>Total Capucal</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>160,087</b>	<b>131,412</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>4,327</b>	<b>2,086</b>	<b>16,061</b>	<b>42,257</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Multiple Loans</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>34%</b>			<b>% Multiple Loans Aldeas</b>						<b>38%</b>		
<b>% Multiple Loans</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>40%</b>				<b>Average # of Loans per person</b>						<b>1.9</b>		
<b>Persons with Multiple Loans</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>40%</b>											

## Table 1.9.1 Sector Capucal, La Unión Collateral and Foreclosures

Years	Average Acres Collateralized		% Title to Property		Foreclosure Notices		Foreclosure notices as % of all Loans		% Illiterate		Average Size of Loans with Foreclosure		Largest Loan as Multiple of Smallest Loan		Microloans as % of all Foreclosures	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>Hasta 1998</b>	9.4	1.52	25%	25%	5	9	63%	75%	38%	25%	20,824	1,338	205	2	60%	44%
<b>1999-2000</b>	4.1	4.44	47%	52%	9	11	60%	48%	40%	13%	4,126	4,173	64	42	44%	45%
<b>2001-04</b>	3.3	4.34	29%	29%	2	11	14%	39%	7%	4%	901	1,478	3	8	50%	9%
<b>Total Capucal</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>3.8</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>11%</b>						

Table 1.9.2 shows another coffee area, this time in Olopa and with stronger indigeneity. In Piedra de Amolar the women had higher repayment rates than men. Average loans and acres taken in collateral were lower than Capucal (Table 1.9.2). Foreclosures against women and men were made without economic discrimination as the multiples between the largest foreclosed loan and the smallest were 50 to 1, almost as exaggerated as in Capucal. Nevertheless, the level of foreclosures was 30% lower than in Capucal. The maturity of the debt was nearly twice that of Capucal, showing once again that villages responded with fear to the practice of foreclosure.

## Table 1.9.2 Piedra de Amolar, Olopa Collateral and Foreclosures

Years	Average Acres Collateralized		% Title to Property		Foreclosure Notices		Foreclosure notices as % of all Loans		% Illiterate		Average Size of Loans with Foreclosure		Largest Loan as Multiple of Smallest Loan		Microloans as % of all Foreclosures	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Hasta 1998	2.2	1.1	57%	59%	2	0	22%	0%	36%	45%	680	-	2	-	100%	
1999-2000	0.7	1.9	54%	54%	3	11	12%	39%	73%	54%	3,899	1,071	51	5	33%	27%
2001-04	1.1	1.8	50%	46%	3	5	11%	18%	61%	39%	2,941	1,509	31	11	33%	60%
<b>Total Piedra de Amolar</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>46%</b>						

## Table 1.9.2 Aldea de Piedra de Amolar, Olopa Indebtedness

Years	# Loans		% Fem	Loans Portfolio (in US\$ adjusted for inflation)		% Fem	Average Loan		Loan Repayments		Repayment %		Average Months in arrears	
	Women	Men		Women	Men		Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Hasta 1998	14	22	39%	21,717	109,146	17%	1,551	4,961	10,358	10,749	48%	10%	121	78
1999-2000	26	28	48%	21,191	44,104	32%	815	1,575	4,973	2,428	23%	6%	47	47
2001-04	28	28	50%	31,657	66,741	32%	1,131	2,384	3993.588	11064.57	13%	17%	34	32
<b>Total Piedra de Amolar</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>74,566</b>	<b>219,991</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>1,097</b>	<b>2,820</b>	<b>19324</b>	<b>24241</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Multiple Loans</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>51%</b>				<b>% Multiple Loans Aldeas</b>						<b>53%</b>	
<b>% Multiple Loans</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>49%</b>					<b>Average # of Loans per person</b>						<b>2.5</b>	
<b>Persons with Multiple Loans</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>48%</b>											

Table 1.9.3 analyzes the Village of el Volcán in Camotán. Like Capucal (1.9.1), women had lower repayment rates than men. In this village, financial institutions foreclosed on 4% of the loans made to women and only percent of those made to men. El Volcán had the highest maturity of debt with average of six years in arrears for women and five years for men

**Table 1.9.3 Aldea El Volcán, Camotán Collateral and Foreclosures**

Years	Average Acres Collateralized		% Title to Property		Foreclosure Notices		Foreclosure notices as % of all Loans		% Illeterate		Average Size of Loans with Foreclosure		Largest Loan as Multiple of Smallest Loan		Microloans as % of all Foreclosures		
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Hasta 1998	1	2	20%	21%	0	0	0%	0%	59%	19%	0	0					
1999-2000	2	1.3	0%	5%	2	0	10%	0%	50%	45%	605	0	1.93		100%	100%	
2001-04	1	1.5	8%	8%	1	1	4%	3%	64%	16%	979	149			0%	100%	
<b>Total El Volcán</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>23%</b>							

**Table 1.9.3 Aldea El Volcán, Camotán Indebtedness**

Years	# Loans		% Fem	Loans Portfolio (in US\$ adjusted for inflation)		% Fem	Average Loan		Loan Repayments		Repayment %		Promedio Months in arrears		
	Women	Men		Women	Men		Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	
Hasta 1998	27	52	34%	35,125	48,659	42%	1,301	936	6,484	11,531	18%	24%	92	96	
1999-2000	20	22	48%	15,474	23,236	40%	774	1,056	1,968	4,382	13%	19%	51	44	
2001-04	25	38	40%	12,953	28,843	31%	518	759	909	5,410	7%	19%	29	32	
<b>Total El Volcán</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>63,552</b>	<b>100,738</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>883</b>	<b>899</b>	<b>9361.6</b>	<b>21323</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>60</b>	
<b>Multiple Loans</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>36%</b>												
<b>% Multiple Loans</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>50%</b>													
<b>Persons with Multiple Loans</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>38%</b>												
				<b>% Multiple Loans Aldeas</b>				<b>48%</b>							
				<b>Average # of Loans per person</b>				<b>2.2</b>							