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**“AQUÍ NO PASÓ NADA”
TERROR, REMEMBRANCE, AND
HEALING IN A GUATEMALAN
"GREEN ZONE"**

BY

WILLIAM G. WAGNER

B.A., Sociology, Colorado College, 1991
A.M., Clinical Social Work, University of Chicago, 1992
M.A., Anthropology, University of New Mexico, 1999

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy
Ph.D. in Anthropology**

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

August 2009

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To Ann, my mother
and the memory of George, my father

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on the experiences of survivors of political violence and their healers in Momostenango, Totonicapán. The majority population of Momostenango is K’iche’ Maya. During Guatemala’s civil war (1960-1996), the state used terror to silence popular resistance and to neutralize the threat of insurgent guerilla forces that drew wide support from Maya communities. From 1981 to 1983 state army and paramilitary forces resorted to scorched earth tactics that two different truth commissions subsequently characterized as genocidal. During the war, the military designated the town as a “green zone” (a region sympathetic to and supportive of the military’s counterinsurgency project).

Aquí no pasó nada (“nothing happened here”) focuses on how state-sanctioned identities are maintained and contested through providers’ and patients’ narrative frames during healthcare encounters. Qualitative and ethnographic analysis of competing accounts and perspectives about historical truths illuminate the interplay of class and ethnic identities as well as the ongoing effects of state-counterinsurgency in post-accords

Guatemala. By exploring how biomedical and traditional Maya healers understand and speak about political violence, this dissertation examines providers' ideologies of care and how survivors think about and actualize their present political agency.

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1

Introduction

Tz'olq'omin b'e

K'o kuriqá
kintz'olq'omij ri nub'e
xa jewa' kinna'tisaj jun jasach.

Weta xata nutukel kinb'in
chonuwach
kin kwin nek'uri kinb'ij chawe
jas ri', ri ucholaj ri sachib'al.

Humberto Ak'ab'al
Momosteco Poet
(Ak'ab'al, 1996)

Camino al revés

De vez en cuando
camino al revés:
Es mi modo de recordar.

Si caminara sólo hacia delante,
te podría contar
como es el olvido.

I walk backwards

Now and then
I walk backwards:
It is my way of remembering.

If I only walked forward,
I could tell you
about forgetting.

Problem: Aquí no Pasó Nada

The production and maintenance of historical memory is a central concern of state nation-building projects. During Guatemala's civil war (1960-1996), the state used terror to silence popular resistance as a means of preserving a social structure of inequality that is the cornerstone of racist subjugation of Maya people. Political violence imposed a set of state-sanctioned identities, and behaviors on Guatemalan society. Healing the physical, psychological and social wounds caused by the civil war requires the creation of contexts where survivors feel safe to speak about their individual suffering, and also where it is safe to question and critique the structures of inequality, exclusion, and racism in Guatemalan society from whence state sponsored political violence originated. In post-accords Guatemala, the latter has been more difficult to achieve than the former.

Talking about the past matters. It helps survivors to create meaning for painful events that defy explanations. Conversely, it can also allow perpetrators to justify their

actions and protect them from official and informal applications of justice. Which historic narratives of the past gain ascendancy in society is a central concern of the state because they help to shape the identity of its subjects in the present. This dissertation begins with the understanding that there is a multiplicity of different and often competing perspectives about what the truth about the past is. Local historical accounts often contrast with “facts” surrounding events that took place. Control over which narratives dominate public understanding of the past is an ongoing and contentious issue. Although there are many subjective understandings about the war, only certain accounts become dominant narratives that attach meaning to past events. The stakes involved in defining what constitutes historical fact are enormous. Facts gird the delicate armature of memories. If memories of the past have any influence on the way we think about the future (and I agree with many others that they do), it becomes important to understand facts from the multiple positionings of different historical actors. In this research, I cast my lot with survivors of political violence from Momostenango by listening to them relate their memories, which are often at odds with dominant narratives about what happened in their municipality.

Guatemala’s civil war was not a conventional war (if such a thing even exists). The tactics used by the counterinsurgent military and paramilitary forces were geared at dismantling organized dissent. They succeeded in doing so by dividing communities and most importantly, by implementing genocide and terror throughout the countryside to separate the majority of Guatemala’s poor Maya from the leftist insurgency. The state’s tactics succeeded in turning organized collectivities into individuals that could no longer speak openly in public about collective problems, because it was not safe to trust anyone.

Healing the individual and collective wounds produced by state terror requires enabling the possibility to break the silence about the past by creating a safe environment for survivors' narratives to be spoken and heard. A healers' understandings of their patients' problems shapes their diagnoses and interventions. Healthcare settings are therefore, critical sites of historical construction where dissenting narratives of the past can emerge.

Momostenango, a municipality in the predominantly indigenous Maya-K'iche' western highlands of Guatemala, is a place that, by most accounts, escaped the type of regional political violence that two post war truth commissions- the Archdiocese of Guatemala's Official Report of the Human Rights Office, Recovery of Historical Memory Project ((REMHI) 1998) and the United Nation's Commission for Historical Clarification ((CEH) 1999)-characterized as "genocide" (Carmack 1995; Tedlock 1992). Human rights abuses that occurred in Momostenango are almost completely undocumented in the REMHI or the CEH. However, ethnographic interviews, participant observation, and archival research that I carried out between 2001 and 2003 demonstrate that depictions of Momostenango as a "green zone" where, in contrast to other highland communities, little violence happened, understate the experience of state terror that members of the community experienced. There were numerous incidents of kidnapping, torture, rape, extra-judicial killings, and outright murder.

Both the REMHI and CEH projects acknowledged that post-war efforts to increase democracy and limit social conflict in Guatemala required an historical and

qualitative recounting of the war that statistics alone could not provide.¹ By providing historical antecedents and the testimonies of thousands of survivors, the reports documented how institutionalized violence (socioeconomic and political structures, particularly Guatemala's systemic racism, military authoritarianism and skewed distribution and access to land) led to opposition movements advocating changes, which the state met with political violence. Levels of state retaliation for resistance to institutionalized and physical violence varied from community to community. The physical violence of both the state and the guerilla opposition was, the reports concluded, a direct expression of intolerable living conditions in which the vast majority of Guatemalans, primarily indigenous peoples, were deprived of their basic needs including: access to food, healthcare, education, housing, a fair wage, the right to organize, respect for their political opinions, etc. (CEH 5:22; REMHI xxviii). Dismantling the institutions that led to wartime political violence, the reports argued, was a prerequisite to true and lasting peace.

Anthropologists explore how both physical and institutional forms of violence become embedded within both social relations and the body itself (Farmer 1992; Feldman 1991; Green 1999; Guarnaccia, et al. 1996; Kleinman 1995; Nordstrom 1997; Scheper-Hughes 1992). Both types of violence are multifaceted and demand an historically and socially contextualized analysis in order to link forces such as the global economy and colonialism to localized distress and suffering (Das, et al. 2000; Farmer 1997; Green 1999; Scheper-Hughes 1990). Paul Farmer defines structural violence, what I am here

¹ Both projects dedicated entire sections to the historic social, economic and political contexts that gave rise to the civil war.

calling “institutional” violence as, “violence exerted systematically—that is, indirectly—by everyone who belongs to a certain social order” (Farmer 2004: 307). In this dissertation I use the terms, political violence, wartime violence and physical violence interchangeably to identify the ways in which people witnessed or experienced events like assassinations, torture, disappearance and other brutalities that the state used to achieve political ends. Physical violence is usually construed as bodily harm, but in addition to physical harm it often has psychological and social consequences for the individual. I distinguish between such types of violence and longer term processes of political, economic and social exclusion and marginalization which I describe as institutional violence. Institutional violence (as well as structural violence) is much more subtle, long term, and may not leave visible marks on the body. But it nevertheless causes harm and damage to the individual, psychologically, socially and often physically. Sources of institutional violence lay in poverty, economic marginalization, lack of access to land and needed goods and services, political exclusion, and racial discrimination. In Chapter 2, I will outline the aspects of Momostenango’s economy, political structure, and religion that are most pertinent to an analysis of institutional violence and its impact on long term health of indigenous residents both in rural and urban areas. Institutional violence in Guatemala is embodied in racist hierarchal social formations which have endured since colonial times. By distinguishing between these two types of violence, both of which have had grave consequences especially for Maya people, I hope to articulate and historicize the links between local lived suffering and broader fields of power that may not be immediately evident to either patients or healers when survivors seek relief to their suffering.

In addition to these topics, the silencing of the historical memory of physical violence plays an important role in solidifying institutionalized violence. This silencing is crucial to any medical anthropological analysis of Momostenango. Wartime political violence carried out by the state or other organizations as a means of attaining political goals, intensifies and increases the marginalization of the poor, mostly Maya, in post-accords Guatemala when the wartime experiences of survivors are omitted from “official histories” such as REMHI and CEH and denied in their own communities. Silence about wartime political violence distorts and obscures historical memory and also shrouds in a cloak of invisibility the socioeconomic and political interests that it serves. I argue that like political violence, institutional violence and silence surrounding the past cause harm. The social, political and economic exclusion that Maya people have experienced in Guatemalan society harms them as seen by higher rates in morbidity and mortality.

Anthropologist Arachu Castro advocates a critical medical anthropology that examines the link between large-scale institutional and political violence by questioning “normalized discourses of blame that implicate the poor as responsible for their own dilemmas” and the “presumed pathologies of the subaltern” while incorporating a discussion of the interests of people who hold power into the analysis of social suffering (Castro and Singer 2004; Massé 2007). Johan Galtung has argued that the study of structural (institutional) violence allows us to analyze “peace” as a construct defined by democratic processes in civil society *as well as* by sovereign states (Galtung 1994).

The attention truth commissions gave to clarifying the historical record emphasizes the role memory plays in preventing the recurrence of tragedies like that which occurred in Guatemala. The REMHI report states,

Without public acknowledgment and social censure of the guilty, the perpetrators may ultimately be strengthened in their positions ... denial of the past, or a standardized memory, helps those responsible for crimes keep their self-image intact (REHMI: 176).

Medical anthropologist Eduardo Menéndez states: “It seems that for life to reproduce itself, forgetting is demanded as a technique of not only biosocial, but also psychological, and cultural survival” (Menendez 2002). Remembering, he argues, is an act that requires personal commitment and understanding of historical structures of domination.

Communities like Momostenango, where political violence that occurred during the war was left out of the “official record” and is not discussed openly today, pose a difficult challenge to healthcare workers who are charged with the task of relieving pain and suffering. How do survivors voice their narratives of wartime violence when that violence is denied? How are institutions implicated in such silences and how do such silences articulate with ongoing suffering? What are the implications of silence?

This research explores how private and public biomedical and traditional K’iche’ healthcare systems are involved in the formation of political subjects by examining the ways that survivors and their healthcare providers discuss or avoid discussion of the political violence survivors experienced. Many studies of Guatemala have examined peoples’ experience of political violence, terror and subjugation and how they are tied to subject formation (i.e., war widows, internal refugees, Maya- n-exile) (Burns 1993; Green 1999; Manz 1988; Taylor 1998; Zur 1998). Although such subject positions

emerge out of abhorrent and violent contexts, theorists have convincingly argued that power is embedded in them (Butler 1997; Das, et al. 2000; Feldman 1991; Scarry 1985). When experiences of survivors of political violence are decontextualized from the clandestine prisons and rural backwaters where they took place and are exposed to local and global scrutiny, survivors' claims to their past acquire legitimacy and power that can change the future.

But what happens when such subject positions are never assigned? What of the lives of the thousands who have their experience systematically denied or silenced and therefore have no alternative but to internalize it, often to their physical and emotional detriment? By exploring the ways in which Momostecos experienced and defined wartime violence and sought help for related healthcare needs and the ways in which local providers responded, I examine what Das refers to as "the tremendous tension between competing truths" (Das 2001) as they are expressed through providers' "ideologies of aid and practices of power" (Nelson 2005) and survivors' own accounts. I argue that the narratives of survivors and their healthcare providers can either reinforce or challenge existing formations of power.

Ongoing injustices and inequalities reinforce "silences" about violent wartime experiences throughout Guatemala (Green 1999; Manz 2002; Sanford 2004; Wilkinson 2002). Survivors I interviewed, even 20 years after enduring the terror and pain of political violence, had difficulty voicing experiences that countered the officially and locally sanctioned narratives of historical events. Societal pressures to ignore or forget the past prevent survivors from returning to everyday life.

Studies of survivors coping with traumatic violence demonstrate that biomedical interventions can decontextualize, pathologize, and individualize the phenomenon of suffering (Bracken, et al. 1998; Das, et al. 2000; Herman 1992; Kleinman, et al. 1997). Further, how different healthcare systems and practitioners address or decline to address marginalization and power relations underscore the theoretical and ideological underpinnings of their interventions and are a key component in the construction of social meaning. Thus, dominant class and ethnic dichotomies between providers and clients, with all their hegemonic assumptions, can exacerbate injuries rather than heal them.

In this dissertation I focus on a health care program begun at a local clinic to aid Momostecos who were survivors of physical or political violence during the war. I examine the beginnings of the program, the difficulties that the indigenous staff (Don Abraham) faced in encouraging local Maya to participate, and the ideologies and practices of Ladino staff, who despite good intentions, intervened in ways that reinforced the victimization of their patients. The beliefs and practices of providers in the clinic, as well as the financial difficulties the clinic faced, led to the program's failure and ultimate closure (within two years of its commencement).

In order to understand the program's failure, I argue that we need to place the clinic and staff/patient relationships in their historical and social context. I suggest that social, economic, and political inequalities, centered on both "race" and class, were implicated in the political violence that occurred in Momostenango during the civil war. Although the war ended in 1996, many of the social arrangements directly linked to institutionalized and political violence remain in place in the twenty-first century. I explore the ways in which survivors' memories of wartime violence and healthcare

providers' conceptualizations of interventions aimed at healing the wounds of political violence are linked to their different positions within the highly unequal distribution of political and economic power which characterizes Guatemalan society.

This study documents political violence that occurred in Momostenango and examines the persisting legacy of state terror. “Aquí no Pasó Nada” (“Nothing Happened Here”), oft-repeated, especially by dominant-class Momostecos when describing wartime violence in the municipality, takes the negation of historic events that took place in Momostenango as a central focus of inquiry and examines the conditions under which silences are created and maintained. How historic events are remembered, or more importantly, how they are not talked about today, is the main focus of exploration in this study. The maintenance of silence through terror is presented as a form of ongoing violence and an example of how institutional violence permeates everyday life.

This research, based on ethnographic interviews, participant observation and review of archival records shows that available mental health interventions in Momostenango (e.g., state-sponsored, private biomedical programs, and traditional healers) aimed at improving the health outcomes of survivors of political violence must take into consideration local representations and understandings of historic events, structures of social, economic and political marginalization, and the range of health seeking strategies patients use to achieve improvements in their health. Understanding the history of political violence as experienced by their patients is an important requisite for healers that hope to ameliorate the wounds of Guatemala's particularly brutal configuration of civil war.

I argue that the shared historical and cultural understandings that traditional Maya healers (e.g., *Aj Q'ijab*) have with their patients' allows for social and interpersonal interventions that are often overlooked or even disparaged by individualized biomedical interventions. Traditional healers provide preventative and curative care, which protects patients from their perceived vulnerabilities to present dangers in ways that biomedical healers cannot. My data demonstrate that continued silence about violence in Momostenango increases already considerable gaps between biomedical and traditional healing interventions. Plural health care utilization patterns by Momostecos require healthcare interventions that address the cultural, social and biological needs of patients. The ethnographic insights in this study bridge gaps between traditional Maya and biomedical models of healing and provide better directions for resource allocation for efforts to improve conditions for survivors of political violence.

Situating Momostenango

Momostenango is a municipality located in Guatemala's most densely populated department, Totonicapán.² The largest nearby city is Quetzaltenango, which lies about an hour by car to the south over the continental divide. From the summit of the continental divide, *la cumbre*, which separates Momostenango from neighboring municipality of San Francisco El Alto, a great basin opens to the north. The main road into Momostenango descends towards the town center along the sides of ravines that form the headwaters and tributaries of the Chixoy, or Rio Negro. These rivers flow into the great Usumacinta

² See (FUNCEDE 1997) and (Instituto Nacional de Estadística et al 1997).

River, which winds its way north from the highlands down through the jungles, forming the boundary between Guatemala and Mexico on its way to the Gulf of Mexico. The high elevation of Momostenango, which ranges from about 6,000 to 9,000 feet above sea level, means its climate is cool year round, even though it is in the tropics. During the dry months of November through May, evening temperatures can dip below freezing. During the rainy season, daily downpours erode the increasingly deforested mountainsides and turn dirt roads into impassable rivers of mud.

As in most municipalities in the western highlands of Guatemala, the majority of Momostecos are indigenous Maya. Anthropologist Dennis Tedlock went so far as to describe Momostenango as “one of the most Indian of all Guatemalan towns” (Tedlock 1985b), citing census figures that reported 98% of the population as indigenous. Most Momostecos speak K’iche’ Mayan as their first language and Spanish as their second. 1970s data estimated the municipal population at around 40,000 inhabitants, a number that likely has tripled since. The majority of Momostecos live in rural hamlets (*aldeas*) and work as subsistence farmers or labor in some way with their hands. They are poor and mostly powerless and suffered disproportionately from the violence of the civil war.

Rural Maya live in small adobe houses scattered among the hillsides. The houses are clustered into *parajes*, tiny settlements usually formed along patrilinear lines. Respected elders called *principales* who have committed several years of unpaid volunteer service to their communities administer local authority in the hamlets. *Principales* from the approximately thirteen *aldeas*, which are administrative units, serve as *auxiliares* to the municipal government and are subordinate to it. *Auxiliares*, who are

unpaid, are responsible for the majority of local administration of community affairs including the application of traditional judicial authority.

Approximately 7,500 people live in the *casco urbano*, the municipality's town center (also called Momostenango) (FUNCEDE 1997). The town is divided into four central *barrios*. Most residents of the town are involved in some form of commerce and only farm small fields of corn on their properties to supplement their diets, if they farm at all. The municipal government has long been run by the minority *Ladinos* and "acculturated Indians" (who I refer to as Maya elite) who make up the local dominant class (Carmack 1995:261-268). Almost all non-indigenous Momostecos reside in town. They are teachers, doctors, nurses, white-collar workers, government officials and clerks. One family, of mixed German-K'iche' descent, the Langs, were the most wealthy and powerful family and dominated much of local politics for decades. Since the 1950s, a growing number of successful Maya-K'iche' merchants, bakers, and weavers have joined *ladinos* as part of the local economic elite and have come to dominate local politics.

The town fills up on the two market days, Sunday and Wednesday, with people from outlying *aldeas* and neighboring communities. On market days, the central plaza, the two markets, the church plaza and the central streets are lined with vendors. Vendors sell locally grown produce such as corn, beans, tomatoes and other vegetables, as well as products grown in the coastal regions such as bananas and citrus fruits. Merchants come from Quetzaltenango and Guatemala City and as far away as El Salvador. Momostenango is known for the wool blankets and clothing produced by local weavers. However, since the 1990s it is more common to see merchants selling *paca*, piles of secondhand clothing

that are purchased by the ton in the U.S., than the *chamarras* and *chumpas* (wool blankets and jackets) for which Momostenango is famous.

Guatemala's system of land distribution, one of most inequitable in the world (Wittman and Saldivar-Tanaka 2006), has produced extreme shortages of arable land for subsistence farming and the over-exploitation of terrain that, in most places, would be considered unsuitable for agricultural use. There are no large-scale landholders in Momostenango and most landholdings are too small to produce enough food to sustain a family. Momostecos farm corn and vegetables on the steep hillsides that surround the town. Since 1970, accelerated population growth in the municipality has translated to added stress on the communal forests and increased erosion of hillsides. Although the *auxiliatura* (local indigenous government) monitors the logging of the communal forests with forest guards (*guardabosques*), increased demand for lumber and firewood has resulted in significant deforestation. Many lands that were previously under the jurisdiction of the *auxiliatura* have changed hands either through expropriations by the municipal government or personal transactions, exposing them to increased potential for exploitation and deforesting. As a result of history, social relations and geography, inequality in Momostenango is a main feature of the social, cultural and economic terrain.

Culture, Identity and Racism in Guatemala

In order to begin to understand the barriers that Momosteco survivors are faced with when seeking medical treatment to alleviate the aftermath of violence, it is necessary to explore how their suffering is normalized and has been historically embedded in

Guatemalan social structures. Marked racial divisions that have historically characterized political and economic stratification in society pose complex challenges to healthcare programs. A brief examination of how identity politics have played out in the country provides an historical base to understand the challenges of addressing violence in Momostenango.

Prior to the arrival of the Spanish conquistador Pedro de Alvarado in 1524, which marked the beginning of the colonial period, peoples of different kingdoms that comprise the modern-day Maya inhabited the lands of present-day Guatemala and Mexico's Yucatan peninsula. Those groups (K'iché, Mam, Kakchiquel, etc.) were often at war with each other and competed for resources and territory. Spanish conquistadors used longstanding animosities between groups to their own advantage. Between losses inflicted directly by the conquistadors and the epidemics that immediately followed, the indigenous population dropped between 60% and 90% by 1570, marking what many call Guatemala's first genocide (Carmack 1995 p.17; Veblen 1975 p.317-335.). Spanish colonial administration in the ensuing centuries was characterized by paternalism towards indigenous subjects. Mayas were treated as wards of the crown and referred to metaphorically as children, or in the case of the church as sheep (Carmack 1995).

The Spanish employed a complicated taxonomy of categories for its subjects in the New World that adjudicated forms of status and privilege. For example, the child of a Spaniard and a "Negro" was a *mulatto*; the child of a Spaniard and an "Indian" was a *mestizo*; the child of a "Negro" and an "Indian," a *zambo*; and the children of such unions had further distinctions. These distinctions were assigned within an extremely unequal

field of power and carried with them variable legal rights.³ As time passed, the distinctions between many of these categories blurred and new ones arose. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the categories of Spaniard, Negro, and Indian remained, while most of the others had been subsumed under the general grouping of “castas,” or “pardos” (Pollack 2005). The latter coincided with positions within the system of production, which was at the time based on labor-intensive agricultural production, primarily dyes such indigo and cochineal.

The term “ladino” as a racial marker emerged from the earlier *castas* (people who were phenotypically indistinguishable from Indians but self-identified with Spanish rather than Indian descent and culture) (Lutz 1994). Both Ladinos and Indians had access to courts and were protected by the administration of the Spanish crown. Competing interests between Spaniards, Creoles (Guatemalan-born Europeans) and Ladinos and fear of insurrection forced colonial administrators to make concessions to indigenous people, which allowed Indian leaders a significant level of local autonomy and power.

After Guatemalan independence from Spain in 1821, highland Indian communities experienced greater exploitation and penetration by Ladinos. The plantation economy was booming and the non-indigenous ruling classes enacted policies that allowed them to exploit cheap labor from the indigenous masses. Indians left to their own devices, the ruling classes argued, would languish. Vagrancy laws, obligatory military

³ Hence these taxonomies imposed by the colonial government unlikely corresponded to the ways in which the subjects of such categorizations identified themselves. Certainly the subjects were aware of the legal and social privileges associated with such categorizations.

service and debt peonage obliged indigenous men to work a certain number of weeks per year on less than subsistence wages or for free, thus subsidizing the plantation economy.

In many communities, federal administrators set up parallel governments, one for Ladinos and one for Indians. These arrangements privileged Ladinos who had authority over Indians to carry out social and political reforms on a local level. Appropriation of indigenous communal lands (*ejidos*), imposition of higher taxes, and mandatory labor laws eroded Indian autonomy and intensified racial relationships.

The exploitation of the Indian majority by the ladino minority increased disparities in political, social and economic relationships and hardened racialized categories. Carol Smith argued the fundamental component of the structural exploitation of Guatemalan indigenous peoples that typified the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was a “system of racial ranking” necessitated by plantation economy demands for a cheap labor force (Smith 1990).

Smith attributes the consolidation of different ethnic groups (Creoles, ladinos, castas, mestizos, and even Maya elite) into peoples that constitute modern day ladinos to the rise of the liberal government in the 1870s and the increasingly important coffee economy (Smith 1990). Others (Pollack 2005; Reeves 1999; Taracena Arriola 1997) argue that the racial and social categorizations evolved into Guatemala’s current binary of Maya-Ladino existed at least as early as the 1820s.

In any event, institutionalized racism, based on the Maya-Ladino binary, remains to this day the major social division in Guatemalan society. Although overtly racist discourse and attitudes have become less socially acceptable since the end of the civil war in 1996 and Maya cultural activism has increased (Hale 2006), Maya still face

disproportionate rates of political and economic exclusion from Guatemalan society (Guatemala 2000). Social justice issues that were central to the 1996 peace accords that ended the civil war, such as the redistribution of land, and amelioration of vast economic disparities have not been implemented and continue to be the cause of serious conflict. After the peace accords, an influx of economic and technical organizations from abroad concentrated on “cultural conflict” rather than economic and political disparities. During the same period of increased, yet restricted, state recognition of indigenous cultural rights, neoliberal restructuring of Guatemalan economic policy did not improve the class disparities that have long been integrally linked to structural racism (that is the racism embedded in the political economy and social structure that marginalizes indigenous populations rather than discriminatory attitudes alone). Given the history of the conflation of race and class and its role in the plantation economy during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the government’s post-1996 ambivalence about resolving fundamental issues of inequality are, at best, troubling.

Identity Politics and Activism in Guatemala

A growth of Maya cultural activism, which emerged in the early 1990s as the war wound down and accelerated after the peace accords, has produced new research studying the multiple meanings of being Maya in Guatemala. Maya identity movements in Guatemala have been called, among other things, Maya nationalism (Smith 1991), the pan-Maya movement (Fischer and Brown 1996), Mayanismo (Cojtí Cuxil 1997), the Maya resurgence (Wilson 1995) and simply the Maya Movement (El Movimiento

Maya).⁴ The many terms used to describe Maya mobilization emphasize different elements of the multiple class, ethnic, gender and regional positionings embodied in the members of such movements. Part of this study therefore will be an examination of how a group of powerful Maya elites in Momostenango suppressed ethnic solidarities in favor of class interests and these class differences provided the basis for Maya-on-Maya violence.

Until the 1990s, indigenous Guatemalans seldom used the term “Maya.” “Maya” was primarily restricted to archeologists and linguists referring to proto languages or ancient peoples, or to tourist agents. Contemporary conventions refer to “Maya” as the people and “Mayan” as the language(s). Most indigenous people I interviewed self-identified either as *naturales*,⁵ by their linguistic group (e.g., K’iche’), or by the place where they are from (e.g., Momostecos). In Momostenango the K’iche’ term people use is Qawinaq or “our people.” Locally people often self-identify based on their *aldea* or *barrio*.⁶

⁴ See (Warren 1998) for a broader discussion of Maya identity politics.

⁵ A term used as a racial caste during the colonial period and synonymous with *indio*.

⁶ What people call themselves is not the focus of this study. The long history of national and international migration of indigenous peoples has produced multiple and diverse identities. I met one Momosteco who lived part of the year in Houston and described himself as a Momostejano. The point I make here is that the term “Maya” has multiple meanings and is not universally employed by people who have a claim to the title. Increasingly, the term “Maya” is being reclaimed by some sectors of indigenous society with specific social and political interests.

Since around 1992 the usage of “Maya” has become more commonplace in Guatemala.⁷ The end of the Cold War created new political openings for indigenous peoples to engage the state with claims for self-determination and cultural autonomy (Grandin 2004; Warren 1998). In Guatemala, indigenous cultural activists used the symbolic significance of the 1992 Quincentennial of Columbus’s arrival in the Americas to challenge institutional racism and to force a reexamination of the ways in which identity is ascribed on the citizenry of a colonized society. “Maya” has taken on new popular meanings as an amalgam of distinct indigenous peoples with disparate linguistic and cultural practices that have, perhaps most immediately, a shared history of exclusion from and exploitation by the state.

Language is a focal point of identity politics and nation building in Guatemala. There has never been any official state recognition of the roughly two-dozen Mayan languages. Most Maya children have never been taught in their native languages, which are officially and incorrectly referred to as “dialects,” yet most speak a Mayan language as their first, and in many cases, only language. The obvious disadvantages of not mastering or even speaking Spanish, the lingua franca of Guatemala’s heteroglossia, are compounded by admonitions from dominant members of society that it is a sign of Indian backwardness. This line of reasoning, frequent in Guatemala, is usually extended to the argument that Maya “backwardness” is an impediment for the advancement and modernization of society.

⁷ Fischer and Brown (1996) argue that the Maya cultural activism or the so-called pan-Mayan movement, which was started after the II Congreso Lingüístico Nacional in 1984.

Since the nineteenth century in Guatemala, there has been little distinction between race and ethnicity. Racial status was principally defined along cultural/ethnic markers. Some Maya activists who marshal essentialist identity arguments to make claims on the state, in turn, have used this conflation of race and ethnicity. Others have countered with post-modern deconstructions of indigenous identity as well as ladino identity (Hale 2006; Warren 1998). Today, depending on which parameters one uses, the Maya population in Guatemala is between 50% and 80%.

Indigenous peoples continue to be heavily exploited by the self-defined, non-indigenous ladino minority. The number of indigenous people living in poverty outnumbers non-indigenous people by a ratio of nearly 2:1. Fifty-seven percent of the indigenous population is literate compared to 79% of the non-indigenous; 4% of the indigenous population has a telephone compared with 23% of the non-indigenous; and 37% of the indigenous population live to age 75 or older compared with 63% of the non-indigenous. Despite such social and economic indicators of contemporary inequality, dominant myths of Guatemalan national origin appropriate the indigenous past as the patrimony of the modern nation. They justify the present status of the country's indigenous by simultaneously claiming that the Spaniards exterminated the true, heroic and glorious Maya during the conquest.⁸ Intellectuals from both the left and the right have argued that modern day Maya are merely a byproduct of the Spanish colonial order.

⁸ Anthropologist Irma Oztzy explains how the image of K'iche' warrior Tecún Umán came to represent this legacy within Guatemalan national imagination and has recently been reclaimed as a symbol of Maya resistance. See (Oztzy 1999)

Their “authentic” culture and traditions were supposedly lost centuries ago (Warren 1998).

State discourses that glorified the pre-conquest Maya but disparaged present-day Maya produced an image of a binary nation with two classes of citizens in which Ladinos and other non-Maya had the self-appointed role as creators and bearers of modernity. This image persisted through most of the twentieth century and produced what many Guatemalans described as the country’s “Indian Problem.”⁹ At first, from the 1920’s to the 1950s ruling class intellectuals wrote about an “Indian Problem” in which Maya were depicted as docile, stupid, in need of guidance and an impediment to progress and modernity.¹⁰ By the 1970s, as civil war raged throughout the country, military state discourse about “Indians” shifted to portrayals of Maya as potential threats to the state itself. The military authors of the state’s counter-insurgent strategy considered Maya potential subversives.¹¹ By the 1980’s, ruling class fears of Maya rebellion combined with the advancement of leftist guerilla groups—which did include but were not exclusively or even predominantly Maya—contributed to state policy of genocide of indigenous people.

⁹ See (Konefal 2005) Chapter 2 for a broader discussion of the “Indian Problem.”

¹⁰ In 1923 Miguel Angel Asturias, who later went on to win the Nobel prize for literature in 1967, discussed Guatemala’s “Indian Problem” in this light. See (Asturias 1977). It is notable that in 2003, Momosteco Poet Humberto Ak’ab’al, whose poetry appears in this dissertation, refused to accept the Premio Nacional de Literatura named after Asturias stating “It does not honor me to receive this prize” in response to Asturias’ thesis.

¹¹ For a concise account of the military’s position during the early 1980’s see Jenifer Schirmer’s interviews with Gen. Hector Gramajo in (Schirmer 1998).

Class divisions in Guatemalan society were tied so closely to ethnic divisions that the ladino Marxist scholar Severo Martínez Paláez (Martínez Peláez 1971) argued that Maya as an ethnicity ceased to exist soon after first contact with Spanish colonization. In this argument, the process of racial mixing that accompanied colonization was complete, and racial/ethnic categories were but a gloss for class divisions created and maintained by capitalist society. The so-called Indian problem divided workers. Only by shedding ethnic identifiers like “Maya” and “Ladino,” said Paláez, could the nation progress to a more egalitarian society in which everyone was simply a Guatemalteco. Although this argument failed to resonate with most indigenous leaders, it was supported among guerilla groups such as the Guatemalan Worker’s Party (PGT), the Guerilla Army of the Poor (EGP), and the “popular” movement of the late 1970s and 1980s, which consisted of primarily ladino university students and a coalition of popular non-governmental organizations, including the labor movement.

Sociologists Carlos Guzmán Böckler and Jean-Loup Herbert (Guzman Bockler and Herbert 1995) presented an alternate view of the nature of social relations in Guatemala. They suggested that the core problem in Guatemalan society went beyond class divisions and had its roots in the colonial legacy of race-based discrimination against indigenous people. They rejected the assimilationist position (e.g., that indigenous people had already, or could and should assimilate into “mainstream” society), arguing that the underlying racial divide, which treated indigenous people as inferior to Ladinos, needed to be addressed before Guatemala could improve as a society.

Both government and guerilla leadership disparaged Ladino fears that ethnic nationalism could lead to demands for a separate Mayan state. While some branches of

the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), particularly ORPA,¹² embraced an indigenist theoretical analysis along the lines of Guzmán Böckler, efforts by indigenous groups to emphasize ethnic *as well as* class transformation in Guatemalan society were treated as suspect by revolutionary leadership. The “scorched earth” devastation of the countryside the state engaged in during the early 1980’s no doubt represented its attempt to undermine and eliminate the threat that a potential union of ethnic and class movements presented to its hegemony.

Privileged and unmarked, Ladinos, until recently, have been treated by anthropologists as a homogenous block in polar opposition to that which is Maya.¹³ Ladino identity has been the subject of important new scholarship. Maya scholars have increasingly called for anthropologists to examine the notion of ladino identity to unpack its varied meanings; some have responded (Arenas Bianchi, et al. 1999; Hale 2006).

Today, Ladinos dominate state offices and hold the majority of political and economic power and the Maya/ladino binary dominates discussions of ethnicity and race. This does not mean, however, that the state represents the interests of all “Ladinos.” Ladinos are neither a unitary block, nor the only non-Maya ethnic group in Guatemala. Elite sectors of the aristocracy, who identify as “Whites” of European, North American, and even Australian descent, abhor being mistaken for Ladinos. European immigrants

¹² ORPA (Revolutionary Organization of People in Arms) was guided under the leadership of Rodrigo Asturias who used the *nom de guerre* Gaspar Ilom, the indigenous protagonist in the novel *Hombres de Maiz*, written by his father Miguel Angel Asturias who won the Nobel Prize for Literature. ORPA documents that came to be known as *Racismo I and Racismo II* outlined an analysis of Guatemalan society that included racism as a central aspect of inequality in Guatemala that insurgent revolution should work to change.

¹³ Ladinos are frequently identified as “no indigena.”

from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often formed their own enclaves and identify still with their old-world rather than Guatemalan heritage. Recent waves of Korean and Southeast Asian companies have established businesses in the Guatemalan maquila manufacturing industry growing communities of Southeast Asians live in Guatemala. Descendants of African slaves and Chinese workers that built much of the colonial and modern day infrastructure have lived in Guatemala for generations. Other ethnic groups, such as Garifunas and Xincas, also share long histories of coexistence in the region that predate the Guatemalan state.

Historical Analysis of Violence and Healing

The K'iche' term that Momosteco Maya use to talk about their history is *ojer tzij*. Roughly translated, the expression means "ancient word" or "ancient truth." The expression has another referent as well, which is "to light something with fire." When K'iche' people tell their history, they illuminate or shine light into the dark corners of Guatemala's past. The lenses through which most historians and anthropologists viewed Guatemala's civil war have aptly focused on how political violence impacted Guatemalan society, particularly, indigenous communities. However, few scholars have addressed differentiation of indigenous people within their communities or focused on the ways in which some Maya activists struggled to change their lot (Grandin 2004; McAllister 2003; Smith 1990). In Momostenango, political battles have occurred among K'iche' and between K'iche' and ladino elites, as well as indigenous people and the state (Carmack 1995). By exploring class as well cultural rifts between Momostecos, I will try to

illuminate significant yet poorly understood factors that weigh heavily on community and national-level efforts to heal the physical and psychological wounds of the civil war.

Methodology

I lived in Guatemala for a combined 34 months between 1989 and 2003. Before I began an extended period of ethnographic research in 2001 and 2002, most of my time there had been spent as a student. First I studied at a Spanish language school; then I conducted research for my undergraduate thesis on evangelical Protestant religious groups; later I studied K'iche'. Mixed in with those activities I also worked at an NGO and managed a restaurant. Between 1991 and 1997, I lived in Chicago while working and volunteering at the Marjorie Kovler Center for the Treatment of Survivors of Torture. There I worked with Guatemalans who fled political violence and sought refuge in the U.S.. My prior experiences in Chicago and living, working and studying in Guatemala, primarily in or around Quetzaltenango, informed this research. Preliminary field research and K'iche' language study took place in the summer of 1999, funded by a FLAS grant. Field research conducted for this study took place between June 2001 and December 2002 and was funded by a Fulbright-Hays fellowship.

During the fieldwork period I spent the first 10 months living in Momostenango with my wife, Veronica Plaza, and our children, Guille and Julia Anna. In the spring of 2002, when Veronica was pregnant with our third child, we moved to Antigua to be closer to the hospitals in Guatemala City. The pregnancy was cause for great concern, as Veronica's first two pregnancies were high risk. Our daughter Helen was born in May, two months prematurely. She nearly died at birth, and spent two weeks with Veronica in

intensive care. As a consequence, we were unable to return to Momostenango. The experience of nearly losing my own child and my resulting interactions with biomedical providers in Momostenango and Antigua provided unexpected and unintended data for this research.

In Momostenango my primary research activities were participant observation, informal and semi-structured interviews with patients and providers in clinical settings, and informal surveys of all of the healthcare facilities in the town center and outlying cantons. Some of my closest friends and principal collaborators in Momostenango were ladino and indigenous ex-combatants of the guerrilla army, URNG, that had been reintroduced (albeit inadequately) into civilian life after the peace accords were signed in 1996, or civilians that had organized in solidarity with insurgent efforts. Their political affiliations were no secret in the community; a fact that I learned soon after people became aware that I was working with them. I struggled with trying to balance the obvious biases that my decided positionality in Momostenango carried with it. It was exceptionally difficult for me to avoid the temptation to “be neutral.” It was an option that arguably did not exist for anyone, let alone a stranger. Ultimately, I believe my positionality served not only as a form of opening doors, but also as an expression of solidarity with some members of the community. Clearly, it alienated others.

My family also became part of a small network of “extranjeros” that were living and working in Momostenango that included Cuban doctors serving two-year medical rotations in rural clinics, Spanish volunteers with a NGO that operated out of nearby Quetzaltenango, and occasional visiting scholars.

I worked to develop my K'iche' language skills. Regrettably, I did not ever attain a level of fluency that allowed me to freely converse. I could, however, understand most conversations. Aside from older women that lived in the cantons removed from the center of town, I found that most people in Momostenango spoke enough Spanish so that we could converse on most topics.

By far the most important contact that I had in Momostenango was Don Abraham Vicente (his real name, used at his request most other names are pseudonyms). He served as my principal collaborator. A Maya and a survivor of torture, he shared his own remarkable story and convictions with me and patiently answered many questions that surely never should have been asked. On more than one occasion he knew exactly the right words to say, or not to say to defuse potentially dangerous situations that we came across together.

I have taken certain precautions to protect the identity of the people I interviewed. I do not use pseudonyms for the place I studied or events that have already been published in other places. Because I was a Fulbright-Hays scholar, the U.S. government knew where I was. The Guatemalan army knew where I was, so attempting to conceal my research location would serve no purpose.

I conducted more than 200 interviews with survivors of political violence from Momostenango and their healthcare providers. In some instances, I recorded the interviews with the interviewee's permission, but in most instances I took notes, which I later transcribed into field notes. In most instances, I needed to seek out the survivors I interviewed. Don Abraham helped me to establish contact with many survivors and accompanied me to many of the interviews. It was the first time many of the interviewees

had been asked about their histories by someone outside of their closest networks of kin. Because perpetrators had never been brought to justice and because of the ongoing threat of violence, I was concerned that discussing the past would be both psychologically and physically dangerous to people I interviewed. I was also afraid that by evoking memories of political violence I might cause undue stress on the interviewees.

I learned later that the interviewees had been expecting me. Don Abraham, drawing from his own need to speak with others about his experience of torture and incarceration, had been holding meetings with other Maya survivors for years. They had been working together to rebuild linkages and relationships that the chaos of the proceeding years had severed. Don Abraham informed them of my research and asked them to participate, which they did willingly.

Despite the accompaniment of Don Abraham and the trust that his presence generated with Maya interviewees, gaining access to survivors was still challenging. I conducted most of the interviews by traveling to the houses of the interviewees. The time, money and effort required to conduct the interviews were not trivial. None of the interviewees had telephones, thus, arranging appointments required a preliminary visit. Sometimes, given the distances within the municipality and the poor quality of the roads, setting up appointments could take a full day of travel. Also, given the economic realities that most Momostecos live with, it was commonplace to arrive at an appointment to find the interviewee was working somewhere else, had gone to take care of a greater necessity, or had simply forgotten. Others requested that we conduct interviews at their house but that we arrive on foot. On at least two occasions that meant walking for several miles through gullies and ravines rather than by road so as not to be seen by suspicious

neighbors. On more than one occasion, Don Abraham asked me to pose as a USAID worker when people were around and ask questions about corn germination to give him an excuse to guide me through a farmer's field. Frequently, during the interviews, I would learn that political violence the "informant" had experienced had been neighbor against neighbor or even within immediate family. I felt myself sharing the anxieties of being watched with the interviewees, not knowing if neighbors, who observed us entering and leaving their hamlets, could be trusted. I learned from Don Abraham to avoid eye contact with passersby, which became one of many behaviors I adapted to lessen the attention given to my presence (which was already highly unusual).¹⁴

The survivors that I interviewed came from four principal areas: the town center (the four *barrios* of Patz'ite', Santa Catarina, Santa Ana, and Santa Isabel); the outlying *aldea* of Xequemeya; the outlying *aldea* of Canquixaja; and the neighboring municipality of Santa Lucia la Reforma. Social and economic divisions existed among and between each area and, as we shall see, resulted in significant differences in how survivors from each area experienced political violence and its aftermath. I also conducted a survey of healthcare providers that worked in Momostenango. I have grouped these providers into four groups, which I explore in depth in chapters that follow. They are public health workers, biomedical healers in private practice, traditional healers (primarily *Aj Q'ijab'* or K'iche' day keepers) and the staff of LA CLINICA the clinic where I was based.

¹⁴ This experience of being observed while knowing there was risk in observing, echoed the type of power disequilibrium created through surveillance described in Foucault's discussion of panopticism. (Foucault 1977)

Outline of Chapters

In Chapter Two, I explore the geographical and social terrain of the atrocities and human rights abuses in Momostenango that are the focus of this study. By focusing on the long term institutionalized violence that preceded the events of the civil war, I trace the historical roots of social oppression and resistance in Momostenango. In Chapter Three I locate the phenomena of truth commissions within the context of tensions between local realities and broader national and international projects while documenting the ways in which political violence was carried out and experienced by its survivors on a local level. I provide evidence that contrasts with the characterization that Momostenango was a “green zone” where little violence occurred and explore how such characterizations reflect ongoing structures of terror that maintain historical silences and make the task of medical intervention difficult or in some cases impossible. In Chapter Four, I turn to survivors’ testimonies. In Chapter Five I discuss how institutionalized violence influences patient health seeking decisions by examining the public health safety net for Momostecos. Using ethnographic interviews from providers, I explore biomedical ideologies of care that influence interventions. Chapter Six addresses the interventions of traditional healers and the efforts of a plural model of healthcare at LA CLINICA. Chapter Seven concludes with observations and further theoretical questions regarding the reasons for the treatment program’s failures as well as considerations for what types of intervention might best serve the needs of survivors of political violence in Momostenango.

The creation and perpetuation of inequality based on the confluence of class and ethnicity, without which Maya could not have been systematically targeted for massive human rights abuses during Guatemala's civil war, is the topic of this chapter. Guatemala's colonial past and the injustices perpetrated on its indigenous people are well known ((CEH) 1999; (REMHI) 1998; Adams 1970; Carmack 1988; Lovell 2005; Piel, et al. 1999; Smith 1990; Tax 1968). Therefore, I will examine primarily the period between 1944 and 1996. This was a time during which a reform government was elected, governed for almost a decade and was then overthrown by a conservative, virulently anti-communist military regime, increasingly repressive variations of which maintained itself in power virtually uninterrupted until the 1986 "democratic opening" in Guatemala. Even though Guatemala returned to civilian rule at that time, the military maintained control of most of the state's functions.

I will examine in turn the history of shifts in local power, changes in the economy, the physical landscape, land use, and religious practices. I will also explore the ways in which local, national, and transnational projects during the roughly 50 year period under consideration converged to produce conditions ripe for the state's use of the overt physical violence (e.g., torture, disappearances and killing) against Maya that indubitably occurred in Momostenango in spite of its designation as a "green zone" where there was little violence.

Political Organization

Maya municipalities (*municipios*) have their roots in the Spanish practice of *congregacion*, the colonial resettlement of Indians into governable administrative units (Smith 1990:41; Cook 2000: 5). In the post-independence period (i.e., after 1821), as the now Guatemalan state oversaw the encroachment of Maya lands by European and ladino planters, *municipios* functioned to provide a steady supply of labor for the plantation economy and otherwise control the indigenous population.

Between 1944 and 1954, the reformist national government sought to change the social fabric of citizenship and nationalism. Formally acknowledging that the subjugation of indigenous people by Ladinos and Euro-Guatemalan elites was an impediment to the advancement of the nation, the government established the *Instituto Indigenista Nacional* (IIN), the National Indigenous Institute). IIN was to conduct investigations into indigenous life, examining the causes of existing social inequities with the express purpose of facilitating the integration of indigenous peoples into modern capitalism. The central issue the government addressed through IIN was the transformation of traditional Mayas into modern Ladinos. Unlike previous regimes, the new government embraced *Indigenismo* (a type of nation-building that emphasized a pre-Hispanic past as a central element of Guatemalan nationalism), acknowledging that the elitist and racist exclusionism, heretofore pervasive in Guatemalan society, was an obstacle to the proletarianization of the indigenous population. In 1945 the new regime approved changes to the constitution that read,

The development of an integral political policy for the economic, social, and cultural improvement of indigenous groups is declared of national interest and

utility. To this effect, laws, regulations, and special decrees can be dictated for indigenous groups given their needs, conditions, practices, uses, and customs (The Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala, Article 38, 1945)(Asamblea Constituyente 1945).

The government implemented policies designed to lessen structural inequalities that bifurcated Guatemalan society.¹⁵ While attempting to assimilate Indians into the national ladino culture, the government also sought through the offices of IIN to preserve the “authenticity” of some indigenous traditions such as weaving (Skinner-Klee 1995). Borrowing from Diane Nelson’s attention to the polysemous use of the verb “to fix” in Guatemala, on the one hand the INN worked to understand and “fix” the “problem” of indigenous culture through assimilation at the same time it worked to “fix” indigenous culture in a mythical past by emphasizing certain cultural forms over others (Nelson 1999).

The overthrow of the reform government in 1954 by an avowedly anti-communist regime¹⁶ (Gleijeses 1991; Schlesinger 1982) cut short effort to integrate Mayas into economic and social society. The IIN lost much of its budget and its central role in formulating state policy. It also shifted its focus to folklore (e.g., “preserving Maya culture”). The types of projects IIN (now renamed Seminario de Integracion Social Guatemalteca (SISG)) sponsored thereafter are a gauge of the ideological influences that

¹⁵ Most notable were the educational reforms and literacy campaigns during the Arevalo presidency 1945-1951 and the agrarian reform during the Arbenz presidency 1951-1954.

¹⁶ It is widely agreed that the United States, through its CIA, played a significant role in the overthrow of the Arbenz government.

guided what may be termed “counterrevolutionary *indigenismo*.” This brand of *indigenismo* decontextualized the material and social conditions of Maya as it focused on quaint traditions. Indeed, *indigenismo* throughout Latin America, as anthropologist Les Field points out, “may have ... serv[ed] as a means for political and economic elites to appropriate indigenous cultures for nation-building ideologies that end up maintaining the subaltern status of indigenous peoples” (Field 1994).

The decisive defeat of the reformist government in 1954 halted state efforts at land reform: a vital concern for Maya communities. The country’s retreat from social and democratic reforms, however, was not an equal misfortune for all Maya. Although there were no general economic gains to speak of, Maya leaders from Momostenango did find opportunities to establish a new political order and assumed a great deal of political power. By allying themselves with the new conservative national regime, “progressive” Maya were able to take control of local government from the Ladinos; although racial tensions remained strong the new Maya leaders shared interests in political power with their ladino predecessors. Thus, although the municipal authorities of Momostenango were almost always indigenous after the mid-1950s, life did not change dramatically for poor rural dwellers, virtually all of who were Maya.

Let me provide an example of how this played out. Earlier the ladino minority dominated the municipal government with the backing of national elites and the protection of the local militia. Because Maya vastly outnumbered Ladinos in Momostenango, Ladinos formed client-patronage relationships with indigenous leaders at election time to obtain Maya votes. Nicolas Guzman Xiloj, a Maya from a prominent lineage, had since the late 1920s regularly insured Maya support for ladino candidates.

Although Guzman Xiloj was not an *aj poronic* (ceremonial “burner”) himself, indigenous traditionalists that practiced Maya ceremonies (the vast majority of Momostecos) (Carmack 1995: 224) supported him. However by the 1950s and 1960s, aided by the fiercely “anti-communist” missionizing of Catholic Action Maya (promoted locally by the Church), a new set of “progressive” indigenous leaders with the support of the right-wing conservative national administration succeeded in having Guzman Xiloj, then an old man, imprisoned as a “communist” (Carmack 1995:242).

“Progressive” Maya that opposed the old guard of Maya elites falsely claimed to represent all Momosteco Maya. With an ideology modeled on state-imposed counterrevolutionary *indigenismo*, they found their support from the growing number of Maya Catholics mobilized by the Catholic Action movement. They were not, however, supported by the traditional base of Maya politics, the *costumbristas*. The new progressives pledged support to the Movimiento Liberacion Nacional (MLN) and shared the anti-communist ideological convictions of the government. In their role as community leaders, many of these new Maya authorities became key informants to anthropologists that conducted fieldwork in Momostenango in the 1970s; thereby skewing the picture anthropology may have of Momostenango. Anthropologist Robert Carmack, who conducted the most thorough ethnohistorical research on Momostenango, described one such leader in the following manner,

Roberto [Perez], perhaps, is the Indian leader who most effectively brought change to Momostenango in recent years. [Perez] started his public life as a successful baker, was elected *alcalde* at a critical point in Momostenango political history, and became a model for the active use of executive power for other

Indian authorities who followed him. [Perez] advocated economic “progress” through commercial development and worked for ethnic parity by providing political opportunities to Indians. He was a weak democrat, but one believing firmly in the necessity of military intervention to maintain “order.” [Perez] manipulated his Indian identity to political advantage, but remained highly ambivalent about the social worth of rural Indians. Like the Ladinos, [Perez] became quite secular in outlook and a leading spokesman in the community in support of legal-type authority. Leaders like [Perez] have changed Momostenango into an economically and politically more modern society, in part by transforming ethnic difference in a contest over which group can out modernize the other (Carmack 1995:409-410).

Perez later became a professional “administrative consultant” who served in other townships. He also became one of the leaders of the *Plana Mayor*, the head of the local repressive apparatus during the civil war. “Integrated” Maya leaders such as Perez, became a potent force in local politics and were instrumental in positioning Momostenango as an official “green zone” during the civil war, thus avoiding the garrisoning of troops for long periods of time in Momostenango, but not able to prevent, even if they had wanted to, the torture and killing of many Momostecos.

For centuries Momosteco Maya depended on Maya leaders who spoke and wrote in Spanish to represent the greater interests of the community to outside authorities. Maya elites often served their communities well and wisely, some used their power and status to gain economic and political advantage over their neighbors. Ladinos and Maya elite

who engaged in profit seeking behaviors, however, alienated subaltern rural Maya in Momostenango. Further, rural guerilla-sympathizers, who hoped revolution would improve their lives, never accepted Maya elite claims to be the legitimate representatives of all Maya.

Anthropologist Garrett Cook describes the Maya folklore tale of the *Cabawil* as a cautionary tale (Cook, 2000 p. 195-202) to those of the community who exceed their authority. A contemporary telling of the story in Momostenango speaks of the *cacique* (leader) Diego Vicente, a descendent from the elite Nijaib lineage and founder of Momostenango, who was extremely wealthy and powerful. The Spanish were suspicious of him because he rivaled them in wealth, land and power. His Maya neighbors envied him because he wanted to be better than them (Carmack, 1995 p 104). Vicente's wealth was said to come from a beast called the *Cabawil* whom he kept in a cave and fed with Maya captives. The black animal (also called *Ek'*) would defecate gold coins. At the end of the story Diego Vicente's own children rise up to destroy both the beast and Don Vicente's wealth.

Momosteco Maya extend the moral to Ladinos who exploited their position in the community. Rigoberto Tzun, a Maya teacher told me,

My mother died when I was seven years old. My stepmother took me to my first day of school when I was nine years old. It was a long distance from the *aldea* where I lived to get to the school. I had to walk past the Lang's house to get there. People said that Don Fritz and Don Guxo [Fritz and Gustavo Lang] had a black animal that was at least a meter and maybe two meters tall. For that reason my father and my mother wouldn't let us go to school for two years, because they

said that this animal ate children. They told us that the children the black animal ate were converted into coins in the animal's feces. It was a huge fear that all of the children had.¹⁷ (Interview with RT: 08/14/01)

The *Cabawil* was a poignant symbol for Momosteco Maya whose prosperity and lives have been truncated by the loss of their land and their forced labor on the plantations. The money acquired by Momostecos, Maya and Ladino alike, is thought to "consume" their neighbors and therefore is cursed. It is not surprising that wealthy people are distrusted regardless of their ethnic identity or 'race.'

The majority of rural Indians are still exploited by the municipal government, even after the changes to the election of indigenous leaders in 1944. For example, leaders from rural, outlying cantons complained that while the municipality extracted taxes and labor from their communities, it did not provide equal services and projects for them. The leadership of two cantons, San Vicente Buenabaj and San Bartolo Aguas Calientes, was so opposed to the (indigenous-led) municipal government by the 1970s that separatist movements formed. In 1979, more than 20,000 Indians loyal to the Momostenango central authorities prepared for conflict with separatists (Carmack 1995). The separatists did not prevail and the cantons remain part of the municipio.

¹⁷ Gustavo Lang was the son of a German immigrant who married a K'iche' woman from Momostenango. He told me that his father, Ernesto Lang, "ran Momostenango like a prison. He controlled what came in and went out". Gustavo became the most powerful man in Momostenango in 1982 when Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt appointed him as *intendente* during the *tierra arrasada* (scorched earth) campaigns and was perceived by many Momostecos as someone who made his wealth by exploiting his neighbors.

In 1982, a date that marks the beginning of the most violent period in the civil war, the Guatemalan military took control of the local government and replaced the indigenous mayor with a ladino *intendente*, Gustavo Lang, who oversaw all municipal activities. The municipal building was used as a holding pen for young Momosteco men who the military commissioner had rounded up on market days; the men were being drafted to serve in the national army. Many men were taken from rural hamlets and cantons, some never to return to their families. After repeated abuses of draftees by the *comisionados militares* (military commissioner) in Momostenango there was an uprising in which townspeople broke into the municipal building to liberate “recruits” who were detained there. Nonetheless, the army was usually able to draft young indigenous men almost at will. This later became a major issue as local troops were forced or perhaps in some cases willingly tortured and killed neighbors and friends.



Figure 2 Faded and painted over graffiti in the center of Momostenango. “Ejército Asesino - Señores Comisionados Militares” - In 1982, when the Guatemalan military took control of the local government, the municipal building was used by the *jefatura* of the *comisionados militares* (the head of the military commissioners). On market days the *comisionados militares* rounded up young men from Momostenango and dragged them off to serve in the Guatemalan military. It was there that many young men were taken, never to return to their families.

During the period of military rule in Momostenango from 1982 to 1996, the *alcaldes auxiliares* lost a great deal of autonomy. Throughout colonial times, the *alcaldes* represented a political structure that paralleled the Spanish authorities. The *auxiliatura*, also known as the *alcaldia indigena* or the indigenous mayors, was run by local indigenous elders who were elected by *principales*—community elders from each *paraje* (local community based on kinship ties). One Momosteco from the canton of Rachoquel explained how rural Maya perceived the municipal governing structure:

The name *auxiliary* is offensive. We are not here to help the *alcalde municipal*. We are elders in our communities and take our responsibilities as leaders of our communities with honor. We are not simply servants of the *alcalde municipal*. Our positions are unpaid, yet we take on important tasks such as resolving conflicts in our communities that the people in the municipal government don't care about. They don't care about our problems. Our responsibilities are much greater than reporting who was born and who died to the municipal government. We are the elders and highest authorities in our communities. (Interview with TA: 10-19-02)

During the early 1980s, when the *intendente* Gustavo Lang assumed power, he rather than the elders selected the *alcaldes auxiliares*. Lang came from a prominent family of German immigrants that had direct ties to the national military leadership. He used his influence and personal relationship with then President Efraín Ríos Montt to maintain tight control over local matters throughout the municipio. Lang chose indigenous men with a history of service and loyalty to the military to serve in the *auxiliatura*, and he used the institution to monitor the activities of community members

and to facilitate the recruitment of young men into military service. One man I spoke to said:

Gustavo Lang was not beyond using force. During the time that he was *intendente* they would round up all of the drunks (*bolos*) in the street. They would bring them to jail or make them work sweeping the streets for days without any food. I remember one time that he brought a drunk man to the building near the town hall that the municipality owned. They tortured the man there. You could hear the screams. It brought fear to everyone. (Interview with DL:09-15-01)

The centralization of authority during the military regime resulted in a significant reduction in the authority of the *alcaldes auxiliares*. The policies instituted under Lang resulted in a decrease in representation from the already poorest and least politically powerful cantons. Indigenous authorities from town, already more educated and affluent were able to consolidate power and more easily assert their authority as the representatives of the poorer Maya living in the outlying cantons. By emphasizing Momostecos' long history of national military service, indigenous elites were able to insert themselves into the paramilitary apparatus of the repressive state and consolidate power in the municipality.

Political Power

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when the plantation economy was in full swing, ladino municipal authorities were extremely oppressive and acted out of self-interest. During liberal period, which began in 1871 and ended with the October Revolution of 1944, ethnic divisions characterized divisions in local authority.

Ladinos held nearly all positions of political and economic leadership. Vagrancy laws and *la ley de vialidad*, which required the forced, unpaid labor of Momostecan Indians, were locally enacted from the municipal building.

In 1952, under the reformist government referred to earlier, moderate attempts were made at agrarian reform. National Decree 900, for example, redistributed tracts of unused lands measuring 223 acres or greater, to local inhabitants. It expropriated the lands from large plantations (estates with lands fully in use were exempted from the law), reimbursing owners through government bonds. In Momostenango it is unlikely any ladino family's holdings were affected in any significant way by the decree. The Cifuentes family had, at the turn of the century, obtained significant power in national government. Local resident General Teodoro Cifuentes had commanded Momosteco indigenous battalions in the war against El Salvador (1906). He became well trusted by the then president who used Momostecan soliders in his presidential national palace guard. General Cifuentes used this to his political advantage at a local level.

The Cifuentes family also served as *habilitadores*, a position in the plantation economy held only by Ladinos. They contracted to enlist local Maya, forced by vagrancy laws to work on the coastal plantations, for work as laborers harvesting coffee. One person I interviewed recalled that in the 1920s,

They would all come from the *aldeas* the night before they had to go to work on the coast. They would line up outside the Cifuentes' house, waiting to sign their contracts and get their pay. Most of them were illiterate and would sign with a thumbprint. Then they would go to get haircuts for themselves and their children and the men would get really drunk. The next morning the trucks would take them

to the coast for 30 or 60 days. If they needed to come back before then they would lose the rest of their pay. They could also be fined. They shipped them out like cattle in the back of those trucks, and many times the truck was so heavy it would slide off the road, killing them.

Construction on the present municipal building in Momostenango (the previous municipal building was destroyed in an earthquake around the turn of the century) was completed by 1920 under the direction of General Teodoro Cifuentes using forced Indian labor power.



Figure 3 General Teodoro Cifuentes. (from Blue Book of Guatemala 1915)

He took advantage of the vagrancy laws to build other public projects as well, including the Catholic Church. One elder I interviewed recalled that workers were unpaid and conditions at the worksite were unsafe. He told me that

The walls were high and the men had to use ladders to build them. Sometimes the men would fall off of the walls and die. We had to collect bunch grass from Pa'suc to place under them so when they fell from the walls they would not get killed. (Interview with VV: 03-07-02)

After Cifuentes' patrons in national government fell from power in the 1920s, the Cifuentes, who had several military figures in the family, gradually lost their monopoly on political influence in town. Although the political power of the family in the community has eroded since the middle of the twentieth century, their reign is well remembered. Today, many Momostecan Indians still use the expression, "Si, mi General" while mocking a military salute as a sarcastic response to requests in general conversation. Again recalling the early part of the century the same elder stated,

We were forced to work six days every six months on building roads. When we finished our obligation they gave us our *vialidad*. It was a document that we had to carry with us at all times. If you did not have it with you they [the municipal authorities] would force you to clean the streets of the town. They would not let you go home and they would not feed you. The *alcaldes auxiliares*, the police, and the *comisionados* [militares] would enforce it. It was obligatory.... We had to carry four documents with us. They were the *vialidad*, the *ornato*, *citas*, and the *certificacion*. If we failed to present ourselves in front of the military cuartel every six months they would send the authorities to come find us and punish us.

(Interview with VV: 03-07-02)

The *ornato* was a tax collected by the municipal government via the *alcaldes auxiliares*. The *certification*, also called the *libreta de jornalero*, documented the work Indians were forced to do in addition to work on roads either on the coast or in the service of municipal projects. The coastal work consisted primarily of cotton, coffee, and sugar plantations and was characterized by extremely difficult conditions, threats, intimidation, and coercion. While on the coast Maya laborers contracted as *mozos* were forced to live in communal housing that was rented to them at high prices by the *finqueros*. If workers became sick or had emergency expenses, they were not allowed to leave the plantation until they had fulfilled their contract and paid rent to the plantation owners. The recruitment and retention process of Indian laborers was ostensibly done under mutual contracts; however, the reality for most workers was a situation of debt peonage enforced by a system of unchecked brutalities. Although the oppressive labor laws were abolished by the middle of the twentieth century and “market forces” kept a ready pool of laborers available for work on the plantations, abuses by *habilitadores* and *contratistas* and institutionalized exploitation of Maya workers continued with a highly unjust plantation labor practices that were characterized more by coercion than consent.

Social Geology

One expression that I heard many Momostecos repeat was “Estamos en un rincón metido dentro de una olla” (roughly translated, “We are in a ditch inside of a bowl”). From the continental divide (elev. 9,000 ft.), which separates Momostenango from neighboring San Francisco El Alto to the south, the land slopes to the north and east towards the valley 3000 feet below (elev. 6000 ft.). The gullies and ravines that cut

through the steep terrain are dotted with small adobe houses of the many hamlets. The multiple drainages run like capillaries to larger rivers that form the headwaters of the Rio Negro. Virtually all the territory within the *municipio* has a slope of 4% or more. The canyon and ridge lands that make up the majority of Momostenango have greater than a 32% average slope.

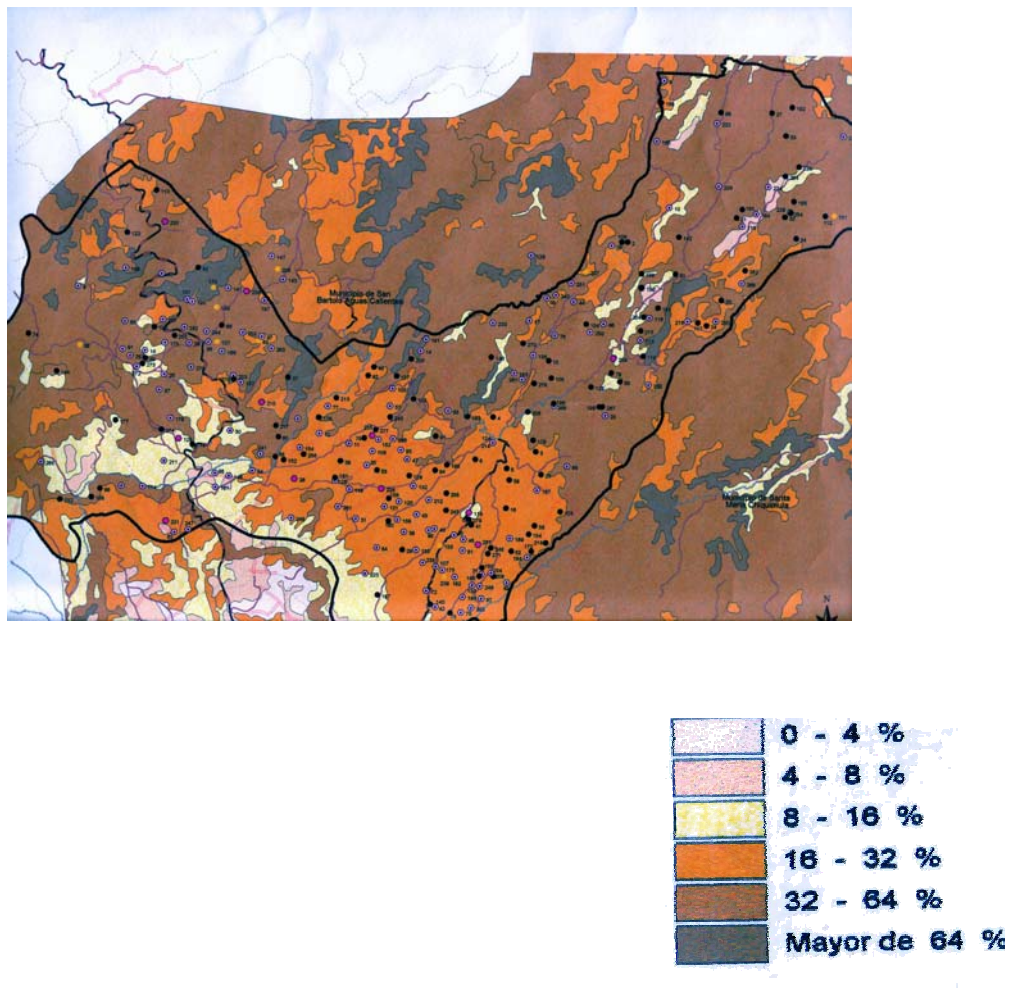


Figure 4 Map of Slope in Momostenango (SIG-APESA Convenio ALA 94/81 2000)

The high population density in the western highlands, accelerated since the 1980s, particularly in the department of Totonicapán,¹⁸ where Momostenango is located combined with the dramatic vertical topography just described, means there is an extreme shortage of arable land, which contributes to the overall poverty of the residents. Momostecos take advantage of nearly all of the hillsides surrounding the rural hamlets outside town for either agriculture or logging but there are few areas suitable for planting anything more than subsistence crops. There are but few with sufficient land to be counted as affluent, or even comfortable. Although the *auxiliatura* (local indigenous government) monitors and control the logging of the communal forests with forest rangers, increasing demand for lumber and firewood has resulted in significant deforestation. Many lands that were previously under the jurisdiction of the *auxiliatura* have changed hands either through expropriations or personal transactions, exposing them to increased potential for exploitation and deforestation.

The makeup of the soil varies throughout the municipality. The top layer is a well-drained highland plateau type with organic material. This topsoil covers a much finer volcanic ash layer that is in many areas cemented together by iron oxides, forming an impermeable hardpan. Local residents cultivate the darker clay-like soils, but it is extremely labor-intensive. Moreover, the hardpan is not suited for farming unless organic materials and chemical fertilizer are mixed in. Human and environmental impact has led to significant erosion in some areas that expose ever-greater expanses of hardpan.

¹⁸ The department of Totonicapán ranked the highest in population density for all of Guatemala (Funcede 1997).

Thomas Veblen noted almost 30 years ago,

By the early part of the twentieth century Momostenango had become less dependent on agricultural activities and more dependent on artisanry than any other Indian town in Guatemala. The entire northeastern third of the department of Totonicapán and the southwestern part of the department of Quiché had become the most seriously eroded and sterile region of the country (Veblen 1978).

The situation has not improved since Veblen's observation. In some areas, erosion of pumice deposits from the hardpan has formed spires called *Los Riscos* similar to those found in Bryce Canyon in Utah. Los Riscos are the result of centuries of overuse of the land for grazing sheep rather than a "natural" geological phenomenon that took place over thousands of years, as they are sometimes billed in national tourist literature.¹⁹ Los Riscos, which are steadily declining in size and "majesty", are emblematic of the rapid erosion not only of the land but also of indigenous peoples' opportunity to subsist in ways of their own choosing on land sufficient to the task.

¹⁹ The first mention of Los Riscos in the topographic literature was in the late nineteenth century.

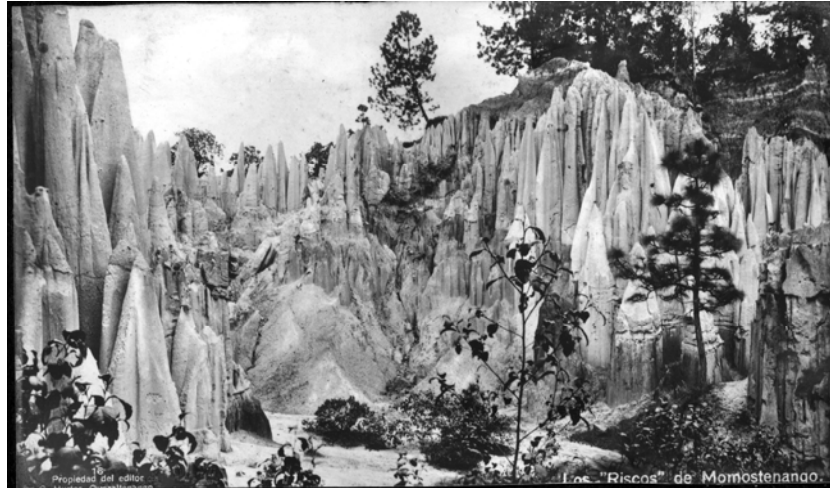


Figure 5 Photo of Los Riscos (ca. 1940) Phototeca CIRMA. Los Riscos historic image: Before I had ever visited Momostenango, I had heard about Los Riscos from my ladino Spanish instructors in Quetzaltenango. They were described as one of the natural wonders of Guatemala, a must-see, something I imagined akin to the Grand Canyon. It was the type of place that embodied the essence of Guatemalan nationalism, a place like Tikal.

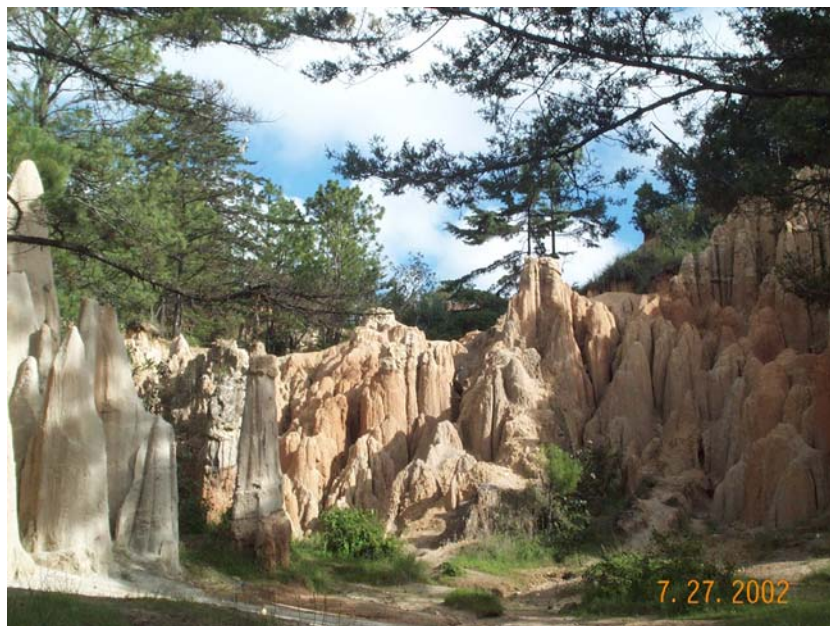


Figure 6 Los Riscos, 2002 (author's photo): I would frequently see local Maya digging at the walls of the formation with a shovel and then carting the sand off in a wheelbarrow for personal use. Despite having been named a National Park in 1955. (note the erosion). Many of Momostenango's indigenous inhabitants saw Los Riscos as a monument to ladino exploitation rather than the embodiment of Guatemalan nationalism.

By the mid nineteenth century, most Maya were landless or had too little land to support themselves. Thus they were susceptible to debt peonage. By the 1940s sufficient numbers of highland Maya had entered the wage labor market and/or had permanently resettled on the coast that plantations no longer needed to depend on forced labor provided by vagrancy laws. Now, “market forces” (i.e., extreme poverty resulting from highly inequitable land distribution and the degradation of the land itself) combined with the tangible fear of violent coercion provided the needed indigenous labor to keep the agro-export industry running. An articulated hierarchy of managers, skilled workers, unskilled workers, merchants and owners kept a stream of impoverished laborers flowing from the highlands to the coast when their labor was needed.



Figure 7 “Walking Indian Merchants from Totonicapán,” ca. 1910. (CIRMA Fototeca) The production of wool blankets (which had been Momostecos’ leading form of non-agricultural income from the eighteenth century until the 1990s, when synthetic blankets imported from Mexico undercut the local industry) required trade with neighboring areas, since wool was not produced in Momostenango (Carmack, 1995 p. 69). Long-distance trade routes probably existed prior to the conquest (Carmack, 1995 p. 376). Since prehispanic times, products produced by Momosteco artisans such as clay pots and bunchgrass brooms have been sold throughout the region.



Figure 8 Momosteco merchant in Guatemala City. Momostecos' penchant for traveling outside of municipality as *comerciantes* is exemplified in an oft-told joke: When astronauts first landed on the moon they were surprised to find a Momosteco there who wanted to sell them *ponchos*. (Photo by author)

The agrarian reforms of the late 1940s and early 1950s did not result in significant changes in the landholdings of indigenous Momostecos. Although throughout the country more than 500,000 campesinos were granted small plots of expropriated plantation lands that had formerly been uncultivated, there were no *latifundias* or expansive plantations within Momostenango. Most of the expropriated land was on coastal plantations. Rather than joining the struggle for land reform that could have potentially benefited the indigent

campesinos masses, indigenous municipal leaders in Momostenango set their sights on an issue closer to home. They focused their efforts, successfully as we have already seen, on wresting the local government from ladino domination. Also, as we have already seen, their struggle succeeded because they capitulated to the anti-communist movement that was sweeping much of the world in the 1950s and which unseated the national reform government.

Unlike other indigenous regions where military generals used their power to seize lands from Maya for their own plantations and the guerillas garnered support by taking the side of the Maya, there were no large disputed tracts of land in Momostenango. By the time the civil war was well underway, the articulation of Momostenango with coastal plantations was no longer profitable for Momosteco Ladinos like the Cifuentes. In addition, as early as the 1930's, Momosteco campesinos had discovered that one way to escape forced labor and military service was to work as semi-proletariat *comerciantes*. By claiming financial obligations to travel outside the municipality, necessitated by the demand for wool blankets throughout the region, Momostecos took their chances as private entrepreneurs rather than wage-laborers on plantations. During the civil war many Momostecos used their status as merchants to avoid service in the dreaded Civil Patrols (PAC).

Resource Management

Prior to the twentieth century there was little government regulation of natural resources in Guatemala. Registries mention municipal lumberyards and forest reserves with special plans for lumber extraction as early as 1870. Rural indigenous villages had

local authority structures that monitored and made decisions about the use of communal forests (Reyes 1998). The *Ley Forestal*, enacted in 1945, was inspired by the U.S. model and established two branches: the Department of Forestry and the Department of Fish and Wildlife. The law was a response to the Guatemalan state's previous failure to regulate logging and mining by foreign companies as well as unmonitored hunting that was characteristic during the 1920s.



Figure 9 "Peten" from the Sanchez Latour Pictorial Map (1939)

In 1955 the *Ley Forestal* was modified to remove restrictions that the just installed anti-communist government viewed as unfriendly to business. The new law stated that companies logging within national forests were no longer responsible for reforestation. It also designated a portion of the funds collected from tourism as well as hunting, logging, and mining fees within national forests for the building of roads (Congreso de la Republica de Guatemala 1955).

Thomas Veblen, who studied communal forest usage in Momostenango in the 1970s noted that communally owned forests had less deforestation than state-managed ones (Veblen 1975). During the scorched earth campaigns in the early 1980's one of the tactics the army used was to burn forest to destroy cover used by the guerillas. Increased pressure for resources from communal forests including fatwood, lumber, firewood, and sap for making incense, combined with the increasing willingness of the municipal government to allow logging in communal forests have resulted in significant deforestation in recent years.

Increased usage and erosion caused by deforestation has resulted in a reduction in local aquifers. One of the greatest problems still affecting Momostecos is the lack of potable water. There are four mechanical wells that supply water to the residents of the urban center. The water from these wells is treated with chlorine; however, the supply is often cut off due to mechanical failures and inadequacies in the distribution system make it unsafe to drink. Communities outside of town have greater difficulty obtaining water. Most households in 1997 did not have piped water (FUNCEDE 1997). Local surface water is scarce and normally polluted. Nevertheless, it remains the principal source of water for many families who often walk miles a day to obtain it. Families that can afford to, dig their own wells by hand.

The inadequacies of the municipal water system have been the cause of many local disputes. Robert Carmack documented the seriousness of one such dispute in 1967 (Carmack 1995: 330-333). More recently on September 7, 2005, after the period of my fieldwork, 3,000 people from Momostenango who were protesting the Water Law marched to the town square to confront Mayor (*alcalde*) Daniel Xiloj about the perennial

inadequacies of the public water system. Xiloj rose to office through a center-left party that united political branches of the demilitarized insurgency (URNG) and the popular movement as well as progressive elements of the industrial sector. Prior to becoming Mayor, Xiloj served as the director of Momostenango's largest credit and savings cooperative. To most Momostecos he represented a significant departure from other Maya elites from the urban center that had for decades sided with the ultra-right and center-right political parties that ruled the national government.

During the protest, alleged criminal elements incited the crowd to riot and the proceeded to destroy the municipal building, burn the home of Mayor Xiloj, drive out the police and destroy three patrol cars of the National Civilian Police (PNC) (Lara 2005). The protests came a day after 48 indigenous authorities from the departmental capital San Miguel Totonicapán rallied thousands of citizens to demand that the departmental governor communicate to congress local residents' opposition to the General Water Law. Eyewitnesses to the events in Momostenango noted the presence of criminal gangs, who were brought into the community from elsewhere, who incited violence and looting. They also alleged that the protests were motivated by the mayor's conservative political opponents on the town council (Diario El Popular Toronto Sept. 7, 2005). Mayor Xiloj's history of political organization in opposition to conservative Momosteco Maya elites that supported the ultra-right *Frente Republicano Guatemalteco* (FRG) party was cited by many Momostecos I spoke with as the real reason the protest broke out into violence. As we shall see in the following chapters, the ability of conservative Maya elites to incite violence, as in this incident, is an important way that the far right still holds power locally. Staging events that make it look like the poor Maya

masses popularly support the violent overthrow of progressive leaders provides a platform for ultra-right, law-and-order candidates to make populist claims in local elections.

Religion: Traditionalists, Catholics, and Protestants

One of the most significant changes in Guatemalan society after the demise of the reform government in 1954 was a new and increasingly close relationship between conservative elements of the Catholic Church and the national government, a relationship that for many years promoted the inequality of indigenous and Ladinos in Momostenango. For nearly a century, the Guatemalan state had attempted to curtail the political power of the Catholic Church. After seizing power in 1871 the liberal reformer, Gen. Justo Rufino Barrios promoted missionization by Protestant sects throughout the country, thus breaking the monopoly of the Catholic Church. During the 1940s and 1950s, under the leadership of Archbishop Monsignor Rossell y Arellano, the Catholic Church struck back by actively campaigning against the reform government, among other things, naming it as “communist.” In 1945, he sent a Pastoral Letter to all dioceses entitled “On the Communist Threat in Our Fatherland.” The letter drew from an address of then Pope Pius XII extolling the “Evil of Atheist Communism” and sounded the warning that,

Except for Catholic Priests . . . the doors of the Republic are open to everyone; it did not take long before those called the “saviors of the workers” arrived in our country; they organized labor unions, which by force and without respect for individual liberty (a red characteristic), have affiliated men and women so that

they will later force them en masse to join the Latin American Confederation of Workers (Episcopado de la Provincia Eclesiastica de Guatemala 1955).

Rossell y Arellano's efforts to counter the "revolutionary government" were well rewarded when anti-communist "liberators" took control in 1954. The Castillo Armas government, no doubt grateful to the Church, chose to bury the anti-clerical hatchet, and the Catholic Church experienced a renaissance. Within 10 years there was a fivefold increase in the number of priests in Guatemala, with foreign priests outnumbering Guatemalan priests by nearly six to one.

The main vehicle the administration of the Catholic Church employed to expand its influence in the countryside was the formation of base communities and the cultivation of local leaders through the Catholic Action movement. Momostenango was the site of one of the first Catholic Action communities in the county.²⁰ The Catholic Action network was part of a worldwide effort of the Catholic Church to expand its influence in countries that had anti-clerical laws like the ones passed during the reformist period in Guatemala. In Momostenango, Catholic Action was run by Ladinos but was built from a base of rural Maya that renounced the "idolatry" of traditional spiritual practices that the majority of Maya still maintained.

The Franciscan Priest Fidencio Dalla Mutta, who served in Momostenango from 1954 until the early 1980s oversaw the expansion of Catholic Action in Momostenango. Padre Fidencio continued the crusade against traditional Maya spiritual practices. He

²⁰ Catholic Action was active in Momostenango as early as 1946 (Garcia Ruiz, 1991:166)

often repeated the discourse of his predecessors, preaching that Jesus Christ was the one true god and that “you cannot serve two masters.” Daykeepers (Aj’ Q’ijab) who converted to Catholic Action were asked to burn or turn in their *barra*, the sack of 260 *tz’ite’* beans used in ceremonies and for divination. While many converts renounced traditional practices publicly, it was common for them to privately acknowledge their continued respect for traditional practitioners.

By the mid-1960s, however, changes in the Catholic Church, which were occurring on an international level with the Second Vatican Council, began to proliferate throughout Guatemala. After the 1968 Medellín Conference, a growing number of priests in the Guatemalan archdiocese took a different position than that of Archbishop Rossell Arellano. These priests said that the church needed to take a “preferential option for the poor,” a position that was endorsed by Pope John XXIII during Vatican II. Liberation theology began to be taught within the Catholic Church, and the ideas resonated with many of the rural Mayas of Momostenango.

For the first time, young Guatemalan clerics, many who had been trained overseas, began to gain positions of leadership within the Catholic Church. One such priest was Tomás García, a K’iche’ Maya from Totonicapán. His efforts to combat the preconceived notions other clerics had about indigenous people through theological discussions were only marginally successful. He believed that he achieved his greatest successes when he was able to put theory into practice. He explained to me in an interview in 2002,

In 1975 I was assigned to head the parish in San Andres Xecul. I was the first priest that had ever lived in the town. For the first time, I began to give mass in K’iche’. I

also began to incorporate *costumbristas* (traditional practices) into the church. During *semana santa* (Holy Week) they participated in the *villa cruces*. There were people that did not like to integrate the church in this way; Catholic Action in Totonicapan was very against it, but the majority of the people were in favor of it. I had a program on *Radio Fraternidad* in Cantel at 5:30 in the morning. The program always announced, “May all rise up, may no one be left behind” which comes from the Popol Vuh. The choir began to sing songs in K’iche’ and were accused of being a guerilla group for doing so.



Figure 10 Padre Tomas Garcia leading Villa Cruces in San Andres Xecul, ca. 1978

We began to explore the historic oppression of our people in Guatemala. When the army began increased hostilities in the late 1970s I began to ask, “*Hermanos Soldado* (*Brother Soldiers*), how is it that you will kill the poor people? Why are you protecting the houses of the rich people?” I knew that I was in danger, but the *Aj Q’ijab*’were vigilant for me. They performed ceremonies around the village to ask for protection. I allowed them to burn in the church, it was a beautiful act. Maya spirituality gave me strength.

Father Tomas' pastoral work addressing the social and economic origins of his congregation's current problems found limited support within the church hierarchy. He reported that many other priests disagreed with his social and political stance and that some were jealous of the support he found within the community. He said,

The other clergy told me that I was stepping outside my role as a priest. They told me that my job was to be like John the Baptist and to prepare the way for the Eucharist. The sacramentalists blocked me from returning to my people in Totonicapan. I wanted to work in my hometown. The people wanted me. But the church blocked me from returning to them.



Figure 11 Padre Tomas participating in a Maya ceremony

Within the Catholic Action movement several divergent philosophies guided priests. The close parallels between the empowered catechists and the traditional authority structure in rural communities provided a religious structure that paralleled indigenous society. On a local level, *principales*, or the clan elders from patrilineal lines, were the local authorities in indigenous communities. Most decisions surrounding family

and community were decided by *principales*. The Catholic Action movement tapped directly into the traditional authority structure by training agreeable *principales* as catechists. Padre Tomás stated,

I was very sad when I was moved to Momostenango. I lasted only two months in 1986. I had many conflicts with the other priest there. My first *ajau* (lord in K'iche') is Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't come [to the earth] to fight over religion. Ideology is what is diabolic. I have never had the arrogance [of other priests] that I am so important. I think that [the parochial priests] are also to blame. We move from parish to parish, the *principales* are the true leaders in the communities and they remain. Why do we need to subvert the authority of the *principales*?

(Interview with PT: 09/22/2002)

While some priests, like Padre Tomás, took the new linkages between the Catholic Church and rural authorities as an opportunity to improve the social conditions of the poor through grass roots political and social movements, others used the Catholic Action network as a top-down means to convert *costumbristas* from their “pagan” religion. Aside from Padre Tomás, almost all of Momostenango’s priests took the latter approach.

The attacks against priests and catechists who embraced liberation theology and “a preferential option for the poor” made it difficult for Guatemala’s Catholic leadership at the national level to ignore the political violence that was increasingly terrorizing its base. Although previous church administrators were fervent anti-communists and had uncritically supported the military (Rossell y Arellano played a central role in the

overthrow of the Arbenz government in 1954 and Casariego would bless the army tanks with holy water), Archbishop Próspero Penados del Barrio, who was appointed Guatemalan high prelate in 1983, recognized the church's obligation to support human rights.²¹ Although the Catholic Church had suffered many losses due to military repression during the civil war, it remained one of the few institutions in Guatemalan society with a popular base and infrastructure that had not been dismantled.²²

Under the direction of Archbishop Próspero Penados del Barrio, Catholic bishops began to take a stronger position against the state's combination of indifference to and targeting of the poor. In 1988 they produced a pastoral letter addressing the problem of land tenure entitled "The Clamor for Land." In 1989, Penados del Barrio established the Catholic Archbishop's Human Rights Office (ODHA). In 1995, recognizing its unique position in Guatemalan society as the only remaining institution with the resources and infrastructure capable of undertaking such a massive project, ODHA began documenting human rights abuses through its own investigation, the Recovery of Historical Memory project (REMHI).

Like the many Catholic leaders who invoked early Church martyrs as their moral examples during the war, Momostenango's *Aj Q'ijab* invoked their Maya ancestors who

²¹ The appointment of Próspero Penados del Barrio to Archbishop was an exception to the more conservative appointments that Pope John Paul II had made. It did not, however, signify a major shift in the Vatican's position vis-à-vis the war in Guatemala. For instance, when Padre Andrés Girón led a march of thousands landless farmers to the capital in 1986 his actions were largely condemned by the Vatican.

²² General Efraín Ríos Montt was a pastor within the fundamentalist evangelical church, El Verbo. Catholic catechists were accused of subversion and frequently murdered during the "scorched earth" campaigns characteristic of the period after his ascendancy as president through a military coup in 1982.

had died over struggles about land ownership. To the Maya faithful, the seventeenth century figure San Simon continues to live and exercises his power to heal and change the future. According to Don Mateo, a Momosteco day keeper I worked with, San Simon represents Christianity and Maya resistance simultaneously. The image of San Simon that is today worshiped is actually that of a K'iche' martyr named Mam Ximon who is often referred to as Maximon. I discuss Mam Ximon/San Simon at length in Chapter 6. San Simon is regarded as a living deity by Maya traditionalists in Momostenango and throughout Guatemala.

Maya spiritual practices provide alternative readings of history. Most Catholic priests reject San Simon as a saint and attribute his popularity among the Maya faithful as an aspect of "pagan" syncretism. Municipal as well as clerical authorities have recognized and sought to undercut the symbolic and political power of traditional K'iche' spiritual leaders. During his tenure as *intendente (military leader)* in 1982, the earlier discussed Gustavo Lang attempted to control the activities of the extensive network of *Aj Q'ijab'* (Maya day keepers) and demolish one of the most symbolic altars in the municipality -- a Maya altar. Housed in a municipal building directly off of the central plaza, the altar is dedicated to the performance by the *Chuch Q'ajaw Winik* (the highest ranking day keeper) of ceremonies that benefit the municipality. The altar is said to be built over the head of El Salvadoran president Tomas Regalado who was killed by the Momosteco Maya militia in the war of 1906. Ceremonies performed at the altar are believed locally to have protected Momosteco Maya as they went to battle. Although Regalado's head symbolized the vanquished enemy of the republic, it also served as a racialized symbol to the limits of white oligarchs' power locally. Although many

Momosteco Maya elites were not practitioners of traditional spirituality, they defended the altar from Lang and other ladino authorities that wanted it removed. They did concede to edicts mandating that the altar would only be used to support the military and proposing an identity card, which allowed only day keepers loyal to the military access to the altar.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined major historical, economic, geographic, religious and social contexts that shaped local struggles in Momostenango during the buildup to the civil war. From 1944-1954, during Guatemala's "ten years of spring", the Guatemalan Government attempted social democratic reforms that promised to lessen (if only by small increments) the social, economic, and political disparities that marked earlier liberal regimes. The dream of a more equal society was cut short during the 1950s when the United States and the Soviet Union waged proxy wars around the globe, and Guatemala's reformist government was overthrown by a US backed dictator. During the same period radical changes in local authority occurred in Momostenango as elite Maya were able to wrest control of their local government away from local Ladinos. As we shall see in the next chapters, the state benefitted from the role that Momostenango's Maya elites played as brokers between local and national interests.

The Green Zone, Denial, Testimony, and the Truth

Commissions

The burdens of time do not so much change as accumulate. (Tedlock 1991: 202)

The color-coded system the Guatemalan military used to identify the level of threat each rural community posed to the state, imposed the widely known wartime binary identities of “friend” or “enemy”, “collaborator” or “subversive”, “PAC” or “guerilla”, etc. on local inhabitants. These militarily-imposed identities often meant the difference between life and death during the civil war and continue to condition how many Guatemalans feel about their safety since the war ended. Many Momosteco ex-insurgency members and guerilla sympathizers I interviewed were concerned about how much of their revolutionary past would become public knowledge. Safety was clearly still a concern and fears of talking openly about the past tempered the narrative frames survivors used to discuss the war.

Since state terror was used explicitly and effectively to silence collective dissent that mobilized the opposition, part of healing the wounds of terror involves not only helping survivors to tell their stories, but also to create the contexts in which their voices can again be heard by collectives. The dominant narrative frame that Momostenango was a place where dissent did not exist continues to put limitations on the ways Momostecos

talk about the past and think of themselves. It also has implications on how they act in the present.

The state's use of violence up to and including genocide during the civil war might be a measure of the degree to which Maya in particular rejected the state's legitimacy in the years leading up to the war. There is no question that the political and economic interests of the oligarchy defended by the state were seriously threatened by revolutionary groups, which had garnered popular support in red and green zones alike.²³ In this chapter I will argue that the military designation of Momostenango as a green zone *is not* historically accurate because it denies widespread popular support, especially among the Maya, for leftist revolutionaries and it denigrates the experiences of the 325 families I know of whose members suffered immeasurably from torture, rape, kidnapping and death. It also obscures the fact that there were many violent incidents that can be directly attributable to the army or Civil Patrols (see Appendix 1). The green zone label, however, *is* useful in understanding support for ultra-rightwing political parties in Momostenango and the hegemonic qualities of the state's control there. I will explore these phenomena in this chapter so that we can better understand the plight of Maya who once supported the guerillas as they seek or refrain from seeking medical care in a community in which everyone's political affiliations are known and where one sometimes sees one's own torturer walking down the street.

²³ See Grandin 2004 for a succinct discussion of how such interests extended beyond Guatemala's borders and were inextricably tied to U.S. Cold War hemispheric policy and capitalism. Not only did the U.S. state department sanction the use of political violence, but it also supplied a great deal of the intelligence, training, and military assistance to allow for the political violence to occur.

Violence in the Green Zone

In the afterword of her 1992 landmark study of Maya cosmology, *Time and the Highland Maya*, Barbara Tedlock, who did extensive fieldwork in Momostenango in the 1970s, noted:

Entire communities were classified and labeled on maps with red, pink, yellow and green pins [by army strategists]. Villages labeled “red” were considered to be in the hands of the guerrillas and thus open to direct attack, “pink” and “yellow” communities were closely watched and received random violence, and those labeled “green” were left alone, because they appeared to be free of subversion....

In the face of potential annihilation, the indigenous leaders of Momostenango made an analytical decision to abandon their dialectical accommodation with the Catholic Action movement. The long history of Momostecan political conservatism, combined with militarism, encouraged members of the community to attack rather than embrace the guerrillas, with the result that the municipality was understood as nonsubversive by the counterinsurgency forces (Tedlock 1992).

In the preface of the 1992-revised edition, Tedlock gave details to how this transpired.

At this point Momostecan ex-military men, many of whom were traditionalists, decided to fight back [against the guerillas]. They captured a car containing six guerrillas and participated in armed confrontations with other guerrilla groups along the northwest borders of the municipality. By demonstrating that their

community was organized, ready, and willing to fight guerrillas, they kept the national military and its scorched-earth counter-insurgency campaign out of Momostenango (Tedlock 1992).

The political conservatism and direct actions of certain members of the local community may very well have spared Momostenango from the violence visited on other highland regions where the army made no distinction between *guerilleros* and their civilian supporters. It is sometimes said that green zones experienced at most “selective” or “random” violence. However, I reviewed municipal death records in Momostenango, collected survivors’ testimonies, and otherwise documented local political mobilization. All sources of data indicated that Momostenango did not escape the violence, nor was the violence it did experience “random” or “selective.” At least 50 Momostecos appear in the official death records, apparently murdered by officially sanctioned forces between 1978 and 1984 (see Appendix 1). Countless others had been forcibly recruited into the military, and dozens had been arrested, imprisoned, raped and tortured.²⁴

The strategy of the “selective violence” that was implemented in green zones throughout Guatemala can only be understood as selective within the qualitative and quantitative realities of genocide. In 1988, anthropologist Beatrice Manz wrote,

²⁴ Much remains to be known about the Guatemalan military’s counterinsurgency project. In 2005 a warehouse in Guatemala was discovered believed to contain over 80 million documents, many regarding clandestine operations conducted by military and paramilitary organizations. I was unable to obtain any records documenting how many men and boys from Momostenango served in the military. The consensus among Momostecos I queried on the subject was that the number of forced recruits was easily in the thousands. Between 1982 and 1995 hundreds of boys were rounded forced into the army every year.

Quite obviously “selective” is a relative term. What is selective compared to Guatemala’s past would hardly be considered selective even compared to countries known as the worst human rights violators in Latin America (Manz 1988 p. 31-32).

While the army, paramilitary civil patrols, right wing death squads, and in some cases the guerillas targeted Maya much more frequently than ladino communities, much of the actual killing, disappearance and torture that occurred in Maya communities were carried out by Maya against other Maya. While the Ladino state versus Maya binary is useful for demonstrating broad structural inequalities between Ladinos and indigenous peoples and their links to genocide (see for example(Hawkins 1984; Smith 1990)), explaining Maya on Maya violence requires a more nuanced analysis. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, there are class fractions among Maya and Maya elites who often throw their lot in with Ladinos.

The political violence that swept through the western highlands in the early 1980’s left no community unaffected. The military’s counterinsurgent strategy tapped into existing class, class fraction and ethnic divisions in order to contain the increasingly potent threat that the popular mobilization and the armed insurgency posed to the state. In order to undermine growing popular support for the guerillas, the military implemented a tactic developed in Vietnam that organized civilian men into *patrullas de autodefensa civil* (civil self defense patrols known as PACs), and assigned them the task of policing their *own* communities from guerilla intrusions. The PACs were established disproportionately in Maya villages and in addition to the indignities they forced on the communities also imposed an onerous and unwanted burden on the patrollers, who stood

guard for 24-hour shifts at least once a week and attended regular trainings. Although the military called service in the PACs “voluntary,” local men between the ages of 16-60 who refused to participate or failed to show up for their duties were threatened with torture, disappearance and death. Although the PACs were widely unpopular within most of the community and among patrollers themselves, they were supported by powerful ladino and Maya elites in Momostenango (described in Chapter Two) that were ideologically aligned with the army.

An examination of how Momostecos’ participation in PACs created and reinforced already existing identities divided by ethnic and class divisions, illuminates the economic and social interests of both Maya and Ladino elites that in turn shaped the distribution and experience of violence in Momostenango. It also helps clarify the obstacles and dangers that survivors face when confronting both their memories and the actual perpetrators of violence.

In other parts of Guatemala the state designated all inhabitants of a region as armed insurgents as a way of legitimizing its use of indiscriminant violence. Momostenango’s constellation of economic, political, and history of militarism, referred to by Tedlock in the passage quoted above, and which crosscut class and ethnic divisions permitted the state to “integrate” the majority Maya population into the project of the state in ways not characteristic of other highland towns. In other words, as I discussed in Chapter 2, Momostenango had one of the first Maya-led municipal governments in the western highlands. Indigenous authorities in Momostenango broke the centuries-old grip Ladinos held on local government in 1955, but shared their ladino predecessors’ willingness to unleash brutalities against any and all who threatened their power.

Now, in 2009, more than a quarter century after the scorched earth policy of the state killed and maimed so many, large numbers of witnesses to violence in Momostenango have died or left. What actually occurred there, to whom and at whose hands, however, is arguably less important than how the past is remembered. The narrative frame of Momostenango as a green zone where not much happened informs everyone's understandings of the past while at the same time influences the way people think about and actualize their present political agency. It also shapes how they think about alternatives for the future. Momostecos who ideologically supported the Marxist revolution or actually took up arms against the state may now continue to be afraid of the repercussions, or in some cases, ashamed that they and the revolution failed. Some, perhaps because of present political ambitions, deny their revolutionary past. Most survivors' testimonies, however, highlight the violence that took place in Momostenango, by whom it was carried out and against whom. Historical clarification of violence that indeed did take place problematizes the negation of their experience inherent in the persistent characterization of Momostenango as a place where "nothing happened" and protects the interests that such a construct protects.

Charles Hale notes the popular ascendancy of the narrative frame of Maya as innocent victims trapped between two armies (or between "two demons"- *dos demonios*) in post-accords Guatemala. He states,

Many civilians—Mayans and Ladinos alike—find in the *dos demonios* image a resonance with previous experience and a source of solace: as victims rather than protagonists, they have less burden of responsibility for the problems spawned by the

violence, greater claim for redress and more room for maneuver in the present (Hale, 2006: 108).

The framing of Maya communities as neutral victims attributes blame equally to the army and the guerillas as though they were entirely independent of the communities of interest that spawned them. It also portrays the army and guerillas as equally brutal, and equally responsible for wartime human rights abuses; a contention disproved by the findings of both independent historical truth commissions discussed earlier. There is no question that the army and its allies were disproportionately responsible for the torture, killing and destruction of entire communities. In red zones the “between two armies” narrative serves post-war state efforts to continue to more or less forcibly assimilate Maya into the nation while severing them from a history in which they could, and did espouse leftist politics. Maya who continue to be threatened for openly embracing leftist politics can, as Hale notes, find some solace in renouncing their past political agency as victimization. Sanitized histories that omit Maya participation in left politics during the war, however, create opportunities for other Maya organizations today to make demands on the state that exclude the economic, political and social demands of the Marxist insurgents during the war. The Guatemalan state has been able to meet many such Pan-Mayan or Mayanista groups’ demands in the post-war era with little socio-economic or political effect on the status quo.

Carlotta McCallister’s (2003) important work in Chajul, a red zone, provides a counter-narrative to the “between two armies” discourse by describing how Maya Chajulenses accepted responsibility for having embraced guerilla warfare. They claim to be “good people” despite their past actions but also express embarrassment about their

failure to succeed in their revolutionary ambitions. McAllister rightfully points out that the historical legacy of Maya agency can only be appreciated through the historical documentation and acknowledgement of Maya participation in revolutionary and leftist politics.

Unlike Chajulenses, whose revolutionary involvement was undeniable, Momostecos who participated in leftist revolutionary politics and the armed insurgency contend with both the narrative that Maya were victims caught between two armies and the narrative that Momostenango was a green zone a place that was not “infected” with communism and thus did not require the clinical sterilization of military annihilation (Schirmer 1999). Although the testimonies that I will present in a later chapter represent only part of the “truth,” they illustrate the challenges that Momosteco survivors face today and the pains they have taken to ensure that the memory of their experience is not denied or forgotten. Healthcare providers’ acknowledgements of such memories are also an important part of healing the individual and social wounds left by the war. In Chapter Six I will explore how discursive and narrative frames of discussing the past also influence decision about the scope of intervention required to treat survivors’ symptoms.

I attribute the endurance of the narrative frame of Momostenango as a green zone not only to the consolation that “between to armies” victimization provides to some survivors but also to the ways in which it absolves the perpetrators who share space with those that they harmed. Despite the impunity human rights abusers have enjoyed since the 1996 peace accords, politicians, military commissioners, and local leaders who perpetrated and often benefited from the violence worry that alternative narratives to

“nothing happened here” will lead to justice or retribution. As survivors’ testimony points out, the violence carried out by local military commissioners has not been forgotten.

Guerillas in Their Midst

The earthquake of February 1976, which killed an estimated 30,000 people, laid bare the social and economic inequalities in Guatemala. Although the epicenter was close to Guatemala City, the vast majority of dead were poor, rural Maya whose inadequately constructed adobe houses collapsed on them as they slept. The inept response of the military government intensified anger within Maya communities and was a source of support for armed revolutionary movements.

By the late 1970s, guerillas that had been operating mostly in Guatemala City and the eastern part of the country since 1960 began to spread throughout the most populated areas of the country and rapidly gained support in the western highlands. The toppling of Nicaraguan President Anastasio Somoza by Sandinistas in 1979 gave hope to Guatemala’s leftists that a successful revolution was possible at home. The two major guerilla groups operating in and around Momostenango were the *Organizacion del Pueblo en Armas*- Revolutionary Army of People in Arms (ORPA) and the *Ejercito Guerrillero de los Pobres*- Guerilla Army of the Poor (EGP). Both were inspired by Marxist theory and practice, but had somewhat different methods of operation, as we shall see.

Many Momostecos supported one or the other of the guerilla groups, particularly in the northern part of the municipality. By 1978 an office of military reserves was set up in Momostenango to facilitate the army’s increased dependence on Momosteco reservists

to monitor and inform on local activities. A fundamental element of the state's counterinsurgent strategy during the civil war was enlisting civilians in rural areas, thereby decentralizing and enhancing the military's capacity for surveillance. Civilian *comisionados militares* (military commissioners) were appointed in rural communities and given broad powers to monitor and control populations for guerilla activity. In many instances commissioners used their army connections to enhance personal interests and take sides in disputes. Unsurprisingly, the army ignored human rights abuses committed by commissioners, allowing the commissioners to build power bases with near complete impunity (CEH 1998 Volume 3; Chapter 2: 254).

“Military commissioners” were drawn from the ranks of the Maya who ran the municipal government and who had also held positions of traditional authority (*alcaldes auxiliares* and *principales*). (Earlier they had held important positions of power within the plantation system as *contratistas* and *caporals*). Thus Momostenango's unique history of militarism provided a means of social and economic mobility for some Maya men and created a small but powerful base of military veterans loyal to the state. They mobilized in support of the state even before the military commenced its scorched earth campaign.

Another factor that shaped wartime conflict and Maya on Maya violence in Momostenango was the insurgency's organizing and military strategy. As of 1976, guerillas attempted to incorporate and organize in the municipality. No one-guerilla group dominated the department of Totonicapán. Generally, the EGP worked in the north and east, closer to Quiché'. In Totonicapán, it had a strong base of support in areas bordering Momostenango to the north and east. ORPA had its base to the south. Both the

EGP and ORPA organized guerilla cells among Momostenango Maya. There were significant differences in their methods of work. The EGP organized department-wide *Comite Clandestino Locales* (Local Clandestine Committees or CCLs). The CCLs were responsible for many of the militant activities common in Quiché'. The CCLs also organized the *Fuerzas Irregulares Locales* (FILs), the lowest level of organization within the EGP, and played key roles in deciding what action they were to take. The FILs incorporated and organized new members, promoted conscious-raising and propaganda and provided local defense.

In Momostenango, the work of the EGP's FILs was done openly. They held meetings in people's houses and invited experts and organizers to discuss the problems faced by poor people. They explained the reasons for their struggle and they publicly invited people to join the EGP. The ladino organizers of the FIL were not from Momostenango and they did not take many safety measures when they arrived in the rural hamlets. They distributed M-16 rifles and grenades among members, openly carried arms and left their faces exposed. Residents reported that it was common to see armed members of the FILs talking with the villagers in the early mornings.

EGP strategists were attracted by the extensive networks the Catholic Action movement had already developed in Maya communities (Perera 1993). Although Catholic Action developed under socially and politically conservative church hierarchy and had become a major anti-communist and anti-traditionalist movement in much of the highlands, it still served in many Maya communities to galvanize support for the guerillas (Falla 1994). As earlier discussed, after Vatican II and the 1968 Medellin Latin American Bishop's Conference, a growing number of priests professed the teachings of Liberation

Theology. For the first time the church ordained Guatemalan Maya, like Tomás García, who also embraced traditional Maya spirituality. In northern Quiché, liberation theology Catholic priests who helped develop cooperatives and protested the treatment of their Ixil Maya parishioners, were targets of the army and many were assassinated (Manz 2004; Sanford 2004). The EGP recruited liberation theology catechists and quickly found a groundswell of Maya support in many communities in northern Quiché and in communities relatively near to Momostenango (Gonzalez 2002).

By 1975 the EGP were assassinating ladino *finqueros* (plantation owners). Emboldened by the groundswell of Maya support in many Quiché municipalities during 1980-1981, the EGP began to mobilize entire communities. It appeared to them that it was inevitable that the insurgency would triumph, given its massive support in the countryside. However, the EGP was not able to adequately arm or defend its supporters and when the army set up permanent bases in conflict zones, local Maya paid heavily for supporting the EGP. One decommissioned member of EGP described the events of 1980 and 1981,

It was a special time for us. We were animated by the support we found in the villages. When we went to Santa Lucía la Reforma we found that so many people were tired of being abused by *los mero meros* (the bosses) who ruled the town like they were kings. They were abusing their power and people were tired of years and years of the same thing. We began to organize the community into local units in many of the towns. We were so supported by the people that it began to get difficult to maintain. It may have been a miscalculation or an error on our part. The local groups began to take revenge against the people in their communities

that had exploited them. When the army responded they showed us that they were beasts far worse than we had imagined (Interview with DL, 05-05-2002).

In Santa Lucia la Reforma, the municipality adjacent to Momostenango, members of the local CCL of the EGP assassinated political bosses who were serving as military commissioners. One survivor of political violence from Santa Lucia stated,

In 1981 the EGP brought many of the military commissioners to the plaza and killed them. After that they had many people begin to support them. Then the military came (Interview with DJ, 03-05-2002).

The military action taken by EGP tied into long standing local disputes about municipal autonomy and ladino/K'iche' ethnic disputes (Gonzalez 2002). The killing of four military commissioners in Santa Lucia la Reforma by the CCL drew the attention of the army as well as local residents. By the end of the year similar events that had occurred in a number of other places were met with decisive response from the army. One of the members of the CCL in Santa Lucia Reforma stated,

They bombed the *aldeas* of San Bartolo Jocotenango and San Antonio Ilotenango in Quiche' in 1981. The people that survived had to flee their homes. I hid 400 people from there in a hole on my land. I had trenches on my land. We dug these for when the airplanes came to bomb. The military commissioners said they were for traps [to catch the army]. The authorities came to me and told me that I was a guerilla. I went to Mexico on March 5th 1982 (Interview with DG, 04-13-2002).

In Momostenango, the parish priest, an Italian Franciscan, was ideologically wary of liberation theology. He warned parishioners against the “communist threat” and advised them to reject the guerillas. His message appealed to many indigenous Momostecos, who for years had increasingly found ways to leave coastal plantation work for higher pay, higher status jobs as *comerciantes*. Although most still lived in poverty, they were not subject to the same cruelties as many of their indigenous neighbors to the north in the departments of Huehuetenango and Quiché’. The priest’s warnings to not be “deceived” by Marxist revolutionaries contrasted with the views of many of priests in areas like the Ixcán who were sympathetic to the guerillas and in some instances directly collaborated with them. The Momostenango priest kept a close watch on the catechists and focused more on evangelization than on liberation. The surveillance and control exerted by Momostenango’s religious hierarchy hindered the EGP from tapping into existing solidarity networks as much as it could in other areas.

ORPA’s strategy in Momostenango was different than that of the EGP. It sought to utilize local resources for *abasto* (supply). Many Momosteco Maya sympathized, supported and even joined ORPA. One Momosteco Maya woman from Racana, a northern rural village reported,

We were tired of the abuse. The *jefes* (bosses) from the center [of town] were abusive. They lived in big houses and had their pick up trucks. We didn’t have even a sack of corn to feed our children. The [Maya] *contratistas* and military commissioners were especially abusive...my children collaborated with the URNG. First one of my daughters and then one of my sons. When my daughter came back she told me that her husband died in combat in Chimaltenango. My

son left but is still alive. He went to Mexico. My daughter died. My husband died of sadness. I suffer from sadness. I knew that my children were with the URNG. I agreed with them (Interview with JJ, 03-05-2002).

Most of ORPA's military actions took place south and west of Momostenango. ORPA's major stronghold was on the slopes surrounding the volcano Tajumulco in the department of San Marcos. ORPA also had fronts along the Pacific piedmont and in the department of Solola. The geographic features, discussed in Chapter Two, combined with high population density in Momostenango did not provide adequate cover and protection for retreat for regular guerilla combat operations. The close proximity of neighbors and multiple roads that entered and exited the town provided local military commissioners a high level of surveillance and posed a serious risk for guerilla collaborators. Given these conditions, ORPA operations in Momostenango were mostly clandestine and focused around *concientizacion* (consciousness-raising) and garnering material and economic support, as well as recruiting combatants from sympathizers among the local population. As we shall see, testimonies about wartime collaboration with guerillas from Momosteco survivors of political violence differed from those in neighboring Santa Lucia la Reforma. The different formations of resistance to the army, which developed in each municipality, have implications for survivors and how wartime political violence is talked about and remembered today.

As the name suggests, the EGP (The Guerilla Army of the Poor) sought its base within the poor masses of primarily rural Guatemalans. It is difficult to attach a uniform ideology to the EGP because conflicting interests and visions for the organization drove

its leaders. One of the general criticisms of the EGP was that it emphasized changing Guatemala's highly unequal class structure without adequately addressing Maya concerns about structural racism into its philosophy and it replicated racial hierarchies present in Guatemalan society into its own organizational structure (Jonas 1991). Of equal concern was the EGP strategy of organizing Maya communities as a whole without being able to adequately arm them so they could defend themselves against the military (Jonas 1991). Like all military organizations (particularly revolutionary ones), the motivations that led individuals to enlist were multiple. Given the structured paramilitary surveillance of daily life in Momostenango by the Civil Patrols (PAC), the political activities of the FILs posed a very real danger for non-combatant Momostecos.

While the EGP conducted both military and political operations in Momostenango, ORPA operated primarily as a military organization. The work of ORPA was secretive and clandestine. ORPA organized the *Resistencia Popular Campesina* (RPC), whose activities included: incorporation of militants, organization of guerilla cells, community defense and dissemination of propaganda. I interviewed Momosteco collaborators with ORPA that said that the organization of cells was so secretive that militants rarely knew anyone in the organization besides the person that recruited them and the members of their cell. Members of ORPA used ski caps to hide their identity and were armed during their operations.

Unlike the EGP, ORPA included Maya leaders among its higher-ranking military commanders such as Efraim Bamaca (a.k.a. *Comandante Everardo*) (Harbury 1997). This was ideologically important for ORPA and one of its leaders, Gaspar Ilom, the son of Nobel laureate Miguel Angel Asturias, emphasized the racial divides in Guatemalan

society as well as class divisions (Bastos and Camus 2003). While the EGP, much more focused on class conflict, named its military fronts after Latin American revolutionary icons like Che Guevarra, ORPA named its fronts after members of its ranks that had fallen in combat, including Luis Ixmata, a Maya.

The two guerrilla organizations did not plan their operations together. On one occasion, after the process of negotiating the peace accords had begun, members of the two organizations bumped into each other in the center of Momostenango while they were both painting graffiti. They argued about who had the right to paint in certain places. One of the ORPA militants that was there that night recalled,

We almost began shooting at each other. Not because we thought each other were the enemy, but because we argued about who had the right to be there (Interview with DL, 12-31-2001).

Eventually, they agreed to where each organization should paint that evening and organized the possibility of doing joint actions in the future. The same militant informed me that similar types of situations occurred in other parts of Totonicapán.

By the end of 1982 it was clear to leaders of both ORPA and EGP that they were not fighting the same type of war they had envisioned just a year earlier. The military counterinsurgency strategy to attack the civilian Maya population as it did in Quiché' and the consequential waves of refugees that fled through Momostenango sent a very clear message to Momosteco Maya about the stakes involved in revolution. Had the EGP's triumphant overconfidence of early 1981 not been crushed by the military later that year, the military designation of Momostenango as a green zone could very likely have been

It was, however, forced into a deeper clandestine mode from which it has not completely emerged.

Beginning in 1974, pamphlets of the communist party, PGT (Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajadores, or Guatemala Workers' Party) were being distributed in Momostenango. In 1976 the *Comite' de Unidad Campesina* (CUC or Committee of United Campesinos) a peasants' rights organization, began having house meetings. A group of young Maya activists, including Felipe Relac, whose story we will hear later, clandestinely brought speakers into town to speak about social, economic, and political concerns. At the meetings the organizers passed out a publication for the "formation of communities of workers" entitled *De Sol a Sol*.



The articles addressed the need for *campesinos* (peasants) to organize into labor unions in order to demand their rights, but ignored the racism that Maya experienced. Nevertheless, the publication was passed from house to house. One of the men who distributed the publication explained,

There was a group of us [Maya] that were the first ones in our families that had learned to read or write. Groups of neighbors would all come to one house so that we could read them *Sol a Sol*. The message was about how the rich landowners and bosses (*patrones*) in the factories would take advantage of the poor. We understood that they did not talk about racism, but the message still stuck with us. We knew that we were the poor (*los pobres*) (Interview with DA 01-17-2002).

For these young Maya, the words in *De Sol a Sol* resonated with their deep understandings of poverty. Many of them had grown up doing seasonal work on the plantations picking coffee with their parents literally from sun up to sun down. Most had lost family members to treatable illnesses like pneumonia and dysentery. All had at least a rudimentary class analysis and knew that Ladinos were not the only Momostecos who discriminated against them. Maya elite who lived in town sent their children to schools in Quetzaltenango and Totonicapán, spoke to them in Spanish despite knowing K'iche', and were generally paternalistic towards them. There was even a Maya-owned restaurant in town that refused to serve poorer Maya from outlying communities who came on market days.

In an effort to take control of local politics from the upper class Maya establishment, a group of young Maya activists formed the “Gallo” party between 1976-

1980. The Gallo movement provided a forum to denounce injustices in Guatemala in general and Momostenango in particular. It was a youth movement that had broken ties to the then ruling Christian Democratic Party because of its choice of conservative candidates. Although they never won an election, Gallo party organizers succeeded in mobilizing a sector of the local Maya population that had previously been silent. From this same group of young activists a small bi-weekly newspaper called *El Momosteco* emerged. *El Momosteco* published razor-sharp commentaries on local issues including class and race relations.

Other self-help organizations flourished. In outlying rural communities local leaders formed cooperatives between 1970 and 1980. One called *Spanish Chiquito* was established by local farmers in the area of Canquixaja and had 180-200 associates. Itinerant priests that served in Momostenango and FENACOAC (the Guatemalan National Credit Union Federation) supported the cooperatives. FENACOAC supplied low interest loans to farmers to buy chemical fertilizers and seed. The combination of credit and fertilizers allowed farmers to plant and harvest corn twice a year and harvest higher yields, which lessened their reliance on coastal plantation work for subsistence. Maya organizers said Ladinos and Maya elites from the town center were suspicious of the cooperatives not only because they were beginning to change their client-patron relationships with rural Maya, but also because they had the potential to become a hub for further organizing of Maya peasants. Many of the leaders of these cooperatives were the first Momostecos targeted for repression in the 1970s.

As the economy slid into recession during the late 1970s and state-sponsored repression increased, a group of Momostecos formed a human rights group. The group

focused on consciousness-raising. It later became known as *Oxlajuj Noj* (thirteen wisdoms) in 1983. The consciousness raising of these popular organizations, combined with the teachings of liberation theology now being spread by members of the Catholic Action movement,²⁵ percolated up within the rural Maya communities in Momostenango, awakening new possibilities for local politics that included both racial equality and rights and the need to address extreme class disparities in Momostenango and Guatemala as a whole.

Development of the Repressive Apparatus in Momostenango

Until 1977, the army had maintained a presence in Momostenango through the military commissioners (*comisionados militares*), who had a local command post. When it learned of the presence of guerilla activity, the army convened a meeting of the military commissioners and equipped the “commissioners” with Galil rifles as well as Uzi and Thomson sub-machine guns, ordering them to keep all village activities under surveillance and to report any suspicious or guerilla activity to the military base²⁶.

The abrupt militarization of the already powerful and oppressive civilian government inspired a deep sense of dread in most of the Momostecos I interviewed. One Ladino from Momostenango that later joined the ORPA stated,

²⁵ Several Maya leaders involved in the cooperative movements from Momostenango were trained at the Instituto Catolico de Capacitacion and the Instituto Santiago Indigena, which were regional and national level training institutes that, despite their anti-communist origins, became important centers for Pan-Maya consciousness-raising after Vatican II.

²⁶ The meeting was held at the 1715 military zone in Quetzaltenango.

Many of us had hoped that we were nearing the end of the dictatorship. It felt like it could not go on forever and that it would die a natural death. The people were tired of being exploited and felt they could stop it. When the cruelest members of our community returned from their meeting with the most advanced weapons it stirred up hatred in many of us. I had to leave (Interview with DA, 03-05-2002).

Some of the more zealous military commissioners controlled the roads that went into the rural areas and ordered the commissioners from the hamlets to inform of any visitors and to document the reasons why anyone entered or left the hamlet. The commissioners took it upon themselves to interrogate people in their own homes. They would ask the head of household and their neighbors who their visitors were, why they had come and how long they had stayed. With the government's backing, military commissioners kept a tight control on local activities.

Between 1976 and 1978, the military commissioners forcibly recruited 150 young men for military service every two years. Beginning in 1980, recruitment intensified under the leadership of the *contratista* and head of the *Plana Mayor*, Leon Chanchabac. The number of forced recruits more than quadrupled to 450 each year. The recruitments were carried out on market days three times a year during the months of January, March and September. Military commissioners, civil patrollers (PACs) and soldiers closed the perimeter of the town center and were seen beating and dragging boys through the market to the municipal building where the *Plana Mayor* had its *comandancia*.

After Gen. Efraín Ríos Montt seized presidential power in 1982 and martial law was declared throughout the country, the army accelerated the formation of the PACs and

intensified its use of terror. A week after the coup, the army ordered all of the *alguaciles* (constables, messengers) from each hamlet in Momostenango to attend a meeting and demanded that they round up all former soldiers. A Momostenango meeting was held in the military reserve command post (in the municipal building), attended by former corporals, sergeants, and army specialists; a colonel from the military base in Quetzaltenango presided over it. At the meeting the *Plana Mayor* was formed. The *Plana Mayor* united and coordinated the activities of the military reserve command and the PAC. Leon Chanchavac and another man were placed in charge of the *Plana Mayor*, in the positions of commander and sub-commander. One Momosteco who lived near the headquarters of the *Plana Mayor* stated,

Chico Leon (Leon Chanchabac) was the greatest assassin of the military commissioners. If he couldn't have his way with someone that he didn't like, he would call the army and they would come with hoods over their heads and torture or disappear them (Interview with RV 01-17-2002).

Parallel to the *Plana Mayor*, the military junta eliminated the position of the municipal mayor and named Gustavo Lang as *intendente* and another Ladino as *vice-intendente*. The son of the *intendente*, Gustavo Lang Jr. was a Colonel in the army, as were the sons of Emilio Perez and Arnolfo Cifuentes. All three had been mayors of Momostenango and all three were personally acquainted with now President Rios Montt via the Adolfo V. Hall military academy. These former mayors shared several important traits: a history of military service, a competitive drive to outdo each other, and a paternalistic relationship to the poor rural Maya majority of the municipality.

In 1998, a year after the peace accords were signed, anthropologist Charles Hale spoke with Col. Cifuentes over a bottle of Johnny Walker at a military banquet. He quotes Cifuentes from their conversation,

[Our society] is getting more and more mixed. In my town, Momostenango, before there were thirteen [ladino] families. All kinds of racism and segregation were practiced... Now, those people no longer exist. They're either gone or mixed. It's a different reality now, of mixing, no differences. *Tratamos con el alcalde, por ejemplo, sin ninguna distinción* (We treat the [Indian] mayor, for example, as if he were one of us)... (Indians) have customs that just don't change very rapidly. It has to be little by little, without raising big expectations. The army is a great motor of integration. We teach [indigenous people] many things, and with that they return to their communities changed. Brush your teeth, shave, dress well, eat at the table and not on the floor- these are the values they learn (Hale 2006:50-51).

Col. Cifuentes's comments help flesh out how the narrative frame of Momostenango as a green zone was constructed. Town Ladinos like Cifuentes, who fashioned themselves as the harbingers of modernity and "culture" were willing to accept Momosteco Maya elites because they had "integrated" into dominant culture through the military. But, as discussed in Chapter Two, Maya ascendancy to political power at the municipal level required them to convince state authorities that they were even more anti-communist than their ladino oppressors. According to Cifuentes's framework of "integration," Mayas, in order to assimilate, have to do more than just abandon patterned

behaviors that Cifuentes stereotypically associates with them. Cifuentes also requires they embrace military discipline (and presumably military doctrine and ideology) as Momostenango's Maya elites had earlier done. From this militarized optic, a green zone is an area within which Maya are just like Ladinos, and nobody supports revolutionary class politics.

A week after the swearing in of the *Plana Mayor* in 1982, the PAC began operating in the hamlets. They were armed and began military training. Every civil patroller was required to take a shift patrolling once a week, from six in the evening until six in the morning. All civil patrollers needed to receive military training from 8 a.m. until 4 p.m. on Sundays. Men who neglected their duties in the PAC ran the risk of being accused of being guerilla sympathizers with all the attendant consequences. The PAC contained both Ladinos and indigenous in town and was composed almost entirely of Maya in the outlying villages.

In both town and hamlets, patrollers were ordered to control access to and from their location, control any activities of communication between people in public areas and to ask for papers of anyone traveling after dark. The army put special emphasis on patrolling the hamlets of Santa Ana, Xequemeya and Canquixaja. The patrollers were well armed and vigilant. Patrollers were ordered to detain anyone traveling by foot and transport him or her to military headquarters in the municipal building. The PAC put a heavy burden on its civilian members as their duties required at least one full day of patrolling obligations and at least half a day for sleep recovery. This onus was greater for poorer rural families who already were struggling to make ends meet with a seven-day workweek. Patrollers in town convinced the military command that the patrols were

unnecessary there after about a year, but the PAC continued in the rural communities almost until the peace accords were signed in 1996. Rural residents recalled the added stress of having to maintain their cornfields and earn a living on a shorter workweek. Everyone noticed untended fields and, to the military, they were a sign the owner was doing subversive activities instead of farming.

On one occasion, civil patrollers captured two girls who were members of the guerillas. They tied them up, beat them, and took them to the *Plana Mayor* in town where they tortured and finally disappeared them. Each night 6-7 members of the *Plana Mayor* took turns at the command post. They had direct communication with the army's military base in Quetzaltenango, which was used as a torture center. Anyone suspected of being a guerrilla was transported there for interrogation.

The obligatory Sunday trainings were held at the soccer field in town. Army soldiers conducted the exercises and administered punishments. Each patroller had to do calisthenics and then 150 were selected to do target practice using M1 and M2 rifles. They used civilian houses as a backstop without taking measures to protect inhabitants. Each patroller took five shots. Those that appeared to be familiar with guns were accused of being guerillas. The chief of the *Plana Mayor*, who gave the orders, insulted and abused elderly men and boys below legal age were if they could not complete the exercises. On several occasions the patrollers were ordered to conduct investigations in order to find supply stashes for the guerillas, or the guerillas themselves. They were taught several forms of conducting sweeps, like the hammer and anvil, where one large wall of soldiers forces enemy combatants to retreat into another wall of troops. On one occasion, the patrollers conducted a sweep from Maquicha (3 miles away) all the way to

town using the hammer and anvil technique until they completely surrounded the perimeter of the town center. They kept the perimeter from 6 in the morning until 6 at night. The operation was harsh and oppressive to everyone. Civilians could not leave or enter the perimeter and patrollers were not allowed to drink water or to eat as they held their positions.

On different occasions, platoons of army soldiers were stationed in Momostenango adding to the fear local residents experienced as a result of the militarization of their daily life. In the early 1980s, when the army first set up a base in Momostenango, two or three truckloads of military units were stationed in the municipal building. Later, military units were stationed in a number of hamlets. These military units were implicated in the rapes of many women as well as the theft of crops and property of the townspeople. The military also forced people to bring them firewood. One Momosteco Maya who lived in Patzite', a *barrio* in the center of town described the experience of being a child in the 1980s,

I didn't have the opportunity to play soccer, go to the park, or buy things at the store. When I was 12 my brother and I had to be in constant hiding. My parents told us that the army would kidnap us or interrogate us if they caught us. They told me I couldn't grow a beard or a mustache. I never finished going to school because I was too afraid to leave the house. My parents wouldn't let us leave the house. I wanted to have a good education and graduate for my father. I wanted to try to find a way to have a normal life. We heard about what happened in Nebaj. I heard that many boys were being murdered or sent to the army. It was terrifying news for a child. We asked my father "Papa why don't we study by correspondence." He said that it was too expensive to send us to a private school. He would say to us, "The day that I lose my sons is the day of my disgrace."

I realized that my father had his reasons to be scared. Many of my friends were tortured and disappeared. During one year the army had set up their camp right next to our house at *Los Riscos*. I could see them torturing people and raping the girls. They were only 12, 13, or 14 years old. One time I was traveling by the exit to San Juan Ostoncalco to try to enroll in school and I was stopped by the army. They grabbed me and said, “You are just the little man that we have been looking for.” I don’t know why but someone in the bus convinced them to let me go. It terrified me. I had heard from friends that they put young kids like myself on the front line with barely any training. I stopped using the bus.

One time I was in the woods cutting a tree for firewood and the soldiers found me. They threatened me and said that I needed to tell them who was involved with the guerillas and they wanted information about my neighbors. I told them that I knew nothing. They told me that they knew where I lived and my family and if they found me again that I would not be so lucky. They stole my wood (Interview with RV, 01-17-20)

Despite the imposed military occupation, the maintenance of the green zone also required the military to legitimate itself. At times, its abuses became intolerable, even to elites in town. On more than one occasion local residents denounced soldiers for stealing, raping and other abuses and their anger was such that the army had to temporarily relocate. Momostecos, who had joined the guerillas, took action on specific occasions to defend the community.

Leaders of both EGP and ORPA that I interviewed confirmed that they planned the execution of Leon Chanchabac, the chief of the *Plana Mayor*, as a direct response to his abuses. On a pair of occasions their plans failed because the civil patrollers successfully confronted them. Neither organization wanted to engage in battle within the municipality for fear of putting the local population at risk and tried to avoid engaging

with the PACs. On some occasions when they accidentally encountered PACs in the countryside they would exchange fire but would shoot over patrollers' heads to avoid killing them. Patrollers reported that they did so as well to avoid being accused of not defending the town. On July 9, 1983, a market day in Momostenango, Leon Chanchabac was shot and killed at the entrance of the market along with his driver/bodyguard, ex-combatants of the guerilla confirmed that the *ajusticiamiento* (political assassination; literally "the making of justice") was carried out by the EGP. The execution of Leon Chancavac frightened the *Plana Mayor*, and its leaders reduced their counterinsurgent activities.

Attacks against Traditional Indigenous Authority Structures

When Gen. Rios Montt assumed the presidency in 1982, the military's counterinsurgent operations intensified, dramatically altering traditional indigenous authority structures in Momostenango. The authority of the *autoridades auxiliares* (auxiliary authorities- also known as *alcaldes indigenas* (indigenous mayors)), the highest legal authorities in Maya communities, was subsumed under the military structure. Prior to the 1980s, *alcaldes auxiliares* shared several qualities. They were usually respected elders and practitioners of traditional Maya spirituality, *Aj Q'ijab'* (daykeepers). *Autoridades auxiliares* served several functions in their communities. First, due to the long history of discrimination by the justice of peace (up until recent years an office held only by Ladinos) in the town center, Maya from rural *aldeas* resolved most legal disputes within their own local communities through the *autoridades auxiliares*. Second, the *autoridades auxiliares* served as conduits for the flow of information and resources

between rural communities and the municipal government. Third, *autoridades auxiliares* were responsible for gathering input from local residents and making decisions for the well-being of the entire community including decisions about: communal well-being and communal services; education; organization; representation; political and fiscal policy; planning; administering justice; and coordination and communication within and between communities.²⁷ In short, *autoridades auxiliares* serve as the highest local authorities in Maya communities and they are part of a set of ancient institutions based on customary principles within local clans.

When Gustavo Lang was appointed *intendente*, he converted the *autoridades auxiliares* into an important part of the local counterinsurgent military structure. Lang dismissed the *alcaldes auxiliares* from their responsibility of reporting to the municipal government twice weekly and ordered them to instead report once a week to him and his administrators and the rest of the time to the military commissioner in their community. In some cases the *alcaldes auxiliares* served in both responsibilities, but in all instances they were subordinated to local military control. The resulting arrangement had profound effects on the structure of outlying Maya communities in Momostenango.

Under the control of *intendente* Lang, *alcaldes auxiliares* were required to monitor and inform on their neighbors for the *Plana Mayor*. The *Plana Mayor* relieved some *alcaldes auxiliares* of their duties and replaced them with other local residents that they selected. During this period, many of the *alcaldes auxiliares* that were chosen by the *Plana Mayor* were evangelical Protestants hostile to traditional Maya spirituality. Long

²⁷ See (Taquitza, et al. 1999)

standing traditions within Maya communities in Momostenango were changed by the imposition of these new counterinsurgent structures of authority. Several *Aj Q'ijab* I spoke with reported that after the military government instituted PACs in local communities, evangelical Christian military commissioners, emboldened by their new power and acting on religious conviction, began to destroy centuries-old clan altars (*warabal ja*). One daykeeper from Racana stated,

They killed and disappeared many of us. They also killed us for being daykeepers. During “la violencia” they put us in jail for burning copal. They killed many *Aj Q'ijab*. We couldn't speak with each other at night. If they saw a candle burning they would accuse us of talking with the guerilla (Interview with JA, 03-05-2002).

Another former daykeeper from Santa Lucia la Reforma stated,

I was an *Aj Q'ij* before. I now know that whoever does harm to his neighbor will not enter the kingdom of glory. I am an evangelical now. I found God and I don't want to remember the past (Interview with DJ, 1-25-2002).

Residents from Canquixaja and Xequemeya reported that at one point evangelical Christian military commissioners issued an identity card to other evangelical residents that allowed them to travel to and from the town center more freely than Catholics or traditional practitioners (*aj poronik*).

Through the structure of the PAC, auxiliary authorities had to take orders directly from the army, control their communities for the army and report directly to the army. They had to report any movement of civilians. For example, prior to the formation of the

PACs, when problems occurred in local communities they were resolved by the *alcaldes auxiliares*, who could convene local residents without notifying the mayor. Under the PACs, meetings of three or more people were outlawed unless prior consent was given by the military.

Another disruption to traditional practices that was altered by the PACs was the ability of local communities to protect themselves from natural and manmade disasters. For example, prior to the formation of the PACs during forest fires, local authorities would call the community together using a drum called the *pregon*. If there were a forest fire, community residents would respond to the call of the *pregon*. After the military's counterinsurgent strategy subverted traditional practices in the early 1980s and *alcaldes auxiliares* were prevented from exercising their authority, forest fires increasingly burned down Momostenango's forests.

Other activities vital to community well being, such as road repairs and the maintenance of the community water supply, were removed from the charge of local committees during military rule. Prior to 1982, indigenous authorities had been in charge of overseeing and maintaining sources of water, piping, and shade for the local population year round. They together with the *regidor*, would petition the *Aj Q'ij, Jalach Winiq* (Leader of all of the *Aj Q'ijab*) to perform a ceremony to maintain the water spring, to bring a bountiful harvest, to bring rain, and for peace in the community.

The *alcaldes auxiliares* were also in charge of the water tanks around the town. As *intendente*, Gustavo Lang removed their responsibility. He imposed a tax and removed the tank in the central park for people to get their water. Before these

responsibilities were governed by the *alcaldes auxiliares*, now they are run by the mayor's office.

Another effect of the period of violence was the shift of procedure in the courts. *Alcaldes auxiliares* no longer have the same authority to arbitrate disputes between neighbors and spouses. One indigenous elder that I interviewed stated,

Some [*alcaldes auxiliares*] may do it anyway but they risk being arrested. They can be accused of usurping authority. This change has given way to corruption in the courts. Now, whoever has money pays off the judge. You could not do that with the traditional authorities. It was very risky. The structure of the traditional authorities does not open itself up to corruption. The *alcaldes auxiliares* make sure that a man provides food for his wife and children. The judges offer a piece of paper that says a couple is divorced, but they don't do anything to ensure the nutrition of the wife and children. They don't orient the spouses towards their roles within the community. They try to reconcile them by throwing them in jail. If they are in jail they cannot bring money into the house.

Land disputes are more difficult to reconcile now. When there is a boundary dispute, the proceedings with the judge take a long time. Both parties involved in the dispute pay more to litigate the problem than if they were to resolve it within the community. The *alcaldes auxiliares* make a measurement. They bring a rope to measure and they work it out there. What they have done is replaced a traditional system with a legal system, that isn't very legal.

Although customary law and authority continues to be practiced in Momostenango, the military's counterinsurgent strategy imposed new and competing authority structures that continue to undermine traditional Maya authorities.

Arriving at the Truth

As discussed in Chapter 1, a Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) was established as part of the peace negotiations between the Guatemalan Army and the URNG. The Catholic Archdiocese set up its own independent project of Recuperation of Historical Memory (REMHI), which preceded the CEH. During the peace process the military originally opposed the formation of a truth commission fearing it could become a tribunal that sought justice. Despite military threats to derail the peace process, international and internal pressures persuaded the Guatemalan government to agree to the formation of CEH. The scope and authority of the CEH was demarcated, however, when the guerilla leadership capitulated to the army's demands that information in the CEH would be used for clarification purposes, but not as an avenue to seek justice (Ross 2000:184). In a sense the CEH promised to provide Guatemalans truth, but not justice.

The Catholic Archdioceses, still coping with massive losses of priests, catechists and parishioners that had taken the teachings of liberation theology to heart, took on the task of detailed documentation of human rights abuses during the war. The Archdiocese, under the leadership of Bishop Juan Gerardi, maintained that survivor truth-telling would give new power to the victims of political violence, create conditions for progressive social change, and was a precursor to healing the individual and social trauma caused by the civil war. Despite limited time and resources to document 36 years of war, the

REMHI report, entitled *Nunca Mas* (Never Again), produced systematic and detailed accounting of wartime political violence that disproved military assertions that insurgent and state forces were equally to blame and placed the vast majority of the violence squarely on the shoulders of the Guatemalan army and government paramilitary forces. The report also produced a standard that the CEH report would, at the least, have to match.

The military's response to the *Nunca Mas* findings sent an unequivocal message to those seeking social justice in Guatemala: The truth is dangerous. Within 48 hours of delivering the report findings to the public, Monsignor Juan Gerardi was found in a pool of blood with his skull crushed in by a cinderblock in the carport of the rectory where he lived. During the investigation of his death government prosecutors alleged, among other things, that he had been killed by an arthritic German Shepherd dog and a homeless man. Although several high-ranking military officers were eventually convicted of orchestrating the murder, the intellectual authors of the bishop's murder were allegedly members of the top brass of the Guatemalan army and have not had to stand trial (Goldman 2007).

Although the Prelate of the Diocese of Los Altos Quetzaltenango-Totonicapán (which included the department of Totonicapán at the time of the commission) supported and participated in the REMHI project, he left the decision to the local priests of whether or not individual parishes would participate in the truth commission. At the time, the parochial priests in Momostenango were involved in the Catholic charismatic movement and, according to Momosteco survivors, blocked the work of the commission. They

would not permit truth commission meetings to be held in order to collect local testimonies. One member of Catholic Action in Momostenango said,

Padre Salvador said that we did not need a truth commission in Momostenango.

He did not acknowledge the people that had lost family and had been affected by the war. He was very close to the business owners in the center of town. The people were afraid to talk, and they knew that he was a reactionary. They stayed quiet (Interview with DA, 03-07-2002).

The REMHI method of investigation required the solidarity of a core *pastoral team* within each parish. When the investigation phase of the project began in 1995, the peace accords had not yet been signed. Interviews were carried out in a fragile and uncertain climate. Knowing the difficulty of accessing testimony, particularly from rural and monolingual indigenous participants, the REMHI organizers sought to support the CEH commission by using its extensive network of local parishes. Pastoral teams were trained to ask seven basic questions: Who was the victim? What happened? Who did it? Why did it happen? What did you do to cope with the situation? What effect did the event have on you and your community? What needs to be done so that violation doesn't happen again? Since the pastoral teams were composed of local residents, the teams were already familiar with local history and could speak the local languages. Their knowledge of the local contexts minimized the amount of effort required to obtain relevant testimony.

While the familiarity that the pastoral teams had with the local communities was one of their greatest strengths, it was also one of their greatest potential weaknesses.

Given the tenuous conditions in which the project was being conducted, it was never certain that the safety of the participants was guaranteed. The high level of recognition that team members attained in their communities provided a sense of security to some and to others it was an easy way to *quemarse* (to get burned) or to be exposed.

The REMHI and CEH truth commissions began their investigations in the context of silence born of fear. The gross distortions that the government presented about the nature of the civil war (i.e., it was a war in which civilians were abused and manipulated by the guerilla armies) were designed to legitimate the military's exaggerated response to insurgent revolt. The authors of the REMHI and CEH reports made special efforts to explain the historical context and causes of Guatemala's internal conflict. Both framed the fratricidal violence as a proxy war of U.S. Cold War policy. Both described the violence perpetrated by the army, PACs and military commissioners in isolated areas as genocidal. By focusing on the red zones, primarily located in the departments of Quiché, Huehuetenango, Chimaltenango, and Alta and Baja Verapaz, both the REMHI and CEH investigations traced the steps of the military's bloodiest campaigns. Despite whatever theoretical or methodological shortcomings REMHI and CEH may have had, they were both groundbreaking (REMHI in particular) in that they unequivocally discredited and denounced the explanations provided by the Guatemalan government and placed the blame for the vast majority of killings on the government's military and paramilitary organizations. Despite the limitations of not being able to individualize responsibility or have legal ramifications, the commission chose to interpret its mandate broadly and produced an analysis of political violence that began not in 1960 with the outbreak of the civil war, but instead, with the colonization of Guatemala in the sixteenth century.

Although the reports were explicitly prohibited from being used for prosecuting victimizers, there is now little secret about which high-ranking military officials' ordered human rights abuses and genocide.

Differences between the military's counterinsurgent strategies in Maya communities (i.e., massacres vs. selective violence) did have an effect on the way that the survivors' stories were incorporated into truth commission reports. The decision of Momostenango's priests to not participate in the REMHI project reflected the powerful local interests opposed to recognizing counter-narratives to their interpretations of wartime political violence. The absence of testimony from Momostenango in truth commission reports had the effect of reifying the false assertion that nothing happened there. The few Momostecos that I interviewed who had actually seen the published reports noted that the local institution that left the greatest impact in Momostenango was the PAC. The *Plana Mayor*, the *junta de comandantes*, and the *intendente* carried out human rights abuses, subverted traditional authority structures and, despite the abolition of PAC with the signing of the peace accords, continue to exercise local power. Unlike many red zones where political violence took the form of massacres carried out by institutions extrinsic to the community such as army troops, death squads and elite *Kaibil* forces, local members of the PAC who continue to live there carried out the political violence in Momostenango. This arrangement poses a paradoxical possibility- that in the aftermath of the military's strategy of terror, silence and social fragmentation in green zones is potentially worse than it is in red.

Since this research is not a comparative study, the ability to draw conclusions between how survivors of torture from Momostenango experience the aftermath of

political violence differently than survivors of the massacres in red zones is beyond its scope. The testimonies of Momostecos in this research do, however, point to the need for localized studies that demonstrate the different ways in which the state's counterinsurgent strategy of terror was carried out and is maintained through historical narratives today.

Agency and the Struggle over Historical Memory

As discussed in Chapter 2, the legacy of militarism and the penetration of counterinsurgent ideologies in Momostenango's ruling class remain significant forces driving local social and political movements. A brief examination of three separate events that took place at the doorstep of the Municipal Palace, the seat of economic, political, and military power in Momostenango, followed by a discussion of their significance, illustrates the influence pro-state Maya exerted in the community over time and provides a framework for understanding the ongoing difficulties of local survivors of political violence.

1979 - San Bartolo Aguas Calientes Boundary Dispute

In 1951, after decades, perhaps centuries, of dispute over the boundaries between and jurisdiction over local inhabitants,²⁸ the indigenous leaders of San Bartolo Aguas Calientes, a canton of Momostenango, successfully appealed to then President Jacobo Arbenz for separate municipal status. They, like inhabitants of other periphery *aldeas* felt that Momostenango's municipal government unfairly meted out funds for infrastructure

²⁸ Juan Napoleon Zarate Itzep, a Momosteco leader who was interviewed during the land dispute argued that Momostenango had claims to the territory dating back to 1700. (Rivera 1979)

projects and had wanted to secede for years. After the fall of the Arbenz government in 1954, Momosteco indigenous leaders who had taken over municipal control by allying themselves with the incoming anti-communist President Castillo Armas government argued that they, and not town Ladinos, were the “true” counterrevolutionaries. They therefore appealed to national authorities for the return of San Bartolo to the jurisdiction of Momostenango. Despite ongoing appeals to departmental and national authorities by Momostenango’s conservative indigenous municipal authorities, however, San Bartolo was allowed to keep its separate municipal status, although the boundaries between the two municipalities were never agreed upon. At the center of the dispute was the status of neighboring districts Pitzal, Tzanjon, Xolajab, Pueblo Viejo, Patulup, and Tierra Blanca. Nearly thirty years later, in 1979, the National Cartographic Institute (ICN) recommended to the government that all the disputed districts be allocated to San Bartolo, virtually halving the territory of Momostenango. Robert Carmack characterized the response of the Momostecos:

They [the indigenous town authorities] marshaled forces, rumored to number 20,000 Indians armed with primitive weapons, and made it known that if necessary they would invade San Bartolo in order to defend their traditional territory.... The rural Indians by the hundred marched to town in military order to the beat of drums... Complete military order, in fact, was maintained (Carmack, 1995 p. 365).

Government anti-riot squads armed with teargas, helmets and batons that had been called in from Quetzaltenango, San Marcos, and Guatemala City did not intervene

because, as one reporter noted, the protest was “a legal action from every point of view” and “the behavior of the residents did not warrant intervention” because it was “totally ordered and disciplined” (Rivera 1979). In response to the massive show of Indian resistance, the Federal Government reversed its decision to cede the neighboring districts to San Bartolo, capitulating to the conservative indigenous leaders of Momostenango.

1995 - The Storming of the Military Cuartel

In May 1995, a group of K'iche' women and men from Momostenango, outraged by the federal army's policy of forcibly recruiting local men and boys, stormed the municipal building that housed the *Plana Mayor* where their sons were being detained. The women liberated the boys who had been captured that day. Prior to the demonstration, the group that organized this act of civil disobedience had prepared a letter to Guatemalan President Ramiro de Leon Carpio, demanding that the abusive practice stop. In the preface to their demands they wrote,

These crimes against humanity that left thousands and thousands of refugees, internally displaced, widows, orphans, terror, fear, uncertainty, and enemies within the population- the majority of which is Maya- converted us into true enemies. Now we don't see each other as brothers from the same roots. Instead, with an ideological division-some with an ideology of life and others with an ideology and culture of death based in the doctrine of national security that was brought by Pedro de Alvarado and his followers that were later put in practice by Justo Rufino Barrios to protect the plantations, the large extensions of land that

were expropriated from our grandfathers and to protect the rich oligarchs, all at our expense as the Pueblo Maya (Momosteco Human Rights Activists 1995).

In response to the action, the military stopped forcibly recruiting boys in Momostenango.

Momostenango - May 10th, 1995

Momosteco citizens confronting the Plana Mayor and liberating forced recruits. Two photos taken in May 1995 show hundreds of people gathered outside the police substation to protest the abduction of young men. The caption on the first picture draws attention to the menacing attitudes and expressions of the military commissioners. The second picture shows the crowd outside the gates in the back of the municipal building where the “recruited” boys were being held. The crowd later broke down the gates to release them. It was the last time that the *comisionados militares* conducted a sweep in Momostenango.

1996 -The Lynching

On November 16, 1996, after the Peace accords were signed, the National Civil Police in Momostenango apprehended four men, who were suspected of having been involved in a series of attacks on buses that service Momostenango and another town. Upon hearing the suspects had been captured a crowd gathered around the jail in the municipal building. Some people in the crowd demanded that the police release the prisoners so that the crowd could dole out rough justice. After several hours of increased tension, during which some members of the growing overturned and burned the suspects’

pickup truck, others threatened to set fire to the municipal building if the prisoners were not turned over to them. The police capitulated and opened the doors and a group of enraged vigilantes entered the jail and began beating the suspects with rocks, sticks, and logs. They dragged the beaten and bloodied suspects out, doused them with gasoline and set them on fire. Hundreds of people and the police watched the suspects burn to death but the police neither helped the suspects nor made any arrests.

The Burdens of Time

Ricardo Falla, a Guatemalan Jesuit priest and anthropologist observed the cyclical patterns of violence during the state's campaign against the insurgents.

each period is characterized by the ebbs and flows of the great forces of the conflict. The flow is the wave of popular unrest and political activity in search of a more just society. The ebb is intense repression that once again drowns these expressions into passivity (Falla 1994: 4).

I draw attention to these three events because they reflect flashpoints of conflict during different phases of the civil war and because they were public performances in the most public of spaces in Momostenango, the central plaza in front of the municipal palace. These three events illustrate the agency and different social, economic and political interests of local actors who fought to establish the parameters of acceptable behavior during the counterinsurgency.

The first event, that of the 1979 boundary dispute with San Bartolo, took place less than a year after the military massacred over 30 K'iche' Maya men, women and

children, after they had marched to the ladino mayor's office over 100 miles away in Panzos, Alta Verapaz to protest labor relations with local planters. Despite the distance, news of the massacre captured national and local attention. The event, which historian Greg Grandin described as "the last colonial massacre" (Grandin 2004) angered many throughout the country and marked a shift in the military strategy against the insurgents. Realizing that it could not turn the tide of growing social unrest, the army launched a covert campaign of political assassinations, torture and death threats that was in full swing by March of 1979 and was a precursor to the far more intense repression that would begin in 1982. Although some in the military believed that the *tesis de exterminacion* (extermination thesis) was the only way to stop the insurgents, by 1982 the military enacted a policy which Charles Hale characterizes as "disciplinary assimilation" (Hale, 2006 p. 65-73). The policy was probably best articulated by Defense Minister Oscar Humberto Mejia Victores, who pronounced: "We must do away with the words "indigenous" or "Indian." Our mission requires the *integration* of all Guatemalans" (emphasis mine). Likewise, in 1983 second Defense Minister Hector Gramajo explained the philosophy of the military's *fusiles y frijoles* (guns and beans) campaign, "Feed 70%, kill 30%" (Schirmer 1998).

The 1979 show of force mobilized by Momostenango's indigenous leaders against the leaders of San Bartolo demonstrated to the dissident, San Bartolenses that their intransigence would be met with military (or paramilitary) force and to the military government that the well-trained Momosteco Indians were organized under Maya authorities who had, in no uncertain terms, embraced the conservative ideology of the military state. The decision to militarily organize Maya masses at that time was an

extraordinarily risky endeavor. The Sandinista rebels were taking control of Nicaragua, and the EGP was recruiting entire Maya communities less than 30 miles away.

Militarized Maya were quickly becoming the army's worst fear. The military government must have been relieved to find an indigenous leadership that had completed military service, was sympathetic to the regime and could demonstrate tight militaristic control over the throngs of indigenous peasants. Importantly, unlike organizing in other Maya communities throughout Guatemala, the demands that Momosteco Maya authorities made on the state had little impact, outside of the municipality, on the economic and political interests the state served. Unlike Maya communities in northern Quiché', Huehuetenango and the northern transverse strip, Momosteco Maya were not mobilizing around land reform or challenging the distribution of wealth and public services in the country. Despite the fact that the majority of Maya Momostecos were harmed by the national political structure that had changed only in minor degrees since colonial times, the 1979 demands that Momostenango's Maya leadership made concerned internal divisions in a land-poor municipality and posed little threat to the landed oligarchy's interests protected by the state. Momostenango's conservative Maya leadership's ability to mobilize and control 20,000 local Maya (which at the time was nearly half of the population) while avoiding organization around class politics was momentous and likely helped convince military strategists to label Momostenango a green zone in the remaining years of the civil war.

The second flashpoint in 1995 around the forcible conscription of youth occurred during the peace process, over ten years after the military dictator-led state had carried out the scorched earth campaigns, and demonstrated how ordinary people in

Momostenango took extraordinary risks to confront the state and combat the apparatus of state terror. Feeling a calculated degree of national and international protection that a heavy handed response by the military could derail the peace accords, these Momostecos directly challenged the tacit belief that Momostecos supported whatever measures the military took. In the declaration that they sent to the president of the republic, the organized Momostecos did not frame their problems as simply a matter of ladino exploitation of their sons, husbands and brothers, but rather acknowledged a long history of exploitation in which some Maya leaders were complicit and harnessed the language of “community” to resist the violence being carried out around them. Momostecos who confronted local military commissioners framed the political violence as an accumulation of state abuses that dated back to the conquest. Their demands for the respect of human rights in their community were couched in the language of *class* exploitation *as well as racial* discrimination and expressed their hope that social justice would accompany the country’s transition to peace.

The third event – the murder of suspected thieves- occurred just weeks before the signing of the peace accords and punctuated the end of the civil war with a grim reminder that the state apparatus of terror remained intact. Eyewitness accounts of the lynching point to members of the *Plana Mayor*, local military officials (not the police on duty), as having played key roles in leading the crowd that burned the suspected felons to death. The men who led the group into the barracks to beat the prisoners and who doused them

with gasoline and set them ablaze—belonged to the ruling FRG party²⁹ and were members of the *Plana Mayor* of military commissioners. Their public display of cruelty in the extrajudicial executions coincided with the transition from wartime to peacetime and was an unambiguous reminder to Momostecos, many of who gathered to stare at the horrific sight, of the state's local counterinsurgent apparatus' ongoing capacity to kill. Guatemalan Defense Minister Gen. Hector Gramajo famously stated,

Our strategic goal has been to reverse [Karl von] Clausewitz's philosophy of war to state that in Guatemala politics must be a continuation of war. But that does not mean that we are abandoning war; we are fighting it from a much broader horizon within a democratic framework. We may be renovating our methods of warfare but we are not abandoning them. We are continuing our [counterinsurgency] operations [against] international subversion because the constitution demands it. (Schirmer 1998: 1)

Gramajo articulated how the military tried to justify the torture and slaughter of thousands upon thousands of Guatemalan citizens by invoking the National Security Doctrine. By characterizing the enemy as a foreign threat (e.g., communists; based on the assumption that leftist uprisings could not possibly be a home grown reaction to the state's exclusionary rule) Gramajo framed the army's iron fisted rule as a necessary defense of the nation. Events like the lynching embedded the military's wartime National

²⁹ Guatemalan Republican Front, the party of former dictator President Efraín Ríos Montt.

Security Doctrine, which defined what types of political violence were legitimate, into Momosteco daily life during peacetime.

The threat of coercive force alone, however, does not explain how the party of the military counterinsurgency's icon, former president, Gen. Rios Montt, continued to control Momostenango's municipal government long after the civil war was over. The state's ability to govern in post-war Guatemala depends as much on public understanding of the state as a benevolent force as it does public understanding of the state as a coercive force.

Given their history of state-supported pilfering of their land and livelihood, most Momosteco Maya are highly suspect of populist rhetoric from politicians. The majority of Momostecos I interviewed were cynical about local and national politics. Most Maya saw the state as an illegitimate authority. As witnessed by the fact that Momostenango's municipal leadership has paralleled ruling national party leadership with few exceptions over the last 50 years, Momosteco Maya endorse candidates and political parties based on pragmatism rather than idealism, in hopes that they might provide access to scarce resources. Diane Nelson uses the metaphor of the state as a candy-filled piñata to describe Maya participation in national party politics. Nelson quotes an advisor to Guatemala's now disgraced president Serrano Elias (1991-1993), who declared, "Everyone hits us and everyone wants us to give them sweets" (Nelson 1999: 27). Momosteco Maya upper class elites, despite their loyalty and service to military regimes, are fully aware that the sweets the state distributes, however limited they may be, are resources that add legitimacy to their governance over municipal affairs. The experience of Maya communities that during the war refused such sweets and mobilized against the

state offers a sobering counter-example of the consequences of such politics. Despite the speed with which they embraced the narrative frame of Momostenango as a green zone, Maya elites' wartime position allowed them to receive the state's sweets along with horrific violence, albeit selective violence, throughout the municipality. This is violence that, for many reasons, some Maya and Ladino Momostecos find it difficult to remember. In Momostenango, no mass graves have been uncovered, no bodies have been exhumed, nor is it likely there will be. The dead lay where they were buried, silent and unseen in the post-war landscape. But, as the *Aj Q'ijab*³⁰ know, the dead have the power to change the present and guide the future.

In the following chapter I will discuss how political violence shaped peoples' daily life by presenting ethnographic narratives of several Momostecos. These case examples focus on the experience of survivors of political violence from four main areas: Momostenango's urban center; the canton of Xequemeya; the canton of Canquixaja' and the neighboring municipality of Santa Lucia la Reforma (see figure 1).

These testimonies illustrate the ways in which people experienced and remembered overt political violence, and the ways in which they survivors claim political agency. The geographical mapping of Momostenango as a green zone where everyone supported the military project was a construct that muted internal divisions and divorced local identity from the subjective experience of thousands of local inhabitants. If the purpose of terror is to sever the ties between individual and collective experience, the mapping of such identity into "zones" can be seen as a symbolic construct. By contesting

³⁰ Maya priest-shamans. Literally "Daykeepers," whose task it is to maintain the pre-Columbian 260-day calendrical cycle.

symbolic depictions of regional identity, the Momosteco survivors of wartime political violence illustrate the dialectical nature of identity construction.

Reconciling the Past and Inoculating against the Insurrectionary Indian

The *Merriam-Webster Unabridged Dictionary* defines the word “reconcile” as follows:

1. (a) to restore to friendship or harmony <*reconcile* the factions>; (b) to settle or resolve <*reconcile* differences>
2. to make consistent or congruous <*reconcile* an ideal with reality>
3. to cause to submit to or accept something unpleasant <was *reconciled* to hardship>.

Although the Peace Accords called for reconciliation in the sense of the first two definitions, it is arguably the third definition that best describes how survivors of political violence are experiencing the post-war period. Momosteco survivors who contend with local and national accounts of the war that diminish or deny their experience are faced with an “unpleasant hardship.” Some choose to remain silent, fearful of the possible repercussions of denouncing war crimes. Not all survivors, however, submit to, or accept “official” accounts of their experience, yet, find it difficult to content with the social silences surrounding what happened. Nonetheless their nonconformity with the narrow parameters of dominant historical frames poses a challenge to the hegemonic discourse of “green zones” and opens potential spaces for resistance.

What Happened in and around Momostenango

Over the course of my fieldwork (between 2001 and 2003), I learned of over 300 families in the municipality of Momostenango whose members had been directly affected by political violence. I interviewed over 50 Momosteco Maya from those families (see list of all interviews in Appendix 2). Many of the interviewees were subsistence farmers, a few were still tied to work on coastal plantations in some way, and others engaged in crafts or were small scale merchants. Most families depended on deep kinship ties for survival, with some family members working in wage jobs in urban areas or *al norte* (to the north in the U.S. or Canada) and sending money home. Many of the interviewees reported that they had not ever been asked about their experiences during the war and had not received any medical, psychological or economic support from outside organizations since it happened. I also interviewed several former guerilla and Civil Patrol (PAC) members as well as former military commissioners to establish my summary answer to the questions of REMHI and CEH, namely who did what to whom and why and what if anything is being done by people or communities to recover from the violence.

As the following testimonies indicate, the violence in Momostenango was not random and was coordinated through a local chain of command that articulated with the Guatemalan military at several points. Both military and paramilitary organizations operated to combat the insurgency. As I discussed in Chapter Two, there is a historical continuity to local repressive apparatuses that extends at least as far back as the late nineteenth century when the Momostenango militia was formed.

I gathered, edited and translated the following testimonies from survivors of violence in Momostenango and Santa Lucia la Reforma. I have included testimonies of

survivors from Santa Lucia la Reforma because much of the violence that I was able to document in Momostenango took place near the northeastern border between the two municipalities. Momosteco residents of the northeastern part of municipality had close ties with their neighbors in Santa Lucia and many sold their produce in the markets there as it was closer than the market in Momostenango. As refugees from the department of Quiche' fled the army's *tierra arrasada* violence in the early 80's many sought temporary refuge in the region between Santa Lucia and Momostenango. The extent to which I am able to quantify political violence in each community is limited to the stories people shared in interviews. From these I can state that there indeed *was* political violence in each place and that it was carried out at different levels. While I make no attempt to draw quantitative conclusions from the ethnographic data I collected about the extent to which individual and collective suffering differed in each community, or whether their concerns were caused by events that were limited to community boundaries, I did notice qualitative differences in the ways people spoke about wartime political violence and the effects it had on their lives.

Santa Lucia la Reforma

Santa Lucia la Reforma is located within the department of Totonicapán and is unique because its inhabitants experienced a level of political violence more characteristic of areas in northern Quiche'. Insurgents from the Ejercito Guerrillero de los Pobres (EGP) occupied the town and, prior to the military's full deployment of scorched earth counterinsurgency, carried out *ajusticiamientos* (political assassinations) on local residents considered to be the worst repressors by their neighbors. Massacres that

occurred in Santa Lucia la Reforma were investigated by truth commission officials and were reported in the REMHI and CEH findings. Both truth commission findings emphasized the importance that truth-telling played in the process of attaining peace and reconciliation in the post-war era.

The following ethnographic interviews were conducted during day trips that I made to Santa Lucia la Reforma with Don Abraham and the clinical team of COPOSUR. Most of the people I interviewed had given testimony previously to the truth commissions.

Don Miguel- 67 years old. I don't know when it all started. But first there were many abuses by the military commissioners. The mayor was Pedro Quinillo Tum. Before he was mayor he was a military commissioner. There were 18 *regidores* and 7 *alcaldes auxiliares*, 2 or 3 ladino families and a *Sindico Primero* and a *Sindico Segundo*. They were all FRG (Guatemala Republican Front- the party of General Rios Montt). The mayor killed three people in Pajumut, Aldea Saqasiwan. He has not asked for pardon. We are afraid of him. They could do what they wanted and the people could not do anything. They told us that the guerillas were bad, but we met some of the *compas* (a slang term for *companeros* meaning in this case "guerillas") and we liked them. In 1981 the EGP brought many of the military commissioners to the plaza and killed them. After that they had many people began to support them. Then the military came. We had help from the human rights, from the CERJ (Council of Ethnic Communities "We Are All Equal", a Guatemalan human rights organization that was started in Santa Cruz de Quiche'). They said they would attack anyone who was with a human rights organization. They said they (human rights activists) are with the URNG and that they are thieves. They killed and disappeared many of us. They also killed us for being day keepers. During "la violencia" they put us in jail for burning copal. They killed many *Aj Q'ijab*. We couldn't speak with each other at night. If they saw a candle burning they would accuse us of talking with the

guerilla. Now it is the military commissioners who are the rich ones in town. I don't know how they got their money.

Don Gaspar-57 years old. From 1970- 1978 we had military commissioners. But they were not as bad. Then there was a major recruitment. The military commissioners began to abuse the people. The guerilla killed 4 military commissioners. After that I went to Mexico between 1981-1982. I went to Mexico because they said I was a guerilla. I came back and then in 1983 the civil patrols called me a guerilla. It is still here because we suffer a lot. I am sick now because of my suffering. I have high blood pressure and problems with my prostate. It is a consequence of what happened earlier. I have rage, anger and fear. Now it is another fear. The military commissioners made deals with the gangs. They got rich off of taking our houses and selling our things during the war.

Don Juan- 43 years old. They took us from our house in green ski masks and they told us we were guerillas. They tortured us then they said if we talked with anyone they would return to kill us. I was an Aj Q'ij before. I now know that whoever does harm to his neighbor will not enter the kingdom of glory. I am an evangelical now. I found God and I don't want to remember the past.

Don Antonio-58 years old. I worked with the Catholic institute in Xela planting corn and potatoes. Later they accused me of being a guerilla. They bombed the aldeas of San Bartolo Jocotenango and San Antonio Ilotenango in Quiche' in 1981. The people that survived had to flee their homes. I hid 400 people from there in a hole on my land. I had trenches on my land. We dug these for when the airplanes came to bomb. The military commissioners said they were for traps. The authorities came to me and told me that I was a guerilla. I went to Mexico on March 5th 1982. I found a piece of land. I worked on the Finca Margarita in Tapachula with my 6 sons. From Mexico we went to Colomba Costa Cuca to pick coffee; we had hunger. Now we don't make any more noise. The military

commissioners are right there. My uncle was killed in the war. He sympathized with the guerilla. My wife suffered greatly. They took (forcibly recruited by the military) one of my sons. He suffered hunger and abuse. One of my daughters died because my wife had *nervios*. I still have fear for my children. Who knows who the military commissioners will attack next.

In the early 1980s the violence in Santa Lucia la Reforma was characterized by local residents directly confronting the military's counterinsurgency project. Before the heavy presence of army troops in the municipality, the local arm of the state was in the hands of the military commissioners. As Don Miguel and Don Gaspar explained, after many abuses by local military commissioners, the EGP, who had been actively recruiting local residents, conducted a public execution of four officers. The event brought attention to the army that the guerillas were active and operating in the municipality. Both Don Gaspar and Don Miguel claimed that they were supportive of the guerillas, but that they never joined. Nevertheless, the military response to the executions forced them into exile in Mexico because. The army's response in Santa Lucia did not make clear distinctions between civilians and insurgents. Prior to the military's *tierra arrasada* response, local residents had difficulty separating their own interests from those that the guerillas espoused. In many cases they were the same. Local residents were not prepared to defend themselves from the type of violence that the military unleashed in late 1981 to early 1982. Although it was prohibited for civilians to carry firearms unless they were serving in the PAC, many residents of Santa Lucia and the northern reaches of Momostenango took great risks by having *buzones* (cache boxes) on their land for supplies and ammunition for the guerillas.

Indigenous markings were a target for military and paramilitary repression. *Aj Q'ijab'* were singled out for repression and some, like Don Juan, converted to evangelical Christianity, at least to some degree, because it was safer. The army prohibited meetings of more than two people and military commissioners began to keep track of their neighbors. People that returned to the community after the *tierra arrasada* campaigns ended continued to be persecuted as *guerrilleros*. Even five years after the peace accords were signed, as I conducted fieldwork, military commissioners continued to threaten the families of Don Miguel, Don Juan, Don Gaspar and Don Antonio.

Many members of the community, like Don Miguel, that shared the experience of political violence during the war sought protection with human rights groups like CERJ. Participation in such groups brought a high level of exposure to the political violence that occurred in Santa Lucia. The priest in the Catholic church held public forums in Santa Lucia during the process of documenting wartime violations for the truth commissions and after the findings were released events were held to support reconciliation in the community. Non-governmental organizations from the capital held meetings to discuss the findings of the truth commissions. The result was that wartime political violence in Santa Lucia was widely accepted as something that did, indeed, happen by both sides of the conflict and society at large. Although they provided a modicum of protection for survivors, human rights groups like CERJ, which advocated on local, national and international levels for their safety, were portrayed by local victimizers as a political extension of the insurgency and heightened the pre-existing polarization in Santa Lucia. During the period I conducted fieldwork, survivors of political violence from Santa Lucia complained of frequent threats and ostracism within the community.

Momostenango-Racana

I conducted the following interviews in Racana, which is located in the most northeastern part of Momostenango in the Aldea of Xequemeya. It is very remote and has poor access roads. It is actually closer to Santa Lucia la Reforma than to the center of town in Momostenango. Most residents have less than 4 *cuerdas* (less than 4 acres) of land to support their families and must supplement their income in some way. Unlike the urban center of Momostenango and Santa Lucia la Reforma, where most families were involved in commerce, most of the residents of Racana were still doing seasonal work on the coastal coffee plantations. The people I spoke with said that they had never given testimony previously and that they still lived in fear of the former military commissioners. The following testimonies are a selection from the interviews I conducted that describe the conditions of poverty and violence that led some Momostecos to join the insurgency, how revolutionary participation changed their lives and their living situation in the war's aftermath. These Maya hold a distinctly different class position, as did the Maya leadership from the urban center.

Don Julian-55 years old. I collaborated with EGP during the war. They (the guerillas) came by all of the houses here. The majority of the people here knew that we were with them. The neighbors began to threaten us. The military commissioners from Racana began to accuse me. Some of the neighbors began to disappear. I was a Catholic catechist. There were a lot of us with the URNG. I was put in charge of local security. We fought for peace and justice. We did not want the Army's forced recruitment in our community. I became the leader of the URNG in Racana. I worked with the young people translating *la Voz Popular* (The Peoples' Voice- an insurgent radio station). They would tell us how many casualties there were, bags we found, weapons recovered.... We hoped to protect

ourselves. Now, I regret that I collaborated with the guerillas. We suffered greatly. My family suffered. We could not tend to the corn and we lost the harvest. We fled to Santa Cruz del Quiche' to stay with Amilcar Mendez and CERJ and did not return until 1989. Now it is not the same. There are people that do not want us here. They speak behind our backs. If we meet with friends they begin to say things. It bothers me that they still consider me a guerilla.

Doña Maria- 47 years old. My father was assassinated. Our whole family was organized (part of the insurgency). People that were displaced from El Quiche' came here to hide and we gave them shelter. The military commissioners realized. My father fled to Santa Cruz Quiche' with CERJ. When he came back he was sick. A military commissioner gave him poison and said it was medicine. When my father died my mother didn't know what to do. We cried a lot. I got sick. My head hurt all the time. We were always tired. We had to maintain the family. I had to take care of my younger brothers.

Doña Cresencia- 60 years old. My children collaborated with the URNG. First one of my daughters and then one of my sons. When my daughter came back she told me that her husband died in combat in Chimaltenango. My son left but is still alive. He went to Mexico. My daughter died. My husband died of sadness. I suffer from sadness. I knew that my children were with the URNG. I agreed with them. My daughter always came by with her friends who were guerillas. They came here and I liked them. They would tell us that things would get better. She moved to Chimaltenango. I am sad that she does not come to visit me. My sons don't come to visit. They are in Mexico and are afraid to return. I don't regret that my family participated in the guerilla, but we still suffer. I feel bad about what people think about my children. They say things. I worry that they will do something to me. I have a hard time eating because I am afraid. I feel pain in my heart and in my body. I don't sleep well. My body is hot. When I feel this way I have to stop thinking about my children.

Doña Julia- 32 years old. I never went to school. I learned to read in the mountains. I joined the guerillas when I was a child. I was in a group that only had a few Ladinos. I didn't tell my mother that I would join. Later, when I returned and told her, she was happy. I joined the EGP. My husband is from San Pedro Jocopilas. We trained together how to shoot weapons and to get our bodies in shape. We were responsible for Momostenango. I got pregnant when I was in the organization. They weren't happy with the pregnancy because they had objectives. I had a girl. She almost died because I was moving so much during the pregnancy. My second child was stillborn. People asked me why I wore pants. My husband was captured in Sacualpa. He was tortured and they never found him. One of the people that was taken with him escaped and said that he was in Quiche' and Quetzaltenango at the military bases. I have not remarried. I am not repentant. My daughter is 12 years old. It hurts to know that she cannot be with her father. Since my husband died I feel sad and sick. I remember when I used to talk with my *compas*. They would help me to feel better. I have never told my story before to anyone outside my family.

Doña Lucia-31 years old. I was 7 years old when my parents told me that we were going to die. The military commissioners would always come by. When I was 8 years old we fled from our home. We went away from here and we hid in the ditches. There were many days when we didn't eat anything. When the Civil Patrols and the Army were near we would not eat. We would spend the whole day hiding. My parents cried a lot. They were part of the organization and they knew we could die. When we left our house the military commissioners stole our land; they sold our animals. My older siblings died of illness. All of them died of measles. There were fourteen children. Now I am the only one left. When we returned the Civil Patrols and the Army kept persecuting us. We slept in the ditches. Twelve of my brothers and sisters died over the course of two months. We were so poor. Now there is more food but things are still very bad. We live

with great fear. The military commissioners continue to threaten us. There is still danger.

Like in Santa Lucia la Reforma, many of the residents from Racana collaborated with the EGP. On a local level the EGP provided a means to protect themselves from local military commissioners who abused local residents with impunity. Residents from Racana did not join the guerillas *en masse* but instead were clustered in pockets. Families that supported the insurgents often lived next door to those that collaborated with the army or were in the PAC. The fragmentation in the local community resulted in tremendous losses for the families that joined the insurgency. The wave of violence that swept through the community from 1981-1983 forced many families to flee the community to Mexico or to other areas of Guatemala. It also left many widows that had to care for their remaining family members.

In the interviews that I conducted in Racana most residents acknowledged that they had actively supported the guerillas. They stated that unlike the closed caste-like isolation that often was used to describe highland Maya communities, they had years of experience traveling to and from the coast to work on plantations. They knew of other areas of the country as well because many of their family members were selling produce and other products in markets around the country. The extreme conditions of *minifundia* and the lack of even the most basic public services convinced entire families, even the women in the community, that armed revolution was the most viable solution to their problems. Some voiced their regret for supporting the insurgency for the heavy price they paid. Others recognized it as a different type of suffering. One that was a shared suffering

and that offered the promise of change. Like Dona Julia, many missed the camaraderie of the organization and the support that they felt within it.

Momostenango Center

I collected over 20 narratives from Momosteco survivors of political violence that lived near the four principal barrios of the urban center (Patz'ite, Santa Ana, Santa Isabel and Santa Catarina). Political violence that was carried out closer to the urban center had a different, more selective quality. Unlike the northern region closer to Santa Lucia la Reforma, guerilla activity near the urban center was more clandestine. The higher density of population near the town center and the close proximity to the headquarters of the local paramilitary headquarters (the *plana mayor*) meant that more people were watching for insurgent activities and if the guerillas were detected that the response would be quick and there would be fewer places to retreat to. Momostecos living nearer to the urban center who sympathized or collaborated with the guerillas were very careful about how they conducted their activities. Despite such precautions, many Momostecos who lived closer to the town center were labeled as insurgents by military commissioners, neighbors, and in some cases family members.

While conducting fieldwork, Don Abraham was my principal collaborator, guide, and mentor. He lived in a hamlet close to the urban center. In the following section I quote him at length because his story was the one I became most familiar with. His own remarkable history motivated him to help other survivors of political violence. In the following section, I share his and his father's testimonies which was one of his requests for collaborating in the research.

Don Abraham Vicente-41 years old. I was born in Barrio Patz'ite in 1960, just below the house where my parents now live. I have two older siblings. My older brother's name is Feliciano Chanchabac Vicente Garcia. Vicente is the surname of my grandmother. Garcia is my mother's surname. Ever since I was a child I was very active. I had many friends. I always liked to share my things. I never liked it when children were violent towards others. I was always protesting, even as a child. If one of my friends hit another, I would be sad. Sometimes they all would team up on me. My father would hit me if I were having a tantrum. My mother always had a great deal of love for me.

My father worked in Los Riscos for the baker Alberto Cogoux. He planted his corn and took care of his field. He always worked in the soil. Sometimes he would dig wells. He would dig a hole with a shovel down into the earth until he hit water. He was a douser and taught me how to find water. He would always contract out his labor. He also worked in construction and as a weaver like most other men from Momostenango. When he worked in the fields he would be paid 2 Quetzales a day. That was when the Quetzal was tied to the dollar. My father would work on the plantations on the coast for a few months each year. There was a time when he worked as a merchant selling pots and brooms. I would accompany him. We would walk as far as Rabinal selling things. We always had food, but sometimes we were hungry.

We lived by the calendar of nature. We used the tz'olkin, the Maya calendar, to decide on which days were best for doing things like planting and harvesting. We had our own traditions. On the 2nd or 3rd of May we would put crosses in the four corners of our cornfields. These were to protect the corn from the wind that could blow the stalks down. My grandparents would teach me these traditions. My grandfather, Pedro Garcia Velasquez, was an Aj Mesa (a diviner). He preformed ceremonies for our clan (*alaxic*). He taught me the 260-day Maya calendar.

For [Maya people] there isn't much difference between the spiritual and the material. For example, some people believe that their health doesn't have

anything to do with the trees and the water. There are people that physically are Maya, but their thoughts aren't. It's contradictory. In the Maya way of thinking the tree is not only for utility. It is a life, a being. It is a brother because it is a living being like the entire universe. It's the same with the little animals. I received instructions from my grandparents not to kill animals with my slingshot. The crickets keep vigil at night when we are sleeping. Fire also is sacred and should not be played with.

My father would work in the fields with his *asadon* and in the forests with his axe from sun up to sun down. It used to take my father two days to cut down a tree when we needed firewood or money. Now it is fast, they cut down many trees in a day. Chainsaws have done great damage. Before we cut a tree, we had to ask permission before and give thanks afterwards. When the scorched earth policy was implemented, this practice was stopped. The burning of the forests was a counterinsurgent practice that is still happening. Today there are people that sympathize with the powerful who continue implementing this practice. They don't ask for permission. They cut the trees to sell or to clear land.

My parents are Catholics and I was raised as a Catholic. When I was 12 years old, I started as a catechist with the parish. At 15, I began going with the older people to give catechism. It was with Padre Fidencio Dalla Mutta. I liked him at first. He was the priest in Momostenango for 25 years. He led the Catholic Action movement. At that time the Catholic Action movement was against the *Aj Q'ijab*. They would have fights about it. Padre Fidencio would say that you cannot serve two masters. He would tell people that to go the *Aj Mesa* was to go to the devil. He would make people choose between our traditions and being a Catholic. Many *Aj Q'ijab*'s would turn in their *barra* (bags of *tz'ite* beans used for divination) to him. I didn't like the way he humiliated the *Aj Q'ijab*. I was a Catholic, but I also respected our traditions. I received my *barra* in 1980.

They kidnapped me on May 25th, 1982. It was on a Tuesday. I went on a visit with my associates in Pala Chiquito. I was listening to the radio in my bag from El Salvador, radio Farabundo Marti. I left for my home at 5:00 pm. I arrived

at my house around 6:00 pm. All that I had with me was my Bible, my book of hymns and my catechisms. When I got to the road, I saw something that wasn't normal. I felt a strange feeling. Something strange was happening. It was getting dark. I saw a soldier under a tree (*Anona*). I walked with a strong step. When I arrived at my doorstep some soldiers came from behind. There were 150 soldiers inside and around the house. A soldier grabbed me from behind. I defended myself by smashing my elbow into his solar plexus. Then they hit me several times with the butts of their rifles in the head. I tried to escape. They could not shoot at me because they were on both sides of me. They would have shot at each other. In the end I decided that it would be better to let them capture me. They were going to take my mother. They tied me with my hands behind my back. They had already captured my brother. He didn't escape. When I was tied up they began to hit my head with the butts of their rifles. They were the most cruel beatings. It lasted for four hours in my house. There in the woods. The soldiers did not speak K'iche'. I heard them say, "Kill him." One of them had human feelings and said, "He's already captured, don't hit him any more." They raped my sister-in-law in front of me. They raped my mother and my sister-in-law (cries).

My father came home from his work with Don Alberto with his flashlight. They took his flashlight and his bread. They tied up my father and beat him. They ate his dinner. Then they took the cows. My brother screamed, "Don't rape her!" and a soldier came and said that if he didn't shut up he would kill him with 30 bullets in his head. They tied all three of us up, my brother, my father, and me. I don't remember, but my sister came to the house when she heard that they were taking us. She said that we were half naked and bathed in blood from the beatings that we had received. She said that we had lost control of our sphincters. My sister ran to warn other family members. She told them that thieves had taken us because she was afraid the military would hurt her if she told the truth.

The military commissioners stole my house and my land. The army was in the command post and the base. Now, two of the military commissioners ... live

in my house. They are family members of the patrol commander. We were fighting to get my home back, but the law says that once a person claims residence, there is a 10-year period in which it could be contested. At first, I was afraid to go back there. Now it is too late. There is no possibility of getting my house back that still exists.

The military commissioners were not satisfied until they took the land. There are others who lost their land too. Don Juan Capriel lived close to us. He was the ex-president of Catholic Action. He lost his house. I have a lost case. It would cost me more to get my house back than what the house is worth. They are still threatened when they see me. Three months ago the father of the man in my house was going to try to hit me with his machete. These people have never been put on trial for their crimes. Publicly, they didn't have power and morally they had less power.

After we were captured, they went and captured Juan and Guadalupe. When they had all of us, they took us walking until the fork in the road above Don Ernesto Orantes' house. They forced us to lie down on the ground with our faces in the dirt. Some of them watched us. Then they went to look for Don Ernesto. We heard gunshots and thought that he was killed. While we lay there we were terrified and didn't know what our fate would be.

After several hours, they took us to another path and where they made us lie down face down again. The soldiers were watching us. They were rounding up many of us. They went down to the house of Martin Lajuj Chanchabac in Xequemeya. He had left the army. They raped his wife. Then when they found Marcos they shot their guns in the air. They took us to Chosaculeu. From there we walked until we hit the road. By that time it was 11:00 or 12:00 at night. There was a truck waiting for us. They put us in the truck lying down. Then they sat on top of us. Then we arrived at Chornol they got down off the truck and they talked with Leon Chanchabac. He was on patrol. They said that they had made a "peaceful assault." Then they stopped and we heard them talking with the *intendente* Gustavo Lang.

They drove us to Xela. When they took us off the truck there was a line of soldiers. They welcomed us with kicks and punches. They hit us with their rifle butts. Then they put us all in tiny cells. Isabel Lajpop, my father Simeon Vicente Chanchabac, and Juan Sen were released after three days. Then they began to torture us.

The cells were so tiny that we couldn't stand up. Maybe they were three feet by three feet. There were four of us. We were there in those cells for one or two months without seeing daylight. We were tortured there. They would put a hood over our head and fill it with lime they would tie a string around our necks. They kept asking us about who "our friends" were. I told them that I was a catechist. There were moments that I wanted to die. (crying)

They applied electric shocks to us in Quetzaltenango on our arms. On my back (shows me) they hit me many times with their rifles. They stabbed me. They stuck needles in me. Two days after they took us our photos came out (in the press). Padre Javier and Padre Bernardo Castro told me that they went to ask about me but learned nothing.

There was a hole in the door. Every 5 minutes the soldiers would pass by and call us "guerillas." We could never lie down because of the cold and the water. The soldiers walked around the outside of the cells. They always would scream, "Guerilla, I will kill you." We couldn't see where we were but we could hear the cars go by in the street. We always claimed our innocence.

One time they tricked one of the prisoners into confessing crimes. They took him out of his cell. We heard wood being nailed together. They took us out of our cells to show us what they had done. They crucified the man. They nailed him to a cross with nails. They cut him and put lime and salt in his wounds. We heard the screams.

I lost track of time while I was in the military base in Quetzaltenango. I couldn't tell day from night. I don't know how long I was there. It seemed like months.

After a long time in the military base, they moved us to the Segundo Cuerpo in Guatemala City.³¹ While we were being transported we made a plan. I had my hands free. I was certain that we were going to escape from there. I decided not to escape.

The second day that we were in jail they took our fingerprints. The third day we were there they interrogated me. They asked us who our friends were. They asked us if we were guerillas. How many of us there were. They asked if I had a pseudonym. I didn't know who it was that interrogated me the first time. They interrogated me again a week later. Someone who was named Aredondo did the third interrogation.

Rios Montt did the fourth interrogation. He was dressed as a civilian wearing a sports jacket and a tie. We were in a room in the Segundo Cuerpo. He said, "Sit down." "You are a guerilla. Tell me who your friends are."

I told him, "I don't know anyone."

He insisted, "You are a guerilla!"

I told him that I was not.

"You know" (*Vos sabés*),³² he told me. "I can release you from here or I can send you to the firing squad."

I said nothing and they let me return to the cell with the other prisoners.

When I was at the Segundo Cuerpo they kept many of us in a cell together. They called some of the prisoners for interrogation and they never returned to the cell. One of them had a small radio receiver. They might have accused him of being a guerilla. We all thought that the same would happen to us. We prayed the holy rosary every day. Fifty of us continued praying and singing. One of the

³¹ The Segundo Cuerpo de Policía de Guatemala is a police detention center that became famous during Guatemala's internal conflict for being a center for torture. The Comando Seis, a highly equipped and highly trained SWAT team, operated out of the Segundo Cuerpo between 1975 and 1985 and functioned as a death squad.

³² *Vos*, the second person singular pronoun, is normally used in Guatemala between people to express closeness or solidarity; in this context, during the interrogation of a prisoner who had been tortured, it was used as a display of power. See Brown and Gilman 1960.

prisoners from Concepcion Chiquirichapa had his hymnal. The Segundo Cuerpo is next to a church and we would listen for the mass.

In November 1983, they called us to sign a document. The day before, I had dreamed of a nun and a virgin and that I was signing something. While I was doing it they said to me “now you can go.” We didn’t know what was happening. At 7:00 pm they called 20 of us. They lined us up. They took us one by one to sign. They let us go at 9:00 pm on November 18, 1983.

We didn’t have our *cedulas* (I.D. cards) and we were afraid of being picked up again and being accused of being guerrillas. I was with my brother and my brother-in-law. We asked for a letter from the police so that we could return home to Momos. We looked for friends in Guatemala City. I wanted to see my mother. When we returned to Momos we entered through the Rancho de Chiquimula on a footpath. We bumped into a patrol unit in Chiquimula at 6:00 in the afternoon. We planned what type of attitude (posture) we would have upon our return. We knew that it was not safe to talk about what had happened. I went back to Patzokit to see my parents. My mother told me that I should leave. It was a very profound moment when I saw my mother. I never told my mother what happened to me. You are one of the only people that know this story. I made my promise when we prayed, to continue the struggle, fighting against injustice. I cannot renounce this. Life has given me great energy. I have to fulfill my responsibility. I promised to always work in solidarity.

For two or three months, I didn’t want to leave my parents’ house. Don Alberto was the first one to come visit me. Don Chuj, Renato’s father, came to visit as well. Padre Bernardo and Padre Javier came to visit. All summer I slept in the furrows in the cornfield. We organized a human rights organization. We had to be very careful not to draw attention. I was still very scared that they would return for me. I did not go back to my home or try to get the things that they stole from me. We were fighting for the abolition of the army patrols. They had raped many girls. For a time in barrio Santa Ana they had an outpost on Loma San

Antonio. It was on the land of Francisco Ajxup. He was a reactionary who let the troops stay on his land. The soldiers stole everything.

In Racanaj Jutacaj, in 1983, soldiers dressed as civilians and went to the house of an evangelical. The woman told them that her husband had gone to *culto*. They grabbed her and they raped her. They were stealing chickens. They were intercepted by the PAC and brought to the outpost in Xequemeya. There they let the soldiers go. They stole a bull in Xequemeya and Jutacaj.

In 1992 I went to Costa Rica with Daniel Matul.³³ In the first years I denied to myself that I had been tortured. My wife thought that I was taken because I was a criminal. Little by little I started to get better. Daniel helped me to connect with Maya spirituality.

Don Abraham's Father, Don Simeon Vicente Chanchabac-82 years old. I knew something was going to happen. The events that happened to us with the army, they came to me in a prayer at *Pala Chiquito*. I knew something was going to happen, but I did not know what would happen. While I was working with the baker Alberto Cogoux carrying firewood, the army arrived at my house. My *compadre* Don Alberto told me that they came to my house. I wanted to go. My *compadre* said "No, you will be stained if you go."³⁴ "I am going (in order) to know what they want," I told him. They grabbed me as I arrived at the house. They had Abraham and Feliciano, my sons.

"Where are the guns?" they yelled. They were hitting him. They told me that they would tie me up.

"Tie me up then." I told them. "Why did you come here?" I asked.

"Because you didn't educate your son," they said.

"He is educated." I told them.

³³ Daniel Matul, the son of a prominent K'iche' family in neighboring San Francisco El Alto, had fled to Costa Rica in the 1980s where he founded the International Maya League, an organization that promoted Maya culture, spirituality, and human rights.

³⁴ "Manchado," as in manchado de sangre—blood-stained.

“Why does your son have a gun?” they said.

“Why do you have a gun?”

“I don’t own a gun. What good would a gun do me? How much does a gun cost? I don’t have enough money to buy a bag of corn.” I told them.

Then they asked me, “And does your son have a gun?”

“I don’t know.” I said. “Why don’t you ask him?”

When I was a soldier, I had a weapon. Now I don’t own one. The gun was the government’s, not mine.

“Fine. Tie them up good. Make sure it is tight.” It was a military commissioner, a relative of mine, Chanchabac a military commissioner from Xequemeya, he was the one who accused us. They gave me a lot of punches. It seemed like a bone broke in my heart. I couldn’t breathe. I couldn’t work. It was three days of being hit with a rifle butt in my head. They took us all to Xela. There in the military prison they kept asking me if I had a gun.

“The only things I need are my axe, my net, my machete, and my hoe. I don’t need a gun.” I told them.

“This asshole isn’t afraid,” one said.

“We are all Christians,” I told him. “We are all Guatemalans,” I told him. “We are all children of God. We are speaking together because of God. If you kill me, you kill me. I will die in the hands of God, not in the hands of a man. Why are you killing your people?” I asked him.

God helped us and we didn’t die. There were two of us older men there in the brig. They gave us the word. “You two can go now,” they told us.

“I have not committed a crime,” I said. On the second day they said we would be released the next day. “Your sons need to stay,” they said. Abraham and Feliciano stayed. I didn’t know if they had a gun or they didn’t have a gun. Why wouldn’t the soldiers tell me the truth? We walked all the way to a place with livestock in Salcaja. There were four of us.

They raped Feliciano’s wife badly. They raped all of the women. Later we went to find Feliciano. They removed him from Xela and sent him to the Segundo

Cuerpo in Guatemala City. Later, I went with the father of Guadalupe. When we got to Guatemala City they wouldn't tell us anything. We went to ask the police, they wouldn't tell us. They let them go later, after many months.

I was afraid. My wife was afraid. She is afraid to be alone. They left her there alone when they took us. When I returned home and saw her, I began to cry. We both cried; we didn't know what happened. My daughter, Seferina, said to me, "Let's get out of this house. Let's go to San Cristobal or to Guatemala City. They are going to kill us. They will kill us. If we leave here they will kill us."

"If they kill us, they kill us," I said. My daughter became very sick. She never was cured of her *susto*. She stayed that way. She is still very sick. Very sick.

Before it all happened I knew something would happen. When we were having the ceremony, I knew it would happen. When we were in Xela, too, I knew that I would be released. My blood gave me the sign that I would be let go. My blood gives me signals if I am going to move. Sometimes my eyes, back, knees give me signs. My blood has always given me signs.³⁵ Since I was a child, I knew if something was going to happen to me. I was given a signal when I was with Alberto. I was born on March 22, 1920. Now I am 82.

My father fought in the war for General Cifuentes. The war was close to the border of El Salvador at Xechingo.³⁶ My father became sick in El Salvador and was sick the rest of his life. I was one year old when my father died.³⁷ My grandfather did me the favor of giving me food in Chuinictacaj. I suffered very much for a year when my father died. My uncle hit me and it wasn't good for me. Tomas Xiloj gave me underwear and clothes for my grandmother. Her name was

³⁵ "*Brinca la sangre*" – Literally, "the blood jumps." *Aj Q'ijab* gain signals from a number of bodily fluids. Where and how the fluids are felt moving in the body gives indication of what will occur.

³⁶ In the 1906 war between Guatemala and El Salvador, during the dictatorship of Estrada Cabrera, Momosteco K'iche' soldiers played a central role in the Guatemalan army's defeat of El Salvador's army led by Tomas Regalado.

Macaria Lopez Chanchavac. She was 125 years old when she died. I was 13 years old at the time.

Later, I became a soldier at age 15. There was no war. I was a soldier with the general Jorge Ubico in 1936 for one year. I was in Guatemala City. They put me in the company that guarded the national palace.

I worked on the roads. The government didn't want to use heavy machinery to build the road because the machines would put them in debt. During that time they would make us work hard for a week. All of the mayors were corrupt. Each one made sure that the road up to their house was paved before they left office. We didn't even earn one cent. Instead, they gave us a little piece of paper, the *vialidad*. We had to work for one week every six months. If you didn't have your *vialidad* they would put you in jail. Another paper we had to have was the *ornato*. It used to be 1 Quetzal, now it is 6 Quetzales. Now I don't pay the *ornato*. I passed the age limit. After I turned 60 I don't pay anything. You needed to carry four pieces of paper, the *ornato*, the certification, the appointment every six months, and the *vialidad*. If you didn't have the four pieces of paper you went to jail. I used to keep all of these papers. But when the soldiers came to the house, they grabbed a lot of them and burned them. Now I don't have any of my old documents.

During General Ubico there were not any thieves. It was still controlled. Now businessmen travel however they want. One time a man killed his uncle. They took him out in the street. That man, they looked for him for six months and they found him. His family was already buried. They killed him there in the Calvario. They passed each other in the street.

I used to work in the plantations on the coast. I would not go with a *contratista* from the plantation.³⁸ There were some that were abusive. One of the military commissioners that accused us was a *contratista*; he was abusive. He would hit the workers with a hose. The people would be bleeding from his

³⁸ A contracting agent.

beatings. I worked in the plantations with the workers planting corn and yucca for 15-20 days at a time. I worked a little as a weaver, but I worked more in the fields. For a while I worked a bit as a traveling salesman. I took pots and water vessels. That is how I lived. I am still alive today. A person needs to withstand and live in life. Before, I could carry a bigger load, now, not so much.

The testimonies from Don Abraham and his father provide two sides of the same violent incident as experienced by younger and older generations. Both were signaled by neighbors as being guerilla sympathizers and captured by the army. They both were beaten by soldiers and watched as family members were brutalized and raped. Both were kidnapped and clandestinely held by the army at the 1715 military zone in Quetzaltenango. Most likely because the military assumed that he was too old to be a guerrilla, Don Abraham's father was released while Don Abraham remained in captivity to be tortured and interrogated.

It is impossible to quantify the level of harm that the events they shared caused their family and community. Don Abraham's sister was never the same after the day the military raped her and took her brother and father away. Several neighbors who were friends of Don Abraham, told me that they knew of his story and said that, after he was disappeared, the silences surrounding the violence that he experienced and the news of what was happening in other communities throughout the highlands created a sense of terror amongst neighbors and within the Catholic Action movement. Many did not know that Don Abraham had survived until several years later when he came out of hiding. The army's counterinsurgent tactics in Momostenango successfully annihilated dissent

without applying the same scorched earth policies that it used in the neighboring department of Quiché’.

After he returned to Momostenango, Don Abraham turned to the knowledge and traditions of his ancestors to make sense of his own experience. Like his father, Don Abraham learned to read the signs that his blood and body gave him. His experience of political violence led him, like many other Momosteco Maya, to renew the healing traditions carried on through generations of *Aj Q’ijab’*.

Another man from the town center who became an *Aj Q’ij* to help heal from the experience of political violence was Don Alfonso Tayun from barrio Santa Isabel. Don Alfonso’s family was singled out because they were suspected of collaborating with the insurgents. He shared how the experience of his mother’s murder affected his family. As an adult he was initiated as an *Aj Q’ij* and served as a director in a human rights group in Guatemala City.

Don Alfonso Tayun- 42 years old.

When I was 17 years old, they killed my mother at 6:00 one morning in 1981. There was no warning. I don’t know why. She didn’t say anything. She wasn’t expecting it to happen. At 5:45 am armed men arrived at our house. They were soldiers. They took my brothers, my father and my uncles out of the house. My mother ran out. They told her, “We want your sons.” She said, “I don’t have any sons.” Then we heard gun shots. They shot her. As the men were leaving one of them shouted, “Eat your tamales because the meat is cooked.” Three years later my father died from sadness. He stopped eating.

I was studying in high school but I needed to stop. My parents were gone and we had many debts. Our family members abandoned us. People were scared. Some blamed my brother, saying that he was involved with the guerilla. We

suffered from malnutrition. We needed to move to Antigua for a time. There, my sister worked for a rich ladina. She would cry because the woman was racist and would humiliate her. We suffered terribly.

It has been twenty years since this happened, but I still miss the warmth of my mother. I have eight children and I don't want to cry in front of them. I use ceremonies to clean my heart.

The murder, torture, rape and disappearance of family members were strong impetuses for many Momostecos, like Don Alfonso and his family, to leave the municipality and relocate in other areas of Guatemala. Some, like Don Abraham's parents and sister, who had no financial resources and nowhere else to go, took their chances and remained in the community. Others like Don Renato from Barrio Patz'ite, who were young and strong enough and had the resources to make the journey fled Guatemala and sought refuge in the United States.

Don Renato Vicente grew up fearing the military. When he was an adolescent the military set up a base near his house. The soldiers at the base terrorized the community and Don Renato witnessed several events that left deep psychological wounds. His parents tried to protect him from the violence that surrounded his home by not allowing him to leave his house. As his parents became ill with alcoholism and their own problems that stemmed from poverty and the political violence they witnessed, Renato left his home to find work in the U.S. to help his family survive. The experience of migrating to the U.S. added another layer to his economic, social and psychological trauma. He stated,

Don Renato Vicente, 31 years old. Once my father became ill, I needed to find work to support my family. A friend of my father's was going to the United States and he took me with him. When I left, my mother had to take care of 5 children

and my father by herself. I told my mother to give me her blessing. I went through Mexico. When I arrived I was cold, hungry, thirsty, almost dead. When I made it to the United States, I tried to seek political asylum with immigration. I was given temporary political asylum. I was only 19 years old and I was completely alone. I made \$4.00 an hour. I couldn't speak English. I tried to save money but sometimes I didn't have enough to eat. When I arrived in the United States, I didn't have any money to send home. I had to pay little by little. My mother would cry on the telephone when I called her. She told me that several times my father had slipped into a comatose state. My brother fled to Chimaltenango, Antigua, El Salvador, Honduras, and finally Costa Rica. My mother told me that she had begun drinking and that my sisters were being abused. I have one sister with epilepsy. My mother had begun hitting her and telling my sisters that it was their fault that she was drinking.

I became paranoid. I felt that I couldn't return to Guatemala because I would be forced into the army, but I knew that I wasn't making enough money to help my family. There, you have to be able to speak English to make more money. I started being afraid everywhere. If I saw a car with polarized windows I thought that I was going to be killed. I couldn't go into public bathrooms. I learned that by drinking I could forget everything that had happened to me. After being in the U.S. for three years, the immigration services had me go before a judge. The asked me if I had any physical scars from where the army had hurt me or evidence that I had been tortured. I didn't know what to tell them. I tried to get a lawyer but he charged me \$300.00 for just a few minutes. I told the judge that I had no scars, and I was deported. I returned without documentation and lived 10 years there. I returned because I was a failure. It has been a terrible experience returning. My family is a failure. I am a failure. People laugh at me when they know that I returned with no money. My father's hand is paralyzed. My epileptic sister is nearly deaf and blind. My life doesn't have meaning. I feel like the war could return at any moment. I have headaches. My refuge is sometimes in alcohol.

I left to help my family and I returned empty handed. I don't know what I should do. Should I stay here or should I go to another place? I see the children playing outside and I wonder why I couldn't have had that. I couldn't enjoy freedom. I liked soccer. When I was a child and went to the field to watch, the army was there. I am 31 years old. I have never been married or had children. I feel that children deserve the best. I am confused. How would I ever be able to get married? I get drunk now about once every two weeks. I want to quit. When I start to drink, I lose control. The last time, I went into someone's house. I drank one time and before I realized it, I was in Xela. I want to start all over again. My heart has not healed.

The trauma of Don Renato's childhood was compounded by his dislocation from Guatemala and the refusal of U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services judges to recognize his legitimate claims for refugee status. His resulting deportation added yet another layer of pain to his experience. Outside of Momostenango, and far from his family's ceremonial altars and the *Aj Q'ijab* that could perform healing ceremonies for him, Don Renato turned to alcohol to help him forget and to ease his pain. As he shared, the alcohol only added to his problems. As indicated by the ubiquitous drunken men that lay in the streets (especially on market days), many Momostecos, like Don Renato, use the cheap and readily accessible *aguardiente* to cope with painful and complex feelings of loss.

A few Momosteco Maya who knew of the historical losses that generations of Maya had experienced, took to community organizing and activism in order to try to improve their lives. One such figure was a young Maya man named Felipe Ralaq. His life was remembered by many in the community as a model for others to try to achieve, his

death was remembered as a lesson about the risks involved in striving for social justice. I interviewed two of his family members who shared their accounts of his life and death.

Felipe's Father- Pedro Ralaq- 59 years old. Felipe was born in 1954. He was a teacher. He looked for work in the Instituto Indigenista in the capital. He worked in the U.S. Embassy. He worked there when he disappeared. They found him when he died in Pajapita, San Marcos. We went to see his body and we didn't recognize him. Only by the body's size could we recognize him.

It will be 19 years since he died in November. I was performing the service of auxiliary mayor when he died. He was the only son who helped. My other sons drank too much alcohol and it caused us a lot of failure. It helped when he sent money home. His other brothers drank a lot. There is a saying, "The good die." We thought about him always. He was buried in the cemetery. He doesn't have his cross. He doesn't have anything [marking his grave]. When he died our family had many failures. At my age I can't do much of anything. I already turned 71. I worked as a weaver. I would leave town to do business. He helped us with the small amount of capital he could send.

When Felipe was a kid he liked to study a lot. When he finished 6th grade, he told me one night, "Papa I want to keep studying." "Why do you want to keep studying, if we don't have any money?" I told him. "I will study with a scholarship he told me." There were 4 or 5 kids that went to Totonicapán. Only he received a scholarship. That way he was able to do his secondary education in Toto. After he finished his secondary education he continued as a weaver. He looked for a job.

According to the government, they told me that he was a great leader in Momostenango. A man named Kelly told me about his death. He is the one who informed me. There were many people when we found him there in Pajapita. It is true that when there were important acts, they invited him. Whatever was good, he was there. I guess that he was also studying law at USAC. He was about ready to graduate.

Just a short time ago, some people came to console me saying, “It is sad that we lost the boy, he was a good boy.” He would work from Monday to Friday and then return home on Saturday at noon. He would come to talk with his friends. He was not a catechist. We did the funeral rites with the body present with Padre Javier.

Felipe took a course once in Panama. They gave him a scholarship. His idea was to help the indigenous people so that they wouldn’t suffer any more. I didn’t teach him these things. He invited many people here to visit and learn how we live. I don’t know if he was in the guerillas. It is possible. I don’t know about those things. I think he worked with the U.S. government.

He had another younger brother who died 22 years ago. His name was Abraham Ralac Xiloj. We say he died because he never came back. We had many children. This one never came back. Two of our children died as babies. Felipe and Abraham are dead. Two weeks ago one of my sons left on foot to go to the U.S.. He was in his third year of elementary school. He went with a coyote that he will pay if he makes it across.

We are sad. My wife became sick when my son Felipe died. He helped us buy our house with the money he sent. I drank for a couple of weeks. We never put a cross over his grave. When we buried him the people said, “This boy didn’t die from illness, he died because men killed him.” They yelled, “Viva’ Felipe.”

He was the director of the newspaper “El Momosteco.” On Sundays he would hand it out to the people. In 1976 when there was an earthquake, the municipal building in front of the central park cracked. Emilio Perez was the mayor. He ordered them to knock down the building. They sent 35,000 Quetzales for the demolition. Felipe wrote, “Why are the people having to carry the rocks away?” They printed it and he passed it out in the market. The military commissioners were forcing the people to do the demolition. There was a peaceful protest. He worked for the people of Momostenango.

Here in Guatemala everyone says that they signed the peace accords. I am not so sure about the peace. It’s the governments that tell us what to do.

Felipe's Sister Maria Mercedes Ralaq- 40 years old. During the period of *La Violencia*, Jose' Felipe Ralaq, my brother, studied and worked. He studied law at USAC. My brother was a revolutionary; he was concerned about our problems. He wanted to change things. He invited people to come to Momostenango to talk about the problems in the country. Many people would look for Felipe. They came to tell him their problems so that he could help them.

They kidnapped him in 1983, during the government of Mejia Victores, together with his wife. He worked as an associate rural educator for USAID. The AID organization put an announcement on the radio and the television. They paid for it. A month later we found what had happened. He disappeared on October 20 and his body was found November 15th or 18th.

He was in his car going to Pajapita. The car fell into a ditch and burned. The bodies were disfigured. The papers on him weren't his. They had been changed. The papers didn't burn. They called my father so that he would come to identify the bodies. They couldn't identify the bodies. There was a man and two women. We never knew for sure. We think that it was he who died in that accident. The bodies that were with his were from Solola. My sister-in-law was from San Juan Sacatepequez. We never knew for sure if the cadaver was my brother.

My brother was a reporter for *El Momosteco*. People came from the hamlets to his funeral as if it were a *villa cruz*. People shouted for justice as we carried his coffin. People yelled "only the people, can save the people" *Solo el pueblo salva el pueblo*. Padre Javier Martinez celebrated the mass at his funeral. Don Enrique Mazariesgos was the mayor; they didn't like the commotion.

I was 16 at the time when they killed Felipe. I was in *3a Basica* at the time in Malacatancito in a school run by Mexican nuns. There were 10 girls there from Momostenango. I have 8 brothers and sisters. My mother died when I was 5 years old and I have 4 younger siblings. My father let the nuns take care of me.

It affected my family a lot when Felipe died, both psychologically and economically. My brother would always send money every month. I had to stop

studying when he died. I started again later. Also, my other brothers began to drink liquor. One still drinks. My brother had offered them an opportunity to study. They didn't accept his offer.

I always told him to be careful. When I was living in Huehuetenango I had a friend who gave food to the guerillas. They killed her. My brother was a sympathizer with the guerillas. He was a great support for me. I am not in agreement with becoming a revolutionary. It devalues the struggle. Felipe would have done so much more if he lived.

Alcoholism is what affected my family. No one supported us after Felipe died. I was very afraid afterwards. I am still afraid today. I think that what happened to my brother could happen to me. It was the army that did it. It is possible that there is no danger now. I don't know.

For me, it is still very hard to talk about Felipe. One of my sisters-in-law took Felipe's son after they died. He will never forget that his parents were killed. There were problems. The judge named my father as the one who should take the child. He fought with the family of Felipe's wife. My father was given custody. They talked to my nephew. They told him lies about his father. They told him bad things. He is still very affected.

My strongest memories of my brother are that he was always telling us to study. He would say to us "We won't always have to live this way." He believed that life would get better. He felt that indigenous people could live better. He felt that racism would stop being so bad. I think it has. That is what he wanted. Even so, I still feel discrimination here in Momos. I have noticed times that when I am walking in a group people say "hello" to the Ladinos in the group and not to me.

When I studied in Malacatancito in Huehuetenango, the guerillas burned all of the municipal buildings. When they burned the *muni* in Malacatancito we heard the bombs. We were sleeping. We heard them march by in the street. We were afraid. They blew up the Pukala bridge. They were celebrating the anniversary at 10:00 at night. 2 months later the army built a war bridge. It took

five years to rebuild the bridge. In 1981, there were friends of mine that needed to flee. At the end of 1983 it began to calm down.

I believe that the war existed because of injustice. The injustice of forced recruitment into the military was the worst in Momostenango. The violence was worse against indigenous people. It was worse in Quiche' and Huehuetenango.

Something Happened Here

The violence narratives of Momosteco survivors of political violence presented above undercut assertions that “nothing happened” in the municipality during the war. State sponsored political violence that was carried out against Momostecos has had lasting impacts on survivors and the community as a whole. Although some of the victims of political violence may have been actively participating as militant insurgents, many were not. For older generations of Momostecos like Don Simeon Vicente, who had served the state in the militia and through mandatory unpaid labor obligations, the violence that the state weighed upon his family was a horrific repayment for his service. For younger generations of Momostecos, political violence sent a clear message that they were not even safe in their homes and that neighbors could not be trusted, thus, providing a strong incentive to leave.

The violence narratives of survivors also indicate that political violence was not experienced uniformly throughout the municipality. In the poorer, rural northeastern hamlets and villages of the municipality political violence was characterized more by the type of military counterinsurgent strategies that were being used in neighboring Quiche', namely scorched earth. Although army massacres like the ones carried out in the Ixcán and Ixil triangle regions appear not to have happened, the violence was much more

widespread in areas like Racana, Jutacaj, and Canquixaja. In areas closer to the center of town political violence was more selective and singled out suspected insurgents and community leaders who opposed the military occupation of their community. In no cases could the political violence responsibly be characterized as random.

In the following chapters I will discuss the efforts of biomedical healers to address the lingering physical and psychological effects of political violence in Momostenango. Generally speaking, these efforts missed their mark of helping survivors to heal the wounds left by political violence and may even have added to the distrust and skepticism that Maya survivors felt about outside offers of assistance.

Conclusion

The social, political and economic contexts that compel some Momosteco survivors to contest historic accounts that deny their experience, also frame the ways in which healers are able to listen to and address their needs. Shared awareness of these contexts is not only important for building empathy, understanding and solidarity, it is also important for survival. If one thing was made certain during the civil war, it was that building social and political alliances that questioned or challenged the established order was risky. Even programs like the cooperative movement in Momostenango that were sponsored by the Guatemalan government and international organizations like U.S. AID (Davidson 1976; Fledderjohn 1974), were not immune to attacks. The murder of Felipe Ralac and direct attacks of cooperative leaders, detailed by his sister and father above, sent a clear message to progressive Momostecos that organizing in any fashion entailed serious risks.

Twenty years after the scorcher earth campaign, Momosteco Maya struggled to find meaning in the violence they suffered. Felipe's father, who lamented the many misfortunes his family suffered after his son's murder, drank for several years to cope with his sadness and fear. He stated,

When Felipe was the director of *El Momosteco* he would write articles questioning why we had to live so badly just because we were poor Maya. "When the *alcalde* had 30,000 quetzales to rebuild the municipal building, why did he make us work for free?" Felipe would ask. It was an injustice. They killed him because he thought we could live better.

When he was killed the people came from the *aldeas*. It was like a *via cruz* (Easter procession). People were chanting insignias and shouting for justice. Now they have forgotten. He doesn't even have his little cross (Interview with PR: 7-30-02).

Although Felipe lies in an unmarked grave, and many of the physical markers of conflict in Momostenango have been patched and painted over, the remembrance of military abuses lies right below the surface for many Momostecos. Momosteco Maya men remember the maltreatment they experienced every Sunday at the PAC trainings held on the soccer field. Military commanders and the members of the *Plana Mayor* would drive home counterinsurgent ideology in no uncertain terms. The message usually contained one or more of the following assertions: that guerillas were thieves in disguise; that the guerillas were brainwashed by Cuban communists; that the guerillas were amoral and atheistic; that they were responsible for the suffering of the poor people; that the

military was the friend of the poor; that all the guerillas wanted was power and when they had it they would enslave ordinary Guatemalans and kill all of the leaders; that anyone who was killed or repressed by the army was a guerilla and therefore deserving of their fate.

This framing of political violence in Momostenango is still widespread amongst Ladinos, elite town Maya, and many Maya former military commissioners from outlying communities. After the army's resounding defeat of the guerilla insurgency, historical discourses that counter this dominant narrative still have difficulty finding traction. For one, alternative discourses are dangerous. By most accounts, local power in Momostenango changed little or not at all after the peace accords. Between 2001-2003, while I was conducting fieldwork, Maya elites that were candidates for the ultra-right National Liberation Movement (MLN) and Institutional Democratic Party (PID) in the 1950s and 1960s still held sway over the ultra right Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG) party that ran the municipal government. Military commissioners that were responsible for many of the local abuses in outlying communities during the war still held positions of local authority. According to dominant historical accounts of the political violence that occurred in Momostenango in English (Tedlock 1992: xiv), the Momosteco civil patrols rounded up a few "misguided" guerillas and thus prevented the insurgency from taking root, thereby saving the town from the army. Such historical renderings omit the history of political assassinations, disappearances, rapes and the fact that Momostenango was completely militarized during the war. It also omits that there was an ongoing guerilla presence in and around Momostenango virtually up until the signing of the peace accords.

Another reason for the predominance of ahistorical narratives that deny the possibility of Momosteco Maya revolutionary consciousness and participation is that they defy the socially authorized roles and spaces that Momostenango's elite Maya occupy. As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, although participation in Momostenango's ladino-led militia forced Maya recruits to oppress their indigenous neighbors and enforce the rapacious labor laws of Guatemala's landed oligarchy, it provided upward economic and political mobility to many Maya during the early twentieth century. By enforcing the counterinsurgent projects of the military during the civil war, these elite Maya military men demonstrated their ability to control rural the Maya Momostecos who stood to gain from land and labor reforms that leftist revolutionary groups sought to enact.

Charles Hale points out that while ladino acceptance of Maya ascendancy to political and economic positions of power has been part of the state's multicultural project in the post-accords era in Guatemala, the spaces that Maya have been authorized to occupy are limited and highly restrictive (Hale 2006). Many local Ladinos and national elites view Momosteco Maya who supported the military project during the war and embrace neoliberal political reforms today as non-threatening. However, revolutionary Maya evoke ladino fears of "insurrectionary Indians" (Hale 2006 p. 158). These are Maya that contest the dominant narratives that they were trapped "between two armies" or that they were never involved with class based mobilization to begin with; they affirm their class consciousness *as well as* community or racial consciousness,

Hale argues that despite the decreasing presence of overt ladino discrimination against Maya based on biologically constructed notions of race, Guatemala's racial hierarchy remains intact. Some Momosteco Ladinos, particularly from the older

generations, openly expressed racialized stereotypes based on assumptions of cultural backwardness that blamed Maya for their own subordination. Arnaldo Cifuentes, a former mayor and descendant of Momostenango's *caudillo*, Gen. Teodoro Cifuentes, stated,

I worry about the situation in which Maya share their homes with animals. The men go to other towns and have other wives. The family is left to live with the animals and they let them in the house. They don't know better. They live barefoot with animals and are very unhygienic. They don't have indoor bathrooms. They use their clothes for a long time and only wash them every 15-20 days. Instead of taking advantage of the eggs that their chickens produce, they take them to market and sell them. They fatten up their pigs and instead of eating them, they take them to market. They don't feed their children so their children are malnourished (Interview with AC: 10-18-02).

Cifuentes echoed a position that generations of Ladinos in his family had taken since their rise to local dominance in the nineteenth century. Namely, Maya cultural traditions and their reluctance to modernize prevent them and Guatemala from becoming a modern nation. The Cifuentes family took it upon themselves to be the ambassadors of modernity to the Indian masses, which they did with brutal efficiency through the militia. The militia in turn was an integral part of the socio-political machinery that forced Maya to work on coastal plantations and generated the majority of the Euro-Guatemalan oligarchy's wealth. Maya that participated in the militia were rewarded by the economic

and social ascendancy that it afforded.³⁹ Hale describes how within Guatemala's racial hierarchy Maya are allowed to ascend through participation in state sanctioned political and economic activities as long as those activities pose no real threat to the established order. Hale describes this mode of being Maya as the "authorized Indian" (Hale 2006).

In direct opposition to state approved Maya that have chosen the "correct" path to modernity, lies the "insurrectionary Indian." These Maya not only question the existing order, they question the premise it is built on, namely Guatemala's racial hierarchy. Hale argues that at the root of ladino fears of the "insurrectionary Indian" is the image of Maya rising up to seek vengeance on Guatemala's minority ruling class that have forced them into subordination for centuries.

Although ladino and Maya imaginings of themselves and each other are much more complex and the borders between the two are more porous than the framework I just laid out, the binary of "authorized" vs. "insurrectionary Indian" can be useful for analyzing underlying power relations that permeate clinical interactions, as we shall see in the next chapter.

³⁹ Carmack notes that after the 1906 war with El Salvador in which the Momosteco Militia played a decisive role, some Maya soldiers were rewarded with tracts of land near Nebaj (Carmack 1995)

Conceptualizing Maya Health

In this chapter I discuss obstacles that prevent Momosteco survivors of violence from accessing healthcare services. By exploring the scarcity of services available for survivors of violence, I begin an argument that will shape the final chapters, emphasizing the need for anthropological analysis of local healthcare systems and beliefs about how best to address health care. In short, in order for programs and providers to effectively address the healthcare needs of survivors, attention needs to be paid to the historical political, economic and social contexts that have helped to shape local attitudes about health care.

Public Health in Momostenango

The World Health Organization reported that Guatemala averaged 9.7 physicians per 10,000 people (PAHO 2008). In 2006, the Guatemalan Association of Physicians and Surgeons reported that almost three-quarters of Guatemala's 12,000 registered doctors worked in Guatemala City and surrounding suburbs, and that about one-third of the country's municipalities did not have a single resident doctor (Replogle, et al. 2006). Such huge gaps in medical coverage within Guatemala's healthcare system create a small market for private physicians in the more rural municipalities because there was virtually no competition with public health care facilities. Even though Momostenango does have one public health doctor, the public health safety net is inadequate. Even by Guatemalan standards, Momostenango, with its population of about 120,000, would need over 100

physicians to provide “average” healthcare access to its population.⁴⁰ Add to the equation social and demographic factors that affect the health of Momostecos, such as poverty, racism, social exclusion, education, population age, infant mortality, and access to potable water, and the problems of missing doctors multiply.

The Momostenango municipal record for 2000 listed the following local healthcare facilities (Gobierno Municipal de la Villa de Momostenango 2000):

1. Two **Health Centers** (Centros de Salud), one in town and the other in the western hamlet of San Vicente Buenabaj, twelve miles from town. The two Health Centers functioned under the direction of the Ministry of Public Health and Social Support (MSPAS). Officially, these centers were open five days a week, Monday-Friday, from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, except for federal holidays. In reality, office hours were unannounced, varying from week to week. People who had to walk for hours, take a bus or otherwise find transportation from outlying hamlets found it difficult to dependably access either Health Center. The Health Centers were classified as “Type B,” meaning that they only offered outpatient services. When I was in Momostenango from 2001-2003, the Health Center in town was staffed with the single doctor, a “graduated nurse”

⁴⁰ As is common throughout the world, primary care physicians are clustered in urban areas where more healthcare infrastructure is located, thus, skewing national averages. Healthcare access in urban areas is generally better, although poor urban population clusters exist that rival rural areas. My point in making this argument is to emphasize that Momostenango is vastly underserved by the public healthcare system and that the number of doctors that practice in the municipality is relational to what the local “market” can “absorb” and not measurable human needs. The economic constraints on Momostenango’s “healthcare market” are many and are directly related to processes of social, political and economic marginalization discussed in Chapters 2 and 3.

(*enfermera graduada*), a health inspector, two auxiliary nurses, an office worker, and a concierge. Despite a significant increase in Momostenango's population since 1974, the staffing was virtually the same as it had been 27 years earlier, when students of the University of San Carlos conducted a municipal assessment (Facultad de Ciencias Economicas 1974).

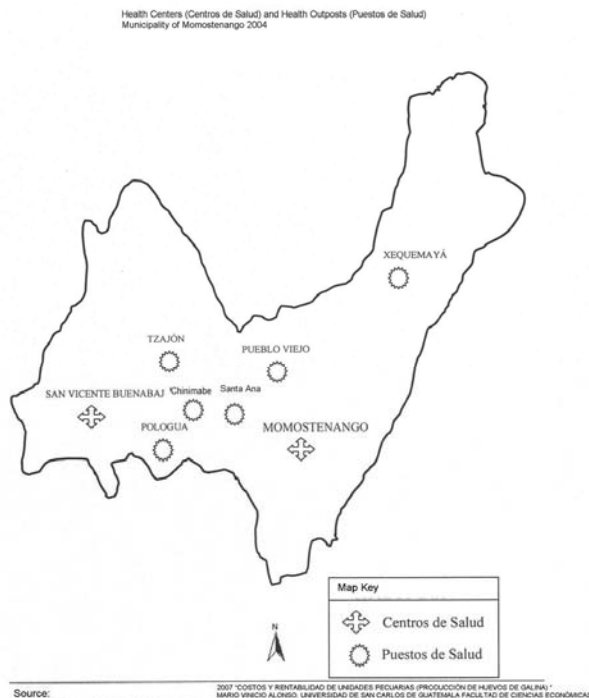
Despite its large population, Momostenango did not have a hospital staffed and equipped to handle inpatient treatment. Patients requiring emergency care could find treatment for minor problems locally, but for serious or chronic conditions they had to travel to hospitals in regional cities—Quetzaltenango and Totonicapán, each more than thirty miles away via windy roads, which cross *el cumbre*, the continental divide, and take about an hour by car. Before it was paved in 1997, the road was frequently impassable, especially during the rainy season when mudslides could block it for days. Momostecos who needed to see specialists, have lab work, or needed procedures that required general anesthesia also must get to one of the regional cities as best they could.

The two Health Centers in Momostenango provide the following services: vaccines, treatment of infections, food and water-borne diseases, rabies, tuberculosis, malnutrition, prenatal care, as well as mental health services and emergency care. Patients who were seen in the Health Care Centers and could show financial need⁴¹ were eligible to receive low-cost medicines for the most common illnesses, including antibiotic and anti-parasitic treatments. However, these medications were often unavailable and

⁴¹ The ladina receptionist at the Centro de Salud told me that she asked people their monthly income to determine financial need, but she offered, "I can tell just by looking at them if they can afford to pay for services. If a woman is wearing a nicely embroidered *huipil* or *delantal*, you know that they have enough money to pay."

they were given a prescription to purchase their medication at a pharmacy. Most patients were from town, but some commuted from outlying hamlets, because there was no health outpost near them or because their medical issue was urgent. The Health Center had a 1988 Jeep Cherokee, which the staff used for rural visits; however the vehicle had a broken axle. According to the public health doctor employed at the Center, the Ministry of Health did not want to fix or replace the vehicle.

2. Six **Health Outposts** (Puestos de Salud) were located in the outlying hamlets of Santa Ana, Tunayac, Xequemeyá, Chinimabé, Pueblo Viejo, and Pologuá. The residents of these outlying communities were primarily poor and indigenous. Public health auxiliary nurses staffed these outposts and public health doctors were scheduled to visit biweekly. During vaccination and nutritional campaigns the Health Outposts were used as a base.



3. Between 2001 to 2003 there were **four licensed doctors in private practice** in Momostenango. These doctors, who had received their degrees from the University of San Carlos in Quetzaltenango (CUNOC), had their own clinics. Two, who had been practicing in Momostenango for twenty years, lived in Quetzaltenango and commuted three days a week. The other two lived in Momostenango. One of the doctors identified as indigenous, and three identified as ladino. The doctors who commuted to Momostenango usually held office hours on market days, Wednesday and Sunday, when people came from the *aldeas* (hamlets) to buy and sell. All the private doctors charged similar rates, which began at 25 Quetzales for a brief consult that did not include medications and could rise into the hundreds of Quetzales depending on the intervention.

The waiting time to see private doctors was shorter than for the public health doctor in the Health Center. Patient reception in the private doctors' offices was also noticeably different from that in the public clinics. Like the public health doctor, the private doctors provided services to a primarily Maya clientele. In contrast to the Health Centers, the private doctors did not require proof of vaccination in order to see a doctor, and all of the private doctors had a K'iche'-speaking nurse on staff who helped interpret for monolingual speakers. Since the private doctors did not have an on-call rotation among themselves, a patient was unlikely to find one available in Momostenango after 5:00 pm. The two doctors who lived in Momostenango both said that on occasion they had seen patients who had come to their homes in the middle of the night but that they usually told the patients to go to the office the next day, during office hours.

The doctors did not work within insurance networks or social security programs. They accepted cash for their services, and all reported that they had at some time bartered

for non-cash items with patients who were unable to pay. Sometimes private doctors offered their patients samples of medications they had received from drug representatives. They were not supposed to sell medications to their patients without a license. These doctors had auxiliary nurse assistants but did not have the laboratory facilities. Thus, they had to refer most emergencies to regional hospitals in either Totonicapán or Quetzaltenango.

4. The Catholic Church provided a **Half-Day Clinic** on Wednesday afternoon. The clinic was staffed by one of the private doctors, assisted by an auxiliary nurse. The church provided services and medications at low cost to congregation members. Some patients were reportedly turned away because they were not Catholic.

5. Eight **pharmacies** were located in the town center, and 11 in rural areas. There had been only two pharmacies in the town center in 1974 (Almengor 1975). None of the pharmacies provided 24-hour on-call coverage, as was common in larger cities. One does not need a doctor's prescription in order to buy medications; several of the pharmacists in addition to dispensing medicine, provide consultation, diagnosis and treatment. Momostecos who can afford to pay for medications, often go directly to the pharmacists without consulting a doctor. Many of the pharmacies are based in storefronts, behind which they live. The pharmacies, especially those in outlying areas, have a limited selection of medications. The pharmacies sell generic first-tier medications, such as analgesics and antibiotics as well as remedies with questionable monikers like BioForzan, Meditonic Forte ("Por Dios es Bueno!"), Memocitin ("Contra la falta de memoria), and "Agua Maravillosa" (marvelous water). Most pharmacies employ unlicensed nurses who

have been trained to give injections; others perform a range of services, such as dental extractions, wound suturing, setting bones, and enemas.

6. Two **dentists** in private practice had offices in Momostenango. They received payment in cash for their services. One was open 6 days a week and the other was open 2-3 days a week. Dentists perform extractions, fillings, and root canals but referred orthodontic procedures to offices in Quetzaltenango.

7. Seven **dental “laboratories”** were based in local homes and staffed by untrained technicians who primarily performed extractions. Some laboratories offered local anesthesia as an option and some also specialized in fabricating dental prosthetics with gold and silver inlay.

8. Two **non-governmental organizations (NGOs)** delivered community health services in the municipality. InterVida, a Spanish NGO with funding from religious institutions, utilized teams of health promoters to conduct vaccination and prevention campaigns in outlying hamlets four days a week. The campaigns were usually held in the elementary schools, where children were given vaccinations. Another NGO based in Quetzaltenango was contracted by SIAS (Guatemalan Government’s Comprehensive Healthcare System) to implement local health initiatives. The organization paid community leaders 50 Quetzales and gave them a box of medications to be dispensed in their communities. Local “health guardians” were invited to monthly meetings in Quetzaltenango, where they received training.

I confirmed the services listed above while conducting an informal survey of health providers throughout the municipality. As I walked through the *cantones* and *aldeas*, billboards announced that other NGOs were operating or, more often than not,

had operated in Momostenango. I noticed also that every community well, school building, electrification project, and latrine program--virtually the entire public utility infrastructure of these communities-- had been funded by an institution other than the government.



Figure 12 FIS - The decentralization of social welfare. In the absence of state infrastructure programs and the post-conflict push for decentralized social investment funds, the NGO signs that covered the landscape proclaimed the dominant social order—one in which poor residents with inadequate housing were more likely to receive assistance from a religious group or a gringo than from the government.

9. There were 5 Cuban doctors in Momostenango, part of the **Cuban Government's medical mission** in Guatemala. They were outside the official public

health framework, but provided important services to the community within the public health centers and outposts.

10. There was a network of **traditional Maya healers**, called *Aj Q'ijab'* (day keepers). They were obviously outside official healthcare framework, but were important to the physical and emotional health of many.

Reading the Symptoms

At first, I was surprised by how few Momostecos utilized the available health services, other than traditional healers. Given the paucity of the public health resources, I expected to find that the private doctors' offices would be overrun with patients and that the public Health Centers would have line of patients stretching a mile long. This was never the case. Where did the sick go? Interviews and participant observation in healthcare settings I conducted indicated a sizeable gap between healthcare needs and accessible services. Further, my survey indicated that market forces rather than needs shaped the existing private healthcare services.

The private doctors in Momostenango competed with each other for clients. Each doctor I interviewed claimed his practice was more legitimate than all of the others. Dr. Lara, for example, told me about a patient that Dr. Lorca had allegedly misdiagnosed and whose family had asked him to treat. He reportedly found a tumor that Dr. Lorca had not noticed and thus saved the patient's life. Dr. Delgado said that Dr. Lara sent patients that could not afford his fees to the public Health Center and that Dr. Lorca was not a licensed doctor. All of the doctors berated traditional Maya healers as quacks and *engañadores* (dupers).

I interpreted the accusations and condemnations between doctors as a reflection of the constraints of their market. Each of the four's private practice was a small business unto itself that sought to maximize profits and therefore clientele. Although Momostenango was severely underserved, the market for physicians was saturated because people either could not afford the services or were discouraged by social forces from seeking them. Several doctors had tried to establish practices but had left for the major urban areas where they could charge more and see more patients. Although the doctors that remained in Momostenango did so because of personal convictions and family ties, their businesses needed to be profitable to survive. All the doctors reported that, at times, staying profitable in Momostenango's market was difficult. For them it was a matter of pride (*orgullo*) and commitment (*compromiso*) to work in an underserved community.

Possibilities for more profitable work did exist outside Momostenango and the services that local providers offered had saved lives. Interviews with their patients confirmed the many ways private doctors had intervened during health crises: childbirth, advanced infections, dehydration from cholera, parasites etc. The health care "market" in Momostenango, however, was not an indicator of the actual health care needs of the local population. Poverty and distance from the urban center produced economic and physical barriers to care. Maya Momostecos from the outlying villages often stated that they feared, distrusted, and even hated Ladinos and Maya elite from town as a result of years of discrimination and exploitation. Dr. Lorca, a avowed leftist, acknowledged the limits of his own practice by stating, "health is not something everyone can afford."

Despite acknowledging historical processes of exclusion that affected Momostecos' care seeking patterns, when I queried physicians about the major health problems in their community, their answers focused on the individual and the cultural. Dr. Lorca stated,

I have a theory. For the poor, sickness is more important than health. The people become accustomed to getting sick. It's cultural. Sickness turns into a social event. Sickness is a part of life. If you want people to give you attention, you have to get sick. I have patients that are brought in by their family members. They say they can't eat or sleep. That way they get attention.

They don't have a consciousness of the meaning of health. That is why they don't talk about prevention. Health is not something to invest in. That is why people believe that money is not for spending on health (Interview with Dr. Lorca, 11-06-02).

Dr. Lara reported,

Racism is not the cause of our health problems. They are caused by cultural and educational factors. Look at the people who live in the eastern parts of Guatemala like Zacapa and Jutiapa.⁴² They demand more.

People here have traditions that cause their health problems. Take for instance the famous *temascales* the indigenous people use.⁴³ They kill people (Interview with Dr. Lara 04-03-01).

⁴² Zacapa and Jutiapa are popularly considered the most uniformly ladino departments in Guatemala.

Dr. Carlos Sanchez, a health promoter with the NGO Intervida, stated,

The reason that there is so much suffering here is because the men are polygamists. They have wives here and in other towns. Instead of saving money for their families, the men here drink. It is part of their culture. They aren't modern people; they are from ancient cultures (Interview with Dr. Sanchez 08-15-01).

Identifying and prioritizing the causes of illness that Momostecos faced was a concern shared by all of the healers I interviewed. They uniformly acknowledged the inadequacies of the healthcare infrastructure, yet when formulating causal explanations, resorted to modernist, behaviorist and culturalist reductionism. The private doctors in Momostenango worked within the same constraints of a failed public health care safety net as their patients. If anything, their frustration with not having the resources or facilities to meet the community's medical needs was greater than their patients' because they were acutely aware of just how deficient the system was. When the doctors or members of their families became extremely sick, they had to go to Quetzaltenango or Totonicapán just as their patients did (although the treatment they were likely to receive was probably fundamentally different than what their patients could expect). Despite not

⁴³ *Temascales* are dome-shaped adobe structures commonly used in indigenous families for bathing. Wood fires are used to heat the interior and bathers crawl into the structure through its low entrance for sweat baths. *Temascales* are used during birthing, as they are seen to represent the womb. Medical doctors unfamiliar with or do not accept the tradition often blame the practice, rather than the lack of prenatal care, for difficult deliveries or deaths at childbirth.

having access to sophisticated imaging devices, laboratories, or equipment associated with “modern” medicine, Momosteco biomedical practitioners claimed they knew more and could treat better virtually anything better than traditional Maya healer peers. Explanatory models that reduce illness causation to individualized and racialized origins are an enduring legacy of ladino self-fashioning as the representatives of modernity. As Dr. Lara claimed, “traditions” not “racism,” are the root of Momostecos’ health problems.

Without exception, state efforts to “modernize” and assimilate Guatemalan Maya into the nation imagined that culture shift was an evolutionary and unidirectional process. The absence of Maya professional healthcare providers in the urban center reinforced ladino presumptions that they- the Ladinos- were better suited to take care of the community’s health care needs. Until the early 1990s, all of the pharmacists and doctors in Momostenango were Ladinos. Obtaining such positions of educational, social and economic power in Momostenango entailed access to resources not available to the majority of indigenous residents, including capital and education. Describing the state of affairs in Momostenango in the 1970s Robert Carmack wrote,

The ladinos of Momostenango lay great stress on the need for “preparation” in order to qualify for office and, of course, claim to be far better “prepared” than even the most acculturated of the town Indians. Through advanced schooling and experience in dealing with outsiders, the local ladinos have the linguistic, legalistic, technical, and cultural skills needed to deal effectively with national officials and politicians. Privately, through ethnocentric boasting among themselves, and publicly, through innuendo and suggestion, the ladinos promote

the myth that the Indians cannot acquire these skills. These same ladinos can prevent the Indians from acquiring the very skills that they are said to lack (Carmack 1995 p. 316).

Carmack was referring to elite ruling class Maya, who had experienced a period of political ascendancy in the 1970s. Although some attitudes towards cultural/racial difference have softened since the 1990s in Momostenango (e.g. “Ladinos only” galas during the festival for the patron saint no longer exist), institutionalized exploitation of rural Maya has not. This observation led Carmack to comment,

The Momostenango town [center] ... to a large degree is no longer culturally Maya, even though it functions as an elite control center over rural Maya (Carmack 1998) p. 348).

Life opportunities for rural Maya remain restrictive and they have significantly poorer access to health care services.

Doctors practicing in Momostenango rarely leave town to visit the outlying communities where many of their patients live. During the civil war, doctors working in Momostenango were trapped by constraints imposed by the military and paramilitaries. Dr. Lara reported,

It was a real problem during the war. If we treated the guerillas when they asked for help we would be targeted by the military. If we treated the military we would be targeted by the guerillas (Interview with Dr. Lara 04-03-01).

Given that I was able to document only one political assassination by the guerillas in Momostenango (that of Leon Chanchabac, the civil patrol leader and his driver), the former statement was more accurate than the latter. Regardless of whether or not the dangers of practicing medicine were real or perceived, Dr. Lara's narrative of being trapped between the army and the guerillas was common among other professionals and community leaders. Learning to address health problems, produced by political violence, poverty and racism, within a framework acceptable to the military was central to doctors' "preparation." The army allowed doctors to treat the effects of violence, as long as they didn't confront the causes.⁴⁴ Dr. Lorca, who had grown up in Momostenango and joined the guerillas as a medic, did not believe that local doctors would have been threatened by guerillas. Instead he argued that doctors (and others) rhetorically distanced themselves from the army they actually supported by claiming the victim status of being trapped between two fires.

Both local actors that supported the military and those who were targeted for violence by it still receive threats of violence, making the terrain of Momostenango difficult to negotiate. Private doctors are buffers between the failings of the state's public health safety net and its mostly Maya patients. In general, residents welcomed their presence. Those that could afford their fees received attention without having to leave the municipality. Private doctors provided more personalized attention and greater continuity of care than could be found in the public Health Centers, and in the public health hospitals in Totonicapán and in Quetzaltenango. Indigenous Momostecos dreaded going

⁴⁴As previously mentioned, community organizers, health promoters, and activists were some of the first leaders targeted for political assassination.

to public hospitals due to the treatment they generally received there. They complained that ladino clerks made no attempt to speak K'iche' and after they had waited a half day would often reschedule them for another day. Private doctors' offices in Momostenango had bilingual K'iche' speaking, culturally sensitive nurse/receptionists, and patients rarely had to wait more than an hour to be seen. Deciding between paying the cost of transportation, long waits and poor customer care at the regional public hospitals and paying the higher fees of the private doctors was easy for many; they chose to pay the higher fees.

Momostenango's ladino doctors worked almost exclusively with indigenous patients. One ladino from Momostenango explained,

Momostenango is a small town. It used to be that there were only 13 ladino families that ran almost everything. There are more ladinos now, but we still all know each other. Unless they are unable to leave town for some reason, ladinos go to Toto (Totonicapán) or to Xela (Quetzaltenango) to see a doctor. Many [ladinos] have IGSS (social security) and use the hospital in Toto. The only reason that doctors choose to work in Momostenango is because they aren't good enough to find work in the cities (Interview with LL: 08-14-01).

Most ladino families in Momostenango own a vehicle and are willing to travel for their health care needs. Aside from concerns regarding privacy and the quality of providers, Quetzaltenango and, to a lesser degree, Totonicapán, offer a greater variety of doctors.

Finding a Cure

In her study of Maya ritual and cosmology in Momostenango, Barbara Tedlock described the inadequacies of the state run health clinic in the 1970s.

The medical clinic has a monolingual ladino doctor and ladino nurses, but it serves primarily indigenous patients. There is also a group of indigenous paramedics loosely connected to the clinic; they bring the ability to administer penicillin shots, as well as a few other simple skills, to the people in the rural cantons. But since most are not initiated Quiche' curers and thus lack the requisite power and authority to heal, they are ignored by a large proportion of the rural population (Tedlock 1992):39-40).

Thirty years later, the situation had not changed. Cuban doctors who were part of a medical mission in Momostenango reported that initially rural Maya were not only afraid of doctors in their clinic they were skeptical about their ability to heal. The Cuban doctors told me they thought the calcified beliefs about biomedical healers were, however, slowly changing. Rural Maya communities that, thirty years ago, depended primarily on *Aj Q'ijab'* (day keepers) for their healthcare needs, had experienced many ruptures. As noted in an earlier chapter, *Aj Q'ijab'* became targets of repression in rural communities. In addition, Protestant evangelical, Mormon, and Jehovah's Witness missionaries made many converts during the 1980s. The new evangelization of these ministries, and the direct relationship they offered with God provided a less hierarchical structure than the Catholic Church and one that the state's military and paramilitary counterinsurgency forces were less suspicious of.

These changes, however, did not result, I would argue, in the polarization of traditionalism and other health care practices in the municipality. Health care ecumenism appeared to be widespread when I carried out fieldwork. On several occasions when I accompanied *Aj Q'ijab'* to perform burning ceremonies they would point out evangelical Christian pastors that were also there performing ceremonies. The quiet amusement of the *Aj Q'ijab'* at seeing the same pastors who denounced such “pagan” practices in their sermons to their congregations told a story of tolerance rather than outrage. Accusations of witchcraft- *itzibal* are not uncommon in Momostenango, even within traditionalist circles. However, at least during the ceremonies, Maya *Aj Q'ijab'* that I had the privilege to work with gave the benefit of the doubt to other Maya faithful.

Most of the Momosteco *aj poronic* (“burners”--traditional Maya spiritual practitioners) I interviewed acknowledged the importance of allopathic medicine, and used the services of the pharmacists and doctors in Momostenango when they could afford them. As one *Aj Q'ij* explained,

People want something that works. If they are out of balance, or they have physical pain, they may see an *Aj Q'ij* or a *Cunanel*. But if they have pneumonia it is better that they use anti-biotics. There is no contradiction. You do not have to abandon one to use the other. (Interview with DE: 09-23-01)

Pharmacists like Don Matias, a Ladino I interviewed, diagnosed their customers in the store. A small room behind the counter served as an examination room. He explained that when he first came to Momostenango in the mid-1950's he worked primarily as a dentist doing extractions and providing basic first aid. Later he began to sell medications. Despite lacking many basic supplies including first tier medications,

Don Matias established his business by offering “modern” healthcare to a primarily urban Momosteco clientele. Access to such services helped to distinguish economic class divisions locally and had high prestige, especially for the then emerging K’iche’ elites. K’iche’ elites used the services of ladino pharmacists like Don Matias because doing so helped to ward off assertions of Maya backwardness (associated with resort to traditional healers). Such assertions were frequently used by Ladinos as a reason to justify preventing K’iche’ from acquiring political power and taking it away when they did.

Binaries that mark the hegemonic discourse of the state in Guatemala such as ladino/modern vs. Maya/traditional reinforce Don Matias use of “naturalized” cultural rubrics, which attribute public health problems to the perceived moral and educational weakness of the Maya. The subtle ideological biases, promoted by a “modernizing” state permeated his explanatory frameworks. He explained,

The cause of health problems here in Momostenango is that the men who can afford it will have two wives. Now that most of the men in town work as merchants they have at least one wife in town and one wife in the place where they work. The women are left to care for the children and the men forget about them. The main reason for poverty in Momostenango is polygamy... The women here respect me and they follow my orders. I have explained to the midwives that they cannot allow the women they are caring for to deliver their children in their *temascales*. The *temascales* are why there are such high rates of infant mortality (Interview with DL: 04-03-01).

Temascales are earthen sweat lodges used in traditional Maya homes for bathing. The *tuj* (K'iche' for *temascal*), is usually located near the patio and is an important architectural feature of many Maya homes that is not found in ladino homes. Maya tradition is to make a blessing before entering the *tuj* because it, like a cave, represents the liminal space of the womb. Caves are important ritual sites for Maya as they are places where both the living and the dead can cohabitate. One K'iche' woman described the use of the *tuj* during childbirth.

When it is time to give birth, the *iyom* (midwife) comes to the house and helps deliver the child. After they have rested, a warm fire is prepared in the *tuj* and the mother and child enter. For *una novena* (nine days) a warm fire is prepared for the mother and child (Interview with DC: 11-09-2001).

Women usually give birth inside their homes, not inside the *temascales*. They enter into the *temascal* after giving birth (sometimes several days after), in order to bond with their newborns in the quiet and warm surroundings.

In Momostenango, most childbirth is attended by an *iyom* in the pregnant woman's home and not a physician in a clinical setting. Aside from a Cuban obstetrician, *El Profe*, who began to work with Momosteco *iyom* providing regular trainings on how to identify high risk pregnancies while I was conducting fieldwork, there was little coordination and collaboration between the medical and traditional healers.

Although the *iyom* are the primary healthcare professionals that attend the majority of births in Momostenango, there is a significant power differential between their social position as women and as Maya and the social position of healthcare

professionals from town who are predominantly ladino males. Reproductive health events such as childbirth generate serious debates about what is considered proper care. Ladino healthcare professional's culturally essentialist and moralistic discourses are embedded in this power differential and have the effect locally of legitimizing their practices and generating authoritative knowledge. Regardless of whether or not there were merits to ladino claims of Maya debauched and anti-hygienic behaviors, the discursive frame of the conflict serves more to reproduce and maintain existing hierarchies of power in social relations than to reform a highly deficient healthcare infrastructure produced by those social hierarchies and historic inequalities. Such "hostile markings"⁴⁵ are the dominant narratives that serve to perpetuate the historic inequalities of a caste-based system of exploitation based on ethnic/racial identity.

Although some Maya men, especially *comerciantes* (businessmen) who spend large amounts of time doing business outside of Momostenango, have secret extramarital relationships or may even have a second 'wife,' this is not exclusively a Maya phenomenon. Infidelity and abandonment are not "culturally bound syndromes,"⁴⁶ and the ancient use of *temascales* for birthing is being promoted in internationally sponsored midwifery programs.⁴⁷ Maya customary laws (*pixab*) prohibit men from having multiple wives within the same patriclan (*alaxic*). Today, most traditionalists also practice Catholicism, which prohibits multiple spouses. On more than one occasion, town ladinos

⁴⁵ Donna Haraway, cited in Nelson 1999:128.

⁴⁶ On two occasions, doctors I interviewed in Momostenango discussed experiences of infidelity that they requested I not share with their spouses.

⁴⁷ In 1999, Dr. George Gilson, an Ob/Gyn from the U.S., gave me a tour of a midwifery-training program near Quetzaltenango that had constructed a large *temascal* for birthing.

made generalized comments to me, implying that polygamy was accepted among Maya men yet, no Momosteco Maya I met claimed to have two wives.

The deficiencies of the public health safety net, the result of a combination of state neglect, and ongoing institutionalized marginalization of Mayas, perpetuate the hegemony of explanatory models of illness causation that blame victims for what has been imposed upon them.⁴⁸

Public Health by the Numbers

The national public health system receives government funding that passes through departmental authorities in the Health Ministry in Totonicapán. Local health ministry officials, as well as municipal officials, are directly tied to the client-patron system of party politics in Guatemala. Appointment to these positions necessarily requires patronage ties with party leaders in Totonicapán and Guatemala City. Historically, the patronage system has led to widespread corruption. The general public views government officials, whether indigenous or ladino, as motivated by personal economic and political gains rather than by a desire to improve the condition of municipal residents. Indeed, most Momostecos I interviewed could recite a litany of noticeable instances of elected officials using their positions for personal economic gain. It was pointed out to me on several occasions in Momostenango that the streets to all the

⁴⁸ Carmack (1995:228) notes that the issue of polygamy became a cornerstone of the Catholic Action movement's campaign against traditionalists in the early 1950s, as were the "vices" of drunkenness, and traditional spiritual practices which the fervent priest claimed were evidence that the Maya were "barbarians" and "animals."

past *alcaldes*' houses were paved with bricks,⁴⁹ water tanks were located near politicians' houses, and elected officials sold lumber from trees cut from communal lands. Most Momostecos that I interviewed were resigned to the fact that corruption was simply a part of politics. The municipality of Momostenango had at least 13 administrative divisions and within them hundreds of smaller communities existed. *Alcaldes auxiliares* (the highest local authorities in Maya communities) were attuned to projects supported by municipal funds throughout the municipality and would openly complain about other communities that they thought were getting too big a piece of the pie.

On one occasion, the *alcalde auxiliar* from Canquixaja, who I had previously interviewed, arrived at my house with a delegation from his community. He requested money for the local indigenous authorities so they could buy silver lapel pins that designated Canquixaja as a separate *aldea* from Xequemeya. He stated,

We want to build a bridge, but they say there is no money. The authorities from Xequemeya have no shame, they eat all the bread and don't even leave us any crumbs (*ni migitas de pan nos dejan*). We have waited for our turn and the *alcalde* keeps telling us "next year" (Interview with DF: 08-17-01).

Conflicts about the distribution of municipal resources have been the major source of separatist movements in Momostenango (such as that of San Bartolo discussed in Chapter Three). Memories of state violence from the civil war motivate rural Maya Momostecos to turn their energy towards disputes with neighboring communities that they perceive as having greater access to desperately needed services, and towards the

⁴⁹ See also Carmack 1995:316-318.

wealthier Maya municipal authorities from the town center, instead of supporting revolutionary or even reformist national movements. Although rural Momosteco Maya demonstrated awareness of broader national and international political and economic forces tied to their suffering,⁵⁰ pessimistic accommodation to fighting over the “sweets” in the government’s “piñata” was the predominant mode of resistance.

The corruption that party politics and political patronage generates has resulted in a public infrastructure that serves politicians more than their constituents and leaves the vast majority of Momostecos with poor access to healthcare. On one occasion, Jorge Yax, the departmental director of the Ministry of Health, invited me to participate in a *consejo de salud*.⁵¹ On the way back from Totonicapan, I stopped at the Centro de Salud in Momostenango to speak with Dr. Ariel Delgado, the director. I mentioned to him that I had received a copy of the Ministry of Health’s 2001 immunization and vaccination data at the meeting and asked if he thought the data was accurate.

He rolled his eyes and pursed his lip. Judging his views from his reaction, I responded, “Yeah, I felt that the numbers were padded.” He said,

All they want from us is the statistics. They never come to see how we are doing here. When I ask for new equipment or more doctors, they start treating me like a troublemaker. I have fights regularly with Jorge Yax about the statistics.

They are always telling me that I need to revise the data that I send them. One

⁵⁰ After the 9-11 attacks in New York, which occurred as I was conducting fieldwork in Momostenango, several Maya made fun of the similarities of the pronunciation of my name in Spanish “Beel” with that of Bin Laden. One time a man from Canquixaja said “*Que bueno les chingaste bien a los gringos*” (How good, you really screwed the gringos”) and joked that I was in hiding with the other *teroristas* in Momos.

⁵¹ A departmental health council, consisting of local state clinic directors and heads of NGO’s working in public health.

time recently they made me submit the encounter data four different times for one month until they were satisfied.

A lot of times they have already submitted their reports to the Ministry of Health before we have turned in the data. Every time they talk to us they make more demands. Our salaries haven't increased and our work responsibilities keep increasing. The jeep that we use to get to the *aldeas* is a danger to drive. The axle is broken and the steering isn't good, a door handle is falling off and they don't want to send us any money to fix it. It would cost 3,000 Q to fix it and they don't want to touch it. When I complain that we don't have the basic things that we need to get our work done they accuse me of things. They always say that we aren't doing our jobs well.

He continued,

They compare what we do here with what they do in Totonicapan. It isn't a fair comparison because they have the public hospital for the department there. If someone with serious problems walks into the Centro de Salud in Toto, they don't even treat them there. They just refer them to the hospital, which is five minutes away. We deal with a lot of those types of cases. Like today a lady came in with a serious hemorrhage in her nose. She was bleeding all over (shows me blood on his jacket). I had to treat it here. I couldn't refer it to the hospital. It wouldn't have been practical. So, the data from Toto looks better than ours because they have the hospital right there to support the work of the health centers. Jorge Yax is nice to you when you go to his office. He will offer you coffee and treat you like a friend but if you don't do what he wants he will stab you in the back. (Interview with DA: 09-0-16-01)

I asked him what he thought would happen if he submitted encounter data that said only 70% of the population he served had received the appropriate vaccinations (a more accurate approximation than the 92% that is reported by the Ministry of Health).

First, I would be relocated to a place that I didn't want to work. Yax would accuse me of being against the party. He has already done it once. When I had a fight about the data that I was submitting he called people at the ministry and started talking bad about me and hurting my reputation. They do things within the party that can create real problems. They say that you are against the politics of the party and that can cost you your job. (Interview with DA: 09-0-16-01)

He closed the door and pulled out a letter from his desk that was signed by Jorge Yax. The letter requested that he resubmit his data for the live births from 2001 in Momostenango to 3,200+, 400 fewer than his data showed. He showed me his data in which there had been 3,600+ live births. He said,

Yax argued that the number had to be lowered because San Vicente Buenabaj was not supposed to be included in Momostenango's data. But even if you subtract the births from San Vicente Buenabaj the numbers shouldn't be so low (Interview with DA: 09-0-16-01).

By lowering the population the Ministry of Health could show higher rates of vaccination coverage. Examples such as this show the difficulties the Ministry of Health has at completing its primary task, that of vaccination.

Politicians who promoted neoliberal, public/private ventures and the reduced role of the state in funding public health programs, required data that could document the efficacy of such programs. Regardless of the good intentions of the public health program doctors, they were bound to a system geared towards reducing state responsibility for

public health. Attempts to increase the role of the state or to show deficiencies with the public health system were met with quick political responses and could cost the dissenter his or her job.

The public health doctor's concerns about the manipulation of vaccination data were significant because vaccinations were the primary service provided by the public health center. Among Momostecos that I interviewed they were also the primary reason that people distrusted the public health doctors. Patients who received services at the health center were required to show a vaccination card. Health centers maintained a "no vaccination, no consultation" policy. Patients who failed to bring their vaccination cards were denied services unless they agreed to have a vaccination. Many patients that had lost or forgotten to bring their vaccination cards to the clinic often agreed to be re-vaccinated in order to have a consultation, thus inflating the numbers artificially. The center maintained vaccination records for the Ministry of Health that were often manipulated for political reasons as described above.

The system of mandatory vaccinations fomented distrust and resentment of patients towards health center staff. A K'iche' man from the northern canton of Racanaj said,

They almost lynched one of the public health doctors about a year ago. A woman brought in her son who was very ill and dehydrated. The doctor required that the child receive a vaccine before he was treated for dehydration. The family saw how they injected the child in his arm. Then a day later, the child died. The people believe that the doctor poisoned the child (Interview with VS: 10-18-02).

Another K'iche' man from the urban center claimed that the "no vaccine, no consultation" policy was not administered uniformly.

If you are a Ladino they treat you differently. The ladino doctors and secretaries will not ask other Ladinos that they know to see their vaccination cards. They tell them to come by at the end of the shift and they let them skip in front of (indigenous) people that have been waiting all day (Interview with RV: 1-17-02).

On one occasion, while accompanying patients to the public Health Center, I watched the process in which people were given their appointments. By 8:00 a.m. when we arrived, a line had formed in front of the secretary's window. . The vast majority of patients were women and children and all of the women were wearing *traje* (indigenous clothing). The secretary (ladina) asked the patients in line for basic information including: name, age, residence and whether or not they carried a vaccination card from the Centro de Salud. Those that had been to the Centro de Salud previously waited while the secretary searched for their file. Patients that could be found in the records were given a piece of stationery with the Centro de Salud letterhead on it folded in a brochure sized brown leaflet with their name written on it. Those that could not be found in the records were required to start a new record and to be vaccinated. By 9:00 a.m., I counted 53 people in line. Around 10:30 the secretary came out from behind her window and announced that the doctor would begin seeing patients. She handed out pieces of paper with numbers on them to patients whose records had been located. Patients whose files

were not found were not given a number and were not allowed to see the doctor. They had to leave.

There were not enough chairs in the waiting room for everyone. I saw several people who, after seeing their number, turned and left despite having waited already for over an hour. I asked a secretary how many patients they saw in a day. She reported that they saw somewhere between 100 and 200, which I believed to be high because there was only one doctor and he was taking 10-20 minutes with each patient. The two other nurses that provided injections worked at about the same pace. None of the patients were there only for vaccinations. Patients that were vaccinated waited afterwards to have a consult with the doctor.

Indeed, at the end of the day, which I had spent in its entirety waiting with patients, a Ladina arrived with her daughter. When the secretary asked her for her vaccination card she replied that she had forgotten it but that “of course” her daughter had been vaccinated. The secretary gave her a number and the woman and her daughter were seen as soon as the doctor had finished with the client he was with. None of the indigenous patients in the waiting room said a thing although many had been waiting all day without leaving for lunch.

After witnessing the poor and biased service and other inadequacies of the public health centers, it was as surprising to learn that patients would spend long hours waiting to be seen as it was to learn that they avoided the Health Centers entirely. Due to lack of reliable data it is difficult to assess the real impact of Ministry of Health public health interventions in Momostenango. However, a general picture can be formed from the only data available.

In 1997, a national study evaluated healthcare demand and expenditures in four departments of the western highlands, including Totonicapán. Four parameters were taken into consideration: the populations' perceptions of health problems, the decision to seek attention at home or in other facilities, the choice of what healthcare provider to use and the amount of money spent on health care. Twenty-four percent of the subjects said they had a health problem during the 30 days before the study. The highest rates of perceived illness were among indigenous households with the highest rates of poverty. Self-medication was found to be the primary source of medical intervention. There was also a low rate of hospitalization, especially in the poorest, indigenous regions, where hospitals were only used in cases of emergency, even when hospitalization was clearly needed (Instituto Nacional de Estadística et al 1997).

A study conducted in 2000 by the University of San Carlos Economics Department indicated that only 9% of Momostenango's population visited doctors in private practice. In other words, 91% of Momostenango's 119,000 inhabitants relied on the only local public health doctor or on traditional healers (Racancoj Alonzo 2000). Nonetheless, the same study reported that 58% of the patients that sought services at the public Health Centers characterized their treatment as "average," 20% stated that they received "good" attention, and 18% said they received poor care. Although the study had little epidemiological validity it draws attention to the fact that when the healthcare infrastructure is so limited, healthcare recipients are by in large grateful for any services that they receive. Another possible interpretation is that the clinics are doing really well given the constraints they are forced to work under.

In terms of the health of the general population as an indicator of the efficacy of public health services, the statistics for Momostenango were worse than the national average.⁵² In 2000 the infant mortality rate was 48 per 1,000 children as compared to the national average of 44, and life expectancy was 60 compared to the national average of 64 (Guatemala 2000; Racancoj Alonzo 2000). Most disturbing of the health indicators in Guatemala is that highly treatable diseases cause most fatalities that Guatemalans not living in poverty are not exposed to or can easily get treatment for. A review of Health Department records from 2000 shows that respiratory infections, gastrointestinal infections, and malnutrition were the leading cause of death (Racancoj Alonzo 2000). A review of the death records in the municipal archive show *fiebre, calentura, anemia, sarampion, asientos, gripe, colicos, and alcoholismo* (fever, anemia, measles, diarrhea, cold, colic, and alcoholism) to be among the most common causes of death.

One of the most alarming data sets in the above report (which is the most recent demographic study of the municipality) is a graph that indicates the causes of illness. The graph separates the causes of illness into two categories. First, “Illnesses Caused by a Lack of Hygienic Behaviors,” and second, “Illnesses Caused by Both a Lack of Hygienic Behaviors and Poverty.” The bar graph shows that 51% of the diseases are attributed to a lack of hygienic behaviors alone and 49% of the diseases are attributed to a lack of hygienic behaviors and poverty combined. Nowhere in the report does it explain how such a conclusion was made or what constitutes “hygienic behaviors.”

⁵² Data collected from the Public Health Ministry is unreliable due to large discrepancies in reported cases and the actual number of cases, as well as manipulation of data for political ends. However, it was the only database available in 2000.

The message gleaned from these data is apparently simple and straightforward. A full 100% of the diseases in Momostenango are caused by a lack of hygienic behaviors, while only 49% have poverty as a contributing factor. While the report offers no recommendations on how to decrease preventable diseases in Momostenango, the data implies that individual behaviors must change first and decreasing poverty second. Although it is certain that fostering hygienic behavior (i.e., washing hands), could prevent many illnesses, the larger question, which is not even discussed in the report, is whether or not Momostecos have the means available to engage in such behaviors. Given some of the highest rates of poverty in the country, the absence of sewage control and waste disposal services, and a lack of political will to address such basic public health concerns, the focus on personal behavior in the absence of the means to effect hygiene is only one part of what needs to be a larger intervention.

Blood, Hygiene, and the Identity Politics of Assimilation

In the fall, at the end of the rainy season, the temperature begins to drop and the winds stir up the dust. It is a time when many people begin to suffer from the effects of influenza and viruses. In many of the adobe brick houses there is little protection from the wind and the cold. Most houses have roofs made from *laminas* (corrugated metal sheets), which began to replace the traditional *paja* or straw roofs in the 1960s. Moisture collects on the metal at night when the temperature drops, producing damp cold that penetrates to the bone.

My son Guille turned four during our first dry season in Momostenango and my daughter Juli turned 2. We kept a constant supply of Motrin on hand because it seemed

that every week one of them would come down with a fever. On one occasion Juli, sick with a high fever, became so dehydrated that one of the Cuban doctors had to treat her with an IV of saline solution.

On one of the fall days that year, a young father named Santos Vicente came into the public health clinic carrying his 6-year-old son, Juan, in his arms. He reported that his son had been sick for several days but he had been “getting better.” Santos said that he worked in the fields near his house in Malacatancito, a small hamlet 15 miles north of the town center. He had left Juan at home with his wife and other children while he picked tomatoes. The previous night they began to worry that Juan’s condition was worsening again. His fever spiked and they were unable to bring it down by placing wet cloths on his head. They sought the help of a traditional healer who had told them that Juan was probably suffering from witchcraft. By morning Juan began having febrile seizures, his eyes rolled back in their sockets and he was unresponsive. It was only then that Santos hired a local man who owned a pickup truck to drive them to the clinic in Momostenango.

Upon their arrival, the doctor quickly diagnosed the child with severe dehydration and began an IV and administered an injection to try to bring down his fever. The doctor told Santos that Juan was very sick and would need a higher level of care than the clinic could provide and that he should take the boy to the hospital in Quetzaltenango, one hour’s drive away.

Santos explained that he had used all of his money to pay the driver to bring him to the clinic and that he could not afford to take him to Xela. The doctor asked if I would be willing to drive Juan and Santos to the hospital accompanied by Sofia, one of

the clinic's nurses, who would try to keep him stable in transport. I lifted Juan gently from the examination table while Sofia held the IV bag. As I held him in my arms I couldn't help but realize that he was the same size and weight as my own son, despite the fact that he was two years older. I remember his homemade pants that were patched at the knees, his brown sweater and worn leather shoes that were untied and seemed like they would slide off of his limp and dangling feet. His hand was contracted and curled. I set him in the back seat of the Trooper, Sofia hung the IV from the window and we sped off towards Xela over the continental divide, going as fast as I possibly could. I repeatedly said to myself that it would be worse if we crashed, but I believed that Juan's only hope was in getting to the hospital quickly. I was doing everything I could to go as fast as I could while keeping the car on the road.

When we arrived at the hospital 45 minutes later, I pleaded to the guard at the front gate to let us through, that we were carrying a dying child. . The guard looked at Santos sitting next to me with suspicion. He slowly walked out of the guard booth and looked in the car window to examine the scene. I thought to myself "Why is there a guard blocking entry to a public hospital?" Would he really turn us away? "I was angry. I looked towards Santos for confirmation that my outrage was justified. He avoided eye contact and stared at the floor. Even after the guard saw Juan, it seemed an eternity before he waved us through.

We rushed Juan into the emergency room where a young man in a lab jacket told me to place him on one of the examination tables. The only doctor present was a young ladino intern who made his way, patient by patient, towards us. Before he asked Santos or me about Juan's history, he took a syringe and drew blood from Juan's curled hand. He

looked at Santos dispassionately and told him that before the child would be treated, he would need to have the lab results of his blood. Without asking, he handed Santos two vials of his son's blood and told him that he needed to take them to a laboratory because the hospital did not have one.

Santos stood holding Juan's blood in his hand and looking at his son's wilted body. He said nothing. I told him that I would take him to the lab. We walked out through the the ER. Families of patients sat on the concrete patio and huddled under the few trees waiting for news of their loved ones. Most of those waiting were indigenous and the patterns of the huipiles (indigenous blouses) worn by the women indicated that many of them had traveled, as we had, from poorer, rural outlying communities.

We crossed the street to a private laboratory. A clerk took the vials from Santos and told him that it would cost 100 Quetzales for the lab tests. Again, Santos looked at me and explained that he had spent a week's salary paying for the taxi to the clinic in Momostenango. I paid for the labs, which they said would be ready in 3 hours. We returned to the hospital to be with Juan. I told the medical student that we had taken the blood samples to the lab. He looked at Santos, who was several years his elder and said, "Y vos, porque no trajiste tu hijo antes?" ("And you, why didn't you bring your son sooner?"). It is commonplace in Guatemala for Ladinos to address indigenous people using the second person familiar pronoun "*Vos.*" In this case it was not an expression of solidarity, but a sign of disrespect. His choice of words and tone were harsh and scolding. Santos ignored the way he was being addressed and responded to the question saying that he thought his son had been getting better. The intern looked at me with an exasperated look and bluntly said, "Esta gente mata sus hijos por la ignorancia" ("These people kill

their children by their ignorance”), as if I would naturally share his interpretation. He walked away leaving us looking down at Juan, his body convulsing.

Sofia pulled me aside to tell me that she had to return to Momostenango before it turned dark because “there were bandits that assaulted vehicles at the *cumbre*” and that her children were at home alone. Given the way Santos had been treated by the hospital staff, I was not convinced that every possible measure would be taken to save Juan’s life. With many misgivings, I told Santos that we could no longer help him and that we would have to leave him at the hospital. I gave him 100 Quetzales and my number and told him to call me if anything happened.

That night at 3:00 am my phone rang. It was Santos. He was crying. He spoke softly and was calling to tell me that Juan had died. He could not explain what had happened. He was lost in his sorrow. He said that the hospital was giving him a problem about releasing Juan’s body and that he would need to pay an undertaker. He did not have the money needed to release his son and was calling family to come help. He would try to pay me back, he told me.

Was Juan’s death a result of cultural beliefs and practices, as the intern had implied when he referred to Santos as “Esta gente”? The intern diagnosed the cause of Juan’s critical state of illness to have been a cultural problem. According to the intern, Santos’ failure to recognize his son’s state of severe dehydration resulted in him waiting too long before he had sought emergency care. Indigenous people’s “ignorance” is the reason that they die of treatable illnesses that wealthy Guatemalans are able to prevent.

Was it simply a belief system and behavior pattern that led Santos to first try to resolve Juan’s problems with a traditional healer? Would Santos have refused to take

Juan to a medical doctor if there was one in his hamlet and if that healthcare was affordable? Was Santos' decision to bring Juan to Momostenango a rejection of his traditional beliefs and an eleventh-hour capitulation to western healing traditions?

By giving Santos vials of his own son's blood and telling him that Juan's problems lay therein prior to making any other intervention to save his life, the ladino intern reinforced long-established ideologies of Guatemalan racial identities.

The conflation of indigenous culture and class into a singular racial identity is nothing new to Quetzaltenango's Ladinos. Historian Greg Grandin points to the cholera outbreak of 1837 in Guatemala as a key event that helped consolidate fundamental ladino ideologies of race (Grandin 2000). Quetzaltenango's ladino elite, who possessed neither political nor cultural hegemony prior to the cholera outbreak, used the epidemic to strengthen their own brand of ethnic nationalism. The fact that the vast majority of plague casualties were indigenous was emphasized by Ladinos.⁵³ Pointing towards indigenous cultural traditions including their "clothes, the food they ate, the way they disposed of their garbage, and the way they buried corpses," ladino authorities enacted local ordinances to control the distribution of food supplies, the burial of the dead, and to mandate the forced treatment and quarantining of the ill (Grandin 2000p. 87). Many of the K'iche' majority perceived these measures as authoritarian and discriminatory rather than the paternal benevolence ladinos imagined themselves to be dispensing. By casting

⁵³ Grandin (2000:91) notes that "From the onset of the cholera days, municipal records inevitably and repeatedly referred to the disease's victims and potential victims as *indigentes*. Considering that, indeed, the vast majority of those afflicted in the highlands were indígenas, this choice of cognate was more than fortuitous. On at least one occasion, the city scribe used the word *indigente* when it was clear municipal officials were discussing Indians.

the epidemic as an illness that afflicted indigenous people, and the cure as eradicating traditional beliefs and practices, Quetzalteco Ladinos projected their cultural identity as universal. By changing behaviors and beliefs, indígenas could assimilate to the dominant culture, and only thus avoid the plague.

It was not the content of the vials of Juan's blood that Santos held that killed his son. The lab results that came back were "normal". Juan's fate was almost certainly determined prior to arriving at the hospital. The macabre image of Santos holding his son's blood, unable to pay for help, offers a surreal portrait of the ways blood, culture, and race combine with economic marginalization in Guatemala. It is the potent conflation of culture and class that has become so virulent in Guatemala, and which continues to be so lethal.

Although there was great fanfare surrounding the 1996 peace accords, with leaders pronouncing that they would usher in a new era of reforms to protect human rights, neoliberal reforms since then that have been implemented in the "post-war" period have fallen short in promoting health as a human right, (as is the case in much of the world). . Instead, health is seen as a commodity that can be purchased and sold. The Guatemalan state has increasingly opened public health institutions to private investors while moving to decrease its own responsibility for public welfare, just like in the U.S. The discourse of democratic reforms and respect for human rights that appears repeatedly in the peace accords is betrayed by policies that decrease state responsibility for public welfare and blame the victim for their health problems.

State emphasis on promoting health interventions that focus on changing individual behaviors such as washing hands before eating and regular bathing are not

unproblematic. Although they are easy and inexpensive to implement for those who have regular access to clean water and offer real health benefits they perpetuate the dominant myth that “dirty Indians are making conscious choices about hygiene. By focusing only on behaviors and beliefs and neglecting the enormous barriers that prevent poor people from accessing affordable healthcare, studies like the one cited above circumvent critiques that implicate systemic change as a necessary reform and instead place the blame of social suffering on the victims⁵⁴. James C. Young observed, it is often the grinding forces of poverty, rather than cultural belief systems, that prevent indigenous peoples from accessing medical treatment (Young and Garro 1981). Given the huge disparities in access to healthcare described in this chapter, analysis of historical political, social and economic roots of the barriers to healthcare access provides a necessary counterpoint to dominant cultural essentialist explanations for health disparities in Momostenango.

Remembering the Dead

The same processes that led to the end of ladino domination of Momostenango’s municipal government in the 1950s, led to disruption in traditional Maya spiritual practices. Local priests that were openly hostile to Maya traditions championed the Catholic Action movement that began in the late 1940s. Emerging Maya elites from the town center embraced the Catholic Action movement as a means of eroding the power of

⁵⁴ Rudolph Virchow acknowledged, “Medicine is a social science; and politics nothing but medicine on a grand scale.” (Taylor 1985) It would follow that social scientists would look beyond the immediate conditions that breed disease and look at the social conditions that breed disease. Virchow, as well as Engels, recognized poverty as being the primary factor in public health.

cofradias- Maya spiritual/religious brotherhoods that controlled the saints from each *parcialidad* (municipal divisions based on membership to patriclans). The *cofradias* served as important mediators between the Catholic Church and *costumbristas* (practitioners of traditional Maya spirituality). *Cofrades* and *principales* were the leading authorities in outlying communities. Maya elites from the town center, who often served as *contratistas* for the coastal plantations and mediators between the Maya indigenous masses and the state, embraced the Catholic Action movement in part because of its emphasis on “modernizing” Maya. Members of the Catholic Action movement were asked to turn in their *mebil* (divining bundles of *tz’ite* seeds used in Maya ceremonies) to the priest and to renounce traditional Maya practices. The military repression of Maya traditionalists during the civil war (see Chapter Three) added to the fragmentation of Maya spiritual practices as the military perceived them as a form of Maya organization and resistance, and therefore, a danger. Despite having been subjected to the transformative forces of the state-sponsored acculturation and genocide projects discussed in earlier chapters, Maya identity and cultural practices have survived by changing, being rearticulated and finding new expressions. Numerous recent studies stress the transformations and continuities of Maya identity over time while drawing attention to the neo-colonial aspects of analyses that lament “culture loss” (Cook 2000; Hale, et al. 1996).

The discussion of forces that have influenced the social, economic and political life of Momosteco Maya over the past century that I have discussed thus far, present a case that there is no singular mode of “being Maya” and that there probably never has been. Many Momosteco Maya stopped participating in “traditional” practices years ago

and identify more with dominant (ladino) cultural and spiritual practices than with what is commonly considered Maya. Nevertheless, historical processes unique to Momostenango have helped preserve some aspects of Maya culture that are no longer observed in other highland Maya communities. Garrett Cook observes,

Perhaps as a consequence of the political struggle within its traditional sector, Momostenango never developed the interlocked civil-religious hierarchy that is commonly seen as a central element in highland Maya community structure.... Perhaps the commercialism and militarism of Momostenango have fostered the retention of core institutions in a social and political system that has made fewer and later adaptations to the forces of modernization than have many smaller and more remote villages that might superficially appear to be more traditional (Cook 2000:9).

Traditional forms of authority that have persisted in Momostenango are a form of resistance and rebellion. Aside from the state's brief overtures between 1944-1954 towards eliminating economic and social barriers that excluded Maya from reaping the benefits of assimilation and modernity, Guatemala's ruling ladino elites have benefitted from state policies that promoted inequality and separatism. Maya "backwardness" and refusal to become "civilized" was then, in turn, used by ruling class elites to submit them to highly exploitative system of agricultural production (Taracena Arriola 1997).

Momosteco Maya have not forgotten state abuses that generations of their family members have experienced. Today, many Maya recognize the ongoing humiliation of racialized state discourses and policies that continue to segregate and marginalize

Guatemala's indigenous majority. The failures of state assimilation projects have prompted many Maya to seek comfort, guidance and support from traditional spiritual beliefs and practices. In this aspect, the persistence of Maya spiritual practices in Momostenango is a form of resistance to state projects of subordination and post-war historical revisionism.

In the following section, I will discuss ways in which the incorporation of historical knowledge is a central element of traditional Maya spiritual healing. When *Aj Q'ijab* burn offerings at the altars of their ancestors, they invoke the dead to intervene in the affairs of the living and reinforce Maya identity and its connections to time and place. I will use excerpts from interviews with Don Abraham Vicente to provide an ethnographic sketch of how some Momosteco Maya *costumbristas* (practitioners of traditional spirituality) understand notions of health and wellbeing. Don Abraham attributes his current wellbeing to his return to traditional Maya spiritual practices after his experience of surviving kidnapping, torture and military detention during the early 1980s. I share some of his experience to illustrate how Maya spirituality remains an important aspect of social life in Momostenango, yet I do so at the risk of over-generalizing about collective ways of experiencing the world.

Momostenango's Maya *costumbristas* have experienced resurgence since the early 1990s and Don Abraham is part of that movement. Many Maya that had given up traditional practices after they joined the Catholic Action movement between 1950-1980 have resumed their former practices. Some Momosteco *costumbristas* reject syncretic rituals and practices that share aspects of Catholicism, and explicitly promote *costumbre* as a pure form of anti-colonial indigenous resistance. Most Momosteco traditionalists,

however, are also, at least nominally, Catholics and reject the contention of conservative priests that argue, “You can not serve two masters”. Barbara Tedlock, described how Momosteco *costumbristas*’ made a dialectic accommodation with rigid Catholic religious doctrine during the later twentieth century by combining ritual aspects of *costumbre* and Christianity (Tedlock 1992).

A central element in Maya spiritual practices is the understanding that the dead help shape the present and can guide the future, often referred to as the “cult of ancestry worship” (Brintnall 1979). The dead are present in daily life and remind the living of historical continuities and the importance of tradition. On special ceremonial days that are clearly defined within the 260-day calendar, traditional Maya pay homage to ancestors through the help of spiritual guides who have been initiated as *Aj Q’ijab*’(day keepers). Don Abraham described what it was like growing up in his family,

We lived by the calendar of nature. We used the *tz’olkin*, the Maya calendar, to decide on which days were best for doing things like planting and harvesting. We had our own traditions. On the 2nd or 3rd of May we would put crosses in the four corners of our cornfields. These were to protect the corn from the wind that could blow the stalks down. My grandparents would teach me these traditions. My grandfather, Pedro Garcia Velasquez, was an *Aj Mesa* (a diviner). He performed ceremonies for our clan (*alaxic*). He taught me the 260-day Maya calendar.

Don Abraham’s spirituality incorporated both Maya and Christian traditions. Unlike some members of his community he saw no contradictions in his shared belief system and emphasized not only the ability of spirituality to transform people, but also the ability of people to transform spirituality. He stated,

I am a Catholic and I am an Aj Q'ij. There are people that reject me from both groups. There are some Catholics that say that Maya spirituality is a sin against God. Padre Fidencio believed that. Others have been more tolerant. Almost all of the Protestant Evangelicals believe that Maya Spirituality is bad. There are a few Mayas like Don Rigoberto Itzep, who say that the Spaniards imposed Catholicism on us and it is a colonial religion. I, like most who practice Maya spirituality, accept both religions. I believe that to change a society one needs to be working in it. If I resign from the church I can't do any thing to change it. If I retire from Maya Spirituality I can't change it.

Don Abraham expressed the importance of being in balance with the natural world and with all things living. Natural resources are a limited resource for the use of all and, therefore, need to be treated with care. He continued,

For [Maya people] there isn't much difference between the spiritual and the material. For example, some people believe that their health doesn't have anything to do with the trees and the water. There are people that physically are Maya, but their thoughts aren't. It's contradictory. In the Maya way of thinking the tree is not only for utility. It is a life, a being. It is a brother because it is a living being like the entire universe. It's the same with the little animals. I received instructions from my grandparents not to kill animals with my slingshot. The crickets keep vigil at night when we are sleeping.

Fire also is sacred and should not be played with. My father would work in the fields with his *asadon* and in the forests with his axe from sun up to sun down. It used to take my father two days to cut down a tree when we needed firewood or money. Now it is fast, they cut down many trees in a day. Chainsaws have done great damage. Before we cut a tree, we had to ask permission before and give thanks afterwards. When the scorched earth policy was implemented, this practice was stopped. The burning of the forests was a counterinsurgent practice that is still happening. Today there are people that sympathize with the

powerful who continue implementing this practice. They don't ask for permission. They cut the trees to sell or to clear land.

Not every Maya that practices *costumbre* has the ability to receive and interpret signs from nature and the ancestors. Many need to use the services of *Aj Q'ijab*' who serve as intermediaries between the world of the living and the world of the spirits. Usually, there is a moment when those with this gift receive their calling. Don Abraham recalled his,

I received my *barra* in 1980. I was suffering a great deal. There was a theft and there were constant problems. An *Aj Q'ij* told me that I was going to have problems. I had dreams of women that symbolized Maya altars. I had dreams of serpents. The serpent is the time and space. With a serpent you can form a circle. Inside is the space. It is the *Culculcan*, the feathered serpent (Interview with DA: 02-12-02).

The name for Maya altars is *awas*, which is also the K'iche' term used for male and female genitalia as well as for "sin". Altars accumulate the histories of generations of Maya offerings burnt at them. These altars, which are everywhere within the municipality, serve as landmarks of Maya historical resistance.

Maya *costumbristas* pay close attention to their dreams and the messages within them. By being in tune with nature, *Aj Q'ijab*' have the ability to diagnose illness and divine the future by paying close attention to signals in their body. In particular, the flows of blood (blood lightening) to certain parts of the body give the *Aj Q'ij* signals and messages. The body of an *Aj Q'ij* is, thus, a microcosm for the universe and answers to life's major questions lie there within. Don Abraham stated,

My blood was vibrating so much all over my body. When someone would come I could feel it from the soles of my feet to my head. If the blood starts at your head and goes to your feet it means that someone will die or that someone will leave. If it is in the knee it means that someone is on top of a mountain. If it is in the ligament of the knee it means that someone is in the base of a mountain. If it is in the calf it is because someone is in a flat place. The interpretation also depends on the flows of blood; if it goes down someone is leaving if it goes up someone is coming. In the gluteus it means that someone is around you. A sharp pain in the back means that someone is rising and comes with bad intent. In the temple it means that someone is thinking of you and you can tell if someone is coming. If there are movements in the eyebrow it means death in two or three months. If it is close to the center it means in 2 or 3 weeks. In the third eye in the center of the forehead it means soon someone will die or that they already did die. The vibration in the upper eyelid means that you will have to see someone cry. If it is in the lower eyelid it means you yourself will cry. If it is on your thumb it means that someone will receive money. In the center of the palm it means correspondence. In the wrist it means it means that one will be captured, the same in the forearm. In the biceps and triceps in means kidnapping. In the big toe it means that death of an adult. In the next toe it means someone not so old will die. In the middle toe in means a young person will die. The second to the last toe it is an adolescent and the little toe is a baby or a child under 5 years old. When the ear makes a sound it means that news is coming in the street or someone is coming. In the throat it means that that they decapitate someone or that they assassinate someone. When there is a serious problem one has a vibration in the groin (latz'). In the shoulder it means that people are planning against you. If the blood moves to the left it is a woman/ feminine side. If it moves to the right it is a man. When the blood vibrates it is necessary to ask the blood if it is woman or a man that has the *nahaul* of a woman. Vibration is fast if something is going to happen quickly. If you are looking for someone and you haven't found them, if the blood in your gluteus vibrates it is certain that the people are in the room. If the elbow vibrates

when someone is talking it means that the person is not apt for the work because he denies the signal. Movement of the upper lip means that someone is drinking alcohol. If it is in the lower lip it means someone themselves will drink. If the ears are burning it means that someone is talking badly of you. All of the *Aj Q'ijab'* have the same vibrations in the same places but they won't tell you if they don't trust you (Interview with DA: 02-12-02).

Like many other Momostecos who experienced political violence during the civil war, Don Abraham left the country. While living in exile in Costa Rica for a time, he met other Maya political refugees that helped to renew and energize his spirituality. He spoke of the transformative ways Maya traditions helped him to overcome fear,

Susto is fear. To be *asustado* is to be frightened, like when a animal jumps out of the path in front of you. But *susto* as an illness is fear that stays with you. One always holds on to their fear. One always has the doubt, the unsettling feeling that they will come to hurt you again. The way we treat the immediate problem of *susto* is by putting red pine tar in a glass of water and then drinking it, we also prepare tea of *ruda* (rue). If you don't treat the *susto* the person can turn jaundiced from an increase in bile. *Susto* can leave physical problems. Permanent fear leaves psychic problems. It requires special treatment. But it can be cured. In Costa Rica they helped me tremendously. Fear transforms into hatred and rage. Fear transforms into other things and it is dangerous. What helped me to overcome my fear was participating in Maya spirituality and returning to Momos and continuing my work in human rights (Interview with DA: 02-12-02).

Don Abraham overcame his fear by renewing his commitment to human rights and renewing his Maya spiritual healing practices. Upon his return to Momostenango he spent several years living in hiding. Gradually, he began to reconnect with community

members and rebuild trust through his activities with a local human rights group, traditional healing cooperatives and the church.

Don Abraham's recovery of a sense of wellbeing required a creative remaking of a world that came violently unhinged in 1982. The marginal economic existence of most Maya Momostecos that live in poverty, many in extreme poverty, has not lessened since the peace accords were signed. Confronting social injustices, especially after the political violence that occurred, requires tremendous faith and courage in the face of life-threatening risks. It also requires public health interventions that confront the vast social and economic disparities that limit life possibilities for most Guatemalans.

Through *costumbre*, Don Abraham found balance and stable footing to take on the task of rebuilding a society that, still today, is in denial of its violent past. During the course of my fieldwork, Don Abraham was physically attacked on two occasions and his life was threatened. Never, during that period did he mention leaving Momostenango. Even after I was able to secure him a multiple entry visa to the United States through contacts in the embassy, something many Momosteco men would pay dearly for, Don Abraham never considered leaving. His act of returning to continue working to alleviate the suffering in his community, despite the fact that the man who had ordered his capture had stolen and now lived in his previous house, demonstrated his ability to overcome fear and his creative life force.

The state's objective of terror warfare and racial violence in Guatemala was to incite fear in the general population. In the western highlands the objective was more specific. It was to prevent the mixing of Marxist revolutionary movements with widespread indigenous anger about historic state abuses. For many Momosteco survivors

of political violence, class and ethnic identities are intrinsically bound. Their social positions as *pobres* was as much a part of their identities as being *Maya*. In the following chapter, I will examine the ways in which dominant narrative frames about local history impinge on Momosteco Maya agency in the context of health settings.

Surviving Political Violence in Momostenango

In previous chapters I argued that wartime experiences of many Momostecos included significant violence, including kidnappings, disappearances, torture, rape, and death. Historical accounts of Momosteco's wartime experiences that omit or deny the experiences of victims and survivors extend and expand the duration and reach of state terror. In this chapter I focus on the experiences of Momosteco survivors who sought services and assistance from a program at the Comité Pro-Salud Urbano y Rural (LA CLINICA) clinic that was especially designed to help them. In some ways, the program goals were similar to those of greater Guatemalan society, namely to heal the wounds of 36 years of civil war. Other similarities unfortunately also existed in the form of persistent racial hierarchies in the structure and practices of the clinic. The majority of those seeking help from LA CLINICA were poor Maya while the majority of providers were middle or upper class Ladinos. Also, concerns about safety in the clinic reflected broader societal worries about discussing the past, which most implicitly agreed was dangerous. Providers and patients shared fears that candid discussion about the past might attract the attention and reprisal of perpetrators of wartime atrocities, and force discussions of unresolved past injustices out of the public and into private forums. As a result of a number of these and other difficulties I will explore, the program had less success than its initiators and funders had hoped.

Writing Beyond Culture-Bound Syndromes

The ethnographic content of many twentieth century studies of Guatemalan Maya communities emphasized local culture over global processes (Redfield 1956 p. 255; Tax 1937). Most current critiques of early ethnographies focus not on what was in the studies, but what was left out (Fischer and Benson 2006; Fischer and ebrary Inc. 2001; Nash 2007; Watanabe and Fischer 2004). The main concern of these critiques is the authors' apparent blindness to transnational forces, such as colonialism and neo-colonialism, which affect local opportunities, perceptions and behaviors. Today, anthropologists find it difficult to ignore broader forces that influence cultural patterns. While global treaties like NAFTA, CAFTA, and GATT become increasingly common and politicians have to take a stance on immigration, a growing awareness of how global forces affect local populations has broadened ethnographic analysis to units besides the individual, the clan, the tribe and the corporate community. Despite this widening of the ethnographic field of vision, intended to remedy local problems created and perpetuated by global forces, instead, may mystify and obscure their origins.

Anthropologists have drawn attention to the ways in which distress, illness and disease can be expressions of society-wide economic, social and political *as well as* individual problems (Comaroff 1993; Das 2000; Kleinman, et al. 1997; Nordstrom 1998; Taussig 1987) and how political violence can be *inscribed* on the body (Csordas 1994; Scarry 1985; Scheper-Hughes 1994). In Momostenango, the physical torture, killing and violence perpetrated by the state against local residents clearly establish their bodies as social/political *as well as* personal/individual subjects. The Truth Commission characterizations of political violence in Guatemala as “genocide” squarely placed racial

relations at the center of social suffering. Since “race” (with its presumed biological underpinnings) and racism in Guatemala are formulated around cultural attributes, it is not surprising that most public health interventions in Guatemala fail to incorporate indigenous understandings of illness and disease, focusing instead on biomedical explanations and interventions. Treatments that focus on changing individual emotions, cognitions and behaviors ignore the possibility that symptoms might be coping mechanisms and strategies of resistance to state terror. This focus on the individual rather than broader social structure as the locus of disease runs the risk of blaming the victim.

While the categorization of state violence as “genocide” has done much to bring attention to the state’s brutality during the civil war, in Guatemala, it did little to humanize and personalize the enactment and experience of political violence on a local level. In his study of infectious disease, Paul Farmer lists three common epistemological limitations to the popular and scholarly analysis of disease,

One is the *focus on local factors and local actors to the exclusion of broader analyses* that would implicate powerful forces and powerful actors outside the field of view. A second is the *conflation of structural violence and cultural difference*. A third, centrally related to the others, is the *absence of serious consideration of social class* (Farmer 1999 p. 84-85) (author’s emphasis).

In Guatemala there has never been serious government consideration of even attempting to reduce class inequalities, resistance to which was at the heart of the civil war. For its part, war is a disease that also has lasting effects on human well-being. Over

150 years ago, the father of social medicine, Rudolph Virchow, described war's relationship to health as follows:

Abnormal conditions always produce abnormal situations. War, plague and famine condition each other, and we don't know any period in world history where they did not appear in more or less large measure either simultaneously or following each other (Virchow 1985).

The chaos and brutalities of war erode the societal consensus of what is normal. War breaks down the fabric of society and leaves in its aftermath broken bodies and minds (Bracken, et al. 1995; Bracken, et al. 1998; Green 1993; Lykes 1994; Summerfield 2000; Zur 1998). While it is precisely such bodies and minds that need to be healed, many interventions, be they biomedical or traditional Maya, situate the body as the sole focus of intervention. War itself, is rarely the focus of intervention. The weak peace accords in Guatemala and the subsequent failure of the Guatemalan military and government to adhere to the accords have resulted in the protraction of the war.

For many in Guatemala, there was no clear distinction between the war's end and the current situation. Although the widespread killings of the army's scorched earth campaigns had almost entirely stopped by 1986 (Ball, et al. 1999), the war continued in other forms for another 10 years. During that time, violence took place throughout the country much in the same way as it did in Momostenango. Selective assassinations and disappearances produced an ongoing sense of fear. Massacres in a number of Maya communities well into the 1990s reminded citizens of the military's capacity for cruelty, as did the lynching in Momostenango, discussed in an earlier chapter.

Now, over a decade since the peace accords were signed, Guatemala has higher crime and murder rates than during the final years of the war. From 2000-2004 the intentional homicide rate of 25 per 100,000 people was nearly five times that of the United States and twice that of Nicaragua (UNDP 2007).⁵⁵ Street gangs, such as the MS-13, the “Salvatruchas,” and the M-18 that are tied to narco-trafficking, as well as paramilitary groups of ex-soldiers, produce new legions of violent and marginalized young men. Government failures to invest in social reforms, which could provide educational and work alternatives to street life and were stipulated in the peace accords, have only helped gangs to proliferate.

The increase in violent crimes and lawlessness provides a platform for ultra-right Partido Patriota (PP) presidential candidates who are able to draw popular support by promoting *mano duro* reforms reminiscent of the 1980s. The perpetuation of rhetoric contained in the National Security Doctrine of an “internal enemy” is still pervasive. Tourists are warned by travel guides and advisories to stay away from the “red zones” in major cities that are dominated by gangs. Law-and-order politicians assert that the existence of such “red zones” legitimates the heavy-handed violence of the state. Given the ongoing dangers of daily living and the impunity offered to thugs and criminals, and given the broken justice system, remaining silent about the past is a survival strategy for many.

⁵⁵ El Salvador was higher with a rate of 31 intentional homicides per 100,000 people.

Locating Pathology

In the 1970s a young anthropologist named James Clay Young conducted research in the Mexican village of Pichátaro, Michoacán. The focus of his research was the decision-making processes Pichatareños undertook when choosing among healthcare interventions. Unlike many of his contemporaries in the field of cognitive anthropology who limited their analyses to the thoughts and behaviors of their subjects without discussion of exogenous factors, Young made a bold leap by observing that Pichatareños' underutilization of available Western medical options could be explained more by their lack of access to those options than by any reluctance enforced by their cultural belief systems. His finding led to his observation that improving the utilization of Western medicine in the village had less to do with finding "cultural" solutions within the community, and more to do with structural solutions that involved the state healthcare infrastructure (Young and Garro 1981).

Young's research was cut short by his untimely death, yet his conclusions offer an opening question for what follows, namely, what are the power relations embedded in cognitions and behaviors? I begin with one of Young's conclusions: that cognitions and behaviors cannot be separated from the social and political milieus in which the mind and body exist. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to discuss the ways in which explanatory frameworks of social inequalities influence how healers diagnose and treat survivors of political violence as well as how they frame the healthcare choices that Momosteco survivors are able to make.

I have emphasized the historical social, economic and political processes that led to political violence that took place in Momostenango to make an argument that political

violence indeed did happen there, that it was not random, and that silences surrounding that violence have implications for the meanings that survivors attach to those experiences in the present and, in turn, how they imagine their future. If my assessment is correct, that political violence in Momostenango was aimed at creating a certain type of political subject idealized in the form of the “sanctioned Maya” (Schirmer 1998) or the “authorized Indian” (Hale 2006), it becomes necessary to explore how such idealized types permeate the clinical setting. Given state-sponsored and perpetrated genocidal violence in nearby communities and ongoing state attempts to assimilate Maya, under what conditions can pathology be assigned to individual Momostecos, when the cause of their illness emanates from state sponsored terror? How do healers and their patients conceive illness and corresponding interventions and how do those interventions challenge or reinforce existing structures of domination and oppression?

When I began the research in the clinic in 2001, I conceptualized two distinct groups, providers and patients. As I became more familiar with the staff of the clinic and their wartime experiences these categorical definitions began to break down. Was it possible to have lived in Momostenango and not be considered a survivor of political violence? What defined the category of survivor or patient? In order to explore the porous boundaries between identities of healers and survivors, I present the experiences of Dr. Leonardo and Don Abraham, two of the founding members of the clinic whose lives were profoundly disrupted by the civil war. I also explore ways in which Guatemala’s racial hierarchy was reconstituted within the very structure of the clinic and how they, in turn helped to shape the operating frameworks upon which providers based their interventions.

The most immediate problems the providers in the clinic faced were twofold: first, there was little internal consensus about how to frame the issues survivors faced and what the appropriate interventions were; second, if they acknowledged the experience of survivors, the program directly challenged the narrative frame of Momostenango as a green zone and therefore faced uncertain risks and dangers associated with that position. By exploring interactions between patients and their providers I consider the possibility of the clinical setting as a site of subject making, which is embedded in larger frameworks of power, and suggest that in order for clinical interventions to be truly emancipatory and liberating such structures can not be ignored.

Operating Frameworks - LA CLINICA

When Leonardo Lorca and Victor Lorca founded the Comité Pro-Salud Urbano y Rural (LA CLINICA) in 1997, they intended to set up a community hospital in Momostenango that could provide inpatient and emergency care. With the help of Canadian nuns working in the Catholic parish of Momostenango, LA CLINICA secured international donations of money and equipment. When I began fieldwork in 2001, the program was running but having serious economic problems. They had to close down a laboratory after money to pay for a technician ran out the pharmacy because of licensing disputes with Ministry of Health officials in Totonicapán. The X-ray machine that had been donated by a Canadian hospital had been damaged in transport and was too expensive to repair. The organization survived by providing 24-hour on-call visitation, however, the earlier described limited resources forced many patients to seek emergency care in Totonicapán or Quetzaltenango.

Income from international donations and patients barely covered LA CLINICA's operating costs. The town's private doctors were openly hostile, claiming that the organization falsely advertised itself as a community hospital. They contended that LA CLINICA was little more than a private practice with extended hours and hence, competed with them. Hoping to expand the range of services and secure additional funding, LA CLINICA administrators solicited grants to start a treatment center for survivors of torture. They obtained United Nations funding to hire a social worker, medical doctor, psychologist and a traditional Mayan healer to treat torture survivors.

LA CLINICA began the hiring process for this new *Modulo de Salud Mental* (mental health program) just as I was starting my fieldwork in 2001, but I was not able to participate in it. After several rounds of interviews, a staff of Spanish speaking professionals from the neighboring department of Quetzaltenango was hired. Funding for the *Modulo de Salud Mental* was tied to the Marjorie Kovler Center in Chicago, which had helped secure UN funding for torture survivor treatment programs.

Once the hiring process was completed, the staff conducted meetings where they discussed the actual work to be carried out. Almost immediately, staff concerns emerged regarding unclear boundaries between LA CLINICA's two clinics: the private health clinic and the new mental health program, intended only for the treatment of survivors of torture. The program staff was asked by administrators to cover for the private clinic instead of seeing the population that the program had been designed for. The newly hired mental health staff complained in private that patients at the private clinic were being charged 50 Q for a consult and 150-200 Q on average for treatment, a price they felt was high. They told me they had not been given contracts but had oral agreements that they

would be employed full-time. They reported that after they were hired they were told there was only funding for them to work part time, so their salaries were cut in half. They believed that the administration was using the funding for the mental health project to augment income from the private clinic. I did not involve myself in organizational disputes, despite repeated attempts by mental health program staff to pull me into conflicts they had with the administration. However, as the weeks and months passed with very little activity in the program, I too began to feel that funds for the project were being used elsewhere. Frustrated with the internal problems the program was having, I set out with Don Abraham Vicente, who was hired as the “*Sacerdote Maya*” (Maya Priest), to talk to Momostecos he thought would benefit from the program. I paid him a stipend for accompanying me. He too, had only been receiving a fraction of the salary that was designated for him by the funders⁵⁶. For several months I traveled with him, often by foot, to the homes of Momostecos that had directly experienced political violence. Don Abraham told the interviewees of the programs existence and that it was set up to help them with problems relating to the violence. The groundwork that we laid during our interviews helped attract program participants.

As the program took shape, and participants began to arrive for services, it quickly became evident that language was only one of many barriers that existed between patients and providers in the program. The mental health program staff decided that it was not safe to advertise the program as a treatment center for survivors of torture.

⁵⁶ The budget for the program listed Don Abraham as a “*Sacerdote Maya*”- a traditional healer. However, his service was limited to interpreting for the non-K’iche’ speaking staff.

Despite the signing of the peace accords three and a half years earlier the local counterinsurgent apparatus that was operative during wartime was still largely intact. Former civil patrol leaders periodically mobilized around rumors that were circulated by the ruling Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG) party that they would be paid for their war-time service. On one occasion a rumor was spread that in order for ex-civil patrollers to be able to receive payment for their past services they needed to register at the local FRG party headquarters. The next Sunday, a market day, a line several blocks long appeared outside the FRG office of men waiting to sign up. Although many men undoubtedly waited only to have a chance at getting some candy from the state's piñata, others used the mobilization as a show of political force not only to support the FRG President Portillo, whose administration was characterized by a number of scandals and corruption charges, but also for local Maya elites that supported the ultra-right ideology of the party.

Program staff cautioned me that before I accompanied Don Abraham outside of the urban center, I should seek out a letter of support from the mayor. Visiting his office, I realized the extent to which wartime memories played a role in contemporary governance. The mayor sat behind a large desk in his office with his *regidores* and *consejales* at his side. Over his right shoulder was a life-sized poster of former president and dictator Gen. Rios Montt along with then President Portillo wearing dark sunglasses. Despite the fact that Gen. Rios Montt's dictatorship had been unconstitutional and characterized as genocidal by both the UN and the Catholic Archdiocese's truth commissions, he was in 2001, serving as the head of congress because the party he had built, the FRG, held a majority of seats in congress. The mayor was part of a new group

of power holders in Momostenango. He was an indigenous businessman from Los Cipreses, one of the cantons closest to the summit (*la cumbre*) between Momostenango and San Francisco El Alto. The canton's proximity to the Pan American highway gave residents of Los Cipreses, who did business in Guatemala City or other parts of the country, an advantage over other *comerciantes* who traveled outside of the municipality for their work. On a local level, successful merchants who were able to swear party allegiance to national party leaders, such as Rios Montt, and to outbid other local coalitions almost always won the office of the mayor. Without the capital and campaign support of the national candidates it was rare that local coalitions could garner enough support to win office.

With a letter from the mayor stating that I was conducting an investigation about healthcare in the municipality, I began traveling with Don Abraham to visit people he knew had been targeted during the war. As we visited the modest K'iche' homes in the countryside, people spoke mostly of their immediate needs. Healthcare, food, employment, water and transportation were among the many problems they faced. Survivors we visited were unenthusiastic about receiving counseling services. However, the possibility of receiving free medical attention attracted them to the program. For most of the people we interviewed in the outlying *aldeas*, 600 Quetzales (less than \$100) a month was a large income. Most households had more than one breadwinner working outside of the municipality, primarily in Guatemala City. Household income was below subsistence level and health checkups indicated that family members were suffering frequently from chronic malnutrition.

On one occasion Don Abraham and I visited Don Guadalupe, a man from the *aldea* of Xequemeya. The dirt road that led to his house had deep ruts laid down during the rainy season. To get to his house we needed to drive ten miles from the town center, park the car on the side of the road and hike a half mile down a narrow path along a steep ravine. He lived in a one-room adobe house with his son. Don Guadalupe had been tortured and imprisoned after Rios Montt came to power in the early 1980's. He had been accused of collaborating with ORPA. Since his torture, Guadalupe had developed a stutter, and had difficulty sleeping. He reported recurrent intrusive thoughts about his torture, an exaggerated startle response to any loud noise, chronic headaches, and stomach pain.

At first, when Don Abraham described the program to him, Don Guadalupe was reluctant to get involved for fear of drawing attention to himself. He reported that the military commissioner that had him arrested still lived in the community. When Don Abraham said that the program would help him get medical care for himself and his son he agreed to have the team conduct a house visit.

The psychologist and the medical doctor that had been hired for the program were reluctant to conduct home visits. Both expressed their discomfort with traveling to patients' homes. However, the team decided that it would be necessary to outreach patients rather than waiting for them to come to the clinic because they had tried the latter and it was not working. When the team conducted its only visit to his home, Don Guadalupe was waiting with his son Jose. We sat down together on his front porch and Dr. Sofia, the psychologist, began to conduct the interview. I was immediately struck by the fact that she spoke to Don Guadalupe in the second person informal pronoun "vos."

By using this form of address, Dr. Sofia was setting interactive parameters within which she was apparently comfortable. “Vos” is a form of address that indigenous Momostecos were very familiar with and widely detested.⁵⁷ Throughout the interview, Dr. Sofia addressed Don Guadalupe with the diminutive form “Lupe.” Neither Don Guadalupe nor Don Abraham said anything to Dr. Sofia about her form of address.

Brown and Gilman (Brown 1960) elaborated on the meanings of power and solidarity tied to the use of formal and familiar pronouns in discourse. In my experience, rural Maya, who preferred the formal and more respectful *usted* in normal usage, rarely used the familiar forms of the second person address, *tu* and *vos*. The patterns of language use during their medical encounter did not reflect intent on the part of Dr. Sofia to disrespect Don Guadalupe. Her intent to help was beyond reproach. The fact that the psychologist was unaware of what seemed to me to be an obvious gaffe, was evidence of deeply rooted relationships of power embedded in the interaction that, at least to Dr. Sofia, seemed natural. Howard Waitzkin observes,

Differences in language use among social classes pattern the ways that professionals and clients either deal with, or exclude from verbal consideration, the social roots of personal troubles.(Waitzkin 1991)

By taking the ladino LA CLINICA staff out of the clinic and immersing them in the lifeworlds of their patients it was difficult not to see the conditions of extreme poverty that Don Guadalupe and his son lived in. No running water, no electricity, no plumbing,

⁵⁷ Don Abraham himself had told me about how he was treated by Ladinos at school who addressed him as “Vos Indio” as a form of disrespect.

no heat, threadbare clothing, were all indicators that their personal troubles were social issues. Yet the racialized hierarchy of Guatemalan inequality has become normalized, if not hegemonic, to the point that it seems invisible or simply the natural order of things, and demonstrates the need for a critical analyses of patient provider encounters when the power dynamics between the two are extremely unequal.

In a later conversation with both men I asked them why they had not said anything to Dr. Sofia. They both agreed that despite attitudes that they believed to be racist, Dr. Sofia was linked to resources they could not otherwise access.. Both agreed that her attitude could be tolerated for the greater benefit of receiving needed healthcare. Don Guadalupe explained,

Until 1972 we had no help in our community. If someone was sick, we used herbs and the *Aj Q'ijab*'to cure them. If there was money we could see a pharmacist in the town center. Many of our children died. When they built the *puesto de salud* we were afraid to go at first. The people were afraid of APROFAM⁵⁸. Now we feel more comfortable with the Cuban doctors that are working there. Sometimes, I have to go to Quetzaltenango. The least expensive visit with a doctor costs 25 Quetzales. Sometimes I cannot afford the medicine. Now my son has a wound on his chest that is always dripping pus. I am hoping that this program can help my son and help me to pay for medications.

⁵⁸ Asociacion Pro-Familiar, a family planning program of the federal government that was accused in the 1980's of sterilizing indigenous women without their consent.

Rural Maya suspicions of state offers of “development” assistance are grounded in the legacy of state abuses they have endured. Development programs are equally involved in the process of political subject formation, as is political violence⁵⁹. Perhaps best exemplified by the state’s 1982 “Guns and Beans” program that simultaneously offered Maya communities the proverbial carrot (the beans) and stick (the threat of military annihilation), post-war state development projects designate acceptable ways of being Maya. Although the LA CLINICA program was a non-governmental organization, Momosteco Maya participants in the program were understandably skeptical of the program’s value. Although he recognized the overtones of racial privilege in Dr. Sofia’s form of address, Don Guadalupe was not cowed. Instead, he employed a cautious pragmatism by exploiting the potential benefits the program could offer.



Figure 13 Puesto de Salud in Pueblo Viejo, Momostenango

⁵⁹ For deeper analysis of this process see:
(Ferguson 1990)

Don Guadalupe told me that he had only completed two years of schooling because he had to help his father work in the fields and on the sugar, coffee, and cotton plantations on the Costa Chica during the harvest season from August to December. Don Guadalupe explained that he had consciously chosen to support the guerilla insurgents during the war because he felt that it was the only solution to change his living conditions. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, he began to attend clandestine meetings in Momostenango. He and his brother helped the insurgents by supplying them with munitions. Don Guadalupe explained,

My parents and grandparents lived on this land. All of my life I have lived on this land. My children will live on this land if they don't move away. We have always suffered. My parents had three boys and three girls. Others died when we were children. They nearly killed me and my brother when they tortured us in 1983. We work as *jornaleros* on the coast and they pay us next to nothing. The abuses that we received on the coast were too much. They would call us *indios*; they would hit us. The mosquitoes on the coast would make us sick. There was no place clean for us to sleep and eat there. If we got sick and we could not complete our work they wouldn't pay us. We thought that the guerilla would change things we thought that they could win. Most of the people here worked on the coast. We didn't have the capital to start businesses as *comerciantes*. When the army came they made us serve and some of those neighbors told them that we were collaborating with the guerilla. That is why they captured us and that is why we continue to suffer. My wife left me to go to Mexico in 1983.

Don Guadalupe wondered aloud if talking to Dr. Sofia in therapy would help. He told me that he felt that she was "*buena gente*" (a good person), but that he was too busy trying to make money.

He had recently started working at the bus terminal in Guatemala City loading 100 lb. bags onto trucks for 25 Quetzales (roughly \$4) a day. He stated that he could only do the work for 2-3 weeks before his body began to hurt too much and he would have to return home. He would, however, appreciate any financial or medical assistance the program could provide. He said that if it meant that he would have to attend therapy sessions with Dr. Sofia in order to receive other services, he would be willing to do it.

About a week after our home visit to Don Guadalupe and his son, they came to the office of LA CLINICA in town. Don Abraham had met with Don Guadalupe to tell him that Dr. Lorca had agreed to remove the cyst from Jose's chest. Although it was not routine, Dr. Lorca had preformed minor surgeries in the past for his private clients that could afford to have an anesthesiologist bring equipment. On this occasion, he felt confident that he could conduct the surgery using local anesthesia. When I asked him about the lack of a sterile environment necessary for surgery he responded,

I have seen in my work that it is not always necessary to have sterile conditions. I have seen how the normal bacteria that are around us can help protect us from disease. We have seen that patients do better when they are exposed to the shared bacteria than when they are in sterile conditions. For that reason, I have no concerns about conducting surgeries under the conditions that we have here.



Figure 14 Dr. Lorca removing a cyst from Jose's chest

Dr. Lorca's unconventional belief system surrounding hygiene illuminated the framework in which doctors in Momostenango operate. Although Dr. Lorca was not a surgeon, he was comfortable conducting the operation because it was a relatively minor surgery that required only local anesthesia. Don Guadalupe trusted Dr. Lorca and allowed him to operate on his son. In Momostenango, there are no advanced directives, no insurance waivers, and no paperwork that needs to be signed prior to surgery.

Dr. Lorca reported that he had conducted several operations in his private clinic, arguing that it was an "advancement for the community." His decision to operate despite the lack of sterile conditions normally required for surgery demonstrated his dedication to providing needed services and the social conditions that Momosteco's poor were faced with.

Due to the failings of the government's Ministry of Health, poor Momostecos like Jose, who could not afford to pay for their healthcare in a private setting, or refused to go to public hospitals because of the distance, language difficulties, mistreatment by staff, long waiting times, insufficient services, and so forth were grateful to local doctors for any services that they provided. The doctors, in turn, understand their role in the

community as valued providers to their mainly indigenous underserved clients. Private doctors have a symbiotic relationship with the state in that they buffer the deficient public health care safety net while making a living from the tremendous need. Although they operated on a for-profit basis, public health doctors like Dr. Lorca provide essential services, primarily for the limited sector of the population that could afford it.

While all of the doctors I interviewed could cite incidents of what they believed to be malpractice committed by other doctors working in Momostenango, none knew of anyone that had actually been sued. Momosteco Maya had long ago learned the limitations of state judicial systems. Their petitions to the state judges to overturn ladino seizures of their farming lands were routinely ignored. In the absence of equal justice, many Momosteco Maya contended that racist state policies made healthcare a privilege afforded to few, and not a basic human right. Momostenango's healthcare system was virtually unregulated aside from market pressures. Dr. Lorca reported that when he tried to set up a pharmacy that provided low cost medications, local pharmacists complained to the Ministry of Health and the ministry responded, forcing him to shut it down.

During the surgery, Jose began to cry, saying that it hurt and that the local anesthesia was not working. I stopped observing when Jose began to sob and I felt my legs beginning to buckle. Regardless, the surgery continued and Dr. Lorca successfully removed the almond-sized cyst from Jose's chest and suture the wound. Don Guadalupe was grateful for the intervention of Dr. Lorca. Although Don Guadalupe was a practitioner of Mayan spirituality and had unsuccessfully tried on repeated occasions to cure his son's wound with calendula salves and prayer offerings, he did not see the medical intervention of Dr. Lorca as clashing with his own belief systems, a view

consistent with what James Young found in Mexico more than 30 years earlier. On the contrary, the free treatment offered by Dr. Lorca was the only medical treatment he could afford. Arachu Castro and Merrill Singer argue that a critical understanding of how illness targets specific groups more than others requires seeing public health policy as “a reflection of the reigning structure of social inequality” (Castro and Singer 2004: xiv). For Don Guadalupe and Jose’ it was poverty and the lack of a functioning public health safety net that had prevented them from obtaining the services that Jose’ needed, not their cultural belief system.

On a separate occasion, I accompanied the LA CLINICA clinical team when they conducted a medical mission in Sta. Lucia La Reforma, a municipality neighboring Momostenango that experienced widespread violence during the civil war. While I was interviewing Don Juan Mejia about his experience during the civil war I noticed that Dr. Sofia was uncomfortable. She began pacing and scratching at her arm as Don Juan described in detail how he had been captured by the military and taken to the base in Santa Cruz del K’iche’ to be tortured. He said he had been accused of being a guerilla as a teenager and explained how he had been repeatedly tortured with electric shocks. Don Juan reported not being able to work for the past 10 years because every time he heard a loud noise he had flashbacks. He spoke of his deep feelings of shame regarding his situation and the burden his condition was placing on his family. He said he had become an alcoholic and that he was afraid to leave his home because the military commissioners that had ordered his torture were still in Momostenango.

When we returned to Momostenango we had a staff meeting to review what had transpired during the day’s interviews. Dr. Sofia expressed her concerns about the

limitations of her professional responsibility. She spoke about being frightened when conducting interviews in outlying communities. All the members of the team, including myself, expressed shared concerns about how to increase our own security, as it was clear that local conflicts remained unresolved. We all shared her worries about our own safety and the potential danger that we put program participants and ourselves in by conducting interviews in the community.

Despite her awareness of the danger conditions in outlying communities, Dr. Sofia's diagnosis of patients like Juan Mejia focused on individual pathology instead of the social conditions that caused all of us a great deal of apprehension. When Dr. Sofia presented Don Juan's case to the group she briefly commented on how he had been tortured and focused heavily on his symptoms. She stated that his "*Neuronas se fueron sin remedio*" (his neurons were lost without remedy) and that he was a "*bolito*" (derogatory name for an alcoholic said in the diminutive). She began to describe how Don Juan had told her that his torturers had driven nails into his hands. She shared her theory of what had really happened,

I have studied about torture. When a person is exposed to extended torture with electrical shocks, the first thing that happens is that they start to lose their mind. After repeated shocks, the flesh around the electrodes begins to rip. What Juan remembers as nails was probably his flesh ripping.

Don Abraham, who had first-hand knowledge of the effects of torture with electricity, interrupted her while she spoke, telling her that it was common for torturers to

push needles into their victims' skin after they had been shocked. Dr. Sofia ignored his comments.

In that brief encounter, Dr. Sofia dismissed two survivors' accounts of their own experience. In so doing, she situated herself as the center of power, knowledge and expertise as a professional, while denying that Don Juan and Don Abraham were the experts about their own experience. Faced with her own fears (fears that we all shared) and a sense of helplessness and desperation (*sus neuronas se fueron sin remedio*), Dr. Sofia situated pathology in the individual symptoms Juan experienced. Her recommendation for intervention was to provide Juan with vitamins and iron supplements for his chronic malnutrition, anti-parasite and antacid medications for his stomach pains, anti-anxialitics (diazepam) and anti-psychotics (haloperidol). Although Dr. Sofia was not a psychiatrist and had no license to treat patients with controlled medication, she still wrote these prescriptions. She said that she was afraid to return to see Don Juan and that she would be willing to see him in Momostenango if he came to the central office for psychotherapy.

If diagnosis and treatment are meant to be emancipatory and healing, it is necessary to address the causes of illness as well as the symptoms. Don Juan's symptoms began when he suffered violence and though medication might make the symptoms more tolerable, they are unlikely to change the fact that Don Juan continued to feel that serious threats to his well being still existed, which in fact, they did. While it is understandable why Dr. Sofia wanted to help Juan reduce his symptoms pharmaceutically, it is worth reflecting on the ideological premises that would make such an intervention appear common sense.

Diagnosis and treatment within biomedical models usually posits pathology within the individual. Dr. Sofia's desire was to "fix" Juan's situation.⁶⁰ Listening to his account of the brutalities he suffered, and the ongoing fear he experienced, we were all outraged at the perpetrators. Daily events in Guatemala, however, made it evident that the state and paramilitary apparatus that had caused Juan's suffering was still in place (military commissioners were still embedded in positions of authority in the community, Gen. Rios Montt still served as the president of the national congress, Civil Patrollers were being remobilized to seek "justice", etc.). Frequently repeated assertions of "*Aquí, no pasó nada*" reinforced our own sense that we were talking about a taboo and dangerous matter with the clients of LA CLINICA.

Most Western psychological healing interventions from Alcoholics Anonymous to trauma recovery programs begin with acknowledgement as the first step. Making justice and restoring balance begins with telling the truth. The truth, however painful it may be, is necessary to call the offender(s) into account. By telling the truth and being heard, a social space is created in which victims of injustices feel safe and the trust that was broken by the abuse can be rebuilt. Justice begins when perpetrators acknowledge their abuses and apologize, or courts of law or public opinion find them responsible for their abuse. Once justice has been served, survivors can begin to forgive and move on with their lives.

Listening to the truth is not an easy task. It can require listening to stories that are painful or hard to hear. It can mean witnessing deep emotions, especially sadness and

⁶⁰ See Dianne Nelson's discussion of the polysemous meaning of the verb "to fix" within the context of the state/Maya binary in Guatemala (Nelson 1999)

anger. It can mean believing that which one does not want to believe. Listening involves responding to the needs of those that have been victimized and in so doing contributes to justice in a broad sense.

In Momostenango, truly listening to survivors' like Don Guadalupe and Don Juan requires a disposition to be able to set aside at least two dominant beliefs. The first is that "nothing happened" in Momostenango is simply a falsehood. As I have documented, the myth of the "green zone" serves the interests of perpetrators of political violence and continues to have serious implications for survivors. Putting aside that myth and listening to the experiences of Momostecos that suffered horrendous abuses, however, means not only rejecting dominant myths, it means taking on a certain degree of uncertainty and risk. In the absence of a functioning justice system and a blanket of amnesty that protect perpetrators, truth-telling means taking on established groups of power holders that are shielded by impunity and challenging convenient "truths."

The second, and more challenging belief that non-Maya listeners need to abandon (because it is deeply embedded in social relationships in Guatemala) is that Maya survivors of political violence are unaware of the historical economic, political, and social marginalization that their ancestors experienced for generations, , and that during the civil war they were entirely powerless victims divorced from revolutionary consciousness and agency. There are times when the cumulative trauma of generations of a group of people congeals in the form of insurrection. In the early 1980s many poor Maya believed that a window of opportunity had opened in which the ongoing and overlapping racial and economic injustices they had experienced could be resolved by participation in revolutionary militant guerilla groups. The outcome of the civil war

slammed that window shut. In the aftermath of the war, the ruling class feared that if the state acknowledged the systemic marginalization that poor Maya have suffered for hundreds of years, they would seek blood vengeance against Ladinos. Such visceral and ever present fears have created historical revisionism in which some types of Maya non-conformity and difference are tolerated, even embraced by the state, and others are not. This the elite and generally conservative Maya of Momostenango who supported the state's counterinsurgency campaign were rewarded by the state for their loyalty while the Maya that participated in revolutionary activity, such as Don Guadalupe, continue to be penalized. Ladino fears of the "insurrectionary Indian" are deeply ingrained in racialized understandings of Maya agency in Guatemala.

The acknowledgment that Maya Momostecos not only suffered from the antiquated racism of colonial caste systems and more recent state assimilationist projects, but that they continue to suffer from racial hierarchies during the multicultural post-war era demands more than most Guatemalans are capable of. The disappointments that the LA CLINICA program experienced, I believe, were largely due to the staff's inability to overcome the monumental barriers in Guatemalan society that discourage critical engagement.

Shortly after the program increased the number of site visits to rural cantons, Dr. Sofia resigned. Dr. Ruben from Quetzaltenango, another psychologist, replaced her. Dr. Ruben had been a professor of psychology at the University of San Carlos. He practiced an anti-psychiatric approach to mental illness that focused more on social rather than biological causes of disease. His approach to diagnosis and treatment was almost the complete opposite of Dr. Sofia's. He explained,

Guatemala needs the material conditions for life, which we lack-work, education, security, access to free healthcare. Momostecos are not owners of the means of production. They don't have access to culture. They don't have opportunities to educate themselves. Here we need a profound change in the structures of wealth.

Dr. Ruben considered torture the byproduct of a recalcitrant and repressive military that served the interests of Guatemala's capitalist oligarchy. He cited the work of Guatemalan Marxist scholar Severo Martinez-Peláez, *La Patria del Criollo*. Dr. Ruben, like Martinez-Peláez, argued that Momostecos' lack of "access to culture" was a result of economic inequities, stemming from colonial times, which have prevented the integration of Indians into Guatemalan society as full citizens. Dr. Ruben contended that by undoing the immense class inequities in society, Maya people (like the majority of Momostecos) would enter into the realm of modernity.

As a student at *Universidad de San Carlos* (USAC) in the early 1980s, during the worst years of state sponsored political violence, Dr. Ruben studied Marxist theory. He chose psychology because, "all of the students going into medicine were *pequebu* (*pequeño burgues*- petit bourgeois) and only wanted to help themselves. In 1980, four professors from the university were assassinated. Dr. Ruben explained, "We had to analyze *la violencia* while we were living it." Several of his classmates came to the conclusion that open militancy was the only means of transforming Guatemalan society. One of his friends was forced into exile in 1980 and was murdered when he returned to the country in 1982. Other students from his cohort were assassinated and all of the surviving classmates were afraid to go to the funeral. As a student at USAC during the

counterinsurgency, mostly middle class Ladinos who shared his Marxist appraisal that Guatemala's internal conflict was fundamentally an issue of class conflict surrounded Dr. Ruben. He, as a Ladino, described economic injustices that kept Guatemala in a "feudal" condition as the source of political violence.

As I was accompanying Don Abraham to his home after the meeting he commented to me,

Ruben believes that class conflict was the source of violence in Guatemala. I agree with him, but there is another important aspect of why we suffered. The war was also a race war. The military tried to exterminate the Maya.

When I asked Don Abraham why he had not said something to Dr. Ruben during the conversation, he looked at me and said, "He is not Maya, it was not his experience." Like Dr. Ruben, Don Abraham had analyzed *la violencia* while he was living it and came to different conclusions about its origins and the appropriate corresponding political responses to it.

Dr. Ruben described his approach, which is called "logotherapy," in the following way:

the therapist understands the signs and symptoms of the patient from the patient's narration and general understanding of his situation. Based on their narration, the patient gains clarity of their history and it relaxes them. This process takes a long time to work. It takes 45 days to be effective.

Within the search for meaning of suffering lies a crucial dilemma that the LA CLINICA program faced; whose meaning and whose suffering? During the 1970s and 1980s students at the University of San Carlos (USAC) were early targets of the state's counterinsurgent violence (Kobrak 1999). Citing leftist militant infiltration into the student and faculty body in the university, the military and paramilitary death squads routinely targeted student leaders and academics for political assassination, torture, and disappearance. All of the professional staff at LA CLINICA were acquainted with these events since they all studied at USAC. Revolutionary intellectuals and leaders in the university, however, aligned their struggle with Marxist analysis of how class divisions in Guatemala contributed to social suffering. Although some intellectuals also noted racial inequality in Guatemalan society (Guzman Bockler 1975), the argument that class unity would bring social balance while racial inequalities would either disappear or be fixed after the revolution which resonated with the *mestizaje* imaginings of the majority ladino student body and faculty, was a bitter pill to swallow for Maya leaders and organizers. Dr. Ruben's understandings of the meanings of social suffering in Guatemala came from a different experience than that of his Maya patients in Momostenango. Although I never observed a clinical session with Dr. Ruben, other staff informed me that towards the end of his short tenure with the program, he gave up logotherapy altogether and began doing *limpiezas* (spiritual cleansings) involving feathers and candles. Thus, Dr. Ruben moved away from a therapy that focused on unpacking the meanings of political violence informed by trauma and shifted to a method aimed at ridding patients' bodies of foreign toxins. Dr. Ruben's inability to hear the ways that poor Maya conceived of their

suffering, I argue, reveals the gaps between providers and patients and exposes the blind spots of post-war Guatemala.

It is exactly such blind spots that produce what Farmer describes as “immodest claims of causality”(Farmer 1999p. 248). Returning to Dr. Ruben’s comments about Momostecos’ lack of “access to culture” as one of the key ailments keeping them from living up to mainstream norms and enjoying ownership of the means of production, it would then seem obvious what the remedy for their predicament would be. The role of the healer would then be to create access to “culture,” assumedly by transforming and modernizing Maya culture into the dominant ladino culture. By blaming Momostecos’ culture, or the presumed lack thereof, for the hardships that present day Maya faced, Dr. Ruben’s comments struck a familiar chord of blaming the victim.

Don Abraham’s reluctance to engage Dr. Ruben in a discussion about race in Guatemala may also have had to do with the organizational structure of LA CLINICA. Over the two years that I worked in Momostenango, I observed the LA CLINICA program expand and contract. Funding for the program was dependent upon international aid. Since grants were secured a year at a time, staff for the program fluctuated with the funding.⁶¹ As the funding of the initial phase of the project was drawing to a close, Dr. Ruben called a meeting of the clinical team which included a physician, a social worker, nurses that worked in the clinic and Don Abraham. I was not invited to the meeting. At the meeting Dr. Ruben presented an organizational chart of his vision of program functioning. The diagram Dr. Ruben presented had designated all of the members of the

⁶¹ In the first year, the program faced a crisis when the funding agency was unable to transfer money to the program’s bank due to bureaucratic delays.

multidisciplinary team under his supervision. Although team members I spoke with later saw the meeting as a thinly veiled attempt by Dr. Ruben to make his job indispensable during downsizing and only alienated them, Dr. Ruben's vision of an operational structure for the program represented structures of power already operational in Guatemala.

Each of the team members, aside from Dr. Ruben himself, was assigned certain responsibilities. The physician was assigned to "health education," the social worker was assigned to "socio-cultural and economic education," the "Sacerdote Maya"⁶² to "Mayan Cosmovision," nurses to "reflexotherapy" and "relaxation techniques" and "translation" was assigned to "Conversational Quiche". I learned from the chart that Dr. Ruben's designated role for me was "accompaniment not investigation."⁶³

⁶² The term "Sacerdote Maya", literally Maya priest, is not a term that *Aj Q'ijab'* use for themselves and is somewhat akin to, let's say, a "Catholic Rabbi."

⁶³ On more than one occasion ladino staff members joked with me about being "*muy shute*" a Guatemalan expression for being dirty or sticking your nose where it doesn't belong. On one occasion when I engaged Dr. Ruben in a discussion about race he told me that I had no business being critical of ethnic relations in Guatemala. Hence, it was not surprising to me that his ideal role for international observers such as myself was as accompaniment for protection and not as an investigator.

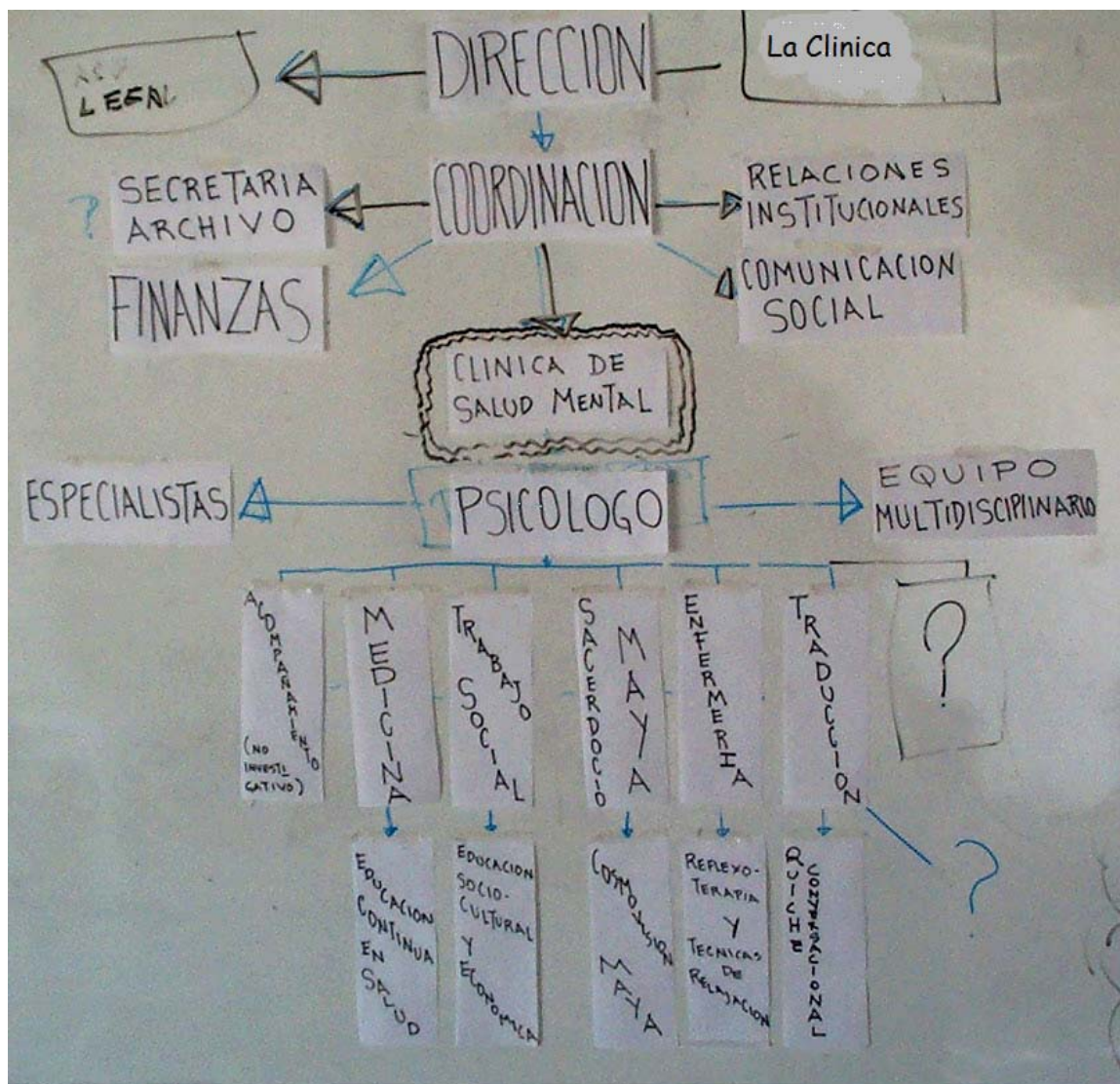


Figure 15 Organization Chart LA CLINICA

The chart projected an organizational pattern reminiscent of the *encomiendas* in Guatemala, in which Spaniards acted on their environment and Maya were part of the landscape. Colonial representations of a dichotomy between subjects that were **doing** and objects that were **being**, between active and passive roles, obscured the real mechanisms of production. Without Don Abraham, the LA CLINICA program could not have

functioned. Reaching out to survivors of torture in Momostenango meant countering a continuous tide of denial. Given that repressive forces tied to the military were still held power on local and national levels, honoring the voices of survivors entailed taking risk and was fraught with anxieties. Despite Don Abraham's efforts to locate, contact and accompany Momostenango's survivors of torture, and to link them with the program, his expertise as a healer was diminished in the operating structure. Because he was not a professional with a university degree, his salary was half of what the other members of the team were paid. The lack of a clearly articulated definition of clinical success or patient improvement within LA CLINICA compounded the difficulties of defining what the right clinical interventions were.

The program was never really able to overcome the obstacles of not clearly defining its mission. Its limited budget and staff concerns about the safety of traveling to rural areas prompted it to stop working outside the confines of the office. For weeks at a time, the staff waited in town for Momosteco survivors of political violence to come to them. A few Maya came to the clinic for medical services, but none requested ongoing treatment with the staff psychologist. Most wanted to be seen by Dr. Leonardo for physical and somatic concerns. Before I finished fieldwork, Dr. Ruben was refusing to see patients entirely and he eventually resigned. Other staff quit when they stopped receiving their paychecks.

Hale's theoretical discussion of the changing discourse surrounding race in Guatemala provides a helpful framework for analyzing the LA CLINICA program's difficulties (Hale 2006). Although classic racism is on the decline, the emerging acceptance of multicultural equality within Guatemala's dominant class has produced

blind spots to ongoing forms of racial domination. Colonial racial discourse, which subordinated Maya to peoples of European descent, was a result of what was imagined to be indigenous biological inferiority. It is giving way to post-war state discourses of racial equality and acceptance of the multicultural character of the nation. Nevertheless, the limits of this latter discourse are obvious. Despite the state's overtures towards multiculturalism, the apartheid-like racial divisions in Guatemala pose a paradoxical dilemma for the state's multicultural nation building project. Namely, if Maya ascend to true equality and power it could potentially undermine the structures of racial and economic privilege that have historically sustained Guatemala's minority ruling class.

I have provided the examples of Dr. Sofia and Dr. Ruben not to try to demonize them as racists. I believe they were drawn to their professional callings by deep-seated commitments to seek social justice and help the country emerge from its dark past. Nevertheless, I argue that contemporary discourses of racial equality and multiculturalism obscure rather than undo centuries of institutionalized violence against Maya in Guatemala, especially when the racial hierarchy that previous state discourses sustained is still intact. I highlight the experiences of Dr. Sofia and Dr. Ruben to emphasize the blind spots produced by ladino racial privilege.

Even while Dr. Sofia and Dr. Ruben worked to overcome the racist indifference that erupted into violence during the civil war, they reinforced dominant racial structures by failing to acknowledge the ways in which their indigenous patients conceived of their own political agency. Hale argues that although Guatemalan Ladinos increasingly accept the tenets of multiculturalism, when they begin to feel the premises of their status in Guatemala's racial hierarchy are exposed and questioned it produces "a flash of intense

feelings focused on the image of the insurrectionary Indian.” (Hale 2006: 217) It is hard to imagine that Dr. Ruben did not feel that he had not persuaded Maya survivors of his ability to help them as he sat for days in the clinic waiting for patients to come to him. Dr. Ruben was the only mental health “professional” in the municipality, while the number of Maya and traditional healers numbered well into the hundreds.

Toward a Different Vision of Public Health - Cuban Healthcare Diplomacy in Momostenango

Perhaps the most significant change in the public healthcare infrastructure in Momostenango over the past century was the addition of the Cuban Medical Cooperation in 2000. As part of the Cuban government’s foreign policy, over 500 general practitioners, specialists and epidemiologists were sent as medical diplomats to work in Guatemala’s poorest regions. Totonicapán was selected as one of the sites and a regional base was established. During 2001-2003 three Cuban doctors lived and worked in the public Health Center in the urban center in Momostenango and pairs of doctors were stationed in Outpost Clinics. The Cuban doctors did not charge patients for their services. They shared the limited resources allotted to the public health centers. Their arrival in Momostenango more than doubled the number of doctors permanently stationed in the municipality.

Cuban doctors who participated in the Guatemalan medical cooperation committed to two years of service. Under the arrangement, the Cuban government pays for the doctors’ transportation and allows them two weeks of home visit each year. The doctors are paid \$400 a month, which is less than half of what the average Guatemalan

public sector doctor makes. Nevertheless, the salary is many times more than what they would make in Cuba. When the doctors first arrived in Momostenango in 2000, they were unequipped for the cold evenings. Dr. Lorca from LA CLINICA told me he had to take up a collection of donations to help the Cuban doctors get set up, and that the Ministry of Health refused to pay for transition expenses.

The Guatemalan government had a delicate relationship with the Cuban medical cooperation. On the one hand, the Cuban doctors provided needed experience and service in administering public health in forgotten rural areas. On the other hand, the Cuban American Foundation and the Colegio Medico Guatemalteco, pressure the government, arguing that the doctors would disseminate communist ideology and undercut the work of Guatemalan doctors. During 2001-2003 when I was conducting fieldwork, the Guatemalan government avoided much fanfare surrounding the program.

The Cuban doctors were also under strict rules, set up by their mission, which required them to always walk in pairs and avoid social contacts outside of the workplace. While Cuban healthcare diplomacy was being implemented in many countries, only a few (including Nicaragua and Venezuela) had the stringent security restrictions that were in place in Guatemala. One Cuban doctor was physically accosted in another department when she refused to denounce the Cuban government. Others had received death threats. In Momostenango, the Cuban doctors worked and lived in the public health center and in the health outposts in the *aldeas*. They worked 22 days straight and then rested for eight. During their time off they would retreat to the departmental headquarters in Totonicapán.

The Cuban doctors that I interviewed in Momostenango were somewhat surprised by the cold reception that they had received in Guatemala. They said that some of the

doctors in private practice had spoken badly about them in the community and that many of the people in the *aldeas* were so mistrusting of the public health clinics that they refused to even speak with them. They also needed to confront local perceptions of Cubans. One of the Cuban doctors said,

I have had several people ask me if I am an atheist or if I worship Satan. During the civil war the people here were told many falsehoods about Cubans. Some people have told me that they are afraid that if they spend too much time with us they will be seen as guerillas in the community. I tell them that the war is over and that I am simply a doctor.

They also encountered suspicion from the Guatemalan staff at the public health center. The Cubans told me that apart from one woman who was a nurse and provided injections, the staff was unprofessional and not dedicated to their work. They said that they had been having difficulty maintaining their morale because the local staff was twofaced. They reported that they experienced multiple betrayals and false rumors and no longer trusted the local staff. Finally, they stated that, aside from the one nurse, the majority of the Guatemalan staff resented their presence. Conflicts arose when the Cuban doctors began to question the work of the Guatemalan staff. One of the Cubans stated,

They feel threatened and the result is that they act like they are your friends and then you find out from someone else that they have been saying bad things about you. They are here because it is a job- and nothing more. A lot of them believe the propaganda that the Colegio Medico Guatemalteco has been promoting. It is very hard to be in a situation where both the patients and our colleagues don't appreciate our work.

I asked how the patients didn't appreciate their work. He continued,

In Cuba the people get angry if their children don't get vaccinated on time. Here many people get angry when we arrive *at their houses* to vaccinate their children. People don't appreciate us. It was funny, the other day a man came in with advanced liver disease. His family didn't know why he was so sick and they were giving him aspirin. I told them that he had a critical liver problem. The man was going to die within a few days if they didn't do anything. He already had a high level of toxins in his blood and was having intense pain in his abdomen. This was a problem that clearly had progressed for years and his doctors here never caught it. He was hospitalized and stabilized on his medication and now is healthy again. Later I told a family member of his that I was looking for a television for my sister in Cuba. He said, "don't buy one, we have a used one at home that is only collecting dust. Why don't you take it, we'll give it to you." When I went to the house to see it the man, whose life I saved, I asked his wife what he should charge me. She said Q900.00. I said that I could buy a new one for that price.

It's not just that they don't mean what they say, it's that they don't say thank you. I don't feel that I have been received warmly by anyone here. When we want to take a break we come to visit you or Leonardo. There are very few Guatemalans here that have warmed up to us. The majority that has warmed up to us also talk about us behind our backs, like the staff here.

The social isolation of the Cuban physicians was compounded by their separation from their families. One of the physicians fell into a depression when he learned that his four-year-old son who had not seen him in over 6 months was having psychotic episodes. His partner told him that it was because his son was missing him.

One of the ladino Guatemalan assistants at the public health office shared with me his thoughts about the Cuban doctors. He stated,

The Cuban doctors don't care. I don't think they help us here. They leave for a week every month. Their job is to work in the infant maternity. They don't help us out. The government should pay Guatemalan doctors to come here. We don't need the Cubans. They don't connect with the people here. We connect with the people here because they are our people (*nuestra gente*).

His comments demonstrated the sense of paternalistic ownership of Ladinos over indigenous. The majority of workers in the Centro de Salud, like this one, were Ladinos that did not speak K'iche' and surely did not connect with the people any better than the Cubans.

The same secretary then went on to contradict himself. He asked if I would be willing to help him and a health committee that he worked on to raise money for the Centro de Salud. He said that he had already spoken with the municipality and that Don Dionisio, the *regidor* in charge of the health commission, had said I could serve as a liaison for the municipality and ask the U.S. embassy for its financial support. I told him that I had not offered that service but that I would be willing to talk to the commission and the committee to discover what their health priorities were. He responded,

The municipality doesn't have a health priority. They give little bits here and there but this is just to appease supporters of the party in office. There is never any money for a major center. What we need here is a communal maternity hospital. That is our priority. Because of the poor attention that we have here many children die. We don't need a new vehicle. We don't need the speed bumps that they are putting in on the main street. They put them in then they take them out. It has been three times already that they have put the speed bumps in now. The first time they were too small, and then they were too high. I bet they charge Q15,000 for each one they put in. What we have for maternity doesn't work. The building isn't any good. There is no equipment. If a patient needs a C-section we

can't do it. Without the Cuban doctors a lot of patients would have died this year. Some have because the Cubans are unable to resolve the problems with the little equipment that they have.

Although the secretary was threatened by the Cubans, he did acknowledge they provided an important public health service. He also shared their frustration with the utter lack of healthcare infrastructure in Momostenango.

The Cuban doctors were as culturally and linguistically separated from their K'iche' patients, as were their ladino counterparts. On several occasions when I was accompanying bilingual K'iche'-Spanish speakers to their appointments, they asked me to translate (in Spanish) for them because they could not understand the Cuban doctors' accents. The Cuban doctors, in turn, had not received training about either the cultural or historical context in which they were working.⁶⁴ When I asked a director why the Cuban medical cooperation had not incorporated a mental health component she stated,

The *campesinos* here don't have any stress. They are a simple, ancient people.

They work in the fields and their biggest worries are whether or not it will rain.

The Cuban doctors focused on health indicators such as infant mortality. When I brought up the issue of survivors of political violence the director acknowledged that she was aware of them and their concerns, but that it would be too political for the Cubans to address and their superiors forbade them from doing so. She also felt that it would be more appropriate for the survivors of political violence to seek out community healers that understood their history and language better.

⁶⁴ I was frequently consulted by the Cuban doctors about the history of the region. One doctor, in particular, referred to his patients on several occasions as Aztecs.

Cuban physicians that took positions in overseas medical cooperation projects did not have to belong to the communist party. One explained,

Although we can make more money in Guatemala than we do in Cuba, most of us do not take on this work for the money. Yes, we can send back some nice things like money and things that we cannot buy in Cuba. But most of us are here because we believe in the mission. It is a humanitarian cause. We have knowledge and training and we need to use it. Most of us are not even members of the official party.

He continued,

The cooperation began in Guatemala three years ago after Hurricane Mitch. The Cuban government offered assistance. At first, the Guatemalan government only wanted financial assistance, but the Cuban government required that aid also come in the form of doctors. We are trained in Cuba differently than in other countries. I believe that our training is more human. We are taught not to only focus on treating the individual but also the social context in which they live. We are not here to talk about politics; we are here to help people. When we arrived in Totonicapán the infant and maternal mortality rates were very high. We have lowered them to 18%, which is half of what it was when we arrived. It is still not good, but it is better than what it was.

Not only did the Cuban government promote the export of doctors to underserved regions around the globe, it also offered medical training to international students. The Latin American Medical School in Havana graduated its first class in 2006 with students from over 80 countries, including nearly 200 Guatemalan. In exchange for free education, they commit to up to six and a half years of service in public health positions in Guatemala after their graduation.

Despite the strengthening of the public health infrastructure, which the Cuban trained physicians provide, the Colegio Medico Guatemalteco (CMG), the largest association of physicians in Guatemala, expressed serious concerns about the Cuban medical cooperation. The primary complaint of the CMG was that the arrangement between the Cuban and Guatemalan government did not require Cuban doctors to be credentialed and licensed in Guatemala. The CMG lobbied the government to have the Cuban doctors submit to the same protocols that were required of Guatemalan doctors in order to practice in Guatemala.

One of the Cuban doctors in Momostenango said,

The CMG is reactionary. They opposed our presence even before we arrived. Now that we are here they are even more reactionary because we uncover all of their failures. One of my colleagues who is a surgeon was stationed at the national hospital in Toto. He reported to us that the training the Guatemalan surgeons receive is criminal. He stated that many of the surgeons have no business operating on patients. The butchering he saw was criminal. They were literally experimenting on their patients without their consent. When he began to complain, the doctors turned against him.

He continued,

My own work in Momostenango is evidence that our training and our record keeping is superior. We are not allowed in Cuba to invent statistics. In Cuba, people will complain to the authorities and you will lose your job if you invent data to serve your goals. We use the same community mapping and epidemiological programs here that we use in Cuba. We always take an inventory of the people that we serve (see map below). We go to the homes in our community and we visit with people in their homes. I know that I am the first doctor that has made a house visit in Xequemeya. People were afraid at first. At

one house when we said we were doctors they sent their dogs to attack us. It was the first time that any doctor had come to their house and the people did not trust us.



Figure 16 Community mapping methodology used by Cuban Medical Cooperation

The Cuban medical cooperation kept its own records and compiled its own epidemiological data. They were able to compile more complete data sets than the public health center because they actually lived in the communities where they were collecting data. The process begins with a community census and mapping. From the census they identify the leading health problems for different age groups in each area they are working.

The Cuban doctors also establish working relationships with the formal and informal leaders in the community as well as other healers. The Cuban obstetrician had established a working relationship with midwives, *Iyom*, and was providing regular trainings for them. When the Ministry of Health held vaccination campaigns and nutritional screenings, the Cuban doctors collaborated. While I was conducting fieldwork, the first wave of Cuban doctors finished their two year commitment and returned to Cuba while others came to fill their positions. One of the doctors that was leaving said, “The new group will have it easier. We are more accepted now and the people are less afraid.” When I asked him “Which people, the doctors or the patients?” He replied, “Both.”

Maya Traditional Healers - Honoring Place and Remembering the Dead

Despite the efforts of the Catholic Church, the preaching of fundamentalist evangelical sects, and attacks against Maya spirituality by military and paramilitary forces during the civil war traditional healers have retained a vibrant presence in Momostenango. Traditional healers are the largest and most active health care providers in the municipality. Many people employ traditional and spiritual healers as their primary providers, rather than as a complementary to an integrated healthcare system. Everyone knows of and uses local plants medicinal purposes. *Botanicas*, or stores that sell herbal remedies, exist throughout the municipality and are widely available. There is one clinic in town that procures and teaches herbal medicine, and offers alternative treatments including biofeedback, urinotherapy and massage. In addition to herbal remedies, which are largely self-administered, Aj Q’ij, *Iyom* and Wikol Bak or ajpab’aqab’ have practiced

their arts for centuries⁶⁵. *Aj Q'ijab*- are commonly referred to as day keepers, priest shamans, or Mayan priests (sacerdote Maya); Wikol Bak are bonesetters, and Iyom are midwives. Momostecos can hire these practitioners or in many cases have one or more in their family.

Although traditional healers receive training, few can live on the proceeds of their practice⁶⁶. Despite movements against healers within the Catholic Church such as Catholic Action and fundamentalist Protestant sects that have at times taken confrontational positions towards them, declaring, “you cannot serve two masters,” Maya spirituality and traditions are still widely practiced. Aside from a handful of *Aj Q'ijab*' that reject Christianity as an imposition of the Spanish colonizers, most *Aj Q'ijab*' are at least nominally Christian. Training to become an *Aj Q'ij* requires being born on a propitious day on the Maya Calendar. During the 2001 Waxaquib Batz (8 Monkey) celebration in Momosteco, thousands of *Aj Q'ijab*' and other traditionalists made pilgrimage to sacred alters around the township. The vast majority of healers and their patients are Maya. However, on more than one occasion I witnessed Ladinos, as well as fundamentalist evangelical Christians that belonged to sects that berated Maya spirituality as pagan and diabolic, participating in ceremonies. As one anti-traditionalist Catholic indigenous man told me, “*No hay que creer, pero no hay que no creer*” (One should not believe, but one should not disbelieve either).

⁶⁵ Together these avocations are all considered *kunanelab*' (healers) and a practitioner an *ajkun* (healer).

⁶⁶ On several occasions I worked with *Aj Q'ijab*' who traveled to Guatemala City and other major urban areas where Momostecos had migrated to. These *Aj Q'ijab*' were able to earn a living by contracting their services for Momostecos who required ceremonies at the altars of their ancestors.

Healers pay homage to the ancestors and honor the cycles of the 260-day calendar. Healing is inextricably linked to spiritual practices and there is no dichotomy or separation of body from spirit. Healers invoke the spirits and the ancestors and are intermediaries between the spirits and the living. *Itz'bal* (evil or badness) is the main cause of illness. The *Aj Q'ijab'* I interviewed told me they are forbidden from using their powers to do evil. They acknowledge that ceremonies that invoke harm are effective and dangerous, but that those that practice them are not *Aj Q'ij* but rather *Aj Itz'* (those that practice evil).

Altars that are spread throughout the municipality and the countryside have specific meanings and ranks. Ceremonies, which involve the burning of offerings to the ancestors, recitation of calendar days, honoring of the dead, as well as petitions for the living, are conducted at different altars depending on the type of petition and the calendar day. A group of *Aj Q'ijab'* asked me to help them produce a book used to recite the sacred places and *Nahuales* during ceremonies. The book listed hundreds of altars throughout Guatemala.⁶⁷

Traditional healing practices and spirituality create a double bind for Maya. On the one hand, they are the most readily accessible and affordable form of healthcare available to Momostecos. However, its detractors present such practices as antiethical to modern medicine. Maya traditional practices and spirituality are offered as proof of indigenous reluctance to embrace “modernity” and they are often blamed for the

⁶⁷ The list did not include *warabal ja* or altars that were specific to clan lineages, which would have multiplied the number of altars many times.

enormous health disparities between Maya and non-Maya in Guatemala. Such binaries obfuscate the structural inequities that contribute to the health disparities in Guatemala.

Many paths led Momostecos to traditional Maya spirituality. Some people were born on propitious days in the Maya calendar and brought up in households that performed the necessary ceremonial remembrance to the ancestors. For others, Maya spirituality filled a void that no other healing institution could. The ranks of this latter group were swelling in numbers as I conducted fieldwork. Nearly every time I visited altars with Don Abraham, new young apprentices were learning the traditions of day keeping. Don Abraham himself did not learn the traditions or become fully immersed in traditional spirituality until after his own kidnapping and torture. Don Abraham was eclectic and mixed in aspects of other traditions such as Chinese medicines and kinesiology with his traditional Maya ceremony.

During the darkest days of his kidnapping Don Abraham filled his days with verses he remembered from the Bible and that other captives would recite. Upon his release he remained sequestered. He told me that only when he began to return to the altars he had once visited and saw others that had shared his trauma could he begin to attach meaning to his suffering. He acknowledged that bringing me, a tall blonde *gringo*, with him to local altars attracted the attention of others but stated,

I have nothing to hide. I only use the ceremonies for good. I only use them for guidance. They are pure and it is good for you to come with me, you want to learn.

Part of Don Abraham's path from the isolation of being tortured and labeled a guerilla upon his return to Momostenango was sharing his knowledge. Instead of holding onto his anger and fear and drowning his pain in alcohol Don Abraham found meaning in remembering not only his own suffering but also those of his ancestors. He used Maya spirituality to renew his knowledge of history and to understand broader truths tied to his own ordeal. He told me that the day in which he stopped suffering was the day that he and hundreds of other Momostecos stormed the headquarters of the *Plana Mayor*, demanding the release of the young men that had been forcibly recruited by the military commissioners earlier that day (see Chapter Four). He said that ceremonies guided the composition of the letter he and others from the Maya human rights group CIEPRODH wrote to the president, demanding the military commissioners respect human rights. "That was the day of my healing," Don Abraham said; "That was the day I overcame my fear."

Doña Eufemia, one of my neighbors, explained how she came to practice Maya spirituality. I quote her at length,

I didn't believe in these things when I was young. The priests that were here told us that it was wrong and that God would punish those that didn't follow him. There was little tolerance for the *Aj Q'ijab* within the Catholic Church and we were from a Catholic Action family that heeded the priests' words. My childhood was very sad. I suffered because my father was an alcoholic. He suffered from that affliction and was often very drunk. I was always being hit by my sisters-in-law and had to work all of the time. I was denied the opportunity to study because I was always working. It got so bad that I decided to run away. I was fortunate to find the support of one of the little nuns here in Momostenango that took me to the Hospital, San Juan de Jesus in Xela where I was given work in the kitchen.

When I was 18 years old the sisters helped me to study and I worked to finish my primary education. Later they gave me the opportunity to study my *basico*. I couldn't finish it because my father died and I needed to return to the house in order to help. When I was on the bus returning to Momostenango I repented my decision to return. I knew that I was going to return to suffering but it is what I felt that I needed to do. When I returned it was very sad. I married my husband but then I began to suffer because of the expectations of my mother-in-law. We lived with his parents and they expected me to serve them. I had many arguments with them about the limits of what they could ask me to do. It was very sad.

The war made it even sadder. The army would come and steal the children. One had to live in constant fear. I became sicker and sicker. One day I went to the hospital because of the headaches that I was having. A lady came up to me and said that I was dying. She was a patient. She looked very concerned and worried. She looked me in the eye and said you will die soon. You may not even make it until this evening. She then told me that it was because of my Nahual.⁶⁸ The day that I was born was a very important day. She said that I was dying because I was fighting with my Nahual. Because of my failure to accept my Nahual I was becoming sick. She told me that I needed to listen to my Nahual or it would kill me. I told my husband and from that moment I have been a believer. Once I began to listen to my Nahual and to practice the ceremony I have been well. There are so many reasons for us to continue with the ceremonies. Our ancestors have been practicing for thousands of years. We have to remember our ancestors. The Ladinos treat us like we are a different type of animal. We give offerings for our children so that they may not live the kind of suffering that we did. We know that if a child from Momostenango goes to the city to find work in a bank or in an office, they will look at his name, and then at the way his face is

⁶⁸ A Nahual refers to the spirit associated with one's birthdate. The numeration and the day names of the Maya calendar each possess certain qualities. Traditional practitioners believe that if one ignores the calling of their Nahual it has the potential to cause them great harm.

and his body-his general appearance. Then they will give the job to a ladino. Our children are always discriminated against. When I went to school in Momos the teachers would humiliate us in the class. I stopped going because the teacher called me Ixta....

[Ixta] is a Spanish word for someone that doesn't wear any underwear. It is an insult that the Ladinos always had for us. They would always insult us if we didn't have shoes to wear. We have always had to suffer from the Ladinos. That is why it is important for us to continue our ceremony it protects us from the bad thoughts that they have about us. We have to live with them constantly insulting us and taking advantage of us. We can protect ourselves by remembering our ancestors. The Spanish came here and brought disease and violence. I wish that I could say that my blood is pure. But we are all ancestors of Spanish in some way. They raped our grandmothers and they brought badness. Now we all have to live with the mix of blood that has both good and bad. We need to remember the good part of ourselves by paying tribute to our ancestors.

Despite having been brought up in a non-traditionalist family, Doña Eufemia embraced Maya spirituality in order to save her life. For her, maintenance of traditional spirituality was not only a matter of health, but also a matter of identity. It provided her a space to resist the overt racism she had experienced. Although she practiced Maya spirituality she also said she did went to see medical doctors when she was ill. For her, traditional healing provided balance and connection to the land and to her ancestors.

San Simon

Within the community of *Aj Q'ijab* in Momostenango people had many beliefs. Debates about which ceremonies were being done for good and which ones were being done for evil pursuits was contentious. One of the more controversial cults was that of

San Simon. On a cold evening at the end of October, I was invited to the house of Don Domingo, an *Aj Q'ij* I had worked with, to celebrate San Simon Apostle (Saint Simon). His one room adobe house was in the tall pine forest that surrounded the Los Cipres barrio and was an hour's walk from the center of town. I decided to drive. It had rained that week, and the dirt road that wound around the edge of a wooded ravine to Don Domingo's was so narrow that there was no room to turn the car around. Knowing that the only way I could get back to the main road from Don Domingo's was to drive in reverse, I parked a half mile before reaching his house and walk the rest of the way in the rain.

The smell of pine needles spread on the floor, a tradition, welcomed us when we arrived. A single light bulb hung from the ceiling, giving the room an orange glow. An altar had been arranged at one end of the room. In the center San Simon dressed in a black top hat and a black suit sat on a miniature wooden chair. At his feet were candles, pom, copal, rosemary and other offerings of rum.

Don Domingo was one of several priest shamans in Momostenango who had an altar to San Simon in his home. He provided the necessary offerings and ceremonial maintenance required to keep the altar and people would come to pay tribute to San Simon and ask for assistance with material and spiritual needs. Petitioners would pay Don Domingo to make offerings and prayers to San Simon. The ceremony this night was not to petition San Simon, but rather to honor him so that he would be pleased. A father-son violin pair was hired to play music throughout the party that began in the early evening of October 27th and ended when the sun rose on the 28th. The homemade

instrument produced a shrill melody that was accompanied by the canonical singing of the 10-year-old boy.

When we arrived, Don Mateo read a speech he had prepared for the event. As we drank tea made from the tassels of corn and sweetened with home made molasses, Don Mateo explained to me the significance of San Simon. According to Don Mateo, San Simon represents Christianity and Maya resistance simultaneously. The image of San Simon was actually the image of a K'iche' martyr named Mam Ximon who is often referred to as Maximon. During colonial times, a man named Mam Ximon from San Andres Xecul led uprisings against the Spaniards, in order to retake lands they had stolen from the Maya. He was incarcerated by the Spanish but escaped. He was said to have been imprisoned four times, but each time he was captured by the Spanish he would disappear and then reappear in one of the four cardinal points. The fifth time the Spanish caught him, they crucified and burned him alive in Zunil. His Maya followers gathered his ashes and placed them at the base of the Tz'ite' tree (Palo Pito) in Chicacau. The tree produces the red seeds that are used by diviners and day keepers (*Aj Q'ijab*). He asked that his name and image be remembered with the Tz'ite tree. After his death, Mam Ximon began to reappear in San Juan La Laguna, Zunil, San Andres Itzapa, and Santiago Atitlan. Today, the most famous images of Maximon are in Zunil and Santiago Atitlan. The image in Santiago Atitlan has an indigenous face and the ashes of Mam Ximon are said to be inside of the head of the image in Santiago.

Don Mateo read,

The Spaniards stole our most fertile lands from us. Mam Ximon tried to get them back and organize us to fight the Spaniards. We remember him for fighting for

what was ours. We refer to him affectionately as Alaj Abuelo (little grandfather).

Mam Ximon was said to enjoy parties, drink and dancing, and to wander by the side of the river. That is why we celebrate in his honor once a year and we take turns dancing with him on our backs.

Don Mateo passed around a bottle of *guaro*, a home made hard liquor. He explained that Mam Ximon was not to be confused with the Mam linguistic and ethnic group. (*Mam* in K'iche' also refers to the *cargador del año* - the year bearer).⁶⁹

The Christianized representation of Mam Ximon has two opposing interpretations. One is Judas Tadeo, the other is Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Jesus. Don Mateo was adamant that San Simon and Mam Ximon were fused in the body of San Simon and that, "they are good, it is we who are bad. Many people claim that San Simon sold out God. It is not true."

While the image of the K'iche' warrior Tecun Uman who engaged in battle with the Spaniards and was also killed while protecting K'iche' lands has been appropriated by the Guatemalan state as a national symbol representing a heroic and noble yet extinct Mayan past, Mam Ximon is frequently disparaged by the modern civil religious

⁶⁹ The year bearer links the 365-day solar calendar to the 260-day Mayan calendar. The 260-day Mayan calendar cycle has 20-day names that cycle through 13 numerical days. Since 365 can be divided by the 13 numbers of the Mayan calendar 28 times with a remainder of one day, the numeration of the day will be the same on the first and the last day of the Solar calendar. Thus, every year the year bearer advances by one number until the numeration reaches 13. Since 365 can be divided by the 20 day names 18 times with a remainder of 5 days there are only 4 possibilities of the names of the year bearer ($20/5=4$). In K'iche' the four possible year bearers are Ik', Quiej, E and N'oj. Given that there are 4 year bearers and 13 numerical days, the Solar calendar and the Maya Calendar coincide every 52 years.

hierarchy. However, to the Maya faithful Maximon represents a living saint with the power to heal and change the future. While the Spanish evoked Tecun Uman as representing the honorable Maya past they defeated during the conquest, to Maya Mam Ximon represents a martyr much like Jesus, who was crucified while advocating for the rights of the poor and oppressed. Pilgrims visit the altars of Mam Ximon to petition for health and better fortune. San Simon is a living deity carefully presided over by Maya elders throughout Guatemala.



Figure 17 Two images of San Simon during Holy Week

Conclusion

Momostecos did not experience state counterinsurgent forces uniformly. Analysis of healer-survivor encounters helps illustrate the ways that healthcare providers can potentially reinforce or challenge the erasures contained in the phrase “Aquí no pasó nada.” The silence imposed on Momostecos when the municipality’s leaders declared corporate allegiance to the army was all but absolute. Momostecos knew of the violence that was occurring inside their community and throughout the countryside. For many, like Doña Euphemia and Don Mateo, Maya spirituality served as a necessary outlet, a place of truth and healing to counter the violence that was all around them. As documented in Chapter Four, the counterinsurgent structure (the PACs, the military commissioners, the intendente, etc.) was hostile towards poor Momostecos in general and the *Aj Q’ijab*’ and traditional spirituality in particular. The military government limited the movement of traditional healers and thus, prohibited the use of most sacred altars, and proscribed the use of particular altars (like the one in the municipal building) for petitions that benefited the military. Accompanying the attacks on Maya spiritual practices were the political measures implemented by the *intendente*, Gustavo Lang, which undermined traditional authority structures such as the *alcaldes auxiliares*. In Momostenango, the counterinsurgent military machinery did not resort to the same degree of scorched earth terror as was carried out in neighboring Quiché’. Momostenango’s dominant classes, both ladino and Maya, had shown over time their willingness to partner with the state. In this sense, silence is a dialectic that binds listeners and speakers in active dyad. In Momostenango, survivors often expressed the terror they had experienced through somatic illness. As seen by the experience of patients and healers at LA CLINICA, the

ability for doctors and other staff healers to “hear” their patients was contingent on regimes of truth each embraced.

Traditional Maya spiritual practices, including the cult of San Simon, provide a corrected or rewritten narrative of the official past; one in which the agency of Maya is acknowledged. Ahistorical narratives that characterize Momostenango as a place where “nothing happened” reinforces state approved imaginings of the “sanctioned Maya” or the “authorized Indian”. The active roles that Maya have played in resisting domination since the conquest are profoundly destabilizing to such imaginings. By remembering their past and maintaining traditional practices Maya forge new political identities and possibilities. The experiences of Maya survivors of wartime political violence resist hegemonic representations Guatemalan multiculturalism while ignoring the racial inequities that persist in Guatemala today. Healthcare providers who understand the insurrectionary history of Momosteco Maya and their continued capacity to creatively shape their worlds with their own original imaginings of the meanings of social suffering have the ability to transform survivors’ suffering into meaning.

Conclusions

Ri kaj

We kataq'an puwi' jun k'isis
we katopan pa ri utza'm ri
uq'ab',
k awil ri' che ri uwach ulew
man naj ta k'o wi che ri kaj.

Pa Chuwitz'aq
katwin ne k'u ri kachapo.

El cielo

Si te encaramás a un viejo
ciprés
y trepás por sus ramas,
verás que la tierra
no está lejos del cielo.

En Momostenango
podrás tocarlo.

Heaven

If you climb an old cypress
tree
And venture upon its limbs,
You will see that the earth
Is not far from heaven

In Momostenango
You can touch it.

Humberto Ak'ab'al (1996)

Both political and institutional violence have as their goal the formation of political subjects consistent with the state and its need to create subjects of a certain kind in its nation-building enterprise (Chomsky 2000; Jenkins 1998; Nagengast 1994; Nordstrom and Martin 1992; Sluka 2000). One challenge for applied anthropological research is how to produce studies that not only account for the systemic ways that the state shapes subjects in a war time era as well as the *individual* and *collective* psychological sequelae of political violence (i.e., trauma).

This study links the political violence that occurred during Guatemala's civil war to historic and economic processes that marginalized Momostenango's Maya majority for centuries and continue to limit their life choices today (what I have called institutional violence). The post-war healing of survivors, perpetrators and bystanders, if indeed any

such existed, must address the longstanding social and economic structures that have undermined Guatemala's nation-building project.

The limitations, even failures of the state in making political subjects in its likeness demonstrate the limits of state assimilation and multiculturalism projects. The Accord on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples that was signed during the peace accords exemplifies how present state policy professes to embrace the multicultural and multilinguistic diversity of the citizenry.⁷⁰ The official change in policy from previous Maya extermination and assimilation campaigns however has yet to prove that it can create a more democratic or just society. Average Guatemalans (i.e., Maya) are worse off in terms of their health, wealth and education than they were when the civil war began nearly 50 years ago. In addition to the state's inability to protect the well being of the majority of its citizens, the judicial system has fallen short in its duty to find justice for survivors of human rights abuses. For example, during the period of my fieldwork (2001-2003), then President Alfonso Portillo (a convicted murderer and former member of the guerilla insurgency who over time transformed himself into a populist leader of the rightwing Guatemalan Republican Front [FRG] led by Rios Montt) remobilized former members of the civil patrols (PACs) by offering to pay for their past service to the country, claiming the state was guilty for imposing such an onerous "obligation" on

⁷⁰ The peace accords signed between the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) and the Guatemalan military included the Accord on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which recognizes the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and pluri-cultural characteristics of Guatemalan society. The historical context in which dialectical struggles for power over representation occur cannot be underestimated. In this sense, Maya identity politics are more akin to the theoretical writings of Bakhtin than to Gramsci. Bakhtin, who was faced with the brutal centralization of the Soviet Union under Stalin, saw that a state could better obtain legitimacy by acknowledging the heteroglot makeup of its subjects. Gramsci advocated for subaltern linguistic groups to strive for political unity by adopting the language of the ruling class, preferring (at least in the historical context of 20th century Italy) monoglossia to heteroglossia.

civilian “volunteers” during the war (El Periodico 2004; Kramer and Thomas 2004). There was no acknowledgement, however, of the well- documented human rights abuses that PAC members committed in the name of the state against ordinary citizens, who themselves have received no compensation from the government. Nevertheless, President Portillo made some payments to Civil Patrollers but left the lion’s share of the \$650 he promised to every patroller to further governments. After he left office, angered and organized ex-Civil Patrol members marched, blocked roads and made repeated attempts to shut down government. The FRG’s political maneuvering remobilized the counterinsurgent PAC during peacetime and provided a platform for future ultraright parties such as the Partido Patriotico (PP) that claim to defend the interests of the ex PAC. The remobilization of the PAC during peacetime reinforced the military’s own imposed labels of “good” citizens and “bad” citizens while reminding the greater society that the state’s counterinsurgent forces, which used terror to quell organized dissent during the war, had not vanished. Such political maneuvers prolong the suffering of survivors and betray the state’s claims of reconciling the past and making the nation whole.

In Momostenango, ongoing institutional violence, which maintains highly unequal access to political, economic, and social resources, erodes the legitimacy upon which conservative Momosteco Maya leadership depends. In a recent study by the Guatemalan Secretary of Food and Nutritional Security (Secretaría de Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional (SESAN) 2008)⁷¹, Momostenango was cited as the

⁷¹ By Alejandra Alvarez; Prensa Libre April 6, 2008

municipality with the highest rate of severe malnourishment in all of Guatemala.

Increased social inequities combined with changes in the ways that fear influences younger generations of Momosteco leadership ruptures official histories and memories and provide footholds for new historical readings and political imaginings to emerge.

Fear is more than a product of memories of past violence. It is a contemporary force produced, reproduced and experienced by actors with real political, economic and social interests and it, in turn, influences the hopes and behaviors of society. Fear, however, need not be a totalizing or paralyzing force. It can be resisted and overcome. The clinical work documented in this study demonstrates that many Momosteco survivors and their care providers, who had every reason to be afraid (and often were), were not completely dominated by their fear. Maya that supported the insurgents were neither dominated by a “culture of fear” nor acting on “false consciousness,” having been duped by the guerilla forces. The threat of political violence never produced a “Momosteco collective consciousness” that functioned in ideological, political or economic unity, nor will it ever. Momostecos that opposed the genocidal state and sympathized with, or directly supported the guerilla movement, weighed their decisions to resist against their perceived chances of survival. For many, struggling against the institutional violence of poverty and racism outweighed the risks and dangers of militancy. Research that fails to critically examine official and unofficial counterinsurgent coercive apparatuses, and how they were resisted at the local level, risks failing to explain internal community divisions. A nuanced unpacking of the production of fear requires a close examination of the coercive forces that operated at local levels

and provides a framework for clinical intervention that avoids depoliticization of survivors' experience.

This research attempted the work of that unpacking by describing how power operated to produce political subjects on a local level. Although a democratically elected civilian government today ostensibly leads Guatemala, the military still wields political and economic control that rivals and, in many ways, supersedes the power of the landed oligarchy it once served. Momostecos' longstanding relationship with the state's repressive military apparatus revealed long term processes of class stratification and demonstrated how they intersected with indigenous mobilization. Maya participation in conservative right wing political mobilization contributed to the ongoing formation and perpetuation of a state that limited and still limits the production of powerful political subjects through coercion.

However useful elite Maya leaders were to the state, they were never to be entirely trusted. Recall that state-sanctioned Momosteco Maya who served in the militia, wrested control of local politics from their ladino adversaries in the 1950s by demonstrating their willingness to represent (however falsely and inadequately) the interests of all Maya Momostecos. Maya elite power holders maintained their control of the municipality until 1982 when military dictator Rios Montt appointed Ladino Gustavo Lang as *intendente*-an office with extraordinarily local military power. This event coincides precisely with the worst period of scorched earth, when the army was decimating entire villages throughout the highlands and massacring their populations. Even in Momostenango, purportedly a green zone of trustworthy and loyal Maya, the state found it necessary to reassert centralized authoritarian control, thereby denying

power to *any* Maya, even elites who had been in the state's pocket for 30 years. Despite their intersecting class interests and demonstrated loyalty, the state leaders perceived even Momosteco Maya elites as a threat to its governance and its overall project.

In the post-war era, new Maya leaders and politicians claiming to represent a revitalized Maya community are emerging. . Whether they exemplify ongoing capitulation or resistance to state power requires a brief examination of the meanings of "community." Dr. Demetrio Cojti, a leading intellectual of the Maya movement clarified his view that "the objective is to defend the interests of the Maya community and not of a particular social class" (Warren 1998p. 46-47). While some theorists argue that the emergence of a Maya movement as a significant social force is testament to the state's failure to create Maya subjects in its image (Fischer and Brown, 1996; Warren 1998; Nelson 1999; Hale 2006), others contend that the defining feature the post-war state with respect to Maya continues to be racist. The articulations between the country's racial hierarchy and its social structure that are so closely linked to its colonial history, however, make separating Maya interests from class interests a highly sensitive issue. Carlotta McAllister writes,

The war and the military's victory... made possible a new form of racism, which no longer only separated Indians from ladinos, but separated Indians from one another. In the post-revolutionary state, some Indians are allowed to be part of the Guatemalan population, on the condition that they enclose their community of interests with that of the Guatemalan community as a whole, while those Indians who insist on having interests outside their community are put beyond the pale, to be tolerated as long as they don't try to cross back (McAllister 2003 p. 306).

Indigenous Guatemalans experienced such extraordinary cruelty at the hands of their own government during the civil war because they were never allowed to participate as full citizens. A succession of racist and exclusionary laws, which dated to colonial times, marginalized Maya and formulated them as both antithetic to, and subjects of the state (Smith 1990, Nelson 1999, Grandin 2004). Even today, in the aftermath of the civil war, analysts frequently characterize the resurgence of Maya political mobilization as “anti-national” (Hale 2006), conjuring up deep seated, yet unsubstantiated, ladino fears that if Indians rise to political and economic power they will seek blood vengeance.⁷²

It is within that framework that scholars have increasingly focused their attention on Maya identity politics (Fischer and Brown 1996; Warren 1998), emphasizing the political spaces that have emerged since the peace accords. While such openings could be (and should be) attributed to Maya resistance, including participation in the guerillas, many discourses of indigenous mobilization during the war do not acknowledge, perhaps even refuse to acknowledge that Maya consciously decided to support the guerillas. “Mayanista” discourses that portray Maya movements as completely detached from the revolutionary insurgency (Cojtí Cuxil 1997), and discourses that portray Maya communities as neutral unified blocks trapped “Between Two Armies” (Le Bot 1992; Stoll 1993), sanitize and dehistoricize the experience of Maya who saw the insurgency as a viable path to their own liberation and their own subject making and therefore made calculated decisions to support the guerillas⁷³.

⁷² Grandin points out that the famed Patzicía uprising of 1947 in which 14 ladinos were killed by local Maya, was actually instigated by national liberal party activists and was subsequently met with the slaughter of hundreds of Indians by squads of ladinos from surrounding towns (Grandin 2000:204).

⁷³ See Hale 2006 for a broader discussion of discourses surrounding Maya resistance.

Winding the Unraveled

Telar	Kemeb'al	Loom
Ahí viejo telar y yo sin hilo para tejer. Esas nubes grises le ponen más peso a mi tristeza. Comienza a llover. Corro y agarro el cabo de un hilo de agua, enrollo enrollo enrollo hasta hacer un buen molote. Se contenta me corazon, canta el telar y me pongo a tejer.	Chi la' ri jun q'el kemeb'al maj nub'atz che ri kem. Ri mo'r taq sutz' kikikoj ura'lal puwi ri nub'is. Kujeq ri jab'. Kinxik'anik kinchap jun utza'm re jun utum ri jab', kinb'alij kinb'alij kinb'alij k'a kinb'an jun molot'. Kaki'kot ri nuk'ux, kab'ixon ri kemeb'al rin in kinok che rikemenik.	There's the old loom, And I have no threads to weave. Those grey clouds Add more weight to my sadness. The rain starts. I run, and grab a hold of one of those water threads, I wind it, Wind it, Wind it, Until I have enough My heart lightens up, The loom sings its song, And I begin weaving.

In his poem entitled “Kemeb'al,” Momosteco K'iche' poet Humberto Akabal relates the sadness of seeing his abandoned loom empty of thread (Batz'). Akabal's poem speaks of having to make something from nothing. Looms were Momosteco Mayas' primary generators of income after the government expropriated their most fertile lands on the pacific piedmont during the coffee boom of the late 1800s. Today, most looms in Momostenango lay abandoned as synthetic wool blankets imported from Mexico undercut the industry. K'iche' Maya of Momostenango have had to respond to market encroachments on their livelihood since the colonial period. A few learned to mediate between the state and the poor, uneducated masses. But the landless condition of most Momostecos destined them to trade subsistence farming for underpaid wage labor in the

plantation economy or as weavers- always with the threat of political violence if they chose unsanctioned paths to prosperity.

Today, most Momostecos are skeptical that they will benefit from the newest wave of state-sponsored neoliberal economic impositions such as the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). What little promise CAFTA once had for Momostecos has most certainly diminished in the 2008-9 downturn of the world economy. Ongoing marginalization and increasing levels of poverty, however, will pressure poor Guatemalans to decide whether to support or resist state-sanctioned economic projects such as the CAFTA. Global capitalism since the end of the Cold War has shifted state counterinsurgent strategies from overwhelming and eliminating the threat of communist or socialist revolutionaries to restructuring society so that people can govern themselves. State struggles to control Maya historical imaginations of possible alternatives to ongoing institutional violence remain at the center of governance for Guatemala's ruling class.

The winding of thread onto a spool, referred to in the poem, is a common metaphor in K'iche' for replacing order in an unraveled world. Momostecos have had to make something from nothing, to create hope out of despair. Momosteco survivors have had to reconcile their own violent past within the context of a society that struggles between remembering and forgetting the past. In K'iche, Batz' is also a homonym for Monkey, one of the more important days on the Maya calendar. For Momostenango's day keepers (*Aj Q'ijab'*) time accumulates as it cycles, like a thread on a spool. Throughout the ebbs and flows of death and regeneration, fear and hope, violence and less violence, Momostenango's traditional healers have remembered the past as a means

of alleviating suffering. Cycles of remembrance and forgetting are a necessary part of restoring order to an unraveled universe.

Despite a legacy of religious and military persecution, Maya cultural activism has had resurged since the early 1990s. Momostenango's Ajq'ijab restore order by marking the passage of time and reading its messages. Despite official histories that sanitize the legacy of political violence, Momosteco *Aj Q'ijab* breathe new life into the historical imagination of new generations of Maya leaders through remembrance of unsanctioned histories. The interviews I offer in this dissertation are but a handful of the unsanctioned histories in Momostenango. At different times, during interviews with perpetrators, witnesses, and survivors in Momostenango, I was told that "*Aquí no pasó nada.*" I came to understand that I must link this discourse to the speaker's subjective relationship to the state as well as his or her relationship to local and extra-local valences of power. Being told by the head of the civil patrol, who ordered and oversaw the capture of local organizers, "nothing happened here" had an entirely different meaning than when the same words were uttered by the widow whose husband had disappeared. While no single testimony provides the "truth" of what happened in Momostenango, the composite of survivors' testimonies afford a subaltern reading of events by those that have been written out of official history. The danger I risk in interpreting previously undocumented political violence is no less than those who would choose to ignore it. That is, by historicizing and interpreting testimonies, I risk censoring certain discontinuities and ruptures within narratives surrounding individual and collective experiences of terror.

Without exception, no community completely escaped the civil war. The ways in which Momostenango's survivors recount their experience, and how providers who treat

them are able to listen or not to such accounts, factors into the ways in which the “reality” of how the political violence that occurred there will be remembered. Though not all actors are equally powerful, none are powerless. In Momostenango, even the dead have the ability to change destiny. The ways the dead are remembered, or forgotten by the living, are cultural performances that produce and reproduce what Foucault described as “regimes of truth” (Foucault 1978 p92). Correspondingly, interactions between healers and survivors can be seen as performances with the ability to edit, censor, or affirm historic “truths” and, in turn, shape the future.

Thus, by examining testimonies of violence and silences about it a different story arises from the green zone; one in which terror is neither a totalizing experience nor completely internalized. Carolyn Nordstrom writes,

The irony in terror warfare is that the premises upon which it is based are inaccurate. People suffer the ravages of war and are changed by the experience of being forced to respond to violent events, but they are not controlled by these experiences. People resist the oppression of violence; they re-create viable worlds; they re-forge political identities of their own making (Nordstrom 1998).

Encounters between survivors and healers have the potential to create a shared, alternative narrative that simultaneously projects historical “truths” and creates new meanings. The terror Maya experienced during the civil war was but one of many episodes of persecution Maya have experienced since colonial times. Clinical encounters between *Aj Q’ijab’* (daykeepers) and their patients incorporate historic local wisdom by invoking the ancestors at ancient ceremonial sites and in their daily prayers. How Maya

remember the past informs how they mobilize (or not) in the present and envision the future. Maya spiritual practices offer a clinical encounter to patients where meanings of past political violence can be shared both in words and also in silences. Social histories that have serious physical and psychological implications for patients' health, which require communication and are often silenced during biomedical encounters, can remain unspoken, yet not be denied during traditional healing practices.

I went to Momostenango to study how survivors of political violence used biomedical and traditional healers to attend to the physical and psychological sequelae of war. I was optimistic that by fostering an environment where survivors could openly discuss historical events, the LA CLINICA would allow new understandings and solidarities to emerge. I believed that truth-telling alone could break the silences that state terror produced. I had little idea of just how difficult creating such an environment would be. In retrospect, I now realize that the hope I had placed in the program reflected my own misunderstandings of the complex and deeply rooted ways in which political violence was experienced at a local level.

Although survivors clearly expressed fears of the potential for ongoing violence, fear alone does not adequately describe the reasons that the program failed. As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation the political violence that Momostecos experienced was rooted in institutional forms of violence that have also contributed greatly to their suffering. Although isolating physical and psychological harm from institutional harm may make sense to outside providers, it did not adequately resonate with survivors' own understandings of their suffering.

For many Momostecos, the violence of the early 1980's was a continuation of state abuses that began with the conquest. From their positionality as Maya, the civil war was more than a struggle between economic classes that began in the 1950s. It was also a struggle against a state that protected the economic interests of a racial minority that excluded and marginalized the Maya majority. When ladino providers in the clinic ignored and even denied the racist elements of Guatemalan society, it alienated Maya program participants because it denied that they were the experts of their own history. By imposing a set of meanings on survivors' experiences, providers perpetuated their own modernist ideologies that failed to recognize institutional violence that marginalizes subaltern Maya.

Don Abraham, who was hired as a *sacerdote Maya*, learned soon after the program began that role expected of him was as an interpreter to the healers and not as a healer himself. The subordination of traditional Maya knowledge to biomedical nosology and treatments within the clinic established a power differential that privileged ladino professionals' interpretations and biases. In this sense the clinic reproduced existing neo-colonial relationships of power.

Although the clinic did not succeed in establishing an accessible and safe program for Maya Momosteco survivors of political violence to address their psychological needs, it is unfair to blame program directors entirely for the failures. Although the program failed in its central mission the significance of the attempt is important. Merely by existing, the clinic staff acknowledged that political violence did occur in Momostenango and that the dominant narrative that nothing happened there was false. The significance of dispelling that myth alone was a milestone and an act of

resistance that challenges the existing social structure. In addition, many of the staff members themselves were survivors of political violence. Staff meetings and meals together provided an important forum where ideas could be shared and debated however skewed the power dynamics and people's ability to listen may have been.

The program's failures also provide a cautionary tale about optimism that individualized solutions to institutionalized problems exist. Even if some of the participants found healing for their physical and psychological wounds, the clinic was not large enough to attend to the needs of even a fraction of the survivors of political violence in Momostenango. Hundreds of families were directly impacted by political violence in the municipality, only a fraction of which I was able to document. The huge inadequacies of the public health safety net are only beginning to be addressed, and this largely by the Cuban medical mission operating in the municipality. Interventions that fail to acknowledge and address Guatemala's systemic public health failures are bound to fail themselves because they reinforces silences surrounding fundamental and profound inequities in Guatemalan society.

Keith Basso has eloquently described the ways in which silence, as a linguistic tool, is a form of communication (Basso 1972). Basso demonstrates how silence is a dialectic process between two or more actors. In this framework, silencing and being silent are both acts that require agency. In Momostenango, where the act of outwardly expressing one's true beliefs or actions has entailed taking great risk of physical harm, especially if they were against the dominant political structure, remaining silent is not the equivalent of being passive. In fact, surviving in Guatemala during the civil war depended, to a great deal, on being able to curb the desire to let people know "how you

really feel.” In the most famous recounting of political violence in Guatemala: *I, Rigoberta Menchu: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, the final words of the Nobel Peace Prize laureate are “Nevertheless, I’m still keeping my Indian identity a secret. I’m still keeping secret what I think no one should know. Not even anthropologists or intellectuals, no matter how many books they have, can find out all our secrets” (Burgos-Debray 1983). Violence has the ability to push lived truths to the margins of “regimes of truth,” into the realm of the unspoken. The secrets and silences that survivors maintain may float in the ether of the “subconscious” or may be lying on the tip of a bitten tongue. In either case, the potential for such realities to reemerge into spoken narrative, into the public/political realm exists and, as such, remains a *threat* to the victimizers’ official narratives, as well as an act of *resistance* by the survivors of state sponsored political violence.

Healing the silences surrounding wartime political violence that took place in Momostenango requires truth telling. Michel-Rolph Trouillot writes,

The play of power in the production of alternative narratives begins with the joint creation of facts and sources...facts are never meaningless: indeed, they become facts only because they matter in some sense, however minimal (Trouillot 1995).

Traditional healers provide a safe context in which counter-discourses and images of alterity to official accounts of state violence can emerge. Widening the scope of forces that medical clinicians as well as traditional healers use to determine the causes of patients’ illnesses to include social as well as individual factors offers generative possibilities to understanding silences about political violence.

The history of Momosteco Maya participation in revolutionary activism matters. It matters to survivors, it matters to the families of the disappeared, and it matters to younger generations of Guatemalans. Understanding the agency of subaltern Maya Momostecos during the civil war informs Momostecos concerned with the present injustices in Guatemalan society. Fostering an environment in which debates surrounding local historical events can take place requires recognition of the inequalities that violence is based on. Given the powerful interests that back dominant narrative frames, which deny Maya agency, a proactive healing requires the willingness of healer and healed to develop alternative narratives that help find meaning and make whole the ruptures that state terror produced.

Doris Sommer (1991) points out that the silences/secrets that emerge are contextualized not only within the scorched earth policies of the early 1980s, but in 500 years of colonization and discrimination as well. Despite the imposition of religious, political and social structures on the K'iche' of Momostenango during colonial, republican and modern periods, secret societies, traditions, and stories have been powerful tools of identity boundary maintenance (Carmack 1995; Cook 2000; Smith 1990; Tedlock 1992; Tedlock 1985a). Thus, western notions of talk therapy- as a means of arriving at a cathartic retelling of historical events in order to "break the silence"- ignore the power of maintaining secrets, a force of resistance that Menchú argues is central to identity maintenance.

This is particularly true if historical retellings of events by survivors risk being discounted or disregarded by their listeners. Perhaps, at best, a healer can bear witness to resistance by acknowledging the multifaceted ways in which political violence comes to

bear on survivors' subjectivity. Secrets and silences in such a framework need not be construed as insurmountable distance between patient and healer. Sommer notes,

that distance can be read as a lesson in the condition of possibility for coalitional politics. It is similar to learning that respect is the condition of possibility for the kind of love that takes care not to simply appropriate its object (Sommer 1991).

This exploration of the ways in which the sequelae of political violence were diagnosed and treated by healers of all sorts, offers hope for the development of healthcare interventions that neither ignore nor exaggerate personal agency. By describing not only the subjective experience of survivors and their healers, but also the political and social structures that permeate such interactions, I have illustrated how no single group has the definitive version of historical events or truth in Momostenango and how history mediates memories of political violence.

Concluding Comments

The prospects for a new era of equality and democratic development in Guatemala do not appear especially promising in the face of the global advance of capitalist privatization of healthcare safety nets and state abandonment of its responsibilities for the economic, educational and health security of its citizens. The peace accords promised to usher in an era of democracy based on the ideals of human rights. However, in the thirteen years since they were signed, the strictures of structural adjustment policies have narrowed, rather than expanded the real choices available to Momostecos and most Guatemalans.

Further, the possibility that the hopes of the peace accords will be realized and that justice might some day be served is a source of hope and potential healing for survivors, and for Guatemalan society as a whole. Yet survivors' hopes for finding justice must be realized within the Guatemalan judicial system and jurisprudence, which thus far has not been up to the task. Alleged authors of massive human rights abuses during the 1980s, such as Generals Rios Montt and Perez Molina, have recently contemplated becoming president of the republic rather than a life behind bars. Increased lawlessness of paramilitary narcotics rings and gangs mark post-war society. The promise that perpetrators may some day be brought to justice and survivors vindicated is remote. If many Maya did not uniformly consent to or support the military's counterinsurgency program, then what stops them from continuing insurgent behaviors in the present? As military forces have returned to their barracks, fear of coercive force alone does not adequately explain how silence about past Maya revolutionary agency is maintained in the present.

The increased pressures and decreased choices that most poor Guatemalans experience expose the state's weaknesses. Although most poor Guatemalans are Maya, it is far from certain that new resistance movements will form along ethnic rather than class lines. Increasing disparity between the rich and the poor coincides with a very recent turn towards more left-leaning regimes. In 2008, a ladino, Alvaro Colom, the son of a liberal politician who was assassinated in 1978, and a trained priest-shaman, won the presidential election over an ultra-right wing law and order candidate. It is yet to be seen how strongly his administration will rise to the task of responding to political, economic and social reforms stipulated in the peace accords.

In this study I have linked the political violence that happened in Momostenango to larger economic and historical processes that created and maintained a large Maya population in a position of vulnerability. This case study complicates assumptions that Maya communities act in a cohesive manner to promote their ethnic/racial and cultural interests. The class interests of many Maya elite from Momostenango in many instances trumped their ethnic/community solidarities. By showing how a particular class of Momosteco Maya embraced counterinsurgent political violence to protect their interests and maintain political power, this research presents a different side to wartime brutalities of Maya against Maya that might otherwise be described as random, or worse, a Lamarckian inheritance of pre-colonial Maya “savagery”.

Critical genealogies of institutional and political violence and the ways that counterinsurgent apparatuses function at a local level are necessary to piece together the ways remembrance of past traumatic events is reactivated in the present. Critical medical anthropologies that take into account the ways in which political and institutional violence is linked to patterns of emotion, thought and behavior can help unpack the meanings of silence and draw survivors together to create new possibilities for envisioning their futures rather than to pathologize and isolate them.

In Momostenango alone, many gaps remain in our understanding of how state governance is experienced locally. This study has emphasized how and why victims’ and survivors’ of political violence have been omitted from official histories. With few exceptions, however, the testimonies that I collected were of Momostecos that stayed in their communities. At the annual *fiesta titular* one is reminded by the shiny pickup trucks and hiphop beats they pump out, that many who call Momostenango home no longer live

there. Who fled the community due to the violence? What was their experience and how do they continue to influence local economic, political, and social life?

Another group we know little about is the victimizers. Which Momostecos were forcibly recruited into the army? Which volunteered? What were their roles in imposing a terrorist regime in Guatemala, how did they benefit from it and how did their experience translate into local power? How did their experiences differ? “Aquí no pasó nada” also negates their experience, experience which undoubtedly continues to have a major influence local formations of political and structural violence.⁷⁴ A broader analysis of their experience would further our understanding of how state governance and political structures are produced and reproduced. With the passing of time, as more information about the ways in which the counterinsurgent state governance was enacted at local levels becomes available, new generations of Maya leaders will require such information.

⁷⁴ The military transferred “boots on the ground” militarization to local PACs after 1983. Although the self-policing capacity of the PACs officially ended before the peace accords were signed, many ex-civil patrollers, ideologically attuned to the policies of the repressive state, still serve as a local counterinsurgent force that can be activated at a moment’s notice.

Afterword

Since the end of the Civil War, state policy towards Maya autonomy has taken a noticeably different tact. In sharp contrast to the centralization of power in the hands of the ladino *intendente* that occurred during the period of *tierra arrasada* in the early 1980s, the state has conceded limited autonomy to Maya-led municipalities like Momostenango. State discourse that embraces Guatemala's multicultural and multi-linguistic character now flourishes. Some politicians, who still harbor racist beliefs, are more cautious about using inclusive language in public address. Legislation that explicitly prohibits racial discrimination (such as Convention 169) has been passed into law. Such changes are not isolated to Guatemala. Citizens in Bolivia, a country that shares Guatemala's history of racist exclusion of the indigenous majority, elected Evo Morales, an indigenous man to be president. Even Guatemala's current president, though not Maya himself, underwent spiritual training as a daykeeper. The ascendancy of indigenous peoples and their culture appears to be a building force throughout the Americas.

It might seem puzzling then, especially in Momostenango where indigenous leaders have dominated the municipal government for over 50 years (and are in no threat of losing that control), that local Maya would organize to form their own separate, but equal, authority structure. Yet that is exactly what is happening in Momostenango today and throughout the country in other indigenous communities.

As of July 2009, *principales* from both urban and rural barrios and communities throughout the municipality have organized to form their own *Consejo de Autoridades Ancestrales* (Council of Ancestral Authorities). The Maya organizers assert that the *Consejo de Autoridades Ancestrales* is not intended to challenge local state authority that resides in the municipal government, but to, instead, create a parallel structure, the purpose of which is to respond to the healthcare, educational, and cultural needs of the general population. The organizers of the *Consejo de Autoridades Ancestrales* seek to create an autonomous body that is not subordinated to the municipal government (as the *autoridades auxiliares* or *alcaldes auxiliares* currently are).

The Maya organizers of the *Consejo* affirm that they are the bona fide authorities that local residents turn to in order to resolve their most pressing needs. They assert that most local justice (such as cases of domestic violence or theft) is handled through these leaders, and not through the municipal or departmental justice systems. Indigenous leaders claim that Maya community residents believe that they will have a fairer hearing if they seek justice through traditional systems than if they go through the state's legal system. They also emphasize that traditional Maya healers are the primary healthcare providers in their communities. They assert that, as a result of state failures to implement reforms mandated in the peace accords, local authorities need to come up with their own solutions.

The *Consejo de Autoridades Ancestrales* referred to the many laws that are already on the books which require the state to respect Maya culture and to protect the interests of Maya people. Citing the failures of the public health, education and resource management systems, the petition for the incorporation of the *Consejo* asserts:

[The collective rights of the *Consejo* are:] 1 To freely maintain, develop and to fortify [Maya] identity, sense of ownership, and ancient traditions 2. To prevent us from being the objects of racism. 3. To compensate communities affected by racism. 4. To conserve the indispensable property of our community lands. 5. To maintain ownership of our ancestral lands. 6. To participate in the use and conservation of our renewable natural resources. 7. To receive prior consult and to be openly informed about prospecting studies [for mineral extraction], exploitation and commercialization of non-renewable resources. 8. To conserve and promote our practices of management of biodiversity. 9. To conserve and to develop our own forms of social organization and to be able to exercise authority in our territories that legally recognized as ancestral lands. 10. To create, develop, and to put into practice our own rights –indigenous rights. 11. To not be displaced from our ancestral lands. 12. To maintain, protect and to develop the collective knowledge, sciences and ancient wisdom; genetic material, medicines, to be able to protect sacred ceremonial sites, our plants, our animals, our minerals and ecosystems inside our territories. 13. To protect, to develop and to preserve our cultural and historic patrimony. 14. To develop intercultural and bilingual education. 15. To participate in official organizations that define public policies which affect us. 16. To be consulted on legislative measures that can affect our private and collective rights. 17. To develop relations with other towns, particularly ones that are divided by international borders 18. To encourage the use of the clothing, the symbols and the emblems which identify us. 19. To limit military activities in our territory. 20. To ensure that the diversity of our cultures are reflected in education and in the media; to be able to create our own media in our own languages. 21. The territories of our communities are of ancestral descent and have intangible value, in them we will be vigilant of any type of extractive activities.

Today, even in land-poor Momostenango, the encroachment of Maya ancestral lands continues to shape political movements. Maya elders organizing the *Consejo* have harnessed the state's language of inclusion, respect for diversity and autonomy while putting into evidence state failures in protect the rights of all citizens.

New efforts of Maya activists to mobilize against ongoing racism, expose the limitations of state discourses of inclusion, cultural equality and local autonomy. The organizers of the *Consejo* emphasize that despite the state's post-Civil War rhetoric, enduring racism and infringement on communal rights compel subaltern Maya to resist and assert their autonomy. The efforts of Momosteco Maya leaders to resist subordination to Maya elites that control the municipal government expose deeply embedded class and racial hierarchies that persist in Guatemala today. Today Momosteco Maya activists call upon their ancestors for guidance and clarity, like they have since time immemorial, not to recapitulate the past but to actively create a more just future.

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Appendix: Timeline of Political Violence in Momostenango

Note: The following represent all of the instances I was able to document but only a fraction of total actual occurrences.

Year	Date	Name	# of people	Comments
1972		Moises Villagran Vasquez	1	
1975		Juan Ajanel	1	Accused of being a member of ORPA by Army; Captured and Disappeared
1976		E. A. and Spouse	2	National Police kidnapped the couple. They were taken to Zunil for a week and were found alive in a ditch a week later with hands tied and bag over head.
1976		V.A. and J. A.	2	Judiciales and G2 returned two weeks later to kidnap siblings of E. A.
1978		Felipe Relac and Spouse	2	Victims kidnapped from their home in Guatemala City. Bodies were found burnt in a car.
1978		Domingo Sontay	1	Murdered
1978		J. S. C.	1	Cooperative leader kidnapped
1978		A.B.	1	Attempted assassination in Los Cipreses. Fled to San Francisco El Alto
1978	18-Sep	Pedro Ajtun Ajtun	1	
1978	18-Jun	Santos Akabal Ixcoy Vicenta Ixcoy Akabal Enrique Santiago Ixcoy Akabal	3	Found burned alive
1979	1-May	Martin Coj y Coj	1	Disappeared
1980		Eustacio Vicente Tzun	5	Disappeared with several others
1980		E.C.	3	Accused of being a guerilla forced to flee with others
1980		S.S.	2	Accused of being a guerilla forced to flee with others
1980	13-Jul	Juliana Herrera Perez	1	
1981	7-Aug	Domingo Tomas Perez Lopez	1	Found murdered along highway in Pitzal
1981		Senora Tayun	1	Murdered in her home
1981	22-Sep	XX	1	Found in Patzoquit burned to death
1981	30-Sep	XX	1	Found shot to death
1981	30-Sep	XX	1	Found shot to death
1981	30-Oct	XX;XX;XX	3	Found shot to death
1981	1-Dec	XX;XX	2	Found murdered along highway in Tzanjon
1982	25-Jan	XX;XX;XX;XX	4	Asphixiation by strangulation in Pasajoc
1982	27-Feb	V.O.V. & V.O.V.	2	Cooperative leaders kidnapped
1982	6-Mar	XX;XX;XX;XX;XX;XX;XX;XX;XX;XX;XX;XX;XX;XX;XX;XX	13	13 bodies of men that had been shot were found in Chinimabe and displayed in the central plaza.
1982	29-Mar	Celistino Pelico Ajanel	1	Shot in the head and abdomen from Barrio Patzite Choquinom
1982		Unidentified women from Jutacaj	8	5 soldiers dressed in civilian clothing raped women from Jutacaj

Year	Date	Name	# of people	Comments
1982	15-Apr	Felipe Elias Pu	1	Accused of collaborating with EGP- Disappeared
1982	25-May	Abraham Vicente and 15 other Men	16	Accused of being guerillas kidnapped from Canquixaja, Jutacaj and Xequemeya
1982	5-Jun	Anselmo Ordóñez Ajcá	1	Accused of being member of ORPA disappeared from Canquixaja
1982	4-Nov	XX	1	Woman found murdered
1982	3-Nov	Calixto Ajanel Vicente	1	Found shot to death Pologua
1983	31-Jan	Juan Felipe Bermudez Prado	1	Found dead in San Antonio Pasajoc
1983	24-Feb	Teodora Quiej Ixcoy	1	Found shot in the head
1983	28-Mar	Feburcio Martinez Ajxup	1	Shot in the chest in Xequemeya
1983	15-Jun	Juan Ixcoy Baten	1	Member of ORPA disappeared from Barrio Santa Ana
1983	10-May	Juan Akabal Ramos	1	Accused of being member of ORPA disappeared from Santa Ana; his body was found tortured and decapitated
1983	1-Jul	Alejandro Ordoñez Vicente	1	Accused of being member of EGP. Disappeared by army.
1983	9-Jul	Leon Chanchabac Mejia Juan Santiago Ajcá Ajxup	2	Head of military commissioners shot at entrance to the market with his body guard/driver
1983	21-Jul	Genaro Itzep Velasquez	1	Shot in the head; Paraje Chonimasac-Pasajoc
1984	5-Jan	Juan Akabal Baten	1	Captured by G2 while on his way to Santa Lucia la Reforma from Jutacaj with his wife; disappeared
1984	27-Mar	Narciso Ralac Alvarez	1	Shot in the head; Santa Isabel
1984	28-Apr	Maria Baten Akabal	1	Wife of military commissioner was raped then beaten and dragged with a rope around her neck until she died
1984	22-Jun	Tomás Torres Chanchavac Guillermo Torres Velásquez	2	Accused of being members of ORPA and assassinated in Canquixaja
1984	12-Dec	Braulio Itzep Tzun	1	Found shot in the chest along highway Km 214-215
1986	6-May	Santiago Akabal Baten	1	Accused of being member of EGP. Disappeared.
1987		Juan Vinicio Bartolo Augustin Vail Lucas	2	Disappeared. Several days later the body of Juan Vinicio found mutilated and tortured in Momostenango.
1990	16-Aug	Estanislau Mejia; XX	2	Assassinated in Momostenango
1992	17-Apr	Santos Baten Akabal	1	Executed by group of military commissioners in Sicalbe
1993	5-Feb	Juan Tum Uz	1	Member of CERJ from Racana forced to drink poison died 5 days later
1995	May	Doming Calel Vicente	1	Murdered in Retalhuleu
No Date		P. Z.	1	Contratista Kidnapped from the center of Momostenango by G2
No Date		Tomás Ajpop	1	Killed by army in Xequemeya
Total			110	