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A history of land tenure in the Ixil region

Elaine Elliott*

Linguist and Researcher

Abstract: After the Spanish conquest, the Ixil Maya initially remained less affected than more centrally located groups. However, dramatic changes occurred due to Guatemalan national government laws in the late 1800s which allowed claims on “vacant land”. Maya on those lands quickly adapted, claiming the areas where they had lived for over a millennium. The government favored large landowners who contributed to the national economy with export crops, particularly coffee. In the 1950s era of land reform, small farmers briefly obtained land, something quickly reversed with the overthrow of the national government, accused of communism for these reforms. Conflict escalated when a leftist guerrilla movement founded in the region in 1972 killed and kidnapped landowners as part of their recruitment efforts. In the subsequent repression, the army destroyed villages, displacing many people, creating confusion over land. Competing land systems continue today, but our failing international ecosystem alerts us to respect how traditional worldviews can correct our exploitive use of land.

Key Words: Ixil Maya, land tenure, land reform, land conflict

PREFACE by Giovanni Batz

Work on land tenure in Guatemala is important today given the continuing land inequalities and displacement that has led to thousands to migrate internally and abroad, particularly to the United States. The creation of fincas and registration land titles in the late 19th century and early 20th century led to massive displacement of indigenous peoples across Guatemala. In the Ixil Region, land displacement was achieved through various nefarious means such as trapping people into debt, creating fraudulent contracts, bribing government officials, among others. Elaine Elliott’s unpublished article entitled “A History of Land Tenure in the Ixil Triangle” (1989), was at the time the most complete work on land tenure in the Ixil Region. Since then, researchers working in the Ixil Region and Guatemala have used and cited it within their work (Batz 2020; Durocher 2002; González S. 2011; Mazariegos 2020; Palencia 2021; Stoll 1993).

While this important work informs us of land tenure at the regional level, there remains much work to be done in reconstructing the history of land tenure in the Ixil Region. Elliott’s article continues to be a crucial reading and study that provides a starting point. The archival data

* Author biography is located at the end of the article.

obtained from the Archivo Eclesiástico de Guatemala, Archivo General de Centro America, Archivo del Departamento Agrario Nacional, and Segundo Registro de la Propiedad, continues to be useful in tracing the origins of *fincas* (plantations), as well as ethnographic data that demonstrates the ways in which *finqueros* (plantation owners) displaced the Ixil from their ancestral territories. Previously unpublished and often accessible through a scanned pdf shared among colleagues, it is presented here in English and Spanish for the public and scholars to consult and engage with. The present version of the article has been updated with a new title and accompanied with minor changes.

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INTRODUCTION

The Ixil Maya of Guatemala, one of the smaller of 22 linguistic groups in the country, provide a case study on the competition between traditional subsistence use of land and modern capitalism. The paper analyzes land tenure during significant periods of Guatemalan history: Colonial era (1524-1821), Liberals and Conservatives (1821-1871), Coffee Plantations (1871-1944), Ten Years of Spring (1944-1954), Export Expansion (1954-1975), and Violence (1975-1986). Beginning with a national country overview of Guatemala, the paper then offers details from the Ixil area in each of these periods.

During the Colonial era the Ixil region, located in the northwest highlands of Guatemala, "ranked among imperial Spain's least-prized possessions." (Lovell, 1988:32) Due to their location beyond the high Cuchumatanes mountains, the Ixiles had less outside interference than more

centrally located groups after the Spanish conquest. As a new national independent government came into power, the three municipalities making up the Ixil region appealed to that government to resolve disputes between themselves. Land conflict became more acute with outside entrepreneurs who established large plantations as coffee became an important export crop. The cultural differences between Maya and the national government which favored international capitalism created conflict, the two systems at odds over differing methods of determining ownership and how land should be used. The traditional Maya view of spiritual reverence for land and corn existed in tension with agribusiness ideology which valued profit over sustainability. The region became part of larger global conflicts between communism and capitalism during efforts to address much needed land reform in the 1950s. The geographic and cultural isolation of the Ixil made them attractive to the revolutionary movement in the 1970s which appealed to the existing tensions between large landowners and subsistence farmers. Provoking violent army suppression, the region gained a reputation as a conflict zone, with massacres, villages destroyed, and many people displaced. Though the political conflict has resolved, the competing worldviews on land use and ownership remain.

LAND TENURE HISTORY NATIONAL OVERVIEW

COLONIAL ERA (1524-1821)

Pedro de Alvarado invaded from Mexico in 1524 and battled with the Maya until his death in 1541 to bring them under Spanish control. Epidemics of “old-world” diseases previously unknown in the “new world” served as his most spectacular assistants. Periodic epidemics continuing through the colonial era probably reduced the population in the Guatemala highlands by 90% in 150 years. (Lovell 88:117) The population slowly rose but did not reach pre-conquest levels until the mid-20th century. Consequently, land remained abundant throughout the colonial period. Numerous surviving documents from this early period, particularly from the K'iche', outline their land claims. (Carmack, 1973)

The Spanish policy of *congregación*, creating settlements rather than allowing the population to remain dispersed, attempted to Christianize the inhabitants and make for more efficient tribute collection. Catholic priests built new churches, and baptized, married, and buried the Maya. Mayas resisting Christianization and resettlement persisted in dispersing.

After concentrating on extracting wealth in forced labor during the 16th century through *encomienda* and *repartimiento*, the 17th century economic crisis caused the Spanish to acquire land throughout Mesoamerica. Highland geography made it unsuitable for cacao and indigo, but sheep could be raised. (Lovell 1983:227) Land acquisition and disputes occurred elsewhere in the highlands, but Lovell's data does not include cases from the Ixil area. *Encomiendas*, which were not land grants, allowed Spaniards to control Maya from a particular area. The areas became towns and eventually *municipios*. With a population of over 200, *municipio* status could be gained, and this became the principal administrative structure after independence. *Parcialidades*, family

groups holding property in common, survived from pre-colonial times, an important source of highland social stability. (Smith, 1984:199)

The crown subjected Mayas to tribute. Maya also paid tithes to the church. A functionary known as a *juez de milpa* checked to see if Maya had planted enough corn and cacao to meet tribute and local market requirements. (Webre, 1987:53) If not controlled, Maya reverted to subsistence farming, something considered laziness by those wanting their labor. Ten Royal decrees over the course of a century (1582-1681) to abolish the *juez de milpa* position implies that local leaders resisted this system of control. (Ibid.)

LIBERALS AND CONSERVATIVES (1821-1871)

After independence from Spain in 1821, the early liberals attempted to implement capitalist expansion and modernization, including titling private property. A series of laws regarding vacant land developed from 1825 to 1836. (Méndez Montenegro, 1961:89-114) All land reverted to the state to then be made private property of those to whom the state sold the land. Rural communities could retain some common land as *ejidos*, land under local jurisdiction. Sales favored those currently using the land if they paid the same price offered by others. Land had to be titled or it automatically reverted to state ownership and anyone who already owned a title showed it to authorities to prove their land rights. (Solórzano, 1987:12)

Eager to become exporters, wealthy families in Guatemala City attempted to acquire more land. The liberal government confiscated church properties, something unpopular with campesinos who rented the land, a change which became a leading cause of a peasant revolt. (Solórzano, 1987:14) Rafael Carrera proved an able leader of the rebels, instituting a conservative regime in 1839. In 1840, when he intervened in a land dispute on behalf of highland Maya, he gained their support. (Solórzano, 1987:20) The government passed a law limiting claims on vacant land, but land conflicts continued. (Solórzano, 1987:23) Highland Maya enjoyed little outside interference, though they appealed to the national government to resolve internal land disputes.

Cochineal, a source of red dye, became the principal export product from Independence until the 1860s. However, as late as 1849, the total area of production remained less than 34 *caballerías*. (McCreery 1983:736) A *caballería*, the principal measurement in land titling documents, is 109.8 acres. (Handy 1984:69) Disastrous rains in 1852 ruined the cochineal crop in central Guatemala. (Cambranes 1985:43) This, combined with competition from aniline dyes beginning in 1857, prompted landowners to plant coffee, a crop already flourishing in Costa Rica.

COFFEE PLANTATIONS (1871-1944)

Coffee growers became discontent with the conservative regime and wanted changes in land laws, providing one motive for the liberal revolution. (Solórzano, 1987:26) Justo Rufino Barrios led the revolution in 1871, and soon put state power behind the coffee entrepreneurs. European foreigners received preferential treatment due to their access to capital, expertise and markets. (McCreery 1981:111-123) Banks, a modern professional army, more infrastructure, and land titles for coffee farms flourished under Barrios. An 1877 law permitted purchase of lands

previously rented from municipalities. (Cambranes, 1985:261) This new law created a rush on claiming vacant land, authorizing 128 titles for 1,541 *caballerías* in 1871. (Solórzano, 1987:28) With greater state power, violence over land disputes dropped dramatically from the earlier part of the century.

Large land holdings developed despite not being more productive than small holdings. A powerful plantation oligarchy developed which has dominated Guatemala's political life ever since. Arévalo asserted that 300 families controlled the culture, politics, and economy of Guatemala. (Handy 1984:113) Membership in this group changed as fortunes rose and fell with changes in the international market, but a dominant oligarchy can still be identified. An influx of German planters entered the elite, becoming leading exporters, producing two-thirds of Guatemala's coffee crop by 1913. (Handy, 1984:66) By 1940 the German planters accounted for the bulk of exports, 5000 people with 109 plantations. (Handy 1984:97)

The state and the planters needed to extract labor from the Maya population without destroying existing highland socioeconomics. Coffee required large amounts of labor only a few months a year during the harvest. Planters either needed to provide workers with year-round subsistence or make certain that enough of the economic and social structures survived to support laborers when not needed on the fincas. (McCreery 1983:738) A system created to meet those needs remained in force for over 80 years. According to McCreery (1983), "Debt servitude in Liberal Guatemala was not a casual or informal affair, but a fully legal system, mandated, regulated, and enforced by the state for the creation and manipulation of a rural labor force." (742) During the world-wide economic depression of the 1930s, President Ubico cancelled debt peonage and for two years Maya had to work for no wages.

TEN YEARS OF SPRING (1944-54)

Civic demonstrations prompted dictator Jorge Ubico to resign in 1944. Led by the urban middle class who wanted a more equitable social order, Mayan needs did not feature in the revolt which included teachers, students and progressive army officers. Though initially landowners remained unaffected, the incoming government did abolish the vagrancy law in the new 1945 constitution.

A 1950 census showed that 2% of the population controlled 72% of farmland. According to Jim Handy (1988): "In 1950 more than two-thirds of the population depended on agriculture for their living. These politicians understood, if often only vaguely, that decades of land dispossession had helped bind the majority of the population into depths of poverty." (675a) President Arbenz introduced Agrarian Reform law which was made into law by the Guatemalan Congress on June 17, 1952, providing for expropriation of idle lands to then be redistributed to peasants. Rural unions spread and a peasant league formed.

As expropriations began, opposition from affected landowners increased. The government expropriated only 16.3% of private land, less than that eligible under the law. (Handy 1984: 132) The CIA overthrew Arbenz' government, installing Castillo Armas who revoked the expropriation decrees.

EXPORT EXPANSION (1954-1975)

New agricultural methods dramatically increased exports. Between 1960 and 1974, exports increased from \$80.7 million to \$315 million. (Davis and Hodson 1982:46) Crops included coffee, sugar, cotton, cardamom and beef. Despite this, the general population remained so poor that over half received insufficient daily food. Inequitable land distribution continued: 87% of farmers owned 19% of farmland and 3% owned 63%. (See Painter, 1987)

VIOLENCE (1975-1986)

The revolutionary movement in eastern Guatemala eradicated in the late 1960s regrouped in Mexico. In January 1972, sixteen Guatemalan revolutionaries crossed the border into northern Quiché north of Ixil country. The Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (EGP) clandestinely recruited Ixil support. Eventually they established organizational links with four other guerrilla organizations, forming the Unidad Revolucionaria Guatemalteca Nacional (URNG).

Modeling strategy on the successful Cuban revolution, they attempted the *foco* technique, choosing Ixil country as a sufficiently isolated location. In 1975, they killed a leading landowner. The army combed the area for months, began selective killing of suspected leaders, and established bases. Bombing hideouts proved ineffective, and eventually the army created a scorched earth policy, destroying villages.

The intense army response meant guerrillas could not protect their supporters. Displaced people gathered in town centers, repopulated destroyed villages, coerced to participate in unpaid work.

The violence disrupted land use, including for landowners who belatedly made changes, including donating land to the government. In 1986 a civilian president replaced the military governments and began a peace process with the guerrilla leaders, offering hope for change.

IXIL LAND TENURE HISTORY

IXIL REGION COLONIAL ERA (1524-1821)

After the conquest, Hernando de Yllescas received Ayllón as an *encomienda* in 1528, later known as Ilom. The Spanish were forced to leave the Ixil Region in 1534 due to an uprising. Francisco Sánchez received Nemá, later known as Nebaj, in *encomienda* in 1528-29. (Kramer, 1989: 104,175,107) Military campaigns occurred in 1529 and 1530 and Antonio de Baldarama and Carlos Vázquez de Coronado received two additional *encomiendas*. (Colby and van den Berghe, 1969:41-42, 47) Responsibility for Christianizing the Ixils belonged to the Dominicans as part of the *Serranía de Sacapulas*.

Lovell (1985:80,81) explains *congregaciones* and the function and preservation of Ixil *parcialidades*. The Spanish regrouping resulted in the following (Lovell/Swezey):

<u>Town</u>	<u>Parcialidades</u>	<u>Tributaries</u>
Nebaj	Santa Maria	76
	Cuchil	26
	Osolotan	16
	Salquil	10-19 (final number illegible)
Chajul	San Gaspar	64
	Ilom	30
	Uncavav	9
	Box	3
Cotzal	San Juan	20-29 (final number illegible)
	Chil	10
	Cul	8

Originally separate, Ilom became part of the Chajul *congregación* to safeguard them from destruction by Lacandones, a northern Maya group from the lowlands of present-day Mexico. Lovell (1985:83) writes:

The area around Ilom was especially vulnerable to Lacandón attack, which was probably the main reason behind the Spaniards' decision to abandon the town after initially building a church there. The Indians of Ilom were ordered to resettle in Chajul and Santa Eulalia, the former receiving the Ilom church altar, the later the Ilom church bells. Chajul was itself attacked many times, the raiding Lacandones entering the Ixil country by way of the Xacbal valley. Unlike Ilom, however, Chajul was never officially abandoned. The Ilom area was itself gradually repopulated, some Ixiles from there presumably preferring to return to their ancestral lands and risk being raided by Lacandones in familiar terrain rather than eking out an existence away from their home territory where the danger was no less real.

A geographic survey in 1722 presented a favorable picture of three prosperous Ixil towns. The report mentioned productive cornfields as well as many mules, cattle, and fruit trees. The report praised the Ixil as hardworking, rational, courteous, good weavers, and devoted to a clean and well-adorned church. Abundant harvests around Cotzal resulted from admirable land requiring little work, with the additional advantage of hot country lands only three leagues away. The report gave the number of tributaries for each town, a reminder the Ixils were not autonomous, despite an idyllic agricultural description. (AGCA A1.17 Leg. 210 Exp 5008) After a smallpox epidemic in 1780 killed around 500 people, the population of the entire area consisted of 4,000 people. (Lovell, 1985:160) With a low population, the Ixil enjoyed abundant land throughout the colonial period.

IXIL REGION (1821-1871)

Independence from Spain, a movement led by Guatemala City leaders, remained a matter of indifference for most of the rural population. Ixil country, too isolated to figure in the Carrera revolt, did not experience land pressures as others in the highlands. The relative tranquility of the period among the Ixil can be deduced from a pastoral visit to Nebaj in 1848. The archbishop commended the people that the *cofradías*, religious brotherhoods responsible for celebrating the saints, functioned well even after the priest's nine-month absence. They even had a surplus for their treasury. (AEG, Visitas Pastorales, Vol. 47, 1848)

Land dispute

Community members appealed to the local priest to settle a land dispute between Chajul and Cotzal in 1758, 1825, 1838, and 1860. In 1860 both sides appealed to President Carrera. The Chajulenses complained that, as in previous years, some had died, and others had been wounded. (AGCA, B Leg. 28592, Exp. 81) Disputing a mere fifteen cuerdas, the Cotzalenses said they owned an ancient land title in their own language and the Chajulenses lacked any title. (AGCA, B Leg. 28,582 Exp. 140, Folio 3)

Land titling

In 1860 after being cited by surveyors for neighboring Soloma, the *principales* of Nebaj wrote to President Carrera to ask for title to their land. The *Corregidor of Totonicapán* explained to the central government his reasons for not acceding to their persistent requests.

It has been three or four years since the ones making the request conceived of this idea, and in this Corregimiento we have not done it, thinking it would be an unnecessary expense since they are not in disagreement about their boundaries with any of the surrounding towns, and because they have many and very good lands, just as all those of the highlands, which to the north, extend to such a distance that they don't even know how far they go. The truth is that it is without doubt for this same reason neither Chajul, Cotzal nor Nebaj have titles and they have lived content with certain boundaries which they have recognized from ancient times, at least in the distances from town to town. Well, as I have said, they can extend in other directions as far as they want, and even so, as the Supreme Government knows, Chajul and Cotzal have a dispute over a few *cuerdas* of land. So, since the towns have lived like this until now, it could bring problems to measure the land belonging to Nebaj. (translation mine, AGCA B Leg. 28,582 Exp. 194 Folio 4)

IXIL REGION (1871-1944)

In the 1880s *ladino* and European *abilitadores* arrived in Ixil country to contract labor. They soon saw an opportunity to obtain land and establish their own fincas. Two large plantations developed through claims to vacant land and purchase of smaller portions: Finca San Francisco in Cotzal and Finca La Perla in northern Chajul. Forced labor resulted in devastating changes, as imported alcohol was used to manipulate the hardworking people described two centuries before.

By the early 1900s a dismayed archaeologist stopped work in Nebaj since the Ixils arrived to work hung over. (Lovell 1985:29)

Nebaj and Cotzal applied for land titles of their ancestral territories in 1878 under Decreto 170 of 1877 which changed the existing system of communal land. Cotzal obtained their ejido title in 1885, helped by their existing written title. A few portions of Nebaj and Chajul municipal land were titled by K'iche's, long-time residents. Resident ladino families registered a few small farms under 5 *caballerías*. Additional outsiders obtained land by foreclosing on debts. (Lincoln, 1945:67) Chajul lost 22 *caballerías* to an outside claimant, prompting titling efforts they completed by 1900. Chajul lost land around Ilom and Chel even after obtaining title, something that will be explained below.

The national government settled disputes between Nebaj and Chajul, and Chajul and Cotzal in the same way: they gave the land to former soldiers. Chajul claimed Las Pilas, 52 *caballerías*, in northern Nebaj which the government gave to soldiers from Momostenango. The government gave Zequiquel, 15 *caballerías* between Cotzal and Chajul and claimed by both, to Captain Francisco Morales. The government split 18 disputed *caballerías* between Nebaj and Cotzal. Extensive titling occurred until around 1920 by which time nationally registered land had become fixed.

Nebaj

Nebaj commissioned measurement of its *ejido* land, and an engineer measured nearly 900 *caballerías*, which included land disputed by Chajul. On February 28, 1881, Nebaj received title to 38 $\frac{3}{4}$ *caballerías* as their *ejido*. A presidential decree said, "owners cannot be displaced even when the titled area is much smaller than what they own." (translation mine, AGCA, ST, Quiché 16:8 Resumen 10 julio 1990) In 1894 they completed the survey despite disputes over land with the people of San Juan Ixcoy, Chajul, and Chiul, as well as soldiers. The soldiers and Chiul retained their land, but Nebaj won the dispute with Ixcoy and Chajul. Nebaj agreed to pay \$10/*caballería* or \$7,141.95 and obtained title to most of their municipality. (Ibid.)

The Nebajenses lost 15 *caballerías* to Captain Isaías Palacios in the lovely Acul valley who cited his military service as justification for receiving the land. The municipality objected, saying their survival would be endangered by losing any land they had cultivated and owned from time immemorial, citing 8,000 inhabitants. (AGCA, ST 16:8 20 diciembre 1902) Palacios received title one week before the municipality. (AGCA, ST, Quiché 18:3)

K'iche' immigrants claimed parcels of municipal land to the west of Nebaj and to the east of Chajul. In one case they had lived there for over fifty years, so the government ordered the municipalities to sell the land at cost. K'iche's created the village of Xix in Chajul.

Chajul

On April 27, 1894, the Chajul municipality solicited 300 *caballerías* of land, 100 each around Chajul, Ilom and Chel (AGCA, ST, Quiché 16:10). They feared losing most of their traditionally owned land since others had begun claiming vacant land. A month later they raised

the request to 600 *caballerías*. The government responded that given their small population, the initial amount was adequate. In analyzing their application, the government critiqued subsistence agriculture preferring industrial agriculture to benefit the national economy.

An insatiable thirst devours some towns, particularly Indian ones, to claim vast extensions of land, in whose hands they are completely unproductive; in this way the country is deprived of important agricultural projects, the main source of Guatemala's wealth.

Communal property seriously delays the progress of industrial agriculture, conflicting with good economic principles. (AGCA, ST, Quiché 16:10 12 junio 1894)

Chajulenses responded to government by stating:

This people, Sir, request a favor from you, but first let us say: there is no greater gift you can give to an Indian than a piece of land on which to raise his corn, care for his pigs and chickens, and on which to rely as his heritage. (AGCA, ST, Quiché 16:10 8 mayo 1895)

The people of Chajul also used their military service as an argument in favor of receiving the grant they asked for:

Don't ignore Sir that the people of Chajul, although semi-savage, in view of the sacrosanct end proposed by the martyrs of liberty General J. Rufino Barrios and Marshal Serapio Cruz, without looking ahead knew how to adhere to their cause holding in their bosom the tender harvest of progress, lavishing help on all classes: had soldiers that were in many military actions, to see liberty implanted, that in the past has not been complete for our race, and many of these can prove this with their wounds, that their life meant more than Conservative bullets: to this end they are pleased seeing the cause they defended gloriously displayed in Guatemala. (AGCA, ST Quiché 16:10 8 may 1895)

The *Jefe Político de Quiché* wrote that only 600 individuals had requested the land, but nevertheless recommended that Chajul receive all it had asked for. Through a Presidential Accord on February 14, 1900, the decree said that the reasons given by the Chajulenses for receiving free land were reasonable.

In consideration that the reasons offered by the residents of Chajul are just and worthy of consideration to receive freely the designated land and that this adjudication is done according to article 11 of decree number 483. However, the communal possession of such a large extension of land is inconvenient for the economic interests of the Republic so it should be divided.

The accord authorized title to 1,186 *caballerías*, 35 *manzanas* and 4,238 square *varas*. The land was divided into lots, one of which called "Chel, Ilóm and Susil" contained 209 *caballerías*, 7 *manzanas* and 1,623 *varas*. (AGCA, ST, Quiché 16:10 February 14, 1900)

However, on November 20, 1917, Favian Picon received over 14 *caballerias* for 20 cents per acre. The land he denounced as vacant was within what Chajul municipality presumably already owned.

“The area of land that includes the village of Ilóm owned by the residents in that same place is included in the general title, extended and registered in favor of the residents of that town whose communal possession is from former times. Consequently, although in the legal file the witnesses declare that the land Mr. Picón is claiming is vacant, we cannot confirm this so that it can be adjudicated within the area claimed under what is prescribed by Article 0000 of the Fiscal Code. If the extension of land claimed by Mr. Fabian Picón is, in your opinion, not included in the perimeter of what is titled and owned by those from the village of Ilom, Chajul Municipality, I suggest it be transferred to him to expand agriculture and commerce.” (AGCA, ST, Quiché 28:1)

In other words, Chajul’s title was acknowledged, saying the grant could only be authorized if confirmed to be outside their area but that national interest would prefer the new owner. (AGCA, ST, Quiché 16:10 14 febrero 1900)

Several military men received grants in Chajul. To the north in Ixcán, still part of Chajul municipality, soldiers of Chiantla and Malacatán received grants of 200 *caballerías* each. In the soldiers’ request they said these are vacant lands:

All the lands are virgin, and in some of the hills one finds places where Indians from Chajul come to live while hunting.

Chiantla struggled with land scarcity:

“the lack of workable land obliges the residents to go to the coast to look for work and earn a livelihood. (AGCA, ST, Quiché 26:7)

Grants to Chiantla and Malcatán north of San Luis Ixcán did not affect the people of Ilom. However, the grant to Momostenango to the west of Ilom in Las Pilas would play a pivotal role in the creation of the Finca La Perla.

Cotzal

The municipality of Cotzal applied for their ejido title, receiving it February 9, 1885. At the boundary with Nebaj, 18 disputed *caballerías* in Pulay were divided between the municipalities which added nearly 10 *caballerías* to Cotzal’s title on August 9, 1913.

The Herrera family, reputedly the second wealthiest in Guatemala, claimed two fincas to the east of Cotzal. Though they built their fortune on coffee, they were at one point in time the largest sugar producers in Guatemala’s southern coast. Herrera workers on farms in the highlands produced food for coastal plantations, and then work on the plantations during the labor-intensive period for harvesting sugar cane.

Finca San Francisco

Pedro Brol, an Italian labor contractor, purchased land to form Finca San Francisco, the largest in the Ixil area. He purchased 16 *caballerías* in 1904 and continued to buy land from neighboring farms during the 20s and 30s from others who had purchased vacant land or received grants from the state. Besides seven pieces of nationally titled land, Brol bought municipal land from Mayan owners. Rifling through registry records, the image emerges of a man constantly on the alert for opportunities to buy more. His name reoccurs as a lender or an adjacent owner in all three municipalities.

On April 19, 1960, the Finca San Francisco consolidated forty registered pieces into one 315 *caballería* 45 *metros* 360 *vara* property. Approximately 200 *caballerías* in Uspantán municipality were divided into six fincas in June 1970. The other 100 *caballerías* in Cotzal are perhaps only part of what the Brol family owns in the Ixil area given confusion in how the land is registered.

Finca La Perla

Joaquín Fernández of Huehuetenango claimed vacant land identified as Shamac on October 15, 1893. This anticipated Chajul's application for communal land six months later, on April 27, 1894. Initially Fernández' claim to the land moved smoothly with only routine steps toward titling. Even by August 1894, Chajul did not react negatively. But by November 16, 1894, the municipality refused to participate in the surveyor's work, believing they had a right to the land. The government pointed out their lack of documents and that Fernández applied first. Chajul had to agree. In January 1895

after a long discussion, they explained that though it's true that in good conscience the land of Shamac belongs to them, since they were the first to plant and cultivate it, transforming it into an enviable place, which it is, that since Sr. Joaquín Fernández claimed it first, they sadly see themselves dispossessed of the right which otherwise they would have.

The ignorance in which our people are still sunk causes us to lament these misfortunes: well, looking at it carefully, it's nothing more than that which in this case has left us defenseless. (AGCA, ST, Quiché 11:1)

After assessing the land, the *Diario Oficial* announced the auction of 22 *caballerías* and 15 *manzanas*. At the auction Don Jesús C. Rivas offered 25 cents more per *caballería* than the assessed price. As the law stipulated, Rivas waited nine days and with no other offers, he received title on June 27, 1895.

Gordillo purchase

Lisandro Gordillo Galán purchased Shamac on June 19th, 1900, for 800 pesos. Within five months he borrowed 3,000 pesos and later another 5,000 with the land as collateral. His purchases

eventually resulted in a property known as *Finca La Perla, Santa Delfina y Anexos*. Each piece of land had a complicated loan history with ever increasing amounts.

Gordillo acquired two more *caballerías* from Chajul in 1917 and another *caballería* from two Ixils in 1921. He made seven more purchases from the soldiers of Momostenango who had received the land as a reward for military service. Gordillo purchased 15 *caballerías* in 1923, 24 *caballerías* in 1925, and 2 *caballerías* in 1927. Twenty of the *caballerías* purchased in 1925 belonged to former President Estrada Cabrera.

The community of Ilom protested that the land Gordillo bought belonged to them. Today's records show they were right. President Estrada Cabrera authorized a grant of 23 *caballerías* 49 *manzanas* and 409 *varas* called Las Pilas on August 19th, 1903, to soldiers from Momostenango. (Segundo Registro, #3021, Folio 258, Tomo 16). On November 20th, 1903, the registry added an additional 100 *caballerías*. In 1928 the registry specified this land came from 54 *caballerías* of Nebaj's titled land, and 79 *caballerías* from Chajul's titled land. The registry ruling, annulled in 1930, came too late. Gordillo had firmly asserted his ownership.

The relevant document in the *Sección de Tierras* is irregular (AGCA, ST, Quiché 17:10) The normal pattern for these documents is as follows: an application for land, surveyor's work checked by another engineer, application for the title, payment or an exoneration, and the extended title. In this case nothing exists in the file before 1922.

“We addressed General Teodoro Cifuentes asking for the general title of the measurements of those lands, but he informs us that it was misplaced in the Capital during the past revolution of Abril 1920”.

when General Teodoro Cifuentes says he lost the title during the revolution two years earlier. After a document citing the Presidential decrees and registration in the *Segundo Registro* in Quetzaltenango, the municipality of Nebaj complains they have not been able to obtain any information.

Despite the work presented, we have not been able to obtain the alluded to information

The ninety pages of surveyor's work in the second part of the file has nothing to do with Ilom and Las Pilas, towns within the area granted to Momostenango soldiers. Today's records show this came from land belonging to Chajul.

People of Ilom

An elderly Ilom resident recounted his childhood memories of the Ilom land conflict to Stephen Elliott in Ixil on April 22, 1975. (Published by Lengyel 1980) Born in Chajul around 1912, he moved to Ilom with his parents during a famine in Chajul where his father had rented land. The good land in Ilom resulted in a plentiful harvest, and they benefitted from abundant animals and forest land. Then Lisandro Gordillo arrived saying he had bought this land in Guatemala City. He had a state-issued title and offered to return the land if the community paid him. The sincerity

of his offer can be questioned since he knew the Ixils would have difficulty in gathering the amount he had paid: over 250,000 pesos (or approximately \$625,000 dollars at that time). Some in the community said they should buy the land. Others said since it already belonged to them by inheritance they should not. The people of Ilom decided against the purchase.

Lisandro Gordillo brought a surveyor which angered the community who imprisoned him and the surveyor. When they released Gordillo, he sent a message to the military saying the Lacandons had invaded, and that Gordillo had been killed. Soldiers arrived, shot three men, and publicly whipped the mayor and two other men. The narrator concludes: "If only [the people of Ilom] had bought the land, our life would be good today. They had good intentions, but they weren't very smart."

In 1975 the finca administrator expressed the opinion that he wished all the people would see it was to their advantage to work for the finca. Approximately 80 households out of 200 in Ilom had made that choice. In essence, the pressure of lack of land forced Ixils to become wage-laborer rather than subsistence farmers. (Elliott)

Court case

The Municipality of Chajul took Gordillo to court in 1928. The community of Las Pilas within Nebaj's jurisdiction also filed suit. (Corte de Primera Instancia, Juicio Ordinario, Leg 11A, Pieza 14) On October 24, 1928, based on Chajul ownership, the lower court in Quiché ordered Gordillo to return the land of Panchita, Santa Joaquin and Lupita to the people of Ilom and Tzotzil within three days. The appellate court upheld this decision a year later. But on December 17, 1929, the Supreme Court ruled in Gordillo's favor, saying the municipality had offered insufficient proof these lands were within their titled land. The court held they were within what had been given to the soldiers of Momostenango. (DAN, Quiché, Finca La Perla)

Chajul's lawyer objected that the Registrar and Gordillo knew they had taken land from Nebaj and Chajul and that the notary who authorized the title had been bribed with land given to his wife by Gordillo. The attorney condemns President Estrada Cabrera who arranged the initial transfer of land in 1902.

The Executive violated the laws established for social order and the tranquility of the State, considering himself superior to those, he took the land of others. This lack of respect for the Law causes everything done to be nullified.

The free grants referred to in the Governmental Accords of March 6th and 24th and 25th of May, 1902, do not contain the formal requirements, having committed a real dispossession and encroachment, because the land granted was not national or vacant. If a precedent can be established that ejidos and Municipal possession can be disposed of under whatever title without notice nor knowledge and without legal recourse, this precedent can open the door for fraud and stripping those entities of their rights. That is what has happened in the present case, in that to save the appearances for the soldiers of Momostenango, for a citizen

invested with the role of President, his employees and subordinates forged titles and purported to appropriate the lands of Ilon and Zotzil.

The Nacional conscience deems that the abuses and arbitrary behavior of the ruler cannot nor should not be approved by any official who respects the law, who knows his honorable purpose and patriotic aspirations, and it is for this reason that the injured rights should be compensated and vindicated. (AGCA, Corte de Primera Instancia de Quiché, Juicio Ordinario, Leg 11b, Pieza 16)

The case deteriorated into complaints and counterarguments on legal procedure. Gordillo's defense included his important contribution to the national economy through export agriculture. The Government gave "the aforementioned land to the Soldiers of Momostenango with the purpose of making them productive, since in Indian hands they remain unused, and this purpose has in part been realized: in this area there are now a number of coffee farms, cattle, and important roads."

The decree taking the land from the municipalities in 1928 was annulled in 1930 after the Supreme court had already ruled in favor of Gordillo Galán. The finca of the milicios of Momostenango was "canceled from the beginning, but nevertheless continued to operate." (INTA list of Ixil Fincas)

Luis Arena Barreda

Gordillo began developing his finca. Too large to be cultivated immediately with coffee, he allowed the people to continue planting corn, beans and squash on finca land. Gordillo was said to have treated his workers well but overextended himself in building a mule trail to Chajul to transport coffee. In 1922 he sold two small parcels to Francisco Fernando Egger Forster. In 1934 he sold La Perla to Forster, but the bank repossessed all the parcels on September 17, 1936. On August 7, 1941, Luis Arenas began buying the finca from the bank. Arenas immediately set barbed-wire fences around his property and limited land use to those who asked. Anyone granted a milpa plot might be called upon to work at the finca. Arena built an airstrip at Panchita to move between administering the finca and his home in Guatemala City. At least two planes crashed, and he turned the finca back to the bank on October 29, 1962.

IXIL REGION (1944-1954)

After the government passed the Agrarian Reform Law, we see a variety of expropriation cases in the Ixil area. The law allowed the government to take ownership of unused land from large farms, pay for it, and give it to small landowners. After the 1954 coup, the government cancelled these expropriation decrees. Some confusion occurred. In one case a small landowner asked to have the expropriation decree revoked, naming the peasants active at nearby fincas. The Agrarian department responded that no one had ever filed an expropriation decree against his land.

Municipal land cases

Municipal land claims show recognition of the importance of a nationally recognized title. In Nebaj, Acul residents contested a claim for land by 21 local families who had received five *caballerías*. In revoking the expropriation to return the land to municipal control, the original Ixil claimant explained he had acted on his own and only wanted 16 *manzanas* of uncultivated land. (DAN, Quiché Municipal land #40) In Cotzal, the mayor agreed to a claim from renters of municipal land who paid 10 cents a *cuierda* per year and had used the land for twenty years. When the Castillo Armas' government returned the land to the municipality the government said the rental arrangement benefitted both the municipality and the landless poor. (DAN, Quiché Municipal land #46)

Claims by K'iche' heirs of four pieces of titled land on Chajul's eastern border were not technically claims to municipal land. The claim attempted to decide inheritance between thirty heirs to titled land. Though Chajul's mayor claimed they had tried to take land from the Municipality, in the end, revocation of the expropriation decree returned a common title to the heirs. (DAN, Quiché, #845, #948)

Small fincas

Expropriations occurred at several small fincas near Finca La Perla. The law stipulated that fincas of less than 6 *caballerías* could not be expropriated if two thirds of the land was under cultivation. Leaders of the appeal to expropriate, "Andrés Perez y compañeros", also made a claim against Finca La Perla. The *Secretario General* of the *Federación Campesina Departamental*, Rosendo Girón Toledo, participated as well. In one case, a Gordillo heir explained that his father would have liked to give workers their land, but since he represented only eleven of 33 heirs, any one of whom could object to the degree, he placed a *recurso de revocatoria*, cancellation of the decree, which was honored. (DAN, Quiché, Las Pilas) Another small finca owner protested that the people of Chel had plenty of land they were not cultivating, and he could not understand why they wanted more. (DAN, Quiché #232, San Joaquin) The government overturned all expropriations at these small fincas.

Finca San Francisco

Nicolás Brol, Minister of Agriculture under President Arbenz, was a co-owner of Finca San Francisco. Since the expropriation law stated it applied only to uncultivated portions of fincas, Finca San Francisco attempted to show how extensively they cultivated their land. They offered aerial photographs and a report from an outside agent. They raised coffee, sugar cane, maguey, cypress, forest, beef, and *heramiles*. They had a coffee processing plant, wheat milling plant, wood processing, sugar processing, a brick factory, a sack-making factory, and silos for storing grain.

The *Unión Campesina* of Cotzal led by Rosendo Girón Toledo brought a claim against the finca on February 25, 1953. Three days later *colonos* of the finca brought two more claims, one by 750 workers. To that and a fourth small claim made on another finca, the owners said they would be delighted to give land to the workers if they currently lived and worked on San Francisco.

Girón said the 750 workers with their nineteen pages of thumbprints did not know what they had signed. He said they received only 40 cents per day rather than the 80-cent minimum wage. Since the finca belonged to the Minister of Agriculture and his brothers, Girón asked for an impartial judgment on how much land workers would receive, fearing they would accept less than the law specified. An expropriation took 86 *caballerías* from Brol holdings, but the new government overturned the decree on July 5, 1956. (DAN, Quiché, Finca San Francisco)

Finca La Perla

Finca La Perla, Santa Delfina y anexos owned over 86 *caballerías*, of which only 5 *caballerías* were cultivated, 7 were devoted to pasture for cattle, and the remaining 65 were forested. On November 13, 1946, Arenas gave Ilom 4 *caballerías*, the steep hillside slope on which the town was situated. On June 11, 1951, before the Agrarian Reform Law passed, a lawsuit redressed the lack of land for Ilom and Chel by taking 10 *caballerías* from Santa Delfina for Ilom and 14 for Chel and Sotzil from Daniel Tello (Méndez Montenegro, Decreto Numero 817, pg. 719-20) By local accounts, no one ever enforced this law.

After the Agrarian Reform Law, an expropriation claim against La Perla began on February 10, 1953. On November 18, 1953, Luis Arenas went to speak to the US Embassy and offered to lead a revolt under his Anti-Communist Unification Party. With \$200,000 from the US, he believed he could exert enough “civic pressure” to overthrow Arbenz. (Schlesinger and Kinzer, p. 54) On March 30, 1954, Ixil leaders and Girón Toledo who represented the *Confederación Campesina* obtained 52 *caballerías* (DAN, Quiché, La Perla) Because the law favored peasants living in a particular area, the decree stated that Ilom and Sotzil should receive the land. Arenas would retain the land under cultivation and pastureland for his cattle. The State would retain forest land with a 30-degree inclination as a reserve. Arenas protested that the campesinos would destroy forest land and provoke erosion through their ecological irresponsibility.

Cancelled on June 4, 1956, this expropriation was the first one overturned in the Ixil area. The Ixils named in the expropriation request quickly disassociated themselves. Juan Caba said he had nothing to do with this. Alejandro Rivera said he had been involved, but not of his free will, having been threatened by agrarian activists. He had fled to Huehuetenango for a year.

The annulment cited how the Agrarian Reform Law as applied, disadvantaged landowners:

There was, on the part of the former authorities and agencies of the Agrarian Reform, a manifest evil intent to harm the interests of private property, breaking the economic and productive unity of private companies, without taking into account the difficulties and the arguments in their defense offered by the owner, arguing only that *Decreto 900* (the Agrarian Reform Law) was intended to eliminate feudal property in the countryside, without taking into account the other provisions of the law, and without foreseeing the grave consequences for the country’s economy and particularly the owner’s economy. (DAN, Quiché, La Perla)

Arenas protested that the company left no land unused, and land given to workers was not to compensate for deficient salaries. La Perla needed more pastureland for cattle, and they used the forests belonging to the finca. (DAN, Quiché, La Perla)

IXIL REGION (1954-1975)

Finca La Perla reverted to the Credito Hipotecario Bank on October 29, 1962. (Segundo Registro 1749/21/9) The people remember the following nine years of bank ownership as good for Iloom. Bank administrators allowed community members to use finca lands for as large a milpa as they wanted to work, charging only 25 cents a year per *cuerda*. One could work for cash at the finca, principally at coffee harvest time. On November 4, 1972, Arena's sons bought Finca La Perla and ceased renting out lands and formed *Finca La Perla y Anexos, S.A.* on November 21, 1977. The society owned 2,304 shares worth Q. 100 each, totaling the Q230,400 value of the property. (Segundo Registro 1749/21/9) Six members owned 50 shares each, contributing a capital of Q30,000. To cover the Q200,000 debt, they would sell the rest of the shares. (Arenas, Personal Communication)

On May 14, 1921, the four Brol heirs established *San Francisco Cotzal, S.A.* as a stock-based company with 500 shares of Q1000.00. Since 1925, Finca Santa Avelina in Cotzal belonged to the Hodgson family. On December 17, 1973, they formed *El Pacayal, S.A.*

Zequiuel

The finca Zequiuel never was cultivated by the military man who received it when the government settled a dispute between Cotzal and Chajul. The Brol company bought it in 1933 but did not exploit it though they owned the national title. However, the municipality of Chajul extended titles on *papel sellado* (legal paper), to the long-term Maya residents. The residents included half Ixiles and half from Totonicapan, all respected one another's land rights and had used the land for 50-100 years. (DAN, Quiché, Zequiuel) In 1952 the municipality and the Brols went to court over the land. The court ruled that the Maya residents could continue to use the land, based on its having been abandoned for more than six months. The Brols retained the national title.

A contradiction between locally recognized titles and nationally recognized titles came to light thanks to taxes on idle lands. The *Instituto Nacional de Transformación Agraria (INTA)* moved against the Brols to collect these taxes in 1971. A newspaper article had said land could be given to INTA to pay those taxes and Brols offered to do this. When INTA engineers began measuring the land, Chajul protested. Those on the land asked for help in getting nationally registered titles. In 1976 INTA accepted the land for back taxes, receiving title in December 1976 and then recognized the titles extended by the municipality. (DAN, Quiché, Zequiuel) This Zequiuel case highlights the precarious situation that Maya residents are placed in since they claim land whose national title is held by a finquero.

IXIL REGION (1975-1986)

Unsettled land in the Ixcán north of Ixil country invited colonization projects for K'iche's and Q'anjob'ales. Catholic priests led these projects into Chajul municipal land, though eventually the government formed a new municipality, Ixcán, in 1985. Guerrillas crossed into the area from Mexico in 1972 and worked alongside the colonists, politicizing them. (Payeras,1981) When the guerrillas began armed attacks, the army retaliated against the colonists.

The guerrillas killed three landowners in Ixil country and kidnapped another. They shot Luis Arenas, owner of La Perla, in the first armed act of the *Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* (EGP) on June 7, 1975. Mario Payeras describes in *Days of the Jungle*, a semi-fictionalized account, how he and fifteen other Guatemalans crossed the border from Mexico in 1972 to recruit campesinos for the revolutionary movement. He says that late in April 1975 they headed to Finca La Perla with a few temporary recruits. Weak political convictions and difficulties on the trail caused many to make excuses to return to their villages. After failing to ambush him, they shot Don Luis as he paid his workers. They then gave speeches describing him as an exploiter of the people and called for armed revolt. The next day the army shot 38 leaders of agricultural cooperatives in Ixcán and spent several months combing the mountains in an unsuccessful attempt to find the guerrillas.

The EGP kidnapped Roberto Herrera Ibárguen on December 31, 1977. The army mobilized an intense search, including a house-to-house search in Nebaj at the end of January. The EGP released Herrera when his family paid a ransom and published EGP communiqués in papers and on the radio. One communiqué cited Herrera's acts as a counter-insurgent leader. (*El Gráfico*, January 1978)

The EGP occupied Nebaj on January 21, 1978, to commemorate the search of the town for Herrera in the previous year. In the market, guerrillas explained their revolutionary goals and denounced Enrique Brol as an exploiter of the people. A Mayan woman protested how men like Don Enrique exploited women. Another Ixil man said, "The older people know what things were like before. We had land. The people had food when there weren't labor contractors. You know how we have been losing our land to powerful families such as that of Don Enrique." A *guerrillera* then shot Enrique Brol in his home. (*Polémica*, 1982) That evening 100 special troops arrived from Quiché. The next morning the army organized a meeting to denounce communist agitators. In February, the *Policía Militar Ambulantes* were established in Nebaj, and disappearances and torture increased. In June 1979 the army established a base. Three thousand soldiers occupied bases in Nebaj, Cotzal, Chajul, and on Finca La Perla. Guerrillas carried out armed propaganda actions with their new Ixil recruits. The army bombed the mountains for several months but found it to be ineffectual.

Violent confrontations escalated through 1980. In 1981-82 almost all Ixil villages were destroyed with massive civilian deaths. People hid in the mountains, unable to plant corn subsisting on yucca and other plants not readily visible from the air. An amnesty resulted in many civilians coming under army control which resettled displaced people in model villages without regard to previous ownership. (Manz, 1988b)

Changes in the land

Attempts to address the violence through changes in landownership included efforts by non-profits. AGROS Foundation, originally formed during the Ríos Montt government, purchased land for Ixiles to buy, offered technical assistance, and helped create export crops. Ixil Fund purchased Chemalá, 2 *caballerías* near Nebaj, for displaced people. The Catholic church also purchased Las Violetas near Nebaj for the displaced.

Major landowners took additional striking actions. Herraras had purchased land in the 1920s which brought their total landholdings to 58 *caballerías* in Cotzal. They sold their land to the government on November 30, 1982. The Hodgson's sold their 36 *caballerías* to 400 individuals. Brols sold 40 *caballerías* in Uspantán to the government. (Notes from Segundo Registro)

During the war, Finca La Perla instituted an employee stock ownership plan as they collapsed financially, going from 6,000 *quintales* of coffee to 1,500. In 1984 the owners introduced *Solidarismo*, a system begun in Costa Rica which set up worker credit unions enabling them to create coops and spin-off business. La Perla workers were to receive no-interest loans to buy 40% shares in the company over 8 years after a 3-year grace period. In 1987 these expectations increased productivity to 8,000 *quintales*. (Arenas, Personal Communication)

Ricardo Arenas believed in the system as an alternative to communism and guerrilla warfare, writing a thesis at the Universidad Francisco Marroquin on the topic. (Arenas, 1986) He cited *El Comunismo Vencido* (Marten) which proposed mutually beneficial relationships between workers and management. Pope John Paul II wrote a letter of support to the Finca La Perla owners. President Reagan commended them as well with a letter of support. (Arenas, Personal Communication) However, union leaders condemned *Solidarismo* as defeating worker power and influence, favoring management.

CONCLUSIONS

Maya views of land used for self-sufficiency conflict with the modern capitalist view of land as a commodity exploited for maximum profit. A change to national level land titles shifted the traditional basis of land ownership in a way that disadvantaged the Ixil. Under Maya common law, cultivating virgin land or inheriting what ancestors had cultivated determined ones' right to land. Under national law, written decrees of the state and transactions within those decrees determined land rights. The Spanish crown and then the national government used a system in which the Maya viewpoint remained weakly represented.

We do see instances where the old and new systems interacted more gracefully. A man raised in Amajchel in the north of Chajul's titled land, illustrates a less conflicted interaction between the Mayan and national land tenure systems. (López Santiago, Personal Communication) His grandfather settled in this remote place in 1955 after a few settlers who had arrived in the 1940s. When they found a good piece of valley land, they split it equally between father and three sons, informally laying out boundaries. Another Ixil defining his boundaries later crossed into this land. They discussed their differences, coming to an agreement that he would honor their claim, shifting the boundary line together. As population increased, they wrote documents with local

witnesses to describe the boundaries of each family's land and the municipality of Chajul honored their documents. (López Santiago, Personal Communication) When K'iche' immigrants arrived, they appealed to the national government for surveyors to divide land between the two groups. The division left the original valley within K'iche' jurisdiction, but in face-to-face discussion, the K'iche's agreed to honor the rights of the original Ixil settlers since they had first cultivated the land. The government formally recognized the settlement as an aldea, including it on recent maps.

However, in general, since Maya views of how ownership is determined and how disputes should be settled differ from a national viewpoint, as the weaker party they have been left feeling victimized. Though they have resisted, including through the legal system, the forces of the global economy have been more powerful.

Works on Guatemalan land tenure and economics put the Ixil experience in a larger context. McCreery points out that the colonial Captaincy-General existed as part of a world capitalist system (1976:439) which transformed the existing economy by raising crops for export. Smith distinguishes between the economic center, dependent surrounding areas, and marginal areas of self-sufficient economies. Since the Ixil remained marginal and self-sufficient longer than more centrally located groups, the competition over land use in the region did not become acute until the national government supported a new titling system. As Solórzano explains, campesino protests over land underlay the conflict between the early national liberal governments and the conservative Carrera regime. Again, the Ixil remained too marginal to be part of this movement and remained preoccupied with intra-municipal conflicts.

The Ixil, however, experienced a "massive assault on indian lands" due to the coffee expansion. (McCreery, 1976:457) The national land titling system restructured Mayan communal land, redefining formerly open spaces as out of bounds. (Davis, 1970:245, 189) Cambranes documents the geographic spread of coffee cultivation (1985:47) which we see impacting even this formerly marginalized region. The rise of the Agrarian Reform raised hopes for a renewal of traditional agriculture, once more dashed by the government's fall. (Handy, 1984:123-147)

Land pressure on the Ixil during the Coffee Expansion demonstrates the violent encounter between cultures. Lovell speaks of three conquests of the Maya: that of imperial Spain, that of national and international capitalism, and that of state terror. Recurrent motifs in these three conquests include the superior weaponry of the winners, forced labor, campesino guerrilla revolts, forced changes in the land, and coercion of labor through land pressure. Ixil titling documents refer to the Mayan ideals of subsistence versus a government favoring export agriculture. The conflict between Ixil and Finca La Perla highlights the violence as the Maya system collided with international capitalism. Not surprisingly, those with superior legal and military force won the competition for land. The massive assault continued with national army support allied with the landowners. As they defined the Ixil as guerrillas and engaged in scorched earth destruction, land and people suffered.

The capitalization of agriculture has contributed to a failing international ecosystem, and we have become more aware that we need the knowledge of traditional cultures such as the Ixil in creating a more sustainable world. Maya humility before the land that apologizes to every plant

or animal sacrificed for our preservation offers an alternative narrative to the unchecked development which has brought us to a crisis. Though the export economy has imposed itself by utilizing more power, we now see the need to listen to the traditional side in the competition this paper has described. As we critique our western ideology, we recognize that the Ixil Maya worldview has important ideas to correct tendencies to violence, domination, and exploitation.

Postscript

This paper, researched and written in 1989 and circulated informally since, ended with the civil conflict still on-going. Though negotiations between guerrillas and the government began in 1986, an agonizing ten years of negotiation would follow. On December 29, 1996, the Guatemalan president and former guerrillas signed a Peace Accord, bringing the 36-year armed conflict to a close. The leader of the *Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres* (EGP), Ricardo Ramírez (aka Rolando Moran) lit a flame of peace with President Alvaro Arzú.

David Stoll's *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala* (1993), includes more information on the rise of the EGP and consequences for Ixil country. Virginia Garrard-Burnett wrote *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala under Efraín Ríos Montt 1982-83* (2010) describing his 13-month government which brought extreme devastation to Ixil country. Brought to trial for genocide and crimes against humanity in 2013, Ríos Montt initially received an 80-year sentence, which was subsequently suspended for a re-trial not completed by the time of his death. The trial transcript contains testimony from 90 Ixil witnesses, published by the *Centro para la Acción Legal en Derechos Humanos* (CALDH) which prosecuted the case (CALDH, 2013).

This paper has an unusual origin. As a teenager my husband Stephen Elliott envisioned creating a non-profit, *Ixil Fund*, to support Ixils in educational, economic and health development. At the age of one, his parents Ray and Helen Elliott took him to Nebaj as they established themselves as the first North American missionaries in the area. They worked with *Wycliffe Bible Translators* (WBT) doing linguistics work and translating the New Testament.

We planned to live in the Ixil area (mostly Chajul & Ilom) but arrived in 1975 as the EGP began armed action. By 1979 our Ixil friends saw the growing guerrilla movement as a danger to us and to them by their association with us. Through our Ixil colleague Manuel López Santiago and a team he gathered in Nebaj, we carried out *Ixil Fund* projects which expanded to include relief: food, clothing, shelter and medical care for displaced people. Through Ixil Fund we bought Finca Chemalá to allow people a place to cultivate corn. Manuel's struggle with the government surveyors as he prepared for distributing individual titles seemed confusing and onerous. He eventually succeeded but the process inspired me to research the land titling process.

Steve, working as an administrator at the *Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de MesoAmerica* (CIRMA) led the computerization of the card catalogue of the National Archives among many other projects so showed me how to find the relevant documents. Other friends pointed to the land registry in Quetzaltenango and the Agrarian archives in Zone 13. I tracked down the owners of Finca La Perla in Guatemala City to interview them. CIRMA's excellent

library contained relevant publications only a block from my Antigua home. We asked a friend to prepare a map using government maps and archival information as a basis.

During this time, I made a few brief trips to Nebaj, but the army permitted us to go no further. This was a time before cellphones and email, and without landlines or even reliable telegram service, we had difficulty knowing what had happened to our friends in Ilo, Chajul. Eventually they communicated that the village had been burned but they had survived. We later learned the army shot 95 men, and many died during the hardships of their displacement. During that time many of the army's actions remained unreported, but we learned enough to question the wisdom of Wycliffe personnel, including Steve's parents, participating in Ríos Montt's development and relief program, the "beans" part of "beans and bullets." Trusting Montt as a fellow evangelical, those who formed the relief organization FUNDAPI failed to see his role in army atrocities, blaming it on lower-level commanders.

The 1980s also saw the transition from the progressive 1949 Spanish-imposed-on-Maya alphabets through phonemic Mayan alphabets and in 1990 the establishment of the *Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala* as the first native-led group in charge of matters dealing with their own languages. We supported the Maya leaders engaged in this non-violent movement to achieve more recognition and respect.

When I returned to the US I began an MA program at the *University of San Diego*, and the land research became part of my thesis. Since the paper has been repeatedly cited, the opportunity to make it more widely available seems useful.

Changes from the unpublished paper have hopefully increased clarity. The title no longer uses "Ixil Triangle" a term the military coined during the conflict and worth avoiding. With the 35 years that have passed, we all understand more deeply the horrors the Ixil people and others experienced. We admire and commend the Ixil who have done far more educational, economic and health development than our small non-profit could ever have achieved. But we remain grateful to have played a small supporting role, including discovering how land tenure contributed to Ixil oppression. Today's Ixil leaders continue to advance human rights, creating a more hopeful future.

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AEG	Archivo Eclesiástico de Guatemala, Guatemala City
AGCA	Archivo General de Centro América, Guatemala City
DAN	Departamento Agrario Nacional, Guatemala City
SR	Segundo Registro de la Propiedad Inmueble, Quetzaltenango
ST	Sección de Tierras, AGCA, Guatemala City

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Elaine Elliott. Worked in Guatemala for the Ixil Fund from 1978-1991, supporting Maya who led educational, health and small business programs. The nonprofit also provided medical care, clothing, food, and land for people displaced by the civil conflict. At the University of San Diego from 1991-2010 she worked on service-learning and social justice programs. As Service-Learning director (2002-2010) she led a dynamic program which gained national recognition. She then returned to Guatemala to work on Ixil linguistics, host study-abroad classes, and research human rights. In addition to service-learning publications, she translated the first modern novel by a Mayan author.