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The Strange Case of “La Mancha Negra”: Maya-State Relations in Nineteenth-Century Guatemala

GREG GRANDIN

ACCORDING to local recollection, around four in the afternoon on September 4, 1884, in the Maya-K'iché town of Nuestra Señora de la Asunción de Cantel, Colonel Florencio Calderón, on orders from Guatemala's president, Justo Rufino Barrios, marched six of the town's municipal officers to the public square. In front of their families and neighbors he blindfolded the six, ordered them to sit in a row on an old cypress bench in front of a military firing squad, and gave the command to fire. Afterward, members of Cantel's *cofradías* (religious brotherhoods) carried the corpses to the cemetery and, on Calderón's command, buried them in a common, unmarked grave.¹

Immediately after the execution, Barrios ordered three pieces of heavy artillery to be placed on surrounding hills overlooking the town. He then sent word that he would destroy every house in Cantel unless a ransom of

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1. This narrative is taken from an unpublished monograph, written some one hundred years later and located in Cantel's municipal office, titled “El día mas triste en la historia del pueblo del Cantel: fusilan a la municipalidad, después piden un rescate,” part of a larger folder of monographs. The author is uncertain.

This essay was inspired by Carlo Ginzburg's “Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm,” in his *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1989), 96–125. As will become evident, however, the solution owes more to Sam Spade-style archival legwork than it does to Holmesian deduction. I thank Bryan McCann for this insight.

120 quintales *de plata* (silver or coinage) was paid. It is believed that *principales* (elders) sold communal land to pay the ransom, which they shipped by mule train two hundred kilometers to the capital and delivered directly to Barrios himself. The president reportedly remarked, on receiving the money, “I will not bother Cantel again as long as my attentions are focused on uniting Central America; after that we’ll see what will happen.”² This implicit threat ended with Barrios’ death six months later during his ill-fated unification campaign.

In one form or another, this story plays a prominent role in both local and foreign constructions of the town’s history. Today in Cantel, oral and written accounts circulate commemorating the seven martyrs (Barrios ordered another Cantelense executed in the capital a few days later) who defended communal land against the establishment of a textile factory by a powerful ladino family. In 1958, 74 years after the massacre, during an attempt by the municipality to establish political jurisdiction over resident factory workers, the town erected a monument to the seven.³ Another memorial hangs in the municipal salon; through the 1960s, the town’s schools commemorated the execution with an annual holiday; and to this day, a bust of Barrios is “held prisoner” in a makeshift prison cell in a municipal building. The large stone cross still stands amid grazing sheep and drying laundry in the old cemetery overlooking the river valley and the factory, its chiseled words evoking the memory of those whose “hatred of tyranny made them martyrs.”

Local chroniclers are not alone in depicting the 1884 execution as a milestone in the relationship between an indigenous community and a modernizing liberal state. Foreign scholars likewise highlight the event as the inevitable violent result of a reforming state’s attempt to transform the subsistence agricultural production and communal political relations that supposedly distinguish indigenous communities. Anthropologist Manning Nash has emphasized the Cantelenses’ fear of change in their opposition to the factory, while more recently, historian Jim Handy has cited the episode as an example of how an indigenous community “steadfastly resisted” land and labor reforms brought about by the state.⁴

Thus, both anthropologists of the 1950s concerned with modernization and contemporary historians interested in peasant resistance depict the event as a turning point in state-community relations. The continuing success of an industrial factory has become the ironic symbol of an agro-export

2. “El día mas triste.”

3. MC, Libro de actas 1958, actas 68, 71.

4. Manning Nash, *Machine Age Maya: The Industrialization of a Guatemalan Community* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), 17–24; Jim Handy, *Revolution in the Countryside: Rural Conflict and Agrarian Reform in Guatemala, 1944–1954* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1994), 53–54. In these two studies, mention of the execution is incidental.

elite's triumph over subsistence-based indigenous communities in its project of rationalizing land tenure and mobilizing plantation labor.

Meanwhile, in a larger context, the central question of nineteenth-century Guatemalan history turns on two successive attempts by Liberals to create a cohesive state with political and military, if not cultural, hegemony. In the years following independence from Spain in 1821, Enlightenment Liberals limited the institutional power of the Catholic church and abolished the corporate protection of indigenous communities.⁵ Elite factionalism and a massive popular rebellion, however, soon smashed the Liberal dream. Beginning in 1839, the Conservative José Rafael Carrera ruled Guatemala and dominated Central American politics for 26 years.⁶ In 1871 Liberals once again took power; and the state, led by the coffee planter Barrios from 1873 to 1885, legislated primitive capital accumulation that made Mayan land, labor, and revenue available to the rapacious needs of the new coffee economy and a burgeoning bureaucracy.⁷

While the deleterious effects on indigenous municipios of the reforms decreed by the first Liberal regime pale in comparison to those enacted by the "coffee state," no sustained popular resistance ensued after 1871.⁸ Why? Guatemalan historiography is still in its infancy, and the responses to this question fairly reflect the academic literature's nascent development. Preliminary answers have focused on the state's increased technical and financial ability to repress Indian dissent.⁹ Recently, mostly because of the careful work of David McCreery, historians have begun to pursue more sophisticated inquiries. The process of land expropriation and labor exploitation now

5. See Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., *Central America: A Nation Divided*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985); Jim Handy, *Gift of the Devil: A History of Guatemala* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1984); Mario Rodríguez, *The Livingston Codes in the Guatemalan Crisis of 1837-1838* (New Orleans: Middle American Research Institute, 1955).

6. On Carrera, see Hazel Ingersoll, "The War of the Mountain: A Study of Reactionary Peasant Insurgency in Guatemala, 1837-1873" (Ph.D. diss., George Washington University, 1972); and Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., *Rafael Carrera and the Emergence of the Republic of Guatemala, 1821-1871* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1993).

7. For a general treatment of indigenous land dispossession and labor exploitation, see Julio C. Cambranes, *Coffee and Peasants: The Origins of the Modern Plantation Economy in Guatemala, 1853-1897* (Stockholm: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1985). For debt labor and seasonal migration, see David McCreery, "Debt Servitude in Rural Guatemala, 1876-1936," *HAHR* 63:4 (Nov. 1983), 735-59. For the most detailed examination of changes in property relations resulting from coffee cultivation to date, see McCreery, "An Odious Feudalism: *Mandamiento* Labor and Commercial Agriculture in Guatemala, 1858-1920," *Latin American Perspectives* 13:1 (Winter 1986), 99-118; and his *Rural Guatemala, 1760-1940* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1994).

8. See McCreery, "State Power, Indigenous Communities, and Land in Nineteenth-Century Guatemala, 1820-1920," in *Guatemalan Indians and the State, 1540-1988*, ed. Carol A. Smith (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1990), 96-115. For the coffee state, see Cambranes, *Coffee*, 611.

9. See McCreery, "State Power," 104, 110-11.

seems less abrupt than historians had previously assumed, and continuities between the Conservative and Liberal regimes are being stressed.¹⁰

Despite this increasingly subtle interpretation of Guatemalan state consolidation, however, some sharp edges still remain. In Guatemala, where exploitation *generally* runs along ethnic lines, literature tends to code Indians as victims and ladinos as villains. Thus, historians still hesitate to examine the complex relations that bind the Maya to their communities as well as to ladino society. McCreery writes, in 1994, that Indian “relations with the elites and the state have been almost entirely those of reaction and avoidance.”¹¹

The intent of this essay is to provide a close historical ethnography of Cantel’s political relations by examining how social actors, both Indians and ladinos, subjectively experienced global processes of state formation and capital accumulation—processes that Guatemalan historiography often assigns “objective status” and places outside the purview of the “ethnographic gaze.”¹² In Cantel, at least, Mayan relations with the ladino state and elites went well beyond “reaction and avoidance.” The land and labor laws of the coffee state did have a dramatic effect on Cantel’s social relations; but as this essay will argue, that effect can be understood only by examining intra-communal divisions, tensions, and contradictions, as well as extracommunal alliances and social integration. While this point is important in providing a deeper understanding of state formation, it has more than heuristic relevance. For this essay will also argue, perhaps counterintuitively, that it is these very divisions, contradictions, and relations that account for Cantel’s high degree of cultural survival and self-awareness.

As I researched this article, I was surprised time and again at how often popular accounts of town history paralleled their supposedly more sophisticated academic counterparts.¹³ Not only do both types of narratives present the execution as symbolic of tensions between an Indian community and a ladino state, they both tend to elide internal communal differences and tensions. It would be hard to find a better description of primitive capital accumulation than the story that Cantelenses had to sell communal land to save the town from destruction. When I first read of this extortion, I dismissed it as a myth. But then, in a local archive, I found the following single

10. See, e.g., *ibid.*; Lowell Gudmunson and Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, *Central America, 1821–1871: Liberalism Before Liberal Reform* (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1995).

11. McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, 10–11.

12. For a call for the “anthropology of national or international forces and formations,” see John and Jean Comaroff, “Ethnography and the Historical Imagination,” in their edited volume of the same title (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 11.

13. See Florencia E. Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1995), chap. 9, for an examination of the play between local and national histories and local and international intellectuals.

reference by Cantel's mayor, protesting that he could not provide labor to work the coffee plantations.

Those who do not have *jefes* in town are all on the plantations of the coast and many more are in the factory. . . . I do not have any more inhabitants because they are all working . . . to pay back the creditors for *la mancha negra* [the black stain] that happened to us in 1884—to pay back the 15,000 pesos that señor General expresidente don J. Rufino Barrios took from us.¹⁴

It seems that Barrios did indeed levy a fine against Cantel in 1884. While 15,000 pesos is not quite 120 quintales *de plata*, it was enough to force some Cantelenses to sell their labor. Yet by reducing the story of how Cantelenses entered into relations of wage and debt labor to a simple conflict between local leaders and Barrios, this popular account erases the role that Cantelenses themselves played in the transformation to capitalism.

That an execution in Cantel did take place is certain. The town's 1884 civil registry on September 4 lists six names, giving *fusilado* (shot) as the cause of death.¹⁵ Beyond this, however, events and causes are open to historical interpretation. While all the circumstantial evidence confirms that Barrios bore responsibility for the execution, a closer investigation would reveal that the president was not the sole author of the crime; he had accomplices. In other words, while we have the bodies, motives and suspects abound. Key to understanding what transpired that day is an analysis of how larger economic and political changes transformed community-state relations, as well as how Cantel's intra- and extracommunal relations of production and politics mediated those transformations.

Many Cantelenses made their living supplying wheat and wood to neighboring towns and cities. Throughout the nineteenth century, demand for both products increased. This demand, combined with a sharp increase in population, altered Cantel's internal relations of production. At the heart of communal tensions leading to the execution was a struggle between Cantelenses who made their living as *aserradores* (woodcutters), and therefore wanted to maintain "communal" access to woodland, and those who wanted to privatize municipal forests into agricultural land. Both opposing factions used the language of community to further their interests. As the reforms and opportunities of the Liberal state intensified communal divisions, these competing groups increasingly appealed to the central government to arbitrate their conflicts, which in turn produced the contradictory effects of increasing community identification while at the same time strengthening the power of the state.

14. AGQ, bulto 1885.

15. MC, Libro de defunciones, tomo 1, Sept. 4, 1884, entries 1721–26.

This essay's endpoint, then, is the execution. Not, however, because it symbolically represents the state's final penetration into indigenous communities, for Cantel's history continues to this day. Rather, because the search for answers to the simple questions, Whodunit? and Why did they do it? will bring us a bit closer to understanding nineteenth-century Guatemalan state formation.

The Municipio of Cantel

The town of Cantel is situated in the western highland department of Quezaltenango, five miles southeast of the department capital of the same name. The municipio sits on the southern edge of the altiplano, just at the point where the sierra quickly drops off to hot Pacific coastal lowlands.

As it emerged from colonial times, the town bore many of the trademarks of corporate communities described by Mesoamerican anthropologists.¹⁶ Village elders held a complex of religious and civil offices, exercising moral and political authority. Six *cofradías* were operating in the pueblo by the 1870s. Municipal offices, usually two *alcaldes* (mayors) and four *regidores* (council members), remained completely in indigenous hands throughout the nineteenth century. Unlike many neighboring Indian communities, moreover, Cantel's population remained almost completely K'iché throughout the nineteenth century, with no non-Indians as late as 1878, despite the town's proximity to the department's capital city.¹⁷

Despite these hallmarks of corporate culture, Cantel had considerable interaction with neighboring towns. Along with other similar K'iché-speaking communities, as well as the two urban administrative centers of Quezaltenango and Totonicapán, it made up a social and economic complex that had once formed the western confines of the pre-Spanish K'iché kingdom.¹⁸ At the end of the eighteenth century, these towns were intertwined in a network of local and far-reaching regional trade.¹⁹ While most Cantelenses

16. See Eric R. Wolf, "Closed Corporate Peasant Communities in Mesoamerica and Central Java," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 13:1 (Spring 1957), 1–18; idem, "The Vicissitudes of the Closed Corporate Community," *American Ethnologist* 13:2 (May 1986), 325–29. For Guatemala, see Christopher H. Lutz and W. George Lovell, "Core and Periphery in Colonial Guatemala," in Smith, *Guatemalan Indians*, 35–51, esp. 47.

17. AGQ, bulto 1878.

18. See Robert M. Carmack, *The Quiché Mayas of Utatlán: The Evolution of a Highland Guatemalan Kingdom* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1981).

19. See Jorge Hernando González, "A History of Los Altos, Guatemala: A Study of Regional Conflict and National Integration" (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1994); Miles L. Wortman, *Government and Society in Central America, 1680–1840* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1982). See also "Año de 1763. Autos formados sobre la Real Cédula . . .," in *Boletín del Archivo General de Gobierno* (Guatemala City) 2:3 (Apr. 1937), 316–23; AGCA, ST-Q, paquete 1, expediente 17.

cultivated corn for their subsistence needs, many engaged in other economic activities. Some made and sold pottery and blankets, others carried cotton from the coast, and still others raised sheep. Cantel's most important regional economic niche, however, was to supply wheat and wood to the surrounding regions.²⁰ Cantelenses traded wheat as far away as the Verapaces, often returning with *panela* (black sugar) to sell in Quezaltenango.²¹ *Aserradores* extracted cypress and pine from the community's *bosque* (woodland), which they sold in neighboring communities and cities.²²

Located outside the purview of bureaucratic and historical documentation, communal norms and relations governing Mayan land use are hard to identify. For this reason, historians have too often been content to emphasize putative mystical cultural values that govern communal land relations. They often stop short of examining how these values were produced.²³ Some remote indigenous pueblos that had open access to an agricultural frontier may indeed have had "free movement of individual families across the broadly defined *ejidos* . . . subject only to the claims of subgroups within the community to certain tracts."²⁴ In other, more populated regions, such as Quezaltenango, land use was much more proprietary. Many *vecinos* had access to the village *ejido* (common land) without enjoying actual legal possession, either through municipal *censo enfiteusis* (long-term lease) or membership in a *cofradía* or *parcialidad* (kin group or clan). These parcels ranged from small family *milpas* (corn plots) of 10 to 40 *cuerdas* (16 *cuerdas* equaled 1 acre; 1,792 *cuerdas* equaled 1 *caballería*) to much larger tracts cultivated with wheat and corn for sale outside the community.²⁵

After decades of use, these lots often came to be regarded as private property, to be sold, bequeathed, and, following the second Liberal regime, registered. While all *vecinos* had access to pastureland, not all were wealthy enough to own animals. In Cantel in 1797, out of a population of 800 indi-

20. AGCA, ST-Q, paq. 1, exp. 17; AGCA, signatura A1, legajo 5347, exp. 54096.

21. AGCA, ST-Q, paq. 1, exp. 17.

22. "Año de 1763. Autos formados," 320; AGCA, ST-Q, paq. 1. Occupational data from an 1893 census underscore the importance of Cantel's pine and cypress reserves. Of 2,392 professions listed, 165 were *aserradores*. This was by far the largest per capita and gross number of *aserradores* for any indigenous municipio of comparable size. See Guatemala, Dirección General de Estadística, *Censo general de la República de Guatemala* (Guatemala City: Typ. Nacional, 1894), 7.

23. See Steve J. Stern, *The Secret History of Gender: Women, Men, and Power in Late Colonial Mexico* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1995); Gavin Smith, "The Production of Culture in Local Rebellion," in *Golden Ages, Dark Ages: Imagining the Past in Anthropology and History*, ed. William Roseberry and Jay O'Brien (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1991), 180–207.

24. McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, 239.

25. Numerous requests for *títulos supletorios* from the late 1870s and 1880s, located in AHQ, demonstrate the longstanding proprietary nature of land use, at least in regard to agricultural lands, among the Maya of Quezaltenango and its environs.

viduals and 208 tributaries, only 31 owned livestock.²⁶ In some communities where wood was either scarce or especially valuable, use of forest land was more restricted. Cantel enforced strict quotas limiting how much timber could be cut and employed *guardabosques* (sentries) to ensure that no one cut more than allowed. Yet this restriction is deceptive, inasmuch as taxes or fines allowing for greater extraction could be paid by those able to afford them.

Cantel's incessant nineteenth-century land struggles can be explained only in relation to its regional integration. While population growth precipitated the town's land crisis, intracommunal relations of production mediated its form. As suppliers of lumber and fuel, Cantelenses needed to preserve large tracts of municipal land as forest. In 1801, Cantel had within its borders 46 *caballerías* of land (1 *caballería* equaled 112 acres).²⁷ Two-thirds of this municipal land was cypress and pine forest, covering large hills on the municipio's eastern and southern outskirts. As an important source of revenue for some Cantelenses, this land was vigorously protected, both from external incursions and internal attempts to cultivate it. Thus, with a growing population needing access to agricultural land, the only way Cantel could preserve forest land was to expand north. Expanding north, however, entailed constant conflict with both neighboring Indian communities and the Hacienda Urbina, the largest in the highlands, which annually produced thousands of bushels of wheat and corn.²⁸

For decades before and after independence, Cantelenses fought the hacienda in the courts and in the fields over boundaries and grazing rights. Even after Cantel purchased the hacienda in 1833, the conflict continued.²⁹ Cantel's municipality paid 10,976 pesos to the hacienda's owners, the Ayerdis family, for a little more than 31 *caballerías*.³⁰ While the purchase was made collectively as a corporation, the money was raised through contributions from both well-to-do vecinos and *cofradías*. The land was then divided among the contributors, with a portion set aside for the agricultural needs of comuneros.³¹ Whether rent was to be paid on this land is unknown. What is clear from subsequent attempts to regain expropriated land is that the wealthier contributors clearly regarded the land they received as private property, although they continued to refer to it in its totality as an *ejido*, or commons.

26. AGCA, sig. A1, leg. 5347, exp. 45096.

27. AGCA, sig. A, leg. 2898, exp. 24710; AGCA, ST-Q, paq. 21, exp. 9.

28. Pedro Cortés y Larraz, *Descripción geográfico-moral de la diócesis de Goathemala*, 2 vols. (Guatemala City: Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala, 1958), 107. See also AGCA, sig. A1, leg. 5347, exp. 45096.

29. AGCA, sig. B, leg. 28529, exp. 5.

30. Ibid.; AGCA, ST-Q, paq. 5, exp. 3.

31. AGCA, sig. B, leg. 28540, exp. 157; AGQ, bultos 1845, 1846.

In 1836, during the first Liberal regime, a representative for the Ayerdis family appeared before the first circuit judge asking for foreclosure on part of the purchase, because of Cantel's failure to keep up the payments.³² The judge ruled against Cantel, and in 1838 ten *caballerías* were expropriated.³³ Notably, it was not until Carrera consolidated his power in 1840 that Cantel launched a prolonged process of litigation and appeal. Although Carrera was at least nominally sympathetic to Indian interests, local realities slowed the Cantelenses' efforts to regain their land. In March 1844, Carrera ordered the corregidor to restore seven *caballerías* to Cantel.³⁴ By this time, however, the Ayerdises had resold much of the expropriated portion to two adjacent indigenous towns, San Francisco El Alto and San Cristóbal, and two large ladino landholders, Isidro González and José María Arriola.³⁵

The corregidor seemed at a loss as to what to do. Attempts by Cantelenses to replant the land were met by violence from both Indians and ladinos. Cantel's authorities claimed that Indians from San Francisco El Alto, "with rocks and sticks," beat and killed Cantelenses trying to plant; that José María Arriola sent *mozos* to pull up their crops; and that "many ladinos arrived looking for [Cantelenses] in order to beat them."³⁶ Indians from San Francisco El Alto appealed Carrera's decision, emphasizing that the original 1833 sale was void because of the Cantelenses' failure to meet payments. Because they had subsequently purchased it honestly and justly, the Indians argued, the land should remain in their possession.³⁷ A settlement of sorts was reached when the government in 1847 reimbursed San Francisco El Alto, San Cristóbal, González, and Arriola, and the Cantelenses agreed to follow a renegotiated payment plan, with the state acting as lender.³⁸

Just as this conflict ended, a new one with Indians from nearby San Miguel Totonicapán began. In the early 1840s, an indigenous parcialidad led by Vásquez Tzil from Totonicapán declared that San Cristóbal had taken a portion of its territory, along with the land it had purchased from the Ayerdises. When this land reverted to Cantel in 1847, the Totonicapán Indians hindered Cantelenses' attempts to reclaim and cultivate it. According to one witness, Indians from Totonicapán evicted Cantelenses from the disputed land and burned their houses.³⁹ In 1865 the Tzil parcialidad commissioned a

32. AGCA, ST-Q, paq. 3, exp. 3. See also AGQ, bulto 1836.

33. AGCA, ST-Q, paq. 4, exp. 2.

34. *Ibid.*, paq. 3, exp. 3; AGCA, sig. B, leg. 1419, exp. 33382; leg. 28530, exp. 3; leg. 28592, exp. 5; AGQ, bulto 1845.

35. AGCA, sig. B, leg. 28530, exp. 10; leg. 28532, exp. 17; AGCA, ST-Q, paq. 3, exp. 3; and AGCA, LP, Cleto Cordova, 1844-47, May 6, 1847.

36. AGCA, sig. C.1, leg. 3, exp. 43.

37. *Ibid.*, sig. B, leg. 28530, exp. 10.

38. *Ibid.*, leg. 28532, exp. 17; leg. 28565, exp. 5, 6; AGQ, bulto 1856.

39. AGCA, ST-Q, paq. 5, exp. 1.

land surveyor, Juan de Dios Morales, to measure the contested land. Indians from Cantel responded swiftly and violently to this new threat. On June 20, 1865, a contingent of Cantelenses attacked the surveying party, leaving more than 25 Totonicanepes dead, the surveyor beaten, and his instruments *inutilizados*.⁴⁰

Corporate representation in these disputes produced its own tension. During the 1847 restitution, for example, the brothers Baltazar, Antonio, Pedro, and José María Colop, along with Diego Xet, claimed five *caballerías* that they professed to have lost in the 1838 expropriation.⁴¹ Yet municipal authorities accused Baltazar and his brothers of taking advantage of the confusion to claim more land than the two *caballerías* they had originally received. What's more, the authorities protested, the Colops took advantage of municipal political connections, paying far too little for what they did receive. "Baltazar and his brother Antonio gave to señor Sebastián Colop, who in that year was first alcalde, 42 pesos; . . . with this little amount they took a large tract of land."⁴² Despite the protests, Baltazar and his brothers managed to repossess the five *caballerías*.

In 1855, Isidro González demanded 1,100 pesos for *mejoras* (improvements) done to the land he returned to Cantel in the 1847 restoration, and threatened to take the matter to court if he were not compensated. Once again faced with the expropriation of the Urbina purchase, Cantel, as it had in the original 1833 purchase, raised capital from individuals. The *alcaldes municipales y principales del pueblo* approached Baltazar Colop, Santiago Xacalxot, and Olayo Morales and "obligated" them to pay González the money "so that the land would be free from the lien." Even though the *municipales* quickly repaid them 570 pesos, less than a year after the loan Colop, Xacalxot, and Olayo appealed to the *corregidor* for the balance: "We ask that you order the *alcaldes* either to pay us immediately . . . in cash . . . or to measure and give us the land that corresponds to the said amount."⁴³

These ongoing disputes among the *principales* reveal the complex and ambivalent nature of Indian identity, which scholars of nineteenth-century Guatemala too readily collapse into community residence.⁴⁴ Baltazar Colop and his brothers received a large amount of land in the 1833 purchase. While later municipal authorities complained about how they had obtained this land, the brothers saw no conflict of interest. Members of a well-to-do family with longstanding claims to community leadership, they probably

40. AGCA, sig. B, leg. 28600, exp. 521; leg. 28592, exp. 65; AGCA, ST-Q, leg. 31, exp. 14.

41. AGCA, sig. B, leg. 28530, exp. 1.

42. *Ibid.*, leg. 28540, exp. 157.

43. *Ibid.*

44. See Sol Tax's paradigm-creating article, "The Municipios of the Midwestern Highlands of Guatemala," *American Anthropologist* 39:3 (1937). 423-44.

played a crucial role in the events and decisions leading to the purchase of the hacienda. The large tract they received in the purchase and the later restoration no doubt sustained many families in the community, binding the Colops in a web of extended patriarchal relations. That a relative was first alcalde when the land from the 1833 purchase was distributed only tied together individual, filial, and communal interests even more.

Considering the complex and changing society in which nineteenth-century Guatemalan Indians lived—a world of political revolutions, separatist movements, rebellions, local conflicts, intrigues, regional commerce, epidemics, and natural disasters, as well as everyday happiness and frustration—there is no reason to believe that indigenous identities and interests were not equally as intricate, evolving, and contradictory. The municipio was not a crucible in which competing identities dissolved and homogenized, but a contested arena that competing interests claimed as their own. In their disputes, both sides insistently presented themselves as *vecinos del pueblo de Cantel*. As coffee capitalism spread, population and production pressures increased, and communal divisions deepened, however, these competing factions increasingly had to appeal to the state to back up their demands, furthering the process of state formation. Within less than a year of their loan, Colop, Xacalot, and Morales were writing the corregidor for redress; which indicates that at least for these three, the state was something more than a political last resort.

The Coffee State

The formation of states, much like the making of classes, is not something that happens like the rising of the sun “at an appointed time.”⁴⁵ Whatever general characteristics the Guatemalan state manifested nationally, its formation was always also local.⁴⁶

In 1871 Liberals once again assumed control over the state. Less inspired by Enlightenment principles than by precepts of progress and order, if not necessarily law, these new coffee positivists, led by Justo Rufino Barrios, enacted land and labor reforms intended to promote coffee cultivation and export, along with a host of lesser decrees and laws designed to raise revenue and effect control. The state established burial taxes, land and civil

45. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1963), 1.

46. For a discussion of the Guatemalan state's insertion into North Atlantic global capitalism, see Carol A. Smith, “Local History in Global Context: Social and Economic Transitions in Western Guatemala,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26:2 (Apr. 1984), 193–228; and Robert G. Williams, *States and Social Evolution: Coffee and the Rise of National Governments in Central America* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1994).

registration fees, population and agricultural censuses, and labor laws, along with new mechanisms to collect, count, and enforce. Underwriting all of these changes was an expanded military, usually headed by local caudillos.

In the department of Quezaltenango, both the expanding coffee economy and numerous public works projects demanded more labor than was readily available.⁴⁷ In the 1880s a public and private building boom was under way. Not only did the ladino elites build roads, bridges, ports, and railroads to meet their export needs, but the city of Quezaltenango became a public showcase for Liberal ideals. The city council began construction on a new municipal palace (larger than the national palace in Guatemala City), built an imposing departmental penitentiary, opened schools, widened boulevards and lined them with trees, laid out public gardens, erected statues to Liberal martyrs, and drained swamps.⁴⁸

Both the 1873 *contribución de caminos*, designed to supply workers for public projects, and the 1877 *mandamiento*, a colonial forced-labor draft retooled to fit the needs of coffee finqueros, placed the responsibility of supplying needed labor on indigenous authorities. Local alcaldes were required to fill labor requests made by *jefes políticos*. If the request was for a *mandamiento*, usually an agent of the finca bearing the *jefe político's* order would arrive in the pueblo to distribute a cash advance to the needed workers.

These measures to appropriate indigenous labor took on striking variations even within close territorial proximity. In the region surrounding Cantel, these variations were most vivid between the Mam towns northwest of the city of Quezaltenango and the K'iché towns (including the city itself) to the southeast. A look at the municipal origins of the indebted peons reveals the corvée's differential impact on highland communities. Information on 1,302 colonos from the Costa Cuca coffee region just southwest of the city reveals that while 378 were from Mam-speaking towns, only 71 were from the K'iché towns of Cantel, Zunil, Almolonga, and Quezaltenango.⁴⁹ Only 3 colonos came from Cantel. The importance of these towns as regional suppliers of basic grains and raw materials, plus their proximity to larger urban centers, provided inhabitants of these K'iché communities with leverage to resist the *mandamiento*.

Economic integration and location may not have been all that spared them. Cantel's authorities repeatedly claimed that all the able men not already working on coastal fincas were employed within the town limits.

47. AGQ, bulto 1873.

48. *Ibid.*, bulto 1884.

49. Data from debt peon rolls in the AGQ, bulto 1894. The Mam towns were Cajolá, 79; San Martín, 16; Cabricán, 51; Huitán, 35; Palestina, 2; Concepción, 63; and San Juan Ostuncalco, 132. The majority of the remaining colonos were from the departments of Totonicapán, Huehuetenango, and San Marcos.

“All are contracted with the *señores agricultores* of this pueblo, cultivating corn and wheat. The harvest of wheat, which is the progress of our country, has just begun.”⁵⁰ Debt data exist for six wheat- and corn-growing farms in Cantel.⁵¹ In 1894, at least 43 Cantelenses were indebted more than 15 pesos each to 6 landowners, at least 4 of whom were K'iché and vecinos of Cantel.

A number of obvious questions arise. Were these contracts simply a means of avoiding the labor draft? Or were they an economic gloss for more “traditional” kinship or clan relations? Did they represent real labor relations in the community? If they did, were they long-established or recent additions to village production patterns? As we have seen, individuals or families in Cantel owned what amounted to large tracts of private property. While the specific attitudes, norms, and social relations governing the cultivation of those lands remain unclear, Cantel was a wheat-exporting town. Whether through relations of wage, kin, or clan, some residents of the town did work for others on enterprises that made money, and probably had done so for some time.

Thus, rather than resistance to labor drafts successfully forming within networks of communal autonomy and solidarity, in Cantel and Quezaltenango it was actually regional integration and intracommunal stratification that tempered the effects of the *mandamiento*. Socially homogeneous and isolated towns in the Mam region were hard hit by the labor drafts, while in Cantel and Quezaltenango, potential *corvée* victims found refuge in the interstices of intracommunal labor relations.

The Family and the Factory

In many ways, the 1871 Liberal revolution represented a final triumph of the old Estado de los Altos, the highlands' shortlived separatist movement (1837–39)—this time extended throughout the country.⁵² Barrios himself was from the Los Altos department of San Marcos, and immediately after the revolution, he returned to the highlands to consolidate his power as *jefe político* of Quezaltenango before assuming the presidency in 1873. Altenses in exile or politically dormant during the long Carrera period now assumed a prominent place in national politics. If the economic base had changed over the decades—moving from regional trade to coffee production—many of the players, or at least the families, remained the same.

One such family, the Sánchezes of Quezaltenango—father, Francisco;

50. Mayor of Cantel to *Jefe Político* of Quezaltenango department, AGQ, bulto 1886.

51. *Ibid.*, bulto 1894.

52. See González, “History of Los Altos”; Arturo Taracena Arriola, “Invención criolla, sueño ladino, pesadilla indígena: Los Altos de Guatemala, de región a estado, 1750–1850” (Unpublished ms., 1996).

mother, Agripita; daughter, Dolores; and sons, Delfino, Guillermo, and Urbano—held enormous economic power and political influence both regionally and nationally throughout the early decades of the Liberal state. Around 1853, expanding on his merchant and aguardiente businesses in Totonicapán to acquire vast extensions of land on the coast, Francisco transferred his family to Quezaltenango, where he established his *casa de comercio*, a retail and wholesale outlet selling tools for artisans and farmers, local and imported clothes, musical instruments, luxury items, corn grinders, stoves, water pumps, and other goods to the regional population.⁵³ The family consolidated its holdings in 1875 as Sánchez e Hijos, and by 1887 possessed at least 18 coffee and sugarcane fincas totaling more than 90 *caballerías*. In addition, the firm owned 25 lots of urban property in Totonicapán, Quezaltenango, and Guatemala City and considerable shares of the Banco de Occidente and the Banco Internacional.⁵⁴

Building on ideological, institutional, and personal ties, longtime Liberals Francisco and Delfino returned from exile in 1871 to take prominent positions in national politics. Francisco helped found the country's first post-Carrera Liberal newspaper, and Delfino held a number of government offices.⁵⁵ In 1883 the Sánchez family became conjugally linked to the state when Urbano married Barrios' daughter, Clotilde.⁵⁶

For decades before the Liberal triumph, the cornerstone of any highland industrial development the Altense elites may have dreamed of was a textile factory. A textile industry, Altenses believed, would both stimulate cotton cultivation and provide cheap, locally produced textile products to the highlands' dense population. Following the Liberal revolution, Francisco Sánchez received government permission to build a factory. From its inception, it was a large-scale, ambitious operation. An 1887 inventory lists 13 buildings, including 7 dormitories for workers, residences and offices for managers and the director, and a large cement structure with an iron roof that contained the weaving and spinning machines.⁵⁷ Workers, as many as a thousand by the turn of the century, processed ginned cotton into white cloth using technology and machinery imported from Oldham, England.⁵⁸

The family located the factory in Cantel both for the town's proximity to Quezaltenango and Totonicapán and its location on the river, which powered

53. Tania Sagastume Paiz, "Fábrica de Hilados y Tejidos Cantel" (Unpublished ms., 1992), 7, subsequently published with the same title in *Cuadernos de Investigaciones*, vol. 8 (Guatemala City: USAC, 1992). Page numbers refer to the ms.

54. Ibid. For financial and personal information on the Sánchez family, see 7–25.

55. Nora B. Thompson, *Delfino Sánchez: A Guatemalan Statesman, 1840–1885* (Ardmore, Pa.: Thompson, 1977), 25–94.

56. Ibid., 15.

57. Sagastume Paiz, *Fábrica*, 32.

58. Nash, *Machine Age Maya*, 18.

the factory's machinery. The exact date the plant became operational is unknown.⁵⁹ The concession was granted in 1880; the first land survey for the factory's location took place in 1881; and transportation of basic construction material, such as stone and bricks, started at the end of 1881. Initial operations were under way by 1883.

In many ways, the construction and later operation of the factory was primitive capital accumulation at its most transparent. From 1882 on, Manuel Lisandro Barillas, the *jefe político* of Quezaltenango, gave direct mandamiento orders to Cantel and other towns to supply the workers needed to transport materials and to build the factory and its immediate infrastructure.⁶⁰ Indians hauled rocks from quarries in Totonicapán and carried spinning and weaving machines from the nearest coastal railroad station up into the highlands. Municipal authorities complained that the workers were not paid *su justo precio* and were treated *inhumanamente*.⁶¹

A factory of this scale needed adequate roads and bridges for its transport activities; work gangs were ordered to widen and fix both the road from Cantel to Quezaltenango and the road to the coast. The state not only mobilized Cantel's labor, but also expropriated its revenue. In November 1882, Delfino Sánchez, acting as minister of development, ordered that "the funds belonging to the *cofradías* of Cantel be applied to the construction of two bridges that are needed . . . in the pueblo and . . . on the road to Quezaltenango."⁶²

Needless to say, many in Cantel were not at all happy with the coming of the factory and the labor and revenue demands that accompanied it. Indeed, discontent with Liberal reforms had already manifested itself several years earlier. On August 6, 1878, Casimiro Sacalxot, a *principal* and member of the municipal council, returned from the capital and, claiming that he carried orders from Barrios, called together 25 vecinos to take his fellow councillors prisoner. Sacalxot charged the municipal authorities with abusing their role as community leaders by "selling people to the *jefatura política* so that they could be put to work on the roads." He also accused them of imposing more than the legal fee to register births in the civil registry.⁶³

This event is significant in two respects. First, Sacalxot's accusations, whether true or not, highlight the kind of connections and dependence that may have existed between Indian authorities and the state, as personified by the local *jefe político*. Both routine administration and furtive abuses of

59. Nash states, incorrectly, that the factory was established in 1876. *Ibid.*, 17-18.

60. AGQ, bultos 1881, 1882.

61. *Ibid.*, bultos 1882, 1883.

62. *Ibid.*, bulto 1882.

63. "Contra Casimiro Sacalxot de Cantel, por suvertir el orden en dicho pueblo," AGQ, bulto 1878.

power by community authorities were linked to the regional ladino state apparatus, and were usually, as in this case, tied to labor and revenue demands. As land disputes and other pressures in the community increased, so did challenges to those authorities. While appeals to state officials were nothing new, village leaders increasingly came to depend on extracommunal relations with ladinos to prop up their weakened position. Sacalxot and his followers held the council members hostage for 24 hours in the municipal building; they were released only when the *jefe político* sent a squadron of ladino militia to free them.

Second, it is possible that Sacalxot actually did meet with Barrios in the capital. A U.S. traveler wrote in 1884 that on arriving at the national palace, she found

In the courtyard . . . 75 or 100 Indians from the country, sitting and lying on the ground in the sun, waiting hours and hours and sometimes all day for a chance to pay their respects to him. As soon as he came in sight every Indian rose and took off his hat. Many were satisfied with a mere glance, while others had some trivial complaint to offer. These complaints were often somewhat amusing, but Barrios always listened to them attentively, and with a few words and a pat on the head sent the Indian off perfectly happy.⁶⁴

Did Sacalxot sit for hours in the sun in the palace courtyard, hoping to gain a brief audience with the president? Did he creatively misinterpret “a few words and a pat on the head” from Barrios as a blessing to take hostage his municipal colleagues? Whatever the case, this is precisely how he justified his and his followers’ actions.

Aside from the obvious appeal to a higher and absent authority, what is especially interesting is that Sacalxot’s tactics echoed past protest strategies. Cantelenses often used the divergence of local and national interests to press their own demands. Community leaders would appeal legally and emotionally to higher authorities seeking judicial redress and protection, while at the local level they would engage in open acts of defiance, such as land invasion, livestock slaughter, and ambush. Employed throughout the nineteenth century, this tactic worked as long as some separation of local and national interests existed. But with the transition to coffee and the Liberals’ restoration, highland and national interests merged. Whatever did or did not happen between Barrios and Sacalxot, Barrios himself sent a letter to Quezaltenango’s *jefe político* a few days after the event, ordering him to “remove . . . Sacalxot from his [municipal] office . . . and punish him if there is merit to the charges against him.”⁶⁵

64. Helen Sanborn, *A Winter in Central America and Mexico* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1886), 63.

65. AGQ, bulito 1878.

Barrios and the State

From the start, local reaction to the coming of the factory was informed by internal divisions. In 1880, Barrios ordered Cantel's authorities to provide land and labor to the Sánchez family, and the municipio, led by then-alcalde Cruz Salamé, refused. As punishment, Barrios ordered 11 *caballerías* of forest land to be expropriated, with 10 to be given to the neighboring ladino pueblo of Salcajá.⁶⁶ On June 16, 1881, the current alcalde, Antonio Yxtac, sent a desperate plea to Barrios to remove "the punishment . . . of giving the mountains and the wood to those of Salcajá."⁶⁷ If Barrios complied, Cantel would gladly carry out the president's "order . . . to give to the señores Sánchez e Hijos the land that is necessary at the banks of the river in order to construct the machines they intend to establish."⁶⁸ Yxtac went on to point out that "if the opposition had been general among the pueblo then the punishment would be deserved; but the true culprit is the aforementioned alcalde."⁶⁹ He then offered to supply workers for the Sánchez enterprise if Barrios would suspend his order.

We cannot be sure why Barrios ordered the expropriation, but from the inception of the factory, the president had exhibited a keen interest in events in Cantel. On November 28, 1879, he sent a telegram to Quezaltenango's *jefe político*: "Send the alcaldes of Cantel to me as soon as possible."⁷⁰ This may have been when he informed them of plans to establish a large industrial textile factory on the town's ejidal lands. In March 1881, he wired the *jefe político* to "measure the land in Cantel where they are going to put the textile factory."⁷¹

Despite his Liberal rhetoric, Barrios was very much the capricious and paternalistic caudillo, dispensing his wrath and largess as need or whim dictated. His hands-on management style toward indigenous communities, undoubtedly perfected during his years as a coffee finquero and Quezaltenango's *jefe político*, often entailed a mix of psychology and legal inconsistency. In 1881, for example, he ordered the *jefe político* of Quezaltenango to free three Indians from the town of Zunil who participated in a riot: "put them at liberty with a scolding . . . and warn them that if they continue as such I will come to punish them severely."⁷² A few months later, he ordered the alcalde of Zunil to expel "three or four of the most perverse" of ten local troublemakers, explaining that "with this it will be enough that the remain-

66. AGCA, ST-Q, paq. 16, exp. 6.

67. AGCA, sig. B, leg. 28684, exp. 791.

68. *Ibid.*

69. *Ibid.*

70. AGQ, bulto 1881.

71. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*

ing [ones] become afraid and conduct themselves better.”⁷³ And one year after his official decree establishing the *mandamiento*, Barrios came to the defense of the Indians from Olintepeque, chastising the local *alcalde*: “As I have said to you numerous times, there is no *mandamiento de mozos*. . . . If the *comandante* of Olintepeque abuses the Indians, get rid of him and put another in his place.”⁷⁴

In Cantel, continuing population growth and an increasing demand for corn, wheat, wood, and pasture strained the community’s precarious balance of subsistence and commercial production. Combined wheat and corn production increased from 21,000 bushels in 1840 to 40,000 in 1878.⁷⁵ Starting in the 1870s, the number of requests from Quezaltenango for wood increased, and with them municipal complaints of rapid deforestation from illegal cutting, both by Cantelenses and Indians from the neighboring community of Zunil.⁷⁶ In 1882, municipal authorities increased the number of *guardabosques* assigned to patrol the forests.⁷⁷ And in 1892, a reforestation project was ruined by the illegal pasturing of sheep, which destroyed thousands of cypress trees planted the year before.⁷⁸

Demographic and production pressures, combined first with the specter of a huge factory and then with the expropriation of a large tract of forest, all within a political context that weakened municipal authority and autonomy, turned Cartel’s everpresent tensions and fissures into gaping rifts.

Antonio Colop Estrada and the Community

What historians might identify as communal tensions, historical actors often experience as opportunities; moments when they can deploy the language and symbols by which people understand their world to change that world. With ambition, impertinence, and political acumen, one such Cantelense, Antonio Colop Estrada, emerged as the leader of a faction in the increasingly disputatious relations of Cantel’s municipal politics.

If, as James C. Scott suggests, the task of peasants is to stay out of the archives, Colop Estrada did not do a very good job.⁷⁹ Complaints from other Cantelenses over his machinations, along with Colop Estrada’s own defense, pervade Cantel’s correspondence. He was, to put it mildly, a contentious sort who did not mind leaving a long paper trail. An elector in the 1878 mu-

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid., bulto 1878.

75. AHQ, cajas 1840, 1878.

76. AGQ, bulto 1878.

77. Ibid., bulto 1882.

78. Ibid., bulto 1892.

79. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1990), 87.

nicipal elections, he spoke, read, and wrote Spanish well; his handwriting and grammar were sharp and clear; and his signature bore a stylized paraph. He married into a wealthy family: Pascuala Sacalxot de Colop's father, Juan, at the time his will was drafted in 1885, owned 500 *cuerdas* of pastureland, 90 *cuerdas* cultivated with corn and 50 with wheat, 40 sheep, 4 mules, and a house.⁸⁰

Colop Estrada's life bridges two important periods in his community's history. Born in 1846, Antonio was 19 when Cantel attacked the surveying commission from Totonicapán. Even if he did not participate in the ambush, the chronic struggles with ladinos and other Mayan communities undoubtedly contributed to his understanding of what it meant to be Cantelense. Yet the changes coming from the Liberal reforms in the 1870s and 1880s must have reconfigured his sense of community, authority, and power, leaving him curious and open to potential benefits and opportunities. Of course, any reading of his life must remain indefinite at best; and it is just this ambiguity that is captured in his first substantial appearance in the archival record.

On August 14, 1880, a number of Cantelenses were performing a *baile de la conquista* (a dance in which Mayans dress as conquistadores and mimic scenes from the conquest) when José Yxcot left to purchase more aguariente from the state-controlled liquor supply.⁸¹ A fight broke out between Yxcot and a ladino soldier in charge of selling liquor, and the soldier stabbed him. Witnesses carried Yxcot to the municipal building, where he died a half-hour later.

On hearing of the stabbing, Colop Estrada, dressed as a conquistador replete with flowing cape and golden locks, marched a crowd down the town's main street to the municipal hall, where he demanded that the indigenous council members turn the soldier over to them. If the soldier were sent to Quezaltenango, Colop Estrada insisted, he would never be held accountable for Yxcot's death, for "the life of an Indian is not worth anything there." When the authorities refused, Colop Estrada called them "unos ladrones" (thieves) and other insulting "frases inmorales" (immoral phrases). He then picked up a rock and threw it at the soldier, rendering him "deprived of his intellectual faculties." The rest of the crowd followed suit and hurled "a multitude of rocks" at the municipales. Once again, it took reinforcements from a nearby garrison to break up the riot. The documentary account ends with Colop Estrada, who was arrested along with three other Cantelenses, escaping from Quezaltenango's newly constructed penitentiary.

Aside from showing his flair for the dramatic, this event is most telling not for Colop Estrada's ostensibly valiant defense of community but for his

80. AGCA, LP, J. Mariano Molina, 1884-85.

81. The following description is from "Contra Antonio Colop Estrada, Juan Antonio Estrada, y Manuel María Yachbalqu por sedición," AGQ, bulto 1880.

challenge to municipal authority. This spontaneous attack on the town politicians was followed by a much more sustained and serious confrontation. On August 8, 1882, 11 vecinos of Cantel wrote President Barrios requesting a grant of six hundred *cuerdas* of communal land, "where the rich pasture their animals."⁸² They wanted the land to plant corn and wheat. Colop Estrada wrote and signed the letter. On August 28, 1883, the president granted the request.⁸³ Two years later, Colop Estrada petitioned the president for proof of ownership for himself and 67 others. Municipal authorities attempted to block the issuing of titles, complaining that Colop Estrada had taken advantage of the president's "good faith and generosity" by giving him a document "plagued with distortions."⁸⁴ They charged that Colop Estrada had taken for himself more than eight hundred *cuerdas* and had declared himself "supreme authority . . . and sold lots of various sizes," totaling more than five *caballerías*, to 67 Cantelenses.⁸⁵

The *jefe político*, Barillas, agreed that Colop Estrada had taken more land than was granted and had distributed and sold it to more people than he was authorized to do. Colop Estrada never denied the charges, defending himself with an interesting appeal to Liberal paternalism.

Señor presidente, you know very well that land under the communal system produces little or nothing. Is it prudent and economical to take these lots from us so that they can be placed again under the . . . unproductive system of communal property? We are going to be left without even a little land where we can plant corn for our children.⁸⁶

Colop Estrada responded violently to attempts to redistribute the land equitably, at one point threatening a municipal officer with a revolver and at another, counseling the wife and daughter of a *socio* to attack a Cantelense trying to reclaim land.⁸⁷ During 1885 and 1886, the municipality issued more than a dozen complaints to the *jefe político* about Colop Estrada and his hold over the other grantees. "Only in crime do they maintain themselves by the counsel of Antonio Colop Estrada and to this day they have not stopped harassing the whole town."⁸⁸

Colop Estrada's mastery of Spanish, which in 1880 had allowed him to defend the community, now helped him advance his personal interests. As one municipal officer observed, Colop Estrada was able to take advantage of poorer and less educated vecinos because "the poor find themselves in

82. AGCA, ST-Q, paq. 21, exp. 9.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

86. Ibid.

87. AGQ, bulto 1885.

88. Ibid., bulto 1886.

unfortunate circumstances both for their poverty and their ignorance of Spanish. . . . They can be manipulated by an intelligent man.”⁸⁹ At the same time, it is significant that the municipality’s 1885 complaint goes on to explain the reason the town’s authorities were silent for so long about Colop Estrada’s abuses. “To our disgrace, the majority of members that composed the municipality in that year and the following were associates of . . . Colop Estrada and helped him carry out the expropriation.”⁹⁰

The Execution

In December 1883, José Ubaldo Ruíz was elected *alcalde* to serve in the coming year. Within a month of his election he petitioned Barrios to ask that the remaining 30 *caballerías* of Cantel’s woodland be privatized and parceled out in lots of 30 *cuerdas* each. His justification was that the land was being quickly deforested and the municipality could not protect it.⁹¹ On February 29, Barrios gave his permission; and from June to August, the state surveyor Luis San Juan measured the land to be distributed.⁹² Located in the municipio’s southeast corner, this land’s northwest portion bordered the five *caballerías* taken by Colop Estrada and his followers.

On June 17, in preparation for the measurement, Ubaldo Ruíz told Colop Estrada and the others to mark off their territory with flags so as to guide the surveyor. The sight of the flags, however, provoked the Cantelenses already incensed with Colop Estrada’s concession. An angry crowd surrounded Ubaldo Ruíz in front of his house and heatedly questioned him about the purpose of the flags. Being “of the same language,” the mayor responded in *lengua* (a popular term for a Mayan language) that the flags were to indicate the land that Barrios had conceded to the “hijos of Cantel.” When Ubaldo Ruíz asked what the crowd wanted, Gaspar Tixal, Ramón Chojolon, and Santos Ajsac came forward and said they were “not happy with the concession . . . and that they opposed it in all forms.” As a result of supposed threats Chojolan and Ajsac made to Ubaldo Ruíz, Barillas sentenced them to 20 days in prison.⁹³

Anger over the land concessions coalesced as organized opposition. Cantel’s ladino political commissioner, passing on information he had received from Colop Estrada, wrote to Barillas, “people are meeting in the *cofradía* San Antonio who oppose the dispositions given by the president with

89. *Ibid.*, bulto 1885.

90. AGCA, ST-Q, paq. 21, exp. 9.

91. *Ibid.*

92. *Ibid.*

93. “Queja de los vecinos de Cantel contra Ramón Chojolan, Santos Ajsac por insubordinación,” AGQ, bulto 1884.

respect to the lands conceded to Colop Estrada.”⁹⁴ On June 19, Colop Estrada himself wrote to Barillas, naming 14 conspiring Cantelenses, including Ramón Chojolan, “who, out of envy, always treat us badly, destroying our crops with their animals. . . . They are meeting in the house of Santos Ajsac and are saying that it is well known that very soon there is going to be a change of government.”⁹⁵

A highland regional conspiracy against Barrios’ government was indeed afoot. On August 9, about 30 men armed with Remingtons and shotguns left Tapachula, Mexico, and crossed into Guatemala, where they were quickly defeated. Influenced by both an ongoing border dispute with Mexico and a desire to discredit the invaders as foreigners, Guatemala’s secretary of foreign relations sent a telegram to Mexico City charging that the insurgents were Mexican.⁹⁶ Yet this was but one of many armed challenges. The testimony of eyewitnesses alleging widespread Mayan participation in the conspiracy, as well as the state’s reaction in the following months, suggest that the rebellion was indigenous in more ways than one. Of more than 182 people arrested in the next few weeks, at least 71 were from Indian communities.⁹⁷

Of the 32 arrested from Cantel, six were executed on September 4: Antonio Salanic; Ventura Ordoñez Colop; Felix Sacalxot; Nicolás Sam; Ramón Chojolan; and his son Francisco Chojolan, aged 22.⁹⁸ Ramón Chojolan had led the June protest against the two concessions and had been implicated by Antonio Colop Estrada for conspiring against the government. Nicolás Sam, interestingly enough, was the heir of Baltazar Colop, who with his brothers had obtained five *caballerías* of land in the 1847 restoration. Sam had reason to be discontented: four *caballerías* Baltazar had left to him were included in the ten Barrios granted to Salcajá in 1881. It is significant that although all the municipal authorities—that is, the elected cabildo—were arrested except José Ubaldo Ruíz, none were among those executed, contradicting both popular and academic history.⁹⁹

Executions occurred in other indigenous pueblos as well, and evidence strongly suggests that Barrios ordered them personally. As soon as Barrios

94. Ibid.

95. Ibid.

96. Casimiro D. Rubio, *Biografía de general Justo Rufino Barrios* (Guatemala City: Tip. Nacional, 1935), 535–36.

97. The following is a partial tally: San Marcos, 56; Coatepeque, 27; San Pedro Sacatepequez, 16; Cantel, 32; Cajolá, 13; Tejutla, 2; Salamá, 1; Salcajá, 1; Concepción, 1; Pajapa, 16; Zunil, 10; Huehuetenango, 1; and Saquichun, 9.

98. I found no information on the seventh person, executed in the capital.

99. For the accusations against the six executed, see AGQ, bulto 1884; for the rest of their ages, see MC, Libro de defunciones, tomo 1, 1877–1886, partidas 1721–26. For the academic history, see Handy, *Gift of the Devil*, 53–54; and Nash, *Machine Age Maya*, 17–24.

learned of the rebellion, he set off “to the west to punish severely those who were involved.”¹⁰⁰ He traveled to San Marcos by way of the coast, taking his time after receiving reports that his troops easily had repelled the invaders. Barrios’ itinerary took him first to the coastal city of Retalhuleu; from there he continued to San Marcos, then to Quezaltenango, returning to Retalhuleu on September 6. Accounts by the Conservatives, combined with archival evidence, suggest that executions occurred in as many as 16 communities, with Barrios ordering at least 10 of them.¹⁰¹

Barrios arrived in Quezaltenango on August 24 with much pomp and celebration.¹⁰² Some Quezaltecos did indeed have reason to cheer. Coffee exports were at an all-time high; public works projects were renovating the city; workers had just completed a rail line linking the port of Champerico and Guatemala City; Quezaltenango’s first international fair, celebrating Central American independence, was only a few weeks away; and it was Barrios’ birthday.¹⁰³ After Barrios approved a new city tax to fund public works and personally donated five thousand pesos for the completion of the municipal theater, the local newspaper gushed, “Quezaltenango and all the pueblos of the *occidente* owe gratitude to General Barrios.”¹⁰⁴ Not surprisingly, not one of the local or national newspapers carried reports of the bloodier side of Barrios’ highland tour. They were too busy reproducing birthday congratulations from foreign dignitaries and odes to El Reformador and his wife.

Barrios’ visit was a remarkable inversion of an event that took place more than 40 years earlier. On April 2, 1840, Rafael Carrera, in the midst of his project of state building, entered the city of Quezaltenango and executed 18 members of the ladino municipality. The horror and outrage provoked by the arrogance of this mestizo “swineherd” killing the city’s leading lights in cold blood produced reams of commentary, verse, and condemnation. To

100. Miguel Alvarado, *General Justo Rufino Barrios* (Quezaltenango: Alvarado, 1925), 26.

101. The communities were San Sebastián, San Felipe, San Andrés Villa Seca, Santo Domingo, Cerro Gordo, San Gabriel, Cantel, Cajolá, San Antonio Sacatepéquez, San Pedro Sacatepéquez, San Pedro Saloma, Todos Santos, San Pedro Necta, Ixtahuacan, Colotenango, and San Sebastián Coatán. See Pedro Joaquín Chamorro Zelaya, *El patrón: estudio histórico sobre la personalidad del general Justo Rufino Barrios* (Managua: La Prensa, 1966); Manuel Valladares Rubio, *Estudios históricos* (Guatemala City: Editorial Universitaria, 1962); *Reproducción de escritos interesantes para la historia patria* (Guatemala: Tip. “El Comercio,” 1894); AGQ, bulto 1884. For San Sebastián see AGCA, sig. C.1, leg. 298, exp. 8034. For San Sebastián’s land conflicts with ladino Altenses just before the execution, see AGCA, ST-Q, pag. 2, exp. 10; pag. 2, exp. 13; pag. 3, exp. 7. For land disputes in San Felipe and San Andrés, see *ibid.*, pag. 2, exp. 7. For the towns in the department of Huehuetenango where thousands of pesos in money and property were confiscated, see AGCA, sig. B, leg. 2784, exp. 28738. More research is needed on the importance of this invasion and subsequent repression for the formation of the liberal state.

102. *Diario de Centro América* (Guatemala City), Sept. 1, 1884.

103. *El Bien Público* (Quezaltenango), Aug. 28, 1884.

104. *Ibid.*

this day in Quezaltenango, Carrera's act, with all its racial undertones, is commemorated and mourned.

Forty-four years after Carrera's bloodbath, Barrios entered the city on his project of state building and apparently ordered the last of the executions, that of the six Cantelenses, the account of which did not make it into the newspapers, let alone the official national history. The irony is even greater in light of one Conservative polemic, which contends that on ordering the execution of the Cantelenses, Barrios listened to "a long speech . . . condemning the memory of . . . Carrera for having executed in 1840 the members of Quezaltenango's municipality."¹⁰⁵ Of course, the message sent by the executions was not intended for the newspaper-reading public.

Barrios at times accommodated indigenous interests and unrest; but unfortunately for the conspirators, national and international politics allowed no such indulgence this time.¹⁰⁶ Since the Liberal triumph, Central American union had been an implicit part of Barrios' plans, but internal rebellions and border disputes with Mexico around the Chiapas-western highland region had precluded any attempt at confederation.¹⁰⁷ By 1882, however, internal stability had allowed Barrios to negotiate a border treaty defining permanent boundaries with Mexico.¹⁰⁸ With friendly governments installed in El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, Barrios began to plan his unification campaign. His tour of the highlands in the autumn of 1884 therefore was not altogether unanticipated. On the pretext of celebrating the newly inaugurated Ferrocarril del Sur, Barrios invited the presidents of Honduras and El Salvador to meet him at Champerico in mid-September to discuss union.¹⁰⁹

After his stay in Quezaltenango, Barrios, apparently content with his "pacificación del occidente," returned to Retalhuleu, where he and his guests boarded the train and sped into the capital.¹¹⁰ At this point, Barrios certainly wanted no repeat of the Momostenango rebellion that had swept the highlands just seven years earlier.¹¹¹ Hence his brutal reaction to the August 9 insurgency.

105. Valladares Rubio, *Estudios históricos*, 439.

106. For an analysis of Barrios' contradictory management style for indigenous communities, see McCreery, "State Power."

107. Thomas Karnes, *The Failure of Union: Central America, 1824-1960* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1961); Steve Palmer, "Central American Union or Guatemalan Republic? The National Question in Liberal Guatemala, 1871-1885," *Americas* 49:4 (Apr. 1993), 513-31.

108. Lista de los pueblos, rancherías i fincas que por la nueva línea divisoria pertenecieron a Guatemala habiendo sido de México; i de otras que pertenecieron a México i eran antes de Guatemala, AGQ, bulto 1884.

109. Rafael Meza, *Centro América: campaña nacional de 1885* (Guatemala City: Tip. Nacional, 1935), 65.

110. C. Rubio, *Biografía de general Justo Rufino Barrios*, 537.

111. Robert M. Carmack, "State and Community in Nineteenth-Century Guatemala: The Momostenango Case," in Smith, *Guatemalan Indians*, 120-21.

The events so far described might lead to the conclusion that in Cantel, discontent over internal and external land expropriation, plus increased labor and revenue demands associated with the coming of an industrial factory, drove many citizens to participate in a regional conspiracy against the government; and that the government, caught up in its international political maneuvering, reacted with unusual harshness. While no smoking gun exists linking Barrios to the crime, the circumstantial evidence is compelling. But one piece is still missing.

Machine Age Machinations

In his book *Machine Age Maya*, Manning Nash writes that the Cantelenses' fear of *novedades* (new things) may have driven them to oppose the factory.¹¹² Even today, standing at the edge of the town center, some three hundred meters above the river valley, it is easy to understand how foreign academics and Cantel's own local intellectuals have seized on the factory as an apt symbol for the Indian community's ongoing relations with ladino society. If now, among *milpas* and mountains, the complex seems incongruous, more than one hundred years ago the impact of its size and noise must have been awesome. Records of the firm's land acquisitions, however, indicate that the coming of the factory inspired more than awe in some Cantelenses.

In 1890 the Sánchez factory owned 578 *cuerdas* of land in Cantel, which it had acquired in four separate land transactions.¹¹³ On July 21, 1881, the factory purchased 150 *cuerdas* from 37 Cantelenses for 875 pesos.¹¹⁴ When the Sánchez family registered the land a few weeks later, its size had inexplicably increased by more than one acre.¹¹⁵ The sale took place four months after Barrios personally ordered the measurement of the factory's future site, and at least five of the 37 Cantelenses who sold the land were either implicated by Colop Estrada in his June 1884 accusation or arrested after the invasion, including one of those eventually executed, Ramón Chojolan. And although the notary recording the sale declared that the municipality had granted the land in 1873, the sellers did not receive a title until just one month before the transaction.¹¹⁶

The next three transactions are even more suspicious. On September 25, 1884—exactly three weeks after the massacre—Colop Estrada sold 47 *cuer-*

112. Nash, *Machine Age Maya*, 18.

113. AGCA, ST-Q, pag. 46, exp. 4.

114. SRP, tomo 33, fol. 77v, no. 3896, tomo 7, diario, fol. 327, no. 436. All SRP references are for the Department of Quezaltenango.

115. *Ibid.*, tomo 7, diario, fol. 515, no. 711.

116. *Ibid.*, tomo 33, fol. 77v, no. 3896.

das to the factory for 185 pesos.¹¹⁷ The records of this sale claim that Colop Estrada purchased the land legally in 1877, as listed in the property registry. That listing, however, records only 14 *cuerdas*, leaving a little more than 2 acres of Colop Estrada's sale to the Sánchez family unaccounted for. One day later, on September 26, the third transaction took place when José María Aleja, who had received land in Colop Estrada's 1883 land expropriation, sold 6 *cuerdas* for 26 pesos.¹¹⁸

The fourth purchase occurred on March 31, 1885, and consisted of 350 *cuerdas*, to this day the majority of the factory's immediate holdings.¹¹⁹ Led by Colop Estrada, who acted as translator, 67 Cantelenses arrived in the office of the Sánchez family notary, J. Mariano Molina, and sold 350 *cuerdas* of land for 1,240 pesos.¹²⁰ Although this sale took place six months after the execution, the 67 appeared before the second circuit judge on September 13, just nine days after the event, and asked for title.¹²¹ While their unnamed representative (Antonio Colop Estrada?) first tried to claim that the land had been granted by the municipality in 1873, the March 1885 property registry listing of the sale states that the land actually was conceded by the municipality in 1883 and was part of Colop Estrada's first disputed concession.¹²²

On December 31, 1884, the judge granted title, and on January 12, 1885, the land was registered.¹²³ It is interesting that José Ubaldo Ruíz—the only municipal authority not arrested after the invasion, a land recipient himself in the 1883 expropriation, and the official who initiated the privatization of Cantel's remaining forest land—testified on behalf of the legality of all three postexecution sales.¹²⁴

Whodunit and Why? Motives, Agency, and Historical Repercussions

An answer to the questions of who actually precipitated the executions in Cantel would entail sifting through the events and clues so far described and choosing the most likely motive. Was it Barrios' concern for matters of state that led to his ordering the execution? His capriciousness? Did he have

117. AGCA, LP, J. Mariano Molina, 1884–86. This sale was not recorded in the SRP until March of the following year, along with the final, largest purchase. SRP, tomo 50, fol. 376, no. 7119.

118. AGCA, LP, J. Mariano Molina, 1884–86, fol. 204; SRP tomo 50, fol. 144, no. 7003.

119. AGCA, ST-Q, paq. 46, exp. 4.

120. AGCA, LP, J. Mariano Molina, 1884–85, fol. 10; SRP, tomo 50, fol. 376, no. 7119.

121. *El Bien Público*, Sept. 13, 1884.

122. *Ibid.*; SRP, tomo 50, fol. 376, no. 7119.

123. SRP.

124. AGCA, LP, J. Mariano Molina, 1884–86, fols. 203v, 204; SRP, tomo 50, fol. 376, no. 7119.

the six Cantelenses shot to help his friends obtain land? Did Antonio Colop Estrada betray the rebellion and turn in his fellow Cantelenses so that he could profit by selling land to the factory? Did Ramón Chojolan and the others join the conspiracy because they were forced to sell their land? Were they executed so the land sales could go through?

It does not seem likely that, had they lived, the six Cantelenses could have prevented the establishment of the factory or even the land purchases; yet the transactions, beginning just nine days after the execution, seem more than coincidental. Did all those who sold land do so voluntarily, or were some coerced? Were Colop Estrada and Ubaldo Ruíz willful accomplices or forced hostages? Evidence suggests that Colop Estrada's relationship with the Sánchez family was longstanding. More than a year before the execution, Colop Estrada wrote to the *jefe político* asking for protection from fellow Cantelenses who "could carry out an armed attack on us, as had been done with the señores Sánchez."¹²⁵ Whatever their relative advantage in Cantel, however, be it familial status or ability to speak Spanish, Colop Estrada and Ubaldo Ruíz were no political equals of the Sánchez family. Despite their earlier intrigues, they could have been forced to make the deal.

Unfortunately, all the evidence at hand is circumstantial. Except for the popular chronicle that opened this essay—written more than a century after the fact—no record exists closely detailing what happened in the days leading up to September 4, 1894. Yet even if a smoking gun existed—a letter, say, from Barrios outlining his motives for ordering the execution, or a transcript of a secret meeting between Antonio Colop Estrada and Delfino Sánchez—it would not illuminate the causes or consequences of the event. Often historians employ microhistories and popular narratives to pick apart more theoretical work that understands social change and politics in relation to structures of power and domination.¹²⁶ The various interpretations or representations of an event say little about history without an examination of the larger context in which the event was produced. To focus on an act, whether a land sale or the writing of an incriminating letter, is to focus on intention

125. AGQ, bulto 1883.

126. For history ultimately, and impotently, consisting of stories told about other stories, see Simon Schama, *Dead Certainties (Unwarranted Speculations)* (New York: Knopf, 1991). German historiography's "history of everyday life" often privileges intent over cause and consequence. See Mary Nolan, "The *Historikerstreit* and Social History," in *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust, and the Historians' Debate*, ed. Peter Baldwin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1990), 224–50. For a Guatemalan example of how a close study of political relations can be employed to undermine larger structural theories, see David Stoll, *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1993). Not all narratives and close studies need be conservative. For two excellent examples of historical narrative infused with structure and politics, see Emília Viotti da Costa, *Crowns of Glory, Tears of Blood: The Demerara Slave Rebellion of 1823* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994); and Jeffrey L. Gould, *To Lead as Equals: Rural Protest and Political Consciousness in Chinandega, Nicaragua, 1912–1979* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1990).

rather than repercussion and to miss the “multiple perspectives” of causality and consequence.¹²⁷

Cantel was embedded in a network of intra- and extracommunal social relations conditioned by their particular historical and ecological context. The contradictions within these social relations intensified as coffee capitalism spread and the Liberal state formed. A growing population demanded that more land be turned over to agricultural production, while relatively privileged yet increasingly politically isolated woodcutters fought to keep land “communal.” Divisions within the community were not new; but combined with the pressures of a consolidating state, the arrival of an immense industrial factory, the commodification of land and labor, and international political maneuvering, they divisions created an explosive situation resulting in the 1884 execution. Without an understanding of these complex relations, the actions of Colop Estrada, Barrios, and the Sánchez family would be meaningless.

After the events of 1884, the government decreed that privatization of Cantel’s 30 *caballerías* of woodland would continue, this time taking care to assure that all landholders received no more than 30 *cuerdas* each. In 1889, however, an attempt to distribute the land to 468 *vecinos* met with fierce resistance by “89 woodcutters of Cantel who impeded the distribution of the *ejido*.”¹²⁸ The grantees complained that even though they had marked off their lots, the woodcutters continued to harass them to the point that they were not able to cultivate the land.

As late as 1990, Christopher Lutz and George Lovell could still state that it would be “unproductive” to portray all Indians “as subjects, not objects, as players who shaped their social situation as much as they were conditioned by it.” Guatemalan society remained “made up essentially of two social classes, the ‘dominant’ and the ‘dominated,’ the conqueror and the conquered.”¹²⁹ Evidence presented in this essay suggests, however, that it is important to examine subaltern agency not just out of political sympathy, but so as to comprehend the very tenacity and endurance of the state.

Within a historical field of force, some social classes and groups retain more power than others.¹³⁰ Guatemala was transformed into an agro-exporting nation. A seasonal agricultural proletariat, made up mostly of Mayans, was created, and the nature of exploitation changed. But it does no justice to those exploited to ignore how power functions within “dominated”

127. Nolan, “*Historikerstreit* and Social History,” 234.

128. AGQ, bulto 1889.

129. Lutz and Lovell, “Core and Periphery,” 48.

130. See William Roseberry’s discussion of hegemony in relation to E. P. Thompson’s field of force metaphor, “Hegemony and the Language of Contention,” in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1994), 355–66.

groups. In too many descriptions of state-community relations, ambitious Indians such as Antonio Colop Estrada or Baltazar Colop are portrayed as aberrations. If we are to understand better how dominant groups exercise and maintain authority, we must explore all manifestations of power. Contradictions and tensions within Mayan society must be not only acknowledged but incorporated into new models of state formation.¹³¹

This essay has demonstrated how, time and again, Cantelenses with disparate access to political, economic, and cultural resources interacted with the state, contributing to its ongoing reproduction. Liberal land and labor laws reconfigured communal relations and led to an increase in intracomunal confrontation and violence; but they did so along already existing lines of cleavage. These tensions were caused as much by the community's internal dynamics as by external pressures. Even the external pressures were not always the product of an imposing state, but sometimes a result of Cantel's long-established integration in Guatemalan society. Increasing demand for wood and wheat, for example, had significantly changed Cantel's internal relations of production.

What the Liberal state did most effectively, and to its own benefit, was lift the veil of communal representation to reveal the multiple interests and contradictions lurking beneath. New leaders, such as Colop Estrada—who, because of his literacy, ability to speak Spanish, and communal authority, could take advantage of tensions between *milperos* and *aserradores*—emerged to represent those interests. This representation, however, entailed the contradictory effect of deepening community identification while reinforcing the state's power. As social tensions increased, competing factions relied to an ever greater extent on the language of community to justify their claims. But in a context of weakening political authority and growing stratification, these leaders increasingly had to call on the state to back up those claims. In Cantel, the state did not arrive unexpectedly in 1871; it was an invited guest.

By stressing extracomunal economic and political ties and intracomunal tensions and stratifications, this essay has argued against essentialized and static notions of ethnicity and community. In doing so it may have unintentionally resurrected the specter of "the rational peasant" who is only loosely constrained by community relations and the community ethos.¹³² It is true that Antonio Colop Estrada was an optimizer if ever there was one. Yet

131. On how the rise of a peasant middle class furthered the process of land privatization and state formation in Mexico, see Friedrich Katz, "The Liberal Republic and the Porfiriato, 1867-1910," in *Mexico Since Independence*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 49-124.

132. For a critique of rational peasantries, see James C. Scott, "Resistance Without Protest and Without Organization: Peasant Opposition to the Islamic *Zakat* and the Christian Tithe," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29:3 (July 1987), 417-52.

to focus on rational choices is again to focus on intent rather than causality and consequence. Colop Estrada was but one of thousands of Cantelenses, and despite his ongoing efforts to manipulate social relations to his benefit, he himself was bound up in them. His status in the community, his access to outside allies, his ability to mobilize a faction, and even his ideas of what personal enrichment was were conditioned by the very relations and norms he sought to transcend.

The Paradox of Popular Memory: Cantel, 1982

To be Cantelense at the end of twentieth century is not the same thing as it was at the end of the nineteenth. Large tracts of nominally communal land have given way to a quilt of small private plots interspersed with large estates held by both Indians and ladinos. Only a small *ejido* remains. Many Cantelenses work in the factory, and many others are indebted laborers on coastal plantations. Since the mid-1960s, more than 50 percent of the town's population has cultivated small, less-than-subsistence plots, while others have no land at all.¹³³ Some work land belonging to others in Cantel, where they grow wheat, corn, apples, and other orchard crops for sale outside the community. A few work as local artisans and merchants, and many are employed in Quezaltenango and Guatemala City in the transport industry or some other sector of the urban economy. A handful of Cantelenses have taken prominent positions in Guatemala's intellectual and pan-Mayan community, and three were elected to the National Assembly.

New organizations and ideologies have furthered divisions in the community. Catechists from Acción Católica challenged the established religious authority of the *cofrades*, while a rise in evangelical Protestantism questioned both of them. Factory workers organized a union in 1945, and village elites joined national political parties, taking advantage of new extracommunal channels of patronage and power. Despite these changes and divisions, however, important notions of community still inform Cantelense identity.

Many of the events examined here support Jeffrey Gould's observations in his study of ethnic relations in highland Nicaragua. There, as in Guatemala, the state relied on Indian elites to meet the land and labor demands of the country's emerging coffee industry. Village leaders were effectively converted into government agents. "Once the indigenous authorities ceased to derive their legitimacy from the *comunidad*," Gould writes, "the incidence

133. Paul McDowell, "The Decline of the Civil-Religious Hierarchy: The Case of Cantel," *N S, northsouth. N S, nordsud* (Canadian Association of Latin American Studies) 5 (1980), 17-35.

of violent abuses increased dramatically.¹³⁴ This also took place in Cantel, as exemplified by the cases of Casimiro Sacalxot, Ubaldo Ruíz, and Colop Estrada.

Unlike Nicaragua's Indian communities, however, Cantel experienced no significant loss of cultural consciousness. Gould writes that both manipulation of Nicaragua's Indian leaders and internal divisions in some villages precluded effective resistance to new forms of exploitation.¹³⁵ As a result, Indian identity disappeared in many regions. In Cantel, by contrast, economic divisions and diversity created a social space in which *vecinos* could take refuge. In the nineteenth century, both integration into the larger regional economy and internal relations of labor saved many Cantelenses from the *mandamiento*. Nor did violent and incessant confrontations among the municipio leadership lead to any significant loss of community or ethnic identity.

This phenomenon continues to the present day. In November 1983, an army colonel from a nearby garrison called a meeting in Cantel's plaza, the purpose of which was to form a *patrulla de autodefensa civil* (PAC).¹³⁶ Established in 1981 under the Romeo Lucas García administration and greatly expanded in 1982 when Efraín Ríos Montt took power, the civil patrols marked a turning point in Guatemala's decades-long civil war. By militarizing the civilian population, the PACs, as David Stoll, in his study of Ixil communities, points out, transformed a war between rebels and the army into a war between Indians, thus finally giving the army the upper hand.¹³⁷

The colonel spoke of the need for Cantelense men to protect their property, wives, and daughters from violence and crime perpetrated by *los subversivos*. His speech was cut short when the crowd spontaneously started hissing and yelling that it was really the army that routinely committed the crimes and violence. Many listeners simply turned their backs. Angriily, the officer concluded the meeting. A week later, a second attempt to form a patrol ended with the same result. Keeping in mind that this occurred at an extreme moment of army repression, which left 440 communities destroyed and tens of thousands dead—indeed, scores of Cantelenses disappeared fol-

134. Jeffrey L. Gould, "¡Vana Ilusión! The Highlands Indians and the Myth of Nicaragua Mestiza, 1880–1925," *HAHR* 73:3 (Aug. 1993), 420–21.

135. *Ibid.*, 422, 425.

136. The following account comes from MC, Libro de actas varias, Nov. 19, 1983, Acta 22, fols. 83–85; and from personal conversations with Cantelenses present at the meeting. See also Carol A. Smith, "Conclusion: History and Revolution in Guatemala," in Smith, *Guatemalan Indians*, 277.

137. Stoll, *Between Two Armies*, 115. The PACs, which continue to serve as vehicles for institutional repression, have been repeatedly condemned by all major human rights organizations. See, e.g., Americas Watch, *Civil Patrols in Guatemala* (New York: Americas Watch Committee, 1986).

lowing the two meetings—this must be deemed a remarkable confrontation. While other communities have since had PACs disbanded, Cantel is possibly the only town that successfully refused to participate in the program from the start.

Again, it can be argued that Cantel's very integration and diversity gave it the wherewithal to resist the PAC. Many, if not most, of Cantel's men work either in the factory or in Quezaltenango. The military is less able to interfere in this type of economic activity than in the local agricultural and commercial enterprises that some more remote pueblos still rely on. It is easier to burn crops and destroy a town on market day than it is to stop a paycheck.¹³⁸ Many Cantelenses, moreover, are members of trade unions, either in the textile factory or in Quezaltenango.¹³⁹ "We factory workers are more awake," one told me, suggesting the level of organizational and ideological experience needed to forestall the patrol. Cantel, possibly because of schools established and supported by the factory, has not only the highest level of literacy among Indian communities in the western highlands, but a higher rate than the republic as a whole, perhaps affording Cantelenses the critical ability to evaluate military propaganda.¹⁴⁰ Finally, one local account claims that the repression following the failed meetings ended only when a Cantelense member of Ríos Montt's evangelical congregation telegraphed the president, asking him to call off the army; which might indicate that extracommunal affiliations contributed to the successful act of resistance.

Whereas integration and diversity may have created the social space needed for resistance, however, this is not how Cantelenses themselves explain the event. When I asked how Cantel, unlike any other Maya community, was able to prevent the formation of a PAC, all those I interviewed, to a person, invoked a group cohesiveness and drew on a memory of collective resistance. "Somos gente culta" and "Tenemos un conocimiento de nuestra historia" were two of many similar responses I received. Nearly all mentioned the 1884 execution, "when Barrios came to destroy the town because we loved freedom."

The paradox of popular memory in Cantel is that while it homogenizes differences and smooths out tensions so as to provide a discursive space where resistance can be articulated, it is, to a large degree, generated from

138. Ricardo Falla notes that it was often on market days that the military attacked communities. See his account of the 1982 army slaughter at Cuarto Pueblo in *Masacres de la selva: Ixcán, Guatemala, 1975-1982* (Guatemala City: Editorial Universitaria, 1992), 83-106.

139. These last two points are suggested by C. Smith, "Conclusion: History and Revolution," 285.

140. Guatemala, Instituto Nacional de Estadística, *Censos nacionales: IV habitación-IX población, 1981; Características generales* (Guatemala City: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 1984), 227.

the very tensions and differences it seeks to erase.¹⁴¹ While this paradox is furthered by Cantel's high literacy rate, which has helped produce a disproportionately large number of local and national intellectuals, it is not new. The nineteenth century saw competing factions with starkly different interests all speaking in the name of the *comunidad*, contributing to the myth of communal cohesiveness. Thus those executed in 1884 can be transfigured into municipal authorities, and the role of Ubaldo Ruiz, the actual mayor in the events leading to the execution, can be forgotten.

If forms of cultural continuity can be called resistance, then Cantelenses seem to challenge the current academic theories that locate subaltern opposition within traditional networks of communal autonomy and solidarity.¹⁴² In Cantel, effective resistance formed as a result of, rather than a reaction against, integration. Yet this is a big qualification. The relationship between resistance and cultural identity, if critical, is not unproblematic. Subaltern ethnic markers and identities can thrive while other forms of exploitation are maintained or increased. What does it mean that Cantelenses still preserve an important cultural self-conception if most of them do not have enough land to feed their families, or if a large percentage live in poverty? In the wake of Guatemala's failed socialist revolution, many national and foreign intellectuals have taken an indigenista turn. Mayan ethnicity is exalted, and class analysis is ignored. Yet the social nightmare in which too many Guatemalans currently live can be explained not by one or the other approach but by an intelligent inquiry that combines both.

141. For two examples of how the reproduction of an oppositional tradition can be based on a selective memory, see Ted Swedenburg, "Popular Memory and the Palestinian National Past," in Roseberry and O'Brien, *Golden Ages, Dark Ages*, 152-79; and G. Smith, "Production of Culture."

142. See Craig Calhoun, *The Question of Class Struggle: Social Foundations of Popular Radicalism During the Industrial Revolution* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982); idem, "The Radicalism of Tradition: Community Strength or Venerable Disguise and Borrowed Language," *American Journal of Sociology* 88:5 (Mar. 1983), 886-914; James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1976); idem, "Hegemony and the Peasantry," in *Politics and Society* 7:3 (1977), 267-96. For a Central American example, see A. Douglas Kincaid, "Peasants into Rebels: Community and Class in Rural El Salvador," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29:3 (July 1987), 466-94.