

THE CENTURY AFTER INDEPENDENCE: LAND AND LIFE IN GUATEMALA, 1821-1920

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Justo Rufino Barrios, president of Guatemala, closes his eyes and hears a din of railroads and steam engines violating the silence of the monasteries.

There is no stopping synthetic dyes in the world's markets, and no one buys the cochineal and indigo Guatemala sells. It's time for coffee. The market demands coffee and coffee demands lands and hands, trains and ports. To modernize the country, Barrios expels the parasitic monks, seizes from the church its immense properties and gives them to his closest friends. He also expropriates the lands of Indian communities. Collective property is abolished by decree and compulsory peonage is imposed. *To integrate the Indian into the nation*, the Liberal government makes him a serf of the new coffee plantations. The colonial system of forced labour returns.

Soldiers tour the plantations distributing Indians.

— Eduardo Galeano, *Faces and Masks* (1987)

In a comprehensive survey of the literature, Lee Woodward observes, somewhat ironically, that we often know more about the history of Guatemala under Spanish rule than we do about post-colonial times, especially the nineteenth century.¹ While Woodward's observation remains valid, some recent contributions afford a more grounded ap-

preciation of the events and circumstances of nineteenth-century life. Woodward's own endeavours have resulted in a study which, while focusing primarily on the political career of Rafael Carrera, in effect sketches the lineaments of culture and society during the first half-century of Guatemala's existence as an independent republic.² The years between 1821 and 1871 have also attracted the attention of another distinguished historian, E. Bradford Burns.³ What Burns and Woodward tell us about the conditions of rural life in Guatemala contrasts vividly with portrayals of what took place in the countryside after 1871, when the rule of Liberal, not Conservative, governments prevailed. Our knowledge of rural life from 1871 on has been advanced considerably by the findings of several scholars, among them Shelton Davis, David McCreery, David Stoll and John Watanabe.⁴ This essay reviews the research of the above individuals as it relates to land and life in Guatemala in the century after independence. Contemplation of historical forces operating at the national or regional level will be followed by scrutiny of their impact in four distinct local settings, specifically the Maya Indian communities of Santiago Chimaltenango, Nebaj, Santa Eulalia and San Juan Ixcocoy.

Conservatives, Liberals and Maya Survival

The political scene in Guatemala following independence from Spain was marked by prolonged internal conflict between Conservatives and Liberals for control of government office. Differences between the two camps were many, but centred around Conservative preference for maintaining Hispanic-derived institutions that sought to preserve the colonial status quo in contrast to Liberal preference for creating an entirely new social and economic order that viewed progress as attainable by promoting capitalist links with the outside world. In terms of the impact of ideology on Maya ways, Conservatism represented a continuation of the culture of refuge shaped during colonial times. Liberalism, on the other hand, signified Maya assimilation into a modern, outward-looking ladino state. The former meant minimal cultural change at the community level, the latter intense, outside interference that would alter irrevocably long-established ways of living with the land.⁵

Liberals dominated political office between 1823 and 1839, but their plans for radical reform were stalled if not reversed for three decades thereafter when Rafael Carrera led the Conservatives to power following a popular uprising. A wily, pragmatic individual who came

to be known as “protector of the people,” Carrera undid the work of his Liberal predecessor, Mariano Gálvez, and championed a stable, paternalist state founded on restored Hispanic institutions. The extent to which Maya communities benefited directly from Carrera’s political agenda is still unclear. Woodward maintains that “Carrera’s Indian policy did indeed protect the Indians from further encroachment on their land and labour during the 1840s.”⁶ He concedes, however, that “after 1850 that protection began to lessen as Carrera became more clearly attached to the Guatemalan elite.”⁷ McCreery is more convinced by the reasoning of the late Oliver La Farge, who suggested some time ago that Maya life under Carrera “becomes a smooth blend; well stabilized, it has the individuality and roundness that mark any culture, and its continued evolution is in the form of growth out of itself, rather than in response to alien pressures.”⁸ McCreery claims that his research findings tend to support the views of La Farge. He depicts Carrera’s program as one in which a “fragile and beleaguered state issued laws and decrees but could visit little effective attention on a rural population that resisted paying taxes and for whose land labour the ladino elites had little use.”⁹ Maya communities, McCreery claims, were “more neglected than protected” by Carrera, a perspective which allows emphasis on human agency to be placed on Indians, not on the state.¹⁰

Liberals regained political office in 1871, six years after Carrera’s death, and under the stewardship of Justo Rufino Barrios began to implement with fervour what they had been frustrated from doing for decades earlier. Burns describes the Liberal agenda as one which signalled “a return to monoculture, declining food production for local consumption, rising foreign debt, forced labor, debt peonage, the growth of latifundia, and the greater impoverishment of the majority.”¹¹ Attacks on Maya land and assaults on Maya labour were inevitable consequences of the Liberal vision of progress.

McCreery argues that Barrios and his successors did not “abolish” or “outlaw” community property.¹² What Liberal legislation demanded was for land to be formally declared and, if possible, registered not by collective but by individual title. The former option was not ruled out; the latter was simply more acceptable, the preferred, ideologically correct choice. McCreery makes the crucial point that “because the process of conversion to private property rested on a number of individual, positive acts it progressed at very different rates from village to village, depending on external conditions and on the

dictates of community traditions and circumstances.”¹³ While “positive acts” on the part of Maya communities by no means guaranteed lawful title to land, failure to lay claim to title exposed them to risks of seizure and encroachment.

Land was most certainly lost; exactly how much, however, has yet to be ascertained. Scholarly opinion ranges from Robert Naylor’s vague impression of there being “little discernible change” in Maya life, of its continuing “much the same as before,” to Carol Smith’s more realistic but undocumented assertion that Maya communities “lost about half of the lands they traditionally claimed during the colonial period.”¹⁴ More systematic research is clearly in order.

Land was transformed from a cultural into an economic resource, from community to commodity, by Liberal desires to capitalize on Guatemala’s untapped potential as a producer of coffee. The Pacific piedmont and the Verapaz highlands in particular offered ideal growing conditions. Both these regions had been relatively untouched by the search for a successful cash crop during colonial times, which had seen cacao, cochineal and indigo enjoy short-lived cycles of boom and bust.¹⁵ Investment by domestic and foreign capital resulted in coffee emerging during the second half of the nineteenth century as Guatemala’s principal export crop, a position it has maintained in the national economy from the time of President Barrios until today. Organized on a *finca* or plantation basis, coffee production demands intensive labour input mostly at harvest time. What suits the requirements of coffee planters best, therefore, is a seasonal work force, one that provides labour when needed and that can be dispensed with when not. Outright coercion in the form of a draft known as *mandamiento*, authorized by President Barrios in 1876, gave way in 1894 to legalized debt peonage, which endured well into the twentieth century in Guatemala, when it was eventually replaced by a vagrancy law requiring individuals holding less than a stipulated amount of land to work part of each year as wage labourers for others: anyone farming less than 6.9 acres was expected to work 100 days; anyone farming less than 2.8 acres was expected to work 150 days.¹⁶ A *libreto*, or identification book, had to be carried at all times, and was best inspected with the requisite number of days fulfilled.

With the advent of Liberal rule, then, Maya communities throughout Guatemala were exposed to a double threat, one that targeted labour as well as land to be desirable economic assets. The degree to which Liberal prerogatives made their mark on community life, how-

ever, varied from region to region, if not from place to place within a region. Four different experiences will now be discussed.

Santiago Chimaltenango

Santiago Chimaltenango, known to local residents simply as Chimal, is a Mam township lying along the southern flanks of the Sierra de los Cuchumatanes at elevations ranging from around 1,400 to over 2,700 metres. It is bordered to the north by Concepción and Todos Santos Cuchumatán, to the east by San Juan Atitán, to the south by Colotenango and to the west by Colotenango and San Pedro Necta (Figure 1). While growing conditions in lower-elevation *tierra templada* are favourable, cultivating coffee as a cash crop in Chimal dates only to the middle of the present century, primarily as an activity of small-scale producers. Chimal was studied in the 1930s by Charles Wagley, to whom we owe two classic ethnographic accounts.¹⁷ Forty years after Wagley first visited, Chimal attracted the attention of another anthropologist, John Watanabe. It is from the latter's work that some appreciation may be gleaned of land-related incidents in the late nineteenth century.¹⁸

Chimal is an interesting case. In terms of the overall impact of the Liberal reforms, it cannot be said to have suffered the worst of transformations. What Chimal's experience illustrates, however, is that moves to lay claim to title triggered counterclaims on the part of neighbouring communities, often with detrimental consequences.

Watanabe informs us that on 19 May 1879, representatives from Chimal lodged a petition with the district governor of Huehuetenango for legal title to community land. Chimal's petition was submitted two years after the Barrios administration issued Decree 170, which terminated the colonial system of land rental known as *censo enfiteusis*. Under *censo enfiteusis*, community residents could purchase usufruct rights to specific plots of land, rights which could be inherited, sold, sublet or exchanged but which did not allow for the legal transfer of land itself. These were precisely the arrangements Decree 170 was designed to eliminate.

Chimal's petition provoked a contrary response from three of its neighbours, all of whom alleged that tracts of the land claimed by Chimal belonged to them. San Juan Atitán was first to protest, stating on 20 June that lands included in the Chimal petition had been claimed by them six years previously. San Pedro Necta followed next, stating in November 1879 that a village called Niy fell within their ter-

ritory, not Chimal's. San Martín Cuchumatán, today part of the township of Todos Santos, declared jurisdiction over a village called Tajumuc, which was said to have been incorporated long ago by them. Chimal, in turn, disputed all three counterclaims, and requested, in December 1879, that a survey be arranged to resolve the matter.

Responsibility for the survey fell to one Juan María Ordóñez, who was charged with measuring land designated as *ejido* and *baldío*, the former a standard allotment of one square league (16.6 km²) around the main township centre, the latter an indeterminate amount of public land beyond. Ordóñez conducted the survey between 2 June and 17 June 1880, after which time he filed a report that calculated Chimal's *ejido* to be 17.4 km² in extent, surrounded by almost 54 km² of *baldío*. Land disputed with San Pedro and San Martín—San Juan, by now, had apparently withdrawn from the fray—lay exclusively in the *baldío*. When, three years later, Ordóñez's report was reviewed by a government official, he observed that Chimal enjoyed access to more *ejido* land than its old colonial entitlement. He also noted that *baldío* land contested by San Pedro totalled almost 25 km². When, on 10 September 1891, a municipal title was finally issued, it recognized as *ejido* all 17.4 km² registered in Ordóñez's survey but awarded to Chimal little more than half the land, some 29 km², claimed as *baldío*.

Out of a total claim of 71 km², then, Chimal ended up with legal title to 46. The 25 km² forfeited in the dispute, Watanabe reckons, went in equal measure to San Pedro and San Martín, the latter's share being absorbed by Todos Santos Cuchumatán when San Martín became part of its municipal embrace.

The stakes at Chimal, compared to what was up for grabs elsewhere in Guatemala, may have been paltry, but the titling episode is instructive on three counts. First, by pitting neighbour against neighbour, it conformed to that most obdurate rule of conquest—divide and rule. Second, it established that a new order would indeed replace the old, for land henceforth would be owned, not merely worked. And, third, it represented the beginnings of Maya accommodation to the modern ladino state, which Watanabe expresses thus: "In seeking legal title—whether municipal or individual—to safeguard their lands, Chimaltecos in effect abdicated sovereignty over that land by appealing to state authority to validate their claims."¹⁹ Further accommodation would be necessary as the power of the state grew.

Nebaj

Nebaj, one of three Ixil townships lying at the eastern edge of the Cuchumatanes Mountains, embraces municipal territory ranging from below 1,400 to upwards of 3,000 metres in elevation. It is bordered to the north by Chajul and Santa Eulalia, to the east by Chajul, San Juan Cotzal and Cunén, to the south by Sacapulas and Aguacatán and to the west by Chiantla and San Juan Ixcoy (Figure 1). Nebaj and its two Ixil neighbours, Chajul and San Juan Cotzal, were studied in the early 1940s by Jackson Steward Lincoln. His untimely death while engaged in field work in Guatemala cut short a promising career, if Lincoln's posthumously published notes are anything to judge by.²⁰ All three Ixil townships are subjected to rewarding scrutiny by Benjamin Colby and Pierre van den Berghe, whose research activities in the 1960s focused on ethnic relations.²¹ Ixil country was hard hit by countersurgency war in the early 1980s, in the wake of which David Stoll conducted a detailed examination of the vicissitudes of life, in the words of Ixil survivors themselves, "between two fires."²² Stoll's work on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries draws in part on archival investigation by Elaine Elliott.

Colby and van den Berghe, as well as Stoll, lean heavily on Lincoln in depicting how the coffee economy "opened up" Ixil country. Labour, not land, appears initially to have been the big attraction. The prospect of recruiting seasonal workers lured to Nebaj one Isaías Palacios, a Spaniard who arrived in the early 1890s to take up the post of town secretary. He soon became Nebaj's first labour contractor, forwarding loans in return for commitments to work on coffee plantations. Palacios and agents like him sealed contracts with the assistance of drink, proffering Indians liquor, trapping them into debt and dependency and cultivating a pattern of behaviour from which escape was difficult. Stoll invokes the words of the Irish-Canadian archaeologist Robert Burkitt, who observed while staying at Nebaj in 1913 "an unceasing coming and going of labor contractors and plantation agents getting out gangs of Indians for the Pacific Coast."²³ Burkitt pulled no punches and spoke frankly of what he saw:

Years ago, when I first visited Nebaj, it was different place from now. . . . I had struck the place at an especially bad moment. The plantation agents were at the height of their activity, scattering money, advance pay for work, and every Indian was able to buy rum. The rum business and the coffee business work together in this country, automatically. The plantation advances money to the Indian and the rum seller

takes it away from him and the Indian has to go to work again. Work leads to rum and rum leads to work. . . . I used to think that Chichicastenango was the drunkenest town in the country, but now I think it is Nebaj. My plans at Nebaj were upset by rum. There are two ruin places that I know of that are to be got at from Nebaj and I did nothing at either of them, and one of them I never even saw. The Indians I was going to take were never sober.²⁴

Connections between the “rum business” and the “coffee business” were also noted by Lincoln, who acknowledges that while “Indians drank on all ceremonial occasions” it was ladinos who were responsible “for increasing the amount and the strength of the liquor for the purpose of enriching themselves.”²⁵ Nebaj at one juncture supported 80 watering holes, which lends some credibility to Burkitt’s claim that Indians there were “drunk from morning to night.”²⁶ Stoll attributes a key role to ladinos who moved to Nebaj from Malacatán, now Malacatancito, a town near Huehuetenango. These people and other ladinos, Stoll claims, by “selling liquor and loaning the cash needed to go on binges . . . separated Ixils from much of their best arable land,” for after an agreement was struck “anything less than prompt repayment meant that the house or land put up for collateral could change hands.”²⁷

To the land lost in this manner was added further amounts appropriated during the titling process. When a municipal title for 388 *caballerías* was issued in 1885 to San Juan Cotzal, 180 *caballerías* also went to private individuals, a substantial amount of the total land available.²⁸ Chajul received title to 2,424 *caballerías* in 1900, an additional 157 *caballerías* being allocated to private individuals. Nebaj was awarded 1,237 *caballerías* in 1903, with 87 *caballerías* privately titled. Most of the land deeded to private individuals was in lower-lying *tierra templada* at elevations suitable for raising coffee or sugar cane. Serious loss occurred in the far north of Ixil country, especially in Sotzil and Ilom, which retained little more than the land surrounding residential compounds. Chel, Ixtupil and Sacsiquán did not forfeit as much, but did lose their most prized units of land. The claimant whose name kept appearing on title deeds was Lisandro Gordillo Galán, a native of Mexico recorded in 1895 as having served as the town secretary of Chajul. Stoll observes: “Titling land may not seem the most obvious way to lose it, but such has been the experience of indigenous people, because what can be titled can be alienated.”²⁹ Irregularities in the way that

land was owned and operated continued in Ixil country well into the twentieth century.

Santa Eulalia

A Kanjobal community situated in the northern reaches of the Sierrade los Cuchumatanes, Santa Eulalia presently incorporates territory that stretches from *tierra caliente* around 800 metres in elevation to *tierra fría* well above the township centre at 2,600 metres. It is bordered to the north by San Mateo Ixtatán and Barillas, to the east by Chajul and Nebaj, to the south by Soloma and San Rafael La Independencia and to the west by San Rafael and San Sebastián Coatán (Figure 1). Santa Eulalia was visited in 1932 by Oliver La Farge, whose study of an array of Maya cultural expressions there remains one of the landmark contributions in Mesoamerican anthropology.³⁰ The community was studied in the 1960s by another anthropologist, Shelton Davis. His doctoral dissertation, after 25 years of limited circulation and recently published in a revised Spanish edition, is a model of historically informed ethnography, certainly the best inquiry to date of how national-level politics shaped local-level landholding in Guatemala in the late nineteenth century.³¹

Assessing the impact of the Barrios reforms was not the primary reason of La Farge or Davis in studying Santa Eulalia. Neither of them, however, could address their research questions without looking into land and labour relations. What La Farge considered the “happy isolation” of the Cuchumatanes “was shattered in the last half of the nineteenth century when the development of the coffee *fincas* on the Pacific slopes of the Sierra Madre produced a demand for labor which could be filled only by drawing upon the population reservoirs of the highlands.”³² Labour may have been plentiful, but in the case of Santa Eulalia land itself was also a major consideration. The community estate traditionally encompassed fertile land at elevations ideal for raising coffee, which did not escape entrepreneurial curiosity. La Farge recorded that a “survey” of Santa Eulalia “resulted in the passing of much valuable land into the hands of ladinos and a considerable reduction in the extent of the *ejidos*, or common lands.”³³ Not until Davis arrived on the scene was the magnitude of loss more fully discerned.

Davis begins by establishing that, although the Laws of the Indies in colonial times and republican legislation under Carrera in theory protected Maya rights to communal land, in practice “they never clearly defined the actual limits of these Indian estates.”³⁴ Reluctance

to do so was clearly a matter of hegemonic power, for "giving Indian municipios the legal right to ancient estates, especially those in the hot county areas distant from pueblo centers, meant that political control and ecclesiastical conversion would be impossible."³⁵ Tenure arrangements that were "chaotic and unstructured" led to bitter disputes about land rights, which set one Maya community against another and which allowed opportunistic intervention on the part of ladino interests.³⁶

The extent of ladino encroachment is shown in his table 1. Davis reckons that, over the 40-year period his data cover, "ladino proprietors gained control of nearly 70 per cent of the traditional lands belonging to Santa Eulalia, including Barillas and the Ixcán, those zones of greatest ecological and economic potential."³⁷ Of 55 lots titled in the *tierra caliente* of Barillas and the Ixcán, Indians received only nine; of the 1,520 *caballerías* involved in the titling process, Indians were awarded 183. Ladinos titled land, as the government wished, individually, not as a corporate body, the customary Maya way of laying claim. Titles issued to ladinos were frequently in excess of 30 *caballerías*, twice as much as the maximum legal limit. As ladinos carved up the *tierra caliente* in latifundia fashion, the Maya of Santa Eulalia concentrated on acquiring legal hold of the *tierra fría* around the town centre. A classic Latin American dichotomy emerged of large, ladino-owned estates in the lowlands and a patchwork of small, Indian-titled fields in the highlands.

Davis records that the first land to be lost was around the village of Santa Cruz Yalmux, where some 200 *caballerías* were claimed by a group of ladinos from Huehuetenango. The claimants made their case on 22 May 1888, when they appeared in person before General Manuel Lisandro Barillas, then president of Guatemala. Claim was laid on the following grounds: (1) that the *ejidos* of Santa Eulalia in *tierra fría* "were large and sufficient" for the Indians who lived there; (2) that the petitioners would deploy "for the development of capitalistic agriculture" the lands to which they sought title; (3) that because Huehuetenango had played a "military role" during "the rise to power of Justo Rufino Barrios," the government was obliged to recognize this; and (4) that issuing title to land would allow a new *municipio* to be created, which could function "as a military outpost for the protection of the frontier between Mexico and Guatemala" along the Usumacinta River.³⁸ Despite protests that the claimants "only wished to gain title to this land so as to later resell it to Indian residents," the Barillas government in July 1888 awarded 200 *caballerías* of Yalmux land to the ladi-

nos of Huehuetenango.³⁹ On 17 October that same year the *municipio* of Barillas came into being, the choice of place name directly linking government action with the erosion of the Maya estate.

Despite lobbying for land in order to stimulate “capitalistic exploitation,” ladinos who received title did not develop their property, with the result that “the Ixcán remained agriculturally unexploited” until the second half of the present century.⁴⁰ What did develop was some small-scale cattle ranching, with the new owners more commonly renting out land as absentee landlords to Indian occupants. Other Maya families, however, paid no formal rent, and simply continued to subsist as “illegal squatters” on land they still considered belonged to them.⁴¹

San Juan Ixcoy

San Juan Ixcoy is a Kanjobal township located in the heart of the Cuchumatán highlands mostly in *tierra fría* upwards of 1,500 metres in elevation. The town centre lies at around 2,200 metres in a narrow valley drained by the Río San Juan. It is bordered to the north by Soloma and Santa Eulalia, to the east by Nebaj, to the south by Chiantla and to the west by Concepción and Todos Santos Cuchumatán (Figure 1). San Juan Ixcoy has yet to receive the scholarly gaze afforded other Maya communities. It is a gloomy, forlorn place that keeps outsiders at bay, as if the memory of the carnage that occurred there in 1898 still lingers, giving San Juan a grisly reputation even by the standards of contemporary Guatemalan violence.

David McCreery has written about what happened in 1898 in San Juan with admirable attention to detail. Disputes over land, he observes, were nothing new to San Juan, which had been involved in such litigation during the colonial period with Nebaj and Soloma. Problems were exacerbated, however, with the advent of the Liberal reforms. McCreery notes, like Davis, that because of “often shaky bases for claims,” titling was not only “involved” and “expensive” but also “potentially dangerous,” a legal process “into which the villages, in the absence of any immediate threat, entered reluctantly.”⁴² San Juan was forced into legal proceedings by a claim laid in 1893 by ladino members of the army reserve at Chiantla. Represented by one Mariano García, the Chiantla *milicianos* were listened to favourably, couching their application in Liberal parlance which stressed “progress” and “private property.”⁴³ These were key words to mention, ones that fell on government ears more sympathetically than San Juan’s petition, lodged on the basis of “ancient titles” and exploitation of land “since

time immemorial.”⁴⁴ As with Santa Eulalia, the claimants from Chiantla counted on government recognition that it was militia like themselves who functioned “as the state’s chief instrument of coercion and control in the countryside.”⁴⁵ At stake in San Juan was land which lay south of the town centre towards Chiantla. This land was part of an allotment of 250 *caballerías* that San Juan claimed exclusively as theirs.

San Juan’s claim drew a storm of protest not just from Chiantla but also from Soloma and Nebaj. In order to advance their case, the leaders of San Juan sought the services of an engineer who they recruited to conduct a survey which was to be paid for by selling community labour. A contract was arranged through the agent Fredrich Koch for men from San Juan to work on a *finca* called Buenos Aires “in return for the finca paying the costs of the land survey.”⁴⁶ Koch was given as collateral the “ancient titles” to San Juan, as well as other relevant documentation. When it appeared that the results of the survey were not to San Juan’s advantage, the community refused to take part in any further deliberation. Tempers flared—ladino *milicianos* from Soloma, it was alleged, laid hands on San Juan’s leaders—and discontent grew.

Discontent burst into bloodshed on the evening of 18 July 1898. Failing to acknowledge that the titling process had not been resolved, agents from Finca Buenos Aires arrived in San Juan and began harassing for labour. To the people of San Juan, the agreement upon which their toil had been pledged had yet to be met; there was no question of them leaving for the coast. Still the agents pressed. Indians from outlying parts of San Juan arrived in town, adding their resentment to the anger of those already assembled. After the agents had retired to their sleeping quarters in the town hall, the building was set on fire. As they fled the flames the agents “were cut down and killed” by the crowd.⁴⁷ Thinking “to eliminate hostile witnesses and conceal their crime,” the crowd then “spread through the village, killing ladino men, women, and children” in addition to “abusing and threatening” those Indians who had co-operated with the agents.⁴⁸ When, by morning, it became clear that some agents or their associates had escaped, San Juan prepared for the inevitable retaliation.

It came swiftly from both north and south. Soloma and Chiantla sent in their militia, to whom McCreery attributes “an unknown number” of Indian deaths.⁴⁹ Some 60 individuals were sent to stand trial in Huehuetenango. While “there is no evidence that the government spe-

cifically stripped San Juan of its land as punishment," McCreery observes that "in the aftermath of the violence the inhabitants were in a weak position to defend their rights."⁵⁰ The *milicianos* of Chiantla eventually received 113 *caballerías* near Tocal. Others from Soloma did equally well. As with ladino successes in Barillas and the Ixcán, those residents of Chiantla and Soloma who were awarded title "did little to develop their new properties," preferring instead to convince "existing residents to stay," recruit "new ones where possible" and simply live off rents "while waiting for the land to appreciate in value."⁵¹

They did not have long to wait. Within a few years the successful claimants resold land to plantation owners on the Pacific slope, who required rent to be paid not in cash or in kind but in labour, thus creating a situation in which "workers estates" in the highlands supplied lowland plantations with a seasonal supply of workers. San Juan never ceased to dispute the legitimacy of the grip plantation owners exerted over community land: "We don't know how it came into the hands of the fincas," townspeople lamented in communication.⁵² Over the course of the next 30 years, McCreery writes, San Juan sustained "a steady and largely non-violent, but certainly not passive resistance to the finca properties in their midst."⁵³ Not until the late 1940s were the "workers estate" dismantled and the native estate delivered back into Maya hands.

Conclusion

Despite their physical and psychological seclusion, Maya communities in Guatemala between 1821 and 1920 were exposed to the same historical forces that prevailed in Latin America as a whole. The first half-century after independence, especially under the Conservative regime of Rafael Carrera, saw Maya life continue to unfold for the most part within the culture of refuge that crystallized during colonial times.⁵⁴ Whether neglected or protected by the policies of Carrera, Maya communities could not help but be affected by the radical change in how Guatemala was governed when, after 1871, Liberals held power. The presidency of Justo Rufino Barrios in particular signalled dramatic and unprecedented change as Guatemala was transformed from a colonial backwater into a modern capitalist nation, primarily on the basis of the commercial production of coffee. Coffee, to the state, represented progress, civilization and advancement; to Maya communities it meant loss of land and forced or indentured labour.

The four cases reviewed indicate that, at the local or community level, the outcome of the Liberal reforms was nuanced and variable. Santiago Chimaltenango appears to have been affected only minimally, Nebaj significantly more. Santa Eulalia and San Juan Ixcay both suffered considerably, the latter with the additional consequences of state retribution after a bloody uprising. Differences in the degree of impact and opposition characterize other parts of Guatemala as well.⁵⁵ Inequalities that emerged in the nineteenth century at the national level have yet to be redressed, especially in the countryside.⁵⁶ There, land is life. To deprive Maya communities of land is to deprive them of life.

Notes

1. Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., "The Historiography of Modern Central America since 1960," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 67, 3 (1987): 461-494.
2. Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., *Rafael Carrera and the Emergence of the Republic of Guatemala, 1821-1871* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1993).
3. Bradford Burns, *The Poverty of Progress: Latin America in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980). The same author's *Eadweard Muybridge in Guatemala, 1875: The Photographer as Social Recorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) affords a unique panorama of nineteenth-century life.
4. Shelton H. Davis, *La tierra de nuestros antepasados: Herencia y tenencia de la tierra en el altipano de Guatemala* (Guatemala: Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica, 1995); David McCreery, *Rural Guatemala, 1760-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); David Stoll, *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993); and John M. Watanabe, *Maya Saints and Souls in a Changing World* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992).
5. Christopher H. Lutz and W. George Lovell, "Core and Periphery in Colonial Guatemala," in Carol A. Smith, eds., *Guatemalan Indians and the State, 1540 to 1988* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 35-51; Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., "Changes in Nineteenth-Century Guatemalan State and Its Indian Policies," in *ibid.*, p. 52-71; Carol A. Smith "Origins of the National Question in Guatemala: A Hypothesis," in *ibid.*, p. 72-95; and David McCreery, "State Power, Indigenous Communities, and Land in Nineteenth-Century Guatemala, 1820-1920," in *ibid.*, p. 96-105.
6. Woodward, "Changes in Nineteenth-Century Guatemalan State," p. 68.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Oliver La Farge, "Maya Ethnology: The Sequence of Cultures," in Clarence L. Hay et al., eds., *The Maya and Their Neighbors* (New York: D. Appleton Century, 1940), p. 291.
9. McCreery, "State Power, Indigenous Communities," p. 101.
10. *Ibid.*
11. Burns, *The Poverty of Progress*, p. 106.
12. McCreery, "State Power, Indigenous Communities," p. 106.

13. David McCreery "Land, Labor, and Violence in Highland Guatemala: San Juan Ixcay (Huehuetenango), 1893-1945," *The Americas*, 45, 2 (1988): 240.
14. Robert A. Naylor, "Guatemala: Indian Attitudes toward Land Tenure," *Journal of Inter-American Studies*, 9, 4 (1967): 629, and Carol A. Smith, "Local History in Global Context: Social and Economic Transitions in Western Guatemala," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 26, 2 (1984): 204.
15. See Murdo J. MacLeod, *Spanish Central America: A Socioeconomic History, 1520-1720* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).
16. David McCreery, "Debt Servitude in Rural Guatemala, 1876-1936," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 63, 4 (1983): 758-759.
17. Charles Wagley, *Economics of a Guatemalan Village* (Menasha, WI: American Anthropological Association, 1941), and Charles Wagley, *The Social and Religious Life of a Guatemalan Village* (Menasha, WI: American Anthropological Association, 1949).
18. Watanabe, *Maya Saints and Souls*. See also the same author's "Enduring Yet Ineffable Community in the Western Periphery of Guatemala," in Smith, ed., *Guatemalan Indians and the State*, p. 183-204.
19. Watanabe, *Maya Saints and Souls*, p. 170-171.
20. Jackson Steward Lincoln, "An Ethnological Study on the Ixil Indians of the Guatemala Highlands," *Microfilm Collection of Manuscripts on Middle American Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1945).
21. Benjamin N. Colby and Pierre L. van den Berghe, *Ixil Country: A Plural Society in Highland Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).
22. Stoll, *Between Two Armies*, p. 20.
23. Robert Burkitt, "Explorations in the Highlands of Western Guatemala," *The Museum Journal of the University of Pennsylvania*, 21, 1 (1930): 58.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Lincoln, "An Ethnological Study," p. 75-76.
26. Burkitt, "Explorations in the Highlands," p. 58.
27. Stoll, *Between Two Armies*, p. 33.
28. A *caballería* of land measures about 45.4 hectares.
29. Stoll, *Between Two Armies*, p. 34.
30. Oliver La Farge, *Santa Eulalia: The Religion of a Cuchumatán Indian Town* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947). La Farge, a Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist and long-time president of the Association of American Indian Affairs, lived and worked in an era uninhibited by the postmodern angst that was later to afflict practitioners of "new" ethnography as well as "new" cultural geography. In the introduction to *Santa Eulalia*, La Farge wrote of his text: "There will be found in it a good deal of subjective, even opinionated writing. This is present partly because the author is an amateur scientist and an ardent professional in writing. This is present even more because the writer believes that ethnology is an inexact science, inseparable from subjective, qualitative observations. The opinions and bias of the observer, therefore, are essential data which should be frankly presented. The colorless objectivity affected by many ethnologists is a deception and a suppression of data." LaFarge's observations may yet serve as a source of comfort for, among many, James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer, *Anthropology*

- as *Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Trevor Barnes and James Duncan, eds., *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text, and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape* (London: Routledge, 1992); and James Duncan and David Ley, eds., *Place, Culture, Representation* (London: Routledge, 1993).
31. Davis, *La tierra de neustros antepasados*. The doctoral dissertation upon which this work is based is "Land of Our Ancestors: A Study of Land Tenure and Inheritance in the Highlands of Guatemala," Harvard University, 1970.
 32. La Farge, *Santa Eulalia*, p. xii.
 33. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
 34. Davis, "Land of Our Ancestors," p. 47.
 35. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
 36. *Ibid.*
 37. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
 38. *Ibid.*, p. 56-57.
 39. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
 40. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
 41. *Ibid.*
 42. McCreery, "Land, Labor, and Violence," p. 241.
 43. *Ibid.*
 44. *Ibid.*
 45. *Ibid.*
 46. *Ibid.*, p. 242.
 47. *Ibid.*
 48. *Ibid.*
 49. *Ibid.* Raymond Stadelman, "Maize Cultivation in Northwestern Guatemala," *Contributions to American Anthropology and History*, 6, 33 (1940): 96-97, records that "it has been estimated that perhaps ten Indian lives were exacted for each slain ladino." McCreery ("Debt Servitude in Rural Guatemala," p. 736) mentions the deaths of 30 ladinos, which might place Indian deaths as high as 300.
 50. McCreery, "Land, Labor, and Violence," p. 243.
 51. *Ibid.*
 52. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
 53. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
 54. W. George Lovell, "Surviving Conquest: The Maya of Guatemala in Historical Perspective," *Latin American Research Review*, 23, 2 (1988): 25-57, and W. George Lovell, *Conquest and Survival in Colonial Guatemala: A Historical Geography of the Cuchumatán Highlands, 1500-1821* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992).
 55. See Julio Castellanos Cambranes, *Café y campesinos en Guatemala, 1853-1897* (Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria, 1985), available in English translation as *Coffee and Peasants: The Origins of the Modern Plantation Economy in Guatemala, 1853-1897* (Stockholm: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1985). Guatemala's emergence as a "coffee republic" is compared and contrasted with other nations in the isthmus in Robert G. Williams, *States and Social Evolution: Coffee and the Rise of National Governments in Central America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

56. The only attempt at redress was during the mid-century presidencies of Juan José Arévalo and Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán; see Jim Handy, *Revolution in the Countryside: Rural Conflict and Agrarian Reform in Guatemala, 1944-1954* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), and Julio Castellanos Cambranes, ed., *500 años de lucha por latierra: Estudios sobre propiedad rural y reforma agraria en Guatemala*, 2 vols. (Guatemala: Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, 1992). The contemporary Guatemalan situation may be evaluated in regional context by consulting Victor Bulmer Thomas, *The Political Economy of Central America since 1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), and Robert G. Williams, *Export Agriculture and the Crisis in Central America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986).