Secrecy, Subjectivity and Sociality: An Ethnography of Conflict in Petén, Guatemala (1999-2000)

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Abstract

The thesis explores the relations between histories of violence and cultures of secrecy in Petén, northern Guatemalan in the aftermath of the Peace Accords signed in 1996 by the Guatemalan government and guerrilla insurgents. Informed by ethnographic research among displaced constituencies with experiences of militancy in the guerrilla organisation Rebel Armed Forces, the thesis traces the contours of dispersed and intermittent guerrilla social relations. It explores histories of governmentality in Petén and their relations to state-sponsored violence, insurgency and repression; the incitement and replication of ambivalence in social relations; the production of socialities and subjectivities marked by secrecy; guerrilla ethics and aesthetics of sociality established through generation and circulation of substance; phenomenologies of guerrilla prosthetic embodiment and subjectivity.

Violence and conflict are shown to be deeply implicated in guerrilla secret socialities and subjectivities. In turn, the social and cultural field appears as a site of ever-increasing partiality. In an effort to apprehend and represent the shifts in perspective thus engendered, the thesis asks what presuppositions make partial subjectivities and socialities amenable to experience, reflection and representation. Through anthropological knowledge practices, social and cultural realms appear plural, complex and relative. However, when anthropology is located within the history of Western metaphysics, it is clear that traditions of anthropological enquiry have imagined partiality to be the culturally specific manifestation of a universal human condition, cognitive structure or interpretative capacity. Since Nietzsche and Heidegger, progressive weakening of Western metaphysics and erosion of the foundations of thought have made these presuppositions problematic. Further, they have engendered the conditions of possibility for anthropology to move beyond the enumeration of potentially infinite partial perspectives grounded in strong universalist assumptions. Anthropology that accepts the weakening of Western metaphysics imagined as the advancement of nihilism may apprehend and represent constant shifts of partial perspectives in anti-foundational terms, thus also realising its nihilist vocation.

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List of Acronyms

ALMG   *Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala* – Guatemalan Maya Languages Academy

ANN   *Alianza Nueva Nación* – New Nation Alliance

CEH   *Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico* – Commission for Historical Clarification

CIA   United States Central Intelligence Agency

CONAP   *Consejo Nacional de Áreas Protegidas* – National Council of Protected Areas

COPMAGUA *Coordinación de Organizaciones del Pueblo Maya de Guatemala* – Coordination of Organisations of the *Pueblo Maya* of Guatemala

CPR   *Comunidades de Población en Resistencia* – Communities of Population in Resistance

EGP   *Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* – Guerrilla Army of the Poor

FAR   *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* - Rebel Armed Forces

FRG   *Frente Republicano Guatemalteco* - Guatemalan Republican Front

FYDEP   *Empresa de Fomento y Desarrollo Económico de Petén* – Enterprise of Economic Fomentation and Development of Petén

MINUGUA   *Misión de Verificación Naciones Unidadas Guatemala* – United Nations Verification Mission to Guatemala

MR-13   *Frente Rebelde Alejandro de León Aragón 13 de Noviembre* – Rebel Front Alejandro de León 13 November

NASA   United Status Agency for National Aeronautics and Space Administration

PGT   *Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo* – Guatemalan Workers' Party

PUR   *Partido Unión Revolucionaria* – Party of Revolutionary Unity

ORPA   *Organización del Pueblo en Armas* – Organisation of People in Arms

PAC   *Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil* – Civil Patrols

PNSL   *Parque Nacional Sierra Lacandona* – Sierra Lacandona National Park

RMB   *Reserva de la Biósfera Maya* – Maya Biosphere Reserve

URNG	*Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* – Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Acknowledgements

'Nosotros estamos y no estamos'

'We are there, but we are not there'

(Turcios Lima, 1967)

'Hay cosas que no se saben, y nosotros nunca las dijimos'

'There are things that are not known, and that we never told'

(Comandante FAR, 2000)

'¡Las preguntas no son las indiscretas, si no las respuestas!'

'Questions are never indiscreet, but answers are!'

(Comandante FAR, 2000)

Introduction

When I arrived in Guatemala in October 1999, the country was in the grip of the electoral campaign for the first 'free and democratic' national elections since the signing of the Guatemalan Peace Accords between the Guatemalan Government and the umbrella guerrilla organisation *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca/* Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) on 29 December 1996. Peace negotiations were punctuated by innumerable setbacks, [1] but eventually they culminated in a series of successive Peace Agreements. [2] The Guatemalan Peace Accords nominally ended a period of thirty-six years of *conflicto armado interno*, or civil conflict.

This thesis explores the relations between histories of violence and cultures of secrecy in Petén, northern Guatemalan in the aftermath of the Peace Accords signed in 1996 by the Guatemalan government and guerrilla insurgents. Informed by ethnographic research among displaced constituencies with experiences of militancy in the guerrilla organisation Rebel Armed Forces, the thesis traces the contours of dispersed and intermittent guerrilla social relations. It explores histories of governmentality in Petén

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[1] Peace negotiations were inaugurated by the 'Procedures for the Establishment of a Firm and Lasting Peace' convened in Esquipulas, Guatemala, August 1987. A second phase of Peace negotiations began in March 1990 and produced the 'Basic Agreement on the Search for Peace by Political Means', known as the 'Oslo Agreement'. This was followed by the 'Agreement on Procedures for the Search for Peace by Political Means', known as the 'Mexico Agreement', and 'Agreement on a General Agenda', both signed in April 1991. The 'Framework Agreement on Democratisation in the Search for Peace by Political Means', known as the 'Querétaro Agreement' was signed in July 1991 and concluded the second phase of negotiations (cf. Sieder 1999, Jonas 2000).

[2] The Guatemalan Peace Accords encompass a framework and eleven Agreements: (i) 'Framework Agreement for the Resumption of the Negotiating Process between the Government of Guatemala and the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca*' signed in Mexico, D.F. January 10 1994; (ii) 'Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights', signed in Mexico, D.F., March 1994; (iii) 'Agreement on Resettlement of the Population Groups Uprooted by the Armed Conflict', signed in Oslo, Norway, June 1994; (iv) 'Agreement on the Establishment of the Commission to Clarify Past Human Rights Violations and Acts of Violence that have Caused the Guatemalan Population to Suffer', signed in Oslo, Norway, June 1994; (v) 'Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous People', signed in Mexico, D.F., May 1996; (vi) 'Agreement on the Social and Economic Aspects and Agrarian Situation', signed in Mexico, D.F. May 1996; (vii) 'Agreement on the Strengthening of Civilian Power and on the Role of the Armed Forces in a Democratic Society', signed in Mexico, D.F., September 1996; (viii) 'Agreement on the Definitive Ceasefire', signed in Oslo, Norway, December 1996; (ix) 'Agreement on Constitutional Reforms and the Electoral Regime', signed in Stockholm, Sweden, December 1996; (x) 'Agreement on the Basis for the Legal Integration of the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca', signed in Madrid, Spain, December 1996; (xi) 'Agreement on the Implementation, Compliance and Verification Timetable for the Peace Agreements', signed in Guatemala, December 1996,' (xii) 'Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace', signed in Guatemala, December 1996 (The Guatemalan Peace Accords 1996).

and their relations to state-sponsored violence, insurgency and repression; the production of socialities and subjectivities marked by secrecy; the incitement and replication of ambivalence and indeterminacy in social relations; guerrilla relatedness and the ethics and aesthetics of sociality established through generation and circulation of substance; phenomenologies of guerrilla prosthetic embodiment and subjectivity.

Revelation and Dénouement

On 24 April 1998 the Human Rights Office of the Archbishop of Guatemala published its report, *Guatemala: Never Again* (ODHAG 1998). In four volumes, the Report detailed the findings of research conducted in the dioceses of the Catholic Church across the country. It focused on detailed analysis of approaches, methods and techniques of violence and terror, and the histories of insurgency and counterinsurgency. In the fourth tome, it named the victims of the conflict. Grounded in interviews with over fifty thousand people, the *Guatemala: Never Again* report attributed the great majority of violations to the Guatemalan Army. On 28 April 1998, four days after the release of the report, Bishop Juan Gerardi was assassinated.

In 1999 the United Nations-sponsored Commission for Historical Clarification (*Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico*, CEH) published the report *Guatemala: Memory of Silence* (CEH 1999). The document was produced in collaboration with the warring parties. Again, the conflict appeared in all its dazzling organisational detail, stern linear periodisation and chilling causal certitude. Unlike REMHI (ODHAG 1998), however, in the Commission for Historical Clarification report anodyne prose and methodical revelation featured alongside systematic omission. The 'memory of silence' would not provide information on the grounds of which criminal prosecutions may be undertaken. The names of victims and perpetrators would not be disclosed, and impunity would be assured.

The Past in the Present

The *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG) was established on 7 February 1982. It brought together the four insurgent organisations operating in the country, namely the *Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres*/Guerrilla Army of the Poor

(EGP), the *Organización del Pueblo en Armas*/Organisation of the People in Arms (ORPA), the *Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo*/Guatemalan Workers' Party (PGT) and the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes*/Rebel Armed Forces (FAR). The history of guerrilla organising in Guatemala, however, had begun over twenty years previously. The first embryonic and yet foundational rebellion took place on 13 November 1960, when discontented Army officers sought to mobilise elements of the Guatemalan Army and stage an insurrection (CEH 1999, Volume I:124, Handy 1984:230). Among them were Marco Antonio Yon Sosa, known as 'El Chino', Alejandro de León, Luis Trejo and Luis Turcios Lima. The latter, also an officer of the Guatemalan Army, had been sanctioned for publicly criticising Army corruption and mistreatment, and had been sent to the Military Base of Poptún, Petén. On 12 November 1960, however, Turcios Lima was in Guatemala City and joined the rebellion (Fernández 1968). The officers were unable to mobilise large numbers of sympathisers in the Army files, and sought refuge in El Salvador (Fernández 1968).

On 26 February 1962 the insurgents released a declaration where they identified as the *Frente Rebelde Alejandro de León Aragón 13 de Noviembre* (MR-13). New guerrilla actions followed, and slowly proliferated. In 1962 a guerrilla column appeared in the western region of Huehuetenango. The local population apprehended the insurgents and turned them in to the Army (CEH 1999, Volume I:125). Meanwhile, members of the PGT (*Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo*) and PUR (*Partido Unión Revolucionaria*) assembled *Frente 20 De Octubre.* Many were killed in a confrontation with the Army. Among the survivors was Rodrigo Asturias, known by his *nom de guerre* Gaspar Ilom, who would later be co-founder and leader of the *Organización del Pueblo en Armas* (ORPA) (CEH 1999, Volume I:128,).

Electoral fraud and intimidation marred the national elections of 1961. Civil unrest followed, with mass mobilisation and protests in Guatemala City led by students and unions. Unable to regain control of the capital, President Ydígoras Fuentes greatly extended the mandate of the Army. According to the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH 1999, Volume I:127), such episodes of popular mobilisation and the increasing prominence of the Army were decisive factors in the establishment of the military confrontation that was to grip the country for over thirty years (ibid:127). Students responded by assembling the guerrilla group *Movimiento 12 de Abril*, and

although the organisation was short-lived, many of its members would join the insurgent organisation that was born in 1962. In December 1962, the PGT (*Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo*) called upon the guerrilla groups MR-13, *Movimiento 20 de Octubre* and *Movimiento 12 de Abril* to devise a common strategy. At the meeting it was decided that the four organisations would seek to overthrow the government through armed struggle. The *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* (Rebel Armed Forces) were born (CEH 1999, Volume I:128, Handy 1984). FAR would be responsible for military aspects of the struggle, and PGT would continue to lead political fronts.

The leader of MR-13 Marco Antonio Yon Sosa, with Rodolfo Payeras, César Montes, Luis Turcios Lima and many others converged in the newly established FAR. FAR guerrilla operations took place in the eastern *departamentos* of Zacapa and Izabal, but by 1963 internal conflicts between FAR and the Trotskyist group close to M-13 increased (Turcios Lima 1968, CEH 1999). Following substantive disagreements as to the aims, objectives and methods of the struggle, M-13 and FAR split. Despite the schism, in 1965 FAR regrouped, headed by Luis Turcios Lima. FAR now encompassed members of the *Juventud Patriótica del Trabajo* and *Frente Guerrillero Edgar Ibarra* (FGEI). An ambitious military guerrilla campaign followed, but during intense activities, *Comandante* Turcios Lima was killed in a car accident (CEH 1999, Volume I:145, Fernández 1968). He was twenty-five years old.[3]

Yon Sosa and Turcios Lima lived on in the memories of the ex-combatants I met in Petén. They were revered figures. Two FAR guerrilla columns operating in and across Petén during the 1980s and 1990s were named after them, and the political programme published by FAR in 1988 featured a photograph of a young Turcios Lima on its cover (FAR 1988). Following the death of Turcios Lima, Camilo Sánchez had been in command of FAR, but in August 1968 Sánchez was captured and command was handed over to Pablo Monsanto (CEH 1999, Volume I:146). Pablo Monsanto was to head FAR until December 1996. In 1968, FAR attempted to make a way into the *departamento* of Alta Verapaz, but the population did not respond positively. The following year, FAR attempted to reach Alta Verapaz and El Quiché from Petén, again with limited success. The northern *departamento* of Petén thus

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[3] An extraordinary account of Turcios Lima's death was offered by 'Tita', the woman who was travelling with Turcios Lima on the day, but who survived the crash (cf. Montes 1968:122-141). She

became their base and key area of operations. Until 1979, FAR did not engage in public operations and concentrated its efforts on organising support among *campesinos*[4] in Petén and among students and workers in the capital (CEH 1999, Volume II:248-9).

Between 1971 and 1979 ORPA underwent a process of organization that resulted in a public declaration of its existence on 18 September 1979 and subsequent operations in the *departamento* of San Marcos, Sololá, Quetzaltenango and Chimaltenango (CEH 1999, Tomo II: 261-4). The EGP was founded on 19 January 1972 by Rolando Morán, who had been militant in previous guerrilla efforts and grew to control large areas of the *departamento* of Quiché. The PGT, FAR, EGP and ORPA had different approaches to the struggle. FAR, EGP and PGT declared a Marxist Leninist orientation, with FAR and EGP closer to orthodox Marxism (CEH, Volume II:236). The operations of both FAR and EGP were informed by the *foquista* theory of revolution of Guevara and Debray (Vinegrad 1998), but FAR was distinctive in its hermetic hierarchical structures and militaristic leanings, when compared with the EGP's emphasis on mass participation (cf. CEH 1999). ORPA, on the other hand, placed emphasis on the racist structure of Guatemalan society rather than on class-based analysis and was less militaristic in orientation (CEH, Volume II: 237). Since 1982, the four guerrilla organisations operated under the aegis of the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca*. Nevertheless, each maintained its distinctive identity, in terms of area of influence, organisational structure, military operations and political organising. In the period after the Peace Accords, the sense of belonging to FAR was very much felt by the ex-combatants I met in Petén, where I conducted most of my fieldwork.

The first document related in earnest to the Peace Accords was signed in 1991 in Querétaro, Mexico. The document bore the signatures of Comandante Gaspar Ilom (ORPA), Comandante Rolando Morán (EGP) and Comandante Pablo Monsanto (FAR). Carlos Gonzales of the PGT also signed all subsequent Accords. The four leaders underwrote the Accords by their respective *nommes de guerre*, but by December 1996, when the final Peace Agreement was drawn, they signed the

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noted that insurgents as well as Army officers attended the funeral.

[4] *Campesinos* may be translated as 'agricultural workers' but it refers more broadly to the rural

document with their civilian names. Their *nommes de guerre* were given in brackets (Guatemalan Peace Accords 1996:293). As established in the *Accord on the Basis for the Incorporation of the Guatemalan Revolutionary Unity to Legality* (Peace Accords 1996:217-37), the URNG was thus set to transition from illegal and clandestine status to a legitimate political party. URNG leaders were turning from *comandantes guerrilleros* to party leaders and elected politicians. The process was fraught with difficulties for all URNG associates, and notably for *ex-guerrilleros/as* in the rural areas and the population who had actively supported the struggle, *las bases*. Many had undergone the process of demobilisation as laid out in the Accords and overseen by the newly established United Nations Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA).

Demobilisation

In February 1997, in preparation for demobilisation procedures, the URNG handed over the names of 3,570 of its members, qualified as '*efectivos*', to the United Nations Mission (MINUGUA). Information concerning weapons of various kinds was also made available and the guerrilla voluntarily disclosed the location of land mines. MINUGUA proceeded to establish eight 'concentration points' located in different areas of the country, where *guerrilleros/as* would gather to demobilise. Each 'concentration point' benefited from a surrounding area of six kilometres in diameter where access to the Guatemalan Army was forbidden. Further, entrance to the 'security areas' by the Guatemalan Police had to be cleared with the United Nations Military Observers. As stipulated by the 'Agreement on Definitive Ceasefire' (Peace Agreements 1996), the URNG had underwritten a commitment to present all its forces, including combatants, intelligence, logistics and medical personnel, as well as its leaders, *el mando*. By 24 March 1997, the guerrilla forces had gathered at the 'concentration points' for a total of 2,928 persons (MINUGUA 1997). As chronicled in their report, the United Nations Mission expressed disquiet, as 642 persons seemed not to have appeared. MINUGUA (1997:4) reported that meticulous explanations were provided by the URNG to justify the low turn out, and their reasons were accepted. The table below illustrates the numbers of combatants who demobilised in each location, with the guerrilla organisations noted.

population.

Table 1: Demobilised Personnel of the URNG

Place	Organisation	Number
Abejas	*Organización del Pueblo en Armas* (ORPA)	250
Sacol	*Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* (FAR)	642
Claudia I	*Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* (FAR)	342
Claudia II	*Organización del Pueblo en Armas* (ORPA)/*Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo*	224
Mayalán	*Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* (EGP)	428
Tzalbal	*Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* (EGP)	499
Tuluché I	*Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* (EGP)/*Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo* (PGT)	285
Tuluché II	*Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* (EGP)	258
Total	**URNG**	**2,928**

(Adapted from MINUGUA 1997:11, Annex II).

Not all *ex-guerrilleros/as* I got to know during my fieldwork had reached the 'concentration points' and formally demobilised. However, all of those who did concentrated in Sacol. Following disarmament procedures, the 'concentration points' were turned into training camps. International Organisations established literacy and health programmes, as well as the somewhat euphemistically termed 'professional training' schemes. The aim of the programmes was to equip people with skills to facilitate their transition from clandestine combatants to civilian life. On 2 May 1997, a ceremony was held in Sacol to finalise the process of demobilisation. As individuals left the 'concentration points', they were issued with identity cards and a 'demobilisation certificate' (*certificado de desmovilización*), commonly referred to by ex-combatants as *carnets de desmovilización*.

Many, however, did not know where to go next. Others, having gone back to their communities to be met by threats and hostility, returned to the 'concentration points'. MINUGUA thus set up four 'refuges' (*refugios*) where these ex-combatants could stay on, receive further training and organise a final resettlement (MINUGUA 1997). The ex-combatants I met in the field referred to these locations as *albergues*. From Sacol, they were moved to Papalja, Cobán, Alta Verapaz. They remembered the months in temporary accommodation as times of extreme uncertainty, frustration and

fear.

No access to land or land tenure provision was made for ex-*guerrilleros/as*.[5] Ex-combatants who were able to establish contact with relatives joined their families. Some, however, considered that their only option was to cluster with fellow ex-combatants and purchase land at market price on which to settle. In 1999, in the aftermath of demobilisation, FAR ex-combatants represented a dispersed constituency. They all held great hopes for the forthcoming elections. Violence, intimidation and vote rigging marred the electoral process in 1999. Nevertheless, they were declared overall 'free and fair': the International Community soon endorsed the electoral results. The *Frente Republicano Guatemalteco*/Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG) won the presidential race in the second round and Alfonso Portillo was elected President. General Efraín Ríos Montt, the man who had risen to power through a coup d'état in 1982 and was considered by many to be responsible for the genocidal counter-insurgency campaigns mounted by the Guatemalan State and Army against civilian population in 1982-1983 (CEH 1999), was installed in Congress. *Ex-comandantes guerrilleros* such as Pablo Monsanto won a seat in Parliament, others worked for the party machinery in the capital. The majority of ex-combatants dispersed across the country. Many of those who had been in the FAR files resettled in Petén.[6]

Secrecy, Violence, Conflict, Ethnography

In 1999, the Commission for Historical Clarification's *Guatemala: Memory of Silence* (CEH 1999) seemed predicated on an ethos of disclosure. It endeavoured to break the silence, bring to light the histories of the conflict and provide the basis for reconciliation. From its inception, however, the Commission for Historical Clarification relied extensively on concealment, as its mandate did not extend to provision of information that may be the ground for criminal prosecutions. As argued

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[5] This was the result of more than an oversight. During the negotiations related to the relevant Peace Accord and in times of interim cease-fire, the guerrilla organisation ORPA kidnapped a wealthy Guatemalan woman and asked for a conspicuous sum of money in return for her release (Jonas 2000:52-3). The kidnapping greatly affected the URNG's bargaining power at the negotiating table, at the time when the Accord for and on behalf of their own combatants was at stake (Jonas 2000). Many ex-combatants thus deeply resented ORPA, and Gaspar Ilom in particular. They argued that the lack of discipline and lax leadership of ORPA had been detrimental to them all and the cause of much hardship.
[6] Many FAR ex-combatants resettled in Petén, but some settled elsewhere.

by Wilson (1998), Peace Accords-sanctioned interdiction of any linkage – between the findings of the Commission for Historical Clarification and the operations of the criminal justice system – produced a partial truth which, failing to be paired with the 'other half' of prosecution procedures, was perhaps, no truth at all. The report *Guatemala: Memory of Silence* (CEH 1999) may have broken the silence with regard to the histories of insurgency and the mechanisms of counter-insurgency, but at the same time it perpetuated the silence which would warrant impunity.

The ethos of partial disclosure of the Commission for Historical Clarification, as much as the programme of open denunciation of the Office of Human Rights of the Archbishop of Guatemala's Report *Guatemala: Never Again* (ODHAG 1998), seemed at odds with my first experiences of fieldwork in Petén. Linear periodisations of the violence inflicted by the Guatemalan State against the insurgent and civilian populations, like those relating to guerrilla organising, were also proving difficult to locate. Despite a general consensus on the accuracy of dates, places, and names where these were provided (CEH 1999, ODHAG 1998), in the early stages of fieldwork the disjunction between the accounts of the conflict offered in the Reports, and people's own experiences and memories, grew ever starker. To the extent that the Reports increasingly seemed partial and hegemonic accounts, the secret socialities of *ex-guerrilleros/as* and their experiences gradually emerged as predicated on a different and more profound partiality.

The thesis explores the multiple partialities engendered in the experiences of itinerant and multi-sited fieldwork in Petén, northern Guatemala, in an effort to represent social relations and subjectivities, marked by histories of violence, and cultures of secrecy. This is an account of the multiple perspectives that emerged in the course of my relations with the ex-combatants of the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes*. Partialities of violence and secrecy trouble anthropological and popular representational practices (Das *et al* 2000, Daniel 1996, Nordstrom and Robben *et al* 1995). They require that researchers grapple with the culturally and historically specific effects of fear and terror (Taussig 1980), and related relational ambiguity and ambivalence. They present the ethnographer with the seemingly paradoxical task of denouncing violence and suffering, whilst refraining from disclosing individual identities, specific incidents or deeds (Daniel 1996). Ethnographies of violence and conflict must simultaneously

expose and conceal. They are inherently partial – peculiarly so.

In the thesis I strive to represent violent histories, secret socialities, and partial subjectivities as they unravelled in and through Petén. I do so through juxtaposition of different texts and experiences, and reflect on how the proliferation of perspectives thus engendered may be replicated in – and make a replica of – the field of anthropology. Whilst partial perspectives produced through ethnography constantly offset each other, I argue that anthropology should also continuously decentre and defer (in and through) its own representational practices and theoretical models. In this sense, writing ethnography coincides with writing theory. Further, ethnographic juxtapositions represent a series of reflections on what anthropological thinking may be, and how ethnographic writing and anthropological thinking may constantly 'out-contextualise' each other (cf. Strathern 1999).

In Chapter One, *The Problem of Context*, I address the question of 'contextualisation' as a key analytical strategy relied upon in anthropology to produce the 'object/subject' of enquiry. I argue that histories of the anthropology of Guatemala have relied on the intersection of notions of 'indigeneity' and 'place' in their context-making efforts. The preponderance of such tropes have produced different nativist accounts which are essentialist and ahistorical. These can be contrasted with selected anthropological accounts of the conflict that disrupt nativism, and expose histories of violence and the movements such histories engender. Anthropological efforts to contextualise the Other produce a series of out-contextualisations.

I am interested in anthropological analytical practices, and the effects of out-contextualisation, in accounting for the relatively peripheral place the northern region of Petén has traditionally occupied in the anthropological imagination. The task is one of devising a representational frame through which the context of 'Petén' may emerge. In Chapter Two, *Multi-sitedness and Desarraigos* (Displacements), I focus on histories of colonisation and the inception of violent governmentality in Petén, from the mid-twentieth century to the ethnographic present. Through textual juxtaposition, I strive to give a sense of the plurality of experiences in the *departamento* and make the conflict emerge surreptitiously, as it did during my fieldwork in people's own accounts.

In Chapter Three, *Towards Weak Description and Thick Nihilism*, I address anthropology's analytical models and, following Derrida (1970), consider the place of anthropology within Western metaphysics. A re-inscription of anthropology within the Nietzschean-Heideggerian genealogy of 'weak thought' reveals the nihilist vocation of anthropology. 'Weak description' and 'thick nihilism' inform the articulation of anthropological hermeneutic practices which are reflexively aware of partiality and provisionality of all interpretation. I argue that 'weak description' and 'thick nihilism' may be analytical modes through which histories of violence and cultures of secrecy may be understood through, and represented in, anti-foundational, transitory, and impermanent hermeneutic practices.

In Chapter Four, *Secrecy, Scale and Anthropological Knowledge*, I consider ex-guerrilla secrecy as it emerged in the course of my fieldwork and the partialities thus engendered. I discuss practices of naming in the insurgency, and related partial socialities and relationalities. I argue the secrecy poses a challenge to anthropological representational practices, while also providing the opportunity for the articulation of anthropological knowledge that moves beyond simple enumeration of multiple perspectives to think socialities, relationalities and subjectivities marked by secrecy in post-plural scales.

In Chapter Five, *States of Violence and Ambivalence*, I consider further articulations of secrecy and partiality with specific reference to state-violence and its effects on social relations and subjectivities. I refer to three stories which offer poignant analysis and exegesis of the arbitrary yet systematic operations of state actors as well as views about the complicity of agents of foreign power, and their adverse effects on human creativity and ingenuity. Further, I trace guerrilla deployment of merographic connections in post-plural scales.

In Chapter Six, *Guerrilla Sociality, Substance and Moral Orders*, I consider multiple partial accounts of guerrilla life in Petén. I note that in one account, the guerrilla was imagined as constituted by three substances, namely combatants, supplies and information. Further, food production, circulation, preparation and consumption illustrated how guerrilla sociality and relationality may be articulated and constantly

renewed. Whilst these practices coincided with a moral order based on sharing, there existed moral orders based on distinct forms of relatedness. I illustrate this point with reference to the short-lived practices of *matrimonios por las armas*, 'marriages by arms' as an example of how the guerrilla was envisioned through the idiom of family relations. In the conclusion I consider views as to the dissolution of guerrilla moral orders in the ethnographic present.

In Chapter Seven, *Prosthetic Aesthetics*, I offer a reflection on the phenomenologies of guerrilla embodiment and subjectivity, and argue for a conceptualisation of 'prosthetics' that may relinquish dependence from Cartesian-inspired dualisms and that may instead be grounded in multiple and complex experiences of ethnographic subjects' prosthetic embodiment. I argue that guerrilla and anthropological post-plural scales supplement each other's prosthetic aesthetics.

Ethnographic Candour and Reticence

Fieldwork was itinerant and multi-sited (Marcus 1998), in my initial efforts to locate 'the object/subject' of interlocution, and the subsequent course that the agentic 'object/subject' determined I follow. During my fieldwork I conducted a total of 121 interviews. Most of these were semi-structured interviews, and some were informal conversations. I attended meetings convened by women's groups, community groups and indigenous rights groups, some of which I recorded with the permission of the organisers. I convened three meetings and recorded the proceedings with the permission of the participants. I also interviewed individuals who had held positions in the local government agency of FYDEP prior to 1990 and got acquainted with Non-governmental Organisations who worked with returnees (COMADEP) and with the ex-combatants (Fundación Guillermo Toriello, ADEPAC, CIEP).

The total number of *ex-guerrilleros/as* interviewed was sixty-one, of which twenty-seven were women and thirty-four were men. Age of *ex-guerrilleros/as* ranged from twenty to sixty-eight years old. All had been affiliated to the ex-*Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes*. A small number had been involved in the organisation since the 1960s. Many were sons and daughters of combatants killed in the conflict and whose families had a long history of *guerrilla* activism. The youngest interviewees may have not been active in military operations, but had lived a clandestine life with their older

relatives. Some interviews were recorded following numerous informal conversations with the interviewees, some occurred through sheer serendipity. On one occasion, an individual agreed to speak to me in one capacity, but during the interview revealed his guerrilla affiliation and determined that the interview dealt with that, rather than with the issues we had previously agreed to discuss.[7] In addition to the ex-combatants with whom I conversed in an interview setting, I met and got to know many more, but did not record our conversations. Most *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* ex-combatants who were interviewed identified as Ladino, but Mam, Q'eqchi', Achi' and Kaqchikel ethnicities were also represented among interviewees. Many other interviewees were not ex-combatants, but guerrilla sympathisers.

All names, pseudonyms and nicknames that appear in the thesis have been changed. The practice of re-naming subjects in order to protect their identities and ensure confidentiality is well established in traditions of anthropological inquiry (cf. Pitt-Rivers 1954). In the present research however, re-naming practices are grounded in understandings of 'confidentiality' that are historically specific and culturally nuanced (cf. Caplan 2003, Fluehr-Lobban 2003). The re-naming practices I deploy are intended to graft onto the complex naming practices used by subjects themselves. As discussed at length in the thesis, *guerrilleras* and *guerrilleros* often had numerous names, pseudonyms and nicknames. They named and renamed themselves, and each other, for multiple purposes, and I rename them accordingly. Many of the names and pseudonyms featured in the thesis are drawn from the novels of José Flores (Flores n.d., 1995, 1997a, 1997b). 'José Flores' is the pseudonym for the writer of four novels that deal with the civil conflict; specifically, with experience of the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* in Petén. Numerous apocryphal stories about José Flores circulated among URNG associates in Guatemala City in 1999-2000. Some involved tropes of gender and other reversals, but none dared to question the veracity of the writer's accounts. José Flores, his own vivid narrative, the stories about him, and rumours about his sources, captured and shaped my 'ethnographic imagination' (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1992, Moore 1994b). Many of the individuals who feature in the thesis thus bear the names of the characters of José Flores' novels.

Nicknames (*apodos*), on the other hand, often involved capturing a trait of the person

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[7] This interview is discussed in Chapter 4.

and were metaphorical and allegorical. Some were secret in the sense that they were known only to those involved in the guerrilla organisation. Some became public to the extent that individual combatants were known to communities by their nicknames and not by their pseudonyms. Some were long-lived, others transient, other still survived only in the memory of the nickname holder. In my account, I have changed all the nicknames except those bestowed upon me. I have tried to maintain a sense of the metaphorical, allegorical and ironic associations and emphasis featured in the original nicknames. I have also been consistent when referring to individual biographies and have refrained from creating composite characters imagined as the synthesis of different individual experiences. Where subjects appear composite, on whatever level, this is not as a result of montage, or any other textual technique.

Itinerant and multi-sited fieldwork in as large a region as Petén (36,000 square kilometres), could not strive, or indeed wish, to cover the 'vastness' through which this territory is and has been imagined. I travelled across Petén following the routes of guerrilla secrecy. I visited some communities regularly, others sporadically or only once. I never got to many of the places and the people I wanted to reach. On occasions, I reached villages to find that those I wanted to meet had left a few hours prior to my arrival. They were not expected to return any time soon, as they had set out to reach the US/Mexican border. Nevertheless, some communities had the kindness to welcome me on a regular basis and endure my questions. To them, I promised to give full anonymity. I am aware that, four years on, conditions have changed and the visibility of some of these communities and subjects has since increased. Nevertheless, and for the purpose of the present analysis, I consider the first agreement between us as binding. Thus, no geographical or other details are given when discussing particular settlements. This does not mean that particular communities were not instrumental to the present research, just that I am reticent about their identities.

Heteroglossia

Guatemala is a multi-cultural and multi-lingual country. The official language is Spanish, but there exist numerous Mayan and non-Mayan languages spoken in the country (Tzian 1994 cited in CEH 1999, footnote 5, Appendix 9, Chapter 1).

Although the exact number of languages is disputed, the *Academia de las Lenguas Mayas*[8] notes the existence of twenty-one Mayan linguistic groups,[9] each with relative sub-groups. To these are added Xinca and Garífuna (COPMAGUA 1995). Equally disputed is the number of indigenous languages spoken in the region of Petén. As a receptacle of migratory population displaced from other areas of the countries, Petén is linguistically as well as culturally diverse. Itzaj and Mopan speakers have traditionally been considered autochthonous to the region, the former usually said to be located around the lake Petén Itzá in central Petén and the latter in and around the town of San Luis in southern Petén (cf. Reina 1964, 1967a, 1967b, Reina and Schwartz 1974, Schwartz 1971, 1983, 1990). Despite their long-standing presence in southern Petén, Q'eqchi' speakers on the whole are not considered native to Petén by non-Q'eqchi' persons. Many of them nevertheless are, and consider themselves to be, Petenero. Further, they are no longer confined to the southern lowlands. Q'eqchi' speakers are increasingly settling in eastern, western and northern Petén. The linguistic make-up of the region is yet more complex when one considers populations deemed to be 'internally displaced' (*'desplazados internos'*) and those returning from exile in Mexico (*'retornados'*). In these communities, many Maya languages are represented, including K'iche', Mam, Kaqchikel, Q'eqchi', Poqomchi' and Q'anjobal. In turn, Spanish monoglots who identify as Ladino feature regional accents, inflections and lexical variations.

The material featured in the thesis was gathered for the most part in Spanish. This includes interviews and conversations with polyglots whose first language was not Spanish. Being already proficient in Guatemalan Spanish, while in Petén I learnt Q'eqchi' using available textbooks and dictionaries (Eachus and Carlson 1980, Proyecto Lingüistico Francisco Marroquín 1999, Stewart 1980). Whilst I was never fluent in the language, I experimented with gathering material in Q'eqchi' and briefly collaborated with Q'eqchi' speakers for translation of selected texts. Due to ethical questions, I resolved to discontinue collaboration with translators, although the experiment was useful in terms of language training. Material on Q'eqchi' culture and

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[8] The *Academia de Lenguas Mayas* was founded by Maya writers and intellectuals with the aim to record, preserve and foster Mayan Indigenous languages in Guatemala.
[9] The Mayan linguist groups are K'iche', Mam, Kaqchikel, Q'eqchi', Poqomchi', Q'anjobal, Tz'utujil, Ixil, Poqomam, Chuj, Popti', Ch'orti', Achi', Sakapulteko, Akateko, Awakateko, Uspanteko, Mopan, Tektiteko, Itzaj (Tzian 1994 cited in CEH 1999, footnote 5, Appendix 9, Chapter 1).

practices featured in Chapter One and Chapter Two was gathered mostly in Spanish, whilst translation for sections in Q'eqchi' was produced on the day of the conversations and in collaboration with the interviewees.

For Q'eqchi' words, I follow the orthographic rules endorsed by the *Academia de Las Lenguas Mayas*. Where authors do otherwise, I retain their respective orthographic choices. Although this may appear confusing at times, I think it would be unwise to collapse histories of orthographic usage in favour of contemporary conventions. I believe it is important to retain a sense of changes in orthography over the years, as these are implicated in broader shifts in conceptualisation of the meanings attached to 'indigeneity' in the country. Thus, insistence on contemporary conventions is part of ever more politicised expressions of indigeneity (CEH 1999, COPMAGUA 1995, Wilson 1995). The new orthography developed by the *Academia de las Lenguas Mayas* aims to provide an orthographic system common to all Mayan languages spoken in the country. It aims to reduce dependence from Spanish and is linked to efforts made by indigenous rights groups to include indigenous languages in school curricula, and to establish schools where learning occurs in indigenous languages as first languages, with Spanish as second language. Thus, where authors render the *Academia de las Lenguas Mayas*-endorsed orthography of *Q'eqchi'* (cf. Siebers 1999, Wilson 1995) as *Kekchi* or *K'ekchi,* be it in works published prior to (Adams 1965) or following the establishment of the new standard orthography (Schwartz 1990, Pedroni 1990, Ruiz Puga 1994) differences are maintained. Names of geographical localities have not yet been standardised in accordance with the new orthography, so they are given in the old orthography; as they appear on maps; and as they are in current usage.

On occasions, conversations that were held in Spanish between myself and subjects whose first language was an indigenous language featured peculiar syntactic structures. Rather than considering the syntax of sentences in Spanish unsteady or inexact, I strive to reproduce the shifts in syntax in my English translations. In-depth analysis of these exchanges might reveal speakers' reliance on distinctive Mayan syntactical structures. While linguistic analysis falls beyond the scope of the present study, I nevertheless strive to reproduce the distinctive expressive styles of individual speakers, with their peculiar syntax as well as lexicon. Spanish lexicon is also variable in a multicultural and multilingual region such as Petén. This is the case not only

among Mayan language polyglots, but also among Spanish monoglots who come from different regions of the country. I strive to give a sense of such variations in my English translation. Further, I indicate Q'eqchi' or Spanish terms in brackets where I feel there are subtleties of tone, reference or inflection that may be lost in translation.

Individuals with different biographies, but with a history of militancy in the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes,* shared a common lexicon. I have chosen not to translate some of these expressions. For instance, *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* combatants, militants and sympathisers referred to each other as *compañeros*, and *compañeras* for the feminine inflection. Similarly, when ex-guerrilleros/as referred to their experiences of clandestine life, they often said they were *en la montaña.* This expression complements and exceeds the meaning of being *en la selva*, that is, in the forest. It stands for clandestine life in the guerrilla in general, with all the phenomenological specificities of the case. I consider these terms and idioms so imbued with the shared experiences of struggle to be untranslatable. I hope the thesis as a whole may give a sense of what it may have meant to be a *compañera* and to live a clandestine life *en la montaña.*

In the thesis I have referred to English translations of texts which were not originally written in English, where translations were available. This is the case for works by Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida and Vattimo. Where translations were not available, as for early seminal texts by Vattimo (1983), I have provided my own translation. Some Heideggerian terminology is given in German, e.g. *Verwindung,* with explanation noted.

Chapter 1

The Problem of Context

They make slaughter and they call it peace.

(Tacitus, in Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 2000:3)

Metaphysics has constituted an exemplary system of defence against the threat of writing.

What links writing to violence? What must violence be in order for something in it to be

equivalent to the operation of the trace?

(Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 1974:101)

1.1 Introduction

The chapter explores social, cultural and historical trajectories that are implicated in the contexts of the present research.[1] In my proposed route through the literature, I wish to consider how the discipline of anthropology has produced and imagined the Guatemalan context historically. Anthropology, as a tradition of social and cultural enquiry that developed in the late 19th century and early 20th century, is epistemologically grounded in the contextualisation of knowledge (Strathern 1995a, 1995b). Anthropologists have provided interpretations of local cultures through contextualisation. In turn, disciplinary hermeneutic efforts have become context-dependent (Dilley 1999:1-2), to the extent that a strictly a-contextual anthropology now appears improbable (Moore 2004). Analytical strategies of contextualisation are inextricably tied to systems of representation. In representation, 'context' is produced as an object of scrutiny (Strathern 1987:276, 1995:160, Dilley 1999:3, 2002), at the centre of the anthropological gaze.

Anthropological context-making practices can be considered in relation to other key concept-metaphors (Moore 2004). 'Culture', for instance, may be amenable to

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[1] The analysis provided in this chapter is greatly indebted to Dilley's (1999) work on the problem of

multiple genealogies (cf. Knauft 1996, Kuper 1999). Historically it has been premised on contextualisation understood through cultures imagined as local, integrated and coherent wholes (Dilley 1999:3, cf. Moore 1999). Through a multiple and multiplier effect, contextualisation has highlighted the local quality of Western presuppositions and produced, in this relational dimension, knowledge of, and about, ethnocentrism (Strathern 1987, 1995b, Dilley 1999).[2] Dilley argues that '[e]ver since Malinowski, anthropologists have chanted the mantra of "placing social and cultural phenomena in context", an analytical strategy adopted to throw light on [...] and make some sort of authentic sense of, ethnographic material' (1999:1). Despite its relational dimensions, context-making as process and practice has been assumed to be a transparent and unproblematic source of authenticity – of phenomena and/or interpretations. Assumptions about the 'positivity' of context (Fabian 1999) and the transparent quality of 'culture' have been the subject of critical scrutiny in recent years, through critiques of anthropological representational practices (Clifford 1988, Clifford and Marcus 1986), and analyses informed by post-colonial theory (cf. Asad 1973, Huggan 1994, Prakash 1992, 1994). Both fields link the operations of anthropology to those of power. Nevertheless, the exercise is by no means exhausted. Neither is it exhaustible, when one considers that context- and culture-making have not been the exclusive prerogatives of anthropologists (Strathern 1995a, 1995b, 1995c). Rather, 'context' and 'culture', whether allied or discrete, are items of knowledge generated locally, with or without anthropologists' presence (Strathen ibid). Insofar as this applies to local uses of those 'contexts' and 'cultures' produced by anthropology, '[t]he uses to which anthropological knowledge can be put are, as always, already recontextualised' (Strathern 1995b:3, cf. Jaarsma and Rohatynskyj 2000). This adds a further dimension to local context- and culture-making, one in which anthropology becomes entangled in complex ways. When viewed in this light, the field of anthropology expands to include discourses that may once have been its own, but are now, or indeed have always been, locally produced, reproduced and consumed by multiple subjects and in multiple contexts. Such local appropriations of anthropological knowledge

context in anthropology.
[2] 'Native knowledge was conventionally contextualised in terms of integrated local cultures, and anthropological knowledge was set against the background of western ethnocentrism and the Malinowskian-inspired vision of the 'detection of civilisation under savagery' (Strathern 1987:256)' (Dilley 1999:3). I take up this point in Chapter 3 in my discussion of the presuppositions inherent in anthropological theorising. For now, it may suffice to note that Geertz (2000) has acutely argued that the 'discovery' of ethnocentrism in not rightfully anthropology's own.

prospectively 'out-contextualise the anthropologist' (Strathern 1995b:11).

This chapter investigates the anthropological analytical and representational frames that have produced the 'context' of Guatemala. Anthropological analyses of Guatemala are shown to have been important sites of articulation of debates over the status of indigeneity, and to have provided frames for contextualisation of contemporary local and national configurations. Thus, analysis of the place accorded to ethnicity in anthropological literature is set against those ethnographic fragments which profoundly unsettle the historical link between ethnicity, settlement and place. The critique of nativism is accompanied by a reflection on context-making practices that bring tropes of violence and conflict into focus. I follow 'violence' and 'conflict' and their intersections with ethnicity in general and indigeneity in particular. I do this to consider how they may be made to connect or slip disjointedly from foreground to the background, in different times and political climates.

I strive to make the contexts of multiple conflicts emerge in a 'spirit of calm violence' (Bhabha 1995), to reflect on the complex ways in which 'violence' may mark the subject/object of enquiry in the realm of experience and representation. I am aware that neither the routes I trace through the literature, nor the deployments I make of ethnographic fragments, are innocent. Routes at once contextualise and out-contextualise my position vis-à-vis the 'subjects'/'objects' of inquiry, namely 'anthropology', 'Guatemala', 'conflict', and progressively, 'Petén' and *la guerrilla*. Awareness of paths that may have been traced before (cf. Hervik 2001, Fischer 1999, Smith 1990, Watanabe 1995, Wilson 1995a), and, excessively, the potentially infinite paths that may be suggested, is tied to an afterthought. It may be the experience of fieldwork that produces the readings proposed here, as I reveal investments in revisiting and reinventing the anthropology of Guatemala that I and others in the field consumed, to renew the relevance of tropes old and new. Thus, whilst ethnographic exchanges emerge as moments of re-contextualisation of anthropological accounts, the experiences of fieldwork locate me vis-à-vis the literature, to point to the multiple out-contextualisations produced in, and through, me in the thesis.

1.2 Eschatology, Empire, Abjection
The history of Guatemala seems entangled in the histories of empires in (dis-)orderly

ways. The Spanish Conquest in the 16th century inaugurated a long period of colonial domination that came to an end in the late 19th century. Following independence from Spain in 1821 and incorporation into the Mexican Empire the following year, Guatemala declared independence again, this time from Mexico, in 1824 and took up membership of the United Provinces of Central America (1823-1840). With the demise of the federation of Central American states, a series of liberal political reforms and *laissez-faire* economic policies assisted the re-colonisation of large areas of the country. German entrepreneurs invested in the lucrative coffee exports business in the western highlands[3], while United States capital took control of the lowlands on the Pacific Ocean to the south, and on the Caribbean Sea to the east. A largely United States-sponsored genocide waged by the Guatemalan State against the civilian and insurgent populations characterized the second half of the 20th century. The conflict, or *La Violencia*[4], officially came to an end in December 1996, when the Guatemalan government and the guerrilla umbrella organisation *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca* (URNG) signed the Guatemalan Peace Accords. In post-Peace Accords times, the multiple guises of empire are most immediately embodied in conditional foreign aid and unrestrained economic liberalisation. The histories and destinies of most Guatemalans appear to have been and largely continue to be over-determined.

Cumulative imperial agency seems to have defied the optimism of successive periodisations most apparent in local and national narratives of progress, modernity and from the early 1960s to the mid 1990s, of revolution. In fact, the hopes invested in what appeared to be important dents into imperial eschatology were punctually shattered. The decade between 1944 and 1954 presented real possibilities to invert imperial logic, as the governments of Juan José Arévalo and Colonel Jacobo Arbenz

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[3] See Grandin 2000, Wilson 1995.

[4] Warren (1993:25) notes that '*la violencia* was a confrontation between military and guerrilla forces. From the military point of view, it was a battle against communism, against an armed and dangerous menace within. Guerrilla terror needed to be met with counterterror. The counterinsurgency war began with the successful routing of guerrilla forces in eastern Guatemala in the 1960s. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, during the regimes of General Lucas García (1978-1982) and General Ríos Montt (1982-1983), the situation intensified as guerrilla groups mounted attacks on military installations, took over towns, and threatened major landowners in the western highlands. [...] From the guerrilla's point of view, this was an armed struggle to challenge the legitimacy of the state and the exploitation of Guatemalan peasants by wealthy landowners and export-oriented commercial elites. They recruited combatants from the countryside and sought support from peasant populations. In their terms, this was a war of liberation to resolve brutally conflicting class interests in a country with the lowest physical quality of life index in Central America and the third lowest, after Haiti and Bolivia, in all of Latin America'.

encroached on United States interest in open defiance of the contemporary empire, or *imperialismo yanqui* (Yankee imperialism). Government-led expropriation and redistribution of land held by United States capital, in the form of the export-agriculture enterprise United Fruit Company (Schlesinger and Kinzer 1982), came to symbolise the possibility of interrupting imperial workings. In June 1954, however, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) designed and directed the overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz's government, and gave imperial agency a Guatemalan face (cf. Cullather 1999). Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas nominally headed the invasion of the country and dutifully executed orders issued directly by United States President Dwight D. Eisenhower. Castillo Armas' proximity to empire, however, swiftly led to his own personal demise. Discontented army officers murdered him and consigned the country to over three decades of *conflicto armado interno*, or armed 'internal' conflict.

Periodically, extractive imperial agency has resurfaced to lay claims to land and labour, connote the present in spatial tropes of inclusion and exclusion, and qualify the violence in terms of internality. The genealogical character of empire has prosthetically bolstered the agency of Guatemalan oligarchies as well as the insurrections and insurgencies of abject Guatemalans. Wedges in the narrative of apparent historical determinism, the insurgents of the second part of the twentieth century rose, seemingly from 'within', to defy empire and

'*tomar el poder e instaurar un Gobierno Revolucionario, Patriótico, Popular, y Democrático que termine para siempre con la explotación, la opresión, la discriminación, la represión y la dependencia del extranjero*',

that is, 'seize power and establish a Revolutionary, Patriotic, Popular and Democratic Government that may put an end once and for all to exploitation, oppression, discrimination, repression and dependency' (FAR 1988:4, my translation). As many of the insurgents pointed out in the ethnographic present and with ethnographic hindsight, their actions and reactions were incited by the unswerving, relentless and unyielding agency of empire. Whether the agency of these genealogical subjects resided within or without was a question – in the ethnographic present – that directly engaged those who participated in the insurgency. Where the boundaries of

insurgency and counterinsurgency actually lay is no less relevant to, albeit less explicitly, narratives of insurgency. Further, whether abject insurgency occupied a place within or outside the project of the nation is a question that still haunts the narratives of repression. There has never been any shortage of *enemigos internos*, or 'enemies within', in Guatemala. [5]

Social, cultural and historical processes through which dyads such as internal/external have been created, boundaries drawn and subjects constituted, deserve further attention. The theory of abjection elaborated by Julia Kristeva (1982) is pertinent. In Kristeva's formulation, the 'abject' is a subject constituted through specific processes of expulsion and exclusion. Specifically, it is through disavowal and repudiation of elements of the self that the Other is constituted. In 'Neither Subject Nor Object', Kristeva writes:

'[a]long with sight-clouding dizziness, *nausea* makes me baulk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. "I" want none of that element, sign of their desire, "I" do not want to listen, "I" do not assimilate it, "I" expel it. But since the food is not an "other" for "me", who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish myself' (Kristeva 1982 cited in Butler 1990:133).

Discourses concerning the sustained temporality of exploitation, the continuity of imperial domination and the enduring relevance of imperial eschatology are master narratives of abjection that may broadly apply to the history of the country as a whole. However, the specificities of systemic control, recurrent imperialist *ingerencia* (interference) and, most importantly, of local discourses, representations, responses and resistances have progressively been disentangled from the hegemonic histories of nation and empire. [6] What is at stake are multiple and complex articulations of

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[5] The notion of the 'enemy within' rose to prominence in the context of the Doctrine of National Security devised by the United States government and implemented in Guatemala in the 1950s (cf. Landau 1988, CEH 1999).

[6] Of the large body of relevant work, I would single out research carried in Alta Verapaz (Wilson 1995), Quetzaltenango (Grandin 2000), Santiago Atitlán (Carlsen 1997), Sololá (Green 1999, 2002). Lovell (1992) and Taracena Arriola (2002) have cogently addressed these questions with reference to

abjection in the Guatemalan context, and the historically specific plurality of forms of 'identity-differentiation' (Butler 1990:134) thus engendered. At the heart of these efforts are signifiers of ethnicity and, more specifically, of indigeneity. Anthropology is and has been in complex ways constitutive of and constituted by the multiple systems of representations through which 'identity differentiation' and its (ethnicised) abjects have come into being in Guatemala.

1.3 *Mestizaje, Blanqueamiento y Ladinización*[7]

Projects of creation, normalisation and disciplining of difference have a long history in the country. Historiographic research points to the complex processes of construction of ethnicity and 'race' in Guatemala, thus unsettling the presentist bias inherent in some anthropological accounts and complicating some of the assumptions on which Pan-Mayan cultural/political activism is predicated. In Guatemala, as in Latin America more broadly, the post-colonial project of the nation was from its very inception implicated in the ideology of *mestizaje*, that is an apparently benevolent utopian vision of a 'mix' of ethnic and racialised differences envisaged to deliver fusion and unity in shared sameness. As pointed out by Rowe and Shelling (1991:18, cited in Radcliffe and Westwood 1993:14),

'mestizaje, a word denoting racial mixture, assumes a synthesis of cultures where none is eradicated. The difficulty with the idea of *mestizaje* is that, without an analysis of power structures, it becomes an ideology of racial harmony which obscures the actual holding of power by a particular group'.

Thus, the colonial systems of social, cultural and racial differentiation, and related unequal power relations on which the historical process of *mestizaje* came to be articulated, clearly require careful unravelling. Furthermore, discourses that presented *mestizaje* as coterminous with a project of de-racialisation of ethnic difference

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the Western regions of the country, while research by Dary (2003), Dary, Elías and Reyna (1998) and Pinto Soria (1993) are concerned with the Eastern regions.

[7] Ideologies of *mestizaje, blanqueamiento* and ladinoisation in Guatemala are explored below. Different national histories of *mestizaje* and *banqueamiento* in Latin America have also been cogently analysed, see for instance Wade (1993, 1997, chapter 1) on Colombia and Kingman Garcés (2002) on Ecuador. Stepan (1991) focuses on nationalism and the eugenic movement in Argentina, Mexico and Brazil. Radcliffe and Westwood (1996) consider the intersections between discourses of *mestizaje*,

(Nelson 1999, chapter 6) and a levelling of inequality should be subjected to scrutiny. This is particularly important in Guatemala, where, as Taracena Arriola (2000) has poignantly argued, historiographic and genealogical research on colonial and post-colonial ideologies of 'mixing' increasingly aims to clarify how exactly *mestizaje* may have produced the notion of '*ladino*'. In contemporary usage, '*ladino*' has come to stand as a synonym of '*mestizo*', or 'mixed', and as a term that finds its Other in the category *indigena*, or 'indigenous' (Dary 1994). It is therefore important to explore the historical routes through which contemporary binary understanding of ethnic difference – most obviously expressed in the *ladino/indigena* dyad – may have been produced (cf. Morales 2000, Schackt 2000, 2002). The task also entails an analysis of the processes through which *ladinos* have emerged as historical subjects and agents, and *ladinización* (ladinoisation) may have been presented as the paradigm of the Guatemalan nation in the twentieth century (Taracena Arriola 2000).

During the colonial period a strict racialised system of ethnic differentiation was established. In the groundbreaking and extremely influential book *La Patria del Criollo* (1970), historian Severo Martínez Peláez argued that ethnic and racial relations in Guatemala were grounded in the creation and subsequent recognition of three groups, namely Spaniards (*españoles*), indigenous (*indigenas*) and blacks (*negros*). Three further categories were soon fashioned and considered to arise from the ones noted above. *Mestizo* corresponded to the product of Spaniard and indigenous mixing. *Mulato* identified those of black and Spanish ancestry, while *zambo* marked those of black and indigenous descent. In point of fact, the establishment of colonial racialised taxonomies failed to order, discipline and maintain sameness, inciting instead the production of ever more intricate representational orders of difference. *Mestizaje*, envisaged in the first place a seemingly uncomplicated process of multiplication of *mestizos* through the 'union'[8] of Spaniards and indigenous populations, failed to deliver unmarked and undifferentiated singularity, belying instead increasing racialised, cultural, social and political diversity and complexity. Such was the complication and ever-widening differentiation inherent in *mestizaje* and specifically in the cross-articulation of

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blanqueamiento and gender in Latin American contexts.
[8] The gender implications of the colonial and post-colonial projects of *mestizaje* have been cogently unraveled by Nelson (1999, Chapter 6).

español, indígena, negro, mestizo, mulato and *zambo*, that the colonial administration resorted to the demarcation of *castas*. Spaniard and indigenous population were thus marked off from the newly fashioned categories of *pardo* and/or *ladino*. These *castas* referred to generalised racialised groups aimed at accommodating the proliferation of racialised difference spurred by foundational colonial racial orderings (Martínez Peláez 1970). Intended to be conveniently set against the populations marked as Spaniard and indigenous[9], in the 18th century, *ladino* and *pardo* still retained marks of earlier racialised distinction, the former referring to those with acknowledged Spaniard ancestry and the latter marking off those considered to be of black descent. However, masking cultural and social complexities, the Spaniard/*ladino*/*pardo*/indigenous distinctions worked towards the erasure of ethnic and cultural differences among all groups, and notably among *ladinos*. Differentiation among *ladinos* increasingly distinguished between rural and urban populations, that is, between *ladinos rurales* (rural *ladinos*) and *capas medias urbanas* (Martínez Peláez 1970). At the heart of any *casta* demarcation was nevertheless an ingrained and virulent racialisation. In 1820, facing increasing lax attitudes to the application of *casta* taxonomies, a document concerning the constitutional electoral system set out to clarify the distinctions in the following terms:

'White (*blanco*) with *indio* produces *mestizo*, and if the latter reproduces with white, *castizo* results, who if united with white will have offspring who may already **pass** as white. A white woman (*blanca*) with a black man (*negro*) produces *mulato*, and black and *indio* gives *zambo*. These are the qualified and commonly recognised races (*razas*) of the country.... Subsequent mixes (*mezclas*) of mixed persons (*personas mixtas*) are unending (*inacabables*) and unnamed (*innominadas*), but generally speaking all persons who are not pure Indians (*indios puros*) are named people of reason (*gente de razón*) o *ladinos* and whites are named Spaniards (*españoles*)'.[10]

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[9] Taracena Arriola (2002, see also 2000) highlights the fact that the creation of *castas* by the colonial administration engendered a considerable juridical problem for the colonial administration. The colonial project was predicated on the motto 'Two Spains in America, a Republic of Spaniards and a Republic of *Indios*'. It was therefore unclear what juridical space should apply to the new fashioned liminal categories of *ladino* and *pardo*.

[10] *Diputación Provincial de Nicaragua y Costa Rica al Ministerio de Gobernacion de Ultramaar, sobre la dificultad de applicar el sistema electoral constitucional en un medio dividido en 22 castas, 22*

The taxonomic order is predicated on practices of 'recognition', which in turn open up the possibility of misrecognition and 'passing'.[11] Passing refers broadly to practices, techniques or conditions of the self, identity, and/or subjectivity that are attributed to subjects who transverse social identifications to purposely adopt or inadvertently be assigned identities other than those conferred to them by socially enforced categorisations (Posocco 2004:152). While passing may apply to any social taxonomy and dimension of difference, it may be useful to recall that it is a term intimately linked to raciological orders and anxieties surrounding 'whiteness'. Theorisations of social practices related to passing arise in the context of analyses of United States slave narratives, and Harlem Renaissance literature (cf. Gates 1987). In the texts in question, African-American subjects who pass as white are said to expose the processes though which blackness and whiteness are socially fabricated. Further, as transgression of racialised social orderings often enables progression across hierarchies of gender, sexuality and class, the intimate relation between negotiations of social taxonomies and access to power and privilege is also exposed (Ahmed 1999, Posocco 2004). Processes of fabrication of whiteness, blackness, indigeneity and their 'unending' and 'unnamed' permutations are clearly marked out in the passage above. Whilst the possibility of upward mobility is less explicitly articulated, the demarcation of 'people of reason' on the one hand, and 'pure indigenous' on the other hand suggests that a certain plasticity may apply to the realm of the former, and less so if at all to the latter.

Taxonomic plasticity and mobility aside, it is important to note that 'passing' is nevertheless dependent upon normative claims to authenticity, and ostracism, repudiation or violence may befall those deemed at any stage to be 'inauthentic' (Ahmed 1999, Butler 1993, Posocco 2004). As argued by Butler (1993), whether passing entails any voluntarism on the part of subjects engaged in purposeful manipulations of social identities is open to question, as any transgression and subversion occur within a highly regulatory and normative terrain (cf. Butler 1993, Posocco ibid). The latter position is endorsed by Ahmed (1999:101), who notes that

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de noviembre de 1820, cited in Taracena Arriola (2002:4, my emphasis).
[11] Practices associated with 'passing' are discussed further in Chapter 5, and specifically with reference to the distinction between the guerrilla and the Army.

passing is consistently predicated upon – and enabled by – assumptions concerning the readability of the body and the visibility of identity. It is the existence of socially, historically and culturally specific scopic regimes and related social taxonomies that creates the conditions of possibility for passing to occur. For subjects to 'pass', there has to be a presumption of ontologies of the subject and of difference grounded in essentialism. When understood in these terms, rather than as the mimetic ability of the subject to adopt identities of choice, passing appears as a technique that is 'exclusive and exclusionary' (Ahmed 2002:108), in that some subjects may *not* be able to pass (ibid 101), and identities may be predicated on grounds other than visibility.

With the benefit of attributed 'reason' in post-independence times, and throughout the 19th century, *ladino* constituencies rose to prominence in economic, political and social arenas. Benefiting from increased access to land and trade, local *ladino* elites negotiated access to political space with the *criollo* population of Guatemala City. In uneasy alliance with those whose power and influence was predicated on claims of direct Spaniard ancestry, namely the urban *criollos*, *ladinos* were increasingly defined in the negative as 'non-indigenous' (Taracena Arriola 2000).

The complex liminal position of *ladinos* was also expressed in the racialised terms that continued to mark inter-ethnic relations in Guatemala. As argued by Casáus Arzú (1995), urban *criollos* actively participated in establishment of a pigmentocracy that would seek to 'preserve' and 'foster' whitening. As documented historically and ethnographically (Casáus Arzú, ibid), *criollo* families actively sought to 'preserve' whitening through endogamous practices that foreclosed unions with *ladino* families. They vigorously sought to 'foster' whitening through endogamous marriage practices, and exogamy aimed at incorporating German families into the lineage. Foreignness thus increasingly appeared as the quintessential repository of whiteness (Casáus Arzú 1995, Nelson 1999, Taracena Arriola 2000), and *criollos* were marked as whiteness bearers and producers. *Ladinos,* excluded from whitening practices, relied on their non-indigenousness to stake their claims to power and influence. According to Casáus Arzú (1995), the project of *mestizaje* (mixing) was therefore undermined by the contemporary *criollo* project of *blanqueamiento* (whitening). In the 19th century, any project of *mestizaje* if there was ever one in Guatemala, was truly defunct. The nation-state never really undertook a project of homogenisation of difference, but

instead actively pursued the whitening of *criollos*, and the separate and distinct whitening of *ladinos*, who may aspire to mould themselves in the image of the *criollo* elite, while always failing complete mimesis (Casaús Arzú 1995). As cogently argued by Taracena Arriola (2000), *ladino* identity seems therefore never to have been directly predicated on *criollo* whiteness, but rather, on a sense of hispanicised character, civilised conduct, and most importantly, on an inherent opposition to indigenous primitivism. The process of ladinoisation was therefore also summarily contradictory, and always haunted by *ladinos'* Other, i.e. the indigenous. In the last instance, the various political, economic and social projects pursued by the Guatemalan nation-state in different historical periods were consistently implicated in the creation, maintenance and reinvention of difference, and never pursued homogenisation. These genealogies of the *ladino/indígena* dyad inform the Guatemalan imaginaries of ethnic difference, and anthropological accounts alike. They provide the conditions of possibility for the spatialisation of that element which is not *ladino*. As apparent in the map below, what is increasingly marked out in contemporary Guatemala is indigeneity, in all its riveting diversity. The map of indigeneity is also a representation of the ambivalence inherent in *ladino* identity, as it is unclear whether it is its hegemonic character that makes it transparent, or whether it may be so ephemeral as to require its Other to be visibly marked in order to gain coherence and intelligibility.

1.4 Ethnicity as *Telos*

Presence and absence, appearances and disappearances, and process of 'identity differentiation' depend on systems of representation through which indigeneity has been articulated in Guatemala. In contemporary Guatemala, the Pan-Mayan movement argues that the population of the country comprises four *peoples* whose histories and cultures are viewed as distinct, albeit intertwined (COPMAGUA 1995). The *Pueblo Maya*, estimated to amount to 60% of the population, is said to share a common ancestry in the Ancient Maya civilisation that inhabited the whole of Guatemala, the southern part of Mexico, eastern Belize, eastern Honduras and northern El Salvador in pre-Columbian times. The Maya linguistic groups currently present in Guatemala are all viewed as part of the *Pueblo Maya*, namely K'iche',

Kaqchikel, Tz'utujil, Sakapulteko, Sipakapense, Uspanteko, Q'eqchi', Poqomam, Poqomchi', Mam, Tekiteko, Awateko, Ixil, Q'anjob'al, Akateko, Popti' (Jakalteco), Chuj, Ch'orti', Itzaj, Mopan (COPMAGUA 1995, Cholsamaj Press quoted in Nelson 1999). The *Pueblo Ladino,* approximately 39% of Guatemalans, is commonly identified as comprising the 'hispanicised' section of the population, who may more or less vocally acknowledge a direct Hispanic ancestry (COPMAGUA 1995, Dary 1994). Recent translations of Ladino as 'white' (Warren 1993:51, note 4) imply a reference to the hegemonic status of Ladino identity in the national context vis-à-vis Maya communities construed as marginalised minorities. While emphasising the asymmetry inherent to Maya/Ladino ethnic relations and highlighting the fact that the ruling economic and political oligarchy may or may not identify as Ladino, this definition obscures the realities of exploitation, poverty and political disenfranchisement faced by many rural and urban Ladinos. The *Pueblo Garifuna* is said to amount to about 1% of the population residing in the western department of Izabal, in the areas Livingstone and Puerto Barrios. Their presence can be traced back to the Garifuna migration from the Caribbean Island of San Vincente and later to Guatemala in the late XVIII century. Culturally, they regard themselves as encompassing Arawak, Caribe and African traits (COPMAGUA 1995). Lastly, the Pueblo Xinka, reported as being in danger of extinction (Cholsamaj Press cited in Nelson 1999), is said to have an unclear history yet to be unravelled.

In the context of contemporary multicultural and multilingual Guatemala, indigeneity, by virtue of its very existence, is often marked as oppositional (Warren 1998). After all, indigenous ethnicities are said to have withstood Conquests, national ideologies of *mestizaje, blanqueamiento* and *ladinización* (mixing, whitening and ladinisation), the genocide of *La Violencia* (CEH 1999) and multiple social, economic and political inequities. Tropes of indigeneity and survival are prominently interlocked in contemporary articulations of Pan-Maya identities and politics (Fischer and McKenna Brown 1996, Warren 1998). Since the early 1990s, and most notably in post-Peace Accords times, the *movimiento Maya* has testified to the increasingly visible Pan-Mayan activism and mass political mobilisation. Through disciplinary propensity for all indigeneity however marked, anthropology has made important contributions to

definitions of the status of indigeneity.[12] Engaging with colonial, post-colonial and neo-imperialist dynamics, the discipline has produced a multiplicity of accounts that are intimately implicated in the delineation of teleologies of ethnicity. Interconnections between a multiplicity of unilinear teleological forms of historical discourse (Vattimo 1992), in which history is prefigured as a process of purposeful development towards a final end, call for critical analysis.

1.5 A 'Special Relation': The Chicago School and the Instituto Indigenista Nacional

In the aftermath of the 1944 revolution, the Guatemalan Government of Juan José Arévalo established the Instituto Indigenista Nacional.

'By means of the accord dated 29 August 1945, the Instituto Indigenista Nacional was founded in Guatemala City, with the objective of investigating and studying the very important problem of the indigenous (*problema del indigena*), with the aim to find, in collaboration with other institutions of the State, solutions to the different aspects of the problem' (Instituto Indigenista Nacional 1945:9, my translation).

Two years after its creation, the Instituto Indigenista amended its constitution and expanded its mandate. In 1946 a comprehensive and empirically based study of the *Distribution of the Contemporary Indigenous Languages in Guatemala* was published, authored by the Instituto's president Antonio Goubaud Carrera (Goubaud Carrera 1946). Goubaud Carrera trained in anthropology at the University of Chicago (Gillin 1952). He graduated in 1943, and is held to be the 'first professionally trained Guatemalan anthropologist' (Gillin 1952; Méndez-Domínguez 1975). In the introduction to the work, and in accordance with the aims of the Institute, Goubaud Carrera noted the usefulness of a study focussing on 'the geographical distribution of languages as they appear located today in the different regions of the country'

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[12] For instance, see Adams, R. N. (1956a, 1956b, 1970, 1995), Annis (1987), Beal *et al* (1943), Brintnall (1979a, 1979b) Colby and van den Berghe (1969), Fischer (2003), Green (1999, 2002), Hale, C.R. (2002), Hendrickson (1995), Nelson (1999), Pitt-Rivers (1969), Redfield (1939, 1956, 1957), Reina (1966, 1967a, 19967b) Schackt (1986), Smith (1990), Stoll (1993, 1997) Tax (1937, 1942, 1947, 1949, [1953] 1963, 1964), Tumin (1952), Van den Berghe (1968), Warren (1978) Watanabe (1990,

(1946:5, my translation). As with the ethos of the Instituto more broadly, the emphasis in Goubaud Carrera's study was both empirical and taxonomic. In point of fact, research at the Instituto was attuned to research strategies at Chicago University's Anthropology Department. The 'special relation' (Méndez-Domínguez 1975:541) that existed between the Chicago School and the Instituto Indigenista Nacional was largely based on research collaborations between Sol Tax, his Guatemalan research assistant and later researcher Juan de Dios Rosales (cf. Rosales 1959), and Antonio Goubaud Carrera, (cf. Goubaud Carrera, Rosales and Tax 1944). Rosales, as well as Goubaud, had trained at Chicago (Méndez-Domínguez 1975). The collaboration between Sol Tax and the Guatemalan scholars of the Instituto Indigenista Nacional produced important ethnographic works[13] that were to constitute the basis for future (re-)configurations of the ethnographic record.

According to Méndez-Domínguez (1975), Sol Tax exerted great influence over his colleagues and was instrumental in setting the direction and emphasis of the anthropology of Guatemala produced by North American and Guatemalan ethnographers. A pioneer of anthropological research in the country, Tax influenced the analytical and empirical frame of contemporary anthropological engagements as much as those to follow. Méndez-Domínguez (1974:542) points out that anthropologists looked to establish '(i) definition, delimitation and characterisation of the people under study; (ii) delimitation of social units; (iii) processes of change' (Méndez-Domínguez 1975:542). Thus, it may be contended that the work of Tax and that of the Instituto Indigenista Nacional during the Arévalo and Arbenz administrations and beyond, were centred on the interrelated problematics of taxonomy, mapping and teleology of ethnicity in Guatemala.

A primary example of the process of forging a taxonomic order is the *Distribución de las Lenguas Indígenas Actuales de Guatemala* (Goubard Carrera 1946:12). With reference to the Q'eqchi', for instance, the text marks the presence of *Quekchi* in Alta

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1992, 1995a, 1995b, 2000,), Wilson (1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1995, 1998), Zur (1998).
[13] Of relevance here are the publications of the Instituto Indigenista Nacional from 1946 to the late 1970s (1948a, 1948b, 1948c, 1949a, 1949b, 1979) as well as Adams (1952). The Instituto Indigenista Nacional issued a periodical, *Guatemala Indígena* and a Bulletin. The Seminario de Integración Social Guatemalteca publications were also under the Instituto's remit (Adams, R. N. 1956b, 1959, Britnell 1958, Carmack 1979, Freyre 1959, Gillin 1958, Goubard Carrera 1964, McArthur and Ebel 1969, Mendelson 1965, Méndez Domínguez 1967, Paul 1959, Solórzano 1963, Stoll, O. 1958, Termer 1957,

Verapaz *and* in Petén and Izabal. In Petén, *Quekchí* figures in San Luís and Sayaxché and it is interesting to note that these markers of ethnicity in the southern and western regions of the *departamento* will substantively disappear in later analyses (Schwartz 1990). [14] As for Petén, Goubard Carrera also lists *Lacandón* in the area of San José, a category to be later transformed into *Itzá* by Schwartz (1990) and *Itzaj* by the Maya Indigenous Movement (COPMAGUA 1995). The taxonomic order of the *Distribución de las Lenguas Indígenas Actuales de Guatemala* did not exclusively produce linguistic/cultural categories of indigeneity. Crucially, it tied linguistic and related cultural taxonomic orders to place. This is obvious in the way the taxonomic order established a link between ethnic markers and *municipios*, or administrative centres. To a significant extent, this was an effect of Sol Tax's preoccupation with 'social units', and more specifically with the *municipio* as social unit (Tax 1937, 1941, 1942, 1951).[15] Méndez-Domínguez summarises this point sharply:

'An oversimplified statement of Tax's views could take the following form: there are Indian populations that can be defined and understood in relation to other terms, such as municipio; they can be delimited by self-identification and observable features; and they can be characterized by surface as well as covert aspects of culture. In this statement, social-relational aspects are seriously considered neither at the definitional level nor at the delimitational level, but only at the level of characterization (...) Goubaud Carrera ... set himself the task of finding characteristics that make a person Indian. He surveyed the criteria people of various communities used to classify *them*. Hence his conception is descriptive and necessarily based on *surface* features, but instead of using the third person's (a nonparticipant's) criteria or those of the first person (self-identification), he used those of the second person, *the community*. Goubaud's work therefore holds up to criticism the notion that "Indian" exists as an entity in itself, objectively determinable, social-relationally free, and

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Wagley 1957, Wisdom 1961).

[14] By 'substantive disappearance' I mean that texts may mark Q'eqchi' presence in maps, while simultaneously excluding them from the analysis (see Schwartz 1990). There is no record of work on Petén that considers Q'eqchi' culture to be *Petenero*, or to pertain to the social and cultural life of the *departamento* in however abject a position.

[15] The 'municipio as social unit' is also amenable to further classification. In Tax's work (1937) the key distinctions are between closed-corporate and open communities.

potentially definable by a single synthetic structure of meaning. Rosales used to say that if you had a town without Indians, people would invent them' (Méndez-Domínguez 1975:542, my emphasis).

During the 1940s and 1950s, both Tax (1942, 1952) and his senior colleague Robert Redfield (1956) sought to provide cultural rather than racial understandings of ethnicity. They sought to identify a number of sociological categorisations by which ethnicity may be articulated in a specific locale (Smiths 1990:26, footnote 1), and so did their Guatemalan colleagues. 'Big and little traditions' in Guatemalan anthropology (Méndez-Domínguez 1975) produced taxonomic and teleological orders that were culturalist, constructionist and to some extent relational, but also invariably socio-structuralist and nativist. Furthermore, Wade (1997:43) points out that pluralism and harmony connoted Tax's understanding of ethnic relations.

The products of the collaboration between Tax, Redfield, Goubaud and Rosales were to be extremely influential for future anthropologists and readers of anthropological texts. Conversely, the issue of influence of individual practitioners on intellectual genealogies and traditions remains a vexed one. Taxonomic orders and related anthropological imaginings were produced through complex personal and intellectual exchanges and collaborations. Sol Tax had received his doctorate from the University of Chicago under Radcliffe-Brown's supervision (Rubinstein 1991, Sanjek 1994). He had then joined the Carnegie Institution's Mayan Indians research project on which Robert Redfield also worked. At Chicago, Redfield had been a student of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski, who had taught in the anthropology department between 1931 and 1937. Since then, Redfield had been very responsive to a Malinowskian approach to fieldwork, a direction which was strengthened by the relationships established during his research in Yucatan with his collaborator Villa Rojas.

'Preferring "objective" observation and survey work, Tax felt comfortable questioning key informants, but Redfield repeatedly pushed him to settle in one location where he could

improve his Quiché language skills and attend more to the pulse of ongoing interaction. This Malinowskian use of the unpaid informant (or actor) and focus on speech-in-action, Redfield reveals [in his letters], was one impressed upon him by his Mexican collaborator Alfonso Villa Rojas in their work in Yucatan, where Villa Rojas, but not Redfield, understood the local language. Villa Rojas, a schoolteacher when Redfield met him, had gone on to conduct fieldwork and write ethnography on his own, and he visited Tax in Guatemala in 1937. A similar trajectory for Antonio Goubaud Carerra [sic], a Guatemalan with some college education and an enthusiasm for anthropology, was urged on Redfield by Tax after meeting Goubaud in 1934' (Sanjek 1994:930).

The genealogical line of early efforts in the anthropology of Guatemala bifurcated: one led back to Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, the other to Villa Rojas. As anthropologists carved out a space for the discipline in academic and government institutions,[16] the labour of 'identity differentiation' stretched to their experiences of fieldwork. In epistolary exchanges with Redfield, Tax noted the remarkable hostility to North Americans he was encountering in Guatemala during his fieldwork (Rubinstein 1991), a reaction he attributed to the influx of tourists, landowners and to the unauthorised presence of a film crew shooting a Tarzan movie (Rubinstein 1991, Sanjek 1994:931). Thus, it seems that the cultural-typical and relational quality of identity was not just the ethnically marked Guatemalan subjects', but also the anthropologists'.

1.6 Of Essences and Classes

During the 1960s and 1970s the anthropology of Guatemala was still preoccupied with the study of ethnicity, although analyses were increasingly focused on ethnicity understood as the product of group or class relations. Those influenced by the work of Frederick Barth (1969) dismissed ideas concerning the relevance of cultural traits and

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[16] For an account of the relatively untroubled careers of Sol Tax and Robert Redfield in the 1940s and 1950s, notably during McCarthyism, see Price (1998, 2004). The FBI held a file on Robert Redfield, but both Redfield and Tax continued to work in the years of anti-Communist witch-hunts. Work at the Instituto Indigenista Nacional also continued during successive administrations and into the years of *La Violencia* (see footnote 4).

resorted instead to an analytical focus on group boundaries. As pointed out by Wade (1997:60), Barth-inspired analyses rendered ethnicity situational. In this view, ethnicity was profoundly relational and not biologically nor culturally essentialist. In Guatemala, the work of Colby and van den Berghe (1969) in the Ixil-speaking area of the *departamento* of Quiché was influential in this respect.

Those undertaking Marxian-inspired analyses, on the other hand, stressed the mutual constitution of ethnic, class and colonial relations. Whilst social and economic change may determine a shift from colonial to class relations, ethnic distinctions endured across systems of exploitation and domination (Stavenhagen 1975). Smith (1990:4) added that racialisation should also be included in the analysis, insofar as local theories of heritage and descent had produced different systems of racialised hierarchy at different times (Smith 1990:4, cf. Casáus Arzú 1995, Nelson 1999), and may thus be mobilised in historically specific systems of inequality. Nevertheless, Marxian approaches did not conceive of class relations as being more salient than ethnic relations. Rather, an interest in inequality and exploitation brought to the attentions of anthropology two key institutions seen as the site of articulation of both ethnicity and class, namely the community and the state (Smith 1990:12). An interest in the community as a social unit was not new, having been pioneered by Tax and Redfield in the 1930s and 1940s, but the addition of the notion of class produced different forms of cultural and historical contextualisation.

'(1) There was little or no "class" difference between Indians and ladinos until the plantation period [early plantation period 1870-1944]; only Indians were subject to tribute, but both Indians and ladinos were mostly self-employed, producing small surpluses for trade, rather than tenants on large estates [...]. (2) With the development of coffee plantations, many Indians were reduced to the position of a "semi" or seasonal proletariat, while ladinos became either tenant farmers in eastern Guatemala or a full-fledged proletariat on the plantations; while most urban production remained artisanal, most "managerial" or "middle" positions in production (both rural and urban) were monopolised by ladinos. (3) The coffee oligarchy, only some of whom existed as important families in the colonial period, was mostly "white" and "capitalist" (rather than seigniorial) in their economic intentions and means. (4) A major

element in the maintenance of Indian cultural identity has been Indian resistance to full proletarianisation and to capitalist relations of production within the community. And (5) in this respect, Indians feel little class identity with ladinos' (Smith 1990:25-6).

Interestingly, in this account ethnicity is viewed as salient in the colonial (1540-1800) and independence (1800-1870) periods, but class is not. During the plantation period (1870-1944), processes of production of 'ethnicity' and 'class' are understood to give rise to an indigenous semi-proletariat, a fully proletarian ladino constituency and a 'white' oligarchy. Further, the permanence of indigenous identity is explained in terms of indigenous refusal to undergo the full proletarianisation that exclusive engagement in the plantation economy would entail. Indigeneity thus depends both on refusal, and on practices that – by sustaining forms of community organisation other than those of capitalist relations of production – ultimately stave off assimilation and ensure cultural survival. This may give a sense of Marxian-inspired anthropological contributions to an understanding of cultural dynamics understood as coterminous with ethnicity, vis-à-vis the dynamics of political economy viewed in terms of class relations. The common ground among different analyses actually rested on the production of anthropological knowledge as pre-eminently local, and the relevance of anthropological analytical constructs such as ethnicity and class in terms of historically specific and geographically delimited communities. Marxian anthropology of Guatemala (Smith *et al* 1990) was thus marked by an acute awareness of the local character of these processes and the problematic status of any generalisation.

'Class relations in Guatemala have almost always been mediated by the state, rather than existing as stark relations between oppressed and oppressor. In addition, relations of exploitation have varied widely by region, and in each region class relations have been mediated by culture (ethnicity) and community in different ways' (Smith 1990:26).

Boundary- and class-based orientations had rather different analytical implications. The former implied that social change would entail possible dissolution of indigeneity through processes of acculturation and ladinoisation, while the latter stressed the

relation between the permanence of indigeneity and the perpetuation of systems of exploitation. An intermediate position between the content-free boundary approach and the Marxian focus on relations of production, underscored by the common theme of exploitation, is that of Guatemalan historian Martínez Peláez, whose work I have already discussed. In his book *La Patria del Criollo* Martínez Peláez (1970) contended that indigeneity was fully a product of the colonial encounter and thus fundamentally inauthentic in its post-colonial manifestations. *La Patria del Criollo* represents a foundational text for debates over the status of indigeneity in Guatemala, and for histories of insurgency. In the ethnographic present, Martínez's text was the oft-cited basis for analyses of the 'Indigenous Question' and critiques of *indigenista* quarters. Critiques of Pan-Maya cultural activism viewed as overwhelmingly concerned with pressing state institutions to recognised matters of *'cosmovisión'* (cosmovision, cosmology, worldview) set out in the 'Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous People' (Peace Accords 1996), rather than focused on pursuing the claims outlined in the 'Agreement on the Social and Economic Aspects and Agrarian Situation' (Peace Accords 1996) and specifically on the land question, were underpinned by references to *La Patria del Criollo*. Whilst anthropological and historical texts were mobilised to bolster different positions along the political spectrum, local contextualisations of the analytical categories of 'class' and 'ethnicity' troubled anthropological narratives concerning their status and relations.

1.7 Symbol, Discourse and Practice

From the 1980s to the 1990s, anthropological analyses developed critiques of essentialism alongside a number of more or less nuanced social constructionist positions. Anthropologists documented a complexity and multiplicity of local discourses and practices, striving to represent ethnographic subjects' historical agency and responses to social change (Nelson 1999, Wilson 1995, Watanabe 1992). Whilst the shift from socio-structural and structural concerns to discourse, representation and practice was preceded by forays in symbolic anthropology (Warren 1978), important ethnographic community-based studies moved beyond essentialism and a-historicism. Watanabe's (1992) ethnography of the Mam-speaking town of Santiago Chimaltenango, and Wilson's work with Q'eqchi' communities in Alta Verapaz (Wilson 1995) are cases in point.

In his ethnography of Q'eqchi' ethnic revivalism, Wilson (1995) adopted a radical social constructionist position when he gave an account of Q'eqchi' religious practices related to *tzuul taq'as*, or spirits of the mountains, in Alta Verapaz. Wilson showed how beliefs and practices related to *tzuul taq'as* were not some essential cultural trait, residues of a pre-colonial past, or post-colonial inventions. Rather, they were self-consciously revivalist practices, which took into account historical events such as the violence that was sweeping the region. In other words, they were linked to Q'eqchi' subjects' responses to the historical conditions they inhabited. It is Hervik's contention (2001), that despite their propensity for contextualising and historicising the experiences of subjects and communities in their respective geographical areas, both Wilson (1995) and Watanabe (1992) deployed essentialist and ahistorical analytical strategies, in that they called upon materials from the regions of Chiapas and Yucatan, 'sometimes centuries apart', to produce their contexts, thus making 'uncritical use of cross-regional, cross-temporal sources. At this level of ethnicity, Mayan-ness becomes essentialised across time and space and against all warnings' (Hervik 2001:345).

Hervik's rebuke (2001) is interesting in several respects. For one, it shows anthropological context-making efforts and strategies develop in the direction of ever more localised analyses, to the point that the purpose of any cross-regional, cross-temporal and, one suspects, cross-cultural comparison seems to be invalidated. Not all anthropology may be willing to forego comparison (Gingrich and Fox 2002), in an attempt to defend forms of contextualisation envisaged as ever more local and myopic in scope. In point of fact, anti-essentialism need not be predicated on the dimension of the local alone, and certainly not on visions of the local imagined as narrow parochialism. Interdiction on movements across time and space, be they experiential and/or textual, works against attempts to make sense of complex local configurations. Thus, what is foregrounded in Hervik's rebuke (2001) is a pernicious form of essentialism and a denial of the ways in which all anthropological subjects, here including the anthropologist, in fact do move across time and space, albeit in ways that are thoroughly local. Were one to point to essentialism in Wilson's analysis, this would not centre on the matter of comparison, but rather on the analytical categories Wilson deploys to give a sense of Q'eqchi' culture. Chief among these, I would single

out 'production', 'reproduction', 'gender' and the ways in which Wilson (1995) figures their relations in the ethnography. It is anthropological subjects themselves who expose essentialism, as they out-contextualise the anthropologist. To illustrate this point I set Wilson's representations of Q'eqchi' culture against my own ethnographic fragments.

Wilson (1995) notes that the Q'eqchi' are agriculturists by vocation but also traders. Household organisation takes a number of forms encompassing nuclear and extended models. The intense ritual calendar centres around the agricultural cycle and Q'eqchi' 'traditional' religious practices are mainly concerned with the *tzuul taq'as*, or 'mountain spirits', i.e. beings that inhabit features of the landscape such as caves and hill tops.[17] While features of Q'eqchi' culture as wide-ranging as the importance accorded to maize cultivation and notions of personhood have been addressed in anthropological research (cf. Estrada Monroy 1990, Siebers 1999), only two monographs actually deal systematically and exhaustively with such issues (Cabarrús [1979] 1998, Wilson 1995). Wilson's book also deals with the notion of *awas*, a term that has complex connotations and one to which a number of cultural practices are related.

Wilson (1995) notes that among the Q'eqchi', *awas* amounts to a polysemic concept that has contextually variable applications and meanings. Crucially, *awas* occurs in maize and in humans and the concept therefore applies to the sphere of agricultural production and the sphere of human reproduction. *Awas* usually indicates the breaching of a boundary and the mixing of elements that should be kept apart and as such, according to Wilson (1995, chapters 4 and 5), *awas* fits the definition of taboo offered by Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger* (1966). When such boundaries are breached or transgressed, adverse effects ensue. In the context of planting, transgressions of '*awas* taboos' exemplified by men having sexual relations when they should instead be abstaining (Wilson 1995:63-64), lead to crop failure brought about by disease or wild animals. On the other hand, *awas* also affect human beings

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[17] It is often noted (Cabarrús [1979] 1998, Estrada Monroy 1990, Pedroni 1990, Wilson 1995) that beliefs in *tzuul taq'as* mean that Q'eqchi' culture is closely related to the landscape. One question I explored during the course of my fieldwork was what may actually happen to Q'eqchi' sacred geographies in conditions of displacement. In other words, what happens to the *tzuul taq'a* when one is forced to abandon one's place of residence and flee to a new area? I address the question in Chapter

as a category of illness that develops during gestation. Should a pregnant woman be repulsed by an object or person, or desire a foodstuff without being able to obtain it, the newborn shall exhibit a condition related to the offensive object or act. *Awas* are therefore primarily thought of as 'inherited' conditions that befall newborn babies (Wilson 1995:125).[18]

As noted by Wilson (ibid), during pregnancy Q'eqchi' women are accorded particular privileges such as eating all available foodstuffs that they may fancy. Further, they may actively object to any behaviour they may find offensive, as it is advisable that a pregnant woman be in a state of *kalkab'il*, or inner peace. As *kalkab'il* is also the ideal condition for people who take part in ritual practices, notably planting-related ritual activities, Wilson argues that a number of elements in Q'eqchi' culture point to specific relation between the realms of production and reproduction, maize and humans.[19] Failing to reproduce the flare and elegance implicit in Wilson's writings and line of enquiry, his conclusion could be summarised by the following equation, whereby the relation between the human realm and the realm of maize rests on both being affected by *awas* conditions, all conducive to the idea that in Q'eqchi' culture production and reproduction are coterminous and humans and maize are part of a single system. [20]

WOMEN : CHILDREN = LAND : MAIZE

⇓   ⇓

AWAS IN HUMANS   *AWAS* IN MAIZE

Two.

[18] In the rare cases when *awas* occur in adults, they only befall pregnant women (Wilson ibid).

[19] 'In sum, **production and reproduction are conceptually united**. In humans and maize, *awas* affect different parts of the reproductive/productive process in complementary ways. In maize, *awas* taboos are present only during the prefertilization and fertilization (planting) periods. In humans, only the periods of gestation and parturition are surrounded with *awas*. These distinctions point to a basic unity. The creation of people and maize are part of a single system, for humans and maize *awas* together encompass the whole process of prefertilization, fertilization, gestation and birth.' (Wilson 1995:130, my emphasis).

[20] 'The **pregnant woman is like the land** during planting, and therefore both are treated with care and seriousness [...] Both are *loq'*, **sacred**. Extremes of behavior and irreverence can cause a child to be born with *awas* or the maize crop to fail. In corns and humans, *awas* illnesses create and emanate from a preoccupation with the mother/earth matrix that produces the growing child/plant. [...] Given the overt association between **women and land**, we would expect a clear identification between children and corn. The two are the two entities that suffer from *awas* illnesses. [...] Like **land and women** during the planting, the equation of maize and children means they are kept apart, in this case in the sphere of *awas* illnesses'. (Wilson 1995:128-129, my emphasis)

Wilson's elegant chapters on *awas* in maize and humans constitute an extremely interesting piece of anthropological analysis. By focusing on *awas* Wilson aims to illustrate how the realm of human beings and maize are a crucial part of Q'eqchi' cosmology as well as critical points at which notions and practices related to production and reproduction are articulated. However, given his rendition of *awas* in humans, his argument may be subjected to scrutiny. As noted above, Wilson seems to assume that *awas* are passed on to the children through the mother. Furthermore, Wilson focuses on female pregnancy and elaborates on the particularities of such a state without ever wondering whether men play a role in the process. When he asks a man about his pregnant wife, the man replies he does not know (Wilson 1995:133).[21] Wilson's arguments were part of the context of my own fieldwork to the extent that I discussed *awas* (and other conditions) at any suitable opportunity. In the exchange that follows, I conversed with a Q'eqchi' man.

S: What happens during pregnancy? I ask because I have been told several times that it is not only the woman who is pregnant, it's the man too...Do you have children?

I: No, I don't have children as yet. I understand what you are saying, for instance, I also asked my mother why is it that **the man too is considered to be pregnant** (*también al hombre se le considera como embarazado*), and of course, it has nothing to do with it, and she says, well, it's because it [the new life] is being formed, and it is of both of them, it's not only the woman's, the being exists because the man exists, because there can't be another life without woman and man, and so life has to be there. For instance, in the case of the woman, **it is said that what the woman feels, logically the man has to share** (*compartir*), because it is understood it is a couple.

S: And if the man misbehaves (*se porta mal*), something happens...

I: Something happens. So, it [the new life] will suffer the damage (*daño*)...for this there are *awas*. The man, as from when the woman becomes pregnant, **the man as much as the**

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[21] However, are all Q'eqchi' men unaware or unwilling to discuss pregnancy? Might it not be that Q'eqchi' men whose wives are pregnant cannot discuss the issue for specific reasons, and other men should therefore be asked instead? Further, is it certain that men are thought to have nothing to do with the pregnancy process?

woman have to uphold great formality and many secrets[22] (*guardar mucha formalidad y muchos secretos*).

S: What you are saying is very important, because, so far, **those who have written about** *awas* say that the responsibility for children getting *awas* is the woman's, that if the woman burns an ants' nest, *awas sank*[23] will arise, that if women walk in the moonlight, *re li poo*[24] will arise [...], in any case, you say the man has some responsibility in the matter as well.

I: Oh yes. As I told you, **the man as much as the woman have to look after themselves** (*cuidarse*), during the months of pregnancy. For instance, if the man enjoys walking at night, or walking the streets, then, as I told you, the man as much as the woman don't have to go out at night because **if the man goes out at night, that's why there is that illness,** *aam a'aj*[25], which is nowadays known as asthma. It's a sound they [the newborns] make here in the throat. So, when the man spends his time walking around at night, you know that that spiders make their webs on the paths, and the man goes by and destroys them, the spider had worked hard and the man starts [destroying them], so, how shall I put it? **It's a mistake made by the man with regard to the animal. For that purpose/reason there is the** *awas aam a'aj*.

S: Oh, I see, it's an *awas*...

I: It's an *awas*, so it comes from there that **the man has to share** (*compartir*) **the suffering of the pregnant woman...**

As I discussed Wilson's ethnography in the field, Q'eqchi' men discussed *awas* with me[26] as something very relevant to their lives and their experiences. In point of fact,

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[22] 'Formality' refers to morality and rules of conduct. 'Secrets' refer to public secrets (cf. Taussig 1999). More specifically, '*secretos*' constitute a pool of knowledge that allows individual to deflect the negative effects implicit in certain actions, contingencies, etc.

[23] *Sank* means ant in Q'eqchi'.

[24] *Poo* means moon in Q'eqchi'.

[25] *Aj aam* means spider in Q'eqchi.

[26] This is an example of another conversation between two Q'eqchi' men and I.

S: And look, about *awas*, always on the topic of children, can you explain to me the matter of *awas?*

D: Well, there are many types of *awas*, when one talks of *awas*, when the woman is already in that state, the woman and the man, when his wife is pregnant, they will have to look after themselves

men's (mis-)behaviour during pregnancy seemed to have potentially as much as an effect on the health of the future child as women's conduct. Describing pregnancy, some Q'eqchi' men and women suggested that pregnancy was both male and female, in the sense that when women were pregnant, it was 'as if' men were pregnant too. In as much as my Q'eqchi' interlocutors were very clear about this 'as if', they were also adamant about the fact that responsible behaviour on the part of the future father was a pre-requisite for an *awas*-free newborn. Future mothers and fathers were therefore said to be subjected to a series of interdictions, e.g. do not go out at night, and were awarded some privileges, e.g. eat all the desired food that is available. These fascinating insights into Q'eqchi' gestation theory deserve to be considered vis-à-vis the tradition of anthropological engagement with local understandings of procreation (cf. Aijmer 1992, Canessa 1999, Delaney 1991, Diemberger 1993, Franklin 1997, Malinowski 1932, Shapiro and Linke 1996). This would no doubt provide a further level of contextualisation.

Nevertheless, the Q'eqchi' view that *awas* may be passed on to children by both mother and father exposes the profound essentialism in Wilson's rendition of Q'eqchi' culture as depending on an equation of land with women on the one hand, and maize with children on the other hand. Whilst it seemed that not only women reproduced but also men, Wilson's renderings of Q'eqchi' concepts of production and reproduction appeared incomplete vis-à-vis subjects' own contextualisations. What was exposed in these ethnographic conversations on the matter of *awas* were Q'eqchi'

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very much (*cuidarse mucho*), they won't have to go out at night, neither the man or the woman, the woman has to carry her matches...
S: And garlic...
D: And garlic, and even...
S: Here? [pointing at the waist]
D: Yes, here, and even, a cloth if it's a woman, I mean, the woman has to wear her her her...
S: Fustang (undergarment worn under the *corte*, the traditional skirt)?
D: Her red fustang ...
S: Red...
D: Or red underwear, she has to, to defend herself from the evils (*malos*), and the man must not whistle at night, also the man has to carry his things too, as the woman carried hers...
JA: And desiring things, for instance, as I was saying, if one says, be the woman or the man, I feel like eating pork scratchings, or I feel like eating something, but if they only desire it [and don't fulfill the desire], that's where the *awas* arises...
S: That's why when one is eating in front of a pregnant woman always has to offer...
JA: That's how it is...
D: One has to give a piece.
S: But also to the man?
D: Yes.

views as to the duogenic character of gestation, *as much as* an anthropologist's presuppositions as to the masculine gendering of production and the feminine gendering of reproduction, the latter grounded in the tiresome anthropological folk model, 'the pregnant woman is like the land' (Wilson 1995:129).

Wilson's ethnography (1995) presents the realms of *tzuul taq'as* and that of *awas* in gendered terms, with practices related to *tzuul taq' as* corresponding to a domain of male involvement, and those related to *awas* coinciding with women's domain. This gendering of domains was radically problematised during my fieldwork. Whilst listing types of *awas*, interlocutors mentioned *awas futbal* (football). As only Q'eqchi' men played football in the community in question, a*was futbal* confirmed that what were perceived to be exclusively male activities may cause the condition. In sum, what was revealed were local re-fashioning of *awas* theory and practice, as much as the refractory essentialisms of anthropological analyses and their (gendered) presuppositions. In turn, these essentialist residues may not be intrinsic features in and of themselves. Rather, they emerge and are produced as anthropological knowledge is recontextualised and consumed, and as it inevitably out-contextualises the anthropologist.

1. 10 *La Cadena del Anuncio*: Anthropologies of the Conflict

From the late 1980s to the present, a new genre of anthropological enquiry in Guatemala developed in response to the violence that was sweeping the country, and in some instances engulfing anthropologists alongside their interlocutors.[27] Foundational in this respect was the publication of the work of anthropologist and Jesuit priest Ricardo Falla. *Quiché Rebelde*, an account of responses to Acción Católica (Catholic Action) in San Antonio Ilotenango, *departamento* of Quiché was first published in Guatemala in 1978. In *Masacres de la Selva*, Falla (1992) provided an account of the massacres that took place in Ixcán in the early 1980s. He views the labour of anthropology to be participant observation once removed, and his role to be to tell what others have seen, in *la cadena del anuncio*, or a 'chain of annunciation'.

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27 Anthropologists were literally engulfed in the histories of *La Violencia* in Guatemala. Guatemalan anthropologist Myrna Mack was killed in 1991. Victor Montejo was a school teacher who was forced to flee the country in the 1970s. In the United States he trained as an anthropologist and has written extensively about his experience of the violence (1987, 1991, 1999).

'Why write a book about massacres? It seems a negative and denigrating effort. Why remember those crudities and cruelties without narration (*sin cuento*)? The witness offers us the key. The testimony which emerged from the bottom of his emotive memory – "I will never forget" – announces a reality which is existentially positive for him: I am alive. His testimony is good news. Whilst ever more terrible/horrific is the narration of what he witnessed (*presenciar*), more marvellous is the reality that he announces: I am alive. This book [*Masacres de la Selva*] assumes the finality of this and hundreds more of these witnesses, who want to tell the people of Guatemala and the nations of the world: we are alive, incredibly, we are alive. (...) We [writers, anthropologists?] are only intermediaries of the announcement. We are not immediate witnesses of what we are going to narrate. But we have been entrusted with the task by fate or history, whatever we may want to call it, of transmitting what the immediate witnesses have seen, smelt, touched, heard, felt, interpreted, thought, fought...We cannot silence it, because they have narrated it as a marvellous story/history (*historia maravillosa*). (...) In this chain of announcement, faith (*fe*) is an indispensable element which transverses all the testimonies, because the good news cannot but be accepted voluntarily. In the first instance, it is to believe the witness himself, because he believes that it is worthwhile to narrate his testimony. But there is a further important aspect of his faith. It is not so much that he may believe in what he is seeing, in the fire and the slaughterhouses (*destazadores*). What he sees and hears, he experiences directly. But on narrating it, he realises that for many, it will be difficult to believe that human beings (*hombres*) may be capable of dehumanisation so gruesome as the one they have witnessed, because to himself and to many of the victims it has been laborious to believe that the Army would commit such crimes, and, as we shall see in many testimonies, that absence of faith cost them their lives' (Falla 1992:ii-iii).

As a result of Falla's work, exhortations for an *antropología comprometida* (Manz 1995) that is a theoretical and methodological anthropological practice that refuses the

'luxury of indifference'[28], were taken up by many anthropologists (Carmack *et al* 1988, Manz 1988, Thompson 2001). The analyses of the violence thus produced represent the inception of a new mode of doing anthropology and one that is 'on the move', as it accompanies the displacements forced upon communities by the violence inflicted by the Guatemalan Army during the late 1970s and early 1980s. *Antropología comprometida* also establishes a new complicity between and among anthropological subjects, as they become linked in 'chains of annunciation' (Falla 1992). Ethnically marked subjects feature in these analyses as the designed victim of genocidal state violence.

Stoll (1993) gives a rather different view of *La Violencia* and the place of ethnicity and indigeneity within it. In his controversial study of the Ixil triangle[29] *Between Two Armies* (1993), Stoll represents the conflict as a confrontation between two parties, namely the Army and the guerrilla. He argues that as innocent indigenous population got caught between the two, their social conditions and political status was adversely affected by the operations of the guerrilla. Whilst – before the confrontation – there were forms of negotiation between subordinate Ixiles and landowning ladinos, and some possibility of upwards mobility for Ixil subjects, with the advent of the conflict these largely disappear (Stoll 1993). The representational frame here is the bipolarism of the Cold War, and as Gledhill (2001) has poignantly argued, Stoll ultimately recolonises ethnicised subjects under the banner of giving voice to indigenous agency.[30]

Despite revisionist accounts (Stoll 1993, 1999), on the whole, anthropologists have laboured to develop frames for an understanding of experiences of *La Violencia* in local contexts (Carlsen 1997, Wilson 1995) – accounting for the conflict from the perspective of a community or a region. Others have engaged with the violence after the fact, and dealt with fear, terror and their effects on memory for gendered constituencies of widows (Green 1999, Zur 1998). The urban perspective proposed by

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[28] Ricardo Falla (Manz 1995) argues that anthropologists should not be only superficially committed and sympathetic to their respondents. Rather, his 6-year long fieldwork with the Communities of Population in Resistance Ixcán (CPR Ixcán), that is, civilian population escaping army repression and hiding in the Ixcán forest, is an example of how it is possible to address directly the needs of the community and involve one's respondents in the research process.

[29] The 'Ixil triangle' refers to the three Ixil speaking *municipios* of Nebaj, Chajul and Cotzal, *departamento* of Quiché.

Nelson (1999), who focuses on violence and body politics in the national imagination, complements these subtle ethnographies of the violence in rural areas.

Movement, displacement and deterritorialisation have become ever more relevant to anthropological practices of contextualisation (cf. Thompson 2001), as analyses increasingly deal with the movements engendered in, and through, the conflict.[31] Furthermore, anthropological context-making has become increasingly multi-sited in its analytical practices, as it strives to represent the violence and invoke a sense of complicity and solidarity among ethnographic subjects.

1.11 Conclusion: Incommensurability and Out-contextualisation

In the ethnographic present, anthropological texts were in the process of becoming important interlocutors of the Pan-Mayan movement and other constituencies, often representing a record against which to validate cultural practices. Richard Wilson's (1995) elegant ethnography of Q'eqchi' knowledge and ritual practice related to maize and *tzuul taq'a* (beings of the mountains) had just been published in Spanish, and the influence of this text was felt beyond the boundaries of Alta Verapaz. In 2000, on a visit to the Q'eqchi' school and cultural centre Aj Awinel in El Estor, Izabal, I was asked whether a copy of Wilson's book recently translated into Spanish could be made available. The text was perceived by the Q'eqchi' teachers and activists as an important tool in the work of 'recuperation' of Q'eqchi' culture, work the school was committed to.

Consumption and circulation of anthropological texts (and their authors) followed disparate routes in the ethnographic present. Between 1999 and 2000, anthropological and historical research carried out by Norman B. Schwartz (1990) was the primary reference for the operations of local and international non-governmental organisations and multi-lateral agencies in Petén, Guatemala. This point is also noted by Sundberg (1998), who highlights the normative character that anthropological writings have acquired in the region: '[f]or cultural and historical data, NGOs tend to rely on anthropologist Norman Schwartz's (1990) work, *Forest Society*, which seems to have

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[30] Stoll's position is echoed in Yvon Le Bot's study (1992).

[31] For literature on returnees, see Taylor (2002), Rousseau et al (2001), van der Vaeren (2000), while González (2000) and Stepputat (1999) follow movements from local perspectives.

acquired prescriptive status in Petén' (Sundberg 1998:7). *Forest Society* had thus become a repository of 'truths' about regional ethnic identities and relations and a record against which ethnic conflict and ethnically marked disputes over land were understood. Through explicit assignation of authenticity and environmental knowledge to the 'autochthonous' populations, and implicit attribution of foreignness, environmental 'ignorance' and hence 'destructiveness' to migrants who have most recently come into the region, *Forest Society* directly informed the validation of demands of those groups who had come to be considered rightful residents, at the expense of those who were increasingly deemed to be 'invaders' (cf. Sundberg 2003). Interestingly, *Forest Society* (Schwartz 1990) and the region that is its subject, namely Petén, both have been consistently out-contextualised in anthropological analyses. They have been placed out of context, and demoted from reviews of the history of disciplinary engagement in the country.[32]

Anthropological research is thus deeply implicated in the production of essentialist taxonomies of ethnicity and related topographies. When 'the local' is spatially and conceptually qualified in terms of indigenous ethnicity, situated contrapuntal histories and specific eschatologies are made to encroach and redefine imperial and national logics. Mostly centred on and around *cabeceras* (administrative towns) of *departamentos* (administrative regions), representations of the local in question often belie a certain nativism.[33] Anthropological and *indigenista* narratives thus occasionally converge to stress the importance of diversity, plurality and indigeneity as records of Guatemalan counter-hegemonic histories. Opposing imperial eschatologies, they illuminate plural narratives and experiences, aim to counteract epistemic violence, and in the case of *indigenista* intellectuals and activists, claim their rightful space in the consciousness and apparatus of the nation.[34] However culturalist, both sets of discourses also participate in the solidification, normalisation and prescription of (ethnic) difference in contemporary Guatemala.

Anthropological research is also intimately implicated in the delineation of the

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[32] *Forest Society* is hardly ever cited by anthropologists working in Guatemala, although it constitutes a key reference for geographers (Carr 2001, Sundberg 1997, 1998, 2003, 2004) and NGO staff working in Petén.
[33] The notable exception is the work of Charles D. Thompson (2001) on the Jacaltecos and their relation to borders that bleed.

eschatology and empire. Through disciplinary propensity for all indigeneity, however marked, anthropology has made important contributions to debates concerning the ethnicised and racialised political economy of imperial agency. Anthropology's concerned with defining the status of indigeneity vis-à-vis imperial dynamics has produced numerous analyses. These include a sustained engagement with analysis and representation of multiple experiences of the conflict. Different approaches to the contextualisation of indigeneity, nonetheless share a teleological vocation. In turn, through analytical attention to the status of indigeneity, anthropological discourses have produced multiple eschatologies and teleologies. Ethnically marked and unmarked subjects have been envisaged as products of and incited into existence by colonial and imperial agency. Alternatively, ethnicity has been viewed as marker of that which empire has routinely failed to annihilate.[35]

As noted by Strathern (1995a), culture as an item of knowledge is part of local native discourse as much as anthropological discourse. Since the pioneering work of Ricardo Falla, anthropological and ethnographic subjects have developed complicit relations through which denunciations of violence and terror have been possible. With these accounts, a complex field of experiences and interpretations has emerged, itself the subject of local re-appropriations. An effect of this has been the out-contextualisation of the anthropologist (Strathern 1995a) and the exposure of anthropologists' culture as somewhat different from anyone else (Strathern 1995a:11).

Out-contextualisation works on a further register in that it produces incommensurability. In the case of the anthropology of Guatemala I have reviewed, I noted how critiques of essentialism resulted in denials of the analytical viability of comparison, thus making local experiences incommensurable. The contextualisation of local experiences marked by tropes of indigeneity has also produced the simultaneous out-contextualisation of experience in local contexts that are connoted as non-indigenous. This explains the absence from my review of anthropological engagement with the region of Petén. The northern *departamento* has been regularly

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[34] On the politics of *indigenismo* see Warren 1995, 1996, 1998.
[35] Anthropologists are fully historical subjects and as such, they participants observers to the fullest of extents (cf. Price 2000, 2004). This history has just begun to be unraveled, and for Petén, it is yet to be written. Future research may wish to focus on the archaeological campaigns organised by Pennsylvania University in the 1970s and early 1980s and the anthropologists associated with them.

out-contextualised by anthropology, partly through its perceived non-indigenous and sparsely populated character. I have surreptitiously introduced Petén into my discussion of local appropriations of anthropological texts. In turn, anthropologies of the conflict have out-contextualised the historical experiences of guerrilla militancy. In the chapter that follows, I strive to contextualise what has been out-contextualised in anthropological analyses, that is, what has been placed out of view or deemed unworthy of attention. I am aware that my context-making practices may produce incommensurability,[36] but it is anthropological subjects themselves who ultimately out-contextualise the discipline and myself.

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[36] 'If different knowledge practices produce different forms of incommensurability, then their foundational or transcendent concepts (their instruments) will also have different work to do' (Strathern 1995b:11).

Chapter 2

Multi-sitedness and *desarraigos*[1]

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the 'contexts' of the present research and the ways in which different cultural texts may illuminate contrasting and often contradictory aspects and interpretations of social life in the Guatemala. Through juxtaposition, partiality and what is or has been 'out of context' is brought into the descriptive frame (Strathern 1987; Fardon 1995). In my analysis I aim to delineate 'plurality in context', through reflections on the contextual and located character of selected accounts and the systems of representation that may be said to underpin them. Accounts and fragments of social reality relationally contextualise each other while also pointing to what has been out-contextualised and kept out of view. Furthermore, the juxtaposition[2] of heterogenous cultural texts – as much as their mutual out-contextualisalisation – gives a form to the multi-sitedness of my fieldwork. In other words, the complex social reality of Petén is here contrived to reveal itself in the pieces and parts of the itinerant, and multi-sited, research practices, through which Petén contextualises/ed itself in that elusive and open-ended interval that was/is the temporality of the field/work (Hastrup 1990, 1995).

In this chapter, I take issue with the systemic models of analysis and representation of the social and cultural realm, and the exclusions they engendered. I note that the anthropology of Guatemala has deemed Petén to be 'out of context' in the sense of being unworthy of attention or tangential to national, regional and international dynamics. Conversely, I explore how Petén, rather than being peripheral vis-à-vis national, regional and international contexts, has in fact been enmeshed in complex relations with the nation-state and regional and global geopolitical realities. To reflect on the relation

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[1] 'Desarraigo' literally means 'displacement'.

[2] Juxtaposition is a textual strategy which is not deployed here with the intent of providing a solution to the problem of context. The problem of context is preeminently epistemological, a point which is taken up and explored further in chapter 3.

between Petén and the nation-state, I discuss the administrations of Juan José Arévalo and Jacobo Arbenz and note how these impacted configurations of social life in the *departamento*, notably through policies of colonisation. Further, I note how the forest of Petén was the training ground for the counter-revolutionary forces that staged the invasion of Cuba in 1961, thus challenging accounts that have represented Petén as peripheral vis-à-vis national and international events. In point of fact, the region of Petén was a site of early militarisation and counter-insurgency. I procede to document the establishment and operations of the government agency in charge of the development of the region between 1960 and 1989, namely the *Fondo de Fomento y Desarrollo de Petén* (FYDEP) and argue that since its inception, FYDEP amounted to an organism of oligarchic self-governance, which was under direct control of the Guatemalan Army. As such, a focus on FYDEP allows for the delineation of processes of relentless and progressive militarisation of the *departamento* in the second half of the twentieth century. Further, I consider the operations of FYDEP and specifically FYDEP's role in overseeing the colonisation of Petén as a project of governmentality, through the accounts of FYDEP personnel.[3] I argue that – through a consideration of different orders of connections that have produced Petén historically as a site of governmentality – histories of insurgency begin to contextualise themselves. Defying linear periodisations of the conflict, I conclude by noting contemporary forms of violent governmentality in the guise of conservationist agendas and document the displacements they generated in the ethnographic present.

2.2 El Petén

The *departamento* of El Petén is the northern region of Guatemala which has consistently occupied a relatively peripheral location in both a capital-centred national imagination and highlands-oriented anthropological gazes. Contemporary Petén amounts to roughly 36,000 square kilometers enclosed by the Guatemalan highlands of Alta Verapaz to the south, the *departamento* of Izabal to the southeast and the periodically disputed borders with Mexico to the northwest and Belize to the northeast. Envisaged as a vast, remote and

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[3] Accounts are drawn from memoirs that FYDEP personnel have produced (cf. Samayoa Rivera n.d.) as

sparsely populated rainforest punctuated by innumerable Ancient Maya archaeological sites[4], Petén was for the most part of the 20th century a relatively distant outpost. [5] 'To the untrained eye, that is, to most of us, as late as 1970 Petén looked like a tropical rainforest – much of it still does' wrote Norman Schwartz in 1990, adding that in order to envisage the Petenero landscape, one would best 'keep in the mind's eye an image of a tropical lowland frontier' (Schwartz 1990:10). To many Guatemalans, Petén was an inhospitable and inaccessible place, where some thought '*las tierras no sirven*', that is, even land, the most disputed of resources in the country, was 'no good' (Samayoa Rivera n.d.:11).

The sense of the singularity of Petén, seemingly apparent in its distinctive landscape, was substantiated by further notable Petenero differences vis-à-vis the national context. In the first instance, the region had hosted specific histories of resistance to the Conquest and localised post-Conquest colonial arrangements. Between 1700 and 1821, colonial administration and control of this 'frontier military district and penal colony' (Schwartz 1990:42) were in the hands of *criollo* families who took residence in the town of Remedios. The colonial centre of Remedios was built on the site of Tayasal, which, in turn, had been the pre-Conquest Itzá capital.[6] Tayasal, vividly remembered by Peteneros[7] in the ethnographic present for the fierce and prolonged resistance organised by the Itzá against the Spaniards, was the last city to capitulate to the *Conquistadores* in 1697. [8] In

well as from interviews and conversations with ex-FYDEP employees I conducted in the field.

[4] A comprehensive history of archaeological campaigns in Petén is yet to be written. The most well known institutional presence in the *departamento* was the fifteen-year long archaeological investigation (1956-1970) undertaken by the University of Pennsylvania Museum (UPM) at the ancient Maya site of Tikal.

[5] When I visited Petén for the first time in 1978, access by land from Guatemala City was an arduous journey that took longer than twenty-four hours. *Fokker* planes would also transport goods, people and information from Guatemala City to the airstrip on the shores of the lake Petén Itzá, central Petén.

[6] Schwartz (1990:32) notes that the Itzá were 'a Mayanized people of non-Maya origin who had migrated to settle in Yucatán. Between 1200 and 1450 Itzá groups moved south from Yucatán to Petén, where they dominated previously established people'. I retain the orthography deployed by Schwartz (1990) in this section, when referring to his work.

[7] During the course of my fieldwork, the resistance of Tayasal was discussed by many Peteneros living on the shore of the lake Petén Itzá. While the processes of constitution of remembrance of the past are plural and complex, the fact that the Peteneros in question resided on the very site where Tayasal is said to have been located may be important. After a heavy rainfall, children perused the soil searching for fragments of pottery and obsidian and commented on Tayasal periodically resurfacing.

[8] It should be noted that the Spanish conquest of Yucatán was undertaken between 1527 and 1546 and control of much of Guatemala and Verapaz had been achieved by 1527 (Schwartz 1990:33). Although uprisings were frequent, the fierce resistance put up by the Itzá of Tayasal is noted with pride by the present-day inhabitants of the towns and villages on the shore of the lake Petén Itzá.

the post-conquest aftermath, *criollo* families settled on the shores of the lake Petén Itzá in the new colonial town of Remedios, ruled over this remote 'hinterland within hinterlands' (Schwartz 1990:39). Distance from the metropolitan colonial centres throughout the colonial period made it possible for Petén to enjoy relative independence from the Bourbon administration. Petén's difference, however, is represented as reaching far back to pre-Conquest times. Schwartz, for instance, notes that pre- and post-Conquest 'indigenous' populations living in Petén had affinities with the Yucatan region, rather than with the Guatemalan highlands or the Pacific Coast (Reina 1964, 1967a, 1967b, Reina and Schwartz 1974, Schwartz 1990:31-76). In historical and anthropological accounts (Schwartz 1990, Soza 1970), Petén has consistently been represented as *sui generis* and peripheral vis-à-vis the colonial and post-colonial national contexts.

Between the 1870s and the 1970s Schwartz (1990: 202) argues that the development of the *chicle* industry, namely the extractive economy of the sap of the *chico zapote* tree, proved a remarkably lucrative activity for the prominent descendents of colonial *criollos* in Petén, and for the nation's coffers alike. Formally tied to the nation through the office of the *Gobernación* and the figure of the *Gobernador*, and substantially connected through fiscal ties, Petén paid tributes to the national government. Fiscal contributions however failed to secure any notable dedicated investment in the region. As noted by Schwartz (1990:203), '[o]ver the years, very little of the revenue from *chicle* was used to invest in productive activities. Fiscal linkages were as limited as production linkages'. Relative isolation and general disengagement from national political developments, according to Schwartz, continued virtually unaltered in the 20th century, and during the progressive decades of the Arévalo and Arbenz administrations. Schwartz (1990:191) argues that

'Arbenz's land reforms, important as they were elsewhere in Guatemala, had *no effect* on underpopulated Petén. There, until the 1970s, there was no pressure on the land, and few highlanders rich or poor had any interest in the distant northern lowlands. For example, between 1945 and 1954, there were 1,497 local agrarian committees set up in Guatemala, but not a single

one in Petén' (ibid:191, my emphasis).

With the exception of the establishment of Suchilma (*Sindicato Único de Chicleros y Laborantes de Madera*), the *chicleros* (rubber tappers) and woodcutters union which operated fairly independently for about a decade and successfully ended debt peonage in the chicle industry (Schwartz 1990:191-2), Petén is said to have maintained its peripheral position vis-à-vis national affairs. Schwartz (1990) consistently maintains that Petén's marginality vis-à-vis the national political context often worked in the interests of the local population, as this meant that the population in Petén was spared some of the violence and strife that befell the rest of the country at times of national and civil unrest. However, this line of argument and analysis fails to address and account for the manner in which violence, surveillance and control may have functioned in Petén in ways that were thoroughly Petenero, and indeed thoroughly local, yet no less brutally productive and capillary. [9]

Schwartz's own texts contain the traces of these local histories as well as pointers to the complex configurations of power in the *departamento*, and their effects. By way of example, the historical realities of unionisation of rubber tappers and woodcutters in Suchilma may be considered. Schwartz (1990:191) concedes that the unionisation effort was fully a product of the progressive reforms that were being implemented in the country as a whole during the Arévalo and Arbenz administrations (1945-1954). Nevertheless, Schwartz swiftly forecloses any productive evaluation of the historical experience of union organising, noting that Suchilma was from its inception viewed by many *chicleros* themselves as a corrupt organisation that had detrimental effects on the overall demand for *chicle*.

The ambivalence that seems to have characterised the relation between *chicleros* and the union is extremely interesting, and a number of factors are highlighted by Schwartz (1990:192) as having played a part in the relative failure to establish class consciousness and solidarity among *chicleros*. First, *chicle* extraction was often an individualised and

isolated activity ill-suited to collective action in the sense of cooperation in productive activities and union organising efforts. Second, the combination of subcontracting relations and kinship ties often determined individuals' ability to endorse the union free from pressures from kin and/or managers. Third, hierarchical relations based on subcontracting were interchangeable, and as individuals were not entirely in consistent and univocal hierarchical relations to one another, unionisation based on specific and stable subordinate status was unlikely (ibid). Fourth, the overwhelming majority of Suchilma leaders, as 'direct descendants of the old colonial Creole and Creole-Ladino families' (Schwartz 1990: 332, note 43), were securely tied to the local system of racialised oligarchic power. Fifth, in the period following 1954, and mirroring national patterns of anti-union violence and repression, reprisals from contractors against union supporters became more overt (Schwarz 1990:192). Schwartz goes on to say that

'[f]inally, in recent years, Suchilma has been **partly subsidised by FYDEP** [*Fondo de Fomento y Desarrollo de Petén*], so even *aside* from the **anti-union stance of the government**, Suchilma has not been free to press hard for worker interests' (ibid:192, my emphasis) .

The above is no minor detail and the nature of Schwartz's 'asides' no small matter. What emerges so vividly – while being so conspicuously made to pass as insignificant – is, first, the important sense in which Petén *was* in fact linked to developments in the nation as a whole, notably during the progressive decade of the Arévalo and Arbenz administrations (1945-1954), and its violent, counter-revolutionary aftermath.[10] Second, noting the eventual subordination of Suchilma to the *Fondo de Fomento y Desarrollo de Petén* (FYDEP), Schwartz points to the violent system of local governmentality established in Petén in 1960 through the creation of FYDEP.[11] Understanding the

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[9] Foucault (1980:38-39).

[10] In 1980 Peckenham noted that 'SUCHILMA, the chicle workers' and woodcutters' union, has made significant progress in the past year, enough to threaten the bosses' power base. In April 1979 SUCHILMA's leader, Alfonso Torres Castro was violently seized from his house in San Benito by the police. His wife and children were beaten in the process. His arrest had been ordered by Waldemar Amador, a local resident with a reputation for exploiting chicle workers' (Peckenham 1980:176).

[11] For studies of governmentality in other regions of Guatemala see, for example, McCreery (1990), Sieder (2000), Stepputat (2001) and Watanabe (1995b). These authors deal with different historical periods and

operations of FYDEP seems therefore critical to an analysis of social life in the *departamento*, and key to any attempt at tracing local histories of violence, surveillance, repression and control. In turn, however, the creation of FYDEP and its violent operations in the three decades that followed require that the peculiarity of relations between the national government and Petén in the period prior to 1960 be considered.

With reference to the mid-20th century, it is important to note that in the aftermath of the *Revolución de Octubre* and during the short-lived administration of Juan José Arévalo (1944-51), Petén became of increasing importance to the proposed national programme of land reform. [12] As noted by Bell (1993) in his comprehensive and insightful analysis of the place of Petén in the progressive reforms of President Arévalo, the region was seen as the ideal receptacle for landless indigenous populations from the highlands. Under the aegis of the national programme of land reform and redistribution, the project of colonization of Petén seemed 'acceptable to *finqueros* (landowners), i.e. the landowning elite, as this did not affect their *fincas* (properties) directly but did respond to the national interest meeting both military and Guatemalan international political objectives' (Bell 1993:23, my translation). The movement of indigenous population to the lowlands of Petén aimed to contribute national economic development and increase agricultural productivity through the opening of new agricultural areas. Romeo O. Samayoa Rivera, *Major* (Army Major), agro-engineer and FYDEP employee describes Arévalo's contribution thus:

'During the government of doctor Juan José Arévalo, man of travel, of great administrative ability

and with a clear mind focused on bestowing on his country progress, well-being and prosperity,

[Arévalo] met with his staff (*asesores*) with the objective of promoting the incorporation of such

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geographical locations and may not explicitly frame their respective analyses in terms of a study of 'governmentality'. Nevertheless, I take their contributions to inform a focus on local histories of governmentality in Guatemala.

[12] This is an important point which is glossed over by Schwartz (1990) in his monograph on the social history of Petén. In 1980 Fiedler (1980:120-121) noted that 'Petén colonisation is not a new concept; thirty years ago, for example, the Arbenz government implemented a programme. But even if we restrict ourselves to looking only at the legacy of the current effort, the starting date is 1964'. Colonisation of Petén in the 20th century therefore did not begin with FYDEP, but rather, with the progressive administrations of

Petenero territory into Guatemala, given that it [Petén] lay completely forgotten ...[T]hat is how overnight the *Colonia Agricola de Poptún* [Agricultural Colony of Poptún] was born... The colony was created as a political measure and with the objective of realising that the Peteneros could feel to be Guatemalans, a labour of approximation/approachment (*acercamiento*) and productivity, as for hundreds of years [Petén] lay forgotten, lost, ignored, sad and relegated to a second position, and what is worse, with no means of transport but the plane, and with only God the Almighty living with and in the hearts of its [Petenero] people' (n.d.:24).

Arévalo's 'labour of approximation' and the task of creation of a feeling of belonging to the nation-state amounted to projects which ultimately sought to promote 'social progress', but as Bell (1993) points out, failure to achieve any discernible degree of success by the end of Arévalo's presidential term, the project of colonisation was largely halted, and indeed inverted, during Arbenz's presidency. Petén did figure in Arbenz's government programme as a possible site of development (Bell 1993: 24). The *Revista Agrícola* published by the Minister of Agriculture in 1953 notes how,

'In the context of the plan of cattle farming rehabilitation (*plan de rehabilitación ganadera*) proposed/promulgated by the Government, the magnificent opportunities offered by the northern region of the country have not been neglected, notably some areas of the vast Petén. On these grounds, since 22 January of the present year, and following relevant studies, free export and trade of live cattle, refrigerated meat and subproducts of the same industry have been granted for the forthcoming 10 years in the *departamento* of Petén' (Villegas Rodas 1953: 52).

Government policy in support of the budding cattle farming industry in Petén was supported by a visit of the Agriculture Minister and a team of professionals and officials, to oversee cattle farming activities around La Libertad. For most of the Technical

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Arévalo and Arbenz, when it was linked primarily to nationalist political strategies, and only tangentially to substantive land reforms. The mid-1960s are discussed in the next section.

Commission, this was their first encounter with Petén.

'At half past nine the bird of steel (*pájaro de acero*) rises and directs its course northwards. The Major of the aviation pilots (*pilotos aviadores*) Arturo Guirola flies it with magisterial ability. We relish in the splendid luminous morning. It has been some time since we desired to know the fabulous territory of Petén. And it was when we least thought of and expected it, that such welcome privilege was presented to us. We had read and heard a lot about this area (*jirón*) of the nation (*patria*), so much so that our appreciation at a distance was entangled in most instances in the brambles (*marañas*) of the florid jungle (*de nutridas selvas*) populated by wild beasts (*fieras*) and tribes of anthropoids (*tribús de antropoides*), such is the myth/legend of the Lacandones (*tal la leyenda de los lacandones*)' (Villegas Rodas 1953:53).

The account of the ministerial visit combines emphasis on the modernity of the present ('the bird of steel', numerous mentions of '*jeeps*') with the optimism of a modernity to come. However, it was the strategic military role of Petén in the dispute of the territory of Belize that came to the fore during Arbenz's term. Guatemalan claims to sovereignty over Belize were tinged with anti-colonial zeal during Arbenz's presidency. According to Bell (1993), the territorial dispute over Belize did not impinge directly on the interests of the military, the landowners or the Church and was therefore a rather uncontroversial policy (Bell 1993:25). With the exception of nationalist arguments that it was in the national interest to regain the territory of Belize, and that such policy could only be pursued from Petén, the region largely languished at the periphery of the nation-state during the 1950s (Bell 1993).

With its mixed results, the Arévalo administration and its failed programme of colonisation of Petén is significant in two respects. First, the colonisation effort represents the antecedent to successive programmes of the 1960s. More generally, the Arévalo administration marked the inception of visions of development and modernity in Petén, endeavours also pursued during Arbenz's term through the construction of the

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road between Flores and the newly established *Colonia* of Poptún (Samayoa Rivera n.d.: 27). Second and most importantly, through the emphasis on the strategic and military importance of the *departamento* vis-à-vis territorial disputes with Mexico and Belize, the Arévalo administration created the conditions for the installation of the Army in Petén. The prominent role of the Guatemalan Army in the social, cultural, political and economic life of the *departamento* was to continue through the years of *La Violencia*, past the Peace Accords of 1996 and into the ethnographic present. In 1960, the *departamento* managed to secure *de facto* administrative independence through the creation of the *Empresa Nacional de Fomento y Desarrollo Económico del Petén* (FYDEP), the National Enterprise for the Economic Development of Petén. An institution nominally created to promote and oversee the economic development of the region, between 1960 and 1989 FYDEP in fact amounted to an organism of oligarchic self-governance with considerable direct ties to the military. Although Arévalo had heralded plans for the colonisation of Petén in the 1940s, it was left to FYDEP to spearhead the venture in earnest.

2.3 FYDEP, Governmentality and the Military

In the second part of the 20th century Petén exercised a remarkable degree of administrative autonomy from the nation state. *Pace* Schwartz (1990), (physically) remote, (symbolically) peripheral and (administratively) disconnected as Petén may have been, the salient historical link between its local institutions and the Guatemalan Army would suggest that Petén was tied to the nation, albeit in peculiar ways.[13] For one, it should be noted that the *Empresa Nacional de Fomento y Desarrollo Económico de Petén* (FYDEP) was established by General Ydígoras Fuentes in 1959 (Samoya Rivera n.d.: 27) in a highly poignant political climate. Colonel Ydígoras Fuentes had risen to power following the murder of Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas. Castillo Armas had nominally headed the infamous overthrow of the Arbenz government organised by the US Central Intelligence Agency in 1954 (Ball *et al.* 1998, CEH 1999, Landau 1993, Schirmer 1998). Subsequent to the *coup d'état* in 1954, the programme of social reform

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[13] Clark (2000:423) defines FYDEP as 'a military sub-unit that governed Petén from 1959 to 1989', but does not elaborate in any way as to the reasons and modalities of the relation between FYDEP and the

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and land redistribution proposed by the Arbenz government was violently quashed and repression ensued under Castillo Armas. The social democratic and communist leadership that had supported the progressive administrations of Arévalo and Arbenz (1944-1954) was exiled, imprisoned or murdered, [14] and the Guatemalan Workers Party (PGT) was banned. All political opposition was brutally suppressed and the country entered a protracted period of military dictatorship and weak civilian rule. The rule of both Castillo Armas and Ydígoras Fuentes were marked by a fervently embraced and violently enforced anti-Communist stance. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, Guatemala assumed a pre-eminently strategic role for United States foreign policy and became instrumental to US plans to circumscribe the perceived communist threat gaining ground in Central America and the Caribbean Basin. The successful ousting of Cuban dictator Batista and the related rise to power of Fidel Castro in 1959 were a cause of serious concern for the United States government. Under Ydígoras Fuentes, Guatemala, and Petén in particular, became a training outpost for those CIA-supported Cuban exiles who were to stage the 1961 invasion of Cuba (CEH 1999, Landau 1993, Vinegrad 1998).

'Following the triumph of the Cuban revolution the CIA secured the support of the [Guatemalan] government presided by Miguel Ydígoras, installing a military base in the proximity of San Juan Acul, Sayaxché, to train the Cuban exiles who were to invade the Bay of Pigs in 1962. The lagoon that goes by the same name served as landing place for the hydro-planes PBY which were used as means of transport. Before international disquiet and the discontent of important sectors of the country, Ydígoras indicated that the rationale for North American military presence was to train the Guatemalan Army in counter-insurgency tactics, due to a supposed Cuban intention to invade the country' (FEDECOAG 1993: 11, my translation).

Petén was therefore an early site of counter-insurgency, and the training ground for the counter-revolutionary Cuban exiles and the Guatemalan Army. Having landed at the Bay

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military.

14 For a detailed and harrowing account of the fate that befell Arbenzistas in Quetzaltenango, see Grandin (2000, chapter 8).

of Pigs, the Cuban exiles were swiftly defeated by Castro, and Cuba became a crucial point of reference for those militant Guatemalans with communist, Arbenzista and socialist orientation (CEH 1999, Landau 1993, Vinegrad 1998). Despite the success of the Cuban revolution, in Guatemala the repressive climate of the late 1950s and early 1960s produced the *Empresa de Fomento y Desarrollo de Petén* (FYDEP), the institution appointed with the task of bringing modernity to the region. As noted by Schwartz (1990:252),

'[w]hen it was organised, FYDEP was charged with responsibility (1) to build an infrastructure to foment agricultural, industrial, and touristic development in Petén; (2) to administer and exploit Petén's resources, except oil, for domestic and overseas markets; (3) to sponsor colonisation and to provide landless peasants with land and thereby increase production of food staples; (4) to settle farmers along the Usumacinta River in an effort to bar a proposed Mexican hydroelectric project from flooding Guatemalan soil and to prevent Mexican colonists from encroaching on Guatemalan land; and (5) to promote medium-scale capitalized cattle ranching in south-central and central Petén. The area north of parallel 17°10' (roughly 33 percent of Petén) several small forest reserves in the south, a thin strip of land running along Petén's southern border, a military zone in the southwest, and a number of archaeological parks – a total of roughly about 1,517,023 hectares – were exempted from colonisation' (Schwartz 1990:253).

This is confirmed by Government documents published in the decade that followed.

'In June 1959 the Decree 1286, Law of Creation of FYDEP (*Empresa Nacional de Fomento y Desarrollo Económico de Petén*) was emitted. This has as its goal (*finalidad*) fomenting and developing in adequate form the natural riches of that northern *departamento* in order to achieve its effective integration (*efectiva integración*) in the national economy by means of the use (*explotación*) and scientific preservation (*preservación científica*) of its forests (*bosques*) and other natural reserves; its improvement (*saneamiento*), colonisation (*colonización*),

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industrialisation (*industrializacíon*) and other policies and activities which may contribute to such aims. FYDEP, in accordance with the above law, depends directly from the Presidency of the Republic' (Secretería General del Consejo Nacional de Planificación Económica, Programa de Inversión Pública y Agricultura Para La República de Guatemala (1965-1969), July 1965:14).

However, it has been argued that along with the forward-looking emphasis on *fomento* (fomentation, improvement) and *desarrollo* (development), the creation of FYDEP was borne out of the perceived necessity of ordering the migratory flows directed to the *departamento*, as landless *campesinos* trickled from the southern and eastern coasts, and to a lesser extent, from the highlands of Alta Verapaz, in search of land. Thus, FYDEP was from its inception a reactive initiative that sought both to induce (FEDECOAG 1993:12) and regulate/control the movement of land-thirsty populations displaced from other regions of the country. With its 'direct dependence' on the Presidency of the Republic, FYDEP amounts to a quintessential project of governmentality.[15]

In Michel Foucault's own definition, governmentality refers to '[t]he ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit very complex form of power, which has as its target population, as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security' (Foucault [1978] 1994:219). According to Foucault, governmentality developed in the West during the course of a transition from the 'state of justice' of the Middle Ages to the 'administrative state' in the fifteen and sixteen centuries (Foucault ibid). This resulted in the rise to prominence of governmentality's peculiar exercise of power in the form of sovereignty and discipline. Thus, 'government' depends on 'the formation of a whole series government apparatuses [and] the development of a whole complex of knowledges [*savoirs*]' (Foucault [1978] 1994:219-220).

Foucault's interest in governmentality and its analytical focus on the 'how-to-govern'

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[15] For an example of studies of governmentality in Latin America, see Poblete (2001).

problem (Burchell *et al* 1991:7) suggests that any analysis of the establishment of FYDEP should explore not only the processes through which institutions of government were established, but also the practices, discourses and knowledges in and through which institutions and subjects were created. What is at stake in such a Foucaultian-inspired analysis is the range of practices through which FYDEP exerted control over the population, and, in turn, how the population was constituted as subject of governmentality, and how specific subject positions may be forged as a result. Poblete (2001:138), following Foucault, has noted that '[p]ower and its exercises manifest as objects of study within a continuity of macro- and microphysical domains (Poblete 2001:138). When considering the creation of FYDEP in the context of the political climate in the country in the mid-twentieth century, it is unambiguous that FYDEP embodied peripheral governmentality. FYDEP set out to provide a vision of a planned future of development and sponsor, regulate and supervise the extractive economy that would strengthen the links of the region to the capitalist world system, and to a lesser extent, to the nation. Likewise, the task of FYDEP was, literally and metaphorically, to

'*evitar la anarquía en el territorio más grande que Guatemala posee*', that is,

'avoid anarchy in the largest territory of Guatemala' (Samayoa Rivera (n.d. :2).

That FYDEP's mission was to stave off real or imagined 'anarchy' is particularly significant when one considers that the creation of the local was, from its very inception, under the aegis of the army. This relationship is most transparent when one considers the figure of the '*Promotor*', i.e. the Head of FYDEP, a subject position that came into being with the establishment of the organisation and that from its creation was the prerogative of military personnel who took up the brief for the duration of the national legislature. The first *Promotor del FYDEP*,[16] Colonel Oliverio Casasola y Casasola headed the institution until 1969, while in 1978, with the election of the President Lucas García, the office of *Promotor* was assigned to Colonel Jorge Mario Reyes Porra. Remarkably, given the prominence and visibility of the relation between the governance of FYDEP and the

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[16] 'The Promotor' is one of the subject positions that come into being with the establishment of FYDEP. In the section below, I explore the question further, noting that the ambivalent status of *Promotores* through

Guatemalan Army, Schwartz's (1990) 'social history' of Petén leaves the question largely

unexplored, thus failing to place the creation of FYDEP within the histories of

militarisation in Petén.[17] Histories of insurgency and counterinsurgency that marked the

region from the early 1960s to 1996 and into the ethnographic present, and the

interlocked experiences of migration and displacement, were thus demoted from the

anthropological and historical record. Nevertheless, the intimate relation between FYDEP

and the Guatemalan Army presented itself rather unambiguously during my fieldwork.

As a high-ranking ex-FYDEP employee recalled during our conversation,

'[FYDEP] was a government, the law bestowed upon it the faculty of a government here at the

local level, as if it were a nation-state (*como si fuera un estado*), though it was a *departamento*. It

was a government within/inside another (*era un gobierno dentro de otro*), according to the law. A

government that administered all resources, land, and woodlands of Petén. So the interesting

aspect was that the funds (*recursos*) that Petén generated would remain here as

works/infrastructure (*aquí se quedaban en obras*). They built hospitals, roads, schools, health

centres, support to municipalities and leaders, administer woodlands, logging concessions

(*concesiones madereras*) were properly overseen (*controlar*). In the end, the only

shortcoming/defect (*defecto*) was that it forever depended on the military government of

Guatemala (*gobierno militar de Guatemala*), hence they would appoint army personnel

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the account of a FYDEP employee.

[17] Schwartz (1987) considers the role of FYDEP in the process of colonisation of Petén and notes Handy's suggestions that FYDEP may have fostered a 'latifundia style development' (Handy 1984:216-7) in the region. With reference to the role of the military in the process, Schwartz notes that 'military officers have benefited from FYDEP's programmes. Many officers, coming from upwardly mobile middle, rather than traditional elite, sectors, wish to acquire land, but opportunities to do so in the highlands have been preemepted by established nonmilitary elites [...] The Petén and the Northern Transversal, where traditional oligarchies have not established complete preeminence, are well suited to officers' ambitions; land is available and inexpensive [...] Given the increasing "regnancy" of the military (Adams 1970) from the late 1960s to 1985, there was little chance than an agency that helped officers realize their goals would be easily dismantled. (Schwartz 1987:176). Schwartz (ibid) concludes that '[m]ilitary interests need not prohibit reform *within* FYDEP, as opposed to radical change' and lists a number of regional factors as a reason for the complex intersection of interests that contribute to Army's. As for this, I wish to point out that Schwart's account is given from the perspective of the military. In its appeasement and defence of upwardly mobile military/FYDEP personnel vis-à-vis the influence of established elites, Schwartz's analysis reveals its partiality.

(*militares*) to work here as promoters of development (*promotores de desarrollo*) [...] The creation of FYDEP was necessary, starting FYDEP was very necessary because of the state of abandonment (*abandono*) in which [Petén] was, hence one had to have a manager here (*entonces había que tener un administrador aquí*), [a manager] of this huge *finca* (*de esta enorme finca*), to be able to look after it and develop it. That is how the government created the law in 1956 [sic], I recall'.

Don Alfonso added that, 'the interesting aspect is that it [FYDEP] did accelerate development. Because of the abandonment in which Petén was, the central government did not have the capacity to attend to Petén, and Petén ran the risk to be kept marginalised and suddenly perhaps to annex itself to Mexico (*El Petén corría el riesgo de mantenerse marginado y de repente de anexarse a Méjico*), such was the rumor (*rumor*). With that new law they nominated a person to direct/oversee the complete development of the whole of Petén and started the process to bring Petén closer to the country/nation (*y se empezó a organizarse para acercarlo al país*) – to incorporate it to the development of the country (*al resto del país para incorporarlo al desarrollo del país*). What's interesting is that this was actually achieved. The only point still pending was this road which was covered with asphalt, but a great deal was done for Petén and that's how entry to migrants begun to be granted (*y fue que se empezó a permitir a la entrada de migrantes*), the majority of them *campesinos* to work the land. For the [situation with] maize was unusual/curious (*por que aquí el maíz era curioso*), this was part of the country and the maize used to be brought over from Guatemala by plane when there was famine (*carestía*), and beans came from Chiquimula (*y el frijol venía de Chiquimula*). So much land and there was no one who could devote themselves to agriculture (*y tanta tierra y no había gente que se dedicara a la agricultura*), so few of them, because the main activity was *chicle* and wood logging. So there were many needs here'.

2.4 Modernity, the Human Wall and Paralelo 17[18]

According to Romeo O. Samayoa Rivera, *Major* (Army Major) and agro-engineer who worked for the *Empresa Nacional de Fomento y Desarrollo de Petén* (FYDEP) for seven years in the capacity of Head of the Department of Colonisation,

'In June 8th 1965, the Cabinet (*Jefatura de Gobierno*) at the order of the Colonel Enrique Peralta Azurdia issued the decree with the force of law (*decreto ley*) 354 through which all institutions then dedicated to Colonisation and Agrarian Reform were ordered to give utmost priority to the formation of a Human Wall (*Muro Humano*) to defend our border shared with Mexico, by means of settlements of people from the whole of the republic who voluntarily wished to go and settled, organised in cooperatives, on the banks of the rivers Pasión and Usumacinta, thus halting the construction of the famous plants [hydroelectric plants] Boca del Cerro and Agua Azul, which would have flooded a third of Petén, thus destroying the land (*suelo*), the forest of fine thousand-years-old woods and the archaeological riches which are so plentiful in the region. Such nationalist mandate was thus undertaken and the construction of the project nocuous for Guatemala was halted' (Samayoa, n.d.: 3).

The period of colonisation inaugurated in 1965 amounted to a 'nationalist directive', that is, a political strategy aimed at defending national territory from the perceived threat of plans for technical development projects proposed by the Mexican government. With its dependence on the creation of a 'human wall', the colonisation of Petén constitutes a quintessential project of governmentality, in that a subject population had to be first amassed, and then fashioned into appropriate subjects of development and modernity. The subjects of governmentality that may allow for the construction of the human barrier

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[18] The title of this section is inspired by the account of the colonisation of Petén offered by Romeo O. Samayoa Rivera in his memoir *Colonización de EL PETEN: Paralelo 17*. Samayoa Rivera, whose titles include that of *Major* (Army Major) and agro-engineer, worked for 7 years for the *Fondo de Fomento y Desarrollo* (FYDEP) as Head of the Department of Colonisation. His recollections of his time in office are gathered in a book that I found on the shelves of a bookstore in La Antigua, Guatemala. No publisher details and date of publication are indicated, thus suggesting that Samayoa Rivera may have financed and overseen the publication and distribution of his work.

needed first to be drafted from other areas of the country. The process of fashioning of these subjects of colonisation was underpinned by a discourse[19] that implied processes of reification through which subjects were turned into objects, in an initial move that turned people into tools at the service of the national strategy of defence. In turn, the constitution of the 'human wall' depended upon the establishment of a discourse and ethos of colonisation. FYDEP official Romeo O. Samayoa Rivera envisioned the project of modernity that colonisation entailed as follows:

'Colonisation of a territory means progress and entails: communications, interchange, schools, markets, hospitals or health centres, terror, horror, death, life, violence, changes to the *modus vivendi* of the populations ...[Colonisation] makes of the territory something large, mighty, powerful (*pujante*), though with great sacrifices and the miracles of the Creator ... Colonisation is change, innovation, life, progress, new faces, new peoples, agriculturists, craftsmen, traders, usurers, speculators, petty thieves, dealers, loose women (*mujeres de la dulche [sic] vida*), murderers (*matones*), thieves (*ladrones*), all of them living together, some for good (*bien*), some for ill (*mal*), villages rise which were never seen before, with names that were never heard before, signs appear overnight and villages disappear through the art of magic (*por arte de magia*) ' (Samayoa Rivera, n.d. 5).

In Samayoa's vision, colonisation amounts to the constitution of material infrastructure (schools, markets, hospitals and health centres), and a social ontology (communications, interchange, change, innovation, progress) to which correspond specific states of being (terror, horror, death, life, violence, change). The image of colonisation is connoted by dynamism, difference and pious moral relativism. While it is clear that the project of colonisation is firmly the product of human agency (peoples, agriculturists, craftsmen, traders, usurers, speculators, petty thieves, dealers, loose women, murderers and thieves), aided by peripheral divine miracles, settlements are established overnight, and

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[19] See the quotation given above, as an example.

disturbingly, may disappear just as swiftly. [20] The phenomenology of colonisation, with its embodied, social and moral ontologies is underpinned by the production of multiple subjects, chief among them, the colonist.

'The colonist is an individual who is willing to gamble it all (*el todo por todo*), lose what he's got, abandon it, trade it, give it with the only aim to better his life and the life of his family, without caring for what he leaves behind. Men willing to bake under the sun, to leave one's life behind for an ideal of conquest and freedom, but who always will be [...] colonist[s], no matter what race (*raza*), colour, creed or religion, language, all that matters is the courage for seeking new horizons and risk one's life to better his family which is all to him, that's how the colonists of Petén reached those inhospitable lands' (Samayoa Rivera n.d.:5-6)

The colonist, firmly gendered in the masculine, is marked by a moral disposition which makes him mobile across space and moral universes. Premised on courageous risk-taking alone, the subject position of the colonist is, in principle, open to anyone. The colonist thus seems to move across and beyond the complex systems of production of difference and subordination which Samayoa himself identifies as implicating 'race', ethnicity, religion, and language. This is a rather radical vision that defies local and national raciological orders and is said to be the genesis of the sociality of colonisation. In the biblical imagery that characterises Samayoa's narrative, the sociality of colonisation comprises people, domestic animals and goods. However, it is through the prescription issued by the Government and executed through the figure of the FYDEP *Promotor* that colonisation is initiated, the first settlements established and families counted.

'The *golpe de Estado* came, and the man who took power, Coronel Enrique Peralta Azurdia, business man (*emprendedor*) aware that that territory [of Petén] could accommodate many landless Guatemalans (*Guatemaltecos carentes de tierras*) across the Republic; it was intolerable

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[20] It is unclear from Samayoa's prose what exactly may be at stake in the processes through which villages are made to appear and disappear through the art of magic. Whether this is a flight of fancy, foreboding of violence to come, or a meditation over the violent character of colonisation is an open hermeneutic

(*insoportable*) for *campesinos* to resist the pressure and temptation to migrate to that territory unknown to Guatemalans, full of surprises, magnitudes and miseries, the rumor (*voz*) spread to the cry: "Colonisation", tuned to a celestial clarion and started the migration: pilgrimage (*romería*), caravans of people who arrived on foot from the mountains of Cobán, others from the Southern Coast and their lorries, vehicles, carts, the swarms/crowds (*enjambres*) of *campesinos* even arrived by plane, with their whole families and animals: dogs, cats, pigs, chickens, sometimes cows and donkeys loaded with useful goods, to start a new life, people who walked hundreds of kilometers, for weeks, to reach the promised land ... the Government ordered the Promotor [Head of FYDEP] that colonisation were started with sixty-four families, who arrived and settled in the village of Colpetén, on the road to Poptún (Samayoa n.d. :29-30). [21]

In view of this, it is important to consider the ways in which the colonist materialises in Samayoa's narrative as a subject of colonisation in general, and as the product of governmentality practices in particular. Vision was often clouded; subjects responsive to the incitement of colonisation were soon so numerous they required governmentality's forceful intervention.

'The pressure from colonists was so great, that if we did not take immediate action, people could occupy in disorderly and anarchic fashion any land that they wished and it would have turned into a battle field, they would perch where they liked, as if they'd been a swarm of butterflies on the sides of rivers or roads [n.d. : 31] (...) The Department of Colonisation worked intensely day and night, with a group of agronomists (*Peritos Agrónomos*), topographers, drivers, tracing the perimeters of *fincas*, collecting groups of people - the agronomists and their secretaries drew up acts (*levantar actas*), filling in forms to request land (*formularios de solicitud the tierras*) and at

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question.
[21] I singled out the formation of Colpetén under direct instruction of the Government and practical overseeing of FYDEP because in the early 1980s, Colpetén was one of the villages that produced a substantial number of members of the Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes. Most of the FAR combatants who originally settled in Colpetén were brutally killed.

the same time giving placement to the families in orderly fashion and giving them instruction (*pláticas*) as to how they should behave (*comportamiento*), their duties, their obligations to their neighbours and to their new home (:31)... That is how the planning and execution of projects was born, to be able to have ordinance (*ordenamiento*) and settlement (*alojar*) of families in specific sectors, looking to group them in homogeneous, ordered and disciplined form where they would live for ever and ever, amen' (Samayoa Rivera n.d:33).

A team of professionals was thus fashioned and enlisted to manage the influx of population and a number of practices instituted to order and discipline the process of colonisation. Practices included administrative procedures through which subjects were made into applicants for land concessions (*títulos*). Aiming at perpetual homogeneity, governmentality would instruct the colonists in the kind of sociality they would have to uphold. This process of mastering movement and difference was not without its problems: what was presented was the refractory quality of difference, marked, in Samayoa's narrative, by indigeneity and religious affiliation.

'The problems of colonisation were multiple and complex, each family represented a responsibility for our Department [.] I recall that we founded a village of Catholic Apostolic *indígenas* and *Cobaneros* [i.e. Q'eqchi'], and the village would not make any progress; an injection (*inyección*) of more indigenous people (*gente indígena*) became necessary, but from other *departamentos* where they really did work, unlike the aforementioned. (...) the village grew, and is now prosperous' (Samayoa Rivera n.d.:41)

Paternalism, and an ethic of responsibility, are held with a prescription to achieve tangible 'progress'. Failure to do so required prompt intervention and the 'injection' of *ad hoc* population. In the above passage, 'stasis and failure' and their antinomies, 'progress and prosperity' are marked – both ethnically and in terms of religious affiliation. Despite Catholic Apostolic *Cobaneros*, who are said to be lagging behind due to their slack work ethic, governmentality's intervention – through the addition of indigenous population of

unspecified provenance and Evangelical religious affiliation – turns the fate of the community on the prescribed track. Governmentality's social engineering causes strife and unrest.

'I recall that in the Municipio of San Luis lived 150 indigenous families (*familias indígenas*) who thought they were the owners and masters of the place, occupying land which they wanted without the assent of the law, and without respecting anybody. That municipality is rich in resources such as cocoa, *chicle, hule, chico zapote*, fruit, cattle farming, pig farming (*ganado vacuno y porcino*), birds of all types, wild animals (*animales de monte*), game (*cacería*), good rivers and it is nothing less than the golden door to enter Petén [.] On a daily basis pilgrimages (*romerías*) and swarms (*enjambres*) of families would arrive carrying sick, tired and hungry children full of warms (*lombrices*). [...] That is how San Luis begun to be populated with hardworking people (*gente trabajadora*) who really were willing to gamble their lives (*jugarse el pellejo*), while the mayor of the place and the indigenous people (*los indígenas*) who wanted to rule the place started to mistreat (*tratar mal*) and quarrel (*pelear*) with the newcomers whom they called foreigners (*extranjeros*), wanting to remove them forcefully from the land they had been assigned by [FYDEP's Department of] Colonisation [.] [T]hese misnamed (*mal llamados*) San Luiseños, goddamned indigenous people (*indígenas rejodidos*) and their mayor, another old *indio* (*indio viejo samarro*) met in the *salón social*[22] which was a large insalubrious shed (*ranchón de mala muerte*) with rough and dilapidated furniture, and in that very place they were making plans for the slaughter (*matanza*) of the intruders (*intrusos*) at blows of *machete* (*filo de of machete*), not caring whether it was children, women or elderly people *(ancianos)*[.] [T]hey wanted to despoil them of their properties and make [the properties] their own, together with the mayor who was one like them (*que era otro igual a él*). They hated to death (*odiaban a muerte*) white people

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[22] In Petén, many rural communities and urban neighbourhoods have a *salón social*, that is a space dedicated to community meetings and communities activities. A *salón social* usually consists of a thatched building with four posts.

(*la gente blanca*) who did not speak their dialect (*el dialecto*), and for that reason they would call them foreign intruders (*extranjeros intrusos*). My intelligence service (*servicio de inteligencia*) informed me of what those dangerous people were plotting (*tramar*), in view of the seriousness of the matter, they called me via radio from San Luis to the capital and the Delegate of Colonisation informed me of how dangerous (*peligroso*) the municipio was becoming and that my presence was urgently needed. Given the seriousness of the problem I requested a special flight from the *Fuerza Aerea* [Military Air Force] giving them all sorts of explanations on how delicate the matter was and they offered to take me to Poptún[.] [I] immediately made the connections via radio with the delegate in Machaquilá, who immediately offered to meet me on landing in the company of another employee who spoke *el dialecto*, and the delegate in San Luis was informed and told to be ready for my arrival, the trip lasted about two hours, it was in the precise moment when the *indial* [mass of indigenous people, derogatory] was listening to their leader (*líder*) cacique and mayor (*cacique y alcalde*), that we plunged upon them (*habiendolos sorprendido*) [.] On arrival, I noticed that many people were armed with sharp machetes, some sitting on benches, others on the floor and some in the proximity of the door. My accolade (*comitiva*) entered [the *ranchón*] like a whirlwind and we sat at the table (*mesa directiva*), pushing to one side numerous *indios shucos* ['dirty indians', strongly derogatory] who were talking like mad (*hablaban como locos*). I asked to speak and asked the mayor to be my translator unaware of the '*pava que era*' [the sort he was] [.] I gave them a complete explanation of the work/programme of colonisation in the whole of Petén and specifically there with them, what our plans and programmes of work were and that the authoctonous people (*oriundos*) or residents (*vivientes*) of the place had no more right (*más derecho*) of any of the new colonists (*nuevos colonizadores*), but that all had to be done in orderly fashion (*ordenadamente*), that we invited them to fill in their documents (*documentos*) and we would give them in ownership (*propriedad*) the sites where they were currently living or had cultivated plots (*cultivos*) [.] The mayor translated at his whim (*a su antojo*), lamenting my words (*malogrando mis palabras*) and setting me against them

(*poniéndome en contra de ellos*), the FYDEP employee who knew the *dialecto* told me: "*Ingeniero*, this character (*individuo*) is fooling you (*lo está fregando*), he is telling them everything differently (*les está diciendo todo cambiado*)" [.] The natives (*nativos*) were very angry and brandished their machetes signaling strife (*a son de pelea*). Seeing that attitude I pulled out my revolver *38 corto*, I placed it on the table, removed the mayor from the table and imposed a new translator who told them that everything that the former translator has said were all lies (*mentiras*) and that I had six shots in the barrel (*séis tiros en la recámara*), that the first person to cause any problems (*problemas*) was a dead man (*hombre muerto*) [.] The natives (*nativos*) started to understand (*entender*) what I had said clearly (*mi exposición clara*), without false pretext (*tapujo*) and they calmed down their rage *(se calmaron los ánimos)*, and in that instant two girls came in to sell pieces of *zapote*,[23] I indicated that they should be distributed to everybody and met the cost myself and this saved/rescued the situation. If it had been otherwise, we would have faced a *zafarrancho* with many casualties (*muchos muertos*). People understood the tragedy (*tragedia*) that may have ensued and how malicious (*mal intencionado*) the mayor was, so much so that he was filling their heads with lies (*llenandoles la cabeza de mentiras*) [.] Hence, they gave their consent (*anuencia*) and assurance (*seguridad*) that they accepted colonisation with enthusiasm (*de buena gana*), and that in the event of any problem arising, they would come to speak in person with the Delegate in the area, and that they would not count in any way in that character (*individuo*) who was placing them in a bad position (*que lo estaba poniendo en mal*). Thanks God and since that day everything proceeded well, there was harmony (*armonía*) and we would see the locals (*los oriundos*) regularly in the offices of the agronomist, as they would call on the *perito* so that he would give them land (*tierras)* with its respective contract and they were no longer nomads (*dejar de ser nomadas*). In the end they entered the loop (*el aro*) and the consolidation (*consolidación*) of all the problems of San Luis was achieved with no regard for (*sin tomar en cuenta*) creed, colour, size, religion, language and ideology, as assistance (*asesoría*)

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[23] Fruit of a tree of the *Sapotaceae* family.

was the same for one and for all (*parejo para uno y uno para todos*) [...] and the best thing was the injection of people from the Eastern regions (*gente oriental*) that the town received, new people (*gente nueva*) with different ideas, different and more developed customs (*otras costumbres mas avanzadas*), hardworking people (*trabajadores de pelo en pecho*), peoples (*gentes*) who would occupy mountainous lands full of infestations (*plagas*), snakes (*culebras*), tigers (*tigres*) and where there was only mud (*lodo*) [to start with]' (Samayoa Rivera n.d:44).

Samayoa's account is remarkable in the way it gives a sense of the violence inherent in the process of colonisation of Petén, FYDEP's encounter with the residents of San Luis, and the process through which governmentality's order was established. In the ethnographic present, conversations with ex-FYDEP employees confirmed Samayoa's narrative. Don Militón, for instance, pointed out that migrants came looking for land (*buscando tierra*). '*Esa era la ilusión de todos*', that is, land was everyone's illusion. Don Militón differed from Samayoa in some respects, however. Moved by a similar ambition to document his experience of work in Petén, and aware of the historical weight of his role in the FYDEP Department of Colonisation, Don Militón harboured anthropological/ethnographic concerns. Based in the *municipio* of Dolores, he had taken an interest in the migrants who had settled there. In the course of our conversation, Don Militón argued that in Dolores, people had come mainly from Jocotán, Camotán and Chiquimula and added:

'Here, they are pure Chortí (*puros Chortis*). They don't speak their language (*idioma*), nor do they practice/speak of their religious ceremonies (*ceremonias religiosas*). These people don't tell you anything (*soltar*). They don't want anyone to know (*querer dar a conocer*), not so much out of fear (*miedo*), but rather out of selfishness (*egoismo*), I think. Many are nomads, they do not settle down (*nomadas, no se asientan*)'.

See Plates 1, 2 and 3, pages 298, 299, 300.

2.4 Cooperatives, Catholics and *Comuneros*

In the mid-1970s, the cooperatives that had been created as a 'human wall' – to stave off the perceived threat of Mexican annexation – were organising as *Comunidades Católicas* (cf. CEH 1999). The impetus for this new form of community association was given by Catholic priests based in Petén, whose religious practice was informed by Liberation Theology.[24] In an interview, a *catequista* and later *guerrillero* remembered his religious and political concientisation thus:

'There was a group of priests here in Petén, the majority of them were from Spain and some from the United States. They stayed with the people (*con el pueblo*), giving them orientations (*orientandoles*) towards... well, they would say that they raise up in arms (*que se levantaran en armas*), but in the courses (*cursos*) they would administer to us they would say that one had to fight because the kingdom of God was here on earth and we should not wait for anything beyond, on the contrary, that is here that we have to construct the kingdom of God (*reino de Dios*). Let's try to better our condition (*vivir mejor*), to live well, to live in peace, God is just and God gave the world for everybody, not for one individual alone. So that is how we progressively raised our consciousness (*conscientizandose*) [acquired class consciousness]'.

Cooperatives, however, were soon the target of Army intimidation to the extent that many resolved to flee over the border and into Mexico. A resident in one of the cooperatives remembered events during our conversation.

'Of those who lived here, many left. They said, we don't like the cooperative, so we will leave, and they left and the conflict started among those who stayed behind, there were those who

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[24] Liberation Theology developed in Latin America via a fusion of Marxism and readings of theological texts from 'below', which is from the perspective of the poor. Gutierrez, author of *A Theology of Liberation* ([1971] 1988) argued that theology should be re-interpreted in local contexts and praxis, and in the struggles for social change and social justice.

wanted/supported the [idea of the] cooperative, and those who did not want cooperatives. Many left, others resisted, and others still went to live on the other side of the stream. And in the meantime, the issue of the conflict, of the war, was already there more or less, what were the questions of politics (*asuntos políticos*), not so much the army, but rather the guerrilla, well one would hear, I heard it very often, as one would hear that people were gathering on behalf of the guerrilla. And that at the same time, it was said that there were *orejas* (ears) and that there was a group that was working cooperatively [as a cooperative], and that the army was controlling that group the most, and that there was a list (*listado*) they had of a group already, and more than anything else, we started realising that it was us'.

Surveillance and intimidation were soon replaced by violent Army incursions into villages. As the resident of a cooperative on the Usumacinta river recalled,

'The time came when I had my *trabajadero*[25], and I was working and I had my *milpa*[26] this high, around the month of June, when I went back [to the village] at about ten in the morning, everyone had left for the other side, for Mexico, because in Arbolito [cooperative] they had already massacred, and as they were saying that there was a list here, that the army had a list and that most of all was the group of, because they would not call us '*cooperativistas*', they would call us '*comuneros*', '*comuneros*' they would say, they would not say the word '*comunista*' directly, and rather '*comuneros*', they would say. I, seeing that people had left, we also left for the other side, to Mexico. June 1981 is when we had to leave for the first time. On the other side, a person arrived who had been wounded in Arbolito, he arrived there with us, they had fired a shot here and it had exited here, but he didn't die, but he had spend eight days in the jungle, wounded, and when they managed to locate him, he had worms already, it was very difficult to cure him. Well, there the Mexican authorities got us out, because when we returned here [they were sent back to

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[25] Cultivated plot of land.

Guatemala], there was nobody left there [in Mexico], the people who got there got there by plane, we were thrown back here'. [27]

Despite the violence suffered at the hands of the Army, community leaders recalled that at the time, they had no knowledge of *la guerrilla*. As they put it, '*para nosotros la guerrilla todavían no existían directamente*', that is, 'for us, the guerrilla did not exist yet'. Three months later, however, they were forced to flee their communities again under the threat of army violence. The army had mistaken a man for a *guerrillero* and had ordered him to lead them to the *campamento guerrillero*. As the community leader remembered seeing the neighbour approach in Army uniform, it was clear to him they would have to leave everything behind and move fast. As they ran into the forest, fellow villagers gathered (*concentrar en la selva*) and eventually came across the guerrilla. The guerrilla, however, said they could not protect them. It was September 1981.

2.5 Routes in the ethnographic present

In contemporary Petén, most people come from somewhere else. For some *Peteneros*, this 'elsewhere' may be a few kilometres around the lake. They may live in San Benito, the urbanised conglomerate that extends up to the northwestern shores of Lake Petén Itzá, and yet have come from El Remate, a village on the northwteastern shore. They may say that once upon a time they were able to live off the land. The fertile soil for the *milpa* produced two *cosechas* (harvests) a year and other crops such as *frijol* (beans) and *ayote* (pumpkin) could be cultivated in the *rancho* and sold to the wealthy families of Flores, or in the market in Santa Elena. On the site of their *gran platanal* (plantain cultivation, approx. 30 trees) is now the incongruous cricket ground-like meadow of the Hotel Camino Real International. Years before, pressure to sell the land to the local developers and subsequent explicit threats (*amenazas*) resulted in that meagre one-off payment that supported the move to San Benito. Manual wage work thus replaced subsistence agriculture, and yet from the *canoa* (canoe), one can still see some of the plantain trees on

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[26] Maize crop.

[27] For an in-depth analysis of the movements of the populations living in the cooperatives on the Usumacinta river in the early 1980s, see Van der Vaeren (2000).

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the lakeshore.

The distance people may have travelled to come and settle in Petén may have been a much longer journey that extended beyond the administrative boundaries of the *departamento*. For *Sureños* (southeners), those *'de Oriente'* (from the eastern regions) or Q'eqchi' from the highlands of Alta Verapaz, the jouney may have been undertaken long ago, and people may care to mention a *departamento* and the *municipio* (municipality), rather than the town or *aldea* (village/hamlet) of 'origin'. People in Petén may also have come from Europe or the United States. The long-standing presence of itinerant tourists has most recently acquired a new type of fellow foreign migrant. Post-1996, personnel of multi-lateral and non-governmental agencies have also come to settle more or less permanently and in relative comfort. Tourists, however, stick to their own routes, to and from Ancient Maya archaeological sites and to and from Mexico and *los cayos* (quays) of Belize, while *gringo* personnel roam around in four-wheel drives and reach the most remote *aldeas* on 'serious business'. Like colonial officials, they take great pride in illustrating the extent and purpose of their worthwhile activities, aided by sinister maps tracking their 'coverage' and influence. What *gringos* share is access to privileged forms of travel.

Petén is and has been a site of more or less permanent residence, of struggles over land and resources, of legal and illegal trades, and, crucially, of travel. In and through Petén, people move willingly or unwillingly, voluntarily or forced, for different reasons and to different effects. Goods are bartered, traded and smuggled. There are routes of commerce to and from *aldeas* (villages), the *cabecera* of Flores (administrative capital of the region), the *municipios* and market towns of Santa Elena, San Benito, Santa Ana, Dolores, Poptún, San Luís, San Francisco, Sayaxché and La Libertad. People venture further afield, beyond the boundaries of the *departamento* to Izabal, Alta Verapaz and Guatemala City, and to Mexico and Belize. Three transport companies manage the human traffic from Petén to the capital, *en route* exposing social stratification based on the class of travel one is able to afford. One may travel on buses *La Pinita* or purchase a ticket for any of the differently priced buses *La Fuente del Norte*. Wealth affords you a

trip on *La Linea Dorada*. The fast, colossal and air-conditioned Golden Line buses with uniformed attendants are deemed to guarantee *gringo* tourists what is culturally acknowledged to constitute adequate comfort and security. Were there *asaltantes* (assailants) or *ladrones* (thieves)[28] along the road, one cannot see how they would dare come in the way of the Golden Line. On *La Pinita,* one can travel through La Libertad, chasing oil pipelines to Betel. In the direction of Frontera Corozal, and Mexico, one is likely to move in the company of *mojados*, the illegal migrants (literally, 'wet ones') led through Petén by *coyotes*, the ringmasters leading the way to the ultimate trial, the United States/Mexican border.

Whatever the vehicle, many are and have been on the move. Migration in Petén consists of numerous displacements out of which people fashion a sense of permanence, subjectivity and sociality. To localise these multi-sited constituencies and trace histories, subjectivities and socialities, I also travelled. As noted by a Roman Catholic priest during our conversation,

'The reality of Petén is extremely complex. We should not reduce reality to the single factor of the war. There are a number of other factors that mark the contemporary reality of Petén. Perhaps, the overwhelming factor is not war, but rather 'displacement' (*desarraigo*), that is, the configuration of a society, of some social collectives here in the *departamento*, an arrangement where social groups from the whole country are being joined, social groups that have come here due to different factors and for different reasons. Some came here searching for land, others have arrived fleeing from violence from *Oriente* or other parts of the country, they have come from Alta Verapaz to seek refuge from violence, others are *fugitivos de la justicia* (fleeing from the justice system), i.e. this is a refuge for people who have crimes on their shoulders. I think these

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[28] *Asaltos* entail stopping vehicles and stealing travelers' belongings under the threat of weapons. During the conflict, *asaltantes* were said to be FAR *guerrilleros/as* gathering funds for the struggle, an accusation always robustly rejected by *ex-guerrilleros/as* themselves. Following the Peace Accords, *asaltos* in Petén have not decreased. Routes to the archaeological sites are prime targets, but the roads to El Naranjo and Guatemalan City are not immune. While I was in Petén, *asaltantes* stopped two buses on their way back from Tikal, kidnapped two foreign tourists and killed a Guatemalan tourist guide. Asaltos, like *maras*

are the important factors'.

Tropes of indigeneity and settledness are antinomies of the ethnographic context I encountered. When these tropes surfaced, they did so independently of each other. In fact, desarraigo, or 'displacement' was the trope most commonly deployed by my interlocutors, across the peripheral and transverse region of migrants that makes up Petén. Indigenous and *ladino* ethnicities on the move constantly redraw the bounds of *ethnos* and of place. In July 2000 an ex-*comandante* of the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* drew an image of Petén for me (reproduced below) while discussing the history of the guerrilla organisation and his own involvement in the insurgency. In trying to make sense of the movement and fluidity of the *comandante's* narrative, I added my own notes on the edges of the drawing after the interview, conscious of the fact that any attempt to fix what had been said and what the drawing represented, was an inept ethnographic stratagem.

See Map 3 , page 297.

In Petén I set out to follow a displacement within displacements. In 1999-2000, that is four years after the signing of the Peace Accords and about eighteen months after the dismantling of the temporary residence camps set up and overseen by the United Nations Mission to Guatemala (MINUGUA), ex-guerrilla combatants were on the move. Many of those who for some time in their lives held association with the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* (FAR) settled in Petén. Most of these, while lacking a definite locus of belonging were 'coming home' to the *selva* (jungle) that had housed them during the war years. Others had not attended the *concentración* and never left Petén. Others still were travelling through the region having come from homes across national borders. A small number of those who had been active in the urban fronts or in the files ensconced in the Universidad San Carlos (San Carlos University) were visiting the land where their *compañeros y compañeras* had fought for years *en la montaña* (clandestinely), for the first time. Others still, having spent the years of *La Insurgencia* (The Insurgency) attending to matters other than *la lucha armada* (armed struggle), were reunited with

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(youth gangs) are possibly two of the most feared types of crime in Post-Peace Accords Petén.

militant relatives and were contextually and privately acquiring quasi-ex-guerrilla status. *Ex-combatientes* of the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* appeared as a quintessentially displaced, itinerant, porous and opaque constituency in a migratory region with old and new disputed external and internal borders[29], the latter being the reminder that while subjectivities may be in transit and socialities may be secretive and partial, the eschatology of empire had not disappeared:

'*porque los enemigos estaban latentes, como están ahora en lo que es la vida política, ellos nunca han descansado ni van a descansar*',

'as the enemies were latent/lurking then as they are now in political life. They have never rested and never rest', as a dispersed ex-combatant poignantly said.

In these contexts, multi-sitedness stands for a reflexive awareness of the specific ethnographic and theoretical strategies through which anthropological knowledge comes into being (Marcus 1998). Multi-sitedness calls for a reconfiguration of the concept-metaphor of the 'field' in and through which ethnographic practice is undertaken, in spatial, temporal, methodological and epistemological terms. The delineation of what may constitute the 'field' of field-work as much as the 'field' of anthropology is a complex undertaking that relies on specific analytical and representational strategies to conjure up the object, subject, space and time of study (Clifford 1988, chapter 1, 1997, Fabian 1983, Fardon 1988, Hastrup 1990, 1995, Moore 1997). Multi-sitedness, as theory and practice (Marcus 1998) must however necessarily confront the fact that the task of providing a context for the intelligibility of ethnographic subjects is already marked, if not overdetermined by numerous teleologies and eschatologies. Thus, I take multi-sitedness here to refer to both an itinerant form of fieldwork that follows a fundamentally displaced constituency, i.e. a research practice that 'followed the people' (Marcus 1998) and a theoretical practice that traces routes through subjectivities and socialities marked

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[29] The new disputed internal borders in question are those of the Maya Biosphere. The relation between the creation of this Natural Reserve in 1990 and the agency of Empire, in the incarnation of USAID is explored below.

by plural histories of conflict and cultures of secrecy, thus 'following metaphors' (Marcus 1998). I travelled through Petén following *el desarraigo*, the traces of insurgency and guerrilla secrecy.

2.6 Widows, *lavado*[30] and death

Ethnography is a fragment of social reality (Clifford 1997), a shred of lived experience which, through specific representational practices, acquires a certain uncomfortable degree of permanence. One of the notable questions that arise out of the crystallization of the 'field' is confronting previous processes of sedimentation with related silences and disavowals. In the case of women who, following the Peace Accords and in the context of an increasingly visible, and hence easily surveilled civil society participation, identified themselves collectively as 'widows', the conflict features prominently in their narratives of displacement. In the 1980s, at the height of the counterinsurgency campaign waged by the Guatemalan government and army against insurgents and civilians, migrants who had come from the East of the country in search of land, or fleeing earlier waves of army violence, were making a living out of agricultural and/or commercial activities (*milpa* and *tiendas*) in Petén. However, their lives soon became embroiled in *La Violencia*. Personal rivalries or disagreements sometimes triggered episodes of violence, as personal disputes came to be settled by denouncing opponents to the Army as *guerrilleros*, and Army repression followed. Often, the suffering, intimidation, and murder, inflicted by the army on these settlers was seemingly random. Women remembered their experiences in conversations with me.

'In the beginning, we dreaded everything, with that fear, that apprehension, that trembling. Before, in the time when they would kill people, we didn't sleep. Before, they would haul up dead people into lorries, they would go and wash the lorries on the shore of the *aguada* around here, they would kill many people. In those times, on the Naranjo route, they would kill many people, they would even destroy their animals, it was a great pity to see people in this

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[30] Literally 'washing, laundry', it refers to the laundry hand washed by women in exchange for a small payment.

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predicament.'

<div align="center">***</div>

'We suffered greatly before, when there were those slaughters of people (*matazones*), we lived down below in a cooperative, we left and emerged in Sayaxché, and on and on and we came over here, but after that, they killed my two sons, so we stayed. They got it wrong, they were looking for somebody else, but they said it was them [my sons]. We were afraid before, the soldiers had us, if only you had seen it, we could not even talk or anything.'

<div align="center">***</div>

'We suffered greatly in those times, we used to go from one place to the next fleeing the shootings (*tirazones*), we were in a *finca* and then came here, always in Petén, we were in a finca far away, as one, being poor, has to work hard, so we were working there and had to come in this direction, leaving everything behind...Was that the army? Well, one could not work it out (*atinar*), what we really feared were the shootings, we were not sure. Now my work is to look for laundry, and when I have no laundry, I prepare food, *tamales* to sell.'

<div align="center">***</div>

'It happened to me in 1981, I was living in the *parcela* of one of my sons-in-law. My son-in-law has an enemy (*enemigo*) to whom he owed 200 quetzales, so it was that man who started the trouble (*fregada*) ... so the man who charged my son-in-law 200 quetzales said, he went to accuse [L's son-in-law] of being a *guerrillero* and in the night they came for him, but they did not find him, they found my son, because we were living in the same parcela. So it was him [L's son] whom they killed, they came at two in the morning, that was in '81, at two in the morning, they dragged him out of the house, they dragged him out of bed, they killed him in the *patio* [courtyard] just like that, as they did not find my son-in-law, they killed him [L's son] unjustly. And from this it went on, because they told us that if we did not leave, they were going to kill us all. This happened around La Nueva Libertad. And the one who betrayed us, it was him who came to hand him over. Imagine, I recognised him, that man [on the night of the murder], that it

was him, the enemy of my son-in-law. "So, he is not here? Then kill that boy". Well then, the army therefore killed my son. What they said was that they were going to come back for us, so what we did was that we left, we left all that we had there to waste, the house and everything else, and they took much of what was there, as my daughter had a *tienda* (shop), they took all the money off her, they took everything there was in the *tienda*, they put everything in *costales* (sacks) and they took everything with them and they left us with nothing, utter thieves, and they killed my son, and four more from La Nueva Libertad, there in front of the house they killed them too, together with my son. Imagine how hard (*duro*) was that year, '81. So we fled, we went to Mexico for two years, and when Ríos Montt came to power, we were told that one could draw near (*arrimar*), so we came back, after about two years.'

2.8 Q'eqchi' *Revuelto*[31] and Tzuul Taq'as in the Lowlands

Through apparent ethnographic serendipity and along the routes of ex-guerrilla secret socialities, I once met Oscarito, a Q'eqchi' FAR ex-combatant. He recalled a visit to Alta Verapaz, while in the FAR files and gave an account of the ethnic configurations taking place in Petén.

'One day, during the war, I got to Alta Verapaz [from Petén]. Everything looked different (*diferente*) there. So I said to a man [in Q'eqchi'], may I have two chillies, and the man gave me four. I can't speak Q'eqchi' very well, I said, I come from Petén. That's okay, the man said, to say "two", you say *wiib*. Ah, so I said to him, I have almost lost/forgot (*perder*), as I can't speak Q'eqchi' anymore. And how is Petén, the man asked me. Ah, it's very pretty (*bonito*), just like the area around Panzós [in Alta Verapaz]. We have to recognized we cannot speak properly anymore… they are pure Q'eqchi' (*puro q'eqchi'*) in Alta Verapaz, we speak scrambled Q'eqchi' (*Q'eqchi' revuelto*). We are all scrambled up (*revueltos*) in Petén'.

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[31] Literally, 'scrambled Q'eqchi''.

According to Oscarito, Petén was a site of scrambled ethnicities and scrambled Q'eqchi' indigeneity. On my way to visit an acquaintance, I sat on the *camioneta* (bus) and followed the unravelling of oil pipelines on the side of the road, to my destination. Once in the village, I looked for the person I had come to see and eventually ended up talking to one of the elders. Don Luis told me there were five *tzuul taq'as* in the vicinity. Four were located within a two-kilometre radium, the closest at five hundred metres from the settlement. A fifth *tzuul taq'a*, Doña Rosa, was known to exist but the location had not yet been revealed. Don Luis told me the names of the *tzuul taq'as* and said he would take me to the *cueva* (cave) Don Andrés. On the way, we picked up Eulalio, who also wanted to go. The three of us walked in southwesterly direction for about half an hour across slightly hilly terrain, extricating ourselves through *milpa* and *monte*. We reached a small hill, and don Luis pointed to an opening on the slope, paused and took off his shoes. Out of his bag he drew candles and a bundle of *pom* (incence). He gave a candle to me and one to Eulalio. He held one himself, did the sign of the cross and said he would recite a *Padre Nuestro*, *Ave María* and *Gloria*. He prayed very quietly, did the sign of the cross again and entered the cave. Don Luis lit our candles, kneed down, and started to pray. I lost sight of Eulalio. While Don Luis prayed, he lit the *pom* and the cave was slowly filled with scent and smoke. He prayed for about ten minutes, then stood up and showed us the spots where they lay the candles when they 'did *mayejak*'.[32] He said he started using coloured candles after having attended a *cursillo* (course, workshop) in La Libertad. Before then, the candles he used were the colour of untreated wax. He showed us the spots for the candles and said they were located at the four cardinal points, *entrada y salida del sol, entrada y salida del aire,* entrance and exit of the sun, and entrance and exit of the air/wind. We walked around the cave and inspected the stalactites. Don Luis showed us a trap for *tepezcuintles*[33]. He said people discovered the cave while hunting. Don Luis told me that only the *chekel winq* (male elders) visited la cueva don Pedro, while *las señoras no conocen hasta allá*, the ladies don't know the site. I wondered about

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[32] *Mayejak* refers generally to religious offerings and celebrations.
[33] Large rodent that lives in the wild.

my status, *ixq* (woman), *winq* (man), young or old, or just foreign. Perhaps *gringa*[34] overrides gender and age in some instances. Don Luis was seventy-two and had lived in the village for eleven years. During the war, he said, the *mayejak* had been banned. However, when he moved to the village, he knew the *tzuul taq'as* were alive (*vivos*). He had known through a dream. The identities and locations of the *tzuul taq'as* were revealed to the *chekel winq* and *chekel ixq* in dreams. Don Luis told me that having attended a *cursillo* (course, workshop) in La Libertad, he did not like the idea of using candles of different colours. *The sacerdote Maya* (Maya priest) said there is no God (*Dios*), only *tzuul taq'a*, and that they should only be concerned with the *tzuul taq'a*. This we did not like, said Don Luis. To find out more about the dream, I should speak to Don Colax.

Whilst Oscarito had pointed to the 'scrambled' character of Q'eqchi' identity in Petén and the loss of linguistic proficiency, Don Luis had dreamt the location and names of the *tzuul taq'as* soon after settling in the community in Petén. Don Luis worried about Q'eqchi' culture, but did not strictly fear a progressive ladinoisation and related loss of Q'eqchi' cultural and linguistic proficiency. Rather, his unequivocal dissent focused on formulations of Pan-Mayanist *indigenismo* with its newly fashioned religious orthodoxies and homogenised Pan-Mayan religious practices. He objected to the suggestion that candels used in religious practice should be of different colours, when he had always used plain wax candles. Similarly, he did not see why practices related to the *tzuul taq'as* should be at odds with his belief in God, as the *indigenista* Maya priest had argued.

Histories of insurgency, counterinsurgency and multiple *desarraigos* (displacements) in and through Petén have been consistently demoted in anthropological records. With opacity and transience in mind, the anthropology of Petén must address the multiple histories of violence and the related cultures of secrecy that have unraveled from the second half of the 20th century to the ethnographic present day. It is through multi-sitedness, as a methodological and analytical strategy, that contingency and partiality

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[34] *Gringa* implies foreignness in Guatemala. I explore the complex relationalities at stake in the term *gringa* in Chaper 4.

emerge to qualify the ethnographic subjects, including the anthropologist. Multi-sitedness also requires that *ad hoc* epistemological and representational strategies be devised to counteract ontologies of presence and make space for partial, scrambled, complex and unelucidable ethnographic subjects.

See Plates 4 and 5, pages 301, 302.

2.9 Contemporary *Desarraigos*: The Maya Biosphere

Histories of governmentality in Petén and their links to violence, conflict and displacement did not end with the dismantlement of FYDEP in 1989. In 1990, the Guatemalan Government with the support of international donors, notably USAID, created the Maya Biosphere with the objective of preserving the tropical humid forest and the important archaeological remains scattered across it. A government institution was also established, namely the *Consejo de Áreas Protegidas* (CONAP) to oversee the complex administration, management and surveillance of the newly 'protected' territories. The Maya Biosphere includes eight core areas known as *zonas núcleo*, where no human settlement is permitted. Among these are the archaeological site of Tikal, the National Park Laguna del Tigre and the National Park Sierra del Lacandón. A buffer zone known as *zona de amortigüamiento* and a multiple uses zone, known as *zona de usos multiples* where human activity is permitted, are also part of the Biosphere and fall under CONAP's remit.[35] CONAP's operations are complemented by the operations of local and international non-governmental organisations (cf. Sundberg 1998). Overall, the Maya Biosphere covers 21,000 square kilometres, equivalent to 68% of the overall surface of Petén (Grünberg 2001). Analyses concerning the rationale and management of the Maya Biosphere are often predicated on discourses about the 'advancement of the agricultural frontier' (cf. Effatin and Gramajo 2002, Grünberg 2001, Hayes, Sader and Schwartz 2000), and the 'population explosion' that has seemingly characterised demographic patterns in Petén in the last thirty years. In fact, population estimates for the region of

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[35] As one of the ex-combatants pointed out, the head of CONAP in 2000 was a Capitán, an Army Captain. The local institutions of Petén were in the process of being re-militarised. As the combatant argued, *el ejército no se desmovilizó, hicieron la pantomima, per el ejército no se desmovilizó,* the Army did not demobilise, they did the pantomime, but the Army did not demobilised.

Petén are highly contested and profoundly politicised. In current debates, they are underpinned by discourses concerning the progressive disappearance of a 'forest society' (Schwartz 1990) of sparse native populations engaged in shifting agriculture and forest extraction activities such as rubber tapping, and the relentless expansion of the agricultural frontier at the hands of land-thirsty migrants construed as responsible for deforestation, soil erosion and dented biodiversity (Sundberg 2002).[36] As an example of typical neo-Malthusian hysteria, Grandia (2000) argues that the population of Petén has grown exponentially in recent years and may have surpassed the half million mark. Citing government statistics Carr (2001:365) states that '[s]ince the 1960s, the population of Petén has grown explosively from a few *chicleros* (rubber tappers) to approximately 600,000 people'. Most demographic growth is imputed to migration of landless *campesinos* to Petén from other areas of the country in search of land.

In 2000, I was told that three *comunidades* had been evicted from the Zona Núcleo of the Maya Biosphere. Moved to a 'temporary' site, the municipal authorities had promised that sufficient water would be supplied to the community with a water-carrier, until an agreement was reached as to a satisfactory resettlement. When I visited them, the representatives of the communities explained that they had been evicted from core areas, where no human activity was permited under the law that governs human settlement in and around the Maya Biosphere. I was told the three communities had been settled there for four years. They had first fled their villages following a massacre and since then, they had moved across the land, looking for a place where they could plant and harvest maize.

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[36] Consider the synopsis offered by the 'Time-series Forest Change, Land Cover/Land Use Conversion, and Socio-economic Driving Forces in the Petén District, Guatemala' carried out within the Land-Cover and Land-Usage Change (LCLUC) interdisciplinary scientific theme of United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)'s Earth Science Enterprise (ESE):'Until recently, the Petén has supported a low population relative to the more crowded and heavily deforested southern highlands of Guatemala. The traditional life of these people has included mainly shifting cultivation agriculture and the harvest of non-timber forest products. This "forest society" of the Petén (Schwartz, 1990), and the livelihood of its people, is inextricably linked to the fate of the forest. This forest, despite legal protection, is being destroyed at an alarming rate. Forest is continually being cleared and its resources greatly taxed as human migration and the expansion of the agricultural frontier threatens the people and environment of the northern Petén (Sader *et al.*, 1997). A thousand years ago, a postulated combination of factors including population growth, political instability and warfare, overuse of resources, climate change, and environmental destruction likely led to the collapse of the ancient Mayan civilization. A similar combination of factors threatens the forest and its inhabitants today, despite a much lower population and a much shorter time frame (Sever, 1998)' (from NASA website).

For a time, they had settled in a *finca*, but Army repression was still raging, and many of their relatives had died there.

'We have suffered greatly, as if we were a pregnant person desiring things that we don't have within our reach, when I think of that it gives me *tristeza*. The Army took us out and we went to the *monte*, they persecuted us as if we were animals'.

As we talked, it emerged that many of the men had been guerrilla combatants. One of them asked whether I wanted to see his *carnet de desmovilización*, and I replied that of course it was not necessary. We spoke of those both of us knew and I was told to give their regard to some of the ex-combatants I was due to see. The news of communities being evicted from the Maya Biosphere was not unusual in the ethnographic present, although the sight of three entire villages being made new refugees was new to me. Rolando, ex-FAR combatant, had spoken of how communities had been made into 'invaders' and were evicted from their homes. We were discussing how difficult the resettlement had been for communities of returnees from Mexico, when he said:

'This was the first problem with the communities of returnees, the quality of food [aid] was terrible (*terrible*), the maize that would arrive was not good to eat (*llegaba el maíz que no era bueno para comer*). And, now, imagine, there is a group who is currently being moved, and without any support/aid (*apoyo*). Well, there is support of sorts, from the Fondo de Tierra and CONAP, who are interested that they move (*salir*) from where they are because they are in a protected area (*área protegida*). They [Fondo de Tierra and CONAP] say that they will support the move (*translado*), and perhaps some aid enough for how many families there are. There are between fourty-two and fourty-four families. They were settled within the Buffer Zone (*zona de amortiguamiento*). They had to leave their village, as they were accused to be invaders (*los acusaron de invasores*). They wanted to evict them (*desalojar*), but they were fighting not to have to leave (*estaban luchando de no salir de allí*). And despite the fact that they [Fondo de Tierra

and CONAP] would evict them, they [the community] would return to the site. They cultivate maize and earn a living with the logging trade (*venta de leña*). They are wood loggers (*cortan la madera*). So that when one visits, one sees all the trunks (*leña*) there, on the side of the road, that's how they make a living'. [37]

In 2000, Petén was the site of new displacements brought on by the regime of governmentality that had replaced the FYDEP era. There appeared to be new systems of governmentality and new practices of surveillance. For instance, an international non-governmental organisation held a database of profiles of 196 settlements located within the Maya Biosphere, detailing name and type of settlement, ethnicity, language, provenance, community organisation, date of foundation, access to water, health, education, economic activities, land tenure, accessibility, population, etc. The *Base de Datos Sobre Población, Tierra y Medio Ambiente en La Reserva de la Biosphera Maya: Petén, Guatemala* (Grünberg and Ramos 1999) was published with the aims of 'documenting the great diversity of *sociedad campesina* in the north of Petén, which is part of the ecosystems of the region and which is transforming them in their new habitat; promote a realistic vision of the agricultural and cattle-farming frontier of Petén to realise agrarian policy which is consistently directed towards socio-environmental consolidation of Petén; divulge knowledge about *comunidades campesinas* who migrated to Petén in search of a permanent space for life and peace' (Grünberg and Ramos 1999, Introduction). It can't have occurred to the authors that their seemingly benevolent aims were in fact the mark of the role increasingly assumed by NGOs in surveillance of the population, and that the database itself may amount to most elegant intelligence. In any case, everyone's activities in Petén were being surveilled from space.

See Plate 6, page 303.

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[37] The law that regulated the activities of Fondo de Tierra had just been published and circulated in 2000 and was still provisional. In 2001 a full '*regulamento*' was expected, to make the operations of the Fondo de Tierra work in practice. As it happens, this community was finally granted access to some land and relocated to a *finca*. The new settlement had no transport links of any sort, and people had to procede on foot to reach the community, or any neighbouring settlemt. In May 2004, I was told that land had been granted to the community in conjunction with a project to grow plantain. Despite the generally insalubrious conditions of the site, the quality of the soil was extremely good, and the plaintain crop had yielded an extremely satisfactory harvest. However, given the location of the settlement, it had been impossible to

2.11 Conclusion

One of the tasks of anthropology has been, historically, understanding and representing the partiality, complexity and disruptions of regions like Petén. In traditions of anthropology, social, cultural, and historical, processes – like those which characterised social life in Petén – have been figured through coherent wholes and entities, strong narrative histories, and discrete geographical locations. In my figuring of the social reality of Petén, I have opted for a different analytical strategy and one which seeks to represent the overlapping complexities that produced the region of Petén. However, histories of colonisation, militarisation, violence and displacement have not been equated with any notion of social breakdown. Rather than relying on meta-narratives that presuppose continuity and that posit permanence and stability as necessary conditions for the functioning of the social realm and for its representation, I have stressed complexity and 'plurality in context'. The emphasis on multiple, rather than singular, teleologies of social change – their multifaceted interactions and effects – is still underpinned by theoretical models. Anthropologists have imagined plurality in different perspectives and scales. Their theories have been systemic: they have imagined the social and cultural realm to be made up of coherent units such as the 'community', the 'ethnic group' and the *'municipio'*. Systemic models are being progressively supplanted by theoretical models that emphasise fragmentation within and between units – with the effect that units increasingly appear to be porous entities which contain plurality within, and produce plurality without, in complex ways (Moore 2004). In the next chapter I consider the limit of the anthropological claim of plurality, and I explore the condition of possibility of post-plural scales and their potential for anthropological theory and practice.

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trade the crop.

Chapter 3

Towards Weak Description and Thick Nihilism

'From the basis of what we ... call the centre (and which, because it can be either inside or outside, is readily called the origin as end, as readily *archè* as *telos*), the repetitions, the substitution, the transformations, and the permutations are always *taken* from a history of meaning [*sens*] – that is, a history, period – whose origin may always be revealed or whose end may always be anticipated in the form of presence. This is why one could perhaps say that the movement of any archaeology, like that of any eschatology, is an accomplice of this reduction of the structurality of structure and always attempts to conceive of structure from the basis of a full presence which is out of play'.

(Jacques Derrida, *Structure, Sign and Play*, 1970:248)

'Nihilism stands at the door: whence comes this uncanniest of all guests?'

(Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, [1901] 1967, Book One, Paragraph 1)

'Those who fancy themselves free of nihilism perhaps push forward its development most fundamentally'.

(Martin Heidegger cited in Rabinow 1983:52)

'If anthropology is permanently in crisis, then the reason may plausibly be sought in the audacity of the ambition to write ethnography at all'.

(Richard Fardon, *Localizing Strategies*, 1990:22)

3.1 Introduction

'Nihilism is a modern term and a modern problem. It rises as an issue in society and in reflections on society is roughly coincident with the rise of modern social sciences. If, following Nietzsche, we see nihilism as the equating of all beings, the levelling of meaningful differentiation, the transvaluation of all values, then it might appear logical that anthropology should have escaped this cultural process. A field whose very foundations rest on the existence of an Other – different ways of being human – ought to be the locus of the preservation of difference. I will argue (...) that, despite itself, American cultural anthropology has had the opposite effect' (Rabinow 1983:52).

In the previous chapters, I traced the contexts in and through which the anthropological object/subject of study of the present research comes into being. In this chapter, I wish to explore the conditions of possibility of anthropological inquiry in greater depth. As noted previously, anthropology, with its preoccupation with difference, however marked, has historically relied upon specific knowledge practices in order to conjure up its object. According to Rabinow (1983:52, see quotation above), since the early twentieth century, the discipline has been founded on the recognition of the 'existence of an Other'. This longstanding disciplinary preoccupation has engendered a number of epistemological positions and related knowledge practices which have sought to identify, describe, explain and often enfranchise multiple culturally marked Others. Following the pioneering work of Franz Boas, twentieth century anthropology's claims for the recognition of the inherent humanity of the Other were coupled with the *dictum* that the Other be understood in its own terms.[1] Thus, modern anthropology marked out a plurality

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[1] In Chapter 1 I commented on the role of Malinowski's work in establishing the canon for anthropological practices of 'centring' and 'contextualisation' of the Other in British social anthropology. In the present Chapter, I discuss the work of Franz Boas and his influence on traditions of American cultural anthropology. Were the founders of the disciplines to be inscribed within a history of metaphysics - and hence, within a history of nihilism - differences as well as similarities between them would require analysis. Both Boas and Malinowski worked against evolutionism, the former developing diffusionism and the latter functionalism. Despite their differences, both made arguments for the Other to be understood in its own terms.

of Others, to which corresponded a plurality of worldviews (Rabinow 1983, Stocking 1974). The status of anthropology as a science rested not simply on taxonomic ordering, but also on pluralisation of values. Such pluralisation arose from the proposition that each Other coincided with a culture, and each culture with a specific value system. The multiplicity of value systems was no longer to be arranged in evolutionary and/or ethnocentric classifications. Rather, 'each culture was seen as distinctive, each people had its own genius – there was no way to rank them' (Rabinow 1983:56). Although ethnocentric hierarchical orderings no longer obtained, it was the task of the professionally trained anthropologist to discern the individual elements that made up each culture and to elucidate the coherence and rationale of culturally specific value systems.[2] This ensured that each culture appeared as one of a plurality of legitimate manifestations of humanity. Nevertheless, it was the prerogative of the anthropologist, rather than culturally marked subjects themselves, to point to cultural wholes, their constitutive elements, rationales and inner workings (Rabinow 1983:56). Granted that there were many cultures – and as many value systems –to be understood in their own terms, evaluation, or judgement, of the Other's worldview according to Western standards was invalidated. The challenge to ethnocentrism spearheaded by Franz Boas was therefore also a potent argument for cultural relativism (Rabinow 1983). The articulation and defence of cultural relativism were enshrined in traditions of American cultural anthropology that spanned most of the twentieth century (Rabinow ibid). Cultural relativism infused symbolic anthropology and became a cornerstone of the interpretative anthropology devised by Clifford Geertz (1973, 1983, 2000). In sum, modern anthropology sought to make the Other intelligible, contextualised and commensurable, while also making a case for alterity's radical irreducibility to and incommensurability with the Same. Since Boas, taxonomy and pluralisation have engendered forms of relativisation.[3]

It is Rabinow's contention (1983) that the epistemologies and related knowledge

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[2] Note how relevant this is for the traditions of Guatemalan anthropology up to the mid-twentieth century discussed in Chapter 1.
[3] Through anthropology, cultures have appeared to some extent commensurable, cross-culturally intelligible and grounded on a shared humanity, yet at the same time incommensurable in the sense that

practices deployed by cultural relativist anthropology to mark out the Other on the Other's own terms, in fact resulted in various kinds of erasure of difference. Paradoxically, given the progressive intentions of its practitioners[4], the recognition of alterity produced simultaneous disavowals of the Other. In order for alterity to be apprehended, anthropology engendered a suspension of some of the claims made by the Other, notably claims as to the truth and seriousness of the Other's cultural statements (Rabinow ibid).[5] The flattening out of difference engendered in cultural relativism Rabinow considers a symptom of nihilism. In his definition, nihilism amounts to a 'cultural process' that produces 'the equation of all beings, the levelling of meaningful differentiation, the transvaluation of all values' (Rabinow 1983: 52, see also quotation above). A feature of modernity, nihilism is an inexpedient consequence that befalls anthropology, mostly despite practitioners' intentions. In other words, anthropologists may have set out to clear a space for alterity, but in the process, they unwittingly reduced alterity to the Same. They did so through specific knowledge practices which were deployed to mark out the Other, but that resulted in certain erasure of alterity, marred as they were by the cultural symptom of modernity, namely nihilism.

Rabinow's analysis points to a number of interrelated questions, namely (i) the status of cultural relativism in (cultural) anthropology and its consequences for disciplinary understandings of alterity; (ii) the status and implications of knowledge practices related to identification and contextualisation of alterity, that is, knowledge practices through which the Other is made into an object of knowledge, identified, explicated and contextualised; (iii) the processes of (historical/cultural) determination of anthropology as a discipline steeped in modernity, and thus marked by 'cultural processes' such as nihilism; (iv) more broadly, the issues of how exactly may nihilism have befallen anthropology, and what the place of nihilism may be within the discipline.[6] Rabinow

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each culture has been made to appear unique, specific and irreducible.

[4] Rabinow (1983) argues that the progressive intentions of Franz Boas, notably his anti-racist stance, were not matched in the cultural relativism espoused by Clifford Geertz. While the premise of cultural relativist arguments was eminently political in the mid-1930s, Rabinow (ibid) suggests this was no longer the case for the 1970s and with regard to the work of Geertz in particular. I discuss this point in greater depth in the section on 'Anti-anti Relativism and Nihilism as Event', below.

[5] I discuss this point in greater depth in the section on 'Anti-Nihilism and the Double Negative', below.

[6] Thus, one of the tasks at hand is to anthropologise anthropology, or to think anthropologically about

(1983) frames these questions in terms of an analysis of anthropology as the site of both relativisation - as in the claims for the recognition of the existence of multiple, relative, discrete and self-determined cultures and related value systems - *and* universalism - as in the premise that cultural multiplicity may be underpinned by a shared and universal human condition. In what follows, I propose a shift or re-orientation of the ways these questions may be said to shed light on each other. To begin with, it seems important to engage with processes of determination of anthropology as a discipline concerned with locating the Other and making its values intelligible, as well as with pointing to a plurality of non-rankable Others and their values. I propose to address the dual labour/predicament of 'centring', 'contextualising' and 'commensurability-creation' on the one hand, and 'relativising/decentring', 'out-contextualisation' and 'incommensurability-creation' on the other hand, and to do so through a distancing effect that recasts the project(-s) of anthropology within a history of Western metaphysics.

I discuss Derrida's reading (1970) of Lévi-Strauss's texts ([1949] 1969) as an elegant critique of metaphysics that takes place at the very site of anthropology. The detour through Derrida (1970)[7] allows for a close reflection on how anthropology engenders moments of 'centring'. Derrida (ibid) argues that in the work of Lévi-Strauss anthropology produces 'centres' through the incitement of 'structure', most notably in the form of the analytical distinction between nature and culture. In turn, anthropology appears as a site at which the structurality of structure is destabilised by 'events'. 'Events' such as the 'incest prohibition' are categories that by appearing at once natural and cultural, both universal and particular, expose the sense in which the centre of the structure is not amenable to structurality. The centre of the structure is a site of play, a (non-)locus of continuous and multiple permutations (Derrida 1970). Through the lens of deconstruction, (anthropological) processes of simultaneous centring and decentring, and, in turn, of univeralisation and relativisation of alterity are highlighted. As argued by Derrida, there is yet a further sense in which anthropology decentres. By pointing to other

anthropology.
7 A number of issues are at stake here, namely a) what exactly does Derrida add to the analysis; b) what the place of anthropology may be within Western metaphysics; c) why consider the place anthropology within the history of Western metaphysics; d) why question the nature and status of the discipline of anthropology.

centres, anthropology in and of itself constitutes an 'event' that effects a decentring of the self-referential quality of Western metaphysics. Deconstruction thus allows for a reflection on processes of centring and decentring that take place in and through the discipline of anthropology. Further, I argue that by recasting anthropology within Western metaphysics, deconstruction in turn permits a consideration of anthropology's place within a history of nihilism.

The task of elucidating what the place of anthropology may be within Western metaphysics inspired by deconstruction informs my exploration of some of the issues flagged up by Rabinow, but produces a notable expansion of the field under consideration. I take Derrida's critique (1970) and his detection/production of 'events' and instances of 'rupture' in Lévi-Strauss's texts ([1949] 1969) and in Western metaphysics, to inform my own interrogations of the presuppositions inherent in the anthropological enterprise in general, and in hermeneutics-infused anthropology in particular. Specifically, focussing on Clifford Geertz's programme of 'thick description' (Geertz 1973), I critically consider how the position of anthropology within Western metaphysics may be implicated in anthropological knowledge practices related to 'centring' alterity, making it intelligible and contextualised. Drawing on critical scholarship on hermeneutics-infused anthropology (cf. Greenblatt 1999, Marcus 1999, Ortner 1995, 1999), I note that three important questions emerge from an analysis of the potential and limitations of 'thick description'. First is the problem of 'ethnographic refusal' understood as a 'refusal of thickness, a failure of holism or density' in anthropological accounts (Ortner 1995:174). This, I argue, leads on to questions as to what the status of 'ethnographic refusal' may be, and how one may produce intelligibility when the Other resists and/or engages in the ethnographic encounter through negation and disavowal. Second, I consider how 'thick description' marks out social and cultural wholes, thus effecting contextualisation. I problematise hermeneutic practices of 'scale hopping' and argue that they rely on the establishment of equivalence among entities which present themselves in different scales, thus reducing hermeneutics to a metatheory of generalised and universal interpretative phenomena (Vattimo 1997). Third, I ask what may be at stake in anthropological hermeneutic practices which, in an effort to 'thicken'

ethnography, produce/incite pluralisation and multiplication of the social and cultural realm, and of social and cultural subjects. The three interrelated questions of refusal, equivalence and pluralisation are by no means exhaustive. Yet, they are profoundly relevant to the material presented in the chapters that follow. Most importantly, they are suggestive of instances of 'rupture' in Geertz's texts. I argue that what presents itself as 'rupture' in Geertz's work is the 'event' of nihilism. In an effort to elicit and pursue the point, I review Geertz' explicit denials, rebukes and disavowals of nihilism and set these against Rabinow's (1983) accusatory glare. As I was reminded in the field, one is to be suspicious of those who say too much. Disclaimers often constitute assertions. Beneath the apparent controversy over (cultural) relativism, and despite themselves, both Geertz and Rabinow operate with double negatives and 'push nihilism forth most fundamentally' (Heidegger cited in Rabinow 1983:52).

To say that nihilism constitutes an 'event' in hermeneutic-infused anthropology is to consider anthropological knowledge practices (and its practitioners) in a non trivial sense historical. It is to re-inscribe anthropology as substantively located within a history of Western metaphysics, and thus a history of nihilism and of Being (cf. Nietzsche 1974; Heidegger [1962] 2002, Vattimo 1997). In other words, it is to re-inscribe anthropology within a Nietzschean/Heideggerian horizon. In Vattimo's terms (1981, 1983, 1991, 1992, 1997), hermeneutics is a narrative of modernity and as such, it is located within the histories of nihilism and Being which legitimate it and give it its provenance (Vattimo 1997:12). Since Nietzsche and Heidegger, the history of Being has been characterised by a progressive *weakening* of strong structures such as Reason, Truth, Man. Nietzsche moved from the announcement of the death of God (Nietzsche [1887] 1974), and the negation of the value of Truth. The Nietzschean announcement of the death of God does not amount to a 'metaphysical enunciation of the non-existence of God; it aims to be the acknowledgement of an "event", given that the death of God is, first and foremost, the end of the stable structure of Being, and hence [the end] of any possibility to enunciate whether God exists or does not exist' (Vattimo 1983:21, my translation). According to Nietzsche, the announcement of the death of God coincides with a form of nihilism, that is, with the '"devaluation of the highest values" and the real world's becoming a fable.

There are no facts, only interpretations; and this too is an interpretation' (Vattimo 1997:12). Grounded in readings of Nietzsche's *opus*, Heidegger's ontology focuses on the question of 'Being'. Moving from the ontological distinction between 'beings', that is entities that are, and Being, that is the underpinning of entities' being, Heidegger argues that 'Being' is most usefully understood as *'Dasein'*. Linking the question of Being to temporality, Heidegger suggests that Being is always already being-in-the-world, and thus can only be grasped in terms of 'becoming' (Heidegger [1962] 2002). Following Heidegger, Being is no longer viewed as the stable and immutable grounding of metaphysics and ontology, or as the overcoming (*Überwindung*) of dialectics. Being in Heideggerian terms is historical in the sense of its location within a 'horizon' and a 'legacy'. According to Vattimo, Heideggerian ontology is a 'weak ontology' in the sense that it is the product of a radical rethinking of the meaning of Being which results in 'taking leave of metaphysic Being and its strong traits' (Vattimo 1988:85-6). In the light of the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics and Heideggerian weak ontology, Vattimo argues (1997:7) that 'there can be no recognition of the essentially interpretative character of the experience of the true without the death of God and without the fabling of the world, or, which amounts to the same thing, of Being. In short, it seems impossible to provide the truth of hermeneutics other than by presenting it as the response to a history of Being interpreted as the occurrence of nihilism'. The foundations of Western thought thus appear to have been progressively *weakened*. This has engendered the conditions of possibility for post-metaphysical 'weak thought' (Vattimo 1983). 'Weak thought' takes leave from strong categories of traditional metaphysics, and accepts post-Nietzschean lack of foundations, absence of certitudes and demise of truth. Whilst strong categories may be abandoned in weak thought, they are not replaced by as categorical an absence. Neither does 'weak thought' supersede traditional metaphysics in linear developmental succession. Rather, following Heidegger, Vattimo argues that weak thought proceeds from an awareness of its own temporality, one that occurs within the horizon of a weakening metaphysics, and not beyond it. In other words, 'weak thought' stands for the philosophy of postmodernity concerned with the 'fictionalised experience of reality, namely *hermeneutic ontology*' (1983:xxii, emphasis in the original). Granted that Being can only *be* in terms of continuous *becoming*, '[o]ntology is nothing other than

the interpretation of our condition or situation, since Being is nothing apart from its own "event", which occurs when it historicises itself and when we historicise ourselves' (Vattimo 1983:3, my translation). As summed up by Snyder, [t]he philosophy of hermeneutic ontology or 'weak thought' primarily relies upon a strategy of 'destructuration'. This strategy requires that the governing discursive forms of Western culture, and all their claims to possessing the truth or to operating according to scientific logic, be revealed – through a nihilistic analysis that "destructures" or "deconstructs" them – to be only interpretations' (Snyder 1988:xxii-xxiii).

I propose to analyse the project(-s) of anthropology and the present research in and through 'weak thought' to recover a place for anthropology within the Nietzschean history of nihilism and the Heideggerian history of Being, thus recovering a sense of anthropology's nihilist vocation and temporality. I note that as weak thought and nihilism occur within a horizon, they are inherited and have left traces I can pursue. Traces of anthropological 'weak thought' are to an extent 'already there', albeit unmarked and unclaimed. Since the mid-1960s, Marilyn Strathern has been concerned with, *inter alia*, questions of partiality, relationality and relativisation (cf. Strathern 1972, 1981, 1988, 1991, 1995a, 1999). Strathern's analyses eschew strong metaphysical claims to delineate fictionalised experiences of reality instead. Insofar as they may be said to defy 'strong thought', scientism, objectivity and realism, Strathern's texts make explicit the artifice of anthropological knowledge practices.[8] Strathern's texts may thus be read as 'weak' in the nihilist sense of the term proposed by Vattimo. Whilst they clearly operate within a horizon, namely the tradition of anthropology, they continuously call disciplinary categories and theoretical presuppositions into question. Strathern exposes a progressive weakening of anthropological foundations, which may be considered to be contiguous with the advancement of anthropological nihilism. Strathern (cf. 1988, 1999) is concerned with the veracity and materiality of the ethnographic encounter, as much as with the task of bringing into view the labour of fabrication that coincides with it, and with ethnographic analysis and interpretation. Her concern with 'fabrication', which one

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[8] See also Moore's discussion of a feminist anthropologist's 'anthropological imagination' (Moore 1994:129-150).

could rephrase in Nietzschean terms as 'fabling', is deeply analytical. Rapport (1997:658), notes that in Strathern's work, 'complexity of phenomena –including their contradictoriness – need not give way in analysis to any more systematic representations of division and conjunction'. Strathern is able to 'maintain a sense of the *provisional* and *tentative* nature of anthropological accounting', and does so through polemics, namely 'the continual *overflowing* of extant analytical categories, so that the social world is continually apprehended anew' (Rapport 1997:658, my emphasis). It is provisionality and tentativeness which I wish to inscribe within a genealogy of 'weak thought', as they inform the contingency of my ethnographic accounts. Overflow is also important. In the forthcoming chapters, I hope to be able to show that the anthropological subjects of the present research continuously spill over. They overflow in and through their names and the 'epistemic murk' (Taussig 1986) of subjectivities and sociality marked by experiences of the conflict. They pour out of their own accounts, and by so doing, they tell tales of how they have exceeded their own frames as much as the frames of others. Along with the ethnographer, they conjure up further analytical categories and relations, making sense of complex encounters and experiences. Overflow of subjectivities and socialities often occurs through refusal, containment and negative relationalities. The thesis is thus borne out of an attempt at *apprehending* the constant shifting of positions thus engendered, and *representing* the shifts of positions throughout. Juxtaposing anthropological and ethnographic texts, in Chapter One I sought to give a sense of the shifting contexts and perspectives that make up the field of the anthropology of Guatemala. Through the artifice of switches in perspective, in Chapter Two I aimed to bring into view what I deemed had been left 'out of context', namely Petén. Thus, I also highlighted 'plurality in context'. The task of the present chapter is to explore the presuppositions that make these shifts amenable to experience, reflection and representation. As the point is the shifting of positions all the way through, and how we may have come to think merographically (Strathern 1999:246), what follows is an alternation of perspectives through which the site of anthropology is made to appear. It seems obligatory to begin obliquely.

3.2 A Critique of Metaphysics on the Site of Anthropology

'Language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique'

(Jacques Derrida, *Structure, Sign and Play*, 1970: 254)

In *Structure, Sign and Play*, Derrida (1970) proposes to subject the concept of structure in Western metaphysics to critical scrutiny. Derrida notes that structure is predicated on a centre or origin whose uniqueness produces the structurality of the structure, but is not itself amenable to structurality. Whilst the establishment of a centre may enable a certain free-play of relative elements, it is at the centre that free-play is inhibited, lest the structure lose its structurality. Indeed, Derrida points out that 'the centre is, paradoxically, *within* the structure and *outside* it' (ibid:248, emphasis in the original). While coherence seems to ensue from the centring of the structure, the recognition that the centre is both part and alien to the structure leads to a re-evaluation of how coherence obtains. Coherence is not the product of centring, but it arises from the contradictory condition of the centre and 'the force of a desire' that a centred structure be maintained, despite the free-play with which it is connoted and through which it is constituted (ibid:248). Derrida argues that 'the repetitions, the substitutions, the transformations and the permutations' (ibid) actually connote the structure, as the desire for coherence and immobility conjures up the presence of a centre. This 'determination of being as presence' is said to characterise the history of metaphysics in the West (Derrida 1970:249, see also Heidegger [1962] 2002, Nietzsche [1930] 1969). Within the history of Western metaphysics, Derrida points to the 'event', or 'rupture', that in his view has accompanied the origin of the structure as predicated upon a centre or presence that requires to be constantly reinstated. The recognition of the origin and the structure on the one hand, and the claim to a centre and presence on the other hand, incite the elucidation of the principles through which centred structure and central presence come into being.

However, as the deferred centre and claim to presence need continuous restatement, the centre appears to be a 'non-locus' which is the site of permutation.[9]

Derrida inscribes his analysis of 'structure' and its relations to metaphysics of presence within a Nietzschean/Heiddegerian genealogy that provides critique and deconstruction of Western metaphysics (ibid 250). What is of specific interest here, however, and what I wish to highlight, is the propinquity at least, and the (deferred) centrality at best, of the subject of anthropology to Derrida's arguments. Derrida actually addresses ethnology and not anthropology directly (ibid: 251).[10] However he does incisively point to the fact that within the history of Western metaphysics, the birth of ethnology may be taken to constitute an 'event' or a 'rupture', that is, a moment of dislocation predicated on ethnology's challenge to ethnocentrism.

'One can assume that ethnology could have been born as a science only at the moment when a de-centring had come about: at the moment when European culture – and, in consequence, the history of metaphysics and of its concepts – had been *dislocated*, driven from its locus, and forced to stop considering itself as the culture of reference ... One can say in total assurance that there is nothing fortuitous about the fact that the critique of ethnocentrism – the very condition of ethnology – should be systematically and historically contemporaneous with the destruction of

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[9] 'From then on it became necessary to think the law which governed, as it were, the desire for the centre in the constitution of the structure and the process of signification prescribing its placements and its substitutions for this law of the central presence – but a central presence which was never itself, which has always already been transported outside itself in its surrogate. The surrogate does not substitute itself for anything which has somehow pre-existed it. From then on it was probably necessary to begin to think that there was no centre, that the centre could not be thought in the form of a being-present, that the centre had no natural locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. This moment was that in which language invaded the universal problematic; that in which, in the absence of a centre or origin, everything became discourse – provided we can agree on this word – that is to say, when everything became a system where the central signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification *ad infinitum*' (Derrida 1970:249).

[10] I argue that in view of Derrida's characterisation of ethnology as 'critique of ethnocentrism', it is unproblematic to bring his arguments to bear on anthropology in general. Conversely, it could be contested that the problem lies not so much in the distinction between ethnology and anthropology, but rather, that the very characterisation of either or both in terms of anti-ethnocentrism is inaccurate, as not all ethnologies/anthropologies sought to pose such a challenge (see for instance Geertz 2000:42-67). This point is to an extent addressed by Derrida, who eschews any voluntarism in the practitioners and recasts the

the history of metaphysics' (Derrida 1970: 251-252, emphasis in the original).

The equation of ethnology with a challenge to ethnocentrism may extend Derrida's arguments to the discipline of anthropology as a whole, and to distinct national ethnologic and anthropological traditions. Indeed, Derrida's characterisation of ethnology as a science centred on a challenge to ethnocentrism is founded on the identification of the discourse, or the horizon, to use a Heideggerian term, within which ethnology and anthropology came into being. The intentions of individual practitioners, or the orientations of specific traditions are not the point, as it is within the discourse and horizon of Western metaphysics that ethnology/anthropology effect(-s) rupture. Ethnology displaces a centre, namely the self-referential quality of Western culture, and by pointing to other possible centres, it ruptures the Western metaphysics of presence. In turn, the struggle with ethnocentrism does not exempt ethnology from the conditions of Western metaphysical discourse. Rather, ethnology operates within the very structure it sets out to challenge. Thus, the critique of ethnocentrism is always implicated in ethnocentrism, without any voluntarism or historical determination.

'Ethnology – like any science – comes about within the element of discourse. And it is primarily a European science employing traditional concepts, however much it may struggle against them. Consequently, whether he [sic] wants to or not – and this does not depend on a decision on his [sic] part – the ethnologist accepts into his [sic] discourse the premises of ethnocentrism at the very moment when he [sic] is employed in denouncing them. This necessity is irreducible; it is not a historical contingency' (Derrida 1970:252).

Derrida illustrates his arguments with reference to the work of Lévi-Strauss, and specifically the axiomatic distinction between nature and culture proposed in *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Lévi-Strauss 1967). According to Lévi-Strauss the distinction between nature and culture may be said to depend on the definition of 'nature' as the 'universal and spontaneous' and 'culture' as that which is culturally or normatively

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question in terms of the discourse within which ethnology and anthropology emerge. See below.

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determined.[11] Having established the premises of the argument, Lévi-Strauss famously highlights an ambiguous item, a 'scandal' which belongs to both nature and culture, namely the incest prohibition.

'Let us suppose then that everything universal in man relates to the natural order, and is characterised by spontaneity, and that everything subject to a norm is cultural and is both relative and particular. We are then confronted with a fact, or rather, a group of facts, which, in the light of previous definitions, are not far removed from a *scandal*: we refer to that complex group of beliefs, customs, conditions and institutions described succinctly as the prohibition of incest, which presents, without the slightest ambiguity, and inseparably combines, the two characteristics in which we recognise the conflicting features of two mutually exclusive orders' (Lévi-Strauss 1967:8-9, my emphasis).

Thus, in Derrida's analysis of Lévi-Strauss's text, '[t]he incest-prohibition is universal; in this sense one could call it natural. But it is a prohibition, a system of norms and interdicts, in this sense one could call it cultural' (Derrida 1970:253). In view of this, Derrida argues that the incest prohibition only appears as a 'scandal' when the nature/culture opposition is to be upheld. However, Derrida suggests that the incest-prohibition may not be regulated by the binary opposition and may in fact transcend it. The conditions of possibility of the nature/culture opposition, and of the philosophical genealogy that depends on it, are therefore predicated on making the origin of the structure inconceivable. What is inconceivable and yet fundamental to the nature/culture distinction, is the origin of the incest-prohibition. In sum, although the incest-prohibition may appear as an incomprehensible scandal, it is on this very scandal that the

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[11] 'Culture is not merely juxtaposed to life nor superimposed upon it, but in one way it serves as a substitute for life, and in the other, uses and transforms it, to bring about the synthesis of a new order [...] Where does nature end and culture begin? [...] No empirical analysis [...] can determine the point of transition between natural and cultural facts, nor how they are connected. [...] Wherever there are rules we know for certain that the cultural stage has been reached. Likewise, it is easy to recognise universality as the criterion of nature, for what is constant in man falls necessarily beyond the scope of customs, techniques and institutions whereby his groups are differentiated and contrasted' (Lévi-Strauss 1967:4-8).

nature/culture opposition is predicated. Were the nature/culture binary viewed as a structure, the structure would have an unknowable origin and an unknowable centre. Metaphysical claims concerning the nature/culture opposition make the origin of the structure unconceivable.

'The incest-prohibition is no longer a scandal one meets with or comes up against in the domain of traditional concepts; it is something which escapes these concepts and certainly precedes them – probably as the condition of their possibility. It could perhaps be said that the whole of philosophical conceptualization, systematically relating itself to the nature/culture opposition, is designed to leave in the domain of the unthinkable the very thing that makes this conceptualization possible: the origin of the prohibition of incest' (Derrida 1970: 254).

As in the discussion of Lévi-Strauss's work on myth in *The Raw and the Cooked* (1969), Derrida points to the ways in which the delineation of a structure, e.g. 'myth', is accompanied by the recognition that the structure has 'no unity or absolute source' in that myths do not seem to have a clear origin or specified author (Derrida 1970: 257). Derrida's deconstruction of Lévi-Strauss's text/field consistently points to the ways in which the text/field asserts specific claims, e.g. the existence of a structure, while simultaneously calling those claims into question, e.g. the uncentred and un-markable origin of the structure. What comes to light is 'free play, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions' which arises out of the finitude/finiteness of the field. The finite field crucially lacks a centre and thus can accommodate endless permutations.

I dwell on Derrida's incisive deconstruction of Lévi-Strauss's text/field to recover an important precedent of critique of metaphysics, and one that takes place on the very site of anthropology. In turn, Derrida's reading (1970) of Lévi-Strauss's texts ([1949] 1969) provides the necessary horizon from which to approach questions concerning the nature and status of the labour of anthropology. In the first instance, the detour through Derrida (1970) suggests reflections as to the processes through which anthropology engenders moments of centring. The production of 'structure' in the form of analytical distinctions between nature and culture is a practice of 'centring' that inscribes the discipline squarely

within Western metaphysics. A consideration of how 'structure' comes into being also exposes (anthropological) processes that simultaneously relativise and universalise alterity. In the case of the nature/culture distinction, alterity is made to appear radically other, as in the content that the nature/culture distinction may assume in any specific culture. For Lévi-Strauss, alterity is nevertheless inexorably subsumed under universality, given the preponderance of structure (nature/culture) over relative and culturally specific content. Conversely, through deconstruction, anthropology appears as a site at which the structurality of structure is destabilised through 'events'. 'Events' such as the incest prohibition expose the sense in which the centre of the structure is not amenable to structurality and is instead a site of play, a (non-)locus of continuous and multiple permutations. As argued by Derrida (1970), there is a further sense in which anthropology de-centres. By pointing to other centres, anthropology effects a decentring of the self-referential quality of Western metaphysics.

Deconstruction allows for a reflection on processes of centring and decentring that take place in and through the discipline of anthropology. In turn, by locating anthropology within the history of Western metaphysics, deconstruction provides the occasion to begin in the task of apprehending the discipline of anthropology in terms of a Nietzschean and Heideggerian sense of locatedness and historicity. Anthropology may be considered in terms of its position within a history of Western metaphysics understood as marked by nihilism. I argue that further deconstructive reading of the field of anthropology, and the work of Clifford Geertz (1973, 1983, 2000) in particular, may yield important insights into both the critique of Western metaphysics, and the place of anthropology within it. I propose to consider Geertz's programme of interpretative anthropology and outline its central claims. Informed by a Derridean deconstruction of anthropological texts, I first point to practices of 'centring' and 'contextualisation' of alterity, and then to 'events' or instances of 'rupture' in Geertz's text/field. Informed by a review of the tenets of 'thick description' and Geertz's 'anti anti-relativism', I argue that what ruptures Geertz's field and the project(-s) of hermeneutics more broadly, is nihilism.

3.3 Hermeneutics, Thick Description and Crypto-Ethnography: Problems with Refusal, Equivalence and Pluralisation

'The concept of culture I espouse ... is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber that man [*sic*] is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning' (Geertz 1973:5).

'In anthropology, or anyway social anthropology, what the practitioners do is ethnography. And it is in understanding what ethnography is, or more exactly *what doing ethnography is*, that a start can be made toward grasping what anthropological analysis amounts to as a form of knowledge. This, it must be said, is not a matter of methods. From one point of view, that of the textbook, doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on. But it is not these things, techniques and received procedures, that define the enterprise. What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, "thick description"' (Geertz 1973: 5-6, emphasis in the original).

'Winks upon winks upon winks' (Geertz 1973:9).

In his seminal essay 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture' Clifford Geertz (1973:3-30) outlines a theory for anthropology as an interpretative science. Following the work of analytic philosopher Gilbert Ryle, Geertz considers the example of two boys rapidly contracting the eyelids of their right eyes. The thin description of the natural experimental sciences would describe the boys' activity in terms of a rapid eyelid contraction of their right eyes. Conversely, thick description entertains the possibility that the contraction of the boys' right eyelids may amount to a meaningful gesture. Insofar as this is the case, anthropologists are not just engaged in

observation. Rather, anthropologists engage in an effort of interpretation that considers whether twitches may in fact be winks, and if so, what winks may be about, what they may mean in any specific context and social interaction. Geertz argues that the object of ethnography is 'a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of which twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies, rehearsals of parodies are produced, perceived and interpreted, and without which they would not (not even the zero-form twitches, which *as a cultural category*, are as much nonwinks as winks nontwitches) in fact exist, no matter what anyone did or didn't do with his [*sic*] eyelids' (Geertz 1973: 7, emphasis in the original). According to Geertz, '[w]hat the ethnographer is in fact faced with... is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit and which he [*sic*] must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render' (Geertz 1973: 10). In sum, according to Geertzian thick description, the task of the anthropologist involves 'grasping' strange, irregular and inexplicit conceptual structures, and 'rendering' them adequately.[12]

Defined in opposition to thick description, the 'thin description' characteristic of the natural sciences is a formalistic device. It provides a general 'description' of an event or 'fact', a description of certain length and width, but one that stops at the surface: two boys may be rapidly opening and closing their right eyes. Moving away from epidermal understandings of culture, to use an embodied metaphor, thick description aims for sonorous, rounded and fleshy depth. Through thick description interpretative anthropology produces structure that contextualises the Other and makes the Other intelligible.

In the following section, I consider the implications and effects of some of interpretative anthropology's knowledge practices. I explore three interrelated problems, namely ethnographic refusal and the negative; scale hopping and the question of equivalence; multi-sited imaginaries, crypto-ethnographic discourses and the status of pluralisation.

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[12] On the adequacy of description, note Geertz's own and much discussed (cf. Crapanzano 1986, Shankman 1984) over-interpretation of, for instance, the Balinese cockfight (Geertz 1973).

3.3.1 Thick Description, Public Texts and the Problem of Refusal

Culture is a 'web of meaning' and thus it is simultaneously understood as semiotic and public (Geertz 1973). Eschewing the psychologism inherent in Lévi-Strauss's structuralism, for Geertz the hermeneutic quality of culture produces cultural texts that acquire significance in the public realm of social discourse. Thus, unlike the minds of subjects, cultural texts and social discourse are accessible to the anthropologist.[13] As noted by Silverman (1990:132), 'cultural texts and their meanings exist, somewhat autonomously in the public world' and unlike the subjects who produce them, they linger in social discourse and are thus amenable to anthropological analysis. The public meaning of cultural texts is the subject of anthropological 'thick description'. Geertz's own thick descriptive practice has been said to often result in a thinning of multi-layered thickness and in the reduction of hermeneutic complexity and openness (Silverman 1990: 135) to broad collective cultural orientations. The reduction of hermeneutics to broad, collective cultural themes, while not as problematic when compared to Lévi-Strauss's universal structures, nevertheless produces broad generalised Weberian analyses of 'the tones and stresses of culture, public sentiment and emotion' (Silverman 1990:129).

'[T]he meaning of the text is an enduring aspect of culture which expands beyond the text proper but to which the text semantically points. Geertz argues, therefore, that the meaning of the Balinese cockfight references not the cockfight itself but rather the fixed, overarching cultural idioms that permeate all Balinese life. The cockfight is merely a single, albeit salient, manifestation of these cultural themes' (Silverman 1990: 132-3).

Further, Greenblatt (1999) argues that the distinction between thin and thick description may actually be a spurious one. With the premise that culture, and hence meaning, are

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[13] With reference to this, Silverman (1990) points out that Geertz is heavily influenced by the work of Paul Ricoeur, who wrote that '[w]hat has to be understood is not the initial situation of discourse... Understanding discourse has less than ever to do with the author and his [sic] situation. It wants to grasp the proposed worlds opened up by the references of the text. To understand a text is to follow its movement from sense to reference, from what it says to what it talks about' (Ricoeur 1971, cited in Silverman 1990:128). See also Tongs (1993).

always public, thinness refers to knowledge derived from specific kinds of texts, rather than a different epistemological position. There are different kinds of cultural texts and 'some texts seem more amenable to thick description than others, and consequently, "thicker" than others' (Greenblatt 1999:17). Ortner (1995) adds that not only are there different kinds of texts, but there may also be a plurality of thickness. The multiplicity of thickness is brought into stark relief in the possible problem of 'ethnographic refusal'.

'If the ethnographic stance is founded centrally on (among other things, of course) a commitment to thickness and if thickness has taken and still takes many forms, what I am calling ethnographic refusal involves a refusal of thickness, a failure of holism or density which itself may take various forms' (Ortner 1995:174).

Ortner (1995:176) suggests that 'sanitising politics, thinning culture and dissolving subjects' amount to examples of ethnographic refusal. 'Sanitising politics' refers to the erasure of complexity in ethnographic accounts that focus on 'politics *among* subalterns' (ibid:179). 'Thinning culture' refers to tropes of authenticity, timelessness and homogeneity through which the Other may be connoted (ibid:180-3). 'Dissolving subjects' refers to analyses that, while trying to address complexity, ambiguity and contradiction, instead dissolve 'the subject entirely into a set of "subject effects"' (Ortner 1995:183). A consequence of this is the denial of the agentic capabilities of subjects. The erasure of the agentic character of the Other also points to the override of 'individuality' inherent in an emphasis on socio-structural and/or socio-cultural and/or discursive domains. When domains are understood in terms of collectivities and/or as power effects, they are not attuned to 'the diversity, multiplicity and creativity of individual consciousness' (Rapport 2004: 3; see also Amit and Rapport 2002). Certain dissolution of (individual) agentic subjects may therefore obtain.

Each of these three modes of 'ethnographic refusal' thus involves one or more of the following: ethnocentrism, reductionism, a-historical bias, universalist epistemological violence. However, these different inflections of ethnographic refusal all pertain to the

anthropologist. With regard to this, I would argue that what is foreshadowed, but is in no sense pursued in Ortner's analysis is the complex and multi-layered question of the possibility that the thickness of some cultural texts and/or ethnographic subjects may be their very thinness. The anthropologist may not strictly engender thinness, but rather thinness may arise in the context and in the course of ethnographic encounters between/among ethnographic subjects, here including, of course, the anthropologist. Cultural texts may always be public, but some may be publicly characterised by thinness, negation and/or foreclosure. Others still may be marked by their absence.[14] In short, the public quality of texts may be complicated by multiple refusals, and refusals may refer to thick practices of thinning.

One may thus re-inscribe 'sanitising politics', 'thinning culture' and 'dissolving subjects' as forms of thinness borne out of the thickness of the ethnographic encounter, and not exclusively coterminous with the biases of the anthropologist. The complexities of thick refusal, as in the rejection of any engagement in ethnographic dialogue, and of thick articulations of the negative, as in the deployment of negation as an expressive ethnographic mode, are not adequately theorised in Geertz's programme of thick description. Neither are they adequately thought through in the analysis of multiple 'thickness' provided by Ortner (1995, 1999). Paradoxically, Ortner's stance appears to be squarely anti-theoretical,[15] when she states that 'it does not require sophisticated theorising to recognise that every social being has a life of (...) multiplicity[16] and that every social context creates such *shifting* between *foreground* and *background* (Ortner 1995:184, my emphasis). Conversely, it may be argued that the possibility of thin and thick 'thinning' of the ethnographic encounter as negation, as well as of refusals as cultural predicaments do in fact require further analysis *and* adequate theorising. This

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[14] For an incisive analysis of 'silence' see Spivak (1988). JongMi Kim has rightly pointed out that the 'absence' of the project of deconstruction is not equivalent to the 'silence' of Spivak's subaltern subject. For a critical discussion of the status of Spivak's 'silence', see JongMi Kim (2004). I am grateful to JongMi Kim for this and many more ongoing conversations.
[15] Rabinow (1983) traced a useful genealogy of cultural anthropology's anti-theoretical stance. It was Boas's emphasis on particularism and cultural wholes which established 'a trend of relativism and antitheoretical description' in cultural anthropology (ibid:54, see also Moore 1999). In this sense then, Ortner's remark is inscribed fully within this genealogy of anti-theoreticism.
[16] As an example of a 'life of multiplicity', Ortner (1995:184) discusses the 'multiplex identity as woman, as poor and as Muslim'.

may entail the development of a specific hermeneutic sensibility which confronts the status of refusal, absence and the negative specifically and the problematic of nihilism more generally.

3.3.2 Thick Description, Scale Hopping and the Problem of Equivalence

Geertz nevertheless pioneered an important hermeneutic strategy, namely that of establishing meaningful relations between 'cultural fragments' and 'wider social worlds' (Greenblatt 1999). With reference to this, Greenblatt argues that it is through foveation, i.e. 'the ability to keep an object (a tiny textualised piece of social behaviour) within the high-resolution area of perception' that Geertz successfully manages problems of both *scale* and *focus* (Greenblatt 1999:18, my emphasis). Hermeneutic anthropology thus also entails an awareness of scale and scale switching,[17] and as Geertz explicitly argues,

'Hopping back and forth between the whole conceived through the parts that actualize it and the parts conceived through the whole that motivates them, we seek to turn them, by a sort of intellectual *perpetual motion*, into explications of one another' (Geertz, 1983: 69, my emphasis).[18]

The hermeneutic movement is one between partible wholes (culture-s) and parts which are compelled into existence by the whole (cultural texts). Interpretation, in its perpetual motion, is grounded in the assumption of equivalence between the scale of the whole and that of the part (cf. Strathern 1999). The 'perpetual motion' and related establishment of equivalence between scales upon which Geertzian interpretation is predicated is suggestive of Gadamer's hermeneutics (1989) and debates about the 'hermeneutic circle'.[19] In *Truth and Method* Gadamer (1989) argues that hermeneutics, as the science

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[17] Note that Geertz is aware of scale and scale switching but not as sensitive to perspectivism.
[18] This is an important point, especially for an analysis of secrecy. Secrecy and the hermeneutic attempt and grasping secrecy, are both partly about scale switching – in the Strathernian sense explored in more detail in Chapter 4.
19 Whilst there exist a long-standing debate on the subject and the respective contributions offered by

of interpretation, does not simply amount to a scientific methodology geared towards the discovery of truth. According to Gadamer, 'there is no experience of truth that it is not interpretative' (Gadamer cited in Vattimo 1997:4, cf. Gadamer 1976:103).[20] As hermeneutics seeks to grapple with the nature and status of understanding, Gadamer engages in a radical 'critique of scientism and modern methodologism' to propose a general theory of interpretation (Vattimo 1997:3). For Gadamer (1989), as for Heidegger ([1962] 2002), subject and object are not discrete entities. Granted that the experience of the world occurs within a linguistic horizon, or in and through *Sprachlichkeit* ('linguisticality') (Vattimo 1997:3), subject and object are underpinned by a shared ontology which provides the conditions of possibility for the hermeneutic circle.[21]

'In its bare essentials the hermeneutical circle designates a reciprocal belonging between "subject" and "object" in interpretation, whereby these terms become necessarily invalidated, since they originated and developed within a perspective that assumed their separateness and

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Dilthey, Gadamer, Heidegger and Ricoeur (Palmer 1969), the hermeneutic circle may be broadly characterised by a concern with the act of interpretation of a text, and specifically with the kinds of relations between the parts of a work and the whole that may be established in the course of understanding. The act of interpretation and the establishment of relations between parts is characterised by hermeneutics in temporal terms. It is argued that cumulative production of understanding is achieved as one modifies the relations between parts in circular manner and reaches a point of closure. Dilthey and Schleimacher's methodological hermeneutics argued that the meaning of a text coincided with the meaning bestowed upon it by the author. In this context, the labour of interpretation of the hermeneutic circle referred to the interpretative effort geared towards the recovery of the world-view inherent in the text. In turn, following Heidegger's critique of interpretation as philology and the development of an *ontological* hermeneutic circle ([1962] 2002), for Gadamer, hermeneutics addresses the subject matter of a text. The temporality of the act of interpretation moves the text beyond the historical specificities and intentions of its author. In the ontological hermeneutic circle, interpretative and creative agency belongs to both author *and* reader and the latter's existential recognition of their 'being-in-the-world'.

[20] 'The universality of the hermeneutic perspective is all-encompassing. I once formulated this idea by saying that being that can be understood is language (...) in the last analysis, Goethe's statement "everything is a symbol" is the most comprehensive formulation of the hermeneutical idea. It means that everything points to another thing' (Gadamer 1976:103).

[21] This is most apparent in Gadamer's discussion of 'historical consciousness' and 'aesthetic consciousness' (1989, 1976). With reference to 'aesthetic consciousness', note that '[t]he consciousness of art – the aesthetic consciousness – is always secondary to the immediate truth-claim that proceeds from the work of art itself. To this extent, when we judge a work of art on the basis of its aesthetic quality, something that is really much more intimately familiar to us is alienated. This alienation into aesthetic judgement always takes place when we have withdrawn ourselves and are no longer open to the immediate claim of that which grasps us. Thus one point of departure for my reflections in *Truth and Method* was that the aesthetic sovereignty that claims its rights in the experience of art represents an alienation when compared to the authentic experience that confronts us in the form of art itself' (Gadamer 1976:5).

antithesis and used them to give expression to these' (Vattimo 1993:18-19).[22]

The hermeneutic circle on which hermeneutic ontology is predicated rests on three constitutive elements, namely 'the rejection of "objectivity" as an ideal of historical knowledge' (Vattimo 1993:19); 'the extension of the hermeneutic model to all knowledge' (ibid); and the 'linguistic nature of Being' (ibid).[23] Drawing on Heidegger's *Being and Time* ([1962] 2002), but consistently blunting Heidegger's own position,[24] Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology establishes as foundational the ontological equivalence between knower and known in interpretation. As with Geertz's thick description and scale hopping (1973, 1983, 2000), the problem with Gadamer's hermeneutic circle is that in the last instance, hermeneutics is reduced to meta-theoretical pronouncements, that is, interpretation is said to coincide with 'every possible human experience of the world' (Vattimo ibid:4). As noted by Vattimo, '[w]hat reduces hermeneutics to a generic philosophy of culture is the wholly metaphysical claim (often implicit and unrecognised)

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[22] Vattimo (1993) notes that Heidegger's philosophy provides a cogent articulation of the shared ontology of subject and object in interpretation. 'Heidegger viewed interpretation as nothing other than the articulation of what is understood, and so always presupposing comprehension or precomprehension of the thing; for him this meant simply that knower and known belong to one another reciprocally prior to any explicit act of knowing and prior to any recognition of something, so that the known is already within the horizon of the knower, but only because the knower is within the world that the known co-determines' (Vattimo 1993:18-19). I discuss this point in greater depth in the section on 'Weak Thought, Nihilism and the Heideggerian Horizon', below.

[23] For Heidegger ([1962 2002] subject and object (both entities, and thus 'beings') share an ontology in Being, but Being exceeds entities, that is, it is more than just beings. Insofar as this is the case, there exists and ontological difference between beings and Being. See discussion of the Heideggerian horizon, below.

[24] It is Vattimo's contention that Gadamer's hermeneutic ontology constitutes an oversimplification of Heidegger's arguments put forward in *Being and Time* ([1962] 2002). For instance, 'the classification of all knowledge as hermeneutical [involves] the reaffirmation, though in a novel way, of the notion of the historicity of knowledge: it means that historiographical knowledge and every other type of knowing is never merely "contemplation" of objects, but rather action that modifies the context to which it belongs and of which it becomes part. In developing his ontological thinking Heidegger tends to think this historicity **radically through the terms of the epochality of Being; for him our knowing is now completely saturated with the metaphysical forgetting of Being and this forgetting is *defined* [emphasis in the original] by Being itself, so that it cannot be altered by a mere change of attitude on man's part.** But Heidegger's "hermeneutical" followers generally tend to pick up only the blander and less provocative aspects of this discourse. For them, the universality of hermeneutics and the historicity of knowledge signify merely that history grows as a perpetual interpretative process. In this "eirenic" perspective, all the dramatic force in the Heideggerian idea of metaphysics is lost. *Truth and Method*, for example, betrays little sign of Heidegger's dramatic vision of the history of western civilisation. This modification and attenuation that Heideggerian thinking on the epochal nature of Being and on metaphysics undergoes at the hands of his hermeneutical successors has significant consequences for the problem with which I am concerned' (Vattimo 1993:22-3, my emphasis). I discuss the implications of Vattimo's critique of Gadamer and radical reading of Heidegger in the section on 'Weak Thought, Nihilism and the Heideggerian

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to be *a finally true description* of the (permanent) "interpretative structure" of human existence' (1997:6, my emphasis). In view of this, what seems to require elucidation is the status of the assumed equivalence between that which presents itself in different scales, and of the metaphysical pronouncements that may sustain such an equivalence. To say that the status of the equivalence between parts and wholes (Strathern 1986, 1999) need not be assumed, is to confront the meta-theoretical quality of Geertz's 'thick description' and practices of 'scale hopping'. It is to challenge the reduction of hermeneutics to 'a comfortable meta-theory of the universality of interpretative phenomena' (Vattimo 1997:8).[25]

3.3.3 Thinning out, Thickening up and the Problem of Pluralisation

Thick description is, *pace* archive-centred New Historicism (cf. Greenblatt 1999) very much grounded in ethnography and the experience of fieldwork, both understood in terms of an 'attempt to understand another life world using the self – as much of it as possible – as the instrument of knowledge' (Ortner 1995:173). Ethnography as a practice of the self and the ethnographic stance as the broad intellectual and moral positionality of anthropology are both grounded in a commitment to 'thickness'. Ethnographic thickness rests on the craft of 'producing understanding through richness, texture, and detail, rather than parsimony, refinement and (in the sense used by mathematicians) elegance' (Ortner 1999:174). As argued by Ortner (ibid) the career of thickness in anthropology has been mixed, and has often entailed the thinning out of thickness into holism. This point is echoed by Marcus, who suggests that despite the calls for thick description and the significant impact of Geertz's work in cultural and social anthropology, a remarkable

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Horizon', below.

[25] To follow up on this point, the comfortable meta-theory of the universality of interpretative phenomena is a variation of the universality of 'humanity' and 'structure' noted earlier. While humanity was universal for Boas and structures were universal with Lévi-Strauss, interpretation is universal for this formulation of hermeneutics. The problem with this is that pluralism is invoked by all concerned (say, Boas, Lévi-Strauss, Gadamer, Geertz) a pluralism which is nevertheless firmly linked to different universalisms. As noted by Vattimo (1988:147), '[a]lterity becomes to some degree "regulated", or as it were exorcised, through metaphysically inspired appeal to a common humanity and to a supra-historical essence within whose confines all human phenomena – no matter how different they may appear – may be situated'. The issue with all universalisms is that they are grounded/rooted in Western metaphysics. They are not 'errors' as such, but they do designate a specific moment in metaphysics, that is, one characterised by 'strong' thought. In terms of universalism's contemporary incarnations, the critique of the meta-theoretical pronouncements that underpin them is also a critique of liberal (political) theory (cf. Moore 1994b) and all

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degree of thinness still characterises ethnographic practice within the discipline (Marcus 1998:18). In his own argument for a thickening of ethnography, Marcus notes that, at a minimum, 'the ethnographer should be able to figure out, to describe, and explain very complex realities in fairly plain terms before clearly distinct theoretical framings, interests, and critiques of ordinary language as political also set in with full force. Otherwise, why bother with the arduous sweat of fieldwork?' (Marcus 1998:18).

Marcus unequivocally singles out three intellectual/research practices, namely 'figuring out', 'description' and 'explanation' as routes and aims to be pursued in the ethnographic endeavour and, *inter alia*, as means to sustain 'what [ethnography] has always done especially well, namely understanding and representation' (ibid:18). These strategies are however complicated by the challenges posed by Marcus' own 'multi-sited research imaginary'. In Marcus's definition, a 'multi-sited research imaginary' consists of 'strategies of quite literally following connections, associations, and putative relationships'. Multi-sited ethnographic research thus strives to engage directly with movement and shifts in scale. Further, it aims to follow and understand linkages across different and yet interconnected entities. In terms of techniques, Marcus suggests that to envision a multi-sited research imaginary, one may follow the people, follow the thing, follow the metaphor, follow the plot, story or allegory, follow the life or biography, follow the conflict (Marcus 1998:89-95, see also Hannerz 2003).

The multi-sited research imaginary and the possibility of transnational ethnographic multi-sitedness produce new representations that may 'lose their depth or rather, their thickness' (Marcus 1998: 245). To recover thickness, however, Marcus critically engages with the thin/thick distinction and argues that both thickness and thinness may apply to the discourses and practices in which subjects themselves engage. Marcus calls this sort of inductive thinness and thickness 'crypto-ethnographic discourses'. Crypto-ethnographic discourses arise out of the process through which ethnographer and interlocutor think about a common object, thus producing knowledge that the ethnographer then seeks to represent. It is a focus on crypto-ethnographic discourses

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the universalisms – and related epistemological violence thus engendered.

which is indicated as a way of thickening ethnography (Marcus ibid).

It could be argued that crypto-ethnographic discourses amount to meta-discourses produced in the dialogic practice of ethnography. However, despite Marcus' interesting transposition of thinness and thickness within a multi-sited research imaginary, and the fascinating question of the production of reflexive and collaborative meta-theoretical insights in the fieldwork situation, 'crypto-ethnography' does not help elucidate what the purpose of thick description may be when the thickness of the ethnography is its very thinness. More importantly, Marcus fails to historicise practices of 'thickening' and thus to address the 'event' that I wish to elicit as foundational in Geertz's work and in hermeneutic anthropology more generally, namely nihilism.

The project(-s) of interpretative anthropology, thick description, multi-sited research imaginaries and crypto-ethnography are fraught with assumptions concerning, for instance, the assumed 'thin' status of refusal, negation and absence. Further, assumptions concerning the equivalence of 'scales' and 'sites' introduce questions as to the status of both 'scale hopping' and multi-sitedness, and the singularities, pluralities and related processes of homogenisation and differentiation thus engendered. A set of debates in the field of hermeneutic anthropology has addressed some of these questions in terms of the value (or lack thereof) of (cultural) relativism. Exchanges between apologists and chastisers are of extreme interest in that they point, in my view, to that which ruptures the field of hermeneutic anthropology. The 'scandal' and 'event' in the field of hermeneutic anthropology, as in hermeneutics more broadly, is not relativism as such, but rather, nihilism.

3.4 Anti Anti-relativism and Nihilism as Event

At the heart of the practice of ethnography and of Geertz's understanding of anthropology is relativism. Echoing Derrida (1970), Geertz argues that anthropology, and the relativism imputed to it, have 'disturbed the general intellectual peace' (Geertz 2000:44). Whether anthropology itself may truly constitute an 'event' or 'rupture' is less clear. Geertz points out that the emergence of what Derrida (1970) would call 'other

centres' is not so much a product of anthropology's labour, but of other centres' themselves. Further, the genealogy of the 'rupture' has little to do with anthropology.

'It is has not been anthropology, such as it is, that has made our field seem a massive argument against absolutism in thought, morals, and aesthetic judgement; it has been anthropological data: customs, crania, living floors, and lexicons... After all, Montaigne could draw relativistic, or relativistic-looking, conclusions from the fact, as he heard it, that the Caribs didn't wear breeches; he did not have to read *Patterns of Culture*. Even earlier on, Herodotus, contemplating "certain Indians of the race called Callatians", among whom men were said to eat their fathers, came, as one would think he might, to similar views' (Geertz 2000:44).

Re-inscribing Geertz's statement in Derridean terms, it could be argued that 'rupture' is an integral part of the history of Western metaphysics, and contemporary 'relativist bent anthropologists' (Geertz 2000:44) with their decentring practices, are inheritors of an horizon that comes into being with the very Western metaphysics that they and those before have been implicated in, and at times sought to challenge. Despite possible protestations to the contrary, I am inclined to read considerable convergence between Derrida's and Geertz's respective stance vis-à-vis Western metaphysics. While Derrida invokes the ability of anthropology to point to other 'centres', Geertz defends the labour of relativisation, or 'relativism', as he puts it, undertaken in and through the discipline. In short, both Derrida and Geertz see anthropology as effecting 'rupture'. With this in mind, and Geertz's smart 'anti anti-relativism' notwithstanding (2000:42-67), it seems a 'scandal' that in his interpretative framework Geertz should firmly and unambiguously, and one may add, rather surprisingly, eschew nihilism. Interestingly, Geertz (1973:449, quoted below) inscribes his programme of interpretative anthropology within a critical tradition that does not take 'culture' and 'interpretation' at face value. The task is instead to point consistently and systematically to constructedness and locatedness (1973, 1983).

'[A]n extension of the notion of a text beyond written material, and beyond the verbal, is, though

metaphorical, not, of course, all that novel. The *interpretatio naturae* tradition of the middle ages, which, culminating with Spinoza, attempted to read nature as Scripture, the Nietzschean effort to treat value systems as glosses of the will to power (or the Marxian one to treat them as glosses on property relations), and the Freudian replacement of the enigmatic text of the manifest dream with the plain one of the latent, all offer precedents, **if not equally recommendable ones'** (Geertz 1973:449, my emphasis).

In typically ambiguous style, Geertz suggests Spinoza, Nietzsche, Marx and Freud as possible antecedents to his interpretative programme, but makes clear that among these, some positions are less acceptable than others.[26] In later writings Geertz returns to the genealogical trajectory underpinning his own stance, and notes that the (cultural) relativism he defends is indeed located within multiple genealogies. These genealogies may all be equally subject to attack, but are not, strictly speaking, the same.

'Relativism ("[T]he position that all assessments are assessments relative to some standard or other, and standards derive from cultures"), I. C. Jarvie remarks, "has these objectionable consequences: namely, that by limiting critical assessment of human works it disarms us, dehumanises us, leaves us unable to enter into communicative interaction; that is to say, unable to criticise cross-culturally, cross-sub-culturally; ultimately, relativism leaves no room for criticism at all...[B]ehind relativism nihilism looms". More in front, scarecrow and leper's bell, it sounds like, than behind: certainly none of us, clothed and in our right minds, will rush to embrace a view that so dehumanises us as to render us incapable of communicating with anybody' (Geertz 2000:48).

Thus, while it may be the case that for critics 'relativism, or anything that at all looks like relativism (...) is identified with nihilism' (Geertz 2000:43), Geertz aims to clarify the

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[26] Note how different Derrida's qualification of the same genealogy is: 'It was within concepts inherited from metaphysics that Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger worked, for example. Since these concepts are not elements or atoms and since they are taken from a syntax and a system, every particular borrowing drags along with it the whole of metaphysics. This is what allows these destroyers to destroy each other reciprocally – for example, Heidegger considering Nietzsche, with as much lucidity and rigor as bad faith and misconstruction, as the last metaphysician, the last "Platonist". One could do the same for Heidegger himself, for Freud, or for a number of others. And today no exercise is more widespread' (Derrida 1970:

status and implications of his relativist position, and questions some of the outcomes attributed to it. Rebuking crass characterisations of the history of ideas and the place of relativism within it,[27] Geertz resolutely defends a relativist stance from charges of nihilism. Nihilism need not follow or mark relativism, and ought instead to be clearly distinguished from it.

'[T]he moral and intellectual consequences that are commonly supposed to flow from relativism – subjectivism, nihilism, incoherence, Machiavellianism, ethical idiocy, aesthetic blindness, and so on – *do not in fact do so* and the promised rewards of escaping its clutches, mostly having to do with pasturised knowledge, are illusionary' (Geertz 2000:42, my emphasis).

Furthermore, Geertz objects to the charge that nihilism may ensue from consuming anthropological texts. As he puts it, 'genuine nihilists' – whatever this may mean- are not among his acquaintances or his readers.

'The image of vast numbers of anthropology readers running around in so cosmopolitan a frame of mind as to have no views as to what is or isn't true, or good, or beautiful, seems to me largely a fantasy. There may be some genuine nihilists out there, along Rodeo Drive or around Times Square, but I doubt very many have become such as a result of an excessive sensitivity to the claims of other cultures; and at least most of the people I meet, read, and read about, and indeed I myself, are all-too-committed to something or other, usually parochial.' (Geertz 2000:46).

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[27] 'The heights to which this beware of the scabby whore who will cut off your critical powers sort of thing can aspire is indicated, to give one last example, by Paul Johnson's ferocious book on the history of the world since 1917, *Modern Times*, which, opening with a chapter called "A Relativistic World" ... accounts for the whole modern disaster – Lenin and Hitler, Amin, Bokassa, Sukarno, Mao, Nasser, and Hammerskold, Structuralism, the New Deal, the Holocaust, both world wars, 1968, inflation, shinto militarism, OPEC, and the independence of India – as outcomes of something called "relativist heresy". "A great trio of German imaginative scholars," Nietzsche, Marx, and (with a powerful assist – our contribution – from Frazer) Freud, destroyed the nineteenth century morally as Einstein, banishing absolute motion, destroyed it cognitively, and Joyce, banishing absolute narrative, destroyed it aesthetically [.] (...) Mindless tolerance, mindless intolerance; ideological promiscuity, ideological monomania; egalitarian hypocrisy, egalitarian simplisticism –all flow from the same infirmity. Like Welfare, the Media, the Bourgeoisie, or the Ruling Circle, Cultural Relativism causes everything bad' (Geertz 2000:49-50).

It is 'pasteurised knowledge' that equates relativism with subjectivism and nihilism, and thus with ethical and aesthetic inconsequence and incoherence. Interpretative anthropology has none of the former, and plenty of ethical, aesthetic and rational judgement, albeit relativist and slightly parochial (Geertz 2000:46). It is therefore clear that Geertz's self-identification is simultaneously a relativist and non-nihilist one. Whilst there may indeed be some 'genuine nihilists' at the -assumed- core of metropolitan privilege,[28] one is to take for granted that their stance may have little to do with being familiar with anthropological arguments. The discipline is thus saved from (nihilist) slander and some form of upright (relativist) credential is restored to it. For all the talk of standing 'against absolutism in thought' (Geertz 2000:44), and aside from the fact that were there nihilists on Rodeo Drive and Times Square, this would be of (anthropological) interest, it is evident that Geertz wishes to defend a relativist position while distancing himself from charges of nihilism.[29]

'Looking into dragons, not domesticating or abominating them, nor drowning them in vats of theory, is what anthropology has been all about. At least, that is what has been all about, *as I, no nihilist, no subjectivist*, and possessed, as you can see, of some strong views as to what is reasonable and what is not, understand it' (Geertz 2000:63-4, my emphasis).

Nihilism, subjectivism and solipsism are possibly distinct, but, one suspects, intimately inter-related 'scandals' often accompanied by 'vats of theory', all to be resolutely deflected in (thick) ethnographic and anthropological hermeneutic practice. It seems ironic, then, that such vocal anti-nihilist stance[30] should be charged with the very scandal

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[28] What is 'Rodeo Drive' for Geertz? Again, it is a matter of perspectives as much as of 'imagination' (Moore 1994, 2004, Strathern 1999). For me, 'Rodeo Drive' is the road that leads to Santa Monica Boulevard, where the subjects of the documentary *101 Rent Boys* (Barbato and Bailey 2001, US) try to make a living.

[29] 'In the human sciences, methodological discussions conducted in terms of general positions and abstracted principles are largely bootless. A few possible exceptions possibly apart (perhaps Durkheim, perhaps Collingwood), such discussions mainly lead to intramural bickering about the proper way to do things and dreadful results ("relativism", "reductionism", "positivism", "*nihilism*" (Geertz 2000:122, my emphasis).

[30] 'It was not relativism – Sex, the Dialectic and the Death of God – that did in absolute motion, Euclidean

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it so vehemently shuns.

3.5 Anti-Nihilism: The Double Negative

As Geertz (2000) makes clear, the problematic of nihilism in cultural anthropology is not new. As with most 'concept-metaphors' (Moore 1997, 1999, 2001, 2004), the status of nihilism in anthropology is highly contested. The nature of the contestation is nevertheless firmly, and perhaps aptly, oriented towards negation or containment. Interestingly, despite Geertz's own explicit refutations, his work has been deemed to extol, rather than circumscribe nihilism. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, in Rabinow's definition (1983), nihilism is 'the equating of all beings, the levelling of meaningful differentiation, the transvaluation of all values' (Rabinow 1983:52). According to Rabinow, the consequences of a nihilist stance in anthropology are twofold. First, nihilism in the guise of cultural relativism leads to a 'bracketing of truth claims' inherent in cultural statements. Second, and pertinent to Geertz's own work, nihilism in symbolic anthropology relies on the 'bracketing of seriousness'. In both instances, these parenthesising practices are said to invoke diversity and plurality, but ultimately to reduce the Other to the Same (Rabinow 1983). According to Rabinow (ibid), anthropology has been marked by, and has actively advanced nihilism in specific ways.

3.5.1 The Bracketing of Truth

Rabinow attributes the 'bracketing of truth' to the tradition of cultural anthropology inaugurated by Franz Boas and entrenched in Herskovits' work on 'The Problem of Cultural Relativism' (1947). Developed as a response to racism and ethnocentrism, cultural relativism in anthropology has traditionally sought to make a space for other cultures. By so doing, however, some unforeseen outcomes have ensued. For one, cultural relativism á la Boas is reductionist in scope, in that 'all differences are preserved

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space, and universal causation. It was wayward phenomena, wave packets and orbital leaps, before which they were helpless. Nor was it Relativism – Hermeneutico-Psychedelic Subjectivism – that did in (to the degree they *have* been done in) the Cartesian *cogito*, the Whig view of history, and "the moral point of view so sacred to Eliot, Arnold and Emerson". It was odd actualities – infant betrothals and nonillusionist paintings – that embarrassed their categories' (Geertz 2000:65).

and denied at the same time. All are treated equally' (Rabinow 1983:59). [31]

'All that is necessary for the cultural relativist to achieve this aim is the bracket of truth claims or beauty claims or morality claims of the culture under consideration. In this act of anthropological purification – ridding ourselves of ethnocentrism – we take *no* culture at its word. We start by bracketing the truth claims or value positions of our own culture and then we do the same for the culture we are attempting to comprehend' (Rabinow 1983:59, emphasis in the original). [In so doing,] [A]ll cultural differences have been both preserved and destroyed. First, difference is emphasized, the uniqueness of each culture; then it is reduced to the Same (...) The role of anthropology is to describe the plurality of these meaningful life worlds. Each way of life is worthy of respect because ultimately each is equally *untrue.* The being of man is all that we can affirm. This is everywhere the same. Ultimately difference (although praised) is suppressed: the Same is triumphant' (Rabinow 1983: 59-60, my emphasis).

Cultural relativists beginning with Boas have thus reduced Difference to Sameness (Rabinow 1983:61). They may have cleared a space for plurality, but by bracketing the multiplicity of truth claims, they have also made each claim to difference 'equally untrue'. To their credit, Rabinow argues (ibid) that they have done so moved by a political project that sought to challenge ethnocentrism and racism. Symbolic anthropologists, on the other hand 'have taken a further step in the *advancement of nihilism* by bracketing the seriousness of cultural statements' (Rabinow 1983:61, my emphasis).

3.5.2 The Bracketing of Seriousness
The 'bracketing of seriousness' of cultural statements in symbolic/interpretative

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[31] 'Previously, cultures had been ranked on a Eurocentric scale. But the critical assault of cultural anthropology was successful in exposing the ethnocentric bias implicit in all the hierarchies of evaluation and classification previously constructed. The motto, echoing Husserl, might well be 'to the cultures' underlying value systems themselves' (Rabinow 1983:59).

anthropology stems primarily from the concept of 'culture' it deploys. As noted previously, culture for Geertz is always local (1973, 1983), and hence particular. Further, it is always public, and hence available to the anthropologist. Rabinow notes however that the local and public qualities axiomatically attributed to culture are underpinned by certain universalising assumptions. First, for Geertz, '[t]here is no culture in general. Culture is not some superorganic realm. It is rooted in the evolution of the species' (Rabinow 1983:63).[32] Second, the public quality of culture, while making culture amenable to thick description, is predicated on the assumption of a shared hermeneutic quality of knowledge and experience. This is said to reduce the multiplicity of knowledge and experience to a matter of aesthetics.

[For Geertz], 'there is a fundamental underlying commonality and a fundamental surface of historical and cultural difference. It is that difference we seek to describe (...) What we do as anthropologists is construct interpretations of what we take to be other people's realities. The writing of ethnography is what makes us anthropologists. We create fictions'. (Rabinow 1983:65) (...) The task of the anthropologist is to report observations, not to answer questions – the truth doe not lie elsewhere any more than it is hidden at home (...) Ethics, science and truth all become aesthetic' (Rabinow 1983:66).

Thus, in the cultural relativism inaugurated by Franz Boas the Other's truth claims were suspended 'as a way of affirming the universal ground which made all cultures equal expressions of an underlying common humanity' (Rabinow 1983: 67). Interpretative anthropology, on the other hand, suspends the possibility that there may be truth claims that are not located within a perspective, *and* that any such claims may be intelligible.

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[32] 'There has always been a conflict (or at least an implicit tension) within anthropology between the particularities of the peoples we go out to study and the theories we use to describe them. If the theory was not general enough, then the risk of mere descriptivism, naïve empiricism, was present. The other side of the coin, however, is that if the theory is general enough than we tend to get a rather washed out, this soup of "behind these seemingly bizarre customs lies John Doe just like you and me". The more general the theory the less it could do justice to the particulars under consideration. So, culture, for Geertz, is irreducible to underlying universals; it is resolutely particular. There is no culture in general. Culture is not

'The anthropologist not only remains neutral to the truth claims of a particular culture but now brackets the seriousness (in the traditional sense of Western philosophy) of the truth claims themselves. (...) The anthropologist is not bracketing meaning, like a structuralist or behaviourist. Rather, what is bracketed is precisely the claims of serious speech acts to serious meaningfulness. *What is suspended is not only the claim to context-free truth, but the claim that such a claim is intelligible.* The interpretive anthropologist will treat both reference and sense as mere phenomena' (Rabinow 1983: 67, my emphasis).

With reference to this, it may be contended that claims that knowledge and experience are hermeneutic, and thus a matter of aesthetics, is in fact not reductionism. Engagement with 'surface' need not be problematic either. When grounded in a Nietzschean critique of metaphysics, the issue ceases to appear as an error. In Aphorism 54 in *The Gay Science* Nietzsche suggests that experience as 'consciousness of appearances' may be likened to a dream. We may be aware that our experience of the world is akin to a dream in that it is neither objective nor directly linked to it. Yet, we 'still must go on dreaming'. Our experience may be sensed as 'appearance', and yet, it cannot be falsified in the sense that we cannot remove ourselves from it, we cannot shed it as if it were a mask. In other words, 'there is no objective reality, no thing-in-itself; there is only appearance in one or another perspective (Nietzsche 1974, Translator's comment – footnote 44, 1974:116).[33]

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some superorganic realm. It is rooted in the evolution of the species' (Rabinow 1983:63).

[33] Aphorism 54: '*The consciousness of appearance.* – How wonderful and new and yet how gruesome and ironic I find my position vis-à-vis the whole existence in the light of my insight! I have discovered for myself that the human and animal past, indeed the whole primal age and past of all sentient being continues in me to invent, to love, to hate, and to infer. I suddenly woke up in the midst of this dream, but only to the consciousness that I am dreaming and that I must go on dreaming lest I perish – as a somnambulist must go on dreaming lest he fall. What is "appearance" for me now? Certainly not the opposite of some essence: what could I say about any essence except to name the attributes of its appearance! Certainly not a dead mask that one could place on an unknown x or remove from it! [...] Appearance is for me that which lives and is effective and goes so far in its self-mockery that it makes me feel that this is appearance and will-o'-the-wisp and a dance of spirits and nothing more – that among all these dreamers, I, too, who "know", am dancing my dance; that the knower is a means for prolonging the earthly dance and thus belongs to the masters of ceremony of existence; and that the sublime consistency and interrelatedness of all knowledge perhaps is and will be the highest means to *preserve* the universality of dreaming and the mutual comprehension of all dreamers and thus also *the continuation of the dream*' (Nietzsche 1974:116, emphasis in the original).

Unequivocally dismissive of Nietzschean arguments, Rabinow (1983) concludes that despite efforts to produce thick descriptive accounts of other cultures, the programme of interpretative anthropology is in fact profoundly reductionist, a 'pure description'. Whilst interpretative anthropology may provide a description of what the Other thinks is true, or serious, ultimately it pronounces all statements relative, and thus neither true nor serious.[34] In this sense, then, Geertz' relativism engenders a flattening of difference, a reduction of the Other's claims to truth and seriousness to discourse, and the opening of anthropological endeavour to potentially any individual willing to reduce the Other to the Same, under the aegis of (anthropological) nihilism.

'Ultimately, when this new purified phenomenological anthropology has come of age, we will understand that culture is discourse, that there are many variants of it, that a heightened conversation is our goal. We will be able to bring this project to fruition when not only a small number of Westerners have become anthropologists but presumably everyone else as well. When the Navajo comes of age, and learns to translate his [sic] frame of reference into what can *only* be our frame of reference, then the long strangeness between us will have ended – and so will all difference as well' (Rabinow 1983:68).

3.5.3 Double Negatives

I consider Rabinow's position (1983) to be anti-nihilist and anti-Nietzschean, and as such extremely interesting in its locatedness. For one, nihilism appears in Rabinow's text as either coupled with fascism (1983:69), or as opposed to humanism (1983:70). Rabinow (1983:72), with Foucault in mind, ventures to propose 'a rethinking of humanism, nihilism, and the relation of truth to power' (1983:72), but does little, if anything, to this effect. What Rabinow does unequivocally is to condemn Geertz for broadening the reach

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[34]'The possibility of pure description of another culture from the outside is now possible. What Geertz once referred to as "a scientific phenomenology of cultural forms" has found its method. We observe what the natives think is true, i.e. what they take seriously. We construct an account of their universe, their frames of meaning, and we converse with it. We bring it into our conversation. The anthropologist thus succeeds in studying what is serious and truthful to Others without it being serious or truthful to him [sic]. As we have been told, there are no truths to be brought back from faraway places. There is nothing specific to be learned from other cultures; they have nothing to teach us, anymore than presumably we have to teach

and scope of nihilism in the project(-s) of anthropology. With reference to this, I would argue that neither Geertz, nor indeed Rabinow, do this to any sufficient extent. Nihilism may constitute the limit of Geertz's programme, in terms of occlusion and potentiality. Indeed, an inherent nihilistic stance is present in Geertz's writings. Traces of nihilism-as-potentiality lie in his characterisation of anthropological fieldwork.

'All the familiar rationalisations having to do with science, progress, philanthropy, enlightenment, and selfless purity of dedication ring false, and one is left, *ethically disarmed*, to grapple with a human relationship which must be justified over and over again in the most immediate of terms' (Geertz 2000: 33, my emphasis).

'[T]he whole enterprise [of social scientific research] is directed not towards the impossible task of controlling history but toward the only *quixotic* one of widening the role of reason in it' (Geertz 2000: 37-8, my emphasis).

Despite these affirmative moments, the 'event' of nihilism in Geertz's texts is founded mainly on the multiple disavowals noted in the previous section. Most rebukes are linked to Geertz's explicit defence of cultural relativism from charges of nihilism and solipsism (Geertz 2000), to the extent that nihilism and its disavowals mark a 'scandal' in Geertz's work. Rabinow (1983:52) is therefore right in applying Heidegger's *dictum* to Geertz's position, and state that 'those who fancy themselves free of nihilism perhaps push forward its development most fundamentally'. Despite their professed differences and mutual accusations, however, both Rabinow and Geertz in fact converge in their evaluation of nihilism as something to be eschewed. Both are engaged in the articulation of an anti-nihilist position. Insofar as what I call the 'anti-nihilist' quality of their respective positions is a negation of nihilism, and as such a double negative, anti-nihilism may amount to an affirmation. One must thus unravel the conditions of possibility and related genealogy of this hastening of nihilism that occurs on the site of anthropology. Furthermore, nihilism need not be reduced, contained and foreclosed. By tracing the

them' (Rabinow 1983:67-8).

intellectual genealogy of nihilism, it may be possible to recover what is disavowed and yet advanced by Geertz and Rabinow, namely nihilism as the vocation of hermeneutics (Vattimo 1997) and by extension, the vocation of anthropology. This requires a reconfiguration of the intellectual genealogy/horizon of the anthropological project(-s) and of hermeneutic anthropology in Nietschean/Heideggerian terms. Within this horizon, it may then be possible to reclaim nihilism as a legitimate epistemological *and* hermeneutic position. I take Geertz's call to widen social scientific, and more specifically, anthropological horizons (Heidegger), frontiers or limits (Foucault, Derrida) to be an invitation to confront what he has left remarkably unexplored, namely the quixotic underpinnings of the anthropological enterprise. The hermeneutic and nihilist vocation of anthropology may therefore be both its very weakness, and its greatest asset.

[Anthropologists] 'were the first to insist that we see the lives of others through lenses of our own grinding and that they look back on ours through ones of their own. That this led some to think the sky was falling, solipsism was upon us, and intellect, judgement, even the sheer possibility of communication had all fled is not surprising. The *repositioning of horizons* and the *decentring of perspectives* has had that effect before' (Geertz 2000:65, my emphasis).

3.6 Weak Thought and the Heideggerian Horizon

'This is the kernel of Heideggerian ontology: I have access to Being through, let us say, some preliminaries, some conditions of possibility, which are not the *a priori* conditions of the eternal Kantian structural reason, but which are instead the reasons, some enabled conditions (*condizioni possibilitate*) of the reason I have inherited, which have a provenance that is transformed in time, and this is the history of Being. This history of Being, however, cannot be interpreted coherently, from a Heideggerian perspective, and in my opinion, but as **weakening**".

(Vattimo 1996:1, my translation and my emphasis)

The suggestion that the vocation of anthropology may be nihilism – understood as a

condition predicated on the absence of foundations, the withdrawal of certitudes and the revocability of truth – requires further discussion. How nihilism may have come to occupy such a place, and what its advent may entail for anthropology, seem relevant questions. In turn, this sheds light on those processes of thick thinning of anthropological description and the related 'weakening' of disciplinary structures, foundations and centres noted above.

Vattimo has considered these questions in his elaboration of the notion of 'weak thought' (Vattimo 1981, 1991, 1997; Vattimo and Rovatti 1983). Vattimo argues (1983, 1991) that the historical provenance of 'weak thought' can be traced to the crisis of the philosophical and political project of the period between 1968 and the first half of the 1980s. With reference to European philosophy, the two decades are said to be significant in that they mark the demise of a single and universal rationality. Western history can be understood in terms of a progressive weakening of ontological categories that have been inherited from metaphysics and whose dismantling begins with the work of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Interestingly, to trace the history of Being is said not to amount to reification. Reification is avoided through recourse to 'interpretation' as theorised by hermeneutics, that is, a conceptualisation of interpretation that acknowledges that one is always located within Being, without ever having to objectifying being to oneself. It is Vattimo's contention that to avoid reification, one can follow Heidegger's methodology and argue one's position in relation to a provenance, without having to rely on 'metaphysical-objectivistic argumentativeness'.

For Heidegger, Being should not be understood as the stable and immutable grounding of metaphysics and ontology, or as the overcoming (*Überwindung*) of dialectics. Being in Heideggerian terms is historical in the sense of its location within a 'horizon' and a 'legacy'. The horizon of Being is one of *Verwindung*, that is, it entails both acknowledgement of a legacy and bidding farewell from it (Vattimo 1983:21-22). *Verwindung* is the mode through which thought thinks truth as *Überliferung* and *Geschick* (Vattimo ibid:22), that is, as both 'declining and distorting' (Vattimo 1983:21), rather than as pre-categorical and/or foundational.

Whilst Heidegger is concerned with articulating the possibility for thinking Dasein through temporality and historicity, both understood as marked by 'dispensations' of Being, or 'Geschick', 'weak thought' re-deploys Heideggerian 'historical-destinal' (storico-destinale) argumentativity to recover a sense of the temporal dimension that it inhabits vis-à-vis traditional metaphysics. Although 'weak thought' cannot transcend metaphysics and its constructs, it does nevertheless inherit them in a weakened and distorted form. This process of weakening of the foundations of metaphysics may also be viewed as the advent of nihilism.

3.6.1 Nihilism and Fabling

As remarked by many commentators, nihilism is a modern problematic (Darby *et al* 1989, Egyed 1989, Rabinow 1983, Vattimo 1983, 1997). Whilst different genealogies of nihilism may be traced (cf. Volpi 1996), it is in Nietzsche's work that the question of nihilism and its place in modernity have been most subtly and influentially addressed. Nietzsche is concerned with tracing the 'dissolution of the idea of fundamentals' (Vattimo 2002:74), such as God, Virtue, Truth and Justice on which moral-metaphysical discourse is predicated. In the context of his discussion of the 'self-sublimation of morality', Nietzsche proposes that 'God is dead'.[35] The announcement of the death of

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[35] Two aphorisms in *The Gay Science*, namely aphorism 108 (Nietzsche 1974: 167) and aphorism 125 (Nietzsche 1974: 181-2, emphasis in the original) are the first occurrences of the 'announcement' of the death of God in Nietzsche's texts. I reproduce Aphorism 125 herewith. '*The madman.* – Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God! – As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. – Has he got lost? Asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? Asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? Emigrated? Thus they yelled and laughed. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. *We have killed him* – you and I. All of us are murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breadth of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need the light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods too decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. "How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born

God is not intended to operate according to the logic of metaphysics, and thus does not constitute either a metaphysically grounded denial, or affirmation. As argued by Vattimo, 'the pronouncement that "God id dead" is not, in Nietzsche's case, simply a metaphysical denial of His existence.[36] For it is not a statement concerning the "true structure" of reality, in which God does not exist while people believe that He does. Instead, conditions have altered and have rendered a fable superfluous, which in other ages was useful and decisively important' (Vattimo 2002:76).

Nietzsche associates the fable of the existence of God, and the related 'imperative of truth' (Vattimo 2002:77) with the need of fashioning a sense of security in the struggle of human existence. Re-framing the question in terms of a history of nihilism, the relevance of God, or indeed Truth, refers to 'the historical period in which the instinct to survive leads individuals and peoples to form communities, to institute rules of exchange which would enable them, if not master, at least create the illusion of mastering, all that is wild, unpredictable and ambivalent: all that is alive' (Egyed 1989:2).

Hence, Nietzsche's announcement of the death of God constitutes, literally, an 'event' (Vattimo 2002:85). Eschewing metaphysical pretensions as in the establishment of new 'facts', Nietzsche's announcement is interpretation. It is 'an acknowledgement of a

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after us — for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto." Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. "I have come too early," he said then; "my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, still require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant of stars — *and yet they have done it themselves.*" It has been related further than on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his *requiem aeternam deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but: "What after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?'

[36] '[T]he Death of God (the summation of what Nietzsche terms the self-sublimation of morality) is not a metaphysical pronouncement on the non-existence of a God. It should instead be taken literally as the announcement of an *event*. To announce an event does not mean, however, that one is "proving" anything. Nor does it mean, strictly speaking, that one is seeking any agreement for the announcement (which could only be sought on the basis of a historical-metaphysical belief in the rationality of the event). Yet announcing an event, allied to describing its immediate circumstances (in this case, a reconstruction of morality's errors and eventual self-sublimation), cannot avoid provoking other events in its turn. And this is precisely what *The Gay Science* also says of the thought of eternal recurrence: "If this thought took hold of you, it would transform you as you are [...] it would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight"' (Vattimo 2002:85).

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course of events in which we are implicated and that we do not describe objectively, but interpret speculatively as concluding in the recognition that God is no longer necessary' (Vattimo 1997:6-7). The announcement of the 'death of God' thus engenders new possibilities. It amounts to an acceptance that 'fables' other than God and Truth may be entertained and that one may explicitly and self-consciously engage in 'yarn spinning' (Vattimo 2002:76). It is this invitation to opening new horizons for the fabling of the world that may arguably constitute a form of anthropologically salient nihilism.

In Nietzsche's writings, nihilism is no unified or monolithic condition. As noted previously, the belief in God that characterises human existence in the historical period prior to the announcement of the death of God is itself a form of nihilism, and specifically one geared towards the containment of the unpredictability and ambivalence of existence in the interest of peace and security (Egyed 1989:2). In turn, the announcement of the death of God and the 'devaluation of the highest values' coterminous with it (Vattimo 1997:12) conjures up two distinct nihilist postures. On the one hand is 'incomplete nihilism', which Nietzsche identifies with Schopenauer's world-weariness (Egyed 1989:2). As argued by Egyed (ibid), '[t]he point here is that since values are seen for what they are, simple instruments in the service of life, they can no longer be valued for themselves, but only tragically'. Nietzsche is notoriously oblique as to what 'incomplete nihilism' may specifically entail, but according to Heidegger's reading, 'incomplete nihilism' may be usefully thought of as simple 'no-saying' (Egyed 1989:3). 'Completed', or 'classical' nihilism, on the other hand, is a form of 'yes-saying', that is, one that is not exhausted in the 'devaluation of the highest values' (Heidegger 1977 cited in Egyed 1989:3). 'Completed nihilism' articulates a simultaneous 'revaluation, a counter movement to devaluing' (Egyed ibid). It is thus of significance that the revaluation in hand does not aim to replace old values with new ones, but constitutes instead 'a complete restructuring of the nature and manner of valuation itself' (ibid).

The distinction between 'incomplete' and 'completed' nihilism is critical to a recovery of the nihilist vocation of hermeneutics, and for the purpose of the present argument, of

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anthropology. As argued by Vattimo (1989), who rephrases the question as one between 'reactive' and 'active' nihilism, such a distinction 'is salient because it allows us to move beyond "nihilism as symptom", to recover the sense in which nihilism in Nietzsche is 'the very basis of the "*positive*" meaning of [Nietzsche's] theoretical proposal' (Vattimo 1989: 15, my emphasis).

'If (...) nihilism has the courage to accept that God is dead, i.e., that no objective structure *an sich* is given, nihilism becomes active in at least two sense. First, it does not simply unmask the nothingness which lies at the basis of meanings and values – it also produces and creates new interpretations and values. It is only passive nihilism which says that there is no need for ends and meanings (...) Second, nihilism is active insofar as it is not simply the "belief that all deserves to be dissolve and destroyed (...)", that all is in vain, but actively operates to dissolve and destroy' (Vattimo 1989:16).

Vattimo argues that 'active' interpretations of nihilism are self-consciously hermeneutic (1989:17). Nevertheless, one should painstaking discriminate between different inflections, and deflect early over-vitalistic glosses (cf. Dilthey, Goethe, Bäumler) as much as the Deleuzian formulation of 'authentic' vital fluxus which is the object of fascist 'canalizations', or Rorty's active nihilism as pragmatism. For Vattimo, all these versions of 'active nihilism' are too vitalistic (1989:17-8) and must be contrasted with a 'weak' inflection which is productive, but neither transcendental nor strongly metaphysical.[37]

The positive 'weak' inflection of active nihilism and its productiveness are important for the recognition of anthropological nihilism. Whilst this acceptance is foreclosed in the characterisations of nihilism suggested by both Geertz and Rabinow, it is now possible to evaluate their respective formulations thoroughly. For Geertz, nihilism is often

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[37] Weak thought is not concerned with ridding itself free of metaphysics. Rather, 'weak thought' aims to recover the radicalism inherent in Heidegger's proposition that any version of metaphysics may be marked by historicity, see below.

coterminous with ethical, aesthetic and logical paralysis (Geertz 2000). Often coupled with 'subjectivism' and 'solipsism', Geertz's understanding of nihilism may be usefully redefined as a form of 'incomplete nihilism' and 'no-saying'. For Rabinow, anthropological nihilism takes two forms, namely, the denial of truth and the denial of seriousness of the Other's assertions. Nihilism brings forth a flattening out of difference, a reduction of the Other to the Same, and a dissolution of ethics into aesthetics (Rabinow 1983). Further, nihilism is a 'cultural process' that befalls anthropology, often despite practitioners' intentions. Rabinow's understanding of nihilism thus coincides with the reading of nihilism as 'symptom' of an epochal malaise given in Vattimo's 'reactive' nihilism. When related to fascism, Rabinow's nihilism often slips into 'active' and over-vitalistic formulations. Despite remarkable convergence between Geertz and Rabinow as far as the eschewal of nihilism is concerned, what still requires elucidation is how a recuperation of nihilism may be coterminous with the recovery of the question of Being, and how this may constitute not just 'scandal', but also an 'event' and the very vocation of anthropology. [38]

3.6.2 Weak Thought

'The weakness of thought vis-à-vis the world, and hence vis-à-vis society, is possibly only one aspect of the impasse in which thought has found itself at the end of its metaphysical adventure. What matters now is to re-think the meaning of this adventure and explore the ways to go beyond

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[38] 'European nihilism is chiefly concerned with the resolution of truth into value, which takes the form of human belief and opinion, or, as Nietzsche puts it, the form of the will to power. What this means, simply put, is that the philosophy of nihilism aims to dissect and dissolve all of the claims to truth of traditional metaphysical thought, in a process that stops only when it reaches the point where these supposed "truths" – such as God or the soul – are revealed to be no less subjective values, and no less errors, than any other human beliefs or opinions (...) Nihilistic thought seeks to show that metaphysical "truths" simply express the subjective values of a given individual or social group, not the immutable, unchanging essence of either the divine, human or natural world. Thus nihilism attacks rationality wherever it is encountered, whether in science, philosophy or art, since the concept of "reason" and "truth" are entirely interdependent in the tradition of Western metaphysical thought. The project of nihilism is to unmask all systems of reason and of persuasion, and to show that logic –the very basis of rational metaphysical thought – is in fact only a kind of rhetoric. All thought that pretends to discover truth is but an expression of the will to power –even to domination- of those making truth-claims over those who are being addressed by them...In the perspective of nihilism, Nietzsche points out, the difference between error and truth is *always* a delusory one; and to do away with one means to do away with the other as well (Snyder 1983:xii).

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it: namely, through negation (*negazione*) – not primarily at the level of social relations, but at the level of the contents and modes of thinking itself – of the metaphysical traits of thought, chief among them the "strength" (*forza*), which it has always believed it could confer to itself in the name of its privileged access to being as foundation' (Vattimo and Rovatti 1983:10, my translation).

Weak thought is the thought of post-modernity. As pointed out by Antiseri (1995), weak thought represents a way out of the strong rationality of modernity, and a break with "the illusionary foundational certainties of any metaphysics and totalising essentialism which intends to exhibit '*fundamenta inconcussa*' (Antiseri 1995). Weak thought thinks reality/Being within linguistic categories, or linguistic horizons, and categories are not Kantian eternal, a-temporal fixtures. Conversely, it is argued that the Kantian a priori is historical and temporal. Being or reality cannot be accessed but in their immediacy – we have no pre-categorical or trans-categorical access to being (Antiseri 1990). As pointed out by Moore (1999), the advent of deconstruction, post-structuralism and post-modernism is associated with a 'crisis of representation', and specifically with a progressive polarisation of terms according to dyads such as objectivism/subjectivism, empiricism/social contructionism. In the field of anthropology, the crisis of representation has brought about 'an insistence on partiality and partialness of interpretation of all interpretations, and a profound questioning of the assumptions and techniques used to develop and convey cultural representations and interpretations' (Moore 1999:5). Further, anthropologists have become increasingly aware of the 'multiple models and or discourses within cultures, societies or sets of people. Anthropologists have only recently begun to discuss and to document the existence of multiple models, and to look at the variation that exists within cultures as well as between them' (Moore 1994:136). In this sense, one notes a splintering of the 'object/subject' of study, a new recognition of added complexity, diversity and variability and an erosion of the conditions of possibility for statements such as 'The Piro think in such and such a manner'.[39] Postmodern and

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[39] I am referring to a comment made by an anthropologist at the conference Secrets and Lies: A Debate Between Psychoanalysis and Anthropology, London School of Economics, 3 November 2001. Geertz's

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deconstructionist-informed debates have engendered an emphasis on 'the role of the anthropologist in knowledge construction, the importance of positionality, and the partialness of all interpretations' (Moore 1999:8). This, perhaps, is the anthropological horizon of weak thought.

3.6.1 The Nihilist Vocation of Anthropology

Anthropology can thus be re-positioned within a history of nihilism. The expansion of the hermeneutic horizon via the paradoxes, retractions, disavowals and double negatives noted so far problematises certain presuppositions and engenders new possibilities. A questioning of the epistemological foundations of anthropological thought is enshrined in a prestigious argumentative tradition, that is, in a history of debate that has most recently addressed matters of representation (Clifford and Marcus 1986), and thus unleashed a series of epistemological, methodological and interpretative strategies. Clifford resolves to engage with surface, 'hit and run' ethnography (cf. Clifford 1997, Geertz 2000), Marcus calls for multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1999), and Moore advocates the development of 'composite theories' (Moore 1997).

'Theorising is or should be *partial* in that it should allude to a 'sense of one's own biases and stakes', along with a recognition of the limited part those biases may be playing' ([John] 1996:35-6) in the process of theorisation. Theorising and theories for John are always *relative, context specific* and *partial*. However, they are also simultaneously 'composite'. Composite theories are those which have both rhetorical and historical dimensions; they have 'explanatory powers as well as more inclusive levels of analysis ([John] 1996: 37). Theories are *composite* because they operate in several analytical registers simultaneously and some registers are more abstract than others. Contemporary theories in the social sciences can never be truly universal, just as they can never be exclusively or indelibly Western. Theories, like their anthropologists, are postcolonial:

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statement that (2000:102) 'the days of simple "the Dangs believe, the Dangs don't believe" anthropology seems truly over', comes across as underestimating anthropology/anthropologists' capacity for neurosis and nostalgia when it comes to metaphysics. That is, metaphysics periodically re-emerges as neurosis and

they are "made up of a network of assumptions, disciplinary affiliations, historical sedimentations, and global connections that have never been fixed or uniform but that evolve in an uneven, power-laden flux"'(Moore 1997:139, my emphasis).

It is Moore's call that resonates more closely to the present effort, when the composite character of theory is qualified as 'weak'. By thinking the project(-s) of anthropology and the present research in and through 'weak thought', I thus strive to recover the place of anthropology within the Nietzschean/Heideggerian history of nihilism and Being. Yet, and as always, the promise of weak thought and nihilism has left traces, albeit unmarked and unclaimed. Since the mid-1960s, Marilyn Strathern has been concerned with questions of partiality, transience, relationality and relativisation of social relations as much as with the intellectual models through which such processes are imagined in anthropology and beyond (cf. Strathern 1971, 1980, 1988, 1991, 1995, 1999). In my view, her texts defy 'strong thought' and strive instead to make explicit the artifice of anthropological knowledge practices. Strathern notes that anthropology relies upon 'ethnographic moments' to conjure up 'ethnographic effects' (1999).

'The ethnographic moment is a relation (joining signifier and signified). We could say that the ethnographic moment works as an example of a relation which joins the understood (what is analysed at the moment of observation) to the need to understand (what is observed at the moment of analysis). The relation between what is already apprehended and what seems to demand apprehension is of course infinitely regressive, that is, *slips* across any manner of scale (minimally, observation and analysis each contains within itself the relation between them both). Any ethnographic moment, which is a moment of knowledge or insight, denotes a relation between immersement and movement.' (Strathern 1999:6, my emphasis).

The ethnographic moment is pre-eminently relational, and connoted by a kind of oscillation that occurs in a specific temporal frame. Although 'immersion' and

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nostalgia.

'movement' come to define anthropological labour in temporal frames, and they are distinguished in terms of the seemingly different intellectual labour they are dedicated to, the 'ethnographic moment' depends on the ways in which 'these activities are apprehended as occupying the same (conceptual) space' (Strathern 1999: 262, Endnote 1 to Chapter 1)

Strathern's work is characterised by an acute awareness of the knowledge practices deployed by anthropologists and the metaphysical, ontological, and epistemological claims that underpin them. Her ethnographic accounts do not stake claims to coincide with the Other's perspective. The perspective of the Other is one effect among many that is predicated on the perspective of anthropology, itself an effect. 'Ethnographic effects' arise out of an effort to do anthropology that anthropologises its own labour. Moments of centring and decentring are marked by the temporalities of description and analysis.

'The interpreting subject appears, then, always positioned to act from a point of view, to take a perspective on events that is never exactly reciprocated by another. At the same time, society is at once regarded as made up of innumerable points of view and as furnishing the individual subject with a technology of communication. The subject thus receives certain interpretations, not just from others but from society at large, which reveals his or her own 'extent' – for the perspective from society is one that no single subject can equal' (Strathern 1999:237).

Interpretation is however not predicated on equivalence, or a shared ontology of subject and object. Instead, the relation established through the ethnographic moment is qualified in terms of 'surplus and displacement' (Strathern 1999). The multiplication of perspectives thus engendered is not taken at face value. Instead, assumptions of 'fullness of comprehension, quantification, multiplication' are consistently problematised.[40] Likewise, the 'sense of incompleteness' emanates from 'the vision of holism that (...) is

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[40] 'But society and the individual subject do not each provide a perspective on the other – there is no mutuality or reciprocity in this regard. They are not homologous abstractions: neither has the dimensions or proportions of the other, and moderns regard them as different orders of phenomena' (Strathern 1999:238).

such an engine to uncovering the unpredictable; [and] from the juxtaposition of fieldwork/writing, observation/analysis. However, the sense of incompleteness such juxtapositions generate has also some source in Euro-American knowledge practices' (Strathern 1999: 246).

[The merographic connection] points to certain practices of knowledge which presume a limitless number of perspectives. Each new angle or perspective eclipses the last; anything may be a part of something else, minimally part of a description in the act of describing it. In this view, nothing is in fact ever simply part of a whole because another view, another perspective or domain, may re-describe it as "part of something else"' (Strathern 1999:246-7).

Strathern's work is epistemologically, ethically and aesthetically merographic.[41] The incompleteness and shifting of perspectives engenders knowledge practices of multiplication *and* incompleteness. These are self-consciously deployed in the context of permanently shifting awareness of the horizon within which they take shape. To the extent that this is the case, Strathern appears to embrace the quixotic element of the anthropological enterprise noted but, alas, not followed up by Geertz (2000). Vattimo argues that the antidote to metaphysical anthropology, i.e. anthropology which consists of descriptions of 'universal structures of the occurrence of the human phenomenon' (Vattimo 1988:146), rests in taking seriously the historical (*geschichtlich*) thrownness of Dasein (ibid), an opportunity suggested in the work of Marilyn Strathern. I consider awareness of the horizon of anthropological knowledge practices a trace of anthropological weak thought. These traces provide the condition of possibility to think beyond old and new universalisms, be those appealing to universal 'humanity', 'structure' or 'interpretation'. It may thus be possible to forego foundational thinking, to follow the effects of constant shifting in perspectives as the horizon for weak description and thick nihilism.

I take up this point in Chapter 4.
[41] In Chapters 4 and 5 I discuss this question in some depth with reference to various guerrilla merographic knowledge practices.

3.6 Towards Weak Description and Thick Nihilism

'Intellectual models depend for their impetus on imaginative possibilities they themselves cannot provide. What masquerades as the academic is very often the popular in disguise, and we would do well to remember that this sophisticated veiling mechanism is merely one of the more common-place methods for covering over what we do not wish to have revealed' (Moore 1994:150).

'Description presupposes analysis, and analysis presupposes theory, and they all presuppose imagination' (Strathern 1999:xi).

Dense anthropological description has been a very influential paradigm and Geertz's (1973, 1983, 2000) contribution to anthropological theory invaluable. It is my contention, however, that in anthropological studies of those social contexts marked by multiple histories of conflict and cultures of secrecy, there may be serious impediments to thick description. Whether an 'ethnographic effect' may connote my experience of fieldwork in Petén, is grounded in the intuition that the thickness of the ethnography may be its very thinness.[42] With regard to this, it may be argued that thick description may accommodate omissions and absences in the analysis and in the interpretative framework, here including the ethnographer's as much as her interlocutors' lacunae. Refusals, absences and silences may be described in the 'thick' form they take and in the 'thick' ethnographic encounters they connote. Conversely, the point is not strictly one of devising more inclusive accounts, or more sophisticated textual techniques, through which the meaningful weight of what is left unsaid, of that which is not known or of socialities and social relations articulated in the negative may be represented. Instead, I have defined the analytical and theoretical task at hand as one grounded in a critical analysis of the processes of 'centring', 'contextualisation' and 'intelligibility-creation', taking place in and through anthropology, and the descriptions it engenders. Further, I

have suggested that processes of 'de-centring', 'out-contextualisation' and 'unintelligibility-creation' may also be important. By placing anthropology within the history of Western metaphysics, I have contended that not only may 'centring' and 'decentring' be apprehended, but it may also be possible to confront *and* recoup the nihilist vocation of anthropology.

It may therefore be possible to think of the anthropological enterprise in nihilist terms, and recast anthropological description within the horizon of weak thought. Weak description in the present research comes into being and is effectuated in and through a complex agentic territory, characterised by overt and covert injunctions to secrecy. Interlocutors often place these injunctions upon the ethnographer, as they demand that degrees of confidentiality be respected. On the other hand, notably in anthropological research on violence and conflict, demands to secrecy often involve a commitment to tell.[43] It is within this complex predicament that the urgency of secrecy, with the telling that is involved, becomes autogenic, self-imposed and adhered to. Weak description is therefore also, but not exclusively, a form of self-discipline and suppression. Weak description has a component of rhetorical departure from Geertzian thick description in the sense that it is inscribed within an anthropology of secrecy and conflict that is self-consciously complicit with that secrecy-imbued and violence-marked ethnographic encounter willed by the anthropologist, but fully driven by the agentic 'object/subject' of study.[44] The routes and structures of these demands for secrecy may be highlighted in weak descriptive analyses. Weak description thus also depends on established anthropological practices of concealment and camouflage (cf. Pitt-rivers 1954), but goes beyond these as it aims to self-consciously explore the complexity of refusal, nescience, negative relationalities and socialities. In my definition, and for the purpose of the present analysis, weak description implies a taciturn and tergiversating mode of disclosure that recognizes the ambiguities, evasions and equivocations that are an important part of

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[42] I owe this point to Henrietta L. Moore.

[43] This point is also made by Valentine Daniel (1997). With reference to an interview with an Estate Tamil woman recounting the death of her father in war-torn Sri Lanka, Daniel (1997:334) notes 'the ambivalence of her charge to me, to tell and yet not to tell'. However, Daniel's work is not concerned with exploring the connection between the charges to tell and not to tell, on the one hand, and secrecy, on the other hand.

[44] Whatever the encounter, Geertz always comes out on top. It was *his* typewriter he refused to give (Geertz

cultural translation and cultural analysis. Weak description does not dispel but acknowledges the possibility that the thickness of ethnography may be its very thinness. Through weak description it is possible to entertain the possibility that keeping secrets at times involves telling, telling may be an opaque form of concealment, and silences may be oblique narrative modes. Refuting anti-theoretical bias, both within but also substantively beyond the horizon of Geertz's thick description, weak description acknowledges that these cultural predicaments in fact require adequate theorising. In other words, 'weak description' is analytical and theoretical, in that is self-consciously positioned within the horizon of nihilism.

It could be argued that in 'Thinking as a Moral Act' Geertz (2000:21-41) provides the starting point for a weak hermeneutics of ethnography. It may be recalled that anthropology's endeavour is connoted as 'quixotic', and the ethnographic encounter is said to leave the anthropology 'ethically disarmed' (Geertz 2000). I have argued that the 'weakness' noted by Geertz requires that one confront – embrace/abandon oneself to?– that which Geertz continuously eschews, namely, nihilism. In view of multiple genealogies of nihilism, what is at issue here is not any nihilist stance, but rather, the refractory product of two loose trajectories. At the risk of resurrecting a distinction that hermeneutic ontology has exploded, the trajectories may be ironically connoted as one thick and one thin. The first is the nihilism that stems from the thick experiences of fieldwork, and is, I would argue, already present, or rather, suggested in rather partial form in Geertz's own writings. Ethnographic nihilism is experiential and grounded in the thickness of the ethnographic encounter to suggest its very 'weakness'. 'Weakness' may be in the experience of being left 'ethically disarmed' (Geertz 2000, see also Strathern 1999), or gripped by epistemological and epistemic doubt. A certain thick nihilism marks the experience of anthropological research. Thick nihilism is grounded in the asymmetry of the ethnographic encounter noted by Geertz (2000:21-41), in the ways its weakness mimics the thinness and ambivalence of secrecy, and the impact that these have on subjectivities. It is the product of the encounters with the ever-more agentic subjects of ethnographic interlocution. The ethnographic encounter and dialogism have been figured

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2000) and it was *his* view of the cockfight we read in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973).

as either a 'conversation among equals', or as an exchange whose power balance is biased in favour of the ethnographer (Geertz 2000, Clifford and Marcus 1986). The loss of selfhood for researchers is bracketed in discussions of experiences of entering the field, a 'culture shock syndrome' with established diagnostics and prognosis (Geertz 2000) and whose symptomatology encompasses alienation, nescience and skepticism. As pointed out by Silverman (1990:139), in Geertz's writings, interpretive uncertainty is moderate and explicitly noted at the beginning of the ethnographic encounter. Conversely, the thick nihilism I speak of is not, or at least it is not restricted to, these occupational syndromes. It is in part a product of the ethnographic encounter that the weakness of thought never establishes interpretative confidence. Instead, epistemological doubt – and the provisionality of all interpretation entertained throughout – seem not only appealing, but the only option.

The present argument takes its lead from an off-centre position, and specifically from Derrida's deconstructive reading of Lévi-Strauss. Derrida shows that, by focusing on events and ruptures, claims for the structurality of structures are predicated on a centre that is in fact a site of permutations and deferrals. Against his own claims, Lévi-Strauss's texts/fields contain their own critique and exceed their own arguments. Derrida's deconstruction of Lévi-Strauss has informed the critical reading of Geertz's texts proposed here, and specifically bolstered an attempt at exposing nihilism as both 'rupture' and 'event' in hermeneutics-informed anthropology. Nihilism, I have argued, is not simply the limit of Geertz's hermeneutic programme, but rather, its very vocation. In this light, Geertz's vociferous denials of nihilism are turned into awkward and partial affirmations. A consideration of the place of nihilism within Geertz's hermeneutic anthropology raises further questions. Indeed, why should Geertz be so explicitly unnerved by the nihilist vocation of hermeneutics? I have argued that part of the answer lies in Geertz's intellectual genealogy which, still in the maelstrom of Western metaphysics - and under the spectre of liberal theory – must somehow cling to universalities and necessarily forego and stave off nihilism. Perhaps the nervous fits that beset hermeneutics-prone anthropologists when the word 'nihilism' is proffered (by themselves, mind you) lies in their self-identification as 'liberal' (Geertz 2000:74).

Conversely, consider the different hermeneutic genealogy in the work of Vattimo. Vattimo's work on 'weak thought' is predicated on the recognition that nihilism constitutes the horizon of hermeneutics. There seem to be important questions at stake in nihilism, for those who embrace it, as much as for those who eschew it. The arguments provide the horizon of the weak inflection of nihilism I have recovered.

Through Geertz's denials and Vattimo's affirmations, I argue that the nihilist vocation of hermeneutics must be recovered, and in fact, it has always been 'already there'. I argue that nihilism already engenders important hermeneutic strategies of relevance to anthropology in general, and to my anthropology of cultures of secrecy and histories of violence in particular. For this purpose, I have referred to the work of Marilyn Strathern and some of the epistemological/hermeneutic strategies she has deployed. These, I argue, may amount to forms of 'weak description' and 'thick nihilism'. In turn, this has served a double purpose. On the one hand, I have re-positioned Strathern's work within what Vattimo calls 'weak thought', that is, within the horizon of nihilism and of Being. To claim Strathern's work can be located within a horizon is intended to be an honour, and bestowal of philosophical rigour. On the other hand, I have tried to think analytically about the conditions of possibility of 'weak description' and 'think nihilism'. These are the analytical tools which underpin the analysis that follows. Weak description and thick nihilism bear the mark of the genealogical paths I have traced in this chapter. They summon up Geertz and Nietzsche, Vattimo and Boas, Heidegger, Moore and Strathern. They make a space in which to interrogate the status of refusal, the negative, equivalence, positionality, absence and presence as they arise in the discussion of the ethnography that follows.

Derrida (1970) argued that ethnology (I say anthropology) is predicated on a critique of ethnocentrism. Geertz, seemingly upholding Derrida's definition of anthropology, argues for an 'anti anti-relativism' stance (Geertz 2000). Indeed, it could be said that both discourses are contributing to the explosion of Western metaphysics of presence (Derrida 1970) and the dismantlement of subtle and crass self-referential universalisms (Geertz 2000). It is within this critique of Western metaphysics that the Nietzschean definition of

nihilism – as the resolution of truth into value – can be placed at the centre of anthropological endeavour, to constantly decentre it. *Pace* Geertz, weak description and thick nihilism bolster the enterprise of 'thinking as a moral act' (Geertz 2000) and ethnography as a matter of ethics and aesthetics (Geertz 2000) as well. Nihilism thus becomes the necessary condition for the articulation of partiality, and related post-perspectival anthropology I am concerned with.

With Vattimo and Strathern, I strive to think beyond universality *and* pluralisation, that is, beyond the safe enumeration of potentially infinite positions grounded in a universal meta-theory of interpretation. Both authors converge in highlighting the 'play' and 'shifts' that constitute the practices of centring and decentring. Further, Strathern takes Heidegger's suggestion to start from 'the inquirer' to task (Heidegger [1962] 2002: 24) and weaves herself through the weak thought and thick nihilism of her ethnographic accounts. What emerges is a constant play, of multiple scales and shifts in multiple perspectives, that makes anthropological accounts possible, as well as an explicit effort to think in and through these shifts. In the process, the conditions of possibility are established for something rather extraordinary to occur, given past and present intellectual climates, namely the announcement that the vocation of anthropology is nihilism. This entails foregoing any appeal to metaphysical 'strong' thought and a recognition that the anthropological endeavour is productively marked by both partiality and a distinct awareness of its own temporality, and hence its own provisionality.

In the following chapters, I explore the possibility of writing an ethnography which is anti-foundational and attuned to the partialities articulated in the field, as much as to its own temporal and provisional character. I consider guerrilla subjectivities and those social relations marked by secrecy, (Chapter 4), experiential and ontological states of violence and ambivalence (Chapter 5), the coexistence and relativisation of multiple moral orders (Chapter 6), phenomenologies of guerrilla and anthropology's prosthetic embodied subjectivity and anthropological appendages (Chapter 7).

Chapter 4

Secrecy, Scale and Anthropological Knowledge

¡Identifíquese compañera!

4.1 Introduction

This chapter opens with a discussion of an ethnographic moment of partial disclosure, when I realised that ex-combatants deployed different names for themselves and others and that names qualified different, multiple and complex relationalities. I discuss naming practices and argue that whatever the scale, through names, pseudonyms and nicknames partial relations and connections were established. Connections may have been articulated positively through disclosure, or occur through negation and foreclosure, but led to connections nonetheless. I also consider names and naming practices in relation to secrecy, and the implications of secrecy for guerrilla hermeneutics of the Other, and for anthropological knowledge more broadly. I argue that whilst guerrilla naming practices may be thought of as holographic, guerrilla secrecy engendered forms of connective relativisation. The guerrilla secret subjectivities and socialities, and related partialities and connectivities require that anthropology relinquish appeals to a plurality of discrete cultural/social entities and/or subjects to envision instead post-plural scales. The scales of post-plurality, with their temporal qualities and ever-shifting horizons may be said to constitute a form of weak description informed by weak thought.

4.2 Positionality and Difference, Partiality and Connection

In the early stages of fieldwork in a community of FAR ex-*guerrilleros/as* and their families, I became aware of ex-*guerrilleros/as* addressing one another by means of pseudonyms (*pseudónimos*) and nicknames (*apodos*). Pseudonyms and nicknames became of increasing relevance as I tried to arrange and schedule interviews. Abiding by

the initial agreement[1] I had entered in with the *Junta Directiva*[2] of the settlement in question, community leaders would arrange for interviewees to be relieved from the responsibilities of collectively organised daily labour[3] so that they may have the time to

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[1] This agreement was later superseded by a certain 'randomness' brought on by the protractedness and mutuality of exchanges. Randomness may be an effect of ex-guerrilla secretive post-plural scales, see below.

[2] In this community, the *Junta Directiva* was the group of community members randomly selected (*sortear*) out of a pool of candidates. Members of the *Junta Directiva* were appointed on a fixed-term basis and took on legal responsibility for the running of the settlement. To ensure continuity and to limit the loss of experienced members, only about half of the *Junta Directiva* was replaced by new appointments every year. In accordance with Guatemalan national law, the structure of the *Junta Directiva* reflected the legal requirements that applied to co-operatives –and any other association or group that wished to manage funds and that therefore must seek legal recognition. President, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, and two administrators (*vocales*) made up the *Junta Directiva*. *Alcaldes auxiliares* (auxiliary mayors) also worked closely with the *Directiva*. In this community, where the population was made up of mainly FAR ex-*guerrilleros/as* and their families, there were a number of additional committees. The *Comité de Trabajo* (Work Committee) for instance, was dedicated to the organisation of collective daily labour. Although labour (*actividades productivas*, productive activities) was organised collectively, the *Comité de Trabajo* allocated time for individuals to undertake household-based work and subsistence agriculture (see note 3, below). Other committees were the *Comité de Jovenes* (Youth Committee) coordinating activities for and by the youngsters and the *Comité pro-Mejoramiento* (Committee for Amelioration) in charge of planning the economic and social development of the community. The *Comité de Seguridad* (Security Committee) had responsibility of security matters but also dealt with unforeseen crises such as forest fires encroaching on community land during the dry season. The *Comité de Mujeres* (Women's Committee) successfully lobbied the Work Committee to take into account women's triple burden of domestic, collective and political work. As a result, women who were full members and *beneficiarias*, that is who had formal and legal status as members of the cooperative, were granted shorter collective labour shifts. Temporary committees such as the *Comité pro-Feria* were instituted to coordinate activities for the celebration of the first anniversary of the community.

[3] When the community was founded, subsistence agriculture had also been collectively managed. Agricultural collectivisation was however short-lived, as agricultural techniques were taken to be a key signifier of (cultural) difference. There was general agreement that agricultural work was culturally specific and that the plurality of views on how to best approach 'agri-cultural' tasks such as planting and harvesting was ultimately too difficult to manage collectively, notably in a multicultural community such as the one at hand. As a result of the perceived unmanageable quality of 'agri-cultural' difference, it was decided that plots of land be given to *beneficiarios/as*, and that households be responsible for their own subsistence. Some *ex-guerrilleros/as* argued that individualisation of 'agri-culture' amounted to positive engagement on the part of the Ladino majority and an example of Ladino acknowledgement of the 'agri-cultural' difference among them, and the difference of the indigenous minority - notably of the Q'eqchi' presence. In short, the Ladino majority had allowed for Q'eqchi cultural practices related to the *milpa* to take place and had resisted implementation of policies of assimilation. During the planting season, Q'eqchi' families followed the patterns of labour recruitment noted by Wilson (1995). Q'eqchi' men went to the fields together and all took part in planting each other's plots. Women worked collectively to prepare the food for the celebration that followed the planting. To my knowledge, no *yo'lek* (vigil for the maize seeds, cf. Wilson 1995) was held. However, having regularly visited the Q'eqchi' households and asked numerous questions about Q'eqchi' culture and language, the families kindly invited me to attend the feast and I followed events with the women. No one else from the community was present at the celebration. When I subsequently asked whether anyone knew that the day was of great importance to the Q'eqchi' families in the village, no non-Q'eqchi' person seemed to know about it. In the light of this, I would argue that the decision to overturn collective running of 'agri-cultural' activities and opt for atomised 'agri-cultural' practices may in fact amount to an extremely partial form of Ladino engagement with indigenous difference.

converse with me. I would be told that on a given day, say, Pedrito would be available. I would thus look for Pedrito only to find, in the preliminary stages of the exchange, that the person I was conversing with was *not* 'Pedrito'. On this particular occasion, Pedrito introduced himself by a first name, second name, paternal surname and maternal surname. He did concede that he had several pseudonyms, but he chose not to elaborate on these or answer to the nickname by which he was known in the community. While it seemed that individuals were *and* were not their names[4], there were reasons for Pedrito *not* to be Pedrito in the course of the interview.

4.3 *Gringa* positionalities, *Gringa* differences

In the first set of interviews in this community, I had the distinct impression that the relations between my interlocutors and I were characterised by a formality that went beyond mutual lack of acquaintance. Interlocutors would answer questions with the deferent attitude and punctilious rhetoric that in Guatemala is often reserved for those perceived to occupy a superior position in the multifarious hierarchies (Casaús Arzú 1992, Grandin 2000, Schwartz 1990) relative to one's subordinate gendered, ethnicised, classed and racialised positionality. I seemed to be eliciting formal responses to the effect that I attributed the ensuing relational distance to that hierarchical (mis-)placement on the part of subjects already noted by Nelson (1999) in her discussion of 'gringa positioning' in the context of her own fieldwork in urban Guatemala. Specifically, Nelson's analysis of 'how being a *gringa* anthropologist is both power-filled and a wounded body politic, and how that identity is formed in relation with multiple others' (Nelson 1999:41), seemed somewhat to the point.[5]

Drawing on the work of Abigail Adams (1997), Nelson notes that

[*gringo*] 'is generally a negative term, and few Guatemalans would be so churlish as to call you a

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[4] Donald F. Thompson noted that '[i]t was not until much later, when I had lived among the Mälnkänidji ... long enough to learn the language, that I found that some of the words I had recorded in good faith as personal names were not names at all. They were terms which substituted either while the proper names were in eclipse during mourning or used by an informant to avoid the embarrassment, and avert the ritual danger of speaking the name of a relative that was tabu to him' (Thompson 1946:157).

gringo to your face [...] *Gringo* is defined as "disparaging" in the dictionary and carries a burden of hatred. A possibly apocryphal origin story attributes Mexican coinage during the U.S. invasion, as a way to tell the green-uniformed yanquis to go away ("green-go!")' (Nelson 1999:63).

'*Gringo*' thus evokes questions of positionality, difference and power in that, as Adams (Adams, A. 1997) points out, the term is articulated on the relational grounds between the United States and Latin America: 'a North American is not a gringo until she crosses a border' (Adams, A. 1997 quoted in Nelson 1999:41).

'"Gringo" is a category produced through interactions, and as such, it works on a variety of borders including but not limited to national frontiers, stereotypes of phenotypic difference, sartorial codes and – as "gringa" (marked by the Spanish feminine) – gender boundaries' (Nelson 1999:41).

The instantiation of gringo subjectivity and locatedness is therefore enmeshed in the geo-political hegemonic historicities that link Latin America to the United States (cf. Mirandé 1987), a power-laden relationality that also impinges on transnational relations of solidarity between North American activists and Guatemalans in struggle (Nelson 1999). More specifically, the derogatory inflection and related ambivalence inherent in the term *gringo* produce, according to Adams, a certain 'failure of rapport' (Adams, A. 1997 quoted in Nelson 1999:63), to the effect that for *gringa* anthropologists in the field and activists alike,

'open-armed welcome may be more pragmatic than personal, more tied to historically specific tactical needs than one's "niceness". We often *fail* in attempts to identify with the Guatemalan people and to differentiate ourselves from our government, from tourists [...] Quincentennial

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[5] I read Nelson's book assiduously during the course of my fieldwork.

Guatemala offers special challenges for gringa self-fashioning' (62-3, my emphasis).

The issues at stake in the deployment of the term *gringo/a* may partly be those of identification, location and negative relationality, if not relational 'failure' as such. To begin with, one may not share Nelson's identificatory labour to differentiate herself from 'her' United States government and one may instead have to reckon with gringa anthropologists' homogenising assumptions about others' 'ownership', 'belonging' and 'location'. Further, one may feel compelled to forcefully oppose the discursive sophism that makes wounds into Baudrillard-style (1988) simulacra to be attributed to hyper-real *gringa* bodies[6], as the sites of hyper-real privilege. At the heart of the question, however, is the refractory quality of the anthropologist's location, subjectivity and positionality in contemporary anthropological analysis (Moore 1997), and in related fashion, the unelucidable quality of *gringa* as a category of difference and catachresis.

Thus, while at one level the elaboration of 'gringa positioning' in Nelson's account does signal a certain sensitivity to questions of subjectivity and location, this is tied to a new set of homogenising assumptions concerning, for instance, the assumed link between gringa identity and the United States. In turn, the terms of the argument established by Nelson incite a specific order of objections, the most immediate being that of having to appeal to the multiplicity of understandings and usages of the term *gringa* in one's experience in the field. Thus, one may wish to note that in contemporary Guatemala the epithet *gringo* marks European as much as North American bodies and selves and it does

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[6] Here I limit my observations to the sophism inherent in making gringa bodies suddenly seem wounded in a context such as Guatemala (Adams, A. 1997, Nelson 1999). Divergence from Nelson, however, is of the theoretical kind and rests on the place granted to positionality in our respective frameworks. For Nelson positionality of a specific relational kind is central and it is related to the practice of 'fluidarity'. Concerning 'fluidarity', Nelson writes that 'all identity is formed through articulation, a notion that problematises traditions of solidarity that lean on "solid" identities and clear-cut divisions between victim and victimizer. Taking the articulatory notion of identity seriously, along with the relationality of gringa identity, I develop the concept of *fluidarity* as a practice of necessarily partial knowledge – in both the sense of taking the side of, and of being incomplete, vulnerable and never completely fixed [...] This neologism plays with the idea of *solid*arity in an attempt to keep its vitally important transnational relations open and at the same time question its tendency toward rigidity, its reliance on solid, unchanging identifications, and its often unconscious hierarchising'(1999:43-4, emphasis in the original). In my own work, the focus on secrecy implicitly problematises Nelson's argument and explicitly requires that relationality and related partialities be theorised in rather different terms/scales than those allowed for in 'fluidarity'. In short, 'fluidarity' misses the importance of secrecy in Guatemala.

so contextually, often with ironic purpose rather than affront. *Gringa* therefore marks, I would argue, bodies and selves who are perceived as foreign *and* geo-politically privileged, as well as female. To further dislodge the link between *gringa-ness* and the United States, and to point to the ways in which one may have strategically tested the discursive and relational boundaries of the term, attempted to 'set the record straight' and/or hoped to deserve any epithet but the relentless gringa calling, I would often say:

'*La verdad es, yo soy de Europa*'

On occasions, I tried to substantiate the statement 'The truth is, I am from Europe' by tracing on the ground unsteady contours of selected continents imagined through dubious unearthly perspectives. The improbable quality of those shapes and the relations between them forced me to dig myself into even deeper trenches:

'*Soy de Italia y de Inglaterra*'

So, it turned out, I was from Italy and England, singular European-ness instantly splitting into two genealogies of affect and belonging and still not exhaustive of the complexity I wished to convey in my refutation of *gringa* homogenisation. So strong is the desire to convey the complexities of one's sense of affinity, belonging and location, that one catches oneself in the act of mobilising essential categories of identity (Braidotti 1994, Spivak 1988, 1999) to at once resist *gringa* anthropologists' homogenisation as well as the quality of gringa-ness imputed by one's interlocutors in the field. In so doing, however, one runs the risk of upholding the fallacious terms on which the debate over the status of gringa positionality is predicated, and once again beg the question that, beyond differences between 'anthropologists and their informants, or perhaps between anthropologists', what may need addressing are the differences 'within each anthropologist' (Moore 1997:131).

Some of my youngest interlocutors in the field were already marking differences between, as much as differences within, as to them I was not just *any* gringa. I was, rather

aptly, '*la gringa pelona*'[7], or the gringa with no hair. There was possibly no need on my part to try and set any record straight to begin with, as at least my gringa credentials were already queer, plural, between and within. In the essay 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', Donna Haraway has argued for an ontology of the subject that focuses on 'splitting' rather than 'being' (Haraway 1991: 193, emphasis in the original), adding that

'[t]he topography of subjectivity is multidimensional ... The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another[.]' (Haraway, ibid).

The multidimensional and multi-layered qualities of difference are therefore not just the ground for ever-increasing and ever-deepening differentiation. Beyond enumeration of the plurality inherent in gringa positionality, the task seems to lie in analyses of the ways in which difference and partiality are *not* markers of relational failures and relational foreclosures. Rather, the task at hand is that of tracing the ways in which difference and partiality may be markers of connection, in whatever manner relationality may come to be articulated. [8]

4.4 Scales of Secrecy

In the light of this, it seems important to further dwell on the aspect of Nelson's argument that focuses on the relational instantiation of the anthropologist's locatedness in the field. In qualified convergence with Nelson, I felt constrained by the way I was being hierarchically (re-)positioned/(mis-)placed, and bestowed with status that I thought I did not command. I was therefore concerned to find a more or less direct way through those asymmetrical orderings and distant privileged relationalities seemingly set up in my

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[7] In Mexico, La Pelona is an ironic and irreverent nickname for La Muerte, or Death. Others are *huesuda*, *pelada*, la *flaca*, *dientona*.
[8] I argue that connection may be variously articulated. With reference to secrecy, see the section on relational partiality and connective relativisation below.

favour by the ever-more agentic subjects of interlocution. Unlike Nelson, however, I argue that, in a context characterised by plural histories of conflict and cultures of secrecy, no degree or amount of 'self-fashioning', even of the relational kind, is to any avail, when confronted with the agentic subject (Other).[9] The realisation that in the initial interview settings those who agreed to be interviewed were not *interviewees* came only retrospectively. In those exchanges, it is very likely that *I* was the interviewee - a perspective/prospective *compañera*? - and hence the one actually and actively being questioned. The first interviews were the last of a series of more or less subtle procedures that I retrospectively think I was made to undergo, as in this specific instance the community, and indeed Pedrito, considered what degree of concealment and disclosure would characterise our relations.

When actually straying on that –assumed- quintessential terrain of closure that Nelson herself noted and elegantly marked with parenthetic occlusion in her statement:

'[I]n Guatemala we encountered ... almost shocking openness (except, of course, as regarded guerrilla affiliation)' (Nelson 1999: 43),

'the pragmatics of open-armed welcome' seems to require further analysis, premising that there may be more to them than historically specific 'tactical needs' (Nelson 1999:62-3). A glimpse of the proliferation of names and the ambiguous hierarchical strictures of the initial ethnographic relationality that I experienced testify to the presence of more or less rigidly 'guarded secrets'[10] among the seemingly bounded constituency at hand.

In the essay on secrecy and secret societies Simmel discusses the relative merits of discretion as the 'respect for the secret of the other' that is exercised through a restraining from knowing what the other does not positively reveal (Simmel ibid:452). Simmel notes,

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[9] Pedrito and Mosquito, ex-combatants whose articulations of secret relationalities with me I discuss below, may be taken as examples of over-agentic subjects. Prosthetic agency is discussed in Chapter 7, although echoes of prosthetic agentic subjectivities can already be discerned in the discussion of practices of naming that follows.

[10] I borrow the expression from Simmel (1906) whose contribution is discussed below.

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however, that '[v]ery often it is impossible for us to restrain our interpretation of another' (ibid:456). Relations may be based on a discreet relationality, and yet be marked by an overriding and compelling hermeneutics of the other. According to Simmel, even between subjects whose relation to one another is grounded on a shared interest, discretion amounts to '[an] attachment of secrecy, in which not the attitude of the person keeping the secret, but that of a third party, is in question, in which in view of the mixture of reciprocal knowledge *or* lack of knowledge, the emphasis is on the *amount* of the former rather than on that of the latter' (ibid:456-7, my emphasis). For Simmel, then, reciprocally entertained knowledge *or* lack of knowledge affect our interpretative approaches to the other. The way we know or do not know the other affects our attempts at knowing the other, where knowledge of the other is a question of how much we do or do not know and how much we would want to know or wish we knew. The hermeneutics of the Other is therefore quantifiable.

Following Strathern (1991), I argue that quantification and related proportionality of knowledge entertained are an effect of *scale*. Strathern points out that anthropological knowledge is characterised by complexity: 'the more closely you look, the more detailed things are bound to become. Increase in one dimension (focus) increases the other (detail of the data)' (1991:xv). Complexity of phenomena and the notion of potentially '*increasable* complication – that there are always 'more' things to take into account-' are the product of changes in the scale of observation, scaling and scale switching being intellectual practices grounded in Western pluralism (Strathern 1991:xiv, emphasis in the original). Similarly, it could be argued that quantification and proportionality of the hermeneutics of the Other, and the related assumption that there are potentially 'more' things to be known, are effects of socially, historically and culturally specific practices of deductive scale switching.

'[T]he interesting feature about switching scale is not that one can forever classify into greater or lesser groupings but that at every level complexity replicates itself in scale of detail. "The same" order of information is repeated, eliciting equivalently complex conceptualisation ... The amount of information remains ... despite an increase in the magnitude of detail' (Strathern 1991: xvi).

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I argue that the notion of scale and the related practices of scale switching are crucial to an understanding of secrecy in a context such as the one at hand. A focus on practices of naming in the insurgency, and on the routes of guerrilla scaling and scale switching allows for a consideration of how complexity and relationality are replicated in the scale of nominal detail.

4.5 Nominal Holographics, Complex Relationality

'Pedrito' had a different name prior to joining the struggle (*la lucha*). In Guatemala, at birth, a child acquires a first name, often a second name, and the surname of the father and the mother. Newborns are registered in birth registers of the *cabecera* (administrative town) whenever possible. Accordingly, Pedrito had first, second and family names that had characterised his life prior to joining the insurgency. These were set aside when he joined the guerrilla ranks. Throughout his years of militancy up to the ethnographic present-day of our exchange, he was known as 'Pedrito'. 'Pedro', his pseudonym proper, was bestowed and adopted in an attempt to make his former first, second and family names redundant. In a context marked by low intensity conflict (Schirmer 1998), periods of brutal state-sponsored counterinsurgency campaigns and permanent social surveillance, those joining the insurgency often[11] – but not always- strove to erase the connection between themselves and the apparatus of conference, management and surveillance of identity by the nation state - and, crucially, the regional government.[12] Pseudonyms were devised to allow the persons to operate, physically move and negotiate their way through multiple systems of surveillance and repression. Long-term and seasonal labour migration, compounded by the ever increasing displacement caused by the recrudescence of the conflict in the early 1980s, made absences from one's place of residence not uncommon. Early on in life, Pedrito had also been a labour migrant. With his family he had travelled from *Oriente*[13] to the *Costa Sur*[14] looking to work in the

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[11] Plurality of connections to the insurgency and different form of militancy characterised association to the guerrilla. Many never erased the connection to their first and second names, and surnames. A case in point is given in my discussion of guerrilla secret relationalities and other relationalities, see below.

[12] Details of the administrative independence of the region of Petén are discussed in Chapter 2.

[13] Eastern region of Guatemala.

[14] Southern coast.

cotton plantations where labour conditions were said to be promising. His family had settled in one of the *aldeas* at the periphery of a *finca algodonera*[15], on the proximity of the sea shore, as only the less fertile soil was left to the labourers to settle in. Pedrito's father had wanted nothing to do with either the army or the guerrilla.

'The guerrilla used to speak to him, and would say that if he did not want to join their files (*incorporarse*), all that they would ask of him was that the matter be kept secret (*que fuera secreto*) because the *guerrilleros* were the very same neighbours. So, of course, they had to keep the secret, one could not divulge (*divulgando*) that the *guerrillero* was so-and-so, for the very situation, because here in Guatemala anyone who got caught would be killed straight away. At least in El Salvador there were prisons for political prisoners, while here in Guatemala there was no such thing'.

Although his father had not given signs of any specific political propensity, Pedrito left his community in 1980 to attend a course (*curso*) organised by the guerrilla. The understanding was that all participants would return to their communities on completion of the course. At the end of the six-month period however, the situation had deteriorated and safety could no longer be guaranteed. Those who had returned to their villages early had been killed and Pedrito decided to stay on, thus becoming a guerrilla migrant and moving from *Oriente* to Petén as a *guerrillero*, no longer a labour migrant and never as a displaced victim of state violence. The latter was the fate of his immediate family, who, following the abduction and murder of Pedrito's father in 1980, moved back to Oriente. Pedrito progressively lost his connection to his former name and only visited his town of origin and his family after the demobilisation process was formally completed in 1997. During the war years, a number of pseudonyms made it possible for Pedrito to seek refuge in Mexico when seriously wounded[16], and later travel to *Sandinista* Nicaragua and to El Salvador to receive political and military training.[17]

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[15] Cotton plantation.
[16] Whose bodies, whose wounds and whose hyperreality?
[17] Pseudonyms are partly also prosthetics of subjectivity in conflict situations (see Chapter 7).

Among the *compañeros/as*, however, he was known by his *apodo*, i.e. the nickname Pedrito, meaning 'small/young Pedro'. As the diminutive form of 'Pedro', 'Pedrito' is a possibly ironic and definitely endearing reference to some perceived qualities of the person, in this case the person's age, demeanour and physical presence on joining the guerrilla files. A*podos* are of great interest, for they give an insight into guerrilla practices of name bestowal, as they evoke the multiple relationalities in which guerrilla names and subjectivities came into being. In the way they move across scales, they constitute guerrilla nominal holographics:

'The concept of relation can be applied to any order of connection. It is *holographic* in the sense of being an example of the field it occupies, every part containing information about the whole and information about the whole being enfolded in each part... [The relation] requires other elements to complete it ...This makes the connecting functions *complex*, for the relation always summons entities other than itself' (Strathern 1995d:17-8).

A prominent ex-guerrilla combatant who for years had held a position of great responsibility in FAR once suggested that if I wanted to speak to women ex-combatants, I should interview 'Alma'. As he was due to visit Alma's community on a business-related trip, he offered to personally introduce me to her. I returned to the community on my own at a later date to carry out the interview with great discretion, as only Alma's closest family relations knew about her past in the guerrilla.

'I ask what her pseudonym (*pseudónimo*) was and she replies Alma. I then ask whether she had a nickname (*apodo*) and she says that yes, she had one. But the guys (*los muchachos*) did not say it to my face, they used it among themselves. I ask what the nickname was. They called me Hombrote. I ask why they called her so. Well, they gave me that name because from the very beginning, I showed physical prowess (*capacidad física*) in as much as combat was concerned, I had considerable physical prowess, as much as any man, so the guys were really surprised (*se*

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admiraban) by it, as men, well, the *machismo* which was at times deployed (*se manejaba*) was about being macho and all that, so that is where it all came from. (...) I ask whether they really never called her Hombrote directly. Well, I heard it but never directly as such, they would never call me that, I mean, they gave me that nickname but always with great respect (*respeto*) because they knew that I could get tough (*actuar muy recio*) with them (*contra ellos*)'.

Alma was one of a relatively small number of women and an even smaller number of indigenous women combatants in the FAR files in the early 1980s. Alma's nickname, 'Hombrote', literally means being manly and a 'macho'. As she pointed out, 'Hombrote' with its associations to the term 'macho' refers to the culture of 'machismo' that she identified as significant during her time in the guerrilla. In Latin American societies 'machismo' is usually taken to refer to

'a way of orientation which can most succinctly be described as the cult of virility. The chief characteristics of this cult [sic] are exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male interpersonal relationships and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relationships' (Stevens 1973: 90).

Interestingly, Alma noted that the nickname 'Hombrote' was intended a sign of respect (*respeto*) to the extent that the *compañeros* never called her 'Hombrote' directly. If that had happened, Alma was sure everyone was aware that she would have retorted like a 'proper' rowdy macho. With reference to Mexico, it has been noted that, unlike Stevens envisaged (1973), the term macho encompasses negative and positive conceptions of masculinity. While being a term that refers to notions of hegemonic masculinity, 'macho' often stands for qualities such as courage and integrity (Guttman 1998, Lancaster 1993, Mirandé 1997). Further, it can be used to refer to both men and women (Chant with Craske 2003, Mirandé 1997). In view of this, it could be argued that Alma's nickname 'Hombrote' is a sign of female masculinity.[18] As noted by Halberstam (1998), analyses of

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[18] Apodos deserve further analytical attention. I am however subordinating the detail and holographics of each part (each *apodo*) in order to make a point about the whole and hoping to demonstrate that the whole

female masculinity unhinge the link between masculinity and men. Thus, the image of the macho *compañeros* acknowledging Alma's masculinity among themselves, but not daring to refer to Alma's macho qualities in her presence, instantiated her contingently hegemonic and their contextually subordinate masculinities. The scale of detail of the apodo 'Hombrote' produces the holographic effects of female masculinity and macho guerrilla relationalities. Crucially, however, the gender relationality that Alma discussed on the day of the interview was a fact of memory, as none of her neighbours or fellow villagers knew of her past as La Hombrote.

The gender relationality inherent in Alma's *apodo* is here taken as an example of the nominal holographics characteristic of guerrilla practices of naming. Gender relationality is but one scale of detail that defines the whole and through which complex relations are established. Guerrilla nominal holographics summon further elements:

'I ask Sandra whether she had a nickname in the insurgence (*en la montaña*). 'Well, that is what I have, a general one (*uno general*) with which they call me everywhere (*que me dicen dondequiera*), only 'La Blanca' they call me'. [19]

Sandra's nickname conjured up relationalities of gender and racialisation. Disclosure of guerrilla secret nominal holographics was on occasions unexpected. I met Romualdo in his capacity of community leader. Our first meeting was uneventful, but on subsequent occasions Romualdo spoke eloquently about the history of his community and I asked him whether I could interview him on matters pertaining to histories of Q'eqchi' migration to Petén and ritual practices. He finally agreed to a date and a time for the interview, kindly finding time for me in his busy schedule as community leader. It was not until the tape recorder was switched on, that I heard Romualdo's personal history. I was utterly unprepared for the intensity of it all.

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is an effect of scale, and that through scale switching the whole in not such.

[19] 'La Blanca' means 'of light complexion', 'fair haired'. ,

'I was with my cousin in Santa Lucia, Fray Bartolomé de las Casa [Alta Verapaz], he took me to work, he told me there was a job of *tapisca*[20] around Cantabal, Ixcán [Quiché]. We left in a car that gave us a lift from Raxujá [Alta Verapaz], it was a *carro juletero*[21] we boarded, we got to the crossing (*cruce*) in Chisec, where Cobán and Petén meet, and what, I think the army had already had a clash (*enfrentamiento*) before going through Chisec or before getting to the crossroad (*cruce*), as I then was a rude youngster (*patojo maleducado*), I had much longer hair (*yo andaba muy peludo*) than what I have now, so the car had a flat tyre, and they were fixing the tyre when the army arrives and they get us to show our documents and all (*nos ponen a registrar y todo*[22]), as I did not have ID as I was still a child (*era patojo todavía*), I was about fourteen and a half, that's where they caught me (*me agarraron*), they caught me from here and they threw me in the *comando* in their lorry, and from there they blindfolded me (*taparon el ojo*) and they took me away, and they left my cousin there, they only took me away and they hit (*golpearon*) the people who were there. From there they took me to the military zone (*zona militar*) number twenty, I think, which is in Ixcán, which is in Playa Grande, that's where they took me and that's where they went on hitting me (*me estuvieron golpeando*) and they tied me to a pole which was there, this is the *guerrillero* that has to go and show us where the *compañeros* of this son of a bitch are (*hijo de la gran chingada*). They were talking about me (*me mencionaban allí*) but they were keeping my face covered (*me tenían tapada la cara*), I only had two small holes from which to breathe/sigh (*suspirar*), so from there, after like three days they got me out of there (*me sacaron*) and they took me in an helicopter up to falling (*caer*) [to fall rather than to land] in Cuarto Pueblo, so they say, as I did not even know where that was, we went down there where they used to have a church before but it was already all *amantado*,[23] and that's where they told me, now you are going to be useful as a guide (*servir vos de guía*), I as *hombre punta*[24], they told me and

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[20] *Tapiscar* is the activity of harvesting maize, beans, etc.
[21] *Carros juleteros* are pick up trucks or other vehicle that provides a service similar to the bus, i.e. they transport people for a relatively small fee.
[22] In Spanish it is the army the subject of the sentence.
[23] Romualdo possibly means 'in ruins' here.

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are going to be useful as a guide (*servir vos de guia*), I as *hombre punta*[24], they told me and they dressed me up as the army, as I was rather small (*chaparrito*), I was a rather sickly man (*hombre enfermito*) in those days, so they put a cap on me, with a shirt and some trousers, and with the same shoes I had on, they told me, go now, we will follow you, go now then, we will follow you and I did not even know what that was/what it was all about (*que era eso*), so for all blows (*golpe*) I was receiving I decided to go, like that, like at the north east of the field (*campo*) of the church of Cuarto Pueblo, and from there I went, we walked no more than two kilometres and a few metres when I hear a shot in front of me, I was thinking that those who had shot me where the *compañeros* who were in the vegetation (*monte*) [i.e. the guerrilla], they shot the soldiers who were walking behind me, and as I was carrying no weapon, they only gave me a knife and nothing else, I was carrying no weapon, nothing, so perhaps they saw I was not carrying anything, the two soldiers who were walking behind me, they [the guerrilla] killed them, and as from that point I kept standing up/still (*yo me quedé parado*) and they carried on *hechando verga*,[25] so I threw myself, there was a little furrow (*sanjita*), so that's where I stayed, I threw myself precisely in there (*cabal me aventé*), they went on for about three hours firing there, so that's where I stayed. As the noise (*la bulla*) stopped, I pretended I was dead *(yo hice el muerto)*, I pretended I was dead and I just stayed there with my mouth down (*hice el muerto y me quedé allí de boca abajo*), it went on for something like three hours that mess (*cuentazo*), then they came to touch me *(me vinieron a tocar)*, they were poking me with the barrel there (*me puñaban con el cañon allí*), luckily the soldiers did not shoot me, throw soil on this son of a bitch (*héchale tierra a este hijo de la chingada*), the officer said. Then, they threw soil over me, sticks and poles and all, in the small cave that was there, I fitted perfectly there (*cabal cupía yo allí*), when they shot, when they threw granades, them, what are they called? Those who are now the ex-combatants, they were landing on the soldiers, and the great quantities of blood (*los pocones de sangre*) and the

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[24] *Hombre punta*, literally 'tip man'
[25] '*Hechando verga*' in this context means the shooting went on.

bodies that were blowing up (*y los cuerpos que le estallaban a ellos*), were falling on top of me/on my back, and from there they threw soil over me and they left me there. They left and from there, as they said I was dead, I stayed there, but how/where would one have got out of there, how? Who knows! (*saber!*). As they took me there by helicopter, and from there, I stayed there, the night fell, and the next day I woke up (*amanecer*) crying, crying, crying, I was there for fifteen days, in the midst of that bad smell that was there, as they had taken with them the bodies of the soldiers, even if in pieces but they took them with them, but I pretended I was dead there, and they buried me there, as I did not even have relatives who were going to account for me (*responder a mi*), so I stayed there and after about fifteen days of having stayed there, plus three days of having been in the [Military] Zone, it is eighteen days, after fifteen days of having stayed sitting there in the vegetation (*monte*), I was crying loud (*llorando fuerte*), I lowered my forehead, my god, what am I doing here, why are they doing this to me, I said, when all of a sudden a girl and a boy come out in front of me and they talked to me, and I was shaking there out of fear, that perhaps they were those of the army, and they said to me, we join you in your sadness (*te acompañamos en tu tristeza*), let's go, they said, accompany us, and I went. Another girl arrived, a fat girl (*gordona*) and she held me, as I was weak and malnourished (*desnutrido*), she grabbed me and she sat me on her rucksack, and off I went, I felt we did not walk very far when we got to the camp, as I was going piggy back (*cucucha*) and I was not feeling anything, I was already about to die (*ya estaba por morirme yo*), so they gave me medicines, they treated me right and I don't know what they gave me/put on me (*me hecharon*) but I got better. A girl looked after me there, but I don't know what her pseudonym (*pseudónimo*) was, what she was called, but as I survived in such a place full of mosquitos (*como me salvé dentro de tanto zancudero*), for that reason they named me Mosquito there, as there they don't ask somebody's name, they just make one up (*solo alli le inventan a uno*)[26], ah ah, so it's from there [that his nickname originates], and

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[26] 'They just make one up' may be taken to mean 'they make someone up', not just 'they make someone's name up'.

I, while I was there *en la montaña*, I would tell myself where I was from (*y como yo estando allí en la montaña me decía, que donde venía yo*), I would say I was from Petén, as I was born here in Petén, but my relatives were in Cobán [Alta Verapaz]'. I ask Mosquito where in Petén he was born. [27] Here in Petén. I tell Mosquito that I seem to remember him telling me his mother spoke Mopan. 'Yes, but she was *Cobanera*.[28] So from there I would spend my time crying and crying (*de tanto llorar y llorar me mantenía yo allí*), but they would treat me very well and all, they were even giving me [military] training (*entrenamientos*), it was a girl who would look after me (*solo una muchacha que me mantenía allí*), she would give me my training (*me enseñaba mis entrenamiento*), there she would give me a little weapon (*me daba un armita allí*), for me to move and all that, for any eventuality, if anything should happen (*cualquier cosa si ocurriera algo*)'

The conversation with Mosquito revealed the embodied states of violence and the prosthetics of suffering and survival. Romualdo had wanted to tell me about how, having survived the torture and violence at the hands of the Army, he had been rescued by *guerrilleros/as*, had acquired a nickname and later joined the guerrilla files in Petén. The revelation of Romualdo's experiences was as swift and sudden as its withdrawal into silence. Romualdo and I never spoke of Mosquito again.

Scale of pseudonyms and nicknames, inherently relational in their bestowal, acceptance and signification, produce holographic effects and necessitate other information for completeness. Guerrilla nominal holographics contain information about the relevance of complex relationalities of gender (El Hombrote), ethnicity and racialisation (La Blanca, El Moreno), and solidarity and survival in a hostile environment (Mosquito). Other relational scales refer to internationalist affinity as in the case of Moscú[29] and anti-imperialist continentalism in the case of América. Many referred to qualities of the person (La Chaparra, the Short One; El Chino, the Chinese One), while others referenced

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[27] This is the first question I ask Mosquito since he decided to speak to me about his secret.

[28] *Cobanera* means from the town of Cobán. The term is also a synonym for Q'eqchi'.

[29] 'Moscú' means Moscow. I was told that the inspiration for Moscú's name came from listening to Radio Moscow while *en la montaña* (in hiding) in the jungle of northwestern Petén.

the animals and insects found in the forest (Mosquito, Lorita, Tigrillo, Guacamaya).

Guerrilleros switched nominal scales and thus reproduced the relational effect of complexity. In *apodo* relationalities, the whole seems to splinter through the complex partiality of relational signification. Indeed, Mosquito noted that in the guerrilla 'they made one up', which could be taken to mean that 'they' made someone up through nominal and relational practices of fabrication of subjectivity. The complex and relational nominal holographics in point constantly illuminate other routes and summon other entities on the terrain of guerrilla secrecy.

4.6 Relational Partiality, Connective Relativisation

In addition to complexity, scale switching instantiates a plurality and partiality of perspectives. Plurality, partiality and complexity in turn lead to relativisation (Strathern 1991). Guerrilla secrecy relied on specific relational partialities, the first of which I define in terms of a negative relationality of non-disclosure.

Jorge had been active in the insurgency since the 1960s. I had asked him to elaborate on aspects of guerrilla training when he said:

'The primordial basis of man is that he be secret – to die shattered in a thousand pieces, but never say who he is, neither his name, nor where he was born, or where he lives…if they kill us, let them kill us, but they will never know who we are'.

Jorge's statement is an example of the role of secrecy in the guerrilla organisation of which he was a long-standing, active member. Secrecy here seems to amount to a survival strategy and a way of staving off annihilation. In Jorge's own words, secrecy is '*la base primordial del hombre*', the primordial basis on which the existence of 'man' is predicated on a terrain marked by constant impending disembodied danger. The relationality of secrecy is articulated in the negative here, as one is instructed to never

reveal who one is. The markers of identity negatively mobilised by Jorge –i.e. that which should not be disclosed- are one's name, one's place of birth and one's place of residence. All three are indeed primary identity markers in Guatemala. Since the work of Sol Tax and Robert Redfield I have reviewed in Chapter 1, through to the more recent contributions made by Norman Schwartz (1990) reviewed in Chapter 2, the anthropology of Guatemala has consistently argued that identity, notably ethnic identity, is not explicitly articulated – that is, in Guatemala people do not objectify ethnicity as a property of the self.[30] This is particularly the case for indigenous ethnicity in the sense that people do not state 'I am Q'eqchi''. Rather, indigenous Guatemalans tend to articulate notions of identity in relation to a provenance – they stress, for instance, the town or administrative region –departamento- where they are from. The latter is also the case for Ladino ethnicity, although Ladino ethnic identity may be more commonly objectified in statements such as 'soy Ladino'.

I take Jorge's statement and its disavowals to be examples of that negative relationality of secrecy through which relations of non-disclosure are established. [31] That is, I argue that non-disclosure, based as it is on negation, still engenders relationalities of secrecy.

'The primordial basis of man is to be secret', Jorge said and yet, as Jorge articulated secrecy in terms of a founding principle to stave off annihilation, the injunction not to tell was problematised by my hesitation, in that pause in our conversation when I was left to wonder whether the 'man' whose primordial basis was being discussed, was a figure gendered in the neutral to mean a masculinist version of "humankind" – or whether this

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[30] This is particularly the case for indigenous ethnicity in the sense that people do not state 'I am Q'eqchi''. Conversely, people do on occasions state 'We are ladinos'. I am yet unclear about the respective dynamics of reification and property at stake in this difference.

[31] This section is inspired by the work of Michael Taussig (1999). The present analysis differs from Taussig's in two substantial ways. Firstly, it does not replicate Taussig's emphasis on the visual apparent in his definition of secrecy as entailing masking and unmasking. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, in his discussion of secrecy and initiation rituals, Taussig maintains that behind elaborate practices of secrecy, there is no actual secret. Conversely, in Guatemala, guerrilleros/as were not masked as Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos may have been, but what was kept secret in most cases did matter, both in terms of the relationalities that the secret engendered and the partialities it created. There were, and there still are secrets. Relationalities of secrecy and the secrets on which they rest, are not formalistic and, rather, substantial. Substantive guerrilla secrecy nevertheless had a form. Aesthetic dimensions of guerrilla secrecy are examined in Chapter 7.

primordial basis may in fact already harbour the very seeds of its undoing – in that conspicuous absence of a subject gendered in the feminine whose existence this same primordial basis seemed to foreclose. This was Jorge's own qualification of his statement:

'Many men have fallen into the arms of death or in the hands of the enemy for loving a woman [...] So, when a man [...] has a relationship [sexual] with a woman, he must not disclose his mission, neither tell her his secrets, if he conquers her, well, that is an individual matter/his prerogative, but he should never tell her, I am, I have, or talk about his work'.

The negative relationality of secrecy was qualified by Jorge in terms of a further injunction, namely one that was gendered and sexualised. There appeared to be threats to secrecy, and these were, at least in the context of this interview, gendered in the feminine and marked by heteronormativity. It is here possible to discern the kind of partiality secrecy entails for subjectivities and social relations. Subjectivities and social relations in a terrain marked by secrecy are inherently partial, based as they may be on a negation, on non-disclosure or on the threat of exposure.[32] As noted by Simmel (1906: 465), however, the relationality of secrecy is not always rendered through prohibition or foreclosure. Conversely, relational secrecy is often based on disclosure.

'What we would do was that a *compañero* would come from afar (*venía un compañero de lejos*), and we would have another one with us, but we would be already in agreement with the former, and we would meet him there, we would meet him on our way, and we would greet as if we were strangers (*desconocidos*), but then, as I knew already, I would say to the one accompanying me, I am going to be back shortly, I have some errands to attend to, you two can talk. While I was gone, the *compañero* would talk to the one who was accompanying me, but this person would not know that I knew what he was going to tell him, so that one would not say one day that I knew

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[32] Partiality creates ambivalence, analysed in relation to the repressive state, Chapter 5.

too. We would use a strategy (*politica*). Later, the person who had been accompanying me would tell me himself, he would say to me, look, that one we met the other day, didn't he say anything to you? He told me such and such a thing, and I am telling you now in confidence and trust (*en confianza*), and so we would carry on with the relationship (*relación*), until later, when I had complete trust in him (*yo confiaba directamente en él*), I would say to him, look, the struggle (*lucha*) is exactly so and so, our duty is to cover ourselves (*cubrirnos*), and it is good that you work in it. When I may in a position to help you with something, I will help you, don't worry. I may even work in it myself at some point in the future (*de repente*). Some of them kept on thinking that I did not know anything, but they trusted me because I was a person who was not involved in disagreements (*pleitos*), in theft, just in my work, with real honesty. That is how we worked training (*formando*) people'.

Although one's allegiance to the organisation should be kept secret, recruitment of new members involved a telling. Seemingly fortuitous encounters were arranged and prospective new members told about the organisation. The remarkable aspect of this specific relational moment of disclosure was that, at least in the intention of those willing the relation, the new member would not suspect who the person ordering the relation was. Although Jorge disclosed his sympathies for the insurgents, he did not expose the nature of his role in the organisation. In this case, then, disclosure involved at once telling and misleading the prospective member. In the case of selective disclosure, relationalities of secrecy were again marked by partiality.

Negative relationalities of secrecy and relationalities of selective disclosure occurred concurrently with positive relationality of secrecy based on relations of disclosure.

'Since the beginning, the *compañero* union organisers who would give us *doctrina* [political training] in the Southern Coast would tell us, the time will come when we will be persecuted...they will persecute us in the homes, in the schools, in the towns, in the hamlets, in

the workplace. Hence, they would tell us, we have to be secretive, talk quietly, know signs'.

The scene where the importance of secrecy was first spelled out to Jorge was already a social context, namely one where union organisers raised political awareness among *campesinos*, i.e. agricultural workers toiling over the foreign-owned plantations of the Southern Coast. Jorge remembered the conversation with union organisers as a moment of initiation into a culture of secrecy of which he had been a participant for over thirty years. His first recollection was unambiguously that of a social context and the fact that one would have to proceed by 'talking quietly' and 'knowing signs' implied that one would have an interlocutor, an audience, and would be enmeshed in a set of relations. Secrecy, therefore, may have been about concealment and misdirection, but as a predicament, activity or endeavour, it inherently implied partial relationalities and a sociality of possible selective disclosure.

Guerrilla secrecy thus seemed to have positively engendered certain kinds of social relations, some of which rested on a commonality of secret semiotics, as well as relations engendered in the negative, and grounded on non-disclosure. Secrecy may be founded on injunctions not to tell, as much as on certain way of telling (Simmel 1906). In all instances, guerrilla positively and/or negatively inscribed relationalities of secrecy. Relational guerrilla secrecy did produce contingent secrets and it would be inaccurate to say that guerrilla secrets amounted to a formalistic device, behind which no secret actually lay (cf. Taussig 1999). That *guerrilleros/as* harboured selective and contingent secrets, becomes apparent retrospectively when one considers guerrilla secret relationalities vis-à-vis other relationalities.

'Because they are very humanitarian (*humanitarios*), and even if it was just a tortilla, in those days they would offer it to you without asking anything in return (*te la ofrecían y no te pedían nada a cambio*), and for that has to be grateful to them, and one would feel much safer (*y se sentía mucho mas seguro*) with an indigenous person (*indígena*), for they would cover your secrets (*que te cubrieran los secretos*) much more than a ladino'.

Positive and negative relationalities engendered by guerrilla secrecy were articulated on a terrain already saturated by other relations. Gender and sexual relations of non-disclosure, for instance, were contingently said to pose a threat to secrecy, while Ladino/indigenous relations of disclosure did not, as stated in the interview abstract noted above. Guerrilla secret relationalities however, seemed to operate parallel and/or antagonistically to relations based on kinship.

'What I would do was, when I would talk to someone, I would see what his/her opinion was *(le tomaba la opinión)*, and I would say to him/her, look, I have a friend who wants to talk to you, but you have to be careful *(cuídate)*, don't go and tell anyone *(no lo vayas a contar)*, don't tell you brothers [or siblings], or your father, until we may get to know your family very well, if it is convenient that they know, otherwise it is best they don't know.'

As one was told not to let family members know about one's association with the guerrilla, one could never be sure that one's kin were not also in some way associated with the insurgency – or indeed, with the army. Ramón's case is an example of this predicament. Ramón told me how he ran into the guerrilla while in his teens. He started making purchases for the insurgents and delivering goods at secret locations. Ramón never told his father about his activities, as Ramón's father was a local *comisionado militar* – that is, he was the civilian representative of the army in Ramón's hamlet, *aldea.* It has been documented, and widely acknowledged, that the establishment of *comisionados militares* was a counterinsurgency tool aimed at a progressive militarisation of the countryside, and an extension of surveillance that was initiated by the army in the 1980s (CEH 1999). In any case, one day, Ramón's father found Ramón in the fields talking to the guerrilleros. Ramón explained the situation and Ramón's father and the guerrilla commander were left to talk in private –to exchange secrets. Ramón told me that to this day, he did not know what was said in that exchange. However, it later transpired that Ramón's father, the local *comisionado militar*, had been secretly passing information to the insurgents for some time prior to that encounter in the fields.

Unbeknown to Ramón, his sister had already joined the guerrilla ranks and was a combatant in hiding. Positive and negative relationalities of secrecy engendered guerrilla subjectivities marked by partiality, as one would be enmeshed in relations, albeit partial ones.

Positive and negative socialities of secrecy did not belong to the past – they persisted in the ethnographic present of my exchanges with the *ex-guerrilleros/as*. By way of an example of the manner in which the relational partiality of secrecy shaped my relations with the ex-guerrilla, consider that, in the course of our conversation, Ramón urged me to reflect on the procedure that I followed in order to get to meet him:

'You looked for me, a *compañero* told you to look for Ramón or Turcio, I don't know what name they gave you, and today you were on your way, you had established contact with a *compañera* who was going come to meet you, and you knew we were going to meet - that is how we used to operate'.

At the time, it seemed that I was also a part of a non-organic whole, and in some peripheral position in the scale of guerrilla relationalities of secrecy. In the case of my exchange with Ramón, for instance, he was articulating a positive relationality of selective disclosure, and letting me in some of his secrets. Conversely, there were many instances in which my interlocutors articulated secrecy in the negative. In view of this and recalling the initial exchange with Pedrito, it remains unclear exactly what secret Pedrito disclosed by ceasing to be Pedrito and where the secret actually lay, for I may have been the one harbouring it, not him. Relational partialities imply connective relativisation, but connectivity nonetheless (Strathern 1991).

4.7 Conclusion: Post-plurality and Post-Perspectivism

'The realisation of the multiplier effect produced by innumerable perspectives extends to the substitutive effect of apprehending that no one perspective offers the totalising vista it presupposes. It ceases to be perspectival' (Strathern 1991: vxi)

Guerrilla scale and scale switching created nominal and relational complexities marked by partiality. Following Strathern (1988, 1991, 1995), I argue that the partiality of subjects and relations imply connections, albeit connections between subjectivities and socialities which are inherently partial. The partiality at issue is not strictly a product of the anthropologist's deductive hermeneutic scale. Rather, the partiality at stake is the partiality of guerrilla secrecy, which is a social, cultural and historically specific partiality that is the product of a social, cultural and historical context marked by histories of conflict and cultures of secrecy.

In view of this, it is of interest to transpose and re-inscribe Simmel's statement in the Strathernian terms that have characterised the present analysis. Secrets no longer refer to 'the mixture of reciprocal knowledge *or* lack of knowledge' of the other (Simmel 1906: 452, my emphasis). Rather, they refer to 'the mixture of reciprocal knowledge [*and*] lack of knowledge' characteristic of the partial relationalities of secrecy that marked the ethnographic encounters discussed here. Hermeneutic awareness of scale allows for the apprehension of, and related switch to, a specifically post-plural scale. Fractal graphics[33], holography, partial connections and connective relativisation allow for both reciprocal knowledge *and* lack of knowledge to exist simultaneously, and to go beyond principles of non-contradiction in the multiple hermeneutics of the ethnographic exchange – in this context marked by positive, negative and partial relationalities of secrecy. For Simmel, relations in which parties are being discreet are characterised by reciprocal acts of discretion. I take discreet relations in the post-plural scale of guerrilla secret relationalities to refer to discrete relations between subjects marked by ethnographic weak ontological partiality, and these discrete relations give ground to partial socialities. These partial subjectivities and socialities of secrecy were instantiated through connectedness and intermittence, and my attempt at finding the appropriate hermeneutic scale is intended as an exercise in post-plural and post-perspectival anthropology.

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[33] Fractal geometry is the scale of post-plurality.

Chapter 5

States of Violence and Ambivalence

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed naming practices among guerrilla combatants and associates and their role in the articulation of secretive and complex relationalities, grounded in selective forms of disclosure and foreclosure. I argued that secrecy challenges 'strong' thought and related understandings of sociality in terms of pluralities of discrete entities. I argued for the relevance of weak post-plural scales to describing and understanding the partial subjectivities and socialities engendered in guerrilla secrecy. In this chapter I provide a different order of post-plural contextualisation, and consider the ways in which violence and ambivalence figured in the narratives of ex-combatants of the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes*, and their effects. Through the accounts of ex-combatants, I focus on guerrilla representations of the conflict, highlighting how entities were rarely viewed as monolithic, coherent and opposed wholes. Rather, imbricate violence and secrecy produced ambivalence and indeterminacy in guerrilla subjectivities and socialities.

First, I refer to the account of Luis, who, through three distinct and yet interrelated episodes, provided his views on violence and conflict in Guatemala. In conversation with Luis, violence was said to develop as a response to individuals' displays of talents and aptitudes, which were deemed to contravene arbitrary and hastily fashioned rules and/or interdictions. The perpetrators of violence materialised in specific guises, namely as the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Guatemalan Army. Some episodes of violence were, on occasion, precipitated by the interventions of indiscreet neighbours, that is, by the incitement of relationalities of disclosure, predicated on the production and

revelation of secrets. Such positive relationalities of disclosure involved the institutions of the nation state and of neo-imperial powers, and unleashed violent reprisals. The multiple embodiments of the perpetrators of violence featured plasticity and ability to multiply, as Army soldiers swelled in numbers. Nevertheless, episodes of violence were preceded by an initial propensity for debate, leniency and understanding. Guatemalan Army soldiers, for instance, were assigned the capacity to appreciate the value and accomplishment of people's intellectual talents and creative actions, despite the fact that these would ultimately be deemed to deserve punishment. In all three episodes, the perpetrators of violence were eventually equated with, and/or made to stand metonymically for, the nation-state and the United States government, both envisaged as apparatuses of surveillance, control, extraction and destruction of human talent. Beyond any debate and appreciation, they ultimately quashed human intellectual and creative endeavours. In sum, whatever the materialisation, action and consequence, all subjects were granted the faculty to discern human ingenuity, but in the last instance violence linked to the management, incitement and production of secrecy prevailed.

As I consider how violence and ambivalence may coexist, and occupy the same intellectual and experiential frame in ex-combatants' accounts, I argue that violence and ambivalence are implicated in the production of entities or parts viewed as discrete, and note how both augmentation and reduction of distinctions between parts occurred in ex-combatants narratives. Strathern has coined the neologism 'merographic', an adjective which combines etymologically 'meros', Greek for 'part' or 'share' and 'graphic', to stress the 'the way ideas write or describe one another; the very act of description makes what is being described a part of something else, e.g. description (Strathern 1992a:204, note 21). In her discussion of English kinship, Strathern points out that domains imagined as discrete, for instance 'nature' and 'culture', may appear to be connected 'by virtue of being at once similar and dissimilar' (Strathern 1992a:72). Similarities are engendered through an effort to 'recognise' connections, whilst dissimilarities emerge out of 'recognition' of difference (ibid), making difference to be a connection from another angle (Strathern 1992a:73). Merographic analogies and the connections on which they are

predicated are partial in the sense that they presuppose 'that one thing differs from another insofar as it belongs to or is part of something else'. These models of relationships Strathern calls 'merographic'.

Following Strathern (1992a), I argue that *ex-guerrilleros/as* deployed a 'merographic capacity', insofar as 'merographic capacity' refers to the ability to envision partial analogies. [1] As argued by Lury (1998),

'Analogies are partial not only in the sense that they imply perceived difference as well as similarity in the making of comparison between wholes and in that sense are not complete or total, but also in that they make wholes (including persons) out of parts in particular ways. In this making, while parts of a person are part of that person as a whole or a system (such as the individual), they are also, from another perspective, conceived as parts of other wholes, such as, for example, society or nature. In this sense, things (including the individual, nature and society) are seen to be *constructed* or *determined* and to be inhabiting what might be termed *synthetic culture* or a *culture that constructs*' (Lury 1998:13, emphasis in the original).

The merographic capacity of subjects evokes weak thought in interesting ways. Working beyond totalising forms of contextualisation, merographic connections open up wholes, to reveal incompleteness, including gaps, from different perspectives. Further, merographic analogies summon up the partiality of the whole and the conditions of possibility of other perspectives, but rather than being exhausted in mere pluralisation of value, merographic analogies conjure new wholes, always displacing and deferring the idea of totality and totalising perspectives.

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[1] Strathern develops the notion of merographic capacity in her work on English kinship (Strathern 1992). Lury (1998) applies Strathern's insights to her study of technology, notably photography, and culture and identity, whilst Franklin (2003) deploys Strathern's 'merographic connection model' to her work on new genetics.

In the case of the material presented here, a number of partial analogies produce merographic connections between parts. Parts such as 'the soldier' and 'the *guerrillero*' are made to appear to belong to different and discrete wholes, namely 'the Army' and 'the guerrilla'. Simultaneously however, multiple relations are imagined between the parts in multiple scales. I focus on how distinctions between parts figured in ex-combatants' narratives, and argue that they generated doubling effects that constantly summoned up other subjects and other relationships. Parts and their relations engendered instances of duplication and diminution and may be said to function in post-plural scales. Indeed, despite suffering and violence endured at the hand of state agents and state-controlled technology, experiences of militancy in the insurgency were not exhausted in binary understandings of the conflict. Distinctions were deployed and exceeded through dissimulation, as well as being periodically dissolved. This is most apparent in the occurrence of doubles, doubling subjects and doubling relations in *ex-guerrilleros/as* accounts. Doubling was associated with merographic connections between entities such as 'the Army' and 'the guerrilla' as they were linked by practices of dissimulation, which in turn engendered ambivalence and indeterminacy. Merographic connections also appeared in ex-combatants' discussions of their relation to their own siblings. Rafael and Nestor, two brothers, discussed their distinct experiences in the Army and in the guerrilla respectively. Whilst presenting themselves as discrete subjects with different experiences of the conflict, and positioned within discrete entities, Nestor recounted how during combat he would imagine his brother Rafael at the receiving end of the shots he fired. He was able to see his own kind in the Other.

In the last section, I consider how in the course of a conversation with Carlos, secrecy and doubling produced instances of revelation. Carlos recounted how in post-Peace Accords times, ex-combatants met the Army officers who had been their enemies during the conflict, and how each party was revealed to the other as proximate and adjunct. In my conclusion, I consider how doubling, simulation and dissimulation may establish different orders of relations between different parts and wholes and the extent to which merographic connections may be said to establish relations which function in post-plural

scales. Insofar as they conjure up (new) wholes such as 'the campesinado', they are also suggestive of thick nihilism, that is, post-plural ethnographic resolutions of truth into value.

5.2 The Secrets of the Maya: the Theft of Stones, Knowledge and People

On one of my usual visits, I passed by Luis, an ex-combatant who had been involved in political organising efforts and in the guerrilla organisation for almost four decades. Luis, originally from *Oriente*[2] but displaced to the *Costa Sur*[3] from the age of five, had been a member of the very first FAR units that were active in the early 1960s. In 1966, following violent curbing of political activity among plantation workers in the *Costa Sur*, Luis migrated to Petén with his immediate family. Luis told me that while his family came to Petén in search of land, the main reason for the move was to escape the repression that was being waged at *campesinos* like himself who had links with the unions. I was asking Luis to comment on the indigenous question in Guatemala when he told me this story.

'Between 1977 and 1978, Luis had met an elderly man about eighty-eight years old. The elderly man was Q'eqchi' and Petenero, in the sense that he was Q'eqchi' and had been living in Petén for a long time. Luis and the old man started talking about the destruction of indigenous people in Guatemala (*la destrucción de los indígenas*). The elderly man said that he did not approve (*no le parecía*) of the murder and destruction of those people who knew the things of the Maya (*sabian las cosas de los Mayas*), as this knowledge was useful (*útil*) for the future. The man told Luis that a stone had been robbed (*se habían robado*) from Ţikal, that the indigenous people in Cobán[4] (*los indígenas in Cobán*) were still a Maya race (*era raza todavía de los Mayas*) and that proof (*prueba*) of this was in that stone where the name of a Maya person who was living in the highlands of Cobán appeared. The elderly man said to Luis that this was the definite proof that the Mayas were not extinct/finished (*terminado*) and it was a coincidence (*casualidad*) that on that engraved stone (*piedra escrita*) that was stolen from Tikal by the Americans (*americanos*)

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[2] *Oriente* refers to the East of the country, namely to the *departamentos* of Zacapa and Chiquimula.
[3] The *Costa Sur* is the Southern Coast on the Pacific Ocean.
[4] As discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Two, the indigenous population in Cobán, Alta Verapaz is Q'eqchi'.

there appeared the name of that man and of his daughter, or rather the man's granddaughter. In any case, there was the name, and the granddaughter could read/understand what was written on the stone. Six to eight months following the theft of the stone, the FBI arrived in Cobán to take the *indita*[5] with them (*para llevarse la indita*). They told her father that they were going to pay for her education, so that she could get better schooling (*para que se preparara major*), and so that they could educate her. These were all lies (*mentiras*). At the time, people were really afraid (*temorizada*) and the army accompanied those Americans and seeing an army soldier (*un militar*) was like seeing the devil (*diablo*), as one was only waiting to be killed by them, as that was the only thing they were doing/did.[6] So, there is no doubt (*no cabe duda*) that this eighty-and-over indigenous man (*este indígena*), no, he was in fact one hundred and fifteen years old, well, at this age he knew for sure that if he was not to give up his daughter, the army (*militares*) would have killed him. Facing this threat the man handed over (*dio*) his daughter and they took her away (*se la llevaron*). So the man went to approach the army (*ejército*) and said that those men (*esos hombres*) had visited and they had agreed (*quedaron*) to bring the man's daughter back and the date had come and they had not returned her. He had not heard from her and wanted to know what had happened to her, trusting (*confiando*) that there were soldiers (*soldados*) with the FBI. Well, he had come to let them know (*avisar*), as one who says, surely you must know (*ha de saber*), because there were soldiers (*soldados*) present when they took her away on that certain date, and when the date came they did not bring her back. It turns out that what they told him was that he should not go round claiming/demanding/insinuating (*reclamar*) anything, because what could happen to him was that he could be killed (*matarlo*). So without any doubt (*no cabe duda*), they either have the girl (*muchacha*) alive or they killed her. I interrupt Luis at this point and ask whether they may have killed her after the girl revealed (*revelar*) what the estela. That may have been the case; they may have killed her after she had deciphered (*decifrado*) the Maya inscription/ tradition (*leyenda*). To the present day, it is not known whether they hold her alive or whether they killed her. But what we think, said Luis, is that they must have killed her, as the *indios* in Guatemala have never really had any defence/protection (*defensa*), or support from the law (*apoyo por las leyes*), they have been mistreated (*tratados mal*). And that is where we, the *mestizos* come in, to receive the same punishment (*castigo*), the same suffering (*sufrimiento*) of the Maya, because some of us the *mestizos* do not agree (*no nos parece*) with the way in which

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[5] '*Indita*' literally means the young indigenous girl. The diminutive form of *indio* is usually derogatory in that it implies a demeaning and/or paternalistic attitude towards indigenous people.

[6] Army counter-insurgency activities deliberately deployed imagery related to the devil. For instance, the military elite group Kaibiles stationed in Petén between 1974 and 1989 trained in a military compound called *El Infierno*, or Hell, in the vicinities of Melchor de Mencos (cf. CEH 1999, Volume II, Chapter

indigenous people (*los indígenas*) are treated, what they do with them, with all the scorn/contempt (*mensoprecios*). So, the way we saw the matter when we spoke to that man who told me this story, I said to him/I say to you (*le digo yo*) why did not the Guatemalan government allow (*permitido*) that she studied here, that they did not take her away, because she would have been very useful to the very same Guatemalan government, the indigenous girl (*muchacha indígena*) as much as the elderly man (*viejito*), because in them were the Maya secrets (*secretos Mayas*) that people don't know anymore, in him there were important Maya stories (*historias Mayas*) for today's generation (*generación*), so rather than supporting them, they destroyed them (*los destryueron*). I say to Luis that they seem to have stolen the estelae and the people (*gente*) too. That is exactly the case. The indigenous peoples (*pueblos indígena*) in Guatemala have lost the confidence/trust (*confianza*) in the law (*leyes*), in those who execute the law, because they are not fair (*justos*), because it's an injustice, so it is in this way that in Guatemala very important things (*cosas*) have been/are being lost (*se ha ido perdiendo*) There are people who know (*lo saben*) but people are afraid (*tienen temor*).

The story told by Luis is a Ladino narrative on the predicament of Guatemala, as a multicultural country marked by the arbitrary exercise of authority and violence, perpetrated by the Guatemalan Army in its acquiescence to, and collusion with, United States imperialism. Set in Guatemala in the late 1970s, the narrative recounts how antiquities, knowledge and people are stolen through violence and deception by foreign powers, and how women, who are bearers of knowledge, are commodified, exchanged and appropriated in the process. In this respect, the story is as much about Ladino representations of indigeneity and gender as it is about the theft of knowledge and secrets. The story opens with the theft of a 'Maya stone' seen as the repository of ancient Maya knowledge, but a form of knowledge that is understood to be directly related to the present. Indeed, the names of living individuals are inscribed on the stone. The individuals whose names feature on the stone can read the inscription[7] and thus can decipher the secrets of the Maya, which are the targets of Federal Bureau of Investigation's interest.[8] When faced by the FBI and the Guatemalan army, the elderly

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II:56).

[7] Archaeologists would argue that no relation exists between the ancient Maya culture of the archaeological site of Tikal in Petén and contemporary Q'eqchi' culture in Alta Verapaz or elsewhere. This, of course does not preclude Luis imagining a relation between the two.

[8] The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is the agency of the United States Department of Justice and principal federal investigative agency. Its functions include the investigation of espionage, sabotage,

Q'eqchi' man decides to give up his (grand-)daughter in order to save his life. Interestingly, at this point the figure of the Q'eqchi' girl is commodified and becomes the object entangled in a system of exchange (Rubin 1975) between the masculinist neo-imperial powers of the FBI, the Guatemalan Army, and the girl's father/grand-father. The arrangement is a temporary one, aimed at providing the girl with better schooling, and the elderly Q'eqchi' man approaches the army when the girl is not returned on the agreed date, as it is within his right to have his (grand-)daughter/property returned. The response of the army is dismissal. The Q'eqchi' man is ultimately betrayed in his trust. Up to the moment of revelation of the deceit, he had viewed the Guatemalan Army as guarantor to the transaction. The fact that there were Guatemalan Army soldiers with the FBI on the day the girl was taken away was no guarantee after all. The Q'eqchi' man is ordered to lay the matter to rest, lest he be killed and his daughter/grand-daughter is never returned. According to Luis, whether the girl is alive and hostage of the FBI, or has been killed is an open question. There is *no doubt* that the FBI *either* holds the girl *or* that they may have killed her, in a context where certainty is inherently ambiguous. Nevertheless, Luis resolves that it is more likely that the girl was murdered.

Gender constructs seem to be established in terms of a system of unequal exchange and indigeneity seems to be articulated (from Luis's own Ladino perspective) in terms of instrumentality and commodification. To an extent, both gender-in-the feminine and indigenous ethnicity are first reified and then circulated as part of an exchange system. As their worth is inherently instrumental, they should be valued, nurtured and 'developed' *because* of their potential instrumental worth. The story acknowledges that the process of commodification of difference in terms of gender and indigeneity is inherently violent. According to Luis, death and annihilation have marked the histories of the relationships between indigenous people and state and/or imperial institutions. This history of violence, vilification and abuse, however, is indicated as the point of convergence between disenfranchised and violated indigenous and ladino subjects, as ladinos rise with indigenous subjects against the injustices perpetrated against indigenous

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organised crime, drug trafficking and terrorism.

people to challenge the ways in which archaeological artefacts, people, knowledge and secrets are stolen through deception by the Guatemalan Army and foreign powers. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the FBI, the Guatemalan Army, ladinos in solidarity and elderly Q'eqchi' men are all laying claims to *Maya secrets* harboured by young indigenous women. It is these secrets that seem to lie at the centre of the controversy, as they engender antagonistic relations between masculinist international, national and local powers.

5.3 *El Aparato*/The Apparatus

Luis elaborated further on the powers of indigenous bricoleur abilities, the accusations of subversion they unwittingly attracted and the violence thrust upon them in a second parable whose main character was a young K'iche' man.

'In the same year, about 1970, this happened around 1970, before the story I have just told you, there was another indigenous person (*indigena*), but he was of the K'iche' race (*de raza K'iche'*). This happened in 1970 and the indigenous person (*indigena*) was 20 years old. He was young and in the area of Quiché, near Santa Cruz Barilla, in the direction of Chiapas, that is where he lived in a village (*aldea*), I have forgotten the name of the village, but the truth (*verdad*) is that this indigenous man (*indigena*) went to the capital of Guatemala. He was illiterate (*inalfabeto*), of his own intelligence (*de su inteligencia*), he liked the matter of radiotransmission (*radiotécnico*) and he stayed in the capital for about a year, and from there he then went back to his village. In his village he started repairing radios to/for his fellow villagers, at the time there were record players (*tocadiscos*) and radios, there were no tape recorders (*grabadoras*). So he started repairing record players and radios, so that after two years working in this trade, on the wall (*pared*) of his house (*casa*) which was made of wooden sticks (*varas*) like that one over there, he started placing/arranging (*colocar*) record player and radio parts (*piezas*) and he started connecting (*connectar*) them and covered the wall, which was about six square metres in size. I [Silvia] ask sceptically, that big? Yes, it was indeed as large as that. The man covered the wall with pieces/parts (*pedazos*) of radios and record players and he made them work (*las puso a funcionar*) and the people were very impressed (*admiración*) so much so that when someone would come to see him to get some radio or record player repaired, he would turn on (*encender*) his apparatus

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(*aparato*) and the apparatus (*aparato*) would play what one was saying (*este aparato sonaba lo que uno platicaba*). I ask whether the machine could record (*grabar*). Yes, it could record and there one could hear (*escuchar*) the telephones of the country (*los teléfonos del país*). Really? I say. Yes, there one could hear the radio stations/frequencies (*difusoras*) of the country. I ask Luis whether he means the radio stations and he says yes. I am very surprised and say, really? Luis replies that that much he could detect (*agarrar*) with that thing he had put on the wall, just like that, with mere wooden sticks (*pura varas*), he had no education (*no tuvo escuela*), he did not have a teacher (*maestro*) to have the opportunity to learn (*poder aprender*). It was his very own intelligence (*pura inteligencia de él*), and you know what happened? When the army (*ejército*) realised (*se dio cuenta*), a gossipy *campesino* (*campesino chismoso*) who was *comisionado*[9] went to denounce (*dar parte*) that that man was making apparatuses (*haciendo aparatos*). Some officers (*oficiales*) came with a multitude of soldiers (*cantidad de soldados*) and went to take a look (*fueron a ver*). Yes, of course, it was an apparatus (*aparato*) he had made out of pieces of radios and record players. Well, the officers, in good spirit (*de buena onda*) and good people (*buena gente*), because they saw (*vieron*) that it was nothing bad (*nada malo*), they were impressed (*admiraron*) when they saw the radio, they were army officers, but the accusation (*denuncia*) that had been made against him was a bad accusation (*se la hicieron mala*), because he was being accused of being a rebel (*lo acusaban de rebelde*), and he did not even know what that was (*él nisiquiera sabia que era eso*). So, those officers left, but after about eight days, the American *gringos* arrived (*los gringos americanos*) there with him, they were from the FBI, they investigated the apparatus (*investigaron el aparato*) and asked him who was it who had taught him that (*que quien le había ensañado eso*), where had he gone to learn that (*que donde había ido a aprender*), whether he had gone to Cuba, whether he had gone to Russia, and I, I, - the man was saying, I did not even know Chiapas, Mexico! Because a poor person (*pobre*) cannot go round travelling, can he? Of course, I say. Well, then, says Luis, those Americans (*esos americanos*) were there with about five hundred soldiers of the Guatemalan army, and what they did was to tell him that that the apparatus was going to be the cause of his misfortune (*la causa de su desgracia*) and the man replied, here I, he said, I repair radios and record players, I am not harming people (*haciéndole daño a la gente*), I am not stealing off anyone (*no le estoy robando a nadie*), I am not causing harm to the government (*no le estoy haciendo daño al gobierno*). So they replied that that apparatus (*aparato*) that he had, well that was against the government, because only the government could have such an apparatus to be aware (*darse cuenta*) of

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[9] *Comisionados militares*, namely civilian populations enlisted to guard against guerrilla activities and keep fellow villagers under surveillance as part of the process of militarization of the countryside (CEH 1999).

telephones at the national level and of radio stations/frequencies (*difusoras*). So, he said, well, why is not the government making the apparatus (*por qué no hace el gobierno el aparato*)? If it is in the government's interest (*le conviene*), it is its privilege/competence, if only the government can do it, (*solo él lo puede hacer*), well then, let the government do it (*pues que lo haga*) but I did not make it for any specific reason (*pero yo no lo hice para nada*), I made it because my thought/mental capacities (*pensamiento*) was/were helping me. So, they said to him, we will be back, and they left, and after eight days they came back, at about five in the afternoon, and he was not heard of again (*no se supo de él*), if they killed him or what (*si lo mataron, o qué*). Did they take him away (*lo sacaron de su casa*)? – I ask. Yes the Americans of the FBI and the Guatemalan army were there (*andaban los americanos del FBI y andaba el ejército de Guatemala*), about five hundred soldiers. I say, for one unarmed man? Yes, unarmed. These two stories (*histórias*) that we know (*sabemos*), it is only few of us [who know them], because many people do not like these stories, I don't know why, I don't know the reason (*razón*), people don't record (*grabar*) the stories that are important, people don't like to know them, but for me/in my opinion (*a mi manera*), yes, they are important, because in my view (*a mi ver*), if the government had been intelligent (*inteligente*), the government would have put the *indita* as much as the K'iche' man to develop (*para desarrollarles*) their memory/intelligence (*memoria*), for the future of the country, but rather than developing them (*en vez de desarrollarlos*), they destroyed them (*destruirlos*). I ask whether perhaps the government felt threatened by such intelligence (*será que se sintieron amenazados de tanta inteligencia?*). Luis hesitates so I add that perhaps people who are doing/making things (*haciendo las cosas*), who can (*pueden*) do/make things, don't need anybody (*no necesita a nadie*) and have strength(*fuerza*) and independence (*independencia*), and that the government may not like. This is correct (*correcto*). Perhaps, the [Guatemalan] government has an agreement/arrangement (*compromiso*) with the United States, what is it called? Because not all the United States are bad (*no todo Estados Unidos es malo*), it is only the White House (*Casa Blanca*), the chair (la *silla*), who try to destroy (*destruir*) rather than develop (*desarrollar*)'.

Luis's parable constructs indigenous instrumental reason as a 'bricoleur' ability to manufacture wonderful creations through one's talents alone, without having to be formally or informally taught. The protagonist of the second story is a young K'iche' man who leaves his village to go to Guatemala City. There he pursues an interest in radio transmissions, and teaches himself to repair radios and record players. On his return to

the village, the man establishes a trade of radio and record players repairs. He collects discarded radio parts and over time he reassembles them on the wall of his house. In this remarkable and monumental installation of discarded items, parts of radios and record players are connected together with wooded sticks. To the amazement of neighbours and fellow villagers, the 'apparatus' actually works. The apparatus records sound as well as intercepting the radio frequencies and telephone conversations taking place across the country. This marvel does not go unnoticed and the man is denounced to the authorities. When the Guatemalan Army arrives to survey the apparatus, the soldiers cannot conceal the wonder and admiration for this cunning installation. Nevertheless, the nature of the charge is too serious to be ignored. The K'iche' man is accused of subversion and of being a rebel. The FBI returns to the scene accompanied by five hundred Guatemalan soldiers. The FBI argues that the man should not be in possession of such an item, and demands to know where exactly the man learnt his skills. Suggestions that he may have trained in Russia or Cuba are seen to be so outlandish as to merit humorous, dismissive, and defiant comments. The K'iche' man points out that poor people cannot even travel to Chiapas, which is only a few miles away from the Quiché town where the story unfolds. Surely the FBI should know that much. It is indeed defiance that marks the exchange between the K'iche' man and the FBI, as he argues his point and tries to illustrate that he is within his rights to assemble the magnificent apparatus, and that there is no malice or harm in his creation. The FBI's position is, however, that possession of such an apparatus can only be the prerogative of the authoritarian regime and for anyone else to own it amounts to an implicit threat to the government. To have access to the private conversations taking place nationwide, on phones and radio frequencies, is the exclusive right of the repressive state. To no avail does the man point out that if it is the government's prerogative to be in possession of the apparatus, surely they could have manufactured one themselves. There was no malicious intent in the assemblage, only the man's intelligence and creativity. The FBI and the Guatemalan Army leave unconvinced and on their next visit the K'iche' man is taken away and never heard of again.

I suggest that the status of the wonder apparatus manufactured by the K'iche' man be

considered in terms of its relation to secrecy. What the apparatus does is allow access to private, semi-public and public information that one would not be aware of, unless aided by one's talents to assemble such a makeshift technology. Fortuitous access to private and public secrets, and to networks through which secrets circulate, amounts to a transgression which is severely punished by the neo-imperial foreign power and the repressive Guatemalan military state. It seems that only the latter have rightful access to secrets through surveillance, and anyone else intervening in the process of secrecy management can only be a rebel. This coincides with a recurrent theme in my conversations with ex-combatants, namely that it is the very nature of the repressive state that to a significant extent manufactures the subject position of the rebel, and thus draws unwitting individuals into a spiral of accusation, exposure and punishment. Interestingly, accusations very often come from fellow villagers who are enmeshed in a social fabric that quite literally produces insurgency through practices of denunciation, despite the fact that underneath the production of insurgency, there are only individual intelligence and ingenuity. The fashioning and functioning of the apparatus occurs in the public domain, as the K'iche' man makes his fellow villagers participate in the appreciation of his wonderful creation. Through the production of audibility, public secrecy, and the right of access to information and networks so engendered, directly threatens the repressive state's seeming exclusive right to surveillance and secrecy management. Likewise, it is the intelligent generation of audibility which induces the violent repression at the hands of national and foreign power. Luis's narrative is elegantly structured, so that each episode he recounts leads on to another. As the parables unfold, they turn progressively more personal, and the last of the three stories deals with Luis's own experiences. As the young K'iche' man had the talent to assemble a wonderful apparatus out of discarded parts and wooden sticks, thus unexpectedly intercepting telephone and radio transmissions, Luis had similar bricoleur aptitudes.

5.4 *El Rifle*/The Rifle

Luis had applied creativity and ingenuity to the assemblage of a marvellous creation of

his own fashioned out of the debris of a plane crash. He had collected the fragments of the wreckage and made a rifle. Having accidentally fired a shot, he had attracted the attention of his neighbours who had reported the matter to their authorities. Like the K'iche' man, Luis was drawn into a spiral of accusations and was soon visited by Army soldiers.

'Personally, I like to mess around (*traviesar*) with weapons (*armas*). In Sayaxché in 1967, I started assembling/making a 38 calibre rifle (*hacer un fusil calibre 38*) out of some pieces of pipes (*tubos*) of a plane (*avión*) that had crashed (*caer*), and when I had nearly finished it, my father hit it hard and a shot was fired (*meterle un tiro*), he hit the trigger and it exploded. The next day the army came to the house because the neighbours (*vecinos*) had gone to denounce me (*denunciar*), that I was making weapons to kill (*armas para matar*). At five in the morning the army got us out of the house (*nos sacó el ejército de la casa*) and what the officer said to me was that in Guatemala it was prohibited outright (*prohibido terminantemente*) that a person developed intelligence of any inclination the person may be (*que una persona desarrollara inteligencias de la índole que fuera*), that in Guatemala nobody could invent anything (*nadie podía inventarse nada*) not even a minimum (*ni lo mas mínimo*) because it was forbidden (*por que era prohibido*). Where did they take you? I ask. They did not find it on me, because I, being wise (*como sabio*), during the night I put the rifle in an old water well, nineteen meters deep. I tied it to a string (*pita*) and I hung it there (*lo guindé*), they did not find it (*no lo hallaron*), because if they had found it, they would have killed me. What the lieutenant told me was that if the Army realises (*se da cuenta*) and they find a weapon on you (*te encuentran un arma*), that you may have made (*que tu la haigas hecho*), they will burn you alive (*te van a quemar vivo*), because that is the law of the government in Guatemala, because that is an offence (*delito*). I said to him, well, I did not do anything to anybody, those people lied to you (*mentir*), I did not, and how would I know how to do/make things, when I am a *campesino*, I told them, I was raised in the *monte* (*me he criado solo en el monte*), I did not even have any education (*yo no tuve ni escuela*), that is what I told them, that was a lie (*mentira*), but he said to me, you were making that rifle (*el rifle tú los estabas haciendo*), because they came to tell, they saw you (*por que los que fueron a decir, te vieron*). I say, ah, somebody went and told them, somebody accused/denounced you (*la denunció*). Yes, Luis confirms, and no, I said to them, I did not do anything (*no he hecho nada*). Didn't you (*cómo no?*)? He said to me, you did make the rifle (*tú lo hiciste*) and at five in the afternoon you fired a

shot (*reventaron un tiro*). Well then, I said to them, you look for it/find it (*aquí, pues búsquelo*), if you can find it! And that is what he said to me, never again make/do anything else (*nunca más vas a hacer otra cosa*) or try to make/do it (*intentar hacerlo*), because they will kill you/you will be killed (*matar*), this is the law (*ley*) and it is in this way that in Guatemala, the very same governments (*los mismos gobiernos*) have destroyed many intelligent people (*gente inteligente*). So, I do not agree (*estar de acuerdo*) with this destruction (*la destrucción*) because if some people are intelligent (*si una gente es inteligente*) one should use that (*usar*) to see whether they develop more (*desarrollar*), but if one kills them (*matar*), that is not right (*correcto*).

Luis's tripartite narrative illustrates how a climate of suspicion and threats of accusation muddled the truth and produced a social context in which secrets were harboured, accessed, intercepted, exchanged, stolen through violence and deception, and fashioned through creativity, intelligence and ingenuity. While secrets engendered the constant threat of exposure, the repressive system of secrecy management seemed to take on a life of its own and intervened even when (or precisely because) there was no secret to protect, no malicious intent to gain access to secrets. Violence, on the other hand, never appeared to be 'mindless'. In Luis's account, the repressive neo-imperial and/or national state apparatus of surveillance actually engaged in argumentation and allowed for people to make their case. In the last instance however, violence or the threat of violence were always imminent, and served the appropriation, management and control of secrets. Yet, one resorted to telling lies to protect oneself and hid the evidence of one's ingenuity, and hence of guilt, inside a well.

5.5 Binaries: *¡A Vencer o Morir!*

In post-demobilisation times, Luis and his fellow ex-FAR associates were identified and indeed self-identified as 'ex-combatants'. The term *combatiente* (combatant) suggests that guerrilla life was about military strife. Whilst many forms of engagement actually qualified as guerrilla activities,[10] military operations were foundational experiences for many men and women involved in the organisation. In the ethnographic present they

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[10] See the account provided by a FAR *Comandante,* Chapter Six.

often reminisced about *ataques* and *ofensivas* (attacks and offensives). Narratives focussing on the occurrence of military operations presented such temporally defined materialisations of the conflict in terms of a whole consisting of a binary oppositional relation between discrete parts. Tucán, a Kaq'chikel *ex-guerrillero*, recalled his participation in combats in the course of our conversation.

'This is something I cannot forget because those really are moments when one's conscience (*conciencia*) is born, of one being a revolutionary (*revolucionario*) and fighting (*luchar*) against an army. This is no easy task. In all instances, it really is a case of Victory or Death (*allí sí, que A Vencer o Morir*). At that moment in the war (*guerra*) we had to endure it (*aguantar*), we had to do it, because that is the idea, to change the situation of Guatemala (*de cambiar la situación de Guatemala*), so at that time of the war, between different groups (*grupos distintos*), it is a matter of life and death (*vida o muerte*), so that I will never forget, because I participated in many combats against the Army (*ejército*), and not only against the Army, but also against the Army Aviation'.

Tucán recalled his participation in military actions as foundational for the articulation of political conscience and the conviction that social change ought to be fostered in Guatemala. He envisioned the struggle as occurring between distinct groups, namely the Army and the guerrilla, and involvement in military confrontation and political mobilisation more broadly as regulated by the seemingly irrevocable alternative between *Vencer o Morir*, Victory or Death. Whilst the conflict appeared to be structured according to the binary distinction between the Guatemalan Army and the guerrilla, the guerrilla ethos appeared to depend on the all-too significant difference between triumph and annihilation. Many accounts, however, problematised the status of totalities, emphasising instead the partibility of subjects, their course of action and their effects.

5.6 A Desire to Exceed (Oneself)

Carlos was thirty-six years old. He was born in the eastern region of Jutiapa and lived in Escuintla in infancy. During our conversation Carlos told me about his family's move to Petén and noted how, as a young man, he had joined the insurgents moved by a desire to exceed his own condition and that of the people of Guatemala.

'When I was about seven, we moved to Petén, and we lived in the village about twenty kilometres from here. My father was looking for land, and he found a place around Melchor de Mencos, here in Petén. That's where I lived until I was sixteen. It is at the age of sixteen that my involvement in the revolutionary struggle (*involucramiento a la lucha revolucionaria*) began, first as support (*apoyo*), so to speak, to the organisation (*organización*). In this case, the very first form of involvement was to disseminate propaganda (*regar propaganda*), during the night, because this was all clandestine (*clandestino*), and no one was supposed to see how we were intervening (*andar interveniendo*), in information gathering, purchase of foodstuff, and such like. Well, we did it, before joining the fronts (*incorporación a los frentes*), which came later. (...) When I take the decision of joining (*incorporarse*), I decide to communicate this to my parents, but this when it was already the decisive moment of my *incorporación*. So I meet with them and I tell them, well, I need to speak with you both. Well, they were surprised (*ellos sorprendidos*). He surely must be thinking of marrying/being in a relationship (*acompañarse*). Marrying the revolutionary struggle (*lucha revolucionaria*), I said. They were very surprised. In the end, they realised that the decision I was taking was the *incorporación* for the development (*formación*) of the guerrillas in Petén. That was something that surprised them immensely, but at the same time they said to me, well, it is very satisfactory for us that you may be taking this path (*camino*), because, for your information, since 1972 we also have been participating in this struggle (*venir participando en esta lucha*). I did not know that. It is something sad (*triste*) that you may be off, because we know that you are going to a war (*guerra*), and a war, as you know, is of casualties (*muertos*), injured (*heridos*) and suffering (*sufrimiento*). But we know that you are going to do it for all of us the poor (*los pobres*) who are suffering (*padecer*) in our country. So we wish you good luck (*buena suerte*), behave yourself (*pórtate bien*), with all the discipline (*toda disciplina*) as you have always done. We know you will have many successes (*éxitos*), and do not forget us. These are the words that they said to me in the end. So that with their support, I took the decision to join, although of course I had come to that decision already, as I was saying to you before, despite the

fact that I was a minor (*menor de edad*). Age was not a limit that could keep me (*detener*) with them. Instead, I longed for something more (*desear algo más*), which was not only to fight for them, but also for the people (*pueblo*) who have always needed it (*necesitar*)'.

Carlos commented on his decision to join the guerrilla at the age of sixteen, noting the youthful fervour and political conviction through which he was able to transcend the restrictions and bounds of village life. When he reached the guerrilla camp for the first time, Carlos told me of how he was not the only one who had willingly exceeded himself and his condition. Through separate routes, over twenty new recruits who had known each other previously, but were unaware of their respective guerrilla collaboration, came together on the occasion of their first guerrilla training. As they were acquainted with weapons, they began to experience a newly fashioned sense of commonality.

'I have to tell you that it was something very pleasurable (*muy agradable*), because in the end we realised that many of us who joined (*incorporarse*), and it was a group of over twenty of us, in the end, we had all known each other before (*conocidos*), but because of the clandestinity (*clandestinidad*) of the organisation, we did not know in what each of us was (*en que estábamos cada uno*) and only there we finally realised. So, there were people from different villages there, and that is how we started and it was very nice (*bonito*) to see the first rifles (*fusil*), although very few of them, of course. For we had to have weapons to make front to the enemy (*enemigo*), and the enemy in this case was the Army. So it turns out that there are about twenty rifles, and in additions there were only rifle carbines (*carabina*), M1 and there were also some shot guns (*escopetas de un tiro*), calibre 16 and 20 millimetres. Well, I was lucky because in the end the one who was in command there knew me and on some occasions he had made use of me as instructor to train (*entrenar*) *la milicia*,[11] so in view of the degree of trust (*confianza*) that there existed, he allowed that a rifle were given to me, one of the automatic rifles! [laughter] I was lucky in that instance, and certainly we begun to feel the warm manner (*manera tan calida*), of brothers (*tan de hermanos*), which was common among us'.

According to Carlos' recollections, military training posited the Army as the common

enemy for the new recruits. Nevertheless, in as much as there had been multiple and discrete paths leading individual recruits to the guerrilla camp, there would be manifold, complex and secretive practices of simulation and dissimulation through which the coherence of parts, wholes and their relations may periodically be sought or, indeed, undermined as they became embroiled in the partialities of the conflict.

5.7 Doubling and Insurgent Dissimulations: *Dos Caras* (Two Faces/Faced)

Nicolás was a Q'eqchi' ex-combatant whose ex-combatant status was that of '*disperso*', that is, in the aftermath of demobilisation he had returned to his family. I met him by chance, as we converged in the same village. Nicolás was visiting his daughter, whilst I had gone on this trip with Flor, who wanted to visit a relative said to be critically ill. Flor introduced me to Nicolás' family and in the evening we sat outside the house to converse in the dark. Nicolás recounted the episodes that led to his involvement in the organisation, noting strategies devised to undermine the guerrilla/Army binary.

'In 1985 there was strife (*pelearse*) in my *parcela*[12] between the army and the guerrilla, and there were deaths, about thirteen army casualties, and for this reason they [the army] were angry (*tenia coraje*) with them [the guerrilla]. They took me to the *parcela*: 'Here it's where the *postas* were yesterday'. Ah, okay, I said to them, but I did not understand (*entendía*) them, I did not get the point (*no le agarraba el rollo*), for, what were '*postas*'? We say '*postas*' when a tree is planted (*sembrar on palo*), I said to them. Well, you do not understand, now this is going to be your downfall (*te vas a caer*), son of a bitch (*hijo de la gran puta*). He [the Army officer] was angry (*enojado*). Look, I said to him, I did not go anywhere (*no salí*). And still you have the face to tell me that that it's not true *(todavía tenes cara para decir que no es cierto)* – he asked. Yes, of course, I said to him, I am not involved in anything (*yo no estoy metido a nada*)'.

On that occasion, the Army officer was satisfied that Nicolás was not involved in

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[11] *La Milicia*, that is, civilian supporters.

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insurgent activities. Nicolás was thus taken to Poptún to receive training as a *patrullero*, that is, as a member of the civil patrols. As Nicolás said, the Army entrusted him with the role of Civil Patrol Coordinator of his own village.

'When I got to Poptún, they even gave me a duty/official post (*carga*)! Civil Patrol Coordinator (*coordinador de patrulleros*)! Of the Civil Patrols?! I [Silvia] ask, in disbelief. *Andále!*[13] Confirms Nicolás emphatically. I explode in a loud *Púchica!*[14] They gave me that job but I would work **two faces** (*pero yo trabajaba dos caras*) so that they would not pay attention to me, but what I was most sure of was that we have to be part of the guerrilla struggle (*lucha guerrillera*). Well, since that time I joined the guerrilla struggle (*me incorporé a la lucha guerrillera*). In the Civil Patrols we would just go around (*pa' arriba y pa' abajo*), what's going on, there is nothing happening, and if anyone armed comes, what do we do, *muchá*? Well, we don't do anything (*no hacemos nada*). In any case, today we see this hamlet (*aldea*) is free, but the day will come when the war will plunge upon us (*va a llegar la guerra sobra de nosostros*), and that was how it was (*así fue*). It always arrived/got there [it came upon us] (*llegó siempre*). I went to *la montaña* in 1985. As I was already asking questions about what was happening/may happen (*qué se pasara*), well, I am clear (*estar claro*), for there are times one does not know what to think (*hay veces pues que no halla como uno*), but when one is clear (*entonces de estar claro*), we decided to go, as we already used to go and visit the *compañeros* (*siempre me pasaba a ver con los compañeros*). My family knew that I had stayed behind [*en la montaña*], but they did not know whether I was alive (*mi familia sabía que aquí me quedé, pero no sabía si todavía vivía*). I was in the Mardoqueo Front, with Comandante Pedro. About twenty-five *compañeros* [Q'eqchi'] from the same hamlet, we all joined (*nos incorporamos*). Some were able to endure it (*aguantar*), some left' (my emphasis).

As a guerrilla sympathiser, Nicolás infiltrated the system of counter-insurgency. As he described it in the course of the interview, for a time prior to joining the guerrilla files *en la montaña*, he would 'work two faces' as apathetic *Comisionado Militar* and active guerrilla informer. Practices of dissimulation were in fact not exclusive to the guerrilla,

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[12] *Parcela* is a plot of cultivated land.
[13] Expression that indicates assent.

and rather a domain of counter-insurgency artifice extensively deployed by the Army.

5.8 Doubling and Counter-insurgent Simulations: *Botas de Hule*[15]

Nestor said that he was absolutely certain that the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* had no links whatever to the site of Las Dos Erres, where the Army massacred an entire village in December 1982 (CEH 1999, ODHAG 1998).[16] Nestor said:

'We had a camp (*campamento*) north of Palestina and we had planned an action (*accionar*) on the Libertad-Subín road, and thus we had to pass in the vicinity of Las Dos Erres [later the site of a massacre], where we would habitually pass by. But what we would do was to avoid it (*evadir*) [the settlement], so that we would not be seen (*ver*), or we may go by at night, but we never let ourselves be known there (*nunca nos dimos a conocer allí*) and people never knew about the

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[14] Colloquial expression indicating, in this instance, surprise.

[15] Literally, rubber boots. They were distinctive of guerrilla attire.

[16] The Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH 1999: 347-411, Case Study No. 31, Annex 1, Volume 1) notes that the village Las Dos Erres was founded in 1978 under the aegis of FYDEP and its colonisation policy. In early 1982 the guerrilla entered the neighbouring town of Las Cruces to hold a political meeting and purchase supplies. The Army responded by installing a military outpost (*destacamento*) in Las Cruces. Following the massacre in the village Josefinos in April of the same year, the area became progressively more militarised. Army recognisance actions in the village of Las Dos Erres also became more frequent. In September 1982 FAR carried out an attack against military objectives in Las Cruces. The *Comisionado Militar* of Las Cruces requested that the village of Las Dos Erres put forward individuals who may take part in the activities of the *Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil*, but the request was rejected. Rumours begun to spread that the villagers of Las Dos Erres may be guerrilla sympathisers. The Army searched the village and found a sack with the letters 'FAR' inscribed on it. The sack belonged to one of the founders of the community, Federico Aquino Ruano and thus bore his initials. Nevertheless the sack was said to amount to proof of guerrilla activity in the village (CEH ibid). About a month later, and as recalled by Nestor in the course of our conversation, FAR carried out an ambush on the road to Palestina. The Commission for Historical Clarification notes that the Army responded by sending a platoon of eighteen men of the Kaibiles Unit, namely the special branch in charge of commando operations. These were joined by forty other Kaibiles. On 6 December 1982, the 58 Kaibiles entered the village dressed as *guerrilleros*. The Commission for Historical Clarification notes that the order was that the fifty-eight Kaibiles wear olive green shirts, civilian trousers and that they carry ordinary weapons. The massacre begun in the early hours of 6 December, as the Kaibiles disguised as *guerrilleros* killed the infants first. Rape, torture and further killing followed. The dead were thrown in a well and by 7 December 1982, the entire population of the village with the exception of a child had been murdered. The Kaibiles also kept two girls alive for three more days. The girls were made to dress in the same attire adopted by the Kaibiles in their disguise to reinforce the perception that the massacre had been carried out by the guerrilla. According to the Commission for Historical Clarification, an eye witness to the massacre, i.e. an ex-Kaibil, commented on the added verisimilitude attained by having the two girls with them thus: '*la guerrilla siempre carga mujeres*', that is, 'the guerrilla always has women with them' (CEH, ibid). The girls were raped and eventually murdered. In the mid-1990s forensic anthropologists identified the remains of 162 individuals in Las Dos Erres, whilst the Commission for Historical Clarification ascertained the identities of 178 of the

guerrilla (*la gente nunca supo*). Nevertheless, they had desire/intention to collaborate in practice (*deseo práctico*) because the Army really tested them (*probar*). According to the information we have, the Army dressed themselves up as *guerrillero* (*el ejército se vistió de guerrillero*), entered the community, the people welcomed them (*recibir*), they gave them food (*le dio comida*), and the Army, in order to confirm (*confirmar*) that they were *guerrilleros*, grabbed the *Comisionados Militares* and they killed them right in front of the people [villagers]. When the soldiers who had dressed up as *guerrilleros* retreated (*retirarse*), they go and dress as the Army (*vestir de militares*) and return (*regresar*) to suppress the people/village (*reprimir el pueblo*) saying why had they allowed that their *Comisionados Militares* be killed (*por qué habían dejado que mataran sus comisionados militares*). This was the justification (*justificación*) for further violence'.

The narrative of the Army dressing up as the guerrilla was a common theme in my conversations with people in Petén. Many had commented on the indeterminacy and ambivalence in the Army/guerrilla distinction. Arguments that whilst there may be *guerrilleros* in the Army ranks, the guerrilla may be made up of Army officers were common. In my conversation with Nestor, I spoke of an 'image confusion' (*confusión de imagen*) and Nestor set out to qualify how any confusion was the product of specific counter-insurgency tactics deployed by the Army to confound the population, and, crucially, to mystify the *guerrilleros/as*. As Nestor said:

'There were other cases. In the guerrilla we used *botas de hule* exclusively and the Army used *botas de hule* to confound (*confundir*) people, or to confound us (*nosotros mismos*), that it had not been the Army that had passed by a certain place. Or else, they would dress, or would arm themselves with the same arms as us. But many succeeded (*lograr*) in identifying/discerning/discriminating (*identificar*) [between the two], because the Army soldier (*soldado del ejército*) and the guerrilla soldier (*soldado guerrillero*) were not the same (*igual*) in the way they treated people (*forma de tratar la gente*). There was a form/manner (*forma*), it was the form/manner that people would identify (*identificar*), and how people would identify the Army. Because whilst the Army may be dressed like a *guerrillero* (*estuviera vestido de guerrillero*), the manner (*trato*), the form in which to address (*forma de dirigirse*) a *campesino*, and poor people (*gente umilde*) was completely different. For we never threatened them

victims (CEH ibid).

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(*amenazar*), we never pointed a rifle to an unarmed civilian (*civil desarmado*), we would speak with them in a form/manner (*forma*), like this, soft (*suave*), without affecting them (*afectarlos*) [detrimentally]. On the contrary, soldiers address (*dirigirse*) civilians undermining them (*hacer de menos*), they treat them with contempt'.

Practices of simulation and dissimulation complicated the binaries on which the conflict was predicated, chief among them the distinction between the guerrilla and the Army. Nevertheless, Nestor was adamant that the practices of simulation deployed by the Army failed complete mimesis. Despite the cunning deployment of guerrilla attire, the Army never mimicked guerrilla ethics correctly, and that is where the categorical distinction lay.

5.9 Doubling in Combat: Brothers

Nicolás had a brother who also joined the guerrilla. As he noted, their fates were to be remarkably different.

'I had a brother, he stayed [in the guerrilla] and died. He was working (*trabajar*) [in the guerrilla], he was working with some *compas* of the village. They were carrying a sewing machine (*máquina*), to sew waterproof clothing (*costurar ropa de repelente*) which was being used for the war (*guerra*). This took them a few days, but they did not realise, or perhaps someone went to tell (*avisar*), and when they came out they fell in the trap (*caer en la trampa*). The military got them. I looked out for them for fifteen days. I looked for them again in the capital when the Peace was signed, but I could not see them, we never saw them again'.

Nestor also had a brother, Rafael. I got to know them both, and one day I asked whether they would like me to interview them together. Nestor and Rafael kindly agreed, and on the day we all went to their home and conversed together for a while. Rafael, whose background I was not well acquainted with, began by telling us about his experiences.

'We used to live in a village in Petén [the site of a massacre] at the time, I was a bit off the rails (*desacarrilado*) we could say, I liked drinking too much. My brothers were already organised (*estar organizado*) [in the guerrilla], we used to talk a bit, we celebrated the triumph of the Sandinistas which was freeing itself (*librarse*) in Nicaragua, and we would identify with that war (*guerra*) and would comment that it would be good that something similar would occur in Guatemala. However, my brothers were already organised [in the guerrilla], but they never said anything to me, perhaps because of the situation, and for the fact that they had to be very discreet (*muy discretos*). They thought it was impudent (*descocado*) that I should be so drunk (*pasado de copas*). They feared I would talk to people who may harm us (*jugar una mala pasada*), so they resolved to never say anything to me. That is how in 1979 I left the village and headed south. I was twenty. And where I was, in the south of the country, in the course of an action of the army (*operative del ejército*), they captured me (*capturar*) to go into military service, and my brothers stayed on in Petén. I was in the army for thirty months. Army training was a bit rough (*brusco*). The reality is that in the Army the training is not very professional (*professional*), I don't know if things are different now, but at the time the training was quite rough. My brothers in the guerrilla had training that was superior to that of the Army. I took a course (*sacar un curso*) in Jutiapa, in the Military Zone there. The course was called *Curso de Tigre* [Course of the Tiger]. In that course one would learn some elements (*elementos*), for instance, what they called '*Sonido de Olores*' [The Sound of Smell/Scent]. One would be taken to a place and they would play things (*sonar cosas*), and they would put meat to roast (*asar carne*), and grass (*hierba*), and one would have to identify the smells. But this was not an intense course. Afterwards they sent me to the area of operations, which is what they called it, they sent me to Nebaj.[17] We were in Nebaj for six months between 1979 and 1980. We were the first soldiers to get there, on the landing strip north of Nebaj, and that is where we installed a *destacamento*. We had no contact with the guerrilla. We would be told that they would come, they would send us papers/messages (*mandar papeles*), and people would inform us that the *guerrilleros* were over there, but personally; our *compañia* never had a confrontation (*enfrentamiento*), with the exception of an unsuccessful attempt (*conato*), where they [the guerrilla] put a *claymore* [Claymore mine] and slightly wounded a soldier. Afterwards we went to look for them, but there was no trace (*rastro*) of them. That was all. The matter got progressively more intense (*agudizarse*), our compañía was *called* 'The First Fusileros Tojiles' (*la primaria de fusileros Tojiles*), and was relived by 'The Third Fusileros Jaguares' (*la*

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[17] Nebaj, in the *departamento* of Quiché, is one of the three *municipios* of the Ixil triangle (c.f. Stoll 1983). The area was the site of the most virulent counter-insurgency campaigns of the conflict. The guerrilla group operating there was the *Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* (EGP) (CEH 1999).

tercera fusileros Jaguares), from Jutiapa. Of those six-hundred-and-sixty soldiers that made up the Jaguares, only fourteen returned to the Military Zone. The rest were annihilated (*aniquilar*) by the *compas* [the guerrilleros]. Luckily I did not take part in any counter-insurgency action, because now I would regret it (*doler*), if had done it. That is, my ideal has always been a revolutionary one (*mi ideal siempre ha sido revolucionario*), but where I was I could not do anything against the current of the army (*la corriente del ejército*). Now I am happy that I can be of use in some tasks related to the party. I think that the best thing my brothers did was not allowing me to join (*incorporarse*) [the guerrilla], because I may not be alive today if I did'.

Following Rafael's account, Nestor confirmed that many of the reasons why he and his brothers had not involved Rafael in the organisation was because they would not willingly recruit a relative in the organisation unless the relative displayed the necessary will and conviction. Nestor then recounted how they had reunited in the mid-1990s.

'We met in front of McDonald's, El Tecolote, in Guatemala City in 1995. And since the day we met, we have not parted (*cuando nos juntamos, no nos despegamos*). At times, when I was in combat, (*estar combatiente*), I remembered them, not just him [his brother, who is present], but also my other brother who was also taken to military service (*el servicio*). When I was in the combat line (*línea de combate*), I would remember them and as I was in the midst of combat, I would think, I may be shooting one of my brothers (*a lo mejor me estoy tirando con uno de mis hermanos*). As there were many [soldiers] from *Oriente* (*orietanos*)[18] in the military files in Petén, I would often hear the eastern inflection in their voice (*la voz caballita*). And one day I had an altercation (*maltratar*) with one of them, there were about five meters between us, and *cabal*,[19] I worked out (*atinar*) that he was from Oriente (*orientano*), and he even told me his name. I did not want to tell him mine, but he was mistreating me (*maltratar*), he would say, with you, I will kill ten *guerrilleros*. I have already killed five, and with you it will be six. *Dále, pues, dále* [get on with it], I would say to him, and I left him there. What I would think was, that the likelihood (*a lo mejor*) was that it was my brother in front of me (*con un hermano estaba yo en frente*). He [the soldier] was from the *compañía Tojil* and in 1983 we annihilated a whole *compañía*, and it was the Tojiles. We had a three-hour long combat, we [the guerrilla] were two *compañías*, and

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[18] Eastern regions of the country.
[19] Expression meaning 'precisely'.

they were one. We rounded them up and annihilated them (*aniquilar*). Some got out alive because they fled, or rather, the platoon (*pelotón*) who was with the *head* (*jefe*) of the compañía managed to escape the confrontation, and the rest were left there (*el resto se quedó allí*)'.

Nestor recalled how in the midst of combat he had seen his own brother in the enemy standing about five metres away from him. Through a merographic analogy, he had seen his own kind in his nemesis. The merographic analogy created a connection between two seemingly discrete entities, namely the Army and the guerrilla, through the image of his brother facing Nestor during combat. The merographic effort was one of envisaging a connection, that is a scale of sameness, in what presented itself as difference, that is, as a connection from another angle (cf. Strathern 1992a).

5.10 Proximity and Adjunction

Carlos told me that following demobilisation procedures, some ex-combatants had gone to meet Army officers they had fought against during the war. Accompanied by MINUGUA military personnel, they entered the *Zona Militar*, that is, the military base. The encounter between the *ex-guerrilleros* and the Army officers engendered the articulation of merographic analogies by both parties, and produced a series of reciprocal revelations. Disclosures revealed how the parts of seemingly discrete entities had been in complex relations to each other. Early on in our conversation, Carlos posited a series of distinctions between the guerrilla and the Army, and the Army officers and the soldiers. Carlos said:

'Well, I think that in our case, [in the aftermath of demobilisation], the majority of people could talk to them [the Army] (*la mayor parte de la gente, sí, venimos y nos podemos platicar con ellos [el Ejército]*), we shook hands (*nos estrechamos la mano*), because in the end, as far as I am concerned, the point was to understand that in those times, to undertake/sustain an offensive activity (*activida ofensiva*) was just and necessary (*justo y necesario*), to be hostile to them *(pues hostil en contra de ellos*), but today this is no longer possible, although one never stops carrying

on (*mantener*) feeling that anger *(coraje)*, in the memory of all they did/perpetrated, *verdad*? But in this case, this is more towards those high rank officers (*altos oficiales*). For instance, if you meet a high ranking officer you know that he intervened (*intervenir*) in that war that is no longer (*finalizar*), and that in one way or other they are responsible for many instances of violations of human rights (*hechos de violaciones de los derechos humanos*). And it is not the same for the soldiers (*soldados*), because soldiers go [into the army] for three years and then they leave, whereas the officer, in order to graduate as officer, they spend a period of seven years directly in the Army for their training (*formación*). So this is where, in the end, in one way or another, one feels rejection (*rechazo*) for another, a rejection we still hold, because we know that in one way or other, we have to carry on erasing it (*borrando*)'.

Carlos then proceeded in his account of how he had met high-ranking Army officers in post-demobilisation times.

'So I recall that soon after I demobilised (*desmovilizarse*), I met some colonels of the Military Zone of Cobán [Alta Verapaz]. Indeed, there I met the second in command (*segundo jefe*). And then I also met another colonel who was third in command (*tercer jefe*). I had that opportunity. So, they tell me, okay, but where exactly were you mostly, and at that exact moment a friend approaches and calls out 'Oswaldo'. They knew of 'Oswaldo' [one of Carlos's pseudonyms], so, you are Marvin Tánchez [his first name]? [They ask]. Correct (*cierto*), I reply. In that case, we have heard of you (*hemos sabido de vos*). Of course, I say to them, for you keep your intelligence (*inteligencia*), you of the military still have it intact! We know you move round a lot, they say to me. Of course, that's correct, I say to them. And when are you going to come and visit us? When the opportunity may arise, and indeed, rest assured, we come and visit there (*llegar*). And that's how it was, I arrived there some time later. And when I got there and was there with them, only the second and third in command were present. Of course, I was accompanied by an official of the military corps of the United Nations Verification Mission to Guatemala, should problems arise. And so we got there and when they saw us, well, [they were] happy, well, welcome, they say, here we are, did you want to speak to us? Of course, we come to visit you, not just to see (*ver*) you, we come to converse a bit (*platicar un poco*). And after three minutes that we were there talking, everything stopped, the Colonel sprung up, the Second in Command, and left to welcome the Colonel of the military base, first in command. He had been told we were there. Go,

pass them to the office, he tells them, and so we went all the way there, inside their office, inside the *comandancia'*.

I sense the strained and chilling aspect of the story and say to Carlos, you entered the lion's den.

Yes, that's where we stayed for a time, in the *comandancia*, that's where we conversed and they were, I can tell you, very cordial. The only provocation came from the second in command, who says, You, were you ever here? For good or ill (*ni a buenas, ni a malas*)? Never, I say to him. Never did they send me to carry out an action here, I say to him, my superiors never sent me. And neither did you have the capacity to bring me here by force (*traer aquí a puro huevo*).

Carlos was an extremely confident and charming man, with a characteristic propensity for irony and wit.[20] But when he recounted of his visit to the Military Base, he seemed, suddenly, profoundly vulnerable. Nevertheless, he pressed on with the story and proceeded to reflect how merographic connections between the two discrete domains of the guerrilla and the Army were articulated in post-demobilisation times. Carlos referred to a merographic analogy from the perspective of the Army.

'That's exactly how I said it to them/what I said to them (*Así se lo dije, va*). So, as I was saying, the second jefe was the one who said that, not the third jefe. The first jefe, what he expresses is that a lot of work was needed at the level of the Army officials, because there was still great

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[20] An example of Carlos' subtle sense of the absurd unravelled as we discussed *formación militar*, that is, the military training he had received *en la montaña*. During our conversation, I asked the most audacious of questions: did you ever know where the arms you were given in 1981 came from? Carlos politely said, never, never, these were very delicate matters, you understand, so we would endeavour not to even ask where they were from. I suddenly became very conscious of the blunder, and added that the reason for the question was to ascertain who supported and indeed who did not support FAR. Although this was not in any way redeeming, Carlos ever more graciously replied that, of course, he understood what I meant, but reiterated that as far as he was concerned, he never dared inquiring about the source of the arms he handled. I was mortified, but not sufficiently so, and to avert disgrace, I resorted to referring to something another ex-combatant had said. I pointed out that I had been told the very first arms of FAR, the very first that were handled, came from Vietnam. When I said this, I used a peculiar expression. I referred to the weapons in the diminutive and endearing form, *las primeritas que se manejaron*, as if arms were tender, precious beings. Here I was literally repeating what I had been told on a different occasion by an ex-combatant who had envisaged the first inflow of arms to come from Vietnam. Carlos chuckled at my remark and with sarcastic composure said, *sí pues, sin duda alguna pues!* Yes, of course, no doubt about it. I learned eventually that if he never asked, I should not ask either.

rejection (*rechazo*) towards us and he asks me if on our part this is also the case. Well, yes, I say to him, there is also that, but that is what one has to work on to strengthen this process we are currently experiencing, it is a commitment (*compromiso*) which in the end we have to uphold, you and us, and contribute with our attitude (*actitud*) so that it may progressively get stronger (*fortalecer*). Excellent, he says to me. But I want to tell you something very special, he says to me. Of an opportunity that arose when we are called, he tells me, to a meeting in Honduras, they called us, and they did not tell us that with whom we were going to meet, but when the plane was about to land, they tell us, you will now have the opportunity to meet Officers of the guerrilla, of the URNG, who come to dialogue with us. I was very surprised, he says (*Yo sorprendido, dice*). And it transpires that, this is a meeting of Army Officers (*oficiales del Ejército*), I am talking about colonels, about officers, some captains (*capitanes*), so he says that his surprise was that there he meets some of his very best friends, of a time when he was a students in an institute, and that best friend of his then is whom we know as El Moreno Méndez, Rodolfo Sanchéz[21]

Manolo![22] I cry out, and Carlos and I laugh.

So then, he says, it is incredible (*increible*) to see you here, and imagine, he says to me, I would have never believed, after all that, that he would be so totally leftwing (*totalmente de izquierda*), and I would be rightwing (*derecha*), because he was in the guerrilla, and I was integrated here in the Army. We stayed there with them for a good spell (*bonito rato*), drinking soft drinks (*aguas*). In what we can, here we are going to help you, and here in the vicinity, with trust (*con confianza*), here are the telephones of the military zone, should you need them, and in that, we get ready to leave. On our way out they stop us, there, at the checkpoint at the entrance, and again, for the two of us who were demobilised combatants (*desmovilizados*), Tucán and I, they say, and your identity papers (*su identificación*)? They say. Look, I say to them, I am Marvin Tánchez. And what is your profession, they say to me. (*Y su profesión, me dicen*). Well, up to not long ago, it was *guerrillero* (*bueno, hasta hace poco tiempo, era de guerrillero*), I say to them. Now, I don't know, because I don't know exactly to what profession I will dedicate myself. The guy laughed. So then, what? Are you going to keep us here detained (*detenidos*)? No, *qué les vaya* bien. Okay, *gracias*. And so we left'.

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[21] Nickname, Pseudonym, Name and Surname.
[22] Pseudonym.

Carlos recalled how during a secret meeting between Army officers of the guerrilla and the Army, the guerrilla and the Army had revealed themselves by a merographic connection as marked by both their proximity to each other and their respective belonging to different domains. Carlos concluded thus:

'There was also another opportunity, which also was very interesting, during the phase of demobilisation (*desmovilización*). Having already demobilised, and the *compañeros* being [back] in the hamlets (*aldeas*), there were some provocations (*provocaciones*) on the part of the some units of the army (*unidades del ejercito*) against some *desmovilizados*. So they came and informed our *compañeros*. We then spoke to the Army and the Army expressed a commitment to patrol (*hacer una gira*) the various areas and gather (*reconcentrar*) again the *desmovilizados*, the populations who may be there and who may have been *incorporados combatientes*, in an attempt to begin establishing and maintaining a contact (*contacto*) with the population and specify to them what the functions of the army would be from then on. So, we went, we went with them, there were two *coroneles*, one who was second in command Ricardo Saguierre, was the second in command of the Military Zone of Puerto Barrios. There was also the second in command lieutenant colonel Gonzales, who was the second in command of the Naval Base of the Atlantic.

They were very impressed by the fact that the population, when one stopped to observe, would come to hug me (*abrazar*), would take off my rucksack to carry it themselves, and could not stop conversing (*platicar*) with me. And they said, Carlos, you are well known around here (*eres conocido por acá*). No, not really, I reply. No, they say, one can see they know you (*se conoce que te conocen*), and that they appreciate you (*apreciar*) very much. And how did you achieve (*lograr*) all this? It has been an enormous sacrifice (*sacrificio*), I say to them, I think that what is most exact (*exacto*) is to have fought for reasons so just (*justo*) that this population has suffered (*padecer*), that is how. Well, I can tell you that they [the Army officers] did not feel too secure (*tranquilo*), how shall is say this? They were feeling bad (*mal*), for the fact that although they were the highest authorities (*autoridades máximas*), they were not regarded and treated in the same way. But it was obvious/inevitable (*lógico*), that the population would express this, *verdad*? And on we went together, and with MINUGUA. Yes, we know we are under surveillance (*controlados*), but this I can tell you, that the conditions which have been created in our country

have to be strengthened. And I think that this is the process in which we have been, to the extent that should they not respect us, this may cause a new conflict. But I think that the conscience (*conciencia*) has been, on our part and on the part of the army, that it does not suit us (*corresponder*), that we do not really have the conditions, nationally or internationally, to develop a new war (*guerra*)'.

5.11 *Guerrilleros* and Soldiers, Sons of the *Campesinado*

Maynor, an ex-combatant in his fifties told me about his conversion to Roman Catholicism in post-Peace Accords times. In his account, merographic connections between the domain of the Army and that of the guerrilla conjured up the effect of a different domain where the distinction was no longer valid. Maynor referred to '*el campesinado*', the *campesino people* and noted how both guerrilleros/as and soldiers belonged to it. In the scale of the '*campesinado*' different orders of connection of affinity and difference appeared. Maynor said:

'*Bueno*, now I am going to tell you. I am persevering (*perseverar*) in the Church, albeit with some sorrow (*pena*). Because those people who are more backwards (*la gente que es mas atrasadita*) are already saying, look, he is in the Church because he is afraid (*tener miedo*), but I don't know fear any longer (*y yo el miedo si ya no lo conzco*), I am no longer afraid (*miedo yo no le tengo*). Respect (*respeto*), yes, for everyone. I talk to soldiers, to anyone, I respect anyone, but I no longer fear anyone (*tener miedo*). But, respect, yes (*Mi respeto si*). No anger (*coraje*). Everyone is free, and God will give to everyone, depending on his or her life on earth. And more so/worse with the army (*peyor con el ejército*). If I reach the knowledge that the army, the soldiers were not culpable/guilty (*si llego al conocimiento que el ejército, los soldado no tuvieron la culpa*). No. They put the soldier there, they told him, this needs to be done, and it's an order. Well then, those who are truly responsible for that are the Governments of the time, those who were in office at the time, and the high military ranks (*los altos jefes militares*). The soldier is below (*el soldado está abajo*), executing orders issued by superiors (*cumpliendo ordenes a los jefes*). If he does not execute orders, they pass him to the left (*si este no cumple ordenes, lo pasan a la izquierda*) because he does not do his duty (*porque este no cumple*), this is a sign (*seña*) that he supports the guerrilleros. But the soldier is son of the *campesinos* (*pero el soldado, es hijo de los campesinos*),

it is not his fault (*culpa*), while the superior is son of the rich (*el jefe es hijo de un rico*), and orders are executed and are not to be challenged (*y ordenes se cumplen y no se discuten*). Hence, this is my dialectics *(dialectica)*, it is not the army's fault because they are humane people (*gente humana*) and all soldiers come from the *campesinado* (*y todo el soldado viene del campesinado*). That is where they come from. Soldiers come from the *campesinado* (*del campesinado viene el soldado*). Yes, this is how I explain this to you (*si, eso yo se lo comento asi*)', (my emphasis).

5.12 Conclusion: Merographic Analogies

Guerrilla struggle, as Tucán, Nicolás, Carlos, Nestor and Rafael imagined it, was not strictly a confrontation between discrete entities, such as the Army and the guerrilla. Rather, in guerrilla representations of the conflict, violence and ambivalence were closely linked and produced numerous connections. Guerrilla subjects displayed merographic capacities, as they negotiated connections between and among discrete domains, with Nicolás belonging to both as a *Comisionado Militar*, guerrilla informer and later combatant. Nestor was able to see his own kind, in the guise of his brother, in his nemesis, namely the Army soldier standing five metres away from him. These *guerrilleros* noted how the Army had attempted to mimic guerrilla merographic abilities, and as part of counter-insurgency tactics tried to appear as the guerrilla, to confound the perception of domains of the population, and the guerrilla themselves. The merographic abilities of the guerrilla and the population were greater than those of the Army, in their capacities to see and replicate connections *and* distinctions. The sensory training Rafael received in the Army aimed to prepare him to both smell and hear distinctions, but as he conceded, the guerrilla surpassed the Army in this respect. Through merographic connections, domains were augmented and supplemented, revealing them as adjunct. When Carlos and his parents revealed (to each other) their distinct trajectories of participation in the guerrilla, the 'guerrilla' as a domain widened. In turn, in post demobilisation times, it was revealed to Carlos how those who had been his leaders in the guerrilla struggle had been close to the same Army officers he had fought against. The latter was not only Carlos's revelation of adjunctiveness and connection: the experience of the high ranking Army officer who recounted the story had at first been merographic, –

he met the *Comandante guerrillero* only to find they had been best friends at school. Merographic connections and the ability to entertain partial analogies generated new domains, in which connections were reconfigured. Thus, according to Maynor, the soldiers and guerrilleros/as both belonged to the *campesino people*, whilst army officers and the rich occupied a different domain. The ability to imagine merographic connections is suggestive of thick nihilism – post-plural ethnographic resolutions of truth into value. In the next chapter I explore the expansion and contraction of value in guerrilla moral orders and scales of relatedness.

Chapter 6

Sociality, Substance and Moral Orders

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explore processes of constitution of guerrilla sociality and relationality. I argue that from accounts given by members of the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes* there emerge a number of perspectives on their experience of guerrilla life. Different perspectives may be said to offer different scales through which guerrilla sociality was imagined – by those who participated in it. Plurality of perspective, and of scale, reveals guerrilla practices through which multiple socialities and moral orders were brought into existence during the struggle, each entailing distinctive forms of differentiation and conjunction among combatants. In view of this, I argue that guerrilla sociality was constituted through multiple modes of relatedness and consider how guerrilla perspectives on sociality thus revealed may be connected to those imagined by anthropology through the notion of weak thought.

First I discuss how in the account provided by a FAR *Comandante*, the guerrilla was envisaged as an entity composed of three substances, namely 'information', 'logistics' and 'combatants'. A tripartite distinction was also drawn between different aspects and modalities of struggle, namely 'armed struggle', 'the political struggle of the masses', and 'the political-diplomatic struggle'. Each substance, as each strand of insurgent activities, was part of an all-inclusive vision provided by the *Comandante*. The *Comandante* also commented on the necessity of managing production, reproduction and circulation of substances, and the difficulty in coordinating the pace of different fronts of struggle. I argue that the management of the three substances, which were envisioned to make up the guerrilla, coincided with the articulation of multiple socialities and moral orders. Further, I note that the comprehensiveness that characterised the vision of the *Comandante*, with its distinctive lexicon and modalities of division, multiplication and

connection, was never replicated in parts or as a whole in my conversations with ex-combatants. Conversely, the *Comandante*'s vision may come across as partial and incomplete when contrasted with and complemented by the vision of guerrilla sociality offered by *ex-guerrilleros/as*. Switching from the scale inherent in the *Comandante*'s perspective to that of the combatants, it appeared that ex-combatants envisioned guerrilla sociality as a moral order based on sameness and sharing. This point was made with reference to the ways in which activities were organised in clandestine life. For instance, most ex-combatants remembered enduring hunger and malnutrition during the war and commented on the constant lack of proper food provision. Nevertheless, they recalled how all available food was shared. Food preparation was also referred to as an instance in which everybody was truly the same, as men and women regardless of rank had to part-take in food preparation. Ex-combatants recounted how *tamales guerrilleros* were made with just maize and water, often with not even lime to properly cook the corn. *Tamales guerrilleros* had often no salt, as salt was difficult to acquire unless funds and channels for purchase and delivery were available. Life in the guerrilla was remembered as a moral order established through homogenising practices based on sharing. Such a moral order was one of many which coexisted simultaneously, some enduring in time more than others.

As an example of an ephemeral moral order, and one geared towards the regulation of specific scales of difference of gender and sexuality, I refer to marriage practices among *guerrilleros/as*. Whilst in Petén I met a small number of ex-combatants who spoke of how they or others had married 'by arms'. Marriage practices in insurgent movements are well documented (Barnes 1991, Bhebhe and Ranger 1991, Kampwirth 2002, Kriger 1992, Randall 1981, Urdang 1979, West 2000 Wilson 1991).[1] Here I refer to the account

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1 Discussion of marriage practices in insurgent movements is commonly related to broader analyses of gender relations. Bhebhe and Ranger *et al* (1991) and Kriger (1992) deal with gendered experiences of soldiers in Zimbabwe's liberation war. Barnes (1991) addresses gender dynamics and the articulation of oppositional responses in colonial Zimbabwe in the early to mid-20th century, whilst Kesby (1996) addresses gender relations in the context of experiences of insurgency and counter-insurgency in Zimbabwe between 1972 and 1980. Urdang (1979) documents the experiences of women in the PAIGC files (African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde) and liberated villages in Guinea Bissau. West (2000) addresses women's experiences in FRELIMO and interdictions concerning sexual relations with men in Mozambique. Kampwirth (2002) discusses women's experiences and marriages practices in revolutionary movements in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Chiapas, complementing earlier analyses such as

of marriage practices in the guerrilla offered by a FAR *Comandante*, and compare it with the account given by Alma, one of the *guerrilleras/os* who were married 'by arms'. I discuss the disjunction in the two accounts and consider the extent to which guerrilla sociality was envisioned through a specific idiom of relatedness and was said to constitute a family. 'Marriages by arms' were ultimately abandoned, however, and I conclude by noting possible reasons for their fleeting character. Whilst life in the guerrilla was often qualified through the merographic analogy of 'family ties', gender and sexual relations were recognised to be unruly and to constantly exceed moral orders placed upon. Further, their ordering need not have aided in the management of the three guerrilla substances. Rather, attempts at regulating gender and sexual relations potentially undermined guerrilla sociality and relationality, as well as the parental authority of the *comandancia*.

Some ex-combatants reflected on their experiences of struggle, highlighting a shift from the moral order based on sharing, which they saw as distinctive of social life *en la montaña*, with the rise of an individualistic post-demobilisation ethos. Cande connoted the ethnographic present as entailing a certain moral disorder, as in a disregard for guerrilla moral orders based on equality and sharing. The transition from a communal to and individualistic form of life that punctuated her account was exemplified in her sense of betrayal of those *compañeros/as* who had died *en la selva* (in the forest) without even having been granted proper burial. Whilst guerrilla socialities and their substances and moral orders emerge as multiple and complex, thus revealing pliability and temporal dimensions, I argue that they supplement the perspective on sociality and subjectivity of an anthropology that moves within the horizon of weak thought.

Randall's (1981) work with Sandinista women. This literature draws attention to both the articulation of gender relations in the context of the development of guerrilla movements and the management of gender relations during times of conflict. The marriage practices and related moral orders articulated at different points in respective histories of struggle discussed in this literature are as heterogenous as the different contexts of struggle.

6.2 *Las Trés Puntas de Lanza*[2]/The Three Points of the Spear

I sought a meeting with one of the *Comandantes* of FAR for some time, and finally managed to arrange to see him. I approached the meeting with a degree of apprehension, and prepared as thoroughly as I could. The *Comandante* in question had lived for over sixteen years in Petén, *en la montaña*. Many ex-combatants had mentioned his name and had described him as the man who, while not strictly at the forefront of the organisation's public profile, was in fact the one who knew the history of FAR in Petén in greater depth than most. For years he had been the strategist of guerrilla operations and had spent more time in clandestine life with the *frentes guerrilleros* than many other members of the *mando* [military command]. The *Comandante* had been a member of the first FAR. His political biography stretched back to 1962. Early on in our long conversation, the *Comandante* offered his views on the nature, goals and means of the guerrilla struggle, and specifically of the political and military programme of the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes*. The guerrilla struggle undertaken by FAR was made up of '*trés puntas de lanza*', three tips of a spear. Each tip of the sharp implement amounted to a great task, an undertaking that the guerrilla had to carry out. Each task provided *nutrimiento*, or nourishing for the organisation and the struggle. The first nourishing substance was 'information', the second 'logistics' and the third 'combatants'. As the Comandante argued,

'There were three great tasks (*tareas*) during the war that people had to carry out. First, information (*información*), all possible information. For our people (*nuestra gente*) lived in hamlets, in villages, in cities, in towns, everywhere, and they would mix with the Army (*y se mezclavan con el ejército*), somehow they would intermingle (*entremezclarse*) with the institutions of the state (*las instituciones del estado*), and in other places (*lugares*) where we would not be able to get access (*tener acceso*). So, in this manner we were able to organise

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[2] The 'three points of the spear' is a metaphor that works at two distinct levels. First, it refers to the triad of nourishment: information, supplies and combatants. Second, it refers to the three different components of the struggle, namely armed struggle (*lucha armada*), the political struggle of the masses (*lucha política de las masas*), and the dimplomatic struggle (*lucha diplomática*).

nets/networks of information (*redes de información*). The other great task (*tarea*) was logistics (*la lógistica*). In the rural areas we were able to develop what we used to call 'war economy' (*la economía de guerra*). So we would organise the people to plant crops (*siembra*), to plant rice, beans etc, and also to have logistic brokering (*corredores logísticos*) which may bring all production (*producción*) where we may need it, and specifically to sustain (*mantener*) the combatant forces (*fuerzas combatientes*), the military units (*las unidades militares*). And the last great task out of three was to have new combatants (*tener nuevos combatientes*), because the development [of the insurgency] we were not going to achieve it on our own (*porque el desarrollo no lo íbamos a lograr nosotros sólos*), it was not going to be a guerrilla of twelve men (*no éramos una guerrilla de doce hombres*) who was going to achieve it all. No. We did not think that would be the case. A guerrilla has never triumphed in this manner (*nunca una guerrilla ha triunfado tampoco así*), but rather with the mass incorporation of the population (*incorporación masiva de la población*). On this account, then, we were able to sustain ourselves (*mantenernos*) over decades, and were able to recover in the aftermath of hard blows (*golpes duros*). For we always had new combatants (*nuevos combatientes*), always. Many would join (*porque teníamos nuevos combatientes siempre. Se incorporaban mucho*)'.

According to the *Comandante*, the third point of the spear, namely the incorporation of new combatants to the struggle, was a structured and graded path. New combatants had to undergo a scrupulously rigid process, with ascending steps that were sealed off from lower ones. First, individuals would become *milicianos*, that is, civilian recruits who would be deployed for tasks deemed by the *Comandancia* to be paramilitary in nature. The process allowed only those deemed to be the most trustworthy and able of individuals to progress to the higher echelons. The next step led to the '*guerrilla locales*', or local guerrillas. These groups were entrusted with the task to carry out military operations that were local in scope. Members would work the land during the day, and would not leave their village of residence. Finally, there were individuals who were

selected from the local guerrillas. They made up a more permanent, better-trained group whose operations were not tied to a village or community and could instead move across local jurisdictions. Although there was coordination among the levels in the instance of specific operations, each grade was, in principle, independent and closed off from their respective lower counterparts. Comandante Manolo explained the process to me as follows.

'We were able to carry out a graded scale of activities (*escala de actividades*) with the new combatants. First, [they would be members of the militia] *milicianos* and would do all the para-military work (*trabajo para-militar*), from distributing flyers (*lanzar volantes*), to aiding as us guides, or developing collateral activities (*actividades colaterales*) related to all military activities. That was their first step/grade (*escalón*) and we always tried to ensure that they passed through all the steps/grades so that they may reach our combatant files (*fuerzas combatientes*) as persons who had been already tested (*personas ya probadas*). We did not grab the first person who may say, I want to come with you, and put them in a regular unit (*unidad regular*). No. Never. [...] That was a basic requirement (*requisito muy básico*) for us. So they would first be members of the militia (*ellos primeros fueron milicianos*). Then, in an ascending scale (*escala ascendente*), the local guerrillas would be organised (*se organizaban guerrillas locales*). The local guerrillas were *compañeros* who would already take part in combats (*combatir*), but at the level of their own communities (*a nivel de sus comunidades*). These local guerrillas worked in their communities (*comunidades*), and for example, if there were five localities (*localidades*) or five hamlets (*aldeas*), then each one would be part of a general plan/planning (*planificación general*) and would undertake some specified activities, but already with arms (*pero ya con armas*). So they would engage in some small disturbance to the army (*pequeños hostigamientos al ejército*), they would place some landmine (*mina*) where a lorry would transit, or they would undertake whatever sabotage activity (*actividad de sabotaje*), but always in their own jurisdiction (*jurisdicción*). When we would draw a general plan (*plan general*), each one of them would

undertake some activity within the whole of that general plan, but at their own level (*nivel*), at the level of their own hamlets (*aldeas*). Then we would somehow organise the territory in various smaller territories (*el territorio en varios territorios pequeños*), for instance, [...] let's say that there were localities (*localidades*) scattered everywhere, there were small hamlets (*pequenas aldeas*) everywhere. We could divide the territory within a general plan and each one of them [smaller territories] would undertake some activity (*actividad*). This territory would then have numerous hamlets (*y luego este territorio tenìa varias aldeas*). Of the best local *guerrilleros* (*guerrilleros locales*), of the very best we would make up a military unity who would be much better trained (*unidad militar mucho más preparada*), [a unit] much larger and much more permanent (*permanente*), *verdad*. Conversely, the communities/villages (*comunidades*) would undertake military activities (*actividades militares*) and during the day they would work the land (*trabajar la tierra*), they would carry on in their communities (*seguían en sus comunidades*), while the others made up a chosen/selected unit (*unidad*) of the best [combatants]. This unit was more permanent. But it would still have a jurisdiction (*jurisdicción*), and we would call them territorial troops (*trupas territoriales*). Then, we had a much larger unit made up of the best combatants out of the territorial troops, and which made up the principal files/forces (*fuerzas principales*), *verdad*, so, as you can see, these were various categories of forces (*varia categorías de fuerzas*) [...] This mobile-strategic force (*fuerza móvil-estratégica*), that is what it was called, could act in any of the territories, in accordance with the characteristics of the operation (*operaciones*) which they would be planning to undertake, in accordance with a number of other things. For instance, if it [the mobile strategic force] was to act in this territory, then the permanent force (*fuerza permanente*) would be of support, with all the local communities/villages (*comunidades locales*). In the end we would design (*deseñarse*) everything in such manner. As you can see, this presents you with a plan (*esquema*) which does not allow just anybody who may want to try to reach just any point, because here one needed people tried and tested (*gente experimentada, probada*) who would not run away at the first Army bombardment (*bombardeo*

del ejército), say. We needed experts, we needed specialists, we needed talented people, good officers, good combatants, and good troupe more generally, and who would be able to achieve its objectives'.

According to the *Comandante*, combatants, i.e. one of the three substances of the guerrilla, represented a whole that was divided into parts. Parts were graded in ascending order. Through a process of selection, grades led to a force which, whilst decreasing in numbers, would be assigned greater mobility and scope of action. In the descending direction, the grades augmented in size to encompass larger numbers of associates, but became both more localised in terms of their operations, and less intense in the kind and rate of insurgent activities allocated to them. By division and grading of combatants, one of the three guerrilla substances contracted so as to be preserved as much as it was possible. In turn, through graded multiplication, agency and movement of guerrilla substance was maximised. From the holistic perspective deployed by the *Comandante*, division and multiplication of substance nourished the organisation and the struggle. Processes of division and multiplication of combatants, forces and territory revealed in the *Comandante*'s master plan were secret. They were not envisioned by the combatants I spoke to but partially. Nevertheless, awareness of substance permeated the accounts offered by ex-combatants. They revealed the perspective of one part of what the *Comandante* had deemed a whole, and specifically the perspective of a part constitutive of one of the three guerrilla substances *Comandante* Manolo had imagined. Some combatants spoke of substance and nourishing when recalling their guerrilla experiences. Carlos for instance, had told me how guerrilla military and political training constituted nourishing.

'We would establish what we would call political, politico-military schools (*escuelas políticas, politico-militares*). There we would form/train (*formar*) all our combatants militarily. One would have to know how to carry out an 'annihilation ambush' (*emboscada de aniquilamiento*), a 'curbing ambush' (*emboscada de contención*), an 'ambush of provocation' (*emboscada de*

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ostigamiento), all those types of military action. So we would train (*capacitarse*) and at the same time, we would study the tactics of the Army. The better our knowledge of them, the easiest it would be to hit them (*golpear*). They would do the same, they would study us, how we would act, and if we were not proficient/alert, they would inflict damage on us. That would happen when we fell into a routine of doing things. In the schools they would also talk to us about the conjuncture the country was in (*la coyunctura que en el pais se manejaba*). We would gain awareness of the economic problems, the social problems which in one way or other affect or affected the population. So we would consider all this and history as well (*historia*), so our consciousness would increase and rise (*elevar la conciencia*), as would the morale of the revolutionaries. I can say to you that this was our chief source of nourishment (*nuestro principal alimento*). And this is what still keeps us here at present, *verdad*?'.

Carlos noted how guerrilla training nourished military dexterity, political conscience and revolutionary conviction among the *guerrilleros/as*. Interestingly, however, despite the common idiom of substance, no other ex-combatant I had the opportunity to meet spoke in terms that may resemble, in part or in its entirety, the master plan of the *Comandante*. In our conversations, ex-combatants never envisaged the whole frame, or used the same lexicon and imaginary deployed by the *Comandante* in his remarkably integral and all-encompassing vision. Up to this meeting, my vision was an ensemble of fragments, as were the visions of the *compañeros/as*. By the time the conversation with the *Comandante* had come to an end, I began to think that, despite the illusion of wholeness, partiality imbricated the account.

'As I was saying to you at the beginning, we needed to feed ourselves/to nourish ourselves of information (*necesitábamos nutrirnos de información*), nourish ourselves of combatants, *verdad,* (*nutrirnos de nuevos combatientes*), hence it was in the more densely populated areas (*zonas más densamente pobladas*) that we had our population (*teniamos nosotros población*). A further element that influenced [the process] was the location of military objectives (*donde están*

ubicados los objetivos militares). We would not be making war here around these lagoons, where there is nothing, not even the Army *(nosotros no íbamos a hacer la guerra en estas lagunas, aquí no hay nada. No estaba el ejército tampoco)*. The Army would concentrate in this area, then where the Army was there would be our war fronts *(ahí donde estaba el ejército, allí estaban nuestros frentes de guerra)*. Now, as our organisation was a clandestine one *(clandestina)*, there were communities where there was never war *(guerra)* [...] The work of recruiting was not one of saying, hey you, are you coming? No *(pero no era un trabajo de reclutar, vos, te venís, no)*. It was a political activity, one of training *(capacitar)* the *compañeros* and *compañeras*. One would give talks *(pláticas)* by night, by day, there was nothing [unusual], they would carry on with their usual routines, but the front was there, and they would join that front, or the nearest front. We developed activities of organisation *(trabajo organizativo)* in the whole of Petén. [...] We did not expect to achieve all three things everywhere, for instance, in eastern and central Petén, what we had the most of there was combatants, and very little supply of provisions *(abasto)*. In the Q'eqchi' villages *(comunidades q'eqchíes)* in Alta Verapaz [in the 1990s, when the Frente Panzós Heróico was established there], there was balance. There were combatants, supply of provisions and a great deal of information *(allí hubo combatientes, hubo abasto y mucha información)*. In San Luis and the whole of that area [southern Petén], what happened was that we did not have many combatants, for a very straightforward reason. Because those were the last organising efforts which were undertaken, and there was no longer time to train combatants. Those were the last places where we achieved [political] organising, because they were going to be deployed as the starting point to penetrate Izabal *(penetrar a Izabal)*. But in order to penetrate Izabal, we had to go through these places, and we needed to meet bases of support *(bases de apoyo)* [...] Within the military forces there were excellent *compañeros* who were not combatants, but who would penetrate the communities *(penetrar a las comunidades)*. And they would be the ones who would be there for months on end, politically working through the people *(trabajando políticamente la gente)* [organising people politically]'.

Comandante Manolo deployed the expression 'three points of the spear' on different registers. The 'three points of the spear' referred to the triad of nourishment and substance: information, supplies and combatants. Further, the expression referred to the three different components of the struggle, namely armed struggle (*lucha armada*), the political struggle of the masses (*lucha política de las masas*), and the diplomatic struggle (*lucha político-diplomática*). Despite coordinating efforts, the different parts at times proceeded at different pace. The different fronts of the struggle produced different subjects of struggle.

'We thought the political strategy (*la línea política*) had three important axes (*ejes*). The first was armed struggle (*lucha armada*), where we endeavoured (*pretender*) that people join (*incorporarse*) the struggle in increasing numbers. The second axis was the political struggle of the masses (*lucha política de las masa*), and the third was the participation of our organisation in the political-diplomatic struggle (*lucha político-diplomática*). The axes were three points of the spear. We were discussing las *Trés Puntas de Lanza*, let us return to the issue (*tema*). The other line, within the political line (*línea política*), was the political struggle of the masses (*lucha política de las masas*). All of those sectors (*sectores*) that in one way or other we had influenced, they headed (*encabezar*) the mass movement [social movements] in the countryside and in the cities: the unions' movement (*movimiento sindical*), the movement of colonists (*movimiento de pobladores*), the movement of the churches (*movimiento de las iglesias*). All that the masses could do. Why, then, was I saying '*trés puntas de lanza*'? Because each had its own objective in the struggle (*objective de lucha*) and each of them would develop its activities independently (*separado*) of the others, but in coordination (*coordinación*). Each had its own way (*su propria forma*) of doing things, those of the military struggle with arms and the masses with their political revindications. The third point [of the spear], was the political-diplomatic struggle/diplomatic politics (*la política diplomática*), that is, to tell the world what was happening in Guatemala

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because here there was a circle (*cerco*) of mis-information (*disinformación*), and to obtain support. So, each of them in its own direction (*cada uno por su lado*) would undertake its own effort (*esfuerzo*). None was more important than the other; all went to towards the same goal (*tema*). What would happen however was that at times armed struggle would go very far ahead (*la lucha armada se nos iba muy adelante*). Or at times it was the struggle of the masses (*la lucha de las masas*), or the political-diplomatic work (*trabajo político-diplomático*) had its objectives and would achieve them. The idea was to stimulate each other (*estimularse entre sí*), because the *compañeros* of the masses/social movements would be happier (*más contentos*) to take the streets in the knowing that there was a war and that we were supporting them. They would have more of an incentive (*propósito*) to get out [overtly struggle] knowing that inside there would be a whole range of activities that would support them (*respaldar*) vis-à-vis the international community. And beyond the *trés puntas de lanza*, there was the fourth stage, namely negotiation (*negociación*), negotiation as a further weapon of the struggle (*una arma más de la lucha*). But this was within URNG. We turned the negotiating table (*mesa de negociación*) into the continuation of the battlefield (*la continuación del campo de batalla*)'.

6.3 Guerrilla Sociality and the Inception of Relatedness

Multiple fronts and subjects of struggle however, soon presented the guerrilla with the task of ordering the relations among themselves and with others, notably with the population. This gave rise to the establishment of social relations of 'affinity'. Affinity came to be qualified in multiple ways, and progressively, the guerrilla was envisaged in terms of family relations. Comandante Manolo explained:

'I am going to tell you about a case (*caso*), which is also funny (*simpático*). One day we met some persons who were cultivating crops. Crops (*siembras*). This was in a territory where the army would not venture, where nobody would venture, we alone had control over everything (*el*

control de todo). They were planting crops (*sembrar*). Obviously, they got very frightened (*asustarse*) because they saw us coming wearing uniforms (*nos vieron uniformados*). So, we asked them what they were doing there, why were they sowing, and in Guatemalan territory, when they were Mexican, they were indigenous Chol (*cuando ellos eran Mejicanos, ellos eran indígenas choles*). So they told us that they had been evicted from their communities, large landowners stole (*robar*) their land and they evicted (*expulsar*) them from Mexico, and they arrived at the border (*línea fronteriza*), on the Usumacinta [river], and what were they doing? Moreover, here there are laws that prohibit logging (*talla de los arboles*),[3] and one was not allowed to plant crops. In any case, they would see that over to the other side [of the river Usumacinta] there was plenty of land, so in clandestine manner (*clandestinamente*) they started to cut the forest (*tumbar la montaña*) and began to plant crops (*sembrar*). It had been some time since they had started doing this. But what else could they do, they had nowhere else to go. So, we told them that it wasn't a problem, that they could carry on doing it, however there were no guarantees that we could guarantee their life there (*garantizar su vida allí*), because the Army would reach the area and they would annihilate them (*porque el ejército llegaba y los iba a aniquilar*). Well, with the understanding/agreement (*compromiso*) that they could carry on planting, they became our friends (*se hicieron amigos nuestros*). Well, there was an interest (*interés*), namely planting crops, but this allowed us to be able to cross to their side [of the river] (*pero esto nos posibilitó a nosotros pasar al lado de ellos*), *verdad*, and establish a good neighbourly relation (*relación de buena vecindad*). On the side where they had their village, one day a woman was about to give birth (*estar dando luz*), and there was nobody who could assist her (*atendier*), and we had a doctor with us, so we crossed the border and took him to the hamlet and he helped with the delivery (*atender el parto*), *verdad*. From that moment onwards, relations of mutual help (*ayuda mutua*) were established in many respects, *verdad*, that resulted in many of

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[3] Comandante Manolo is referring to the FYDEP-related legislation of the mid-1960s discussed in Chapter Two that prohibited logging north of Paralelo 17.

them crossing the border (*frontera*). They would come to plant crops over here. But we were worried that if the Army arrived, they would experience problems there, so they asked us whether we could defend them (*nos pidieron que nosotros los defendiéramos*). But we could not do that, we would go back and forth, of course, that was an area that we controlled, but we could not dedicate ourselves to looking after/protecting people, could we? So they asked us that we teach them how to use arms, and whether we could give them some for them to defend themselves (*defensa*). That we could do, so [we passed on] a few *escopetas*, a few little rifles (*riflecitos*), so that they could feel a bit safer, mostly for defence, because they weren't war/combat arms (*armas de guerra*), and we would not have given them combat arms anyhow, but with a rifle, an *escopeta*, they were feeling better already (*ya se sintieron mejor*). We taught them how to use them, and gave them some ideas as to how they could defend themselves in the event the Army should get there. This established an excellent relation (*una excelente relación*) with them. Later we would go by, and they would guarantee some sort of corridor to get the things (*cosas*) for the guerrilla through from Mexico. At times they would volunteer to help us with their animals, with their mules, that is, a very good neighbourly relation (*relación de buena vecindad*), as we would say. But as this was the area where our *guerrilleros* would get to on occasions following a combat, there we had a hospital, a school and a training camp (*campo de entrenamiento*). We had everything there. That was our base (*zona base*). So our guerrilleros would get there, and these *compañeros* begun to cross the border more often, in groups, with families. There was coming and going of people, back and forth and it became more and more our base. A daring *guerrillero* (*osado guerrillero*), I would say, fell in love with (*se enamoró*) with the *Mejicanita*[4] on the other shore, and would go and see her. They fell in love so much that the *guerrillero* brought her over to Guatemala. So the family of the *guerrillera* wondered what had happened. He had taken her with him, so that established some familial ties of support (*lazos familiares de apoyo*) to the *compañera* who was going to Guatemala, and of course for the son-in-law (*yerno*). Those familial

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[4] Young Mexican woman.

ties were always very good, because they identified people with the struggle (*esos lazos familiares siempre fueron muy buenos, por que identificaban a la gente con la lucha*). At the same time, in those places, there was great [Army] repression (*represión*), to the extent that entire families (*familiar enteras*) would go to *la montaña* to hide. That is where we developed plans of defense and production (*planes de defensa y de producción*), because we could not be left there with no food (*estar sin comer*). Further, one had to defend oneself from the army, so we made plans for them. At the beginning, we defended them, but it was best to teach them how to fight (*luchar*) so that they could defend themselves. We could not carry on defending people, or we would not have reached our objectives. In that way, entire families joined (*integrarse*). In the villages, in the local guerrillas (*guerrillas locales*) and even in the permanent forces (*fuerzas permanentes*), one would see entire families there [...]. Each family would grow, to the extent that it would then mix (*mezclar*) with the other families (*las demás familias*) and you would see the nephew married to the daughter of Fulano, so one would become related [through kinship ties] (*emparentarse*). That was common and I don't think it was negative. On the contrary, it was very positive, it established ties (*lazos*) which would allow us to win over that large family (*ganar esa gran familia*), to attend to it politically (*atenderla políticamente*), because not everybody would be in the guerrilla front, they would disperse across the organisation. The only negative aspect was that information may run up and down, that would happen and it was inevitable (*inevitable*). Occasional leaks of information (*fuga de información*) were managed, but those ties of friendship (*lazos de amistades*) and family links/ties (*nexos familiares*) we were able to make good use of (*aprovechar*) to establish corridors of organisation (*corredores de organización*). [...] And we carried on considering ourselves a large family (*gran familia*), because not only ties of familiarity (*lazos de familiaridad*) were established, but also, through political work, we would make the *compañeros* see the fraternity/amity (*hermandad*) which we had among us all (*tener entre todos*), to recuperate a series of moral values (*valores morales*) which would allow (*permitir*) that the relations among *compañeros*, between couples (*parejas*) and with the

population would be excellent (*excelente*). For instance it was absolutely forbidden to touch even a single fruit of a tree which would not be ours, of which would belong to a person who had not given it to us. In all instances one had to buy it. If the *campesino* would give it to you, that was different. And still, it would be shared among all (*y aún así se compartía entre todos*). *Hermandad* [fraternity/amity] was the affection (*afecto*) and the affinity (*afinidad*) which existed among the *compañeros*. For instance, I was in Petén for very many years, and that was my people (*esa fue mi gente*), although I was born elsewhere. But imagine spending sixteen years *en la montaña*, and having numerous combatants as I did, combatant whom I saw (*ver*), formed (*formar*), educated (*educar*), trained (*entrenar*) and those I took to combat (*llevar al combate*). By necessity (*necesariamente*) nexus of great friendship (*amistad*) are established. Clearly, it is a very healthy friendship (*amistad muy sana*), as it does not hinder (*obstacular*) the military line of command that there exists (*la línea de mando militar que existe*). But one ultimately holds great fondness for them (*llegar a tener mucho cariño*), affection (*afecto*). As times goes by, as they say, they had children and their families, and their children were also my combatants. I had two generations of combatants (*dos generaciones de combatientes tuve yo*), the parents and the children (*los padres y los hijos*). So I would see the young man (*muchacho*) and I would ask how is your father, perhaps his father was older, or had a problem with his leg or something and could no longer be the combatant he had been before. He is there and he sends his regards, [the young man would say]. And I would later visit the ex-combatant, as my brother (*ya como mi hermano*). We had been together (*juntos*) for a long time, and he had his ·children and they were now combatants, even officers (*oficiales*). So the relation/relationship (*relación*) extended over generations (*generaciones*). How could one not have fondness (*cariño*) for these people? Moreover, that was your family for so many years (*además esa fue tu familia durante tantos años*)'.

The Comandante noted the multiple ways in which the guerrilla was akin to a family. For

one, guerrilla forces established kinship ties with civilian populations who would converge in the areas under guerrilla control. Further, following violent counter-insurgency actions, the population of entire villages sought refuge in the forest leading to families joining the guerrilla files. As families mixed with each other and became kin, a specific form of guerrilla relatedness developed. Guerrilla *hermandad* (fraternity/amity) provided a further mode of articulation of relatedness, to the effect that the guerrilla itself may be thought of a large family. As noted by Carsten (2000:2), 'relatedness' may be usefully deployed 'in opposition to, or alongside "kinship" in order to signal openness to indigenous idioms of being related rather than a reliance on pre-given definitions'. 'Relatedness' conveys a distancing 'from a pre-given analytic opposition between the biological and the social on which much anthropological study of kinship has rested' (Carsten ibid). Framing guerrilla sociality in terms of relatedness thus seems particularly apt, as it allows for different deployments of idioms of 'family ties' as they occurred simultaneously in guerrilla discourse. As the *Comandante* noted, there were parents whose children had also joined the guerrilla. Thus, there were two generations of combatants and as the *Comandante* pertained to the generation of the parents, he considered them to be his siblings. *Hermandad*, in the sense of fraternity and amity, permeated the sociality of guerrilla relatedness. In point of fact, guerrilla sociality and relatedness developed a distinctive and enduring moral order based on sharing. In turn, practices around sharing of substance functioned in complex ways and produced effects of sameness and difference.

6.4 *Tamales Guerrilleros* and Sharing Substance

Rubén spoke of a memory common to many ex-guerrilleros/as when he noted that some activities in the guerrilla were predicated on sameness. He recounted how tasks such as washing one's clothes and preparation and consumption of food had to be carried out by all.

'Nobody would wash the clothes (*ropa*) of others. There were beautiful (*lindo*) things in the guerrilla. To go to combat (*ir al combate*) and do work in the kitchen (*trabajo de cocina*) was the same (*era lo mismo*), *verdad*, and serving others (*sevir*) was forbidden (*prohibir*). That is, we had

to share (*compartir*), everything was shared (*en común*). Furthermore, in the case of Cande, she was an expert in making tortillas (*hechar tortillas*), nevertheless, she was never viewed as a person who would make tortillas. My brother was also an expert at making tortillas. One would share everything, in all instances (*en todo caso se compartía*), *verdad*, one would help out, one would contribute so that activities may be undertaken and accomplished. Many things would thus be undertaken on the grounds of physical re-considerations (*reconsideraciones puramente físicas*), let us say, not everything would be strictly the same. That is to say, well, the load is of fifty *libras*[5], are we going to distribute it to everyone the same (*miramos parejo*)? No. Instead, at times, for physical issues (*cuestiones físicas*), there we would reconsider, where that *compañero* is able to carry fifty *libras*, he will carry fifty *libras*. The *compañeras* are able to carry twenty-five *libras*, then they carry twenty-five *libras*. Alternatively, there would be a standard measure, where the *libraje* would be thirty, and from there one would ask for volunteers, for those who would manage (*aguantar*) five *libras* more, those who would bear twenty more, would carry twenty more. Because by the same token (*igual*), there were some *compañeros* among us, including myself, who were physically much weaker (*débil*) than a woman, for there were *compañeras* who were much stronger than of any of us. Things would be measured (*medir*) that way, so that there would be equity (*equidad*) and no mistreatment (*maltrato*). The *compañeras* would work in communications (*comunicaciones*), in medical service (*sevicio médico*), they had greater talents (*mejores abilidades*). There were excellent *compañeros*, but one would notice (*notar*) that the *compañeras* had better abilities to do that kind of work. Likewise (*al igual*), there were excellent women combatants (*excelentísimas combatientes*), and many of them died in combat. It was the same. Merly, for instance, died in combat.'

As both the *Comandante* and Rubén had noted, food was scarce, but it was always shared. Cande commented on this as follows:

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[5] One *libra* is 0.454 kilos.

'It was very difficult, because at times, we had to carry *bolas de masa*[6] to eat. They were cooked *bolas de masa*, we would call them *'tamales'*,[7] but it was only cooked *masa*, and at times there was no food at all [...]. At times we would eat, at times we would not. It was the same with water, sometimes we would find water, and sometimes we would not. We would set up camp for one or two days, but most of the time we would walk and walk and walk, carrying one's food (*comida*). Because in the beginning, in the years from 1981 to about 1986, we would not have the luxury to eat some beans (*frijol*), or sugar or oil. It was mostly cooked *bolitas de masa* which we would call *'tamal peludo'*. There [*en la montaña*] everything was shared (*compartido*). There were squads (*escuadras*), each with six combatants, and each platoon had four *escuadras*. So everyone would take turns (*era turniado*). For instance, if it was that platoon's turn, they would arrange tasks with the *escuadras*. Everything was shared, the work in the kitchen (*trabajo de cocina*), guard (*la posta*), gathering wood for fire (*ir a traer leña*), anything really, everyone had to do what it was their turn to do'.

Despite scarcity, ex-combatants recalled how any available food was shared and a sense of commensality established. In the case of food, and *tamales guerrilleros* in particular, to share meant to divide one substance of the guerrilla, as well as the activities related to its production, among all. Through division and distribution of equal parts, the effect of sameness was achieved, regardless of other scales of difference such as rank, gender and ethnicity. Thus, division of substance in this instance created sameness. Rubén commented on other practices related to circulation of substance, notably those aimed at making substance move and circulate with the guerrilla forces. With regard to transportation of load, Rubén noted how to share was to divide the load among the combatants, but not to do so strictly in equal parts. Instead, to share weight was to begin

[6] *Masa* is maize cooked in water with a pinch of lime and ground.
[7] *Tamal* is a prized food in Petén. It is made out of maize, and contains meat, *achiote* (bixaceae *bixa orellana*), and/or beans. The tamal is wrapped in banana leaves and boiled or steamed. '*Tamales peludos*' is an ironic and euphemistic expression that places emphasis on the meagre quality of the *tamales*

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with a standard unit and increase or decrease the load carried by individuals by and established part, to accommodate differences among them. The differences at stake were not those in the scale of rank, status or gender, but rather those of a perceived capacity/ability to physically endure an increase and/or decrease in load. Furthermore, individuals would take on increases in load voluntarily. With this scale, the guerrilla created difference of an embodied kind, as in the distinction between physically stronger and weaker combatants, and a mode of agency, as in the acquisition of greater quotas of load for transportation by those who would be able and willing to do so. The circulation of that composite guerrilla substance that was 'logistics' was thus made possible. Further, related production of scales of sameness and difference conjured up an overall effect of equity. From the perspective of the ex-combatants, these practices were foundational to the establishment of guerrilla sociality. Insofar as guerrilla sociality was grounded on specific practices of sharing and on the establishment of related dimensions of sameness and difference, the ex-combatants acknowledged the partiality of the sociality they endeavoured to create and maintain during the years *en la montaña* and of the moral orders that sustained it. Guerrilla socialities and moral orders based on sharing substance differed from the socialities and moral orders that connoted the lives they had led before joining the struggle, and those they were to live following demobilisation. Sociality predicated on sameness and equity was partial in a further sense in that it coexisted with other guerrilla moral orders which produced sameness and difference in different scales.

6.5 *Matrimonios Por las Armas*/Marriages by Arms

Rubén discussed the moral order based on sharing substance and the effect of sameness equating both with an ethos central to guerrilla life. However, he also commented on other coexisting moral injunctions, notably those that concerned scales of gender and sexuality, and gender and sexual relations among combatants in particular. He noted that gender and sexual moral orders had changed over time. Rubén said:

'As I was saying, [in the guerrilla] there were beautiful things and others very hard (*duras*). At

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guerrilleros.

the beginning, it was forbidden (*prohibido*) disrespect (*faltar de respeto*) a *compañera*, for instance, talking to her about sex (*hablarle de sexo*) or asking her to sleep with you (*pedirle que se acostara con uno*), *verdad*. At the beginning there were rules (*principios*), that one could not disrespect a *compañera*, one would have to maintain a boundary (*limite*). I did not live in that time (*esa época yo no la viví*), but I have been told about it. Many of the *comandantes* would joke about what used to happen as a result [of the rules]. One day, someone was nearly executed by firing squad for something like that. Well, someone was nearly executed because he had sexual relations (*relaciones*) with a *compañera*. He was already on his way to trial (*juicio*), because then FAR had a very tough (*fuerte*) set of disciplinary rules (*reglamento*) which would be upheld (*respetar*). Well, luckily (*de buena suerte*), he was rescued by the *compañera* who took it upon herself to save him. She said to the other officer (*oficial*), *sos un cabrón*, you are a *cabrón*[8] if you execute the boy (*el patojo*), and I will tell everyone that you also slept with me (*acostarse*), ah, so you stitched yourself up (*te jodiste*). So no, he must not be executed (*no hay que fusilarlo*) [laughter]. All these things I am telling you, they all fit within a trajectory (*trayectoria*). Later on, in my era (*en mi era*), in my time (*época*), this continued in the same manner, but perhaps a bit more flexible. You could talk to a *compañera*, but you cannot talk to the *compañera* who is already in a relationship with a *compañero* and you have to lean to respect her (*respetar*), *verdad*. That is why the *casamientos por las armas* [weddings/marriages by arms] occurred (*para eso se dan los casamientos por las armas*). That is what they were called. They were symbolic (*simbólico*) and somewhat juridical (*algo jurídico*), so to speak, among ourselves (*dentro de nosotros*). It held great honour (*honra*) and great respect (*respeto*) for us. So we began to that, to marry by arms'.

Rubén recalled how a young man who was later to become a prominent leader of FAR had come close to be executed for having slept with a *compañera*. So strict were the rules

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[8] *Cabrón* in this context may be translated as 'fool'.

of conduct ordering gender and sexual relations in the early FAR, that a breach would have been punished with death by firing squad. The *compañera* in question, however, had come to the rescue of her lover and manipulated the strictures of the rules to her advantage and to the benefit of her young *compañero*, whose life was spared as a result. By the time Rubén joined the guerrilla files, Rubén argued rules of conduct had been relaxed. Sexual relations among men and women were allowed, and yet, they still required some ordering. That is why *casamientos por las armas*, that is, 'marriages by arms' were instituted. Alma, a combatant in her late thirties, had been one of the few who got married 'by arms'.

'I asked Alma whether she had a relationship *en la montaña (se acompañó en la montaña)* and whether she did something akin to *la pedida*. In Petén, it is customary but not obligatory for the family of a young unmarried man or young unmarried woman to visit the house of prospective suitors and 'ask' (*pedir*) a man or woman in marriage for their offspring. I asked Alma whether when she got together with her partner they [the couple] informed anyone (*es decir informaron a alguien*), such as a military chief (*jefe militar*) of the event. Alma replied that she did. I asked who she informed, whether she informed Nestor and she replied that no, at the time Nestor wasn't there, he was down south. I said to Alma that I understood many informed Nestor. Nestor was like a father for many people (*papá*). In her case, at the time it was Comandante Méndez, as he was still alive and was there, so there were marriages then, marriages by arms, but there also was free union too (*entonces, allí existían casamientos también, por las armas, y existían unión libre también*). This was the first time I heard of 'marriages by arms' and I hesitated, repeating, marriages by arms... (*casamientos por las armas*)... who got married by arms, that you may remember (*quién se casó por las armas, que Usted se acuerde*)? Someone whom people would call Magalí got married, Magalí and, I don't know who it was, Noemí, I don't remember who else who was there. I also got married by that (*yo también me casé por eso*). So Alma revealed she had married by arms as well and added that yes, that is, it was like a marriage similar to that

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which occurs in civil life (*sí, o sea que allí era como un matrimonio parecido a lo que se da en la vida civil*), that is, if an unmarried woman goes just like that (*que si una muchacha se va solo así*), well, she has much less, less support (*pues tiene menos, menos apoyo*), as she has not respected her elders/superiors (*o no respetó a sus mayores*), we could say, (*podríamos decir*), so the matter there was the same (*entonces la cuestion allí era lo mismo*), verdad, it was similar to that (*era parecido a eso*). I asked Alma whether it was for that reason that there were 'marriages by arms' (*y por eso 'matrimonios por las armas'*) and she replies yes. I asked what the name of her *compañero* was and Alma replied it was Eagle (*Aguila*). So she had a marriage by arms (*así que hicieron un casamiento por las armas*) and everyone was there, everyone (*todos estuvieron allí, todos estuvieron*), the whole front. I asked Alma whether in civil life, with her current partner, Alma did something similar to *la pedida*. Yes, when we met, we were *novios* for a time (*sí, y cuando non conocimos, estuvimos un tiempo de novios*), although it was known to my parents (*aún que estaba a conocimiento de mis padres*), but I always had the idea that they would give me the opportunity that I would converse[9] more (*pero yo siempre mantenía la idea de que ellos me dieran la oportunidad de platicar más*), that I would relate myself to him more to see whether it was to my convenience/liking or not (*relacionarme más con el para ver si me convenía o no*), because in some cases what happens is that the unmarried man enters directly (*porque en algunos casos, lo que se da es que el muchacho entra directo*), and the parents decide for her/of her (*y los papás deciden de ella*), verdad, so in my case (*entonces en el caso mio*), it wasn't like that (*no fue así*), verdad, they gave me the opportunity (*me dieron la oportunidad*) and when I considered that it was to my convenience/liking with the [unmarried] man (*y cuando yo consideré de que me convenía con el muchacho*), I told my father, I told him (*yo le dije a mi papá y le dije a él*), verdad, so, his parents went to talk to the house [of her parents] and all that (*entonces, ya los papás de él fueron a hablar a la casa y todo*), we reached an agreement (*ya nos pusimos de acuerdo*), well, first of all, *el permiso* [permission] (*bueno, más que todo el permiso*), already

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[9] In Petén, to converse implies intimacy.

formal (*ya formal*), since then we were officially *novios* [officially engaged] and all that (*que ya fuimos novios oficiales y todo*), *verdad,* that is the first time they entered [the house] (*fue cuando la primera vez que entraron*). The second time [they visited] it was already to establish the dates for the wedding (*ya la segunda vez fue para poner fechas para el matrimonio*). I asked Alma whether she thought *la pedida* was something that was in the woman's interest or not. I explained that on occasions I had been told by women who were not ex-combatants that the event of *la pedida* was something they had endured (*la pedida mucho le costó*), because they could not decide (*porque ellas no pudieron decidir*), what I meant was that a person entered to ask for them and spoke directly with the father and mother (*la persona entró a pedirlas y habló directamente con el papá y la mamá*) and the women I had spoken to felt they did not have any part in the process (*ninguna parte en el proceso*), they were simply handed over (*y que solo ellas fueron entregadas*). There were some such cases (*hay unos casos de esos*). Yes, this did happen, but not in her cases, Alma noted. I added that in other cases/instances it [*la pedida*] was a guarantee for the woman (*garantía para la mujer*), because I was told that if something happened between the couple (*la pareja*), for instance if there were episodes of violence (*episodios de violencia*), the parents had the right to get their daughter out (*los padres tienen derecho a sacar a la hija*), that is to say, that in that case/event, it was like a form of security (*seguridad*) for the daughter, the fact that the parents had handed her over (*la entregaron*), *verdad?* Alma confirmed that was indeed the case, *verdad,* that was why *la pedida* existed, *verdad,* because one leaves under the gaze of the parents (*por que uno se va en vista de los papás*), *verdad,* because in any event that may occur in one's life (*porque cualquier cuestión que sucede, ya en la vida de uno*), *verdad,* in the event that the man made a mistake/got the wrong partner (*que a lo mejor el hombre se equivocó de pareja*), then in this case the woman (*entonces aquí la mujer*), *verdad,* can, she has the aid/protection/guardianship of her parents, because it is under their gaze that she left in the first place (*puede, tiene el amparo de los papás por que en vista de los papá se ha ido*), *verdad?* According to Alma there were similarities between civilian and guerrilla life, but there were also

differences. A life as the one that one lives here (*por que una vida que se vive acá*) [in the ethnographic present], one has friendships and all that, one gets on well with people and all that (*uno tiene amistades y todo, se lleva con la gente, y bueno*), *verdad*, but during the life *en la montaña* one would see oneself as brothers and all that, very united (*ahí uno se veía como hermanos y todo, muy unidos*), yes, what one would have and what the other would have would be shared, everything (*sí...lo que tenía uno y lo que no tenía el otro se compartía, todas las cosas*)'.

According to Alma, 'marriages by arms' were akin to *de jure* and *de facto* unions in civil life where individuals were accompanied and supported by their parents and families in their choice of a partner. In Alma's account, 'marriages by arms' augmented the sense in which the guerrilla was a family. The assent and witnessing of the union on the part of the guerrilla family represented a guarantee for the partners, notably for the woman. As in civil life, eloping with a partner or entering a *relación informal*, that is a 'informal relationship' was considered reckless in that the partners, notably the woman, would not be able to count on the support of their family in the event of a dispute between them, domestic violence or other issue which may be the ground for separation. Through '*matrimonios por las armas*' a number of merographic analogies were articulated, for instance the merging of the two domains of 'guerrilla life' and 'civil life' and the establishment of a sense of contiguity of the moral orders relating to both. According to Alma, marriages by arms constituted a safeguard for women combatants, as they would be able to appeal to the parental authority of the *comandante* in the event of a crisis. Nevertheless, as Rubén noted, *matrimonios por las armas* were a short-lived practice. Rubén explained:

'So we begun having marriages by arms, but soon afterwards, the couples would begin to fight/argue (*pelearse*), they would split up (*dejarse*), and so we simply could not continue on such a course. So, it was announced, okay *muchachos*, what we really do not want is that one day someone may shoot somebody else (*alguien le meta un tiro a alguien*) for such a matter. So we

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will maintain the same principle of respect (*principio de respeto*). As for the *compañera*, well, let her decide whether she wants to be with her *compañero* or not, if she wants to leave him, but nobody should be duplicitous (*hacer el duple*). Rather if they want to split up, let them split up, but they should make it public (*que lo publiquen*), and if they later want to be in a relationship [formal] (*juntarse*) with someone else, they may do that if they wish. So there would be public announcements (*anuncios públicos*) about who was splitting up and who was not (*dejarse*) and some of them were very funny (*chistosos*). I will tell you about an anecdote (*anécdota*). There was a *compañero*, a veteran, whom we would call Chano and there was a *compañera* who was much older (*muy avanzada de edad*), *verdad*. So we would call this Chano '*el clandestino*' [the clandestine one], because of his clandestine relations (*relaciones clandestinas*). So, Chano, in clandestine manner (*clandestinamente*) and so that no one would realise (*percatarse*), begun having sexual relations (*relaciones sexuales*) with the *compañera*, and she would correspond (*corresponder*). One day, however, for sure she must have sent him away (*de plano ella lo cachó*), saying that he was simply amusing himself (*simple y sencillamente estaba pasando el tiempo*). So, during a gathering of the forces, and with the procedure we used to use, she said, I ask to speak (*pedir la palabra*), and she was told, do speak *compañera*, come to the front (*pase al frente*). So she stepped in front and said, *compañeros*, I just want to declare/inform you that as from today I am the wife (*esposa*) of the *compañero* Chano, and please, nobody bother me from now on (*y que por favor nadie me moleste*). That was the joke of the year (*la broma del año*), and Chano did not know what to do with himself (*no hallar donde meterse*). In any case, they were not together for long after that. So, one would say, *compañeros*, we inform you that, or, I wish to inform you that I have finished my relationship with Fulano, so that there would not be problems. But the point was not, oh, so that someone else may follow (*para que venga otro*), someone else may come and speak[10] to me (*hábleme otro*). No, the point was simply, it was a manner (*forma*) that the *compas* adapted (*adaptar*), their own manner (*forma propria*), so that they would not be

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[10] Conversing again implies intimacy.

disrespectful to anyone (*para no faltarle de respeto a nadie*). So if people wanted to be in a relationship, they would no longer tell the *comandante*, but they may announce it in public. Okay, so the *compañero* has come to the decision of being in a relationship with the *compañera* and that was it. This was to avoid that any other *compañero* may be disrespectful to her by mistake (*equivocadamente*). Now, as for couples splitting up, announcements were not very common. Everyone would realise very quickly that they had split up, or that they had an argument/fight (*rápido todos se enteravan que se habían dejado, se habían peleado*), *verdad* [laughter], but that is how it would happen. Marriages by arms were abandoned because one could not go around marrying people, and one could not make fun of authority (*no se podían estar casando, no se podían estar burlando de la autoridad*). So to avoid that authority should be undermined (*evitar que se burlaran de la autoridad*), it was best not to marry (*era mejor no casarse*). Lead your life (*hagan su vida*), behave according to the regulations (*compórtense de acuerdo al reglamento*), careful in making mistakes (*cuidado con cometer errors*), and nothing would go wrong (*y nada pasa*). We don't bother you (*molestar*) and you do not bother the collective (*colectivo*), the organisation (*organización*) and the *compañeros*. That is how that changed, according to the circumstances (*fue cambiando palautinamente*)'.

Comandante Manolo had married the combatants 'by arms' and commented the marriages and on the reasons for their quick demise as follows:

'Marriages by arms (*matrimonios por las armas*). Comandante Manolo is surprised by my question. Well, that occurred at the beginning, it did not work out (*funcionar*). What happens when you have an area under your complete control (*zona de tu completo control*), you have to organise the economy (*la economía*) there, production for the war (*producción para la guerra*), not just the combatants, but the people who produce in the very same space (*allí mismo*). That also makes you consider what to do with all those children, for instance. For children are not

going to be left to the wild (*niños no van a quedarse de silvestres*). You have to make plans for their education (*educación*) their training (*formación*), because this people will join/be part of (*integrarse*) society. And how could they without an education? Then, that made us consider social life (*vida social*), it made us think about the children, the elderly, women, hospitals, schools and many other things. And we resolved to create (*formar*) our own institutions (*nuestras proprias instituciones*) in those living conditions (*condiciones de vida*), *verdad*? So, as they were many people, we had to organise (*organizar*) and regulate/establish norms (*normar*) the life of everyone. And that is how we, leading on from a certain tradition (*a partir de cierta tradición*), and this has not been written/recorded anywhere, we had to elaborate our own civilian laws (*leyes civiles*), you understand. Those civilan laws allowed us to have a degree of control (*tener un control*) over our people. However, these civilian laws, this control, were established not merely to organise our own people, but also to avoid (*evitar*) any infiltration from the enemy (*infiltración del enemigo*). Anyone who would violate those norms, was also violating security (*seguridad*), and that could not be (*eso no podía ser*). For instance, we could not allow that a girl (*muchacha*) from around here should arrive and marry (*casar*) a *guerrillero*. And who is that girl? Why does she come to the guerrilla? Who sent her? What for? (*y quien es esa muchacha? Y por qué viene a la guerrilla, y quien la mandó? Con qué propósito?*). Could she not be someone who has infiltrated the files (*infiltrada*)? We had all the right (*tener el derecho*) to ask those questions and we had all the right to guarantee the security (*garantizar la seguridad*) of our organisation, you understand. So that is why those norms (*normas*) were not written down (*estar escritas*) almost anywhere. They were forged (*plasmar*) in our military regulations (*reglamento militar*) [...]. Those norms safeguarded us (*garantizarnos*) over many years; they gave us a degree of organisation (*cierta organización*), a degree of coordination (*cierta coordinación*), and a degree of control (*cierto control*) over our people [...]. As for civil laws, the *comandantes* had the authority (*potestad*) to carry out marriages (*hacer matrimonios*), I held them myself, the task was deemed to be my responsibility (*a mi me tocó*). And '*pasar por las armas*', don't think it meant

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that I was executing them by firing squad (*que los estuviera fusilando*). No, it was a symbol (*símbolo*). The *comandante* of the guerrilla unit married the *compañeros* who had decided to live together (*vivir juntos*), to be a couple (*ser pareja*), well, they had the right to do that. We did not deny (*negar*) that to them. Of course, they had to uphold many rules (*cumplir muchas normas*). But later on, '*pasar por las armas*' also meant a festivity of the guerrilla (*festividad de la guerrilla*). Two lines of *compañeros* would assemble, verdad, and they would hold their arms up, and the *compañeros* [who were getting married] would go by underneath [the arms]. [That meant] that the whole of the guerrilla accepted the fact that they were a couple (*ser pareja*), in other words, the whole of the guerrilla gave them their blessing (*darle su benedición*) and accepted the fact that they were husband and wife (*marido y mujer*). That is what it was. I did that twice, we did it twice. However, we then realised that very often our combatants and our people who would join (*integrarse*) the guerrilla, they brought their whole villages (*aldea*) to the guerrilla. That is, they went to the guerrilla with their customs (*costumbres*), with their traditions (*tradiciones*), with everything. Something important should be said about this, and I will illustrate it with an example, so that we may understand each other [...]. In the village the *compañera*, or the woman, has very few options (*opciones*) to be free to choose who she is going to marry (*casar*), very few. Because the villages (*aldeas*) are very dispersed/far apart (*dispersas*), or because Fulano has already eyed her up (*hecharle el ojo*) for her to be his wife (*su mujer*). But the first requirement (*requisito*) is that he should have a good cultivated plot/harvest (*siembra*), that he should have money (*dinero*), that he should be able to support her financially (*mantener*). In other words, it is a contract (*contrato*). And although she does not love him (*querer*), she goes with/follows him. But she goes to live with him because he can support her financially (*mantener*). He will give her clothes, he will give her many things, that is, it is a relationship (*relación*) which is not grounded in affection (*cariño*) and love (*amor*). As you know, in relationships (*relaciones de pareja*) in everyday life (*muy corrientes*), well they first get to know each other (*empezar conociendose*), they go out together (*salir juntos*) and then they feel that they are having a relationship (*sienten*

que están teniendo una relación entre ellos). It is a process *(proceso).* In this case however, it is not like that. Thus, a *compañerita*[11] who has not had many options in her own village, now can choose *(escoger)* who she will marry *[de jure] (casar),* with whom she will marry *[de facto]* *(juntarse),* because there would not even be *de jure* marriages *(por qué nisiquiera había matrimonios).* So, in the village of the [guerrilla] front there was a young man *(muchacho)* who eyed her up *(hecharle el ojo)* and he said to her to go with him. Before she could not choose among many, there were no options, due to the repression/violence *(represión),* for whatever reason. And they would get to a village in resistance *(aldea de resistencia),*[12] and they would relate *(relacionarse)* to everyone there, and there they would truly live a community life *(vivir en comunidad).* So she would see all those handsome young men *(hermosos muchachos)* who were there, and she would look at her husband, and she would realise that he did not meet all the conditions *(condiciones)* of someone she would like to have as a husband. So the next day she would get together with someone else. Just like that, she had compared her husband with the others, and she realised that he did not meet all the requirements, that she had no other option than marrying him *[de facto] (juntarse)* in civil life *(la vida civil), verdad.* So, what would happen was that as these were relationships that were not grounded *(cimentadas)* in affection *(cariño)* and love *(amor),* and rather in material conditions *(condiciones materiales),* the first marriages [held in the guerrilla] were among these people, more or less, and would fail *(tronar).* And eight days later the marriages *(casamientos)* had dissolved *(disuelto).* And all that, of having got them to *'pasar por las armas',* that had been all in vain. So we opted for not doing it like that. In time, the *compañeros* would choose their partner *(pareja),* and those were more stable relationships *(relaciones más estables),* but we never again ventured in being ridiculed *(quedar en ridículo)*

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[11] This is the diminutive form of *compañera* and may be taken to imply either youth or simple mindedness.
[12] *'Aldeas de resistencia'* refers to the *Comunidades de Población en Resistencia* (CPR), literally Communities of People in Resistance. There were three different bodies of CPR in Guatemala: *CPR Costa* (on the Pacific Coast and associated with ORPA), *CPR Sierra* (on the mountains of Quiché and associated with the EGP), and *CPR Petén* (associated with FAR). The CPR always presented themselves as civilian population under army persecution.

even! [laughter]. In doing marriages which were not going to last for anything (*durar nada*)! With the effect that the political authority (*autoridad política*), the authority of the organisation (*organización*), of the *comandante*, of the people would be compromised (*comprometer*)! Well, no, we resolved not to have them [marriages by arms] again. Since then, the relationship was different, if there were people who had lived together for some time and they decided to get married [*de facto*] (*juntarse*), and wanted to have a ceremony (*ceremonia*), well then, they could get married (*casarse*), so the *comandante* had the necessary authority (*toda la autoridad*) to marry them (*casarlos*). That was the history (*história*)'.

Through marriages by arms one of the guerrilla substances, namely 'combatants', was divided and combined according to scales of gender and sexuality. Marriages by arms joined a male and a female combatant into a couple, thus setting the individuals concerned apart from the rest of the combatants in as much as gender and sexual relations were concerned. Through a merographic analogy, guerrilla sociality and relationality were imagined to be akin to a family. Moral orders based on sharing were articulated in conjunction with familial practices such as marriages by arms, where an authoritative figure, usually a *comandante*, would take on the parental role of witnessing and sanctioning the union. The community would also be joined in familial and communal terms, as they witnessed the union of the couple in the celebrations. Marriages by arms were however short-lived. Whilst the merographic analogy of 'family ties' continued through the years of struggle, as did the ethos of *hermandad* (fraternity and amity) and sharing, gender and sexual relations demonstrated certain unruly quality. As they exceeded and undermined the moral order(-s) placed upon them, guerrilla moral orders adapted to mould themselves in accordance with the excess of gender and sexuality. To safeguard the authority of the *comandancia*, rules progressively relaxed and were replaced by a more flexible notion of 'respect'. 'Respect' suited the merographic image of the family, but extended it, as respect was due not only to superiors, but to any *compañero/a*.

Alma, Rubén and the *Comandante* had offered different perspectives on marriages by arms. Alma had noted that they provided a degree of continuity between the experiences of social life within and outside the guerrilla. Rubén pointed out that they had juridical validity in so far as the combatants were concerned. Through humorous anecdotes, however, he argued that in matters of emotional and sexual relations between men and women, flexibility of moral orders were more appropriate than strict codes, rules and procedures. The *Comandante* had also underplayed the significance of the practice and noted that marriages by arms had been ephemeral and ultimately unsuccessful. Nevertheless, Alma, Rubén and the *Comandante* converged in their consideration of marriages by arms as part of a much broader and significant undertaking, namely that of fashioning social institutions in the guerrilla. They all acknowledged to be engaged in the creation of a doubling of the society they had left when joining the insurgency. They attached different values to this process of creation of sociality, and to the unions and separations thus engendered. The duplicate society of the guerrilla may resemble the society they laboured to protect themselves from. Nevertheless, the guerrilla replica was distinct, in that it functioned on moral orders based on commensality, *hermandad* and respect. Whilst there may be replication, there was also re-invention. Guerrilla reinvention however, presented itself to me as marked by melancholy. In Butler's reworking of Freud's work on the subject, melancholia connotes a 'refusal of grief and the incorporation of a loss, a miming of the death it cannot mourn' (Butler 1997:142).

'If melancholia designates a sphere of attachment that is not explicitly produced as an object of discourse, then it erodes the operations of language that not only posit objects, but regulates and normalises objects through that positing. If melancholia appears at first to be a form of containment, a way of internalising an attachment that is barred from the world, it also establishes the psychic conditions for regarding "the World" itself as contingently organised through certain kinds of foreclosures' (Butler 1997:143).

Steeped in guerrilla post-plurality, but overwhelmed by melancholy and harbouring my own secrets, I ventured to ask Rubén about the heterosexual logic that seemed to mark any discussion of gender and sexual relations in his account and in the accounts of other ex-combatants.

'I asked Rubén whether the logic that regulated sexual relations in the guerrilla was primarily heterosexual (*lógica de heterosexualidad*). Rubén says that there was only one case he could recall, of an excellent officer (*excelentísimo oficial*). I respect him very much as an officer. In how he presented himself, he was not homosexual (*su presentación, pues no era que fuera homosexual*), verdad. We experienced a very delicate situation, because the *compañero* joined in the capital, and arrived in the guerrilla fronts [in Petén] and gained prestige (*cobrar mucho prestigio*) on the grounds of his personality (*antes su personalidad*), his respect (*su respeto*) and attitude (*actitud*) towards women and towards the *compañeros*. So he got to graduate as lieutenant (*graduarse hasta de teniente*) and headed a front in the area of Narajo, La Libertad. This *compañero* was an excellent officer, but whilst being an officer he made undue propositions (*algunas proposiciones no idebidas*) to a *compañero*, and this *compañero* denounced him. So when this happened, the whole unit was very indignant (*la unidad se indignó demasiado*), knowing that a homosexual was in command (*un homosexual los estava dirigiendo*). The *compas* felt betrayed (*se sintieron como traicionados los compas*), there was lack of political maturity (*falta de maduréz política*). So the *compañero*, for having made an improper proposition (*propuesta inadecuada*) to this other *compañero*, turned so incandescent (*candente*) that the *comandante* had to intervene, and those of us in charge of security had to take him out of Petén, because the *compañeros* were very angry (*muy molestos*), because of that *machista* attitude (*por la misma actitud machista*), or whatever you may want to call it. But the *compañero* was an excellent (*excelentísimo*) and extremely good officer (*calidad de oficial*). We suggested (*pedir*) to him whether it may best that he got out (*salir*), in order to avoid problems, and he himself said

that he would prefer to leave Petén. Work for him was arranged in the city, so he carried on working as our *compañero* in logistics. That was the only case we had then. Later on, with the others, things were very different. In the case of the *compañero* whom you know well, nobody was bothered or offended *(reprocharse)*'.[13]

6.6 Moral Disorders: Mourning the Dead in the Ethnographic Present

Cande was thirty-nine years old. She was born in Santa Rosa and was one of the first women to join the guerrilla struggle in Petén. She told me that her parents came to Petén between 1960 and 1968 and settled in a village where they spent years working the land, at times renting a plot, or *agarrando*,[14] with no security of any sort in terms of land tenure.

'My parents *(mis padres)*, one was unaware of many things *(uno ignoraba muchas cosas)*, but my parents and their siblings *(pero mis papás y sus otros hermanos)*, they has been working in that [the guerrilla] since before *(desde antes venían trabajando en eso)*, and gradually they started disclosing to my mother *(declarandole a mi mamá)*, well, my father [began disclosing] what he was working on. And as we grew up, it was explained to us on what he was working on, and they started deploying us *(utilizar)*, that is, unconsciously we were already contributing to that work *(o sea, inconscientemente ya nosotros aportábamos en ese trabajo)*, but we didn't know what we were doing. Afterwards, my father began to explain to us to what ends/why we were fighting, so that in Guatemala there may one day be a better life for the people *(el pueblo)*, not only for those who fought, and that is how they gradually deployed me as messenger *(mensajera)*, I was first messenger delivering correspondence to a place, and learning a few things concerning arms

13 The person Rubén referred to in his concluding remarks was a prominent gay activist in the ethnographic present. In 2000, with the Grupo Promotor Colectivo Gay-Lésbico, he had organised the first public rally for '*el respeto a la diversidad sexual*', that is 'respect towards sexual diversity' in Guatemala City. Rubén noted with appreciation the *compañero*'s radicalism, adding: 'I may not identify, but I do not

(*algunas cosas de armas*), like that, guns, things like that, I worked on that for a time, that was my beginning. And as I was saying to you, my father used to converse a lot with us, he would gather us and explain to us what the causes were, and why [the struggle] was undertaken (*nos reunía y nos esplicaba cual eran las causas, y el porque se hacía*), because of the situation, that is, power in Guatemalan is held by few, isn't it (*por la situación, o sea el poder en Guatemala lo tienen unos cuantos, no*)? And that every day it kept getting worse for the poor, and that is how I started, I could say that all my family, for the whole of my family got involved in it, in those things (*y así es que yo pues empezé, podría decir que toda mi familia, por que nosotros, toda mi familia se metió en eso, en esas cosas*). I was fourteen, between fourteen and seventeen years of age when I was working on that, I would make tortillas, I would deliver mail, I would make purchases for the *compañeros* who were already *en la montaña*. It was in mid-1982 that I joined (*incorporarse*) the clandestine struggle directly was in mid-1982. No, I am sorry, in 1980. Because at the time, before the beginning of 1980 there was a group who went abroad to train (*preparase*), so in that group was me, and then the group went to the *monte* to train more people. So I joined one of those groups, with a *compa* who died, whose name was Androcles, whose pseudonym was Androcles. And with Nestor, whom you know.

Cande trained in Cuba and when she returned to Petén she was a combatant and also worked in communications. When she got in a relationship with a *compañero*, she told the officer in her platoon. During her years in the guerrilla she said she had always commanded respect.

'I have to tell you about respect (*respeto*) of how one may command the respect of others (*como uno se da a respetar*). When I started, there were no women. In the group where I was there were only men, I was the only woman. I would go round in a small patrol (*patrullita*) and when we would get together with the other groups to train, I felt at ease (*sentirse lo normal*), nobody

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accuse you (*acusar*), nor I vilify you (*agrear*) and least of all attack you (*atacar*)'.

disrespected me ever, I felt the *compañeros* of my patrol and the others appreciated me greatly, they admired me (*admirar*) because I was involved [in the guerrilla]. When I went to Cuba, the group who went with me was very fond of me (*cariño*) and they would support me. During the training we would stand in huge trenches (*trincheronas*) and I could not jump high enough and get out, so the same *compañeros* would help me so that I could get up'.

I asked Cande what had meant for her to be *en la montaña* and her grief and melancholy submerged us both.

'What did it mean for me to be *en la montaña*? Look, as I said, at the beginning my father would tell us many things, the majority of us who were *en la montaña* believed so strongly (*creer tanto*) in [revolutionary] triumph (*en el triunfo*), and we were so resolute (*decididos*) and with so much conviction (*convencidos*), that if in any instant we should commit (*ortorgar*) our lives, this would have been for something just (*justo*). That is why I tell you, it gives me sadness (*tristeza*), I start to cry, at times out of anger (*coraje*), at times out of sadness (*tristeza*), for all our *compañeros* who gave their lives (*vidas*), they gave their lives out of conviction (*convencidos*), so that those of us who would survive would continue [in the struggle], and would serve as examples with our people and with all the people. All of us who were there were moved by this ideal, that there would be change (*cambio*), for our children and for everyone's children. Regrettably, for reasons I do not entirely understand (*comprender*), that was not achieved (*llevar a cabo*), because other countries who had the revolution already, lost it, and that did not help us. I believe that if we had triumphed, we would not have been allowed to live either, because the powerful (*poderosos*), they have the power (*poder*), and what rules is money (*lo que manda es el dinero*). That is why I tell you that I was clear and convinced of [the necessity of] the struggle, of change, but now I am upset (*molesta*), because when the Peace was signed, there was an item [in the Peace Accords]

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[14] Occupation and use of land with no legalised land tenure.

that said that we would be able to go and look for our combatants who were left dead (*quedarse muerto*) and that we would be able to give them Christian burial (*cristiana sepultura*), and now that is not possible. [...] They say there is no money for it, and that the established deadline to carry out this work has already passed. What really hurts (*doler*), is that while our *compañeros* gave their lives for the people (*mientras nuestros compañeros dieron su vida por este pueblo*), now '*traga quien tiene mas galio*'[15], and the [deceased] *compañeros* lay forgotten (*olvidados*), and I am left with nothing. [...] I don't know how to explain it (*no sabría explicarme*), I don't know, handing over the weapons (*entragar las armas*) caused something like emotion/sentiment in me (me *causó como una cosa de sentimiento*), and since then I began to feel for those *compañeros* who died, I began to feel, like the one who says, I will go there, and you stay here (*yo me voy acá, y tu de quedas allí*). I cried when I left la *montaña* (*salir de la montaña*), I cried because I also had taken such fondness/appreciation to the forest (*le agarré tanto aprecio a la selva*), because the forest gave us a roof, gave us food, gave us water and the weaving that was part of our life (*por que la selva fue lo que nos dio techo, quien no dio comida, quien nos dio agua, quien nos dio el téjido parte de nuestra vida*), and when the demobilisation happened, and we got out from there, it was difficult for me (*costar*), it was difficult for me to accept this life change (*cambio de vida*), because, one does not know what one will find here [in civil life], exiting a system (*sistema*), so to speak, and entering a new one. For now it would be very difficult for us to go and visit these *compañeros* who were left buried (*enterrados*), some of them, at least. For others the army took with them, and who knows what happened to them.'

For Cande, leaving *la montaña* was to leave a 'system' to enter a new one. Cande discussed her experiences at demobilisation as entailing a detachment or parting from a complex set of relationships to persons, objects and the environment, all of which had participated in the interlacing that was guerrilla life *en la montaña*. At this point of

[15] Those who can drink more, drink more.

dissolution and disassembling, guerrilla sociality and relationality appeared as a whole constituted by parts which included the deceased *compañeros* buried in the forest. Their death had not marked the end of their relationship. Rather, death marked a sense of permanence and durability of guerrilla relationality and its continuity, so long as those who survived carried on in the struggle spurred on by,[16] and on behalf of, those who had been killed. Guerrilla sociality between the living and the dead was made possible by their mutual coexistence *en la selva*, that is, in the forest. The connection could be sustained and reproduced as long as the sociality in the forest may itself be maintained. Other ex-combatants had implied that what was also necessary was that there exist those who may recall where the dead lay. On demobilisation, Cande envisioned the inception of dissolution of guerrilla sociality as a moment of splitting, as in the division between the deceased *compañeros/as* who were left in the forest, and those moving on to a life and a system outside of it. The temporality of this perspective conjured up assemblage, as in the dead increasingly appearing as bundles of guerrilla relationships, and disassembling, with guerrilla relationality progressively resembling a 'vanishing whole' (cf. Strathern 1992b). I have argued that *guerrilleros/as* envisaged their experiences *en la montaña* as grounded on moral orders based on sharing, commensality and relatedness. Cande argued that the process of disassembling of guerrilla subjectivities and sociality entailed forgetting the dead with the relationalities and moral orders they had come to stand for. Unwilling to part-take in what was for her a progressively more ravenous and greedy ethnographic present, and unable to sustain her relations with either the living or the dead, Cande felt she had been left with nothing. Cande had laboured strenuously to avoid the disclosure of this sense of diminution. For months she had amiably and yet firmly exerted ethnographic refusal and rejected any relation with me. Encouraged by her brother, she eventually accepted to speak of the scale of disappearance and diminution through which her attachments to the guerrilla whole were articulated at the time.

6.7 Conclusion: Weak Description and Thick Nihilism

In ex-combatants' accounts, guerrilla sociality and relationality was predicated on

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[16] This point was made explicitly by Macario, whose thoughts are discussed in Chapter 7.

multiple merographic analogies and intersecting moral orders. Through production, reproduction and circulation of guerrilla substances, central dimensions of guerrilla social relations were generated. Equitable distribution among all of scarce food provisions produced relationalities of homogenisation, and a moral order based on sameness. Merographic analogies that established connections between domains such as 'the guerrilla' and 'the family' provided the ground for further moral orders grounded on interdependence *and* authority. With short-lived practices such as 'marriages by arms', idioms of familial relatedness grounded an attempt at ordering gender and sexual relations. Nevertheless, gender and sexuality appeared to be connoted by excess and instability, and any attempt at disciplining them was acknowledged to ultimately challenge the parental and military authority of those entrusted with the task of governing them, and thus the guerrilla project as a whole. 'Marriages by arms' were supplanted by a notion of 'respect' which was sufficiently permeable and flexible to accommodate the excess of scales of gender and sexuality, and that ensured the authority of the *comandancia* would not be ridiculed and undermined. *Guerrilleros* and *guerrilleras* with their different perspectives and scales produced multiple models of sociality and relatedness. Guerrilla models appeared to depend on division and connection of parts and wholes, and disassembling and reassembling of the social realm. Insofar as these processes occurred in temporal frames, they also conjured up the effect of malleability, as the guerrilla replica displaced the broader society and periodically re-invented itself. The labour of imagination at stake in these processes, with its models of sociality and relatedness, replicates and is replicated in the post-perspectivism imagined by anthropology through the notion of weak thought. Eschewing simple enumeration of a plurality of discrete wholes, both guerrilla imagination and the imagination of weak thought elicit a multiplicity of interpreting subjects marked by the immediacy of their historicity, the deferrals inherent in their constant shifting in perspectives, and thus in constant re-articulation. There thus seem to be a partial, tentative and provisional correspondence between guerrilla merographic analogies and the weak description of anthropology, as well as between the positive, rearticulatory thick nihilism of weak thought, and that of guerrilla resolutions of truth into value.

As noted by Cande, guerrilla socialities and moral orders based on sameness and sharing were being replaced by individualistic frames in the ethnographic present. In her view, this amounted to a form of betrayal of those combatants who were left dead in the forest without even having been given proper burial. A consideration of the multiple frames deployed by ex-guerrilleros/as in their discussion of their experiences of struggle suggests the complexity and plasticity of guerrilla socialities, relationalities, subjectivities and moral orders and the thick nihilism inherent in ethnographic switches between and across moral orders and their scales. In the next chapter I recast these questions in terms of anthropological/ethnographic post-plurality and anti-foundationalism and reflect on the aesthetics of ethnography and anthropology, weak description and thick nihilism through the concept-metaphor of 'prosthetics'.

Chapter 7

Prosthetic Aesthetics

'Gaps seem to give us somewhere to extend: space for our prosthetic devices. Absent expertise, the features of a distant kinsman, a glimpsed spirit elicit their imagining while also eliciting the perception that all images are borrowed images. A sense of excess or insufficiency, then, of lack of proportion, of connections being partial suggest[s] we could extend the perceptions themselves' (Marilyn Strathern 1991:115-6).

'We can understand phenomenology only by seizing upon it as a possibility' (Heidegger ([1962] 2002:39).

7.1 Introduction

This chapter is intended to be a reflection on thin, thick and weak *forms* of description and theorising, that is, on the aesthetics of ethnography and anthropology. The aim is to provide a 'cultural description' of cultural categories such as 'subjectivity', 'personhood', 'embodiment' and 'agency', and not a 'sociological analysis' (Strathern 1988: 274). I envisage the task by reflecting on the aesthetics which underpin theoretical models and the processes through which theoretical models emerge. To address the labour of imagination that theory and ethnography entail, I propose an engagement with 'prosthetics', as a critical tool and a concept-metaphor (Moore 1999, 2004) of considerable imaginative potential, and one which lends itself to a series of (re-)inscriptions and (re-)articulations.

There exist numerous sites of articulation of 'prosthetics' in the imagination of anthropology and cultural theory. 'Prosthetics' evoke debates over relations between the organicity of the body and the in-organicity of technology (cf. Downey, Dumit and Williams 1995, Gray 1995, Haraway 1991, Stone 1996, Zylincka 2002). From this

perspective, 'prosthetics' suggests meditations on the status of the nature/culture boundary usually resulting in both augmentation and excentricity of the agentic prosthetic subject. In point of fact, prostheses are often understood to mark the liminal space between the organic and the inorganic, the animate and the inanimate. The relation between inorganic prostheses, more or less permanently attached to organic bodies, suggests a series of questions concerning the type of sociality that may be established between organic humans and inorganic technology and the kinds of embodied subjects that may be said to emerge in the context of organic/inorganic interactions. Further, through a questioning of dualisms, prosthetics suggests reconfigurations of what may be understood by 'embodiment', 'subjectivity' and 'agency'.

It is in the work of Donna Haraway (1989, 1991, 1997) that a groundbreaking attempt has been made at rethinking the relationality of humans and machines. It is Haraway's contention that the interaction between the two is not unidirectional, or indeed, anthropocentric. Rather, Haraway suggests that humans and machines are *both* produced through mutuality of interaction. Agency is thus posited as a product of mutual interworkings of the human subject and the machine, and this insight in turn leads to a reconfiguring of the subject in terms of a cyborgian imaginary.

'A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction [...] The cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late 20th century. This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion' (Haraway 1991:149).

In Haraway's cyborgian imaginary, the hybrid cyborg is enmeshed in fact and fiction, to the extent that the boundary between lived reality and representation appears to be a perspectival effect, and optical illusion. The cyborgian subject is further defined as a normative, if simulated, effect of Foucauldian bio-power (Haraway 1991:163) and

Western hegemonic teleology. The cyborg's hybrid and illegitimate conception engenders the possibility of a counter-hegemonic political strategy.

'By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorised and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are all cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics... The cyborg is also the awful apocalyptic *telos* of the 'West's' escalating dominations of abstract individualism, an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency, a man in space... The cyborg skips the steps of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense. This is its illegitimate promise that might lead to subversion of its teleology as star wars... The cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence' (Haraway 1991:150-1).

The cyborg is thus a subject who/which, having merged the organic/mechanic interface and transgressed speciation narratives, allows for reconfigurations of subjectivity and agency that are not entirely dependent on, but may be still spuriously related to, Western metaphysical traditions. The cyborgian subjects presented by Haraway eschew dualism and naturalism and are endowed with cyborgian agency and heteroglossia.

Haraway's conceptualisation of the human/mechanic interface has been very effectively explored in the work of the performance artist Stelarc. In the context of the 'Third Hand' project, for instance, a mechanical limb is grafted onto/into the artist's stomach and leg muscles. During the performance, Stelarc's body is also attached to a computer system so that Internet users can remotely determine the movement of Stelarc's prosthetically enhanced bodily extension. The overall effect is that of decentring Stelarc's control over his own movements, so that the artist's body is no longer 'his own'. Fleming (2002:95) argues that Stelarc's performances with 'the body-as-an-action-system' subvert Cartesian notions of control and centricity through 'corporeal decentrings' enacted in the complex and multiple spatial and chronological site of the wired environment. The subversion of the autonomous agent is said to amount to 'subversion without inversion'. Partly in

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reference to Stelarc's work, Moore (1999a:162) notes that 'all forms of technology are, of course, prosthetic and, this accounts in part, for their symbolic role in the construction and mediation of identity, particularly gender identity'. The mutuality of articulation between the organic and the inorganic, the human and the mechanic has its confluence in the figure of the cyborg and its hybrid, illegitimate and heterodox condition. In its complex relation with Western metaphysics, that is both within the horizon of Western metaphysics and also substantively and ideationally beyond it, the cyborgian subject is a 'weak' subject, or a subject marked by weak thought.

In a rather different exchange, 'prosthetics' have been conceptualised in terms of notions of presence and absence, with factual or imagined prosthetic extensions as supports to a body which is understood as lacking factual or imagined limbs/bodily parts (Hogle 2003, Nelson 2001, Kurzman 2001). 'Prosthetics' have thus been deployed to illuminate a number of trajectories such as the prosthetic role played by the *mujer maya* (Maya woman) in propping up the Guatemalan state (Nelson 1999, 2001), or the prosthetic body of workers as the sites of capital accumulation (Harvey 1996, Haraway 1993), and related to the latter, the prosthetics of supervision in *maquiladora* factories (Wright 2001). Objecting to the deployment of the term 'prosthetics' in these analyses, Kurzman (2001) notes that the metaphor of 'prosthetics' presupposes certain normative ideas of bodily wholeness and completeness, thus implicitly relying on the body of amputees as the ground, 'or silent site of creative discursive frameworks' (Kurzman 2001:374). As Kurzman states, '[p]rosthetic imagery assumes a defective body in need of propping up and absence and lack are implied in the use of the image of the amputee's body' (Kurzman 2001:375). Interestingly, Kurzman (ibid) adds that the metaphor of prosthesis is not 'about disrupting the construction of subjects "on the ground", or the site of establishing discursive frameworks for body politics, nor is about subaltern subjects as agents. It is about our inability to deal with physical difference, impairment and disability, and about the difficulty of thinking outside of our singular concept of the Body and its relationship to subjectivity' (Kurzman 2001:384). The use of prosthetic metaphors in anthropological analysis thus appears mired by normative assumptions about the body and notably by 'the preconception of impairment and disability as a lack of bodily and

subject presence' (Kurzman 2001:383). Instead, Kurzman proposes to think critically about the way 'we all naturalise able-bodiedness as a subject position tied to one particular body' and develop instead frameworks that, by thinking about impairment, may allow for theorisations of 'multiple bodies, subjectivities, forms of ability and mobility, and ways of being whole' (Kurzman 2001:383-4), and, I wish to add, ways of being in parts.

Whilst technology-endowed cyborgian prosthetic ex-centric subjects may at times be predicated on an unacknowledged monism which often undercuts the very conditions of possibility of prosthetics (Malik 2002), and normative *a priori* or supplemented wholeness may be presupposed in conceptualisations of prosthetics-as-presence/absence, I would argue that prosthetics aesthetics have important imaginative potential. The cyborgian subject operates as fact *and* fiction, science fiction *and* social reality (Haraway 1991). Further, in the prosthetic subject presence and absence may come to presuppose each other in complex existential embodied trajectories so that subjects may exist in composite wholes, or indeed in parts. Through the concept metaphor of prosthetics, with the recovery of gaps and cyborgian interactions that the concept metaphor allows, it may be possible to hold within the same frame the phenomenology of the prosthetic subject and the scale of her supplementation.

Prosthetic aesthetics were conjured up during my fieldwork in different contexts and scales of engagement. The ethnographic moment that connoted the realisation of multiple and complex naming practices and related relationalities among *ex-guerrilleros/as*[1] revealed that names amount to a prosthetics of guerrilla subjectivity and sociality. Through the deployment of different names, (ex-)guerrilla subjects were able to extend themselves to fashion different orders of agency and connection. Further, through names, presence and absence presupposed each other in specific ways. Discarding a name may make a subject disappear so that she may be able to embody a new pseudonym, and hence a different incarnation. With nicknames, 'the same' subject may acquire a further prosthesis and one that mainly functioned within guerrilla secret socialities and

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[1] I have discussed this ethnographic moment in Chapter Four.

relationalities. When Mosquito recovered his guerrilla nickname in the course of our conversation, he activated a guerrilla prosthetic extension that pertained to the realm of guerrilla secrecy. Just as swiftly, through ethnographic refusal, he deactivated it. In a different scale, ex-combatants often referred to joining the guerrilla organisation as a moment of *incorporación* or 'incorporation'.[2] The term was to me extremely powerful in that it evoked a sense in which each *guerrillero/as* may be part of a corporeal guerrilla whole and may in turn represent a partial prosthetic embodiment of the guerrilla. Through accounts of *incorporación,* I was made to imagine bodies in parts, embodied/corporeal parts and wholes, and multiple orders and scales of attachment and connection. In other words, I imagined the guerrilla through prosthetic aesthetics.

In what follows I wish to highlight a further aspect of prosthetic aesthetics, and one that is presupposed in the cyborgian subject as much as in the subject marked by presence and absence, namely the prosthetic subject and her phenomenology. Csordas (1994:11) argues that '[t]he dominance of semiotics over phenomenology, and hence concern with the problem of representation over the problem of being-in-the-world' has marred anthropological analysis and is reproduced in the seemingly categorical distinction between 'language' and 'experience' (Csordas ibid). Drawing on Husserl (1964, 2002), Heidegger ([1962] 2002) and Merleau-Ponty ([1962] 2002), anthropological approaches informed by phenomenology draw attention to the experiential and embodied quality of subjectivity and sociality (cf. Csordas *et al* 1994, 1999, Jackson *et al* 1996, Rapport 2002, 2003). As argued by Rapport (2003:220),

'It is important to reiterate that these three kinds of knowledge – self, world and other – are bound up together, mutually implicated. Also, that these knowledges are personally embodied; they are the possession and creation of distinct individual organisms. Also that such mutually implicated, personally embodied knowledge is not a fixed or stationary phenomenon but one in continuous process of being and becoming. Finally, the identity of the organism and its environment – the

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[2] To incorporate, Middle English *incorporaten,* from Late Latin *incorporare, incorporat-,* to form into a body (OED 2004).

organism-plus-environment – can be said to be dependent on the ongoing process by which that organism comes to know itself. The organism is the knowledge of the world, is the order it creates of and around itself (Rapport 2003:220).

Within the horizon of weak thought and phenomenology, strong categorical distinctions between 'experience' and 'representation' are weakened. Moreover, with Heidegger's specification that '[w]e can understand phenomenology only by seizing upon it as a possibility' (Heidegger ([1962] 2002:39), I wish to discuss phenomenologies of the ethnographic encounter and its prosthetics and forms of being-in-the-world.

In the conclusion I suggest that the relation between guerrilla prosthetics and anthropological prosthetics may be tentative and temporal replicas of each other. Through the establishment of a relation of equivalence between the anthropological prosthesis of the tape recorder and the guerrilla prosthesis of the rifle, the guerrilla and anthropology borrowed each other's images, to constantly extend, re-inscribe, supplement, and defer to, each other and their relations. Such temporal processes of corporeal re-inscription make subjects and descriptions prosthetic as well as weak, that is, marked by weak thought. Subjects and their descriptions may be always incomplete, ever partial and yet constantly augmenting and diminishing in and through their prosthetic aesthetics. Prosthetics thus allow for (re-)figuring and (re-)configuring linkages and sites of analysis, representation and experience, thus (re-)casting prosthetics in anthropological and cultural theory, and as a detour, in the practice of ethnography.

7.2 Prosthetics and the Phenomenology of the Ethnographic Encounter

'Alma and I meet again, about two weeks after our first brief encounter. Alma was allocated her own *lote* (plot of land) and *vivienda* (house), but prefers to live with her mother, father, siblings, partner and her own children on her father's *lote*. The family built a large kitchen with wooden walls and *techo de corozo* (palm roof). The sleeping quarters are large enough to accommodate everyone, including visiting researchers. For our conversation however, Alma takes me to her

own house. We walk through the village for about five minutes, and then stop, while she undoes the knots of the rope that keep the wooden door shut. There is ash in the *fogón*, a sign that fire has been lit at some point in the past, but a hen is now sleeping in it. It is clear that people seldom come by or use the premises. There are no utensils or items of every-day use. We sit on the benches whose stilts are buried in the ground. I set up the tape recorder, take out the cigarettes and Alma and I smoke, while I explain the nature of my visit in greater detail. The long conversation that ensues is punctuated by our smoking *Rubios Azules.*[3] Alma recounts several episodes related to her time *en la montaña* and I am mesmerised by her gripping story-telling. While Alma's house and the cigarettes mark the inter-subjective space of our encounter, and the tape-recorder grants all manner of prosthetic extensions to us both, there are other items that gain prominence as her narrative unfolds'.

In order to re-route concept metaphors and meta-theories of prosthetics, I propose to consider an ethnographic encounter with Alma, the ex-*guerrillera* engaged in giving *form* to embodied subjectivity in my presence. The analysis therefore takes its lead from a conversation with the ex-*guerrillera* intent on the act of telling stories about her time *en la montaña* during our ethnographic encounter. The fictional quality that I hope to highlight is not that of the content of what is being said, or what is being remembered. Rather, I wish to point to the phenomenological dimensions of the ethnographic encounter and the multiple processes through which embodiment, subjectivity, agency and anthropological knowledge come into being and are supplemented through a number of prosthetic mediations.

The labour of ethnography entails the deployment of self (Ortner 1999) as much as the use of distinctive paraphernalia. The place of objects in the practice and representation of ethnography has been noted by Stocking (1983) and Clifford (1980, 1988, 1992, 1997) in

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[3] *Rubios* is a brand of cigarettes produced in Guatemala. They are cheaper than imported brands. Cigarettes of whatever brand and label are viewed as superfluous items in Petén. Men often go to the local *tienda* and purchase one or two at a time. Most men *and* women, however, smoked with me thus engaging in specific prosthetic relations.

their insightful remarks on the role played by the tent in Malinowski's fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands. Clifford (1992) notes that Malinowski's tent functions in his work as a defining icon of ethnography, producing a regulatory conceptualisation of ethnography as a 'practice of co-residence'. Conversely, the paraphernalia of my fieldwork was mainly the stuff of travel. Rucksack, hammock, mosquito net, toothbrush and toilet paper marked the itinerant and transitory quality of the ethnographic encounter as much as a clinging to specific 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1988). The items were also suggestive of multiple conceptualisations of the experience of ethnography in the way they seemed to figure a shift from 'single-sitedness' to 'multi-sitedness' (Marcus 1998).

The *chiclero* hammock I borrowed was made of thick enough *lona*[4] as to be impenetrable to insects and was often remarked to be the token of Petenero identity. The Petén and the Petenero identity in question were those of the early- to mid-twentieth century, namely times characterised by the mass extraction of *chicle*. The sap of the *chico zapote* tree (*Achras zapota*), also known as *oro blanco*, or 'white gold', made the fortune of the United States chewing gum industry. It also allowed for the accumulation of wealth and status for a number of prominent Guatemalan/Petenero families (Schwartz 1990, see Chapter 2). The *chiclero* hammock, as a prosthetic attachment to the resting body of the *chiclero*, was a reminder of the bodily practices associated with the extraction of labour and resources for the purpose of capital accumulation (Jameson 1991, Martín 1992, Taussig 1981, 1987, Limón 1994) characteristic of Petén up to the mid-twentieth century. That the *chiclero* body and its prostheses were of archival rather than contemporary ethnographic relevance was signalled in the ethnographic present by the diorama exhibit one could view in the INCAP museum in Flores. There one could find the display of a 'Disappearing Petén', including the *chiclero* hammock arranged in a taxidermic, *faux*-jungle setting for the consumption of tourists as much as justification of the work of the 'environmentalist' non-governmental organisation that financed it and maintained it. Nevertheless, the prosthetics of labour and human and natural exploitation had changed. The *motosierras* (chain saws) and *los camiones* (lorries) of the illegal logging industry were more topical and relevant prosthetics of capital accumulation in Petén in the

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[4] *Lona* in Petén is a thick cotton fabric.

ethnographic present and featured prominently in people's everyday discussions and preoccupations.

During my time in Petén, I also acquired an '*amaca guerrillera*', or 'guerrilla hammock'. Acquaintances told me that a group of *ex-guerrilleros/as* disabled by injuries suffered during the conflict were putting the skills they had acquired during their time in the insurgency to use in post-demobilisation times and were making hammocks. I said I would very much like to buy one and weeks later the hammock arrived from Guatemala City. *La amaca guerrillera* (the guerrilla hammock) was a large rectangular piece of waterproof fabric, which I was assured, would keep out rain and insects, and regrettably retain the heat and humidity within. I never used *la amaca guerrillera* while travelling to and from communities, because I thought it would be safer to conceal obvious signifiers of insurgency.

Rucksack, hammock, tape recorder, cigarettes and camera and the other prostheses of my fieldwork were complex sites of multiple mediations. Their activity and idleness defined the prosthetic quality of my ethnographic practice. For instance, my propensity for 'hearing' rather than 'seeing' seemed suited to my activities on the routes of guerrilla secrecy and determined the primacy of the tape recorder in my exchanges with the ex-guerrilla. The tape-recorder seemed to function in less intrusive and more intimate ways than the prosthetic eye of a camera may do. Unlike with images, I felt I could produce anonymised recordings self-sufficiently, that is, secretly. Nevertheless, my prosthetic hearing entailed its own anxieties, mainly to do with that disturbing and most prosthetic of associations with *orejas*, in the literal sense of 'ears' and the metonymical sense of 'informer'. With the story of the apparatus recounted by Luis in mind,[5] and the implicit warning that (anthropological) bricoleur abilities to hear and record the conversations of post-Peace Accords ex-guerrilla secret socialities may provoke violent reprisals, I took Luis' advice seriously and hid the evidence, namely the tapes, 'inside a well'. The tape recorder of my fieldwork functioned as the prosthetic extension of the ethnographic embodied subjects whose agency now extends beyond the immediacy of the encounter.

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[5] I discussed this story in Chapter 5.

Ex-guerrilla ex-centric and hyper-agentic subjects fully realised the prosthetic potential inherent in the ethnographic encounter and its prostheses. *Ex-guerrilleros/as* re-drew the boundaries between us subjects and our prostheses accordingly. They conjured up the image of technologically enhanced, ex-centric prosthetic guerrilla subjects and their experiences and noted how ex-centricity and prosthetic embodiment also pertained to anthropology. In so doing, they gave a *form* to the phenomenology of the ethnographic encounter.

7.3 Guerrilla Phenomenology and its Prosthetics

As Alma and I smoked *Rubios Azules* in her abandoned house, she began to recount stories about her time in the guerrilla. Guerrilla phenomenology and its prosthetics slowly emerged in Alma's story telling. I was captivated.

'I am going to tell you [a story] (*contar*), I remember that once, when I left, once I went to Mexico, I got back in [into Guatemala], and when I got back in, I thought I was going in the direction of Dolores, but at that time they were going to establish the Panzós Heróico Front in Alta Verapaz, so the Captain who was in that front would say to me, let's go. The captain was in love with me (*enamorado de mí*) and was courting me (*me estaba enamorando*) but the truth was that I had not yet decided what to do about him (*estábamos en veremos con él*). We passed by a camp (*campamento*) and I realised that he had, well, he had a girl (*chava*), well, before, and there he met up with the girl and I saw that he stayed on (*se quedó*) with the girl there and I did not like that, so I told him definitely no (*ya no*) [nothing would happen between them]. Then we left that camp and proceeded on our course (*marcha*) and he tells me, let's go [to join his own front] and I tell him no, and he asks why and I tell him it is not in my interest (*no me conviene*) to go, and he was a bit hard pressed (*presionado*) because he wanted to take me there, but as I was stubborn (*necia*), I would jump (*brincaba*) [in frustration and anger] when I considered that I had my reasons, I would say no, I want to go the other way, to the FAR Front, my front, I won't leave it

for anything (*yo no lo dejo ni por nada*). And he, obstinate (*terco*), as obstinate as that. In the end, I did not go [with him]. Two to three months went by and eventually he rested his case (*se convenció*). I went as far as the river Santa Isabel, and from there I made my way back to the FAR [Front]. That's where I stayed. With time, something like eight to ten months later, I can't remember well, the other front needed to be strengthened and they sent almost everybody [in the FAR Front] that way. We went and I was the one in charge of setting the route (*rumbera*) because I knew the area, I was taking all that crowd (*gentio*) with me in that direction, feeling quite sad (*triste*), as at times I would forget the routes (*rumbos*), and we would proceed kind of lost (*algo perdidotes*) at times, but we would carry on nonetheless. We got together with the others, and on one of those occasions there were some *compas*[6] who were ill with *dengue*[7], and I had a problem with my tonsils and they had to go and attack an Army base (*destacamento*) which was there in Fray [Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, Alta Verapaz], so they told me, you are not going, you are staying behind. So we stayed on with those who were ill, all of those who were ill and a medical officer who stayed with us. Three days later, the guys were supposed to be back on the fourth day and most of us were already feeling better and I was also feeling quite well again, so they sent us, go and wait for the guys. We went. I remember we were picking *nances*,[8] and while we were doing that a girl came out on her way to fetch water, and the *compa* who was with me started courting the girl (*enamorar a*), but the girl would not take much notice of him (*le daba lado*), and we were carrying our handful of *nances*, we gave some to the girl as a present and carried on. So, I say, there was a house in that direction, I say to him, I will go there to try and get a bag because my little hat, the hat that we would wear, that's where I was carrying the *nances* in. I am going to look for a bag, I say to him, and I left my ammunition belt (*cinturón*) behind, my rifle and everything, and I go just like that (*me voy así*), as I was wearing a brown t-shirt, a civilian one (*particular*), I put that on and that is it, when I get this close to the house I see a woman

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[6] *Compas* is short for *compañeros*.
[7] *Dengue* is an illness similar to malaria.

approaching and she says to me that [one word is unclear in the recording] and she keeps on looking at me (*me quedó viendo*), and I notice that behind the house, that's where the soldiers are, and I make my way back quickly and I say to the other *compa*, that's where the *cuques* [soldiers] are, I say to him, and we left quickly, we left. So, what of the *nances*? I had a handkerchief, and we left the little wrap with the *nances* tied to a tree, and on our way back we went to pick it up, with some *tortillas* that that girl had given us as a gift, we went to a hill (*cerro*) to wait for the others and we started to eat, when I see that the group (*grupo*) was over there, that's where the *compas* are, I say to my companion, and he just keeps on looking (*se queda viendo*), I stood up, and I was whistling and whistling at them and they did not even take notice, imagine (*fíjese*), there in the terrain free of vegetation (*allí en lo puro limpio*). Stoop down, my companion told me, that's the *cuques* [soldiers], he told me, and I was stubborn, until finally I threw myself to the ground. He would tell me, it's the *cuques* [soldiers]. We will see, I told him, anyway, we walked down the hill to go and see. We were just getting near when we heard the bangs (*cuentazos*), they [the soldiers] had clashed with the other [guerrilla] group, those who were coming to meet up with us (*venían al contacto con nosotros*). And precisely (*cabal*), it was the Army. And there the noise/exchange of fire (*cuenteyo*) started. So, I say, they fell onto the guys (*le caieron a los muchachos*), I tell my companion, and they must have caught them by surprise, so I say, let's get in there, and we bash (*les damos*) the *cuques* [soldiers]. From behind? I [Silvia] ask. Yes, from the rearguard, seriously, so they come up against us and the others are free. So we got in there, and precisely from the rearguard we started shooting. So, the other *compa* tells me, here we should proceed by *saltos vigilados*, because there could be more of them in that direction, and so we were proceeding like this, he would advance a bit and I would stay still supporting him from behind, from there, he would take on guard and I would go ahead, and that's how we were proceeding when, (*cabal*) we fell right into an army ambush which was right where we had left the *nances* and where they had seen us! And that's where we went back to!? And that's where

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[8] *Nances* are berry-like fruits thatg row in the wild.

they were waiting for us, and precisely when we were going through a nice clean stretch of grazing land (*potrero*), I eyed a little house that was on the small edge, so that people would not see us (*para que no fuera a ver la gente*), when I see a shadow (*sombra*) this big and I realise that it was the army, I turn and the shooting is just behind me in my direction (*y son los cuentazos atrás de mí*), and I threw myself to the ground fast (*yo corriendo me tiré a tierra*), there was a fence there, and I threw myself in the direction of the fence, I stand up again (*me vuelvo a parar*) and I jump into a stream that was there, and the other *compa* who was with me, well he also started unleashing lead [shooting] (*rempujar plomo*), and so we started, and what? It's when we start to withdraw that another Army group comes out, like that, to cover us [in the sense of siege, not protection], and they almost got us encircled (*casi nos teníamos encerrados*). It was just the two of us, and that's when we started unleashing lead [shooting] (*bolarles plomo*) and proceeding ahead, and they were shooting back, we were just about to jump across a huge furrow (*íbamos a cruzar un sanjón bien grande*), because there are very ugly furrows in Alta Verapaz, when they threw a mortar (*tiraron un morterazo*), and I almost fell ahead of myself, ahead of where I was going, so I came back on myself, and the other [*compa*] on his way back from jumping across the stream fell near me, so the expansive wave (*onda espansiva*) [result of the explosion] threw me on my mouth in the direction of the furrow (*me tiró de boca para el sanjón*), and that's where I got the problems with my spine, up to this day I suffer from problems with my leg, and there, I could not get away, I was feeling watery (*me sentía aguada*) [in the sense of unsteady], I felt my feet becoming watery (*sentía que me se aguadaron los pies*) had already no strength left (*ya no tenía fuerza*), and the other *compa* did not want to leave me behind, come, he said to me, he was giving me his hand so that I could get out, and I was not even able to stand (*yo ni pararme podía*), in the end I got across a stretch of land that was there, where there was *milpa*[9], the *milpa* was nice and small (*chiquitita estaba la milpa*), and on we went, let's go, he said to me, and the *compa* was dragging me (*me llevaba a jalones*), I was feeling that my legs had no strength anymore, and the

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[9] *Milpa* is any stretch of land where maize has been planted.

cuques [Army soldiers] behind us unleashing lead (*volandonos plomo*), they almost killed us (*casi nos mataron*), they pushed us towards the Chiniq river, that's what they call it in Alta Verapaz, and I say to the *compa*, you go, I am going to stay here (*yo aqui me quedo*), that's where I am going to stay (*aqui me voy a quedar*) because I don't want to die drowning (*porque yo no quiero morir ahogada*), I say to him, it's better this way and I am going to throw lead from here, you go. He did not let me do that/leave me (*no me dejó*), what he did was throw me in the water (*lo que hizo me tiró al agua*), and we, I mean, he threw himself and he pushed me, and I was going behind him, and that way, we got to the other side swallowing water (*tragando agua salimos al otro lado*), and to hell we went (*y nos fuimos a la fregada*), and they did not catch up with us again. In the meantime, the unit with which the army had clashed, I mean, those *compas* started to manoeuvre, and the row/stir up with them started (*y ya empezó el alborote*) and they got them off our backs. But all this was outright chaos (*Ah, pero todo eso fue la fregada!*). We did not go through there, the trouble (*tenquello*) started at about two, at about two PM, and it finished at about six PM, as it was already getting dark, and they started, I was really unwell (*yo iba bien fregada*), I recall I got to the house of some collaborators (*colaboradores*) at about eight-nine PM. I recall that they gave us food, and from there the big gossip arose (*y de alli el gran chisme*), that they had killed me (*que me habian matado*), and as in those days the army started putting women in their files, well they started to say that so-and-so [Alma] had been killed (*empezaron a decir mataron a Fulana*) and all that, and as many people, civilian people, knew me, they would say, they killed so-and-so, they killed so-and-so, and the *compas* would say to them, no, that's not true (*no es cierto*), that's where she is, but no that can't be because we saw her, the army showed her to us, no, that's where the *compa* is, she is around, she is well, bring her here for us to see, to see whether it is true (*a ver si es cierto*), they [ordinary people] would say. Later, little by little, I started to appear (*después a poco a poco fui yo apareciendo*), Ah! Well, that's true, so who was it that the army had with them?! They had a girl who looked like you, they would say, and so on, but in reality it wasn't so. I say to Alma that from what she tells me, it is clear the people in the

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villages (*comunidades*) cared for (*querían*) her and the other *compas*. Yes, they care for us (*nos querían*), Alma said. Many people got to know me. I had many acquaintances (*mucha gente conocida*) in those days. I ask whether this means that one was not in total clandestinity (*a clandestino total*). No, Alma replied, people knew us, we were not totally *en la montaña* as it was said (*nos conocían, nosotros no andábamos totalmente en la montaña como decían*), we were in there, in the community/village (*nosotros estábamos metidos en la misma comunidad*). [...] There are many, many stories [...] and for that problem that I had there [being injured by the explosion], I already had problems, and later I did not have the same physical endurance I had before (*la misma resistencia física como tenía antes*), the legs were bothering me a lot, I could not run anymore, I was facing considerable difficulties. That's how they later got me out (*así fue como después me sacaron*), I did not want to leave, I remember that, there on the border [the border between Guatemala and Mexico] I met up with Nestor and I told him, I do not want to leave, look Nestor. Yes man (*sí hombre!*), he said, but if you don't go/get out, you are going to be even more screwed up (*jodida*), I am going to recommend you to the *compañeros* there, learn some job, learn to drive, all that, he said to me, and if it is the case that you really don't like it and you can't get used to it (*si en caso totalmente no te parece, no te vas a hallar*), I am going to send for you, you come back again. With time, I got used to it. There is a great deal I like recounting (*hay una mayoría de cosas, me gusta contarlas*). Sometimes, when I get together with the guys, we start telling these stories, yes, that's the way it is'.

I thank Alma for taking time out to speak to me and turn the recorder off. However, Alma begins to recount another story. The form or aesthetics of her narrative also seems prosthetic, in that it is punctuated by gaps which lead to further attachments, further images and experiences.

'Once the news came that a group (*grupo*) [group of *guerrilla* combatants] that had gone the San

Pedro Carchá way failed in their mission/got hit (*fracasaron*), and a *compañero* arrived looking for us, saying that they had taken out (*sacado*) a wounded *compañero*, and the boss (*jefe*) said to us, who wants to go that way? So, there was a sargeant there who was the uncle of the guy (*muchacho*) who got wounded, I'll go, I said and he said to me, let's go, it was about ten in the evening, we had just got there, very tired (*bien cansados*), we have to go right now because the *compa* is wounded, so we left there and then, on foot. At about two o'clock in the morning we stopped walking, we rested for a while, and then we started walking again, we stopped again at about two in the afternoon, we were possibly (*quizás*) near the road, and in that place where we were the night fell, then at night we crossed the road and we started walking again in the night (*de noche, a caminar Usted*)! At about one in the morning, that's when we stopped for a while, and from there again, up to where the *compa* was, he was in that Sierra Machamá, there in Alta Verapaz, that's where the *compa* had got himself into (*estaba metido el compa*), we went to get him, and we were going back, but when we were on our way back we meet up with the other group (*grupo*) that was around there and when we were about to cross the river, that river, what is the name of that river that is near Fray...what's its name? It's the same as the one here, the Pasión river, what do they call it, perhaps I will remember later on, of having crossed it so many times, I can't even remember now! Anyway, in crossing this river, the river was extremely high (*lleno*), very high, who dared throw themselves to the other side (*quien se avienta al otro lado*)? It is very dangerous for one to throw themselves in a haste like that, because there may be (*a lo mejor*) the Army on the other side, they would stir one up (*se lo atizan a uno*)! Who are the best swimmers? Because I had learned to swim quite well, I tell them, well, I can jump in (*yo me aviento*), and that León was there, I jump in too he says, and that Angel says, me too, so good, the three of us. The first one to throw himself in was that León, that one was really good in the water (*ese si era bueno para el agua*), he threw himself from there, and from there the other *compa* jumps in, and what? He had not even got half way into the river that he started to shout that he was drowning! Ah! I started to be afraid (*a mi me empezó a darme miedo*), as when a river swells up, it

penetrates up into the vegetation (*se mete así entre la palazón*), and there was indeed a big tree (*palo*) there, this size, and I went to climb/hang myself from (*aprenderse*) that tree always looking to the other *compa* and shouting to the others that they got him some help (*que le dieran ausilio*), and I started to climb up that tree, that tree had a hole/cavity like this, and I grabbed the hole to lift myself up, when I see that that's where there was a huge curled up snake (*cuando veo yo, allí estaba una gran culebrona enrollada*) in there, I lost hold of the tree and fell [in untidy fashion] into the water (*yo me desprendí del palo y cahí amontonada en el agua*), and I say, how to get out? And León says to me, as the river did a turning, and the *compa* was shouting and he was disappearing [in the water] and every now and again he would appear, he says to me [León], let's go to the turning, perhaps we still manage to find him, and we said, just get this [to me], there in the grazing field (*potrero*), we were running, and a man (*don*) heard the screams (*gritos*) and he went with his canoe (*cayuco*), and he dragged the *compa* out and he [the *compa*] pulled through (*salió*), but very frightened (*espantado*), horrible, there. Later on with the man's canoe, the man had no idea who they were (*quienes eran*) [who the people he had helped were], ah, they said to him (*le dijieron*), could you do us the favour of taking us to the other side, and the man (*don*) could not refuse (*y el don no podía decir que no*), out of obligation (*porque obligadamente*), [10] that's where it is, the canoe and the oar, everything, the boys (*muchachos*) went first, and from there we all got to the other side. I ask Alma whether they had any equipment and she yes. I then ask her whether they were carrying all the equipment with them when all this happened and she replies that no, they had left it behind. I say to Alma that she seems to remember many things. Many things indeed...once, but this was here in Petén, they sent us to get some uniforms, here, on the way to Belize, I went with a *compañero*, it was only two of us, we went, and on the shores of the river Mopán we set camp (*acampamos*), early the next day we left

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[10] It is unclear why the man was in no position to refuse to take the *guerrilleros/as* to the other side. It may have been a matter of politeness, but it could also have to do with the fact that although Alma said the man had no idea who he was talking to, in fact the very (certainity or) uncertainty, and hence fear, may have precluded the possibility to refuse the favour.

again, the *compañero* got to the other side [of the river] and went to get a canoe, and we both

jumped (*nos zampamos*) into the canoe with the rucksack and all, and the rucksacks were very

heavy, we were carrying a load of uniforms (*puros uniformes traíbamos*), and the only thing I

said, I am going to take off my boots, so there I was only with my equipment when, what the hell

(*que púchica*), I see that the canoe capsises half way across the river (*a medio rio da vuelta el*

cayuco), and we fall in the water (*y nos vamos al agua pues*), and I have no idea about how (*yo ni*

se ni como), but the only thing I did was grabbing hold of (*agarrar*), secure (*asegurar*) my rifle,

but from there I don't remember (*pero de allí no recuerdo*), get this (*fijese*) [to me], I put a

shoulder string of the rucksack here, the other here in the middle, and I have no idea of how I

managed to swim, but the reality is (*la verdad es*) that I did manage to get out, and the leather

boots (*las botas de cuero*)[11], the two pairs of boots, they were gone, mine and the other

compañero's and we were so sad (*y nosotros tristes*)! What are we going to do now?! Well, we'll

have to walk barefoot (*nos toca caminar descalzos*), there was that plant (*sarsa dormilona*), how

it would scratch one's feet, very bad (*bien feo*). And I say to him, I am not going to be able to

withstand walking like this (*yo no voy a aguantar a caminar así*), I am going to get myself into

that house, and be it only a pair of old shoes that they may give me (*aún que sea un para de*

zapatos viejos que me den), because I am not going to be able to bear it barefoot (*pero yo*

descalza no voy a aguantar), so we got ourselves into a *manaquea*[12], waiting for the late

afternoon (*tardecita*), and from there I got near to the house and the group of youths (*la*

chamaquía) who were there realised very quickly that I was barefoot, and what happened to you?

And to your shoes?[13] I left them over there, and from there I spoke to the man (*señor*) and they

[11] The fact that the boots were made of leather is important. Resources were so scarce in the *guerrilla* that most combatants wore rubber boots, or *botas de hule*. As discussed in Chapter 5, *botas de hule* were a signifier of insurgency.
[12] A *manaquea* is a stretch of land where one finds *manaca*, i.e. a type of palm with narrow branches very common in Petén. *Manaca* is used for roofing nowadays, as the more longlasting leaves of *guano* become increasingly hard to find.
[13] Surprise at seeing someone barefoot suggests that this episode must have happened relatively close to a main town with Ladino population, e.g. Melchor de Mencos. In the rural areas people, especially women,

had a pair of boots, an inside out pair of boots (*botas al revés*) [laughter], oh my god, an inside

out pair of boots (*a par de botas al revés*), but this is how in the end we managed to get hold of

some shoes, and that's how we carried on walking, but well fucked up (*pero bien jodidos todos*)

at times we had to take off the boots, we would carry them by hand and we would walk barefoot,

and on like this' [...] There are so many stories from *la montaña*, so many things happened, like

these, and many more'.

I focus on the prosthetic aesthetics of Alma's narrative in part to highlight the prosthetic

form that her account and narrative took, in that every story she recounted conjured up

the incompleteness of the account and the narrative movement towards a further episode.

Through the concept-metaphor of prosthetics, I also want to reflect on the aesthetics of

the subject her accounts presupposed. Through Alma's account of her being-in-the-world,

Alma gave a sense of the experiential and embodied character of her time *en la guerrilla*.

She referred to numerous prosthetic attachments such as her hat, boots, rifle and

ammunition belt and those she found along the way such as the bag to carry the *nances*

and the canoe to cross the river. As Alma lost attachments and acquired new ones, her

agency was expanded and/or contained. Paraphrasing Strathern (1991:115-6), gaps and

intermittencies gave Alma somewhere to extend. Alma's story telling also extends

anthropology and conjures up a space for anthropological prosthetic aesthetics, as

anthropological perception is extended and made into an augmented sensory field. This is

a field of sensory augmentation and extended agency that allows anthropology to borrow

images, for instance those indeterminate images of the Army and the *compañeros/as* that

even Alma confounded, the embodied experience of combat, and of guerrilla embodied

subjectivity more broadly. This fabling of the world and of the subject, agency and

prosthetic extensions entrusts Nietzsche's maxim that 'we must go on dreaming' with

renewed poignancy. Ex-guerrilla fabling of the world was enabled and sheltered in the

ethnographic present by the disused dwelling offered by Alma as much as it was

activated through the anthropological prosthetic extension of the tape-recorder. Siezing

upon phenomenology as possibility (Heidegger [1962] 2002:39), both guerrilla and

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are often barefoot.

anthropological prosthetics allowed for the articulation, repetition, circulation and supplementation of guerrilla and anthropological fabling, and the mutual borrowing of images.

7.4 *Entregar las Armas y Grabadoras*/Handing over Arms and Tape Recorders: The Guerrilla and Anthropology Borrowing Each Other's Image

During the course of my fieldwork many *ex-guerrilleros/as* expressed the pain and sense of loss they had experienced in the demobilisation camp at Sacol, when the order was issued that they should hand over arms. If it had not been for the weapons, they argued, they would not be alive in the ethnographic present. Manuel explained:

'To surrender the weapons was the hardest thing (*lo más duro*), for us, to leave them, after so many years that one had carried it (*lo cargó*) [the rifle], one carried it, so, more than any other thing, one would defend oneself with it (*uno con eso se defendía*), if it hadn't been for this, one wouldn't be telling what we really lived/experienced (*lo que vivimos*) and suffered (*sufrimos*). The most arduous of stages (*la etapa más dura*) was when we said, here it is, for that was the hardest part *(lo más duro)*'.

Manuel handed over his rifle but kept his hammock and his tent (*carpa*). The tent, a rectangular piece of thick water-proof fabric was spread across his patio when I visited him. It was being used to dry *frijol* (beans) in the sun. Macario also spoke eloquently about the time leading up to the Peace Accords and the eventual decommissioning of weapons. In his concluding remarks, he likened the tape-recorder, that is, the prosthetic tool of anthropological labour, to arms, that is, the prosthetic tool of guerrilla labour. This was no simile that restricted its signification to the realm of representation. Rather, it was part of his attempt to evoke the phenomenology of loss and its embodieness at stake in decommissioning, and one in which I was to part-take. Macario elaborated on guerrilla and anthropological prostheses thus:

'There were *compañeros* who were '*bases*', they may pass (*pasar*) as combatants now, but in reality they were not combatants, they were *base*, or *milicia*. They would look after/the weapons, in the *buzones*, in the ground (*bajo tierra*). They were the contact (*contacto*) towards the Mexican border. Look Silvia, when in 1988 I joined in earnest (*meterse de lleno*), already carrying an arm (*ya de tomar un fusil*), the vision (*visón*) was to give grounds to profound social change (*profundo cambio social*), to establish a revolutionary government (*gobierno revolucionario*), a government with equity (*equidad*) for all, that was our idea, because we knew that the was the only way (*forma*) to bring forth structural change, and that it is why I got involved (*meterse*). I saw *compañeros* cry, I saw very sad *compañeras* due to the situation they had experienced (*vivir*). I was young (*joven*), I had not experienced it, but of course, I lived in poverty (*vivir en pobreza*), yes, but had not experienced all that they had experienced. On entering the *campamentos* [guerrilla camps], the situation there was very difficult (*difícil*) *en la montaña*. They would give you a rifle but they would not give you a uniform (*uniforme*), one would have to see what to do about a uniform, one would get one's boots (*botas*) and would start to walk. But this [hardship and lack of resources] was not important, because what mattered was the spirit of the revolution (*espíritu de la revolución*), to foster change (*cambio*). That is why I joined, because I saw the injustice in which the people (*el pueblo*) lived. So my spirit (*espíritu*) was above all revolutionary (*revolucionario*), to make changes (*hacer cambios*) and so that no more innocent people (*gente inocente*) would die. The years went by, and from 1990 onwards, one began to talk of a possible peace settlement. For us that was very difficult (*difícil*), because we had the experience of the peace settlement in Nicaragua, and in El Salvador. And we would say, will it be the same? But in the end, that idea began to be introduced. What was most difficult was that in actual fact the *Comandancia* took very radical decisions in the centre, and the combatants and *las bases* were almost not taken into account in signing the Peace Accords (*la comandacia tomó decisiones muy radicales en el centro, a los combatientes, y a las bases casi no se les tomó en cuenta en la firma de la paz*). Nevertheless, the decision [to sign the Peace Accords] was from the bottom up (*de*

abajo para arriba). I worked in the area of logistics, and I was a political organiser. We would receive information concerning the [negotiation] proceedings (*procedimiento*) and the contemporary situation. We would go and tell *las bases* and work with them. Of course, we would receive suggestions (*sugerencias*), but the suggestions were very few. We found that very painful (*dolernos*), signing the Peace Accords that is, with all the problems in our country, and knowing that it was unlikely that politicians would deliver (*cumplir*). The first Accords were signed, and us, still as combatants of URNG, we would not believe it (*creer*), and we did not feel satisfied (*satisfechos*). The Accord on the Ceasefire was signed, and believe me, when the United Nations Mission to Guatemala [MINUGUA] arrived, for us it was even more difficult. They arrived in the *campamentos* [guerrilla camps] and they would tell us that if twenty soldiers should approach, and there were thirty of us, we should not fire at them (*dispararle*), because we would be violating their rights (*violar sus derechos*). And if we captured a soldier, we had no reason to harm him (*hacerle daño*). And this [was said to us] when we knew that if they [the Army] should capture a *compañero* or ourselves, they would dismember us in pieces (*hacer pedazos*). It was very difficult, and we would say, is this really how things are (*si esto es así*)? In any case, we were clear (*estar claros*) about our vision (*visión*), and we had to accept that moment (*momento*), Silvia, the whole situation. And believe me, when the signing of the Peace Accords happened on 29 December 1996, instead of feeling satisfied (*sentirse satisfechos*) of that mission, we felt very sad (*sentirse muy triste*). For us that was not a reason to cheer (*gritos*), it was not a happy occasion (*alegrías*), as if to say, good, it has ended (*acabarse*), mission accomplished (*misión cumplida*). No. The tears rolled (*se nos rodaron las lágrimas*), we looked at our rifles (*miramos a nuestros fusiles*), we remembered the *compañeros* who had fallen (*nos acordamos de los compañeros que habían caido*). And believe me, it was difficult, remembering and saying, have we done well (*bien*), have we erred (*hacer mal*), well, if it is for the good of the country (*país*), that's fine, but if this turns against us (*si esto llega a dar un giro*), we will be those responsible/culpable for it (*culpables*), because believe me, many things can be done with a rifle

in hand (*porque creeme con un fusil en la mano, se pueden hacer muchas cosas*).

I say to Macario that many *compañeros* have said that to me. They said that it was very difficult for them (*le costó muchísimo*) handing over the arms (*entregar las armas*), the very act of handing them over, of going to leave them. Some did not go to leave them, they gave their rifle to another *compañero/a*, so that they would leave it on their behalf because they could not face the act. Macario agrees.

What was extremely difficult was that one would remember (*recordar*) *compañeros*, those who had been *compañeros*. I will tell you something. One would remember the *compañeros* who died, and who always, when they were on the point of dying (*que ya para morirse*), would say to you, Silvia, I am leaving (*yo me voy*), you go, and continue in the struggle (*sigue la lucha*). It is difficult to forget, wounded *compañeros*, hearing them cry (*oirlos llorar*) and say, well *compañeros*, you go and fight (*hagan ustedes la lucha*). That is not easy (*facil*) and we, those of us who had healthy arms (*brazos buenos*), healthy legs (*piernas buenas*), and yet tired of walking, because one would walk, we could carry on with the struggle. We had already gathered (*concentrarse*) in the *campamentos* [demobilisation camps] to hand over our rifles (*entregar nuestros fusiles*), but as I was saying, that was something very difficult to believe (*creer*) and to accept (*aceptar*). In any case, there were some *compañeros* who were already very tired (*cansado*), which must be said. I was tired too, but I still had the spirit (*espíritu*). [...] At the same time, the tears (*las lágrimas*) [would roll], because at times one cries inside/internally (*llora uno internamente*), because one cannot hold back/resist it (*no puede resistirlo*), let the Peace be undersigned (*que se firme la paz*). But many *compañeros* would say to me, look *compa*, if the singing of the peace does not happen this year, or next year, I will leave, and indeed, many left. Six months to the signing of the peace, many *compañeros* left. They could not withstand it anymore (*aguantar*), war is not easy (la *guerra no es facil*). That is why when civilians (*gente*

civil) at this moment, many have said to me, look *comandante*, because that is what they call me here, and I was never [*a comandante*] and I have told them that, if you need us and if you want to make war, we'll come with you, if this government [the FRG government] does not deliver (*cumplir*), let's make war (*hacer la guerra*), we will go/join. So I say to many of them, *compas*, I am very grateful, but you do not know in earnest what a war is, a war is not fought with conscience alone (*una guerra no se hace solo con consciencia*), in a war one needs strong political training (*formación política*), having a psychology but for a clear objective of what you are undertaking/doing (*tener una psicología pero por un objetivo claro de lo que tú estás haciendo*), and not just that they should give you a rifle and that they should teach you how to handle it (*manipularlo*) and how to shoot. Within, it is not a matter of destroying but rather of doing (*por dentro no va aquello de destruir sino de hacer*). [...] We were exhausting ourselves (*nos estabamos desgastando*), militarily and economically and in what were human resources (*material humano*). Every day people had more fear (*miedo*), day by day people wanted less struggle (*cada dia la gente tenia mas miedo, cadad dia la gente quería pelear*) because they feared retaliation, given all that had happened and the campaign the Army had undertaken to destoy us. I think that was a political moment characterised by very clear thinking (*pensamiento claro*) on the part of the *Comandancia, allí sí*, up to having to kick us out from *la montaña* (*hasta que nos sacaran a patadas de la montaña*), to come out with our heads high (*salir con la frente en alto*), there they [the *Comandancia*] really deserve great praise, despite the pain in our heart (*aún que con el dolor en el corazón*), and everywhere (*y en todo*). But I think that it was better this way, than having to leave by fleeing (*era mejor así, que salir corriendo*), believe me, the tears flooded out of us (*se nos derramaron las lágrimas*) when it was announced that we were going to hand over our rifle, the rifle that had been our life companion (*nuestro fucil, que habia sido compañero de la vida*). The point is that it was not easy to take off your tool (*quitarte tu arnés*) with all your equipment (*equipo*), take out your mosquito net (*pavillón*), your tent (*carpa*), place everything there, knowing that they were going to burn it (*quemar*), handing over your rifle

to the point that they would count the ammunitions (*balas*). It was very difficult, and one would say, might it be that as I hand over my rifle (*será que al entregar a mi fusil*), it is possible that they could come and kill me (*es posible que me vengan a matar*), a series of things would arise in one's mind (*le venían a la mente a uno*), and that is why many *compañeros*, what they have said to you is true (*es cierto*), one would give one's rifle to one of the new *compañeros* [more recent recruits], and would say to them, look, you go, because I cannot do it'.

Macario talked of the pain and sense of loss inherent in the process of decommissioning. The order to hand over arms induced dismemberment, as the *guerrilleros/as* parted from their prosthetic extensions. Decommissioning procedures such as counting ammunitions were experienced as a violation of the integrity of prosthetically enhanced guerrilla embodiment. The process of dismemberment evoked by Macario did not apply just to the guerrilla: it was to fully engulf anthropology. The exchange between Macario and I concluded thus:

'Silvia, you work with this tape-recorder, and I think you really love your tape recorder, and the day you will return to England, you will take it with you (*tú trabajas con esta grabadora, creo que la quieres mucho, y el día que te vayas a Inglaterra te le la vas a llevar*). I reply that I have the tape recorded on loan from the University. Macario is very surprised and says, imagine that (*imagínate*)! I say, the tape recorder is not even mine. Macario says, that is too bad (*peor*). In any case, it is your work (*trabajo*), they gave it to you for that, like they gave me a rifle (*por eso te la dieron, como a mi me dieron el fusil*) and that is why you are very fond of it (*le tomas mucho cariño*), because the rifle I carried was not mine (*porque ese fusil que cargaba yo no era mío*), but handing it over, and in good condition (*buenas condiciones*), knowing that you were handing it over but you had grown fond of it. Like your spectacles Silvia, they are useful to you (*servir*) and it is not easy when someone tells you, look, I give you a passport so that you may go (*a parte que por darte un pasaporte y que te vayas*), you give me your spectacles (*dame tus lentes*). When you

know that those spectacles are being useful to you/you need them (*servir*), that they can be much more useful than that which they are offering to you, well, if you hand it [the tape recorder, the spectacles or the rifle] over is because you have no other option (*si lo vas a entegar es porque te encontrás obligada*), you have no other way out (*no tienes otra salida*). That is to give you an example of the situation we experienced/lived through (*eso es para ponerte un ejemplo, de la situación que vivimos*). With the *compañeros* we would say, *compas*, are we going to see each other again (*será compas que nos vamos a volver a ver*)? Will we (*será*)? *Compas*, what will be of us (*qué va a ser de nosotros*)?'

Macario suggested that I thought about the situation the *compañero/as* had experienced at demobilisation by establishing a relation of equivalence between their rifles and my tape recorder. Macario had a rifle, I had a tape recorder. As I would want to take my tape recorder with me when I went back to England, they would have liked to keep their rifles, that is, the prostheses which had made guerrilla survival possible during the conflict. Endowed with the tools of our work, we had acquired prosthetic embodied subjectivity and grown fond of our respective prosthetic attachments. Macario was surprised to hear the tape recorder was not my own. This revelation perhaps unsettled the presupposition that *gringas* may own their own prostheses. With the knowledge that I had the tape recorder on loan, that is, that it belonged to others, Macario established a renewed sense of commonality between us. Both of us had to maintain our prostheses in good order, and this made parting from them the more painful. Handing over one's rifle would be as painful as leaving one's tape recorder behind. Macario emphasised the point referring to another of my prostheses, and specifically, to my spectacles. He argued that they were useful to me to see the world and that anything that may be offered in exchange for them would not be satisfactory. Even a passport, the prosthesis of mobility across multiple borders, would not be acceptable, as one would only agree to such a transaction when given no other option. With no alternative, the guerrilla handed over their prostheses. Macario's powerful image did not just instate a relation of equivalence between his prosthetic embodiment and experience and mine. It also established the conditions of

possibility for the guerrilla and anthropology to borrow each other's images in the phenomenology of the ethnographic encounter. The result was 'a sense of excess [and] insufficiency, of lack of proportion and of connections being partial' (Strathern 1991:115-6), as much as extension of our perceptions.

7.5 Conclusion: The Aesthetics of Weak Thought

The concept-metaphor of 'prosthetics' conveys the complexities inherent in the aesthetics of anthropological and cultural theory, and the practice and experience of ethnography. I have noted that during the course of my fieldwork I imagined the form of the accounts and narratives of *ex-guerrilleros/as* as prosthetically marked by the constant additions of more parts. Additions occurred through positive and negative relationalities of ex-guerrilla secrecy. Narrative parts took the form of unexpected revelatory additions, hastily added adjunctions and expressive tangible silences and retractions. Guerrilla narratives supplemented themselves and each other in secretive prosthetic articulations. I also began to think prosthetically about ethnographic subjects, both in terms of the prostheses that made our encounters possible, and the aesthetics of the guerrilla subjects, revealed in the course of ethnographic exchanges. The ethnographic moment of realisation of the complex naming practices relied upon by ex-combatants was underpinned by prosthetic aesthetics, in that subjects seemed to be contextually and temporally engaged in re-fashioning themselves anew, through the attachment of names, pseudonyms, and nicknames. Thus they extended their agency, and gave form to guerrilla secrecy, whilst I learnt to envision ethnographic prosthetic attachments, and extend anthropological agency in the process. Further, guerrilla subjects, agency, and embodiments, appeared in their prosthetic forms, as ex-combatants related their struggle, and their lives, in the ethnographic present, conjuring up all manners of attachments and connections. I have argued that prosthetics are implicated in the ethnographic encounter in complex ways, and that they also give a form to anthropological aesthetics. In and through prosthetics, the guerrilla and anthropology borrowed each other's images, to establish temporal and partial connections. Loosely paraphrasing Moore, and thus thinking prosthetically to an extent, prosthetics 'is an aesthetic in the straightforward

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sense that it is a way of approaching the world, a perspective. Thus, it is simultaneously a *mode of knowledge* and an idiom, *a form* for the expression of knowledge' (Moore 1997: 68-69, my emphasis). Prosthetics give a form to a post-plural anthropology. With constant deferrals, re-articulations, the temporality of their form, the transience of their borrowings, thrown-ness (*Geworfenheit*) (Heidegger [1962] 2002) and historicity, prosthetics also constitute the aesthetics of weak thought.

Conclusion

In the thesis I set out to explore the relations between histories of violence and cultures of secrecy in Petén, northern Guatemala, in the aftermath of the 1996 Peace Accords signed by the Guatemalan government and guerrilla insurgents. Informed by ethnographic research among displaced constituencies with experiences of militancy in the guerrilla organisation Rebel Armed Forces, I aimed to trace the contours of dispersed and intermittent guerrilla social relations; histories of governmentality in Petén; and their relation to state-sponsored violence, insurgency and repression. I also dealt with the incitement and replication of ambivalence in social relations; the production of socialities and subjectivities marked by secrecy; guerrilla ethics and aesthetics of sociality established through generation and circulation of substance and multiple modes of relatedness; and phenomenologies of guerrilla prosthetic embodiment and subjectivity. In short, I set out to accomplish what Fardon (1990) deemed the ambitious and crisis-inducing programme of writing ethnography.

Noting historical contextualisations of Guatemala provided through the discipline of anthropology, I pointed to instances of out-contextualisation in anthropological analytical and representational practices. I argued that in the context(-s) of Guatemala, anthropological writing, and its reliance on tropes of indigeneity, settlement and place produced normative accounts of complex social realities and dynamics. Further, I noted that anthropological knowledge may be deeply implicated in the constitution of the 'field' of theory, practice and representation that is 'Guatemala'. Drawing on Strathern (1992, 1999), I aimed to highlight processes through which ethnographic subjects out-contextualised anthropology and its anthropologists during my fieldwork, at once exposing anthropological presuppositions, bringing into stark relief the labour of fabrication that coincides with the anthropological endeavour, and the ways in which anthropology may be consumed, reinterpreted, displaced – and indeed out-contextualised – by ethnographic subjects.

The emphasis on processes of out-contextualisation seemed particularly relevant as I aimed to bring into view what I argued had been deemed 'out of context' by multiple anthropologically and governmentality-informed discourses, namely the region of

Petén and related violent histories of displacement. Through the artifice of shifts in perspective and scale, I tried to reveal the (deferred) centrality of Petén to an understanding of histories of violence and conflict, experiences of insurgency and counter-insurgency and related cultures of secrecy. In so doing, I furtively brought violence and conflict within the realm of perception, mimicking the partial, fragmentary and secretive modes of disclosure and foreclosure that marked the revelation of experiences of the *conflicto armado* during my fieldwork.

In view of the complexity and plurality of ethnographic socialities, subjectivities and their histories, I resolved to confront anthropological models and presuppositions. I suggested that anthropology and its knowledge practices be subjected to critical scrutiny. The task was critical and constructive in orientation and aimed to demolish, re-imagine and rebuild, and to do so in ways that were partial and weak. To some extent, my critical posture borrowed images from the guerrillas. The Nietzschean anthropology I envisaged may seek to demolish the logocentrism and self-referentiality of Western metaphysics and its structure(-s), as the guerrilla in Petén had sought to bring down a system of governance with its neo-imperial ties to re-build sociality anew. In point of fact, the Rebel Armed Forces had not deferred the labour of reassembling of the social realm to a post-revolutionary aftermath. Rather, the experience of the guerrilla had produced specific articulations of subjectivities and socialities during the insurgency. Guerrilla insurgent subjectivities were refashioned on a terrain marked by secrecy and traces lingered in the ethnographic present. Anthropological critical modes thus intertwined in the realm of representation with guerrilla ethnographic modes through which subjectivities and socialities may be obliterated, suspended, refashioned and reassembled anew. Histories of violence and conflict were shown to be deeply implicated in guerrilla secret socialities and subjectivities. In turn, the social and cultural field appeared as a site of ever-increasing secrecy-imbued plurality and partiality.

Deconstruction, Weak Thought and Scales of Post-plurality

Moving from Derrida's critique of metaphysics (Derrida 1970) and noting the (deferred) centrality of anthropology to Derrida's arguments, I proposed to elicit 'structure', 'scandals' and 'events' in the field of hermeneutics-informed anthropology and to subject anthropology's appeals to plurality, partiality and

relativisation to critical scrutiny. Following Rabinow (1983), I noted that traditions of social and cultural anthropology have historically been predicated on the recognition of alterity. The entrenchment of a disciplinary preoccupation with difference has produced numerous epistemological positions and related knowledge practices which have sought to identify, describe, explain and often enfranchise multiple culturally marked Others. Through anthropological knowledge practices, social and cultural realms and social and cultural subjects have appeared plural, complex and relative. However, when, following Derrida, anthropology is located within the history of Western metaphysics, it is clear that traditions of anthropological enquiry have imagined plurality, partiality and complexity to be the culturally specific manifestations of a universal human condition, cognitive structure or interpretative capacity.

Since Nietzsche and Heidegger, the progressive weakening of Western metaphysics and the erosion of its foundations of thought have made these presuppositions problematic. Further, they have engendered the conditions of possibility for anthropology to move beyond the enumeration of potentially infinite partial perspectives grounded in strong universalist assumptions. In an effort to apprehend and represent the shifts in perspective engendered in the context of a *weakening* of 'strong thought', I considered what presuppositions may make partial subjectivities and socialities amenable to experience, reflection and representation. Informed by the work of philosopher Gianni Vattimo, I argued that the concept-metaphor of 'weak thought', that is a mode of thought that takes leave from strong categories of traditional Western metaphysics and accepts post-Nietzschean lack of foundations, absence of certitudes and demise of truth, holds important theoretical and imaginative potential for anthropology. Anthropology that accepts the weakening of Western metaphysics – imagined as the advancement of nihilism – may apprehend and represent constant shifts of partial perspectives in anti-foundational terms, thus also realising anthropology's nihilist vocation.

I argued that the traces of 'weak thought' and the realisation of the nihilist vocation of anthropology might be suggested in the work of anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (cf. Strathern 1971, 1980, 1988, 1991, 1995, 1999). I suggested that Strathern's texts may be read as 'weak' in the nihilist sense of the term, in that they eschew strong

metaphysical claims to delineate fictionalised experiences of reality instead. Insofar as they may be said to defy 'strong thought', scientism, objectivity and realism, Strathern's texts make the artifice of anthropological knowledge as explicit as the tentative and provisional character of anthropological analysis and representation (Rapport 1997:658).

The point of convergence in the theoretical strategies and knowledge practices deployed by Derrida (1970, 1974) and Strathern (1971, 1980, 1988, 1991, 1995, 1999) may be found in their respective projects to elicit, understand and represent the constant play, permutation and shifts in perspectives which lie at the core of structure and context-making. Whilst Derrida focuses on the history of Western metaphysics and its structure-making intellectual practices, Strathern calls upon the history of anthropology, with its models of society and the person, to reflect on anthropological practices of contextualisation and their effects. Derridean 'play' and Strathernian 'shifts in partial perspectives' precipitate reflections on knowledge practices and theoretical models, and reveal how to 'centring' there may correspond specific 'decentring', whilst contextualisation and commensurability creation may be tied to forms of out-contextualisation and incommensurability creation.

Taking Derridean and Strathernian analytical and representational strategies under the aegis of Vattimo-inspired weak thought, I argued that 'weak description' and 'thick nihilism' may be relevant to an anthropology of histories of violence and cultures of secrecy in Petén, Guatemala. Whilst deconstruction allows for a consideration of the place of anthropology within Western metaphysics, and Strathernian anthropology suggests the provisionality and tentativeness of anthropological labour, weak thought, with the Nietzschean and Heideggerian genealogies that are inscribed on it, infuses anthropology and its knowledge practices with temporality and historicity. Weak thought provides the horizon for anthropological theory and ethnographic writing to move beyond subtle and crass universalisms. Further, it allows anthropology to apprehend and represent the constant shifts in perspectives and related partialities that marked my encounters with the ex-guerrillas, as well as the ways those ethnographic subjects marked by experiences of insurgency constantly exceeded their own frames and the frames place upon them.

Conflict, Secrecy, Subjectivity and Sociality in Petén, Guatemala

I have suggested that it was the experience of fieldwork which made the interrelated questions of partiality, pluralisation and relativisation appear critical to understanding *and* representing multiple and complex processes of contextualisation and out-contextualisation in Petén on my meandering routes through histories of violence and cultures of secrecy. Furthermore, it was the ethnographic encounter and its partialities – in the form of retractions, refusals, foreclosures, disclosures and revelations – which compelled me to confront the multiple, complex and partial scales of guerrilla secrecy and to seek an adequate theoretical, hermeneutic and representational frame through which shifts in perspectives may be apprehended *and* represented. Anthropological weak thought is thus borne out of the proliferation of partial perspectives of the ethnographic encounter: it's commonly construed as equivalent with the concrete, but in fact is the most abstract and theoretical of 'fields'.

To understand and represent my encounters with the ex-guerrilla in Petén, I pointed to ethnographic moments of selective disclosure and foreclosure. I discussed guerrilla naming practices in the insurgency, and argued that these were critical to the articulation of partial guerrilla subjectivities and socialities. As I followed the proliferation of names and relationalities of guerrilla secrecy, I noted the ways in which subjectivities and socialities may be marked by the experiences of violence and conflict in complex ways. Violence, surveillance, and the control of secrets by state-agents and neo-imperial powers, instantiated ambivalence and indeterminacy in subjectivities and social relations. In turn, the revelation of complex practices of insurgent simulations, and counter-insurgent dissimulations, abated the coherence and distinctiveness of entities and the distinctions between them – as in the case of the categorical distinction between the Army and the guerrilla. In the scale of guerrilla secret socialities and relationalities, the guerrilla established merographic connections between and among entities, thus revealing entities to be similar and dissimilar, distant and adjunct. Furthermore, processes of augmentation and contraction were figured in accounts of the guerrilla whole as composed of three substances, namely 'information', 'logistics' and 'combatants'. Considering different perspectives on guerrilla substance, I noted distinct modes of expansion and diminishment, as well as

differentiation and conjunction. Guerrilla sociality and relationality appeared to encompass multiple forms of relatedness and entailed multiple moral orders. The idiom of kinship permeated the guerrilla whole and produced orders of sameness and difference among combatants. In turn, guerrilla sociality developed distinctive modes of relations based on long-lasting principles of sameness, respect, equality and *hermandad* (affinity/amity), enacted through practices such as commensality. Whilst early attempts at regulating the scale of difference of gender and sexuality through the creation of institutions such as 'marriages by arms' were short-lived, through modes of relatedness and moral orders, the guerrilla envisioned a long-lasting mirror image of the broader society. Guerrilla disassembling and reassembling of the social realm and the production of a guerrilla replica of society involved not just replication, but also re-invention. I have argued that partiality, complexity and relativisation, as they arose during my fieldwork, should be represented in post-plural scales, that is, in a mode of thought that focuses on connections and relations, thus foregoing appeals to discrete entities, unified subjects and social wholes. Whether or not the scale of post-plurality and weak thought may be said to underpin my account of guerrilla subjectivities and socialities – as they arose in the course and the contexts of my fieldwork – I have argued that they presuppose a form: that is, they are underpinned by prosthetic aesthetics. Out of the phenomenology of the ethnographic encounter, subjects revealed themselves in and through their prosthetic extensions. As we discussed loss and acquisition of our prostheses, anthropology and the guerrilla borrowed each other's images in and through our prosthetic extensions and prosthetic imaginings. Thorough the transience, tentativeness and thrownness (Heidegger [1962] 2002) of these borrowings, anthropology and the guerrilla gave form to each other, and by extension, gave form to the scale of post-plurality and weak thought.

From the partial perspective of philosophy, weak thought suggests a critique of anthropological models of subjectivity and sociality, the knowledge practices that sustain them, and universalisms that underpin them, to point to the conditions of possibility of weak and nihilist inflections of anthropological knowledge. Weak thought thus advocates the articulation of anthropological knowledge practices which acknowledge their temporality, provisionality and partiality and, crucially, which reflect on their own historicity, or their thrownness, to use a Heideggerian term. Weak thought offers the opportunity to relinquish connections as both neurosis and nostalgia

to a 'strong' subject imagined in all manner of scales of difference and sameness, but predicated on universalities of human condition, cognitive structures, and/or interpretative faculties. Anthropology that borrows an image from philosophy, and locates itself within the history of Western metaphysics may prosthetically and ex-centrically extend to apprehend and represent subjects and socialities in post-plural scales. Further, an anthropology that accepts the weakening of Western metaphysics – imagined as the advancement of nihilism – may apprehend and represent constant shifts of partial perspectives in anti-foundational terms, thus realising its nihilist vocation.
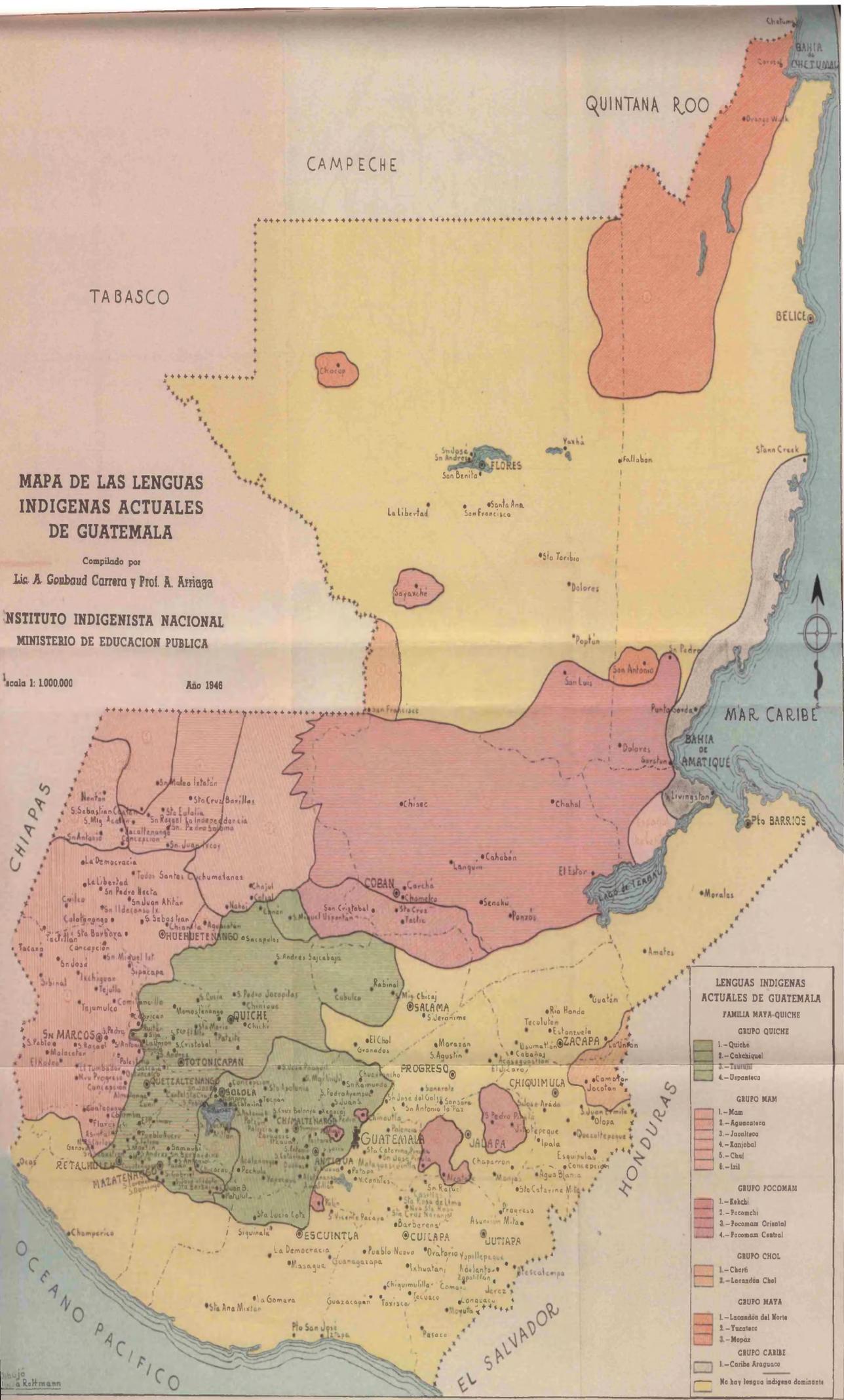
MAPA DE LAS LENGUAS INDIGENAS ACTUALES DE GUATEMALA

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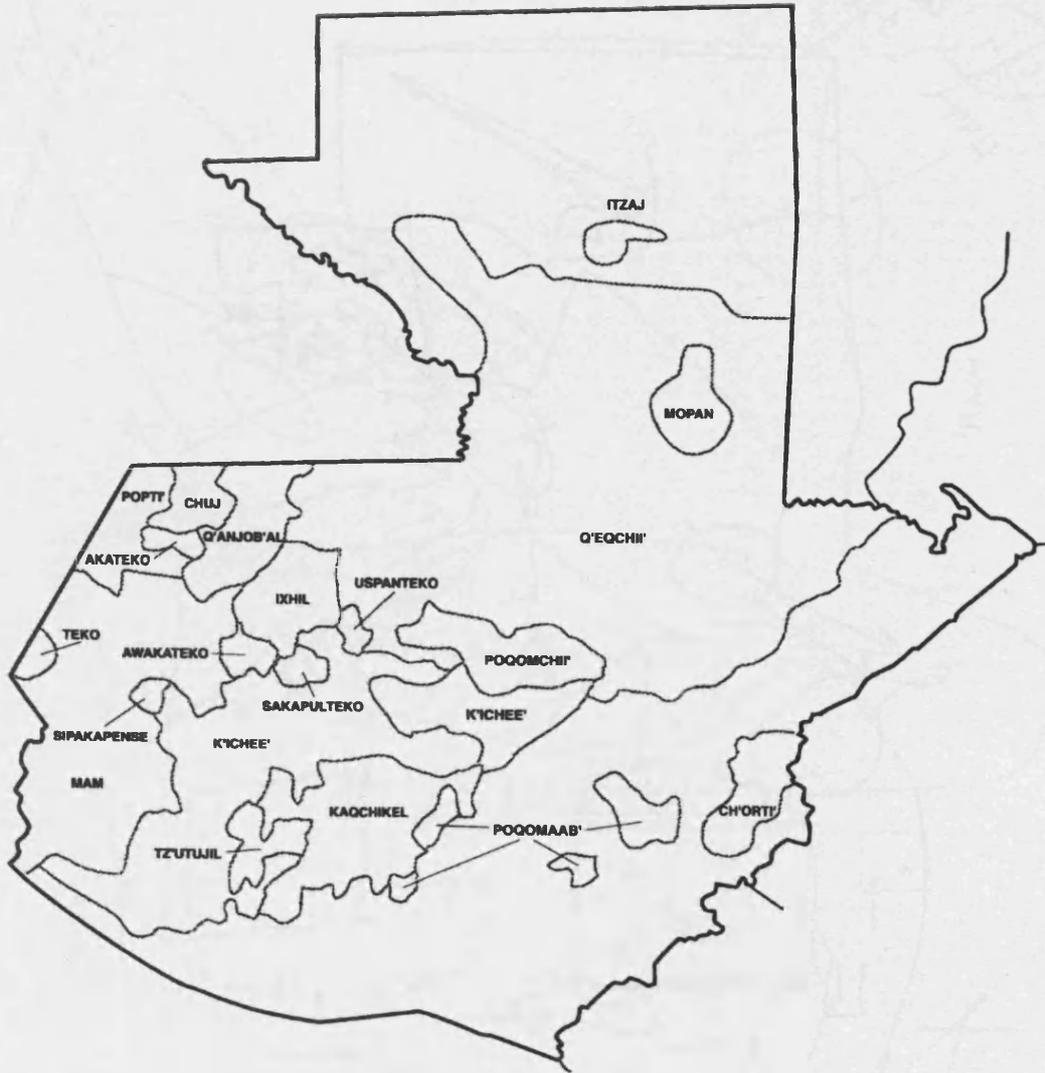Lic. A. Goubaud Carrera y Prof. A. Arriaga

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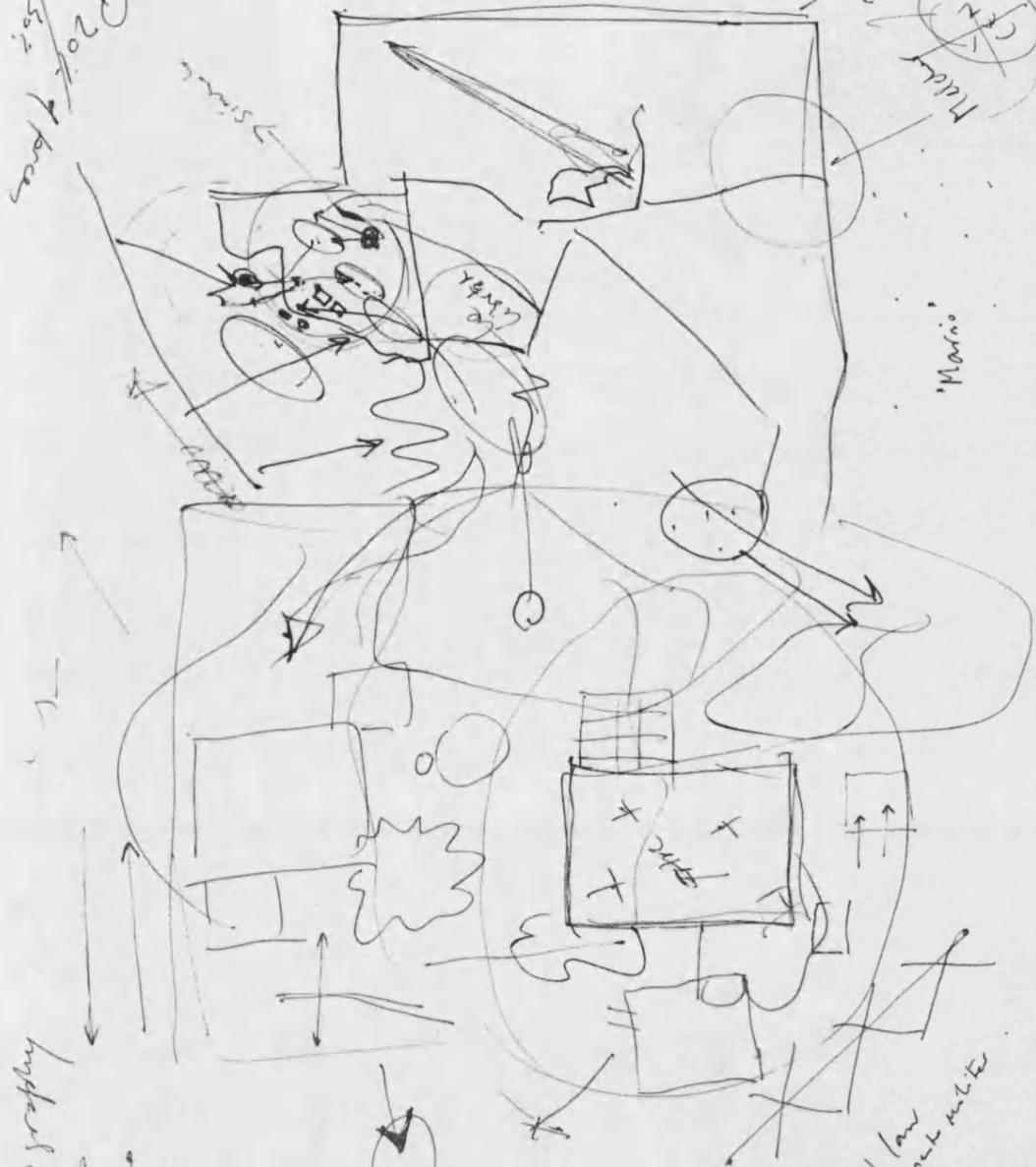
Escala 1: 1.000.000   Año 1946

Dibujo
Luisa Rottmann

Regiones y referencias geográficas

TABASCO
CHIAPAS
CAMPECHE
QUINTANA ROO
BELICE
BAHIA de CHETUMAL
MAR CARIBE
BAHIA DE AMATIQUE
HONDURAS
EL SALVADOR
OCEANO PACIFICO

Lugares

Chetumal
Corozal
Orange Walk
Stann Creek
Chocup
Yaxhá
Fallabon
San José
San Andrés
FLORES
San Benito
Santa Ana
San Francisco
La Libertad
Sto. Toribio
Dolores
Sayaxche
Poptún
San Pedro
San Antonio
San Luis
Punta Gorda
San Francisco
Dolores
Garstun
Livingston
Pto. BARRIOS
Chisec
Chahal
Cahabón
Languin
El Estor
COBAN
Carchá
Chamelco
Sta. Cruz
Senahú
Panzós
Morales
San Mateo Ixtatán
Sto. Cruz Barillas
Nentón
S. Sebastián Coatán
Sta. Eulalia
S. Mig. Acatán
San Rafael La Independencia
San Pedro Soloma
Jacaltenango
Concepción
Sn. Juan Ixcoy
La Democracia
Todos Santos Cuchumatanes
La Libertad
San Pedro Necta
Cuilco
San Juan Atitán
Nabaj
Chajul
Cotzal
San Ildefonso Ix.
Calatenango
S. Sebastián
Sta. Barbara
Chiantla
Aguacatán
HUEHUETENANGO
Sacapulas
Tectitlán
Concepción
San Miguel Ixt.
Sn. José
S. Andrés Sajcabajá
Sibinal
Ixchiguán
Sipacapa
Tejutla
Comitancillo
Tacaná
Tajumulco
S. Pedro Jocopilas
Rabinal
Chicaj
Cubulco
S. Lucía
Momostenango
QUICHE
Chichi
SALAMA
S. Jerónimo
Guatán
Río Honda
Teculután
SAN MARCOS
Sn. Pedro
Sn. Antonio
La Unión
San Cristóbal
Estanzuela
ZACAPA
La Unión
Sn. Pablo
Malacatán
TOTONICAPAN
El Chol
Granados
Morazán
Usumatlán
Cabañas
Acasaguastlán
El Rodeo
El Tumbador
Nvo. Progreso
Concepción
QUETZALTENANGO
PROGRESO
El Jícaro
CHIQUIMULA
Camotán
Jocotán
S. Juan Ermita
Olopa
Ipala
SOLOLA
Sta. Apolonia
Tecpán
Jutiapa
Quezaltepeque
CHIMALTENANGO
San José del Golfo
Sansare
San Antonio La Paz
S. Pedro Pinula
Jalapa
GUATEMALA
ANTIGUA
Mataquescuintla
Chaparrón
Monjas
Agua Blanca
Sta. Catarina Mita
RETALHULEU
MAZATENANGO
San Rafael
Sta. Rosa de Lima
Nva. Sta. Rosa
Sta. Cruz Naranjo
S. Vicente Pacaya
Sta. Lucía Cotz.
Barberena
Asunción Mita
Progreso
Conguaco
Champerico
Siquinalá
ESCUINTLA
CUILAPA
Oratorio
Yupiltepeque
JUTIAPA
La Democracia
Pueblo Nuevo
Masagua
Guanagazapa
Ixhuatán
Zapotitlán
Adelanto
Jerez
Tescatempa
Chiquimulilla
Comapa
Tecuaco
Conguaco
Sta. Ana Mixtán
La Gomera
Guazacapán
Taxisco
Moyuta
Pto. San José
Iztapa
Pasaco

Recuadro de referencias

ITZAJ

MOPAN

POPTI' CHUJ
Q'ANJOB'AL
AKATEKO
Q'EQCHII'
USPANTEKO
IXHIL
TEKO
AWAKATEKO
POQOMCHII'
SAKAPULTEKO
K'ICHEE'
SIPAKAPENSE
K'ICHEE'
MAM
KAQCHIKEL
POQOMAAB' CH'ORTI'
TZ'UTUJIL

Map 2 – Maya Language Map of Guatemala (Warren 1998:14).

El FYDEP Inmerso en la Cruzada de Desarrollo Integral de Petén

El impulso de trabajo del Coronel Reyes Porras se ha visto coronado con el apoyo irrestricto que el Presidente de la República, General de División don Fernando Romeo Lucas García ha prodigado a Petén, que –justo es reconocerlo– ha sido uno de los departamentos más favorecidos con grandes proyectos sociales y de infraestructura durante el actual régimen gubernativo.

Es por ejemplo, una obra para la posteridad y de grandes alcances económicos y sociales, la trilogía turística de Tikal, que insumió más de 30 millones de quetzales y que trajo para Petén un monumental aeropuerto internacional, una carretera asfaltada que enlaza al Mundo Maya con la civilización de nuestro tiempo y obras dentro del parque arqueológico en mención, necesarias para el confort del turista.

También impulsa el Presidente Lucas García otras grandes obras que han revolucionado la vida económica de Petén, como la electrificación, la construcción de Centros de Salud y de monumentales hospitales, como el de San Benito y de programas de desarrollo agrícola, pecuario y artesanal.

El Coronel Reyes Porras, un hombre que ha hecho realidad en Petén, obras que nos parecían lejanas y quiméricas, es inquieto, dinámico y de ejecutorias prácticas e inmediatas. Al margen de su trabajo frente al FYDEP, dedica su tiempo restante a visitar comunidades, conocer sus

EMPRESA NACIONAL DE FOMENTO Y
DESARROLLO ECONOMICO DEL PETEN

FYDEP

PROYECTO DE
LEY PARA LA ADJUDICACION
DE TIERRAS NACIONALES EN EL
DEPARTAMENTO DE EL PETEN

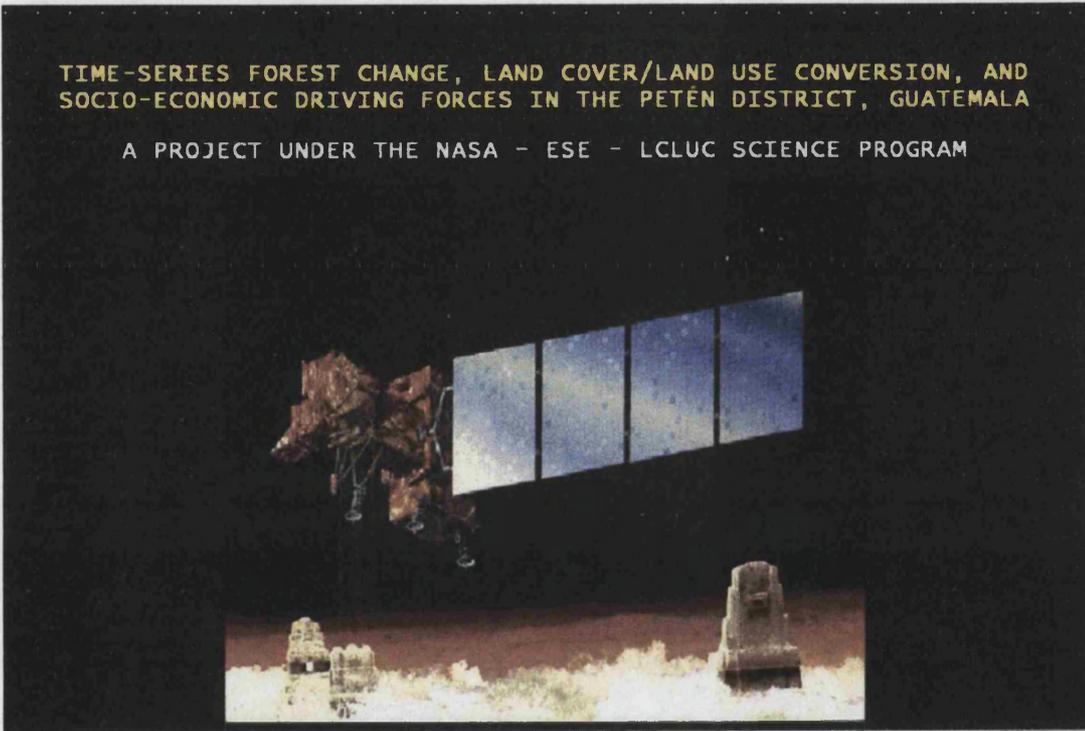**PLATE 3** – *'Colonos'* (Samayoa Rivera n.d.:4).

PLATE 4 – 'A *Tzuul Taq'a* in the Lowlands', Petén, 2000. Don Luis had dreamt the name and place of residence of the local *Tzuul Taq'a*. Photograph by Silvia Posocco.

TIME-SERIES FOREST CHANGE, LAND COVER/LAND USE CONVERSION, AND
SOCIO-ECONOMIC DRIVING FORCES IN THE PETÉN DISTRICT, GUATEMALA

A PROJECT UNDER THE NASA – ESE – LCLUC SCIENCE PROGRAM

PLATE 6 - 'Petén as Star Wars'. This montage illustrates the 'Time-Series Forest Change, Land Cover/Land Use Conversion, and Socio-Economic Driving Forces in the Petén District, Guatemala' (see Hayes, Sader and Schwartz 2002). The Ancient Maya site of Tikal is depicted below a giant mechanical creature, i.e. a satellite that surveys/surveils forest changes and social life.

Sombras de selva

José Flores

PLATE 10 – Ex-combatant harvesting maize and inspecting crop failure, Petén, 2000. Photograph by Silvia Posocco.

PLATE 11 – 'Temporalities'. Petén, 2000. Photograph by Silvia Posocco.

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