

Can the Subaltern Be Seen? Photography and the Affects of Nationalism

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Day of the Dead, 1900: a day to venerate the past by honoring the deceased, a year to herald the excitements and fears of a new century, and a fitting date for K'iche' Mayans from the Guatemalan highland city of Quetzaltenango to begin a half-century professional relationship with portrait photographer Tomás Zanotti. Born in Mexico to a Mexican mother and an Italian father, Zanotti made his way to Quetzaltenango, roughly two day's journey from Guatemala's northern border.¹ Shortly after he arrived in 1898, Zanotti apprenticed with the Englishman James Piggot, who operated the city's first portrait studio, and then took over the trade. At the time, K'iche's comprised an overwhelming majority of Quetzaltenango's population. Yet during those early years only a handful showed up to have their pictures taken. The low prices charged in the few anonymous account book entries—"dos indios," "grupo indios"—suggest that bureaucratic compulsion drove them into the studio to obtain passport-sized images for official documents. From 1897 to 1900, the majority of Pig-

Comprising over three thousand glass plate negatives and prints, the Tomás Zanotti collection, on which this essay is based, is housed in the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (CIRMA), located in Antigua, Guatemala. I want to thank Irma Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj. Throughout the essay, much of the analysis of the photos is made possible by her generosity in sharing her time, insights, and knowledge. I also want to thank Diane Nelson, Sarah Hill, Ann Farnsworth, and the attendees at the University of Pennsylvania's Ethnohistory Workshop. I would also like to thank CIRMA, particularly its director, Tani Adams, and its photograph archivist, Valia Garzón, for helping with the reproduction of the images accompanying this essay.

1. Information on the life of Zanotti comes from a series of interviews conducted with photographers currently working in Quetzaltenango, as well as miscellaneous documents found in the CIRMA collection. Information on his family is found in the record office of Quetzaltenango's public cemetery. This essay is an elaboration of a short discussion in my book, *The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2000), pp. 185–190.

got's clients were wealthy ladinos (non-Maya) or foreigners, their names recorded in mixed Spanish and English.

On the Day of the Dead, things changed. Between October 30 and November 2, 1900, Piggot shot 23 portraits. Of these, 17 had K'iche' surnames: Sac, Racancoj, Xicar, Coyoy, and so on. Only 6, however, according to surviving records, returned to pay their balance and claim their mementos. Following this cautious beginning, K'iche's increasingly sought out the services of Zanotti, as well as other Quetzalteco photographers. Throughout 1901, picking up during the Easter and Christmas seasons, more K'iche's arrived to commission portraits, a practice that steadily increased throughout the first half of the century, until tapering off with the advent of personal cameras. Perhaps anticipating growing indigenous interest, Toms Zanotti actively cultivated a K'iche' clientele. He charged less than his competitors and set up shop on the top floor of a two-story house located just off the city's main plaza, on the street leading to the public cemetery. As K'iche' funeral processions left the cathedral and made their way to the cemetery, they passed under Zanotti's window. It was a prime location that linked new practices surrounding the staging of portraits to established rituals governing death and mourning.

Over the last 20 years, scholars have afforded photography, as both art and technique, considerable power to structure the subjectivities, hierarchies, and experiences of modern life.² Its spectral and quicksilver, yet durable, nature is often taken as both the instrument and mirror of hegemonic power, capable of classifying, disciplining, fixing, and coding. The stilling of radiant energy—like the minting of coins or the printing of bills—abstracted, congealed, and affirmed an array of social relations. It produced a benchmark of homogenized, if continually bartered, value, making possible the impersonal transactions, methods of social control, and affective identifications central to the growth of a bureaucratic state, the expansion of capitalist relations, and the elaboration of nationalism. Photography filed and tracked criminals and cataloged citizens. Photogrammetry—the use of cameras for surveying—defined property boundaries and publicized the contours of national territories. Similar to money, the

2. See Cristraud M. Geary, *Images from Bamum: German Colonial Photography at the Court of King Njoya, Cameroon, West Africa, 1902–1915* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute, 1988); Catherine Lutz and Jane Lou Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993); Christopher M. Lyman, *The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions: Photographs of Edward S. Curtis* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); and Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

circulation of customized portraits in the form of postcards through a state bureaucracy (post offices) not only helped individuals dislocated by capitalism, urbanization, and migration to maintain increasingly distant family relations but also created an assumed correspondence between those sentimental ties and the administrative functioning of the nation-state (figure 1). Portraits—particularly those of individuals set in seeming suspension—helped produce the fiction of personal sovereignty and contributed to the construction of liberal, rights-bearing national subjects. Photography’s close association with travel writing, naturalism, medicine, and anthropology coincided with the extension of nineteenth-century European imperialism, providing visual confirmation of ascendant pseudoscientific and rationalized discourses of civilization, nation, and race.³

Deborah Poole’s important work explores how, in Peru, photography “played a crucial role in producing the truth of ‘race’” by creating “a format through which each individual could change his or her racial identity by recording it in the concrete, realistic, technologically based, and hence scientific medium of the photographic print.”⁴ The creation and circulation of these images formed a “visual economy” that situated landscapes and peoples into modernist discourses of race, family, status, and nation.

Yet little research has been conducted in Latin America on how popular groups themselves engaged the new medium.⁵ Zanotti’s portraits stand in sharp contrast to the photographs of random “natives” sold throughout Europe and North America (figure 2). Some of these photographers, such as Edward Curtis, went so far as to touch out the accoutrements of modern life—erasing clocks, cars, and umbrellas from the negatives—so as to ossify Indians as relics.⁶ In contrast, K’iche’s themselves solicited and consumed the images shot by Zanotti. These photographs stand in contrast to the Cusqueño working-class and peasant portraits that Poole examined, which tended to be of life-cycle events: marriages, deaths, communions, and so on. While wedding pic-

3. For anthropology, see Elizabeth Edwards, ed., *Anthropology and Photography, 1860–1920* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1992). See also Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturalism* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

4. Deborah Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity: A Visual Economy of the Andean Image World* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1997), 214.

5. Poole offers only a brief reading of how peasant and working-class families may have engaged the new technology, focusing primarily on elite and foreign involvement in visual production and exchange. *Vision, Race, and Modernity*, 209–12.

6. For Curtis, see Lyman, *The Vanishing Race*.

Figure 1. A postcard backing is printed on this portrait of a wealthy, urban K'iche' family.



tures and mortuary photographs exist in the Zanotti collection (figures 3 and 4), it is the studio portraits—extravagances usually reserved for Latin America's dominant and aspiring classes—that are most striking. The conscious presentation of self and family for use as an “icon of remembrance” is intimately familiar and immediately comforting.⁷ Yet the images remain unknowable in their anonymity. There exists no information about the sitters—no names, no dates—except what is contained within the image and what we know about the photographer, the place and years he worked, and the community he serviced.⁸ The weight of such anonymity forces the viewer to look deeper to discover a world of indigenous hierarchy and authority that is not so immediately recog-

7. Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity*, 202.

8. Of the roughly three thousand images found in the Zanotti collection, at least two thousand of them are of K'iche' subjects. In addition, Zanotti's daughter estimated that these surviving images are about half of what her father had shot. Quetzaltenango's indigenous population in 1950 was 11,046 men, women, and children (which we can estimate represents more than 2,500 families)—the number of surviving images indicate that portraiture was indeed a popular form of self-expression within the K'iche' community.



Figure 2. This *tajeta de visita* is from the German photographer Emilio Herbruger, who worked in Guatemala in the 1860s and 1870s cataloguing physical and cultural traits of Guatemalan Indians.

nizable, one that uncannily upsets the aesthetic assumptions that underpin understandings of race, class, gender, and culture.⁹

Quetzalteco Exceptionalism

When Tomás Zanotti arrived in Quetzaltenango at the end of the nineteenth century, the city was at the center of far-reaching economic, cultural, and political upheavals that profoundly reconfigured the country's ethnic and class relations. In 1871, liberal ladino planters from Guatemala's western highlands took over the state, and for the next 70 years they legislated, in effect, a sort of primitive capital accumulation: using their political and military power to break the subsistence base of communities and make indigenous land and labor available

9. Alan Trachtenberg uses Sigmund Freud's notion of the "uncanny"—as "something familiar and old-established in the mind" that has been estranged in the mind in an act of repression—to reflect on how the first daguerreotypes were received: "Freud's insight into the way the psyche allows itself pleasurable terrors of the uncanny in order to reinforce its defensive repressions suggests a role for the daguerreotype, particularly with its overtones of alchemy, in initiating Americans into a new age of science and industrial technology, in which railroads, telegraphs, and steam-powered machinery also seemed driven by magical,

Figure 3. K'iche' bride. During its early years photography was referred to as "Dauguerre's mirror," and practitioners often placed a mirror within a scene to amplify photography's "narcissistic trick of doubling its subjects" (from Carol Mavor, *Becoming: The Photographs of Clementina, Viscountess Hawarden* [Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1999], 98–101).



to the rapacious needs of coffee planters. Historians have recently pointed out that many of the economic and political reforms promoted by the new liberal state had been long underway—namely, the commodification of property and labor and the secularization of state institutions.¹⁰ Nevertheless, if liberals did not conceive the new nation, they did induce a hurried birth of the values, identities, and assumptions associated with plantation capitalism and ladino nationalism.

The coming of coffee devastated many indigenous communities. The cumulative effects of decades of forced labor and debt peonage, land loss, and militarization have been well documented. Quetzaltenango itself, however, was located at too high an altitude for coffee growing, and urban K'iche's largely escaped ruin. Planters did not covet their land, and they were able to hold on to a good part of their property, which in turn allowed many to benefit from an expanding market economy. Likewise, Quetzaltenango was too politically important for the kind of wholesale expropriation of land which took place in other nearby highland towns. Local and national elites needed K'iche's to administer

perhaps demonic, forces"; Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 23.

10. David McCreery, *Rural Guatemala, 1760–1940* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1994).



Figure 4. A number of observers speculated that this man was ill and that this memento was taken in his home before his expected death.

the city and to procure labor and revenue for public-works projects. Further, the building boom that took place in the city following the coffee revolution produced an economically powerful class of skilled indigenous masons, carpenters, quarrymen, and contractors.

Quetzalteco exceptionalism, however, entailed more than the consolidation under liberal rule of an urban, economically stratified K'iche' community. By the end of the nineteenth century, Quetzalteco K'iche's fashioned an alternative nationalist discourse that both drew from and challenged the assumptions that underpinned ascendant ladino nationalism.

Following independence from Spain in 1821 and intensifying after 1871, ladino politicians, reformers, and nationalists promoted a fungible understanding of racial identity based on cultural and behavioral traits.¹¹ The shift to coffee cultivation and the construction of a militarized state dramatically transformed relations between Guatemala's ruling class and its majority indigenous population. More than ever before in the history of the colony or the nation, elites viewed Mayans as a labor force to be mobilized. In their debates on nearly all aspects of public policy—forced labor, debt peonage, education, suf-

11. See Grandin, *The Blood of Guatemala*, chaps. 3, 6, and 7, for a more detailed discussion of the summary that follows. See also Marta Casáu Arzú, *Guatemala: Linaje y racismo* (Guatemala City: Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, 1995).

frage, municipal administration, commerce, public health—reformers and nationalists often used “race” and “class” interchangeably (race understood as indigenous culture and class understood as poverty), with the assumption that both were destined to disappear with national fulfillment. They sought to turn Indians into ladinos, at least in rhetoric, if not always in policy, by encouraging them to speak Spanish, wear Western clothes, and interact with ladino society. To be sure, obsessions with skin and blood still held. But across the nineteenth century, ladino intellectual and political elites (at least publicly) increasingly described “race” in social and cultural terms.¹² The weaving together of class and race into a national narrative of development led many reformers to stress environmental modification—as opposed to the hereditary and biological eugenics views popular in the United States and Europe—as the route toward permanent “racial improvement.”¹³ The government needed “to give Indians the means to leave their communal system; their common and unchanging dress, their barbaric diet,” wrote Antonio Batres Jáuregui, Guatemala’s preeminent fin de siècle intellectual, in an 1894 prizewinning essay on how best to resolve the Indian problem. Indians had to shed their “their antediluvian languages; their rural, primitive, and rustic homes. . . . It will not be the present generation of aboriginals . . . but the new generations, young and flexible, who will adjust to the demands of the new century” (see figure 5).¹⁴

In Quetzaltenango, efforts to transform indigenous subjects into citizens had tangible political and economic consequences, as throughout the nineteenth century ladinos repeatedly used the rhetoric of ecumenical liberalism to dilute the enduring local corporate caste power of K’iche’ elites. In response, indigenous authorities began to express in their political writings and actions an alternative understanding of the relationship of race to nation, one which borrowed heavily from modernizing notions of progress, yet insisted on the insoluble nature of race. Ladinos tended to view nationalism and indigenous ethnicity as mutually exclusive—the progress of the nation depended on even-

12. For a useful discussion of the analytical utility of the concept of race, see Alan Knight, “Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo: Mexico, 1910–1940,” in *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940*, ed. Richard Graham (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1994), 72. For similar constructions of racial identity, see Marisol de la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos: The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919–1991* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2000).

13. See Nancy Leys Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics: Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1991), 84.

14. Antonio Batres Jáuregui, *Los indios: Su historia y su civilización* (Guatemala: Tipografía La Unión, 1894), 177–78.



Figure 5. Guatemalan reformers placed their hopes on the young. The infinity of the black backdrop suggests an exaggerated attempt to define ladino identity as not only as cosmopolitan but also as universal, in its fullest sense.

tual elimination of the Indian. K'iche' elites, however, argued the opposite: neither the nation nor the Indian could move forward without the other. In their oft-stated view, "regeneration of the Indian would lead to civil and political equality which was the basis of a democracy."¹⁵ This particular interpretation of race and nation manifested itself in vibrant participation in local and national public life. Quetzaltenango's emergence as a cosmopolitan city, one celebrated by liberals throughout the Central American isthmus, was as much a result of indigenous initiative as it was of ladino planning. K'iche' elites helped to bring the railroad to Quetzaltenango, built public buildings and monuments, established patriotic beauty contests, and gave nationalists speeches. By hitching national fulfillment to cultural renewal, K'iche's justified their position of community authority to the local and national ladino state. Conversely, by linking ethnic improvement to the advancement of the nation, they legitimized to other Mayans their continued political power. Although K'iche's accepted much of the racial, ascriptive features of ladino nationalism—particularly their belief that the Indian was corrupted and needed to be regenerated—K'iche' patriarchs and political leaders insisted that one could adopt as many defined ladino traits as possible and still remain indigenous.

15. Archivo Histórico de Quetzaltenango, caja 1894. For a more detailed discussion of various manifestations of this alternative nationalism, see Grandin, *Blood of Guatemala*, chaps. 6 and 7.

To Instruct and Advise

The ways in which photography empowered K'iche' patriarchs to advance their idiosyncratic understanding of race and nation are best seen by contrasting ladino images of Indians with K'iche' self-representations. Figure 6 is a posed studio shot, taken by Zanotti, of two boys using tumplines to carry wood. Figure 7 is another Zanotti image of a ladino boy dressed in indigenous shepherd garb, probably taken on the feast day of Guadalupe. Compare these ladino-staged images with the portrait of Santiago Coyoy, one of Quetzaltenango's wealthiest and most important K'iche' political leaders (figure 8).

The first two images index the simultaneous symbolic proletarianization and projected extinction of indigenous culture, setting "Indians" in agrarian contexts meant to inscribe class and racial identities within a temporal narrative of national advancement. With the spread of coffee plantation labor—much of it procured through state-administered *corvéés*—to be an Indian no longer implied community residence but meant, at least in public discourse, either an impoverished worker or a lingering remnant of bygone times. The pastoral pose of the ladino child evokes the halcyon feel of a receding rural past, while the staged photo of the two young haulers references a certain manifestation of reformist discourse common to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For many ladino nationalist intellectuals, the image of the hunched Indian *cargador* came to epitomize all that Guatemala needed to overcome if it were to advance. Politicians passed laws that sought to abolish "blood haulage," while reformers decried the practice as a particularly pernicious obstacle to efficient commerce.¹⁶ Coyoy's portrait, in marked distinction to these visual narratives of national progress, conveys the social position of the subject in isolation, abstracted from the processes and relations that afforded him power. His averted gaze denies a relationship even with viewers of the portrait, while the indistinct backdrop accents the individualism of the bourgeois self.

Family portraits resituate K'iche' patriarchs within a wider context of household social relations. In figure 9, the couple seated in the middle is the authorial center of an expansive clan. Figure 10 reveals the changing nature, as well as the transformed iconic importance, of the K'iche' household. While extended kinship ties retain to this day their importance in the K'iche' community, a shift of

16. Guatemala, *Primer Congreso Pedagógico Centroamericano y Primera Exposición Escolar Nacional* (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 1894), 286. See also the 1879 *Ley para las municipalidades*, which charged municipal authorities with ending the practice of "carrying goods on the head and the back," *Recopilación de las leyes emitidas por el gobierno democrático de la República de Guatemala*, 2 vols. (Guatemala City: Tipografía El Progreso, 1881), 2: 283–93.



Figure 6. "Beasts of Burden, poor and lamentable pariahs."



Figure 7. Ladino boy as Indian, Día de Guadalupe.

Figure 8. Santiago Coyoy (courtesy of Sociedad El Adelanto).



emphasis did take place. As Quetzaltenango transformed into a more integrated urban economy, the immediate family represented by a father, mother, and a reduced number of children gained in prominence.¹⁷ The center of this photograph, much more than the couple in the portrait of the larger family, is the father, underscored by both his youthfulness and absence of older male relations. His scuffed shoes indicate that the young man is perhaps an urban artisan. This distillation both concentrates patriarchy and accentuates gender. As reciprocal community relations and obligations dissipated with the nationalization of productive relations, the *form* of ethnic identity—represented nowhere better than in indigenous women’s dress—came to hold increased importance.

These family portraits directly counter the imagined elimination of indigenous culture, resisting efforts to hive off “modernity” from “tradition.” They present a synthetic image of the K’iche’ family in which men, attired in Western clothes, were the harbingers of progress, while matriarchs—dressed in *huipil* (indigenous tunic) or *corte* (dress), often barefoot—became the standard-bearers of ethnicity. They call to mind Partha Chatterjee’s description of the gendered dimension of Indian anticolonial nationalism. Chatterjee argues that the subjugation of “non-European peoples” by the West took place primarily

17. From the eighteenth to the late nineteenth century, the mean K’iche’ household size fell from five to four. See Grandin, *Blood of Guatemala*, 183.



Figure 9. K'iche' family.

in the material realm, in the “world” of military might, science, industry, technology, and juridical and governmental organization.¹⁸ Nationalists, in response, emphasized an anticolonial identity rooted in an inner, spiritual domain, a “home” that came to be embodied by women, not sullied by the profanity of politics. As Chatterjee suggests for the case of India, the symbolic domestic confinement of women represented not a rejection of nationalism but instead an attempt to respond to its universalizing claims, claims that call forth difference while at the same time insisting on its negation.

Yet spilling beyond frame and family, the “public act of being photographed rather than through the relatively private views of its members’ collective photographic image,” as Poole describes the spectacle in Cusco, both represents and affirms privilege and status.¹⁹ Nineteenth-century travel literature often vividly describes the tired and dusty foreigners who, upon landing in some remote pueblo, seek out the indigenous mayor to announce their arrival and secure a mule and a few indigenous haulers for the subsequent leg of the trip. One European traveler recounts how in 1840 the Mayans he hired in

18. Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994), 120.

19. Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity*, 202.

Figure 10. K'iche' family. The cumulative effect of setting, pose, expression, positioning, clothing, props—clay dogs, rugs, ornately carved tables, columns (a constant ladino refrain was that Indians needed to be taught to use modern furniture), and false staircases (representing the expansive modernity of a two-story house)—helped standardized diverse and changing social identities into stable images of middle-class urbanity.



Figure 11. A balance of gender and generation.



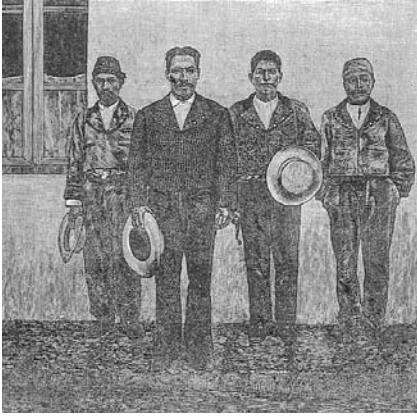


Figure 12. The K'iche' cabildo conscripted an indigenous hauler to carry the photographer's baggage to the next town in exchange for this portrait (etching from William Tufts Brigham, *Guatemala: The Land of the Quetzal* [New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1887], 146).

Quetzaltenango were placed in jail by the indigenous authorities, thereby ensuring they would be available and sober for the next day's trip.²⁰ In 1886, upon William Brigham's arrival in Quetzaltenango, the K'iche' mayor, Florencio Cortez, and three indigenous councilmen approached him to have their portrait taken.²¹ The photograph has not survived, but an etching made of the portrait reveals the Mayan municipal officials posed standing on a city street (figure 12). Considering the newness of photography, the event probably attracted a crowd of onlookers.²² Dressed in trousers, jackets with wide lapels, and brimmed hats, the four K'iche' politicians formed a picture of urbanity and authority that stood in sharp contrast to the specters of "degenerated" rural Mayans that haunted the ladino imagination. Cortez, in addition to the silver dollar, supplied Brigham with a conscripted Indian to cart his belongings to the next town, underscoring how photography reinforced a broader network of unequal transactions stratified and enforced by political power.

The complexity of Quetzalteco K'iche' society is portrayed not just in a variety of fashions but by a diversity of poses, positionings, and expressions. Social identity was not just written on the body in the form of clothing, but in

20. John L. Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in the Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841), 2:219–21.

21. William Tufts Brigham, *Guatemala: The Land of the Quetzal; A Sketch* (New York: Scribner, 1887), 147.

22. The only previous recorded instance of photography in Quetzaltenango confirms this. In 1875, the famous photographer Eadward Muybridge was greeted in the plaza of Quetzaltenango by a martial band and a crowd of hundreds. See E. Bradford Burns, *Eadward Muybridge in Guatemala, 1875: The Photographer As Social Recorder* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986).

Figure 13. K'iche' woman at mirror.



the way a person stood, the way he or she looked, and what they did with their hands. Alan Trachtenberg writes that in the United States in the nineteenth century, “the challenge of the intractable countenance, the face which would not relax or mellow or glow with ‘expression’ formed the core of an emerging middle-class discourse.” To prevent the “blankness of expression or the pained scowl of a direct, frontal look into the camera [sitters were prodded to] gaze ‘vaguely at a distant object.’”²³ The millions of surviving nineteenth-century images in the United States, also mostly of anonymous sitters, show people “learning a new way of seeing themselves in the eyes of others, seeing oneself as an image.”²⁴ With little knowledge of what took place between Zanotti and his clients, the ritual of staging—decisions regarding pose, expression, background, choice of props—was probably a negotiated venture. It is impossible to know what was at stake in each studio session, yet patterns emerge from sequences of images. On the whole, ladinos tend to assume the proper bourgeois pose and avoid the frontal stare, while K'iche's more often than not look directly into the camera. Figures 13 and 14 are nearly identical—in background, prop furniture, pose, and posture—portraits of individual women. Yet

23. Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, 26.

24. *Ibid.*, 29.



Figure 14. Ladina woman at mirror.

aside from her dress, the ladina distinguishes herself from her counterpart by turning her face, whitened with powder, away from the lens. Did K'iche's insist on facing the camera directly? Or did Zanotti, after trying to set the hands and relax the body, not care to turn the head, to "instruct and advise" K'iche's on the proper bourgeois presentation of self?

Whatever the case, "expression" did seem to track—and help naturalize—the never-quite-achieved transition from the sprawling, peasant-based kinship structure to the urban, condensed family, a transition that symbolized the supposed forward motion of the modern nation-state. While some portraits of urban K'iche's—such as Coyoy's or the nuclear family in figure 10—exhibited an ease of pose, the sitters in figure 15, especially the parents, are noticeably stiff. The husband, wearing sandals, sits erect, the older woman, with no rings on her hand, leans slightly forward. Not only is their gaze unrelenting, but tension is also revealed in their clenched hands (what to do with limbs was another concern of early photographers). Yet despite the rigidity, this picture reveals that the family had some means. Aside from the fine design of its backstrap weave, the woman's huipil reveals two marks of wealth: a velvet lining around the neck and a clasp holding the collar closed. Now fairly commonly used in the manufacture of huipiles, at the time the portrait was taken (between 1900 and 1930) velvet was a new introduction, affordable only to a few. The standing



Figure 15. "The challenge of the intractable countenance."

woman is wearing at least three rings, earrings, and a fine and probably expensive necklace.

As in every aspect of Guatemalan society, ascriptions of social power and status run through these portraits. They are inescapable. Yet they are not all of a piece. The popularity of portraiture cuts across class and gender lines in the K'iche' community. Wealthy urban and poorer rural families, individual women, and pairs of women—mothers and daughters, sisters, friends—willingly posed in front of Zanotti's camera, creatively engaging with the new medium, consciously presenting new decorative accessories and new fashion styles, some of them posing quite comfortably.

Since colonial times, Quetzaltecos traded their crafts and crops as far north as Tabasco and as far south as El Salvador. Long before it was the highland coffee capital, Quetzaltenango served as the commercial hub of a vibrant regional economy and an important stop on the trade route connecting Mexico City to Guatemala City. Throughout the twentieth century, Quetzalteco K'iche's remained in control of much of this trade, working as itinerant merchants,



Figure 16. "To instruct and advise."

operating stalls in the city market, and running large-scale import outlets. The Zanotti photographs reveal a particular manifestation of commerce as it appeared in the early twentieth century—the increasing use of imported or mass-produced fashion objects: rings, broaches, clasps, bracelets, faux pearls, necklaces made from glass, coins, and medallions, umbrellas, watches, belts, ties, and sweaters. In the years prior to World War II, K'iche' merchants, building on established trade connections, traveled throughout Mexico in search of new items they hoped would catch on in Quetzaltenango. *Fantasia*—the word used in Guatemala to describe the newly affordable and available manufactured novelties and adornments increasingly used by women in the twentieth century—playfully captures the importance of visual imagination and desire in the presentation of self that takes place with stepped-up commodity circulation. Figure 17 presents what appears to be an economically well-to-do couple from San Pedro Sacatepéquez. The pregnant woman is wearing earrings and a shawl, possibly imported from Mexico. She also has on a cotton blouse—*blusa de maquina*—rather than a handmade huipil.²⁵ The

25. See Carol Elaine Hendrickson, *Weaving Identities: Construction of Dress and Self in a Highland Guatemalan Town* (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1995), chap. 2, for the diversity of

man is dressed in both a button-down shirt and a zippered wool sweater, again apparently made in Mexico. This couple chose to combine imported and manufactured goods with accessories associated with traditional culture—she, manufactured jewelry along with a *chachal* (a necklace made from coins or medallions); he, imported clothing along with *caites*, or sandals. The shawl over the women's right shoulder is pulled down to reveal an ornate necklace. Was this her doing or Zanotti's? Notice also that the bottom border of the man's sweater runs seamlessly into the woman's *faja*, or belt. Creative engagement with fashion is likewise highlighted by the willingness of Mayans to mix and match clothing from other communities. The family in figure 15 appears to reside in Totonicapán, a K'iche' city about 30 kilometers to the east of Quetzaltenango. All three women were dressed in "*trajes combinados*"—cortes from Totonicapán and *perrajes* (shawls) from Quetzaltenango.

Photography captures light, yet there is movement. Children, particularly the way they sit, or refuse to sit, conveys this tension, at once kinetic and quiet. The eyes of the boy in figure 10 shift slightly to the right, perhaps hastily trying to correct himself after curiously turning his head toward the photographer. Boys and young men, much more than girls or young women, personified in their pose assumptions of national progress and hopes of social ascension. As mentioned above, K'iche's repeated, at least publicly, many of the racial assumptions that underpinned ideologies of national progress. In particular, they (as did ladinos) invested a good deal of expectations in their children. During the first decades of this century, indigenous mutual aid societies founded and supported over a dozen elementary and vocational schools. Adoption of a national curriculum, including courses in Spanish, English, civics, geography, economics, and history, situated K'iche' boys and girls, their city, and their nation within a global political economy in which Guatemala was increasingly entrenched. In 1911, indigenous leaders wrote the president to thank him for supporting one prominent K'iche' school, insisting that with education, their children will no longer be fated to live as "beasts of burden, poor and lamenta-

factors that inform the decisions women make as to what kind of blouse or huipil to wear. See also Irma Otzoy, "Identidad y trajes mayas," *Mesoamérica* 23 (1992): 95–112. For other discussions on the relationship between identity and clothing, see Terrence Turner, "The Social Skin," in *Not Work Alone: A Cross-Cultural View of Activities Superfluous to Survival*, ed. Jeremy Cherfas and Roger Lewin (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1980), 112–40; as well as the essays in Joanne B. Eicher, ed., *Dress and Ethnicity* (Oxford: Berg, 1995); and Hildi Hendrickson, ed., *Clothing and Difference: Embodied Identities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1996).



Figure 17. Sanpedrano couple.



Figure 18. Rural couple.



Figure 19. The youngest sons frame this urban family; their erect pose and fedoras serve as a counterpoint to the peasant hats and hunched shoulders of the boys in figure 6.

ble pariahs.” “We will develop our intelligence and strength,” the letter continued. “Our blood circulates in the national life and with our effort the *Patria de Tecún* [Tecún was the K’iche’ warrior reportedly killed in the conquest by Pedro Alvarado] will be strengthened and advanced.”²⁶ In the portrait of the wealthy rural family (figure 15), such martial claims to national citizenship are revealed not only in the soldier’s uniform but also in the cock of his knee and in the swagger of his stance. In figure 9, the young man, seated to his father’s left, embodies social mobility not only with a suit, tie, and shoes, but with comfortably crossed legs and an easy expression. Girls and young women, on the other hand, tend to bear the weight of a wide range of local practices, meanings, and values. Clothing, props, and poses serve as memory aids, transmitting the codes of community propriety across time. In many of the Zanotti photos, especially ones absent of men (figures 20, 21, 22), mothers position their daughters as if they were on display (which, of course, they were). This presentation (the mother staging the daughter) within a presentation (the photo-

26. Manifestación que la sociedad “El Adelanto” de indígenas de Quetzaltenango . . . hacen al señor presidente, Museo de Historia, Quetzaltenango.



Figure 20. The mother's corte, while expensive, is wrinkled, suggesting that she was poor and unrolled her dress only for special occasions.



Figure 21. Essay questions assigned in 1901 in one K'iche'-administered school—"What should be the role of education for women in the twentieth century?" and "How should children behave when they have received a higher level of education than their parents?"—capture gender and generational disquiet and convey a sense of anticipation as to what the new century would bring.

Figure 22. Three generations.



graph itself) highlights the socialization that takes place not just through the photograph as icon but through the photograph as event. Through their pose, the mothers seem to be teaching the children how to stand, what to wear, how to look—in short, how to be in the world. The photograph not only reminds viewers of these codes but also symbolically links families, via women, across generations.²⁷

Despite their striking ability to interpret national notions of race and progress according to their own lights, Quetzalteco K'iche's lived in a nation that was at war against indigenous culture. Reformers and politicians incessantly devised and implemented plans designed to turn Guatemala into a ladino nation, while migration, commodification, and the dictates of wage labor rearranged community identities and ties. Figure 22 suggests how this “symbolic violence”—as Jeffrey Gould, building on Pierre Bourdieu, describes the process in Nicaragua—may have played out across generations.²⁸ By her dress, the woman in the center of the portrait is from a rural K'iche' town—either San Cristóbal Totonicapán or San Andrés Xecul—a few miles outside of Quetzaltenango. To her left seems to be her daughter. Her swing-era dress, stockings, shoes, and made-up hair suggests that she was not living in her home commu-

27. Hendrickson, *Weaving Identities*, 99.

28. Jeffrey L. Gould, *To Die in This Way: Nicaraguan Indians and the Myth of Mestizaje, 1880–1965* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1998), 59, 177.

nity but perhaps had migrated to Quetzaltenango, where the portrait was taken, or to Guatemala City. In Quetzaltenango, while domestic servants were often permitted by their employers to wear huipiles and cortes, indigenous women who worked in hotels and restaurants usually were required to adopt ladino-style clothing. If she had moved to Guatemala City, perhaps the family had taken advantage of a return visit to the highlands to have their portrait taken. The little girl may be either the younger woman's daughter or her sister; the girl's unkempt hair, bare feet, and threadbare dress hint that she may not have accompanied the younger woman on her travels but instead remained in her home community. The child's white-skinned doll (proxy for a forth generation?) highlights the close connection between material culture and social change.

Can the Subaltern Be Seen?

K'iche' engagement with photography reflects on two associated concerns that dominate critical postcolonial scholarship: the first pertains to nationalism and the second to questions of agency, representation, and subjectivity. At least since the publication of Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, scholars have moved beyond attention to the economic structures and political alliances that produced modern nation-states to incorporate the subjective, metaphorical, or psychological constructions of national sentiments, mediated through romances, maps, newspapers, letter writing, national histories and economies, photography, and other discursive technologies.²⁹ Yet Manu Goswami, a historian of colonial India, has recently detailed the inadequacies of tilting too far in either direction, of ignoring the mediated interplay between (for want of a better word) objective processes associated with local and global capital accumulation and the subjective dispositions that create a spatial and temporal equivalence between the individual, the region, and the nation.³⁰ The images surveyed in this essay certainly contributed to such a correspondence. Clothing, props, poses, stagings, and expressions standardized on a national scale represent a

29. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, "Introduction: From the Moment of Social History to the Work of Cultural Representation," in *Becoming National: A Reader*, ed. Eley and Suny (New York: Oxford Univ. Press 1996).

30. See Manu Goswami, "Rethinking the Modular Nation Form: Toward a Sociohistorical Conception of Nationalism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no. 4 (2002): 770–99, as well as her *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, forthcoming).

Figure 23. Ladinás dressed as K'iche's. The overstated, flamboyant posturing of these middle/lower-class ladinás hints that cross dressing allowed a freer degree of expression than would have been permitted in a constricted ladino family portrait.



myriad of intersecting (at times contradictory, at times complimentary) racial, gender, and class discourses. But these congealed ideologies—frozen on glass plates and paper—both emerged from, and represented, the widespread, turbulent social upheavals and savage political realignments that accompanied an ever-deeper insertion, via coffee capitalism, into a world market. The rareness of the Zanotti collection—the counterintuitive participatory embrace of photography by a politically and culturally marginalized population—provides a unique window into this dialectical interplay. This participation affords an unparalleled view into how everyday community-based ideas and social relations governing men and women, rich and poor, urban and rural, ladino and Indian, became nationalized into a visual imaginary that captured not just hierarchy and exclusion but also the wishful fantasies that accompany accelerated commodity circulation.

In terms of agency, representation, and subjectivity, these images raise a perhaps more vexing question. When we view in the Zanotti photographs the formidable mobilization of gender ideologies to mimic, execute, and maintain patriarchal power, what can we say about the subjects that does not condemn



Figure 24. Three community leaders from Comalapa adopt a literate pose.

them to the position of perpetual outsiders, unable to influence a representational system that is always constructed from the male position?³¹ When read along with other manifestations of K'iche' nationalism, how can we not conclude that the derivative visual iterations of racial, national, and class discourses on display in these images did not simply serve to impose dominant ideologies on the community, conjuring a miasmatic smoke screen that blocked access to subaltern agency? While specifically concerned with the ability of Indian women to represent themselves, Gayatri Spivak's famous query—"can the subaltern speak?"—is now shorthand for the question of whether nations, social movements, and individuals could express themselves in forms that neither reaffirm dominant colonial or national ideologies nor "dissolve the subject" in a sea of discursive "subject effects."³² Spivak's answer, at least in that essay, sug-

31. If "subjectivity is produced by the entry into culture," as Diana Taylor writes in her study of Argentine political terror, "then it is gendered and, more specifically, gendered from the monologic male position in a closed system of self-reference." In a visual system in which "women are unrepresentable as subjects, representation seems, by definition, to be male self-representation"; Taylor, *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War"* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1997), 88–89.

32. Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota, 1986), 40–42. See also Homi Bhabha's concern with the

gests that they can not. Caught between British agents and Indian patriarchs, she writes, “the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the ‘third-world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization.”³³

Such a position, as many have pointed out, runs the danger of doing away with the very subject of oppositional politics, which subaltern studies did so much to uncover. This conundrum has driven recent postcolonial scholars, most famously Dipesh Chakrabarty, to insist increasingly on the radical autonomy of difference and to deny the power of the West—understood as capitalism, the Enlightenment, or, more vaguely, modernity—to colonize history.³⁴ The guiding light here is no longer Antonio Gramsci, with his emphasis on engaged struggle, but Martin Heidegger, with his celebration of the purity of the folk.³⁵ Yet Goswami has pointed out that the impasse that has led to this Heideggerian turn is not an ontological condition of history but a conceptual misrecognition of the doubled nature of capitalist modernity, which creates at the same time expectations of universal sameness (whether in reference to the individual or the nation) and real differences, manifested as poverty, racial distinction, patriarchy, exploitation, underdevelopment, and crisis. Many postcolonial scholars ignore the social relations that produce alterity, while focusing almost obsessively on the much-vaunted discursive imposition of uniformity. They grant so much primal force to language’s role in structuring subjectivity that the only way out was, in the awesome face of such absolute power, to repudiate that power through the insistence of autonomy.

ways in which colonial authority depends on the splitting of subjectivity by forcing its subjects to adopt its values, traditions, and language, in “Conclusion: ‘Race,’ Time, and the Revision of Modernity,” in *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994). For the quote, see Sherry Ortner, “Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1 (1995): 183.

33. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1994), 102.

34. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2000).

35. The first generation of subaltern studies, particularly its application of Gramscian theories of hegemony, greatly enriched Latin American historiography. See Florencia Mallon, “The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History,” *American Historical Review* 99 (1994): 1491–1515. See Ileana Rodríguez, ed., *The Latin American Subaltern Studies Reader* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2001), for current attempts to apply postcolonial studies—less by historians than by literary theorists and cultural philosophers—to Latin America.



Figure 25. Modern love.

The K'iche' portraits under consideration here convey neither total discursive omnipotence nor radical distinction. The enthusiasm of their production, their widespread popularity both within the city and without, permits us to reimpor the social into the metaphorical, to examine how family photography served as an imaginative venue that mediated regional, community-based ideas and relations and national ideologies intimately affiliated with capitalist state formation. In these photographs, both the local and the national, the particular and the universal, interpenetrated and shaped each other, although each undeniably from positions of vastly unequal resources. Their circulation, mostly within families but also, with the help of postal service, throughout the country, generated the affections indispensable to the elaboration of nationalism. It is important to highlight the asymmetrical distribution of power that invests all systems of representation with meaning, yet that discursive thrall should not be given so much sway that the only remedy is to obscure the histories, structures, relations, and ideas that bind the world together in an uneven wholeness. Zanotti's portraits suggest that the subaltern can not only be seen, but they can also see and act, at least as well as anybody can from where they find themselves.