Formal Displacement

Savannah Grace Dixon
sdixon13@vols.utk.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_chanhonoproj

Part of the Cultural History Commons, Indigenous Studies Commons, Latin American History Commons, Latin American Studies Commons, Latina/o Studies Commons, Other Architecture Commons, Other Languages, Societies, and Cultures Commons, Urban, Community and Regional Planning Commons, and the Urban Studies and Planning Commons

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Supervised Undergraduate Student Research and Creative Work at TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Chancellor's Honors Program Projects by an authorized administrator of TRACE: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange. For more information, please contact trace@utk.edu.
FORMAL DISPLACEMENT

Savannah Dixon
For my parents, Gretchen, and Eduardo -
uno de los desaparecidos.
# Table of Contents

- Acknowledgment 3
- Abstract 4
- List of Figures 5
- Map of Guatemala 7

## Framing
- Culture of Development 9 - 10
- Culture of Colonisation 20
- Culture of Imperialism 24
- Culture of War 34
- Culture of Growth 44

## Analysis - Guatemala City
- 50 - 61

## Design
- 62 - 69

## Conclusion
- 70

- Glossary 72
- Bibliography 74
- Images 78
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people I would like to thank for their involvement in the planning and execution of this honors thesis and design analysis. I have been so fortunate to have so many multi-disciplined faculty members involved in the development of my ideas, the cultural sensitivity of the project, and the architectural reality of building in a developing country.

Many thanks to the College of Architecture and Design for being my case study of architectural thought and history. Without many of the faculty members and advisors within the college, I never would have felt comfortable doing a project like this.

I would also like to thank the Hispanic Language & Literature department for their support, advice, and incredible insight and teaching over the last five years. Specifically, I would like to thank Dr. Lisa Parker for her amazing encouragement and kindness towards me during my years in Spanish. You reminded me of my passion for architecture in a way so different from my other professors. Through your strength and support, you gave me a hope for my career and future that I did not believe, and I will never be able to thank you enough for that. Also, I would like to thank Dr. Michael Handelsman for his incredibly challenging yet beautiful perspective of the Spanish language. My appreciation for the language and how that is expressed in culture has grown exponentially. Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Millie Gimmel for allowing me to study K’iche’ which has been and will continue to be so incredibly inspiring to my future and my understanding of indigenous people. Our conversations have been so special to me and the impact of your perspective and knowledge have helped shape my thoughts in many ways.

From Cumberland County, to Finland, to Guatemala, I cannot thank Scott Wall enough for everything he has let me do throughout the last three years of my architectural education. Scott, your liberating attitude and your trust in my abilities have been integral to the development of this project. Thank you immensely for your perspective and understanding.

I cannot finish this statement of thanks without mentioning the incredible support of my family. They have spent many an hour listening intently to me explain issues that they did not find interesting or necessary at that moment. I could never have finished the last five years without them. Their constant pride and continuous belief in my abilities were essential to my completion of school and this project.

I have to mention one last person before I close with who I thank the most, but I would like to thank Gretchen Fromke for her words of love, wisdom, and strength that she has instilled in me over the last two years. Taking brokenness and making something functional is incredibly difficult and you were integral to me finding the strength and motivation to speak for a people who I admire and respect immensely. The effects of your guidance in my life will follow me continuously.

Last but not at all least, I want to thank the Mayan people. This is difficult to do and say because they may never know about this study, but what I have learned about resilience, culture, the definition of wealth, and the definition of poverty to the Guatemalan people has given me a deep perspective of roots and the identities of the people who inhabited the land in the Americas centuries before Europe arrived. I have gleaned so much beauty from their culture, and yet I have equally gleaned so much tension, disdain, and sorrow. Finding the line between solving “problems” and accepting those “problems” as existing differences has been a constant struggle throughout this project, but my personal experiences with the Guatemalan people makes this project so exceptionally real to me.

To the Guatemalan people,
Maltyox,
Chjonte,
Muchas Gracias.
ABSTRACT

Civilizations rise and fall, develop and evolve, or quietly disappear from the annals of history. It is the burden of the present to protect the legacy of those who have come before.

Unfortunately, many of the civilizations of the Western Hemisphere have been neglected or forgotten. Submerged because those who came to inhabit the Americas assumed lordship instead of relationship. While this happened in all of the Americas, the focus of this narrative is about the cultural and architectural consequences of European colonization of Guatemala. This country occupies the fertile rain forests and plains between Mexico and Honduras. Its physical geography contains mountains, volcanoes, and rivers; and its cultural geography contains over twenty-eight different people groups making up the largest population of indigenous Mayan peoples in Central America.

This history of occupation of the land by force, the mass removal and relocation of indigenous peoples, forced labor on stolen land, civil war and rebellion, created long-term patterns of population migration. The direct consequence of this fluidity of population movement among the lower classes has created an architectural culture based on the mobility of the nomadic. This nomadic system of community, housing, and infrastructure leads to a lack of stability and consistency in the lives of people who already live in this world of inconsistency and flux.

By examining this history of nomadism and its manifestation in Guatemala City, architectural elements begin to present themselves as interesting potential alternatives to a traditional fixed architecture in a non-fixed world.

FIGURES

1.1 Indigenous Population
1.2 Mayan Civilization
1.3 ‘K’iche’ Language and Culture Map
1.4 Technological Comparison
1.5 Evolution of Guatemalan Border
1.6 Tikal Axes
1.7 Kaminlajuyu within Inner Guatemala City
1.8 Mayan Cultural Overlap
2.1 Colonization Path of de Alvarado
3.1 Agrarian Use
3.2 Human Habitation
4.1 Prayers for the Fallen
4.2 In the Midst of Chaos
4.3 Massacre Sites
4.4 Inter-Country Migration Due to Violence
5.1 Population of Mayans Worldwide
5.2 Wealth Disparity
5.3 Percentage of Those Under the Poverty Line
5.4 Ethnic Diversity
5.5 Housing Conditions
5.6 Percentage of Indigenous Population
5.7 Inter-Country Migration
5.8 Cycle of Violence
6.1 Earthquake of ’76
6.2 Evolution of Guatemala City
6.3 Proposed City Growth
6.4 Department Division
6.5 Electric Infrastructure
6.6 Interstate System
6.7 Fault Lines
[FIGURES CONT'D]

6.8 Zones of Guatemala City
6.9 Department of Guatemala
6.10 Zones of the Department of Guatemala
6.11 Guatemala City Cityscape
6.12 Guatemala City
6.13 Population per Acre
6.14 Square Footage per Person
6.15 People per Home
6.16 Nomadism

7.1 Formal Displacement
7.2 Site Location
7.3 Site Plan
7.4 Materials Exploded Axon
7.5 Stove Exploded Axon
7.6 Stove Elevations
7.7 Stove Plan and Sections
7.8 Roof Plan
7.9 Plan
7.10 Axon
7.11 Elevation
7.12 Elevation
7.13 Exploded Axon

[IMAGE]
Framing
**Population Growth**

- **1500 AD:**
  - World: 440,000,000
  - Indigenous peoples: 60,000,000
  - Mayans: 2,000,000

- **2016 AD:**
  - World: 7,000,000,000
  - Indigenous peoples: 955,000,000
  - Mayans: 60,000,000

This incredible civilization now forms the largest group of indigenous people in the Western Hemisphere. Yet, after years of discovering and documenting new finds in all of Mesoamerica starting in the 1920s, there remains no significant explanation for the rise or fall of the Mayan empire. Theories range from ecological, external context, and a rise of a hierarchical chiefdom system. Because of the lack of a clear theory, the Mayan civilization has come under scrutiny as a complex culture. The definition of complex culture—while similarly defined by urbanism as civilization—also includes the factors of growth in religion, trade, and moral ideology. These factors allow the Mayans to be considered a strong complex culture with evolving customs and feudalistic classes.

The Mayan Empire stretched from southern Mexico to northern Honduras. Much of the Mayan land was on the Yucatan peninsula and all throughout the country of Guatemala. Over the last 500 years, the Mayan population has grown substantially and currently 5 million of the 6 million Mayan people worldwide live in Guatemala. Beginning in the 2000s BCE, the Mayan civilization flourished creating centers of control led by self-identified noble families who utilized the farming class to produce and refine the natural resources of the area. While this created a moderately successful civilization, the organization and dependence on the farming class probably led to the downfall of the Mayans in 900 CE. Comparable to the lack of theory as to the beginnings of the Mayan civilization, their fall is likewise disputed. Most historians believe that the dispersal of Mayan centers was connected to overuse of resources or an environmental disaster like drought or famine. This reflects the lack of civil stability connected to the feudal system of Mayan leadership. While the land and identity was wholly Mayan, the people did not have a control over their lives as part of the Mayan empire.

To discuss the cultural development of building within the Mayan empire, there are significant archaeological principles to note. Adams et al. discuss at length the history of Mayan civilization through ceramic quantity at different sites. Through a study in Tikal, they discovered that the majority of developing ceramic evidence is linked to large and medium urban centers. This demonstrates the beginning of larger more organized city structures especially during the Chuen era circa 300 BCE. While many studied Mayan sites are in the Mayan Lowlands—northern Guatemala and the Yucatan Peninsula, there is also significant evidence that their forefathers came from the south, through the Guatemalan highlands, in order to settle on better farm land ca. 1000 BCE.

From their arrival to the lowlands in the Middle Preclassic Period, these small settlements of farmers slowly began to grow. By the Late Preclassic Period ca. 250 BCE, these subgroups had centralized and began to show signs of organization. This organization, subsequently, led to infighting and competition amongst the families for the best land for growing maize. During this period, there is substantial proof that the beginnings of the noble families and elite class began to rise out of warfare and land ownership. With the rise of an elite, ruling class also came cultural ideological shift amongst the Lowland Maya allowing centers of nobility to engage in art, trade, craft, and study. The Protoclassic period spanned from 50 BCE to 250 CE. This time was essential to the preparation for the Classic Era; the time where the majority of Mayan culture we know today appeared. The Protoclassic age was defined by turmoil, disorganization, crumbling political structure and crisis. Because of this, the people began to consolidate geographically, ideologically, and architecturally.

By the Classic Era, the largest Mesoamerican cities established trade routes—the majority between Tikal, the Aztec center of Teotihuacan, and the southern Mayan center of Kaminaljuyu—and the sharing of language, tradition, and cultural artifacts. Between 250 CE and 900 CE, the Mayan people flourished becoming a center of scientific innovation, artistic expression, and agricultural revolution. However, by 800 CE, the tension between the regional ruling classes arose turning the Mayan urban centers into military states pitted against each other. Because of their zeal for control, power, and resources, the Mayan nobility had exhausted the soil to the point of infertility. The food shortage and lack of governmental stability is the best guess for the decline of the Mayan civilization by 900 CE.
In 2000 BC, the Mayan Pre-Classic period marked the beginning of artistic and technological advances like pyramid building, art, and writing.

The city of Kaminaljuyu was a center of Mayan rule from 1500 BC to 1200 AD.

Between 1250 and 1450, the Quiche subgroup from the Mayan empire allied with the Toltecs from the north to create the most powerful Mayan empire after the collapse.

This marks the arrival of Pedro de Alvarado and the Spanish conquest of Guatemala.

In 1821, Guatemala gained independence from Spain.

1954: The CIA backed a coup to oust President Arbenz who was seen as a socialist threat because of his redistribution of land and possible arms deals.

1960-1996: Guatemala was torn by a civil war between the Guerrilla, civilian armies, and the state military. During this war, over 200,000 civilians were either brutally murdered or simply disappeared. After the war, many mass graves were found of rural, Mayan people who had been killed for being in the way. Thus, this time is known as La Violencia and also the Mayan Genocide.
After the decline of the civilization, the urban centers, rife with architectural innovation, were abandoned. More than likely, the Mayan people did not become extinct; they simply dispersed into the land forming smaller communities of farming units. For six generations of moderately undocumented history, the people lived in seeming isolation with only a small group forming a new nation of the Quiche people - descendants of the proto-maya. The groups that came together after the dispersal of the Mayan Lowlands are the ancestors of today’s Guatemalan and Yucatan indigenous people. The Quiche people not only continue to exist today, but are the largest indigenous group in Guatemala with over 1 million self-identifying indigenous people – over 10% of the overall Guatemalan population. Therefore, it is important to note that despite the phrasing of the “collapse” of a civilization, the Mayan people very much survived the fall of 900 CE and continued growing until and after the Spanish arrival in 1524.

Two of the main Mayan urban centers within the modern borders of Guatemala are Tikal and Kaminaljuyu - currently ruins under Guatemala City urban sprawl. Both cities shared similar linguistic, ethnic, and cultural identities. Today, Tikal is one of the main motivations for tourism because of the well protected and preserved ruins in the flat, Guatemalan lowlands. On the other hand, the site - or more accurately sites - of Kaminaljuyu stretches from the northwest corner of Guatemala City past its eastern border. While they are of very similar sizes, Kaminaljuyu is virtually nonexistent. Because the Spaniards stayed near the Pacific coast of Guatemala during colonization, the land around and above Kaminaljuyu was established before Tikal being 350 miles south and quickly Guatemalans began developing the land for housing, agriculture, and urban centralization. Today, Tikal National Park is a 143,000 acre UNESCO World Heritage site, roughly the same size as Chicago.11 Kaminaljuyu, contrastingly, is ill-defined, ill-preserved, and has less than 30 acres of protected land. Each of these cities represented multiple Mayan, urban characteristics important to the development of urban centers.

As the most known site in Guatemala, Tikal is plastered on every sign in the La Aurora International Airport in Guatemala City, seen in the background of Star Wars: Return of the Jedi, and visited by hundreds of thousands every year.12 Protected by national and international entities for its archaeological and ecological wealth, there is something strange about Tikal and its complex. While many Mayan sites throughout the Yucatan follow similar, clear principles of civic organization, Tikal “as a whole is a complicated assemblage of many city-planning principles”10.13

Architecturally, the Mayans have been studied intently because of their city planning. The shift from hunter-gatherer to rural trade created a need for civic space for the newly developing elite class. This not only was an ideological shift, but many archaeologists believe this also reflected an architectural shift.13 During the Preclassic period, the Mayans designed their cities based on an east-west axis. This demonstrated the overarching control of the solar system as the dominant power source of their cities and society. Many of their cities that reflect an east-west orientation seem to trace solar movements and those of the milky way.14 Scholars believe that this tracing of the heavens was a way of reenacting the creation of the universe which is also well-documented in various indigenous texts as well.15 14 During the ideological shift between the Preclassic and Classic era, the shift from religious-based design to civic-based design introduced a new planning axis. With the north-south city axis, the elite class was dictating where they would be in the afterlife. “North” and “south” were not necessarily cardinal directions, but represented the heavens and underworld, up and down. If a ruler placed his tomb or stele on the north side of the city, he was ready for his journey to the underworld.

While Tikal’s Temple I and II [Fig. 1.6] represent a perfect east-west axis of cosmological order, the rest of the city plan is less organized. Tikal did, however, continue with the north-south shift during the Classic era, but for some reason Temples I and II retained their religious and civic importance post shift. Most cities saw less use or reuse with the more religious structures – reformatting them to be civic structures or funerary structures. However, Tikal is unique in that the two most important religious structures retained their importance as a center of the entire city and an entrance to the acropolis. Tikal is designed outside of the norm, but holds great significance in city development during pre-Columbian Guatemala.
Starting in the 1920s, archaeologists Alfred Kidder and Edwin Shook became interested in the Mayan ruins hidden in picturesque jungles with their cascading steps, strange creatures, and towering pyramids. Uncovered from years of earthquakes and heavy rains carving grooves in the landscape, Kaminaljuyú – which means “hills of the dead (or ancestors depending on the translation)” in the ‘k’iche’ indigenous language – peaked the attention of Kidder, Shook, and others for the better part of thirty years. Unfortunately, once they rediscovered the ancient city – situated slightly northwest of what was then the outskirts of Guatemala City – the land was being developed for building. Owned by a ladino who controlled the finca that was being developed, the archaeologists had a difficult time gathering data because the workers were recycling the stone and brick of the ruins to use as building materials. Over the next twenty years, the archaeologists came and went because of World War II and other stateside issues, yet continued trying to find more information about this ancient city.

Thankfully, pottery pieces, roofing, and other ancient containers were not seen as useful for brick making or building, so most of these pieces were discarded allowing for the archaeologists to collect the pieces to store at the Guatemala National Museum. From their excavations, the archaeologists discovered layers of cities built on top of each other demonstrating a long history on the site. This is not an unknown concept, but what struck Kidder as strange how the Guatemalans reacted to it. In his archaeological investigation of Kaminaljuyú, he commented “We did not realize, as clearly as we do today, in how little respect the Maya, or for that matter most Mesoamericans, held their ceremonial buildings, abandoning them, looting them for building materials, or burying them under new construction.” Essentially, he was noting how little the Guatemalans seemed to care about the preservation of their ancient people, letting it become overgrown and looted. For example, a modern archaeologist examining Kaminaljuyú – Dr. Bárbara Arroyo – had similar issues when trying to examine the ancient city. Roger Atwood, an editor for the Archaeological Institute of America, wrote about her struggle saying, “One ancient pyramid, today a nondescript mound, sits in the garden of a private mansion. The owners of the house won’t let Arroyo look at the site, much less excavate it, so she hopes to inspect it with a drone.” Unfortunately, the majority of this city is lost under parking lots, housing slabs, and developed buildings [Fig. 1.7]. Because of this, the best way to spatially study the city has been through ceramic study. According to the dissertation of Joseph J. Lischka, there are three levels of settlement analysis pertaining to Kaminaljuyú: (1) individual structures and their typologies, (2) the relationship between those structures, and (3) the distribution of those structures over the landscape. However, it is impossible to analyze the true extent of the settlement at Kaminaljuyú due to the urban sprawl of Guatemala City. While this is the reality, studies like that of Lischka, Kidder, and Shook demonstrate that the only way to study this overgrown city is through shards of ceramics. This study is ongoing and many groups are more conscious of the protection and promotion of Kaminaljuyú.
Figure 1.8

Notes
4. Ibid., 20-21.
7. Ibid., 419.
8. Ibid., 420.
9. Ibid., 421.
11. Ibid.
13. Ibid., 203.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
19. Ibid., 561.
20. Ibid., 562.
21. Ibid., 564.
24. Ibid., 13.
In 1521, the Aztec empire fell at the hands of Cortez’s vast Spanish army. An integral captain to this endeavor who made a name for himself in his cruelty and avarice was Don Pedro de Alvarado. This man would become the malicious villain of the Mayans and the hero of the Spanish. Over the next three years, de Alvarado would wander over the Guatemalan highlands slaughtering, massacring, and conquering the Mayan people. Many different events helped him in this quest. Firstly, the Guatemalan people groups were at great odds against each other - especially the Kaqchikels and the Quiches. Upon the arrival of de Alvarado, there was already existing tensions and injury due to infighting. In addition, something travelled even faster than the Spaniards: plague. Smallpox and other European sicknesses ravaged the Mesoamericans faster than the Spaniards could kill - more than likely decimating around 40% of the Mayan population. While the history of the colonization in Guatemala is important to the framing of the current trends of architectural practice, the lingering results of colonization in Guatemala today are of more pressing importance.

After the Aztecs fell, Cortez ordered de Alvarado to go south and continue conquering the indigenous people and the lands for the Holy Catholic Church – or Spain - because of evidence in Teotihuacán of commercial trade between the Mayans and the Aztecs. On July 25, 1524, de Alvarado stood outside of the capital city of the Quiche empire - Utatlan. After killing the head chief of the four leaders in the city, the city and its empire fell to the Spanish. The day following this slaughter, de Alvarado travelled to Quetzaltenango and commented on the city saying, “...after yesterday’s punishment I found it empty – not even a single person there.” This pattern continued as de Alvarado challenged every group he encountered leaving death in his wake. He traveled from the modern department of Retalhuleu, through the crumbling Quiche empire, to the founding of Antigua, Quetzaltenango, and Guatemala City [Fig. 2.1]. De Alvarado’s men trekked across the highlands without passing north leaving most of the Guatemalan lowlands essentially untouched.

In 1526, the Kaqchikel people group - who had been loyal to the Spaniards helping them conquer their fellow Mayans - rebelled against the Spaniards and joined the remaining Mayans in their resistance against the oppressive invaders. Thus began five centuries of resistance. Even though their resistance was strong, the European culture that seemingly appeared in thin air created a sort of culture shock. For a people who had never seen a gun, horses, or men of European color and clothing, the psychological impact of this vision did not help the Mayans in their resistance. In order to control these brave and resilient people, the Spaniards designed new systems and input their own systems to round up and centralize the people. Primarily, and this is a common theme in all colonization, their mandate was directly from God himself, so they could always justify their actions. The use of missionaries and Catholicism aided...
in the control and forced conversion of the Mayan people.

Physically, the Spaniards maintained control of the indigenous people under the policy of congregación which forced thousands of native families from their homes. These congregaciones were usually situated near a church and helped the Spaniards with civil organization and by creating a centralized workforce for building these new colonial cities. Within the congregaciones, the people worked within the confines of encomiendas or repartimientos, ways for the Spaniards to take tribute from the indigenous population without any documented power titles. However, this did not work long-term because of how unpredictable the Mayans were in producing and delivering tribute. In 1591, seventy years into their occupation, the Spaniards received a royal order known as the composición de tierras. Essentially, this allowed for the ongoing preservation of the Mayans to this day. Even the Spaniards could see this innate tie to the land. Two friars wrote back to King Charles in the 1550’s:

“...among all these Indians there is not one who wishes to leave behind the hut passed on to him by his father, nor to abandon a pestilential ravine or desert some inaccessible craggy rocks, because that is where the bones of his forefathers rest.”

Because of this constant urge to return to their homes, to relive their pre-Columbian lives, and escape the hand of their captors, there was constant movement away from their Spanish-determined city centers. The Spanish called them “indios fugitivos” – the unruly Mayans who would constantly desert their centers and villages for their cornfields. This flightiness and likelihood to run began to affect the architecture of colonial cities. Because the construction of said cities were dependent on the Maya for production, the colonial Mayan communities designed outside of the Spanish definition of the city were “seldom spatially fixed or static,” and without clear designation or legality. In response to these informal communities, the indigenous elite began to lead what came to be known as parcialidades - groups defined by kin, location, or land ownership. These parcialidades, while divisive and weakening to the indigenous people, allowed many of the cities and people to maintain their languages and traditional city names. However hard they tried, the Spaniards could not take away the roots of the indigenous Mayan people.

The results of colonization are visible in multiple forms. However, one of the most significant result of colonization comes from the idea of the “dualization of society.” In Lovell’s article on surviving conquest, he paraphrases this idea from Eric Wolf, an anthropologist from the 1960s. The “dualization of society” infers that from the point of colonization – and inevitably until today - the indigenous people of Mesoamerica endured some sense of slavery under the Spaniards creating a sense of “us versus them.” This allowed for control, respect, and wealth on the part of the Spaniards, yet it bred “suspicion, distrust, hatred, and fear” on the part of the Mayans. That sense of fear is what has endured for five hundred years after Pedro de Alvarado arrived in the Americas. That sense of fear has caused the Mayan people to adapt to a life of instability and constant flux.
In 1821, the Spaniards were called home by a pending war in Europe and the defeat of Spanish troops in Mexico. Following the Spanish retreat, the United States passed the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 to warn European nations against colonizing further in the Americas. Even with the Monroe Doctrine, foreign entities – including the United States – maintained control over economic and agricultural powers in Guatemala. According to George Lovell’s article on how the Mayan people survived their conquest, two opinions have formed about native integration after Spain left the Americas. Oliver La Farge, an anthropologist and historian from New York, opined that after the Spaniards’ exit, “Indian life becomes a smooth blend; well-stabilized, it has the individuality and roundness that mark any culture, and its continued evolution is in the form of growth out of itself rather than in response to alien pressure.” However, Carol Smith, a scholar of Mayan nationalism, finds no proof of La Farge’s research. During the transition between Spanish rule and an established Guatemalan government, the gap between the wealthy and the poor began to grow wider, and a regional marketing system developed which started moving the peasant class out of agriculture. Essentially, Smith posits that these two transitions funneled the Guatemalan people into a system easily overtaken by a liberal regime. From 1823 to the 1870’s, Guatemala had different conservative presidents who worked to maintain the paternalistic Spanish governing system. In 1871, Justo Rufino Barrios became president and pushed the country into the capitalist world. The first step to this process was expediting land use and government ownership. However, in doing so, Barrios passed a decree that legalized the repossession of indigenous lands by remaining Spanish families or ladinos. In addition, the liberal regimes raised taxes and took control of vast spreads of national land to encourage foreign entities to encourage European immigration. Because many of the indigenous land owners and population did not understand the decree, hear the decree, or even remotely know how the new government system worked, they were quickly overtaken and removed from their lands with nowhere else to go but to work their own land in possession of another or travel to seasonal fields for temporary work. This becomes the third distinct time the Mayan people are displaced after the fall of the empiric Mayans and the colonization of the Spaniards. Pausing historically, it is important to note that the push towards industry created a cultural divide among the Guatemalan people. Before the liberalists came into power within the Guatemalan government, the social divide was between the incredibly wealthy land owners and the peasant, Mayan class – which made up the majority of the population. Rene Reeves, a professor of history and economics, observes an interesting sociocultural separation upon the introduction of liberal government. According to Reeves, when the liberal regime settled, the indigenous population was faced with a choice. They
could become “ladinos,” thus giving up their biological connection to indigenous history and culture, or they could refuse and continue to hold onto their cultural birthright to the land. The distinction was no longer biological, it was a cultural choice of acculturation. Ladino nationalism grew so strong that in certain cities, the sentiment, “Ladinos with Ladinos, Indians with Indians,” became the expression of the late 1800’s.

By the twentieth century, the need for industrialization overwhelmed the Guatemalan government which was completely dependent on feudalistic economic systems to exist. Thus, Guatemala entered the “Banana Republic.” This phrase, coined by O. Henry in 1912, refers to those countries in Central America and the Caribbean that fell prey to the monopolies of American industry, namely the United Fruit Company (UFCO). On the one hand, UFCO developed “plantations, railways, telegraph lines, housing, hospitals and ports in the producing areas.” On the other, more economically damaging, hand, UFCO enslaved millions of indigenous people, repossessed hundreds of thousands of acres for fractional costs, and, while they were very economically prosperous, hardly a cent returned to the Guatemalan economy.

By 1934, President Ubico, one of the more renowned dictators of Central America in the twentieth century, legalized vagrancy laws requiring those who owned small plots of land to work one hundred to one hundred and fifty days out of the year with a penalty of imprisonment, taxes, debt, or even death. While the Guatemalan government worked directly with the UFCO and other American multinational business entities, economists and historians like Marcelo Bucheli do not think of this as an alliance, but rather an unbalanced, ill-defined dependency that question Dependency theory of the 1970s itself. The issue with this economic system is, first and foremost, not the exploitation, but the strict set of exterior elements that have to fall into place for such a system to succeed. Because the relationship between multinational corporations and the totalitarian government of Guatemala during the 30s required economic stability in both parties, there was very little leeway for mistake. This would work in many other countries, but Guatemala had different issues coming to light simultaneously.

Firstly, if the UFCO and Guatemala were to work seamlessly, there could be no economic disruption, and yet they were completely dependent on a marginalized community to sustain the economy within the country. Dependency on this lead to many issues with the desire for worker unions, labor reform, and strikes. The more issues that rise, the more likely they are to continue or repeat thus beginning a cycle of economic instability, dependency on foreign entities, and informal dealings within the government in order to profit themselves.

Secondly, the indigenous Mayans of Guatemala were becoming restless and embittered toward this economic system. It is estimated that over 70% of indigenous land was repossessed for industrial purposes between 1880 and 1945. Families,
for festival days and holidays in order to pay for rum, food, and other celebratory elements. The debt incurred was far more than one-hundred or one-hundred and fifty days could repay. This system of debt is still the norm on fincas today with many indigenous people eternally indebted to the ladinos who own them.

The cycle of conquest controlled by imperialism came to an end during the governmental shift called “The Spring” between 1944 and 1954. In October of 1944, Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán [Img. 11] lead an overhaul of Ubico’s government under the slightly misunderstood philosophy that “Guatemala’s internal difficulties stemmed chiefly from the ignorance and isolation of its Indian population.”

In reality, Lovell says clearly: “What Arbenz apparently never understood was that capitalism had evolved symbiotically in Guatemala to create a situation wherein highland Maya villages and piedmont fincas existed in varying degrees of interdependence; in this specific setting, capitalistic logic dictated that ‘if the former endure, the latter are ensured the labor they need.’”

After Arbenz brought down the liberal presidency, Juan José Arévalo was elected president in 1945. Over the next six years, Arévalo introduced policies to return land to indigenous people, to promote Mayan language learning, improve education, like the quote below demonstrates, with documented claims who had bought and rebought their lands had no way of regaining their possessions:

“You have ordered us to leave our lands so that coffee can be grown... In exchange you have offered us 600 caballerías [18,600 acres] on the coast. We know how to grow coffee - we do this for the landowners on their fincas - but we want our fathers’ lands for corn. They have always been ours. We have paid for them three times... We have the money now. How much do you want for our own lands this time?”

If these indigenous citizens spoke out about the imbalance of power and wealth, it became legal for ladinos to kill insurgents. In addition, if ladinos saw this injustice and said anything about it, they were ostracized from economic culture thus making them obsolete on the market.

These patterns of imperialism and industrialism in Guatemala set the third cycle of conquest into motion with displacement and dependency. The industrial focus in Guatemala before 1945 not only displaced the majority of the indigenous population, it also divided the wealth into further disparity. The system put into place forcing indigenous people to work for certain amounts of days was truly oppressive, and it was also a trap. Ladinos and landowners would allow their employees to take loans...
Arbenz became president when many entities began to stir. His presidency ended in a CIA backed coup in 1954, and the effects of this coup continue to dissipate through Guatemalan politics.

By February of 1944, the United Fruit Company’s landholding had gone from over 500,000 acres to less than 200,000. Without their tax-cuts and quasi-free labor, the UFCO was beginning to feel the monetary repercussions of this political change. By June of 1944, over 100,000 families had received land and new cooperative, government-run farms were being utilized by the majority of the population signifying the beginning of the end to fincas run by the elite. Now, not only was the largest economic entity in Guatemala feeling their power crumble, the 1% of the Guatemalan population was crumbling as well. Soon, grumbles of “communism” and “marxism” began to whisper through the cities sending fear into the minds of the poor who had only heard of the horrors of these regimes in Europe.

During 1953, the United States government attempted to represent the UFCO and demand payment and the return of land from the Guatemalan government. However, the loss of land was now law under the Agrarian Reform Law of 1952 and the payment was completely based on tax forms, which the UFCO had been dishonest on for fifty years. However, in May of 1954, the United States Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, “accused the Guatemalan government of being infiltrated with Communists,” with his most condemning evidence being that Guatemala had recently received a shipment of arms from the USSR. However, Dulles did not mention that this shipment from Czechoslovakia was due to the embargo against Guatemala since 1948.

In 1952, the United States government partnered with Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas to begin “Project Success” – the CIA backed operation to remove the communist government of Guatemala [Img. 12]. In the 1990’s, Nick Cullather performed an intensive study within the CIA’s archive to discover what the true involvement of the CIA was. What he discovered was an intensive record of the paranoia of the Cold War. Project Success, “would combine psychological, economic, diplomatic, and paramilitary actions,” to rid Guatemala of communist influence. The operation, which took two years and multiple attempts, “relaxed on the State and Defense Departments to isolate Guatemala diplomatically, militarily, and economically.” During 1952, the CIA was attempting to send contraband arms to Armas who was stationed in Honduras when word started spreading about the operation thus jeopardizing its success. When they began again, Secretary of State, Dulles authorized $3 million towards the project in December of 1953. Over the following year the insurgency began utilizing radio, propaganda, and word of mouth to plant doubt in the Arbenz regime in the minds of the Guatemalan people.

By January of 1954, rumors spread that Armas’ purpose in this project was the overtaking of Guatemala City by means of violence and chaos. The population of Guatemala, torn in multiple directions, was unable to choose a side, thus allowing Armas and his troops the political freedom to move at will without much counterinsurgency. In mid-May, officers, saboteurs, and communications specialists completed training programs organized by American troops situated in Nicaragua and Honduras. One trainee recalls: “The friendly, taciturn American instructors…were known only by their first names, which were either Pepe or José.” There were at least 5,000 men in the Guatemalan army at the time, and, even with the elite American training, Armas’ men were no match unless they could convince the army to turn against their president. However, the propaganda that Armas’ regime had spread in the country began to truly warp the political climate:

“Agency propaganda operations succeeded making Guatemala into the type of repressive regime the United States liked to portray it as. By late April, freedoms of speech and assembly had all but been revoked by official decrees and unofficial goon squads, which intimidated independent newspapers and radio stations into silence. Radio Universal, the only openly anti-communist radio station, closed after its offices were raided by goons and its owner placed under arrest.”
Evolution across the liberal, reformation, and conservative regimes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Dosal notes that Guatemala's industrialization has been the “product of collaboration and competition among a number of forces, both public and private, national and foreign.” Over decades of dependence on foreign entities, the Guatemalan government had no way of maintaining economic, cultural, and political balance. The government also, “lacked dynamic mechanisms for self-autochthonous growth,” thus creating a trapped state of imbalance between the economic powers – the UFCO – and the economic providers – the workforce. This sets the stage for the fourth, and most significant, displacement of the Guatemalan people.

Early morning, June 15, 1954, armed guerillas poured over the Honduras-Guatemala border launching an anti-communist political coup. Due to the psychological warfare over the previous two years, the army, being totally demoralized, decided not to defend their country. By June 25, Arbenz announced that the army had abandoned him and by the 27th, he sought political asylum with the Mexican embassy. He left the country a few months later being forced to strip to his underwear at the airport and hand over all his medals and awards. Within the year, almost all the land given to the campesinos was returned to the landowners. In 1971, Arbenz drowned in his bathtub under mysterious circumstances and it was not until 1995 that his remains were proudly returned to Guatemala. One man remembered:

“I was seven when the CIA overthrew Arbenz, and I remember my parents, who were very anti-communist, cheering when he gave his farewell speech on the radio and left the country. How shortsighted they were, and how different our lives would have been if he had been permitted to carry out those reforms. How many lives has this cost us?”

In the late 1980’s, Dr. Paul J. Dosal wrote a political history of the industrialization in Guatemala through the story of one of the most prominent concrete companies in the country and its evolution across the liberal, reformation, and conservative regimes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Dosal notes that Guatemala’s industrialization has been the “product of collaboration and competition among a number of forces, both public and private, national and foreign.” Over decades of dependence on foreign entities, the Guatemalan government had no way of maintaining economic, cultural, and political balance. The government also, “lacked dynamic mechanisms for self-autochthonous growth,” thus creating a trapped state of imbalance between the economic powers – the UFCO – and the economic providers – the workforce. This sets the stage for the fourth, and most significant, displacement of the Guatemalan people.

Notes

38. Ibid.
40. Ibid., 10.
42. Ibid., 434.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., 436.
46. Ibid., 24.
48. Ibid., 42.
49. Ibid., 43.
51. Ibid., 44-45.
52. Ibid., 61.
53. Ibid., 75.
54. Ibid., 76.
56. Ibid., 44.
57. Ibid., 72.
58. Ibid., 67.
61. Ibid., 325.
The coup in 1954 undid virtually everything done in the decades before. The land returned to the indigenous people was removed once again. The feudalist economy returned with a fury. The totalitarian government was reinstated as a military dictatorship with unstable turnover seeing more than sixteen different leaders in forty years. In her third working paper on the political repercussions of violent civil war, Sabine Kurtenbach divides the Guatemalan civil war into four stages beginning in 1962. The first phase (1962-1966) began with rebellion stemming from within the military. After the assassination of Carlos Castillo Armas in 1958, the soldiers still loyal to him fled the country. By 1962, they had formed a small guerrilla armed force that returned to take a stand against the United States involvement in Latin American armies. With the political show in 1962, small factions began forming in the more rural areas of Guatemala. Because of the events of the Cuban revolt, the Latin American population saw that political change through violence was possible. The guerillas who rose up within the Guatemalan non-military population were majority ladino men from the rural middle class.

The second phase (1966-1978) consisted of a repetitive pattern of guerilla mobilization and military oppression. While this decade was more preparatory than active for the bloodiest phase of the war, an estimated 42,000 Guatemalan citizens were killed or “disappeared” during this time. In 1974, the military regime had its first truly organized elections and elected General Kjell Laugerud. He had a more relaxed view towards political protest which allowed for the guerillas to mobilize and organize before most violent period of the war. In 1976, an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.5 took the lives of 23,000 people and left more than a million people without homes. The military used this event to cement further their power over the people to prove that resistance was futile [Img. 14]. Even the church used theological language to blame the insulation for the earthquake itself. Even with this anti-uprising language, the Guatemalan people continued to believe that resistance was the only escape from the systematic killings.

The third phase (1979-1985) saw the bloodiest events in the war. In 1982, the guerilla army organized into a singular group called the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG, Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit). Lovell notes that after the earthquake and small indigenous insurgencies in ’77 and ’78, “the Guatemalan government, at the command and in the service of a powerful few, declared war on its own citizenry, especially the indigenous people.” During the same year, the Guatemalan army began a scorched earth policy. During the final years of the war, the Center for Human Rights Legal Action (CHRLA) and the Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean (EPICA) wrote a piece about a group that evaded this policy called the Communities of People in Resistance (CPR) [Img. 16-18]. They described the scorched earth regime...
saying, “They have bombed, burned, and massacred with impunity, civilians have been captured (and often disappeared) without legal arrest warrants, and there has been no legal recourse for grievances against the authorities.” It would not be until the early 2000’s that the Guatemalan army would face the repercussions of their actions.

It is difficult to write about the culture of war and evoke the correct outrage, sorrow, and disgust that this era of Guatemalan history warrants. Other than sharing the basic facts and timeline of the war above, I am going to remove myself from the rest of the narrative and only share the testimony of others who witnessed and survived the terrors of this war.

“We were always asking each other, ‘Where should we go? Where can we go? Is there a place we can go?’ We were always looking for another place, a safe place. Many elderly died because we were climbing up and down steep mountains; the elderly cannot walk that much. They would find them and kill them. They killed lots of people: the elderly, children, babies, boys and girls, men and women, our youth. There was a señora with us. She had one child, a boy. We were running from the army, she was carrying her son, she was holding him in her arms. A bullet hit her in the back, it came through her stomach, and went through her baby. She died there with her son in her arms. They died together.”

… As Doña Eugenia recounted the story of the señora dying together with her son in the mountains, her body began to shake. She clenched her jaw, stiffened her arms, and crossed them in front of her chest. She looked away from Miriam [her sister who was translating from, most likely, Ixil] and stared out the window. She said: “The same thing happened to me, except the difference is that I had my baby on my back. I felt the impact of the bullet, but I felt no pain. I touched my back and it was wet. When I looked at my hand, it was covered with blood. I kept running, running from the soldiers shooting at us, I discovered my baby had taken that bullet. I am alive because my baby died on my back. I am always sad because of this. I am always remembering this sadness.”

“The Army’s hatred has reached a point that they poison the rivers and wells of these people; they poison the salt left behind in their homes. The Army places grenades beneath the cadavers of their victims so that when one goes to bury the dead the grenades will explode and more people will die.”

“When those men [Guatemalan soldiers] first killed my husband, I wanted justice. Then, I wanted those men judged and sent to prison for the rest of their lives so they wouldn’t be able to kill more people like that, so the village could live in peace. When they killed my husband, it was a time of great violence and many people were harmed.

“Now, so many years later, I look at my daughters and how difficult their lives are. Even the wood we need for the stove costs so much. It is the fault of these men. What guilt do my daughters have? Why should they suffer like this?”

“Doña Eugenia recounted the story of the señora dying together with her son in the mountains, her body began to shake. She clenched her jaw, stiffened her arms, and crossed them in front of her chest. She looked away from Miriam [her sister who was translating from, most likely, Ixil] and stared out the window. She said: “The same thing happened to me, except the difference is that I had my baby on my back. I felt the impact of the bullet, but I felt no pain. I touched my back and it was wet. When I looked at my hand, it was covered with blood. I kept running, running from the soldiers shooting at us, I discovered my baby had taken that bullet. I am alive because my baby died on my back. I am always sad because of this. I am always remembering this sadness.”
“When we were ordered to pick up the stray dogs on the street, I thought we were going to learn how to train them, that we would have guard dogs. But when we arrived at camp, we were ordered to kill them with our bare hands. We had to kill some chickens, too. We were ordered to butcher the chickens and dogs and put their meat and blood in a big bowl. Then, we had to eat and drink this dog and chicken meat that was in a bath of blood. Whoever vomited had to vomit into the shared bowl and get back in line to eat and drink more. We had to eat it all, including the vomit, until no one vomited.

“The army kills part of your identity. They want to break you and make you a new man. A savage man. They inspired me to kill. There was a ladino recruit who said that Indians were worthless and that we didn’t go to school because we didn’t want to. I pushed him off a cliff. I would have enjoyed it if he had died. This is how the army creates monsters.”

GASPAR Tz’utijil who grew up on fincas and in the streets of Guatemala City

“The soldiers took our wives out of the church in groups of ten or twenty. Then twelve or thirteen soldiers went into our houses to rape our wives. After they were finished raping them, they shot our wives and burned the houses down. … All of our children had been left locked up in the church. They were crying, our poor children were screaming. They were calling us. Some of the bigger ones were aware that their mothers were being killed and were shouting and calling out to us. … They took the children outside. The soldiers killed them with knife stabs. We could see them. They killed them in a house in front of the church. They yanked them by the hair and stabbed them in their bellies; then they disemboweled our poor little children. Still they cried. When they finished disemboweling them, they threw them into the house, and then brought out more. … Then they started with the old people. … ‘What fault is it of ours,’ the old people said. … ‘Outside!’ a soldier said. They took the poor old people out and stabbed them as if they were animals. It made the soldiers laugh. Poor old people, they were crying and suffering. They killed them with dull machetes. They took them outside and put them on top of a board; then they started to hack at them with rusty machete. It was pitiful how they broke the poor old people’s necks. … They began to take out the adults, the grown men of working age. They took us out by groups of ten. Soldiers were standing there waiting to throw the prisoners down in the patio of the courthouse. Then they shot them. When they finished shooting, they piled them up and other soldiers came and carried the bodies into the church.”

GASPAR Tz’utijil who grew up on fincas and in the streets of Guatemala City

FIGURE 4.1

UNNAMED SURVIVOR

at the massacre of the Finca San Francisco corroborated by fellow survivors
“Day and night, they put [my brother] through great, great pain. They tied him up, they tied up his testicles, the organs of my brother, behind him with a wire and ordered him to run. Then, not allowing himself, my brother could not bear the great pain and screamed, crying out for help. And they abandon him in a well, I don’t know what it is called, a pit where there is water, a little mud, and there, they left him, naked, during the entire night. My brother was in there with many dead bodies in the pit where he could not endure the smell of the dead. There were more people there, tortured people. There where he was, he recognized many of the Christian teachers who also had been kidnapped in other small villages and who were suffering as he was. Mi brother was tortured for more than sixteen days.

They cut off his nails, they cut off his fingers, they cut off his skin, burning parts of it. Many injuries, the first injuries were swollen and inflamed, were infected. Yet, he continued living. They shaved his head, they left him at the point of death and, at the same time, they cut the skin from his head and pulled one side and the other side and cut the fat part of the face. My brother bore torture to every part of his body, caring very much for the arteries and veins so as to be able to endure the torture and not die. They gave him food so that he might hold out and not die of his injuries. There, there were twenty tortured men or in the middle of torture. There was also one woman. They had raped her, and after raping her, they had tortured her.”

—Rigoberta Menchú (personal translation of original Spanish text translated from original K’iche’ testimony)

As a personal disclaimer to this quote, Rigoberta Menchú, author, Guatemalan presidential candidate, Nobel Peace Prize recipient, and agrarian rights activist, came under high scrutiny by author David Stoll in the 1990’s. Essentially, Stoll had fact-checked many of the events in Menchú’s book and found significant discrepancies. Many experts have gone back and forth on her facts and stories, but nothing has been determined about the exact accuracy of her testimony. However, Stoll himself discounts many of the verified, first-hand accounts during the Civil War, thus discounting much of his own evidence against Menchú. Due to contradicting evidence, as the reader, I ask you to decide the relevance of her testimony. While these events may not have happened directly to her or her family, they did in fact happen and many of these atrocities that you will read below document similar horrors. Is the validity of her story necessary if it brings to light the extreme crimes against humanity committed by the Guatemalan army? Does this conflict confirm the phrase, “The truth doesn’t matter. All that matters are the stories we tell?” It is up to the reader to decide.
Despite the obvious human rights violations, the United States continued giving economic assistance to the Guatemalan government that totaled over $60 million until 1981. Under the regimes of Romeo Lucas García who was deposed by Efraín Ríos Montt who was deposed by his own secretary of defense, Oscar Mejía Víctores, these three men single handedly allowed, planned, and encouraged the deaths of over 150,000 people. The fourth and final phase after 1985 sought peace and movement towards a demilitarized government. By the end of the war, more than 200,000 people had died (Fig. 4.3) - many of whom have not been recovered or were dumped into the Pacific ocean, over one million Guatemalan’s had been displaced (Fig. 4.4), and over 250,000 Guatemalans had migrated outside of the country to Mexico, the United State, and Canada. The Communities of People in Resistance formed camps of thousands of people who moved sometimes fifteen times in a month. Not only was this period of displacement most significant, it only ended in 1996. Guatemalans are still living who were displaced by the civil war. There are people in Knoxville who have been here since they migrated during the war. This cycle of displacement is much of the reason for intercountry migration today.

Notes
69. Ibid., 160-61.
70. Kaibil are the elite fighting forces of the Guatemalan army; Sanford, Buried Secrets, 298.
71. Ibid., 184.
74. Brian Ambroziak, "Lecture" (Knoxville, TN, 2012).
On December 29, 1996, the URNG and the Guatemalan militia signed the final peace accords in Guatemala City thus ending the thirty-six year civil war. Reports released by the Historical Clarification Commission (CEH) in 1999 attributed 93% of the violence during the war - and specifically during 1978-1984 - to the army and governmental control. Because 83% of those killed were Mayan, this qualified as genocide. This report also made connections between the U.S. military and human rights violations over the course of the war. Soon after this report, President Bill Clinton apologized for the United States involvement in Guatemala. The following ten years were laden with unrest, violent outbursts, and gang-related murders and rapes.

Today, Guatemala is continuing to work through issues stemming from the war, colonization, and the economic dependence on foreign entities. According to a report on human rights from 2015, round 60% of the population lives under the line of poverty with almost 13% living in extreme poverty. 3 million out of the almost 16 million person population live without access to safe drinking water, 6 million live without sanitation services, and half the population reportedly lives in inadequate housing. In 2012, there were over 1,000 children who died of malnutrition which affects 8 in every 10 Guatemalan children. According to most recent estimates, roughly 106 people are murdered every week, that is roughly 15 people murdered a day. This is only country-wide. In Guatemala City specifically, the homicide rate of over 100 people per 100,000 in comparison to Chicago which has a homicide rate of around 27 murders per 100,000. The most common cause of death is complication due to the common cold or pneumonia due to poor ventilation and air quality in the homes.

Not only do these problems persist, the people live in constant fear of repetition of the years of war. During the bloodiest years of the war, groups like the Communities of People in Resistance came to rely on living in nomadic groups for protection; the more people, the increased likelihood for survival. Because of this, economists like Andrew R. Morrison put an economic value to violence as a rationale for inter-country migration. According to Morrison, “if utility in the destination area exceeds...”
In Morrison's conclusion, he notes: “Migration flows are shaped by violence, and the effect of violence on migration tends to increase as the level of violence escalates.” In Morrison’s studies, he discusses how we tend to associate migration with monetary reasons: better jobs, better housing, more resources, etc. However, in studying the Cycles of Violence in another economic study by Morrison and Dr. Rachel May a year later, the “utility” mentioned by Morrison previously is directly tied to two goods: economic goods and safety goods. Consequently, “individuals ‘buy’ safety in the sense that they take steps to avoid being the target of political violence.” This analysis that violence is an economic reason for migration is a direct consequence of not only the civil war, but the continuous cycles of colonization, displacement, and overall violence that the Guatemalan people have been plagued with for over 500 years.

Regardless of the attempt, Guatemala is trapped. Those who want to study, aid, or serve the country must accept the cycles of displacement and violence before approaching a solution. Being aware of one’s standpoint is also essential to working within marginalized communities. Sandra Harding states bluntly: “No amount of empathy, careful listening, or ‘going native,’ valuable as such strategies may be for various reasons, will erase the fact that the Western, white, masculine, university-agency-funded researcher is going to leave the research process with no less than the economic, political, and cultural resources with which he or she arrived.” Continuing the colonized relationship between Europeans and Americans - Europeans being those who are not native to the Americas - will only create a deeper fissure between the indigenous Mayans and the land-owning ladinos. This cultural study of displacement serves as the foundation for an analysis of Guatemala City, its growth, history, and potential future. As the largest city in Central America, Guatemala City serves to represent common traits of growing cities in developing nations.
Societal Disequilibrium

Nonauthoritative Turmoil

Nonauthoritative Conspiracy

Exceeds Boundaries of Retaliation

Authoritative Violent Response

Dialectic

INTERSTATE MIGRATION can be divided into two factors:

Economic Factors
- Distance
- Wage
- Unemployment Rates
- Education

Noneconomic Factors
- Violence
- Oppression
- Community
- Family

and into two economic utilities:

"consumption goods" + "safety goods"

Lessening Acts of Violence

random violent outbursts between landowners and "campesinos" [farmers]

Genocide

historically, the state’s power hunger leads to an organized massacre of a minority - typically the group who began the conspiracy

Nonauthoritative Conspiracy

organized guerilla/indigenous response

Notes
80. Ibid., 25.
81. Ibid., 34.
82. Ibid., 46.
85. Ibid., 828.
88. Ibid., 53.
The world is urbanizing at a frightening rate. Many of the highest populated cities in the world are in developing nations. Guatemala City is no exception to this international growth. In 2001, Guatemala was just over 1,000,000 people. Today, Guatemala City has a population over 3 million, yet the population difference for the entire country is roughly 2 million people. And yet, it is impossible to assume that the 2 million people added to the Guatemalan population all moved and live in Guatemala City. The inter-country migration is growing at an alarming rate due to many of the issues previously discussed. The easiest way to see this is in the growth of Guatemala City since its founding in the early 1800's [Fig 6.2].

In the first documented cityscape in 1894, Guatemala had a relatively distinct grid. Due to the incredible difficulty of building on the terrain, the grid of the city has shifted and was never a true grid. Over the following half century, Guatemala City urbanized quickly and evaded documentation. By 1969 when the first aerial photographs were taken of the city, the civil war had just begun and there were people fleeing to the cities to escape the violence in indigenous communities. Between 1969 and 1985, a level 7.5 earthquake leveled much of the outskirts of the city [Fig 6.1]. In the current cityscape, the reaction to this earthquake is seen in the infill built on the newly cleared lands. These lands were essentially free since they were not structurally stable, able to grow food, or in valuable locations. In this refuse land, huge informal housing communities began to form. Even with the impending threat of mudslides, earthquakes, and flooding, huge populations of Guatemalan inter-country immigrants, poor, and those seeking better access to resources began to pack into the city. Yet, their own lands have been taken from them during different cycles of displacement, thus leaving them without their only source of monetary value and unable to buy them back. Informal housing communities - otherwise known as slums, favelas in Brazil, shantytowns in the Caribbean, ghettos, barrios, or many other terms - rise out of these and other circumstances. In Guatemala City, these communities tend to form their own economy and government controlled by gangs or important community members. Regardless of health and safety, these informal housing settlements are first and foremost communities of human beings which carries with it all the aspects of community life.

Before discussing the “problems” within informal housing in Guatemala City, it is absolutely necessary to pause and remember: cultural differences must be put to the side in order to approach issues of health, safety, and identity in housing crises in developing nations. The western definition of safe, clean, healthy, and adequate - while

---

**Figure 6.1**

**Figure 6.2**

**Figure 6.3**
important to personal standpoint - only divide the marginalized and the solver. In order to truly approach international issues of poverty, hunger, homelessness, and sickness, cultural understand comes before preconceived notion. Thus, this analysis and following design are simply branches from continued research. This is not a solution nor is it identification of a “problem.” That which is deemed a “problem” to those in the United States implies a possible solution. However, many of the “problems” in developing nations do not have solutions. This is not to say that the “problems” in developing countries cannot be remedied, but if they are approached as cultural entities instead of “problems,” the reaction is hands-on, anthropological, participatory research and development instead of a simple solution and retreat.

Guatemala as a nation sits, at its highest, 13,000 feet above sea level, has mountain ridges riddled with volcanoes, wetlands, highlands, jungles, and rainforests. It is home to over 20 different ethnic groups - not including those of Hispanic origin - and there are over 24 languages spoken by the growing 15 million person population. The largest language spoken is K’iche’ which is spoken by over 1 million people, and at least 20% of the population does not speak Spanish at all. There is little documented infrastructure on the city level, but nationally, there is a distinct highway and electrical system laid originally by the United Fruit Company in the early 1900s [Fig. 6.4 & 6.7]. The country sits on two major fault lines: the Polochic and Motagua [Fig. 6.8]. Roughly the size of Tennessee in terms of area, Guatemala is divided into 22 departments which divide themselves into zones. Most of these departments follow rough ethnic boundaries, but many of the larger ethnic groups like Ixil, K‘iche’, Kaqchikel, and Tz’utujil branch over multiple disciplines.
Guatemala as a city has over 3 million people over 267 square miles. That is equivalent to roughly 18 people per acre. The city is divided into 25 zones, but zones 20 and 23 are “missing” or not identified in the city plan. The majority of the southern zones are safer and used by tourist groups while the more outlying zones are the areas of the most crime. As you can see in the city plan, the cityscape seems rather lawless. This is a reflection of informal housing development after the earthquake, unmanaged growth, and lack of formal infrastructure. As the density of the city is growing independent of the land use, informal housing is becoming normative. Addressing the cultural and health issues that stem from informal housing is a sensitive issue that requires pure field research which I was unable to conduct. Thus, the design phase of my research is conjecture and addresses only certain elements within informal settlement. I do not identify my research as solution nor do I believe I can propose a solution.
SUSTAINABLE INFORMAL HOUSING PRECEDENT

These scenes represent housing typologies and practices that express different aspects of informal housing that create sustainable communities.

ABOVE RIGHT: This informal housing community situated on a railroad track outside of Mumbai, India, is a clear demonstration of a need for density growth. There is evidence of vertical growth - an essential factor of informal housing - and an increase in density. Another common aspect of informal housing is a lack of apertures. These openings let in both air and light and are almost always missing from informal housing. This not only leads to the necessity to be outside of the home, and therefore typically in communities of high crime, but also leads to many respiratory diseases such as Tuberculosis and Pneumonia.

ABOVE LEFT: In South Africa, there was a competition in 2010 to design the “iShack” (improved shack). A team from India designed a $300 compartment home defined by the necessary amenities to fulfill basic human needs - water filtration, indoor facilities, ventilated living quarters, sustainable energy in the form of solar paneling, and mosquito nets.

RIGHT: Winner of the 2016 Pritzker Prize, Alejandro Aravena gave a new face and name to informal housing design as not only a “vogue” design challenge for modern architects but also as a growing urban necessity for 60% of the world’s population. Urban housing and the need for a housing typology that addresses growing density instead of growing periphery.

In one of the many ravines that cut through Guatemala City, quite possibly the largest slum in Central America sits with its own culture, infrastructure, economy, and design (Img. 25). La Limonada is a 0.04 acre piece of land in the center of Guatemala City that is home to over 60,000 people. It sits between zones 1 and 5 and divides itself into ten districts. Each district is controlled by a different gang which is constantly at war with the other gangs.
Figure 7.1
Outside of the city center is a growing metropolis for the wealthy as an escape from the reality of the poverty in their city and country. Paseo Cayala exists as a mask to cover the wretchedness of their community. Here, is one of the only empty plots of land in Guatemala city. This land belongs to someone and buying land in the city can cost anywhere between 2 and 100 million dollars per acre. Not only is real estate so expensive, the price changes based on the person. There are no laws, regulations, or codes to stop wage, race, or sexual discrimination in real estate.

On this plot of land edging between the city and farm land, I place a community for the displaced. People come to the city to escape violence, to preemptively protect themselves from a future war, for better jobs, for family, or for education. They have the choice of being enslaved on farms or being densely packed into a city with possibly more freedom. This is obviously a generalization and there are other options, but for the majority of Guatemalans, the options are slim. This is why informal communities appear.

Designing in the realm of the informal, one has to think outside the laws of code, structural soundness, and urban planning. Formal architectural design could and will only work if partnered with displaced people. I, nor anyone, can predict the growth, density, or patterns of informal housing.

The reality is that Guatemalan people scavenge for their homes; build them and make them their own. The needs of Guatemalan shelter are three:
1. A DOOR FOR SECURITY
2. A ROOF FOR SHELTER
3. A HEARTH FOR FOOD

With these three elements in mind, I am exploring a community of half built houses. This would provide displaced families with a location to come to, a concrete floor for health benefits, and two walls for property and density control. With this plot of land and space, the family can bring the remaining materials as needed or as they can pay.

With this site design, I also propose a moveable collection of materials for initial completion. With a typical trailer, a family can fit enough rammed earth blocks, tin roofing, and other materials to supplement the existing design in order to have a lockable home for their first night in the city.
Every Guatemalan home needs a stove top. The staples of the Guatemalan diet are corn, black beans, eggs if affordable, and bananas along with other tropical fruits. Guatemalans use corn for different meal supplements from porridge to tortillas. The process of grinding corn into meal, regrinding, creating batter and making tortillas is an art form that is only possible with a stove top. Many homes with stoves are poorly ventilated and the smoke can be harmful, but with a simple design with one pipe, the smoke can be controlled and funneled out of the house.
What are the architectural ramifications of this analysis? If it stands to reason that the informal housing of Guatemala - like many others in Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia - is the result of years of colonialist power divides and remnants of conquest, where does the solution fall? Is this anthropological? Is it historical? Is it sociopolitical? Is it architectural?

Not only do I find this problem unlimitedly faceted, I also do not find architecture in its solution. After ethnographically floating through my final two years of architectural education, I found the kink in the armor, so to speak. In order to approach informal design, sociopolitical unrest, historically marginalized communities, or otherwise forgotten areas of the world, there is a key attribute architects need that is not taught in school. While the teaching of structures, grandeur, history, and theory is necessary for preparation of the practice, architectural education is lacking in the gravity of reality. This is not the key attribute mentioned above, but it is the first step in revealing that attribute. However oxymoronc it may seem, working in informal housing – or any type of building – requires a real grasp of the weight of reality. This is contradictory because the solutions proposed for informal housing are, by definition, idealistic. It is necessary to design for the utopian in order to fall into the realm of reality. However, the idealism crucial to the first steps in design solutions requires an intense base of knowledge which can only be gained through personal experience. Throughout architectural education, there is an emphasis on seeing the world, visiting sites of architectural significance, going to Chicago, New York, UVA, Atlanta, and there is an expectation that you see some of these sites without educational organization. Despite this personal experience, what we see and what we know do not match. In many of the great architects we observe, there is a great lack of sensibility and an excess of grandeur. This is what makes them great. Nevertheless, in the reality of informal housing, sensibility will trump grandeur every time.

If sensibility is the result of understanding the gravity of reality, then what would logically follow is a desire to understand more of the process, background, and rational for existing cultural elements to informal design. In Guatemala, there are roughly ten million people living in substandard housing. Yet, how does one operationalize “substandard housing?” Is this a term you, as the researcher, coin to describe a set of housing variables? Is this a term defined by international poverty organizations? Or, most importantly, is this a term defined by the community? Determining this is the sensibility. You cannot enter into an informal community with the ideals, codes, systems, and organization of formal building. Once dedicated to this redefinition of adequate housing, you are accepting that you cannot solve the issue as you cannot even define it. In order to accept this, there has to be a key attribute of humility - something not discussed within architectural education.

The name of this analysis is “Formal Displacement.” Displacement and cycles of displacement in Guatemala have been formal demonstrations of power over indigenous people. Mayan displacement was due to poor leadership and planning from the elite class of Mayan leaders. Colonial displacement introduced a new standard of wealth, leadership, and language. Industrial displacement split the land into pieces controlled by small groups of international entities. Violent displacement sent millions into exile, homelessness, and mass graves.

Yet, this formal displacement caused a completely informal housing crisis. This research begs the question that if we approach informal housing settlements as formally displaced communities, can we begin to look at nomadic elements of housing - rammed earth bricks, sheet roofing, standardized stove construction, etc - to begin not solving the health and safety disparities in Guatemala but working with them. Accepting the cultural difference and working within those parameters is significantly more effective than approaching with a specific solution. Ironically, this approach is not the primary choice in architectural problem solving. Architectural education does not encourage questioning the true source of issues. In communities that suffer from gentrification, perhaps the initial reaction is not architectural, but economic. In communities with high poverty, perhaps health practice, women’s health rights, and sanitary infrastructure are reactions that should come before architecture. While architecture and architects bring incredible skills to the world of international development, the initial issue with working in informal housing and development is the assumption that architecture can and should be the solution. To assume a solution even exists is insensitive and ignorant; to assume architecture is the starting point disregards the humility necessary to engage in international development.

In sociological theory, we take two variables and try to understand their connection. In this case we assume that poor architectural practice leads to poor quality of life in Guatemala. However, with independent and dependent variables, before one can assume that a connection exists, a prior variable must be eliminated. Perhaps architects should problem solve by engaging humility and eliminate and find prior variables before assuming their role.
composición de tierras  (lit.) arrangement of land; Spanish legislation in 1591 for the Spaniards to begin a treasury to sell the land colonized by the conquistadors

congregación  (lit.) congregation; centralized settlements of indigenous people during the 1550’s

encomienda early labor control system utilized by the Spaniards with the Muslims in Spain and the indigenous people in the Americas

finca  a large farm controlled by one group, yet worked by a group of lower-class citizens

indios fugitivos Mayans escaped from their Spanish dictated cities

Kaqchikel  [kah.chee.kel] Mayan people group situated east of Guatemala City

ladina non-indigenous person; typically, a moderately derogatory term for a landowner from Spanish descent

maya a central american who identifies as one of the 24 different ethnic groups stemming from the precolombian Mayan Empire

Quiché  [key.ché] Mayan people group situated in the Western Highlands of Guatemala

parcialidad small indigenous communities divided by families or clans

repartimiento colonial forced labor system


IMAGES

Cover photo by Savannah Dixon


4. [Justo Barrios] https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d8/JustoBarrios.jpg

5. [Jorge Ubico] https://alchetron.com/Jorge-Ubico1247336


7. Ibid.

8. [Banana Tansportation] https://battleofourtimes.com/2012/06/01/


23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

Para los guatemaltecos, espero que haya representado a ustedes en una buena luz. Es el puro deseo de mi corazón mostrar el respeto apropiado por la gran resiliencia de los Mayas a través de historia.