

Third Invasion

State-Sponsored Violence and Armed Struggle

Don Juan, a man in his early forties, invited me to an exhumation of victims of a massacre in his community of Chisís (Ch'isis). I met don Juan in 2012, and over the years I began to learn more about his life and his family. He was involved in the movement against Palo Viejo and had experienced threats due to his involvement. When he invited me, I was not sure if it was appropriate for me to attend. He said it was fine and informed me that his parents would be among the exhumed and he wanted me to be there.¹

On February 13, 1982, Chisís suffered one of the largest massacres in Cotzal during the war, when approximately two hundred people were killed by the Guatemalan state (CEH 1999a, 89–96).² Don Juan was only eight years old when the military destroyed his community. He had never gotten into the details of this day, nor did I want to ask. All I knew was that at the end of that day there were hundreds dead, including his father. Those who survived the massacre hid and sought refuge in the mountains, and some returned to their razed community to bury the dead in clandestine graves. In many cases, people remember where they buried their relatives, friends, and neighbors, and it is this knowledge that allows forensic anthropologists to locate and exhume the bodies, at sites that are considered crime scenes.

On a cloudy morning in Chisís, the residents met with a team of forensic anthropologists. At least three exhumations would be conducted, one of a common grave containing various people, and two more for don Juan's parents since they had been buried separately. The people of Chisís took the forensic anthropologists to the site where they buried their relatives. After careful digging of soil, we saw a round object that turned out to be the skull of a young child between the

ages of three and five. In total, this clandestine grave contained thirteen bodies: nine children, two women, and two men.³ Some of the children were too young for the forensic anthropologists to determine sex; all had been burned alive. These children would have been don Juan's age had they not been murdered by the military. The two men found at the crime scene were killed with a gunshot to the head. While the grave that contained murdered children from the 1980s was being dug up by forensic anthropologists, living children looked on, while their mothers wept silently.

Don Juan, his siblings, and his mother had fled into the mountains during the massacre. He would later bury his mother high up in the mountains. To arrive there from Chisis, we drove about twenty minutes on a dirt road and then hiked for two hours up to one of the highest parts of the surrounding mountains. Our party consisted of members of the exhumation team, a police officer, don Juan and his family, two of his sisters, an Ixil leader, and another researcher. We arrived at the site, which was located at the peak of the mountain, surrounded by a ring of trees with birds chirping. Without hesitation, don Juan pointed to the exact location to where he had buried his mother.

After digging, the first signs of don Juan's mother's remains led to a silence from the family and those of us present. The digging continued, and the family waited patiently until their mother was completely unearthed. Once she was, everyone paused as don Juan said some words in her honor. Afterwards, one of the forensic anthropologists began to remove her remains and place them in plastic bags, which were to be taken to their lab in Guatemala City. When the first bone was lifted, the family began to collectively weep. Their shattering cries were the haunting sounds of sorrow, anger, pain, suffering, and mourning that broke the relative silence of the mountains that day. One of the forensic anthropologists who has been doing this for over a decade also teared up. Later he said that even after doing this for so long, you never got used to these moments.

After an exhumation, remains go back to a lab, where they are processed and analyzed to see if their identity can be determined. Once they are identified through various means (DNA, testimonies, etc.), it can take up to a year or more for remains to be returned to the family to be properly buried. In the cases where remains of war victims cannot be identified, they are placed in individual boxes in a storage unit that houses the victims of war from throughout Guatemala.

During my field research, I did not ask many questions directly regarding the war since I did not want to open any wounds or recreate the pain and trauma that I saw and felt that day at the exhumation. Yet while I was working in the Ixil Region, I found it nearly impossible not to discuss the war or conflict in general, especially since it had permeated every aspect of life. Some leaders today use language from the war to describe the Palo Viejo hydroelectric plant. For example, some say the rivers have been "kidnapped" by Enel Green Power. Others view the fourth invasion as a continuation of state-sponsored violence. I have not lived through a war,

but I learned from the Ixil and K'iche' that the reality of war is extremely messy and impossible to capture in words. The Ixil Region has been the location of many research projects regarding the war, as well as serving as the case used against General Efraín Ríos Montt for genocide (Brett 2007; CEH 1999b, 1999c; A. Flores 2017; García, García, and Axelrod 2005; Garrard-Burnett 2010; Hernández Alarcón et al. 2008; Manz 1988; Mazariegos 2020; Oglesby and Nelson 2016; Perera 1993; REMHI 1998; Sesé, Burt, and Colardelle 2013; Simon 1988; Skylight Pictures 2011; Stoll 1993).

Living in San Felipe Chenlá and visiting various communities allowed me to glimpse the complexities of each location and community. I have talked to people who were patrolmen, military, guerrillas, members of the Communities of Population in Resistance (CPRs; those who were internally displaced by the war and who organized themselves in the mountains, where they were subject to further military attacks and persecution), and youth who were born in model villages, in exile, or in CPRs. In some cases, people were in multiple roles during the war. For instance, some people were CPR members and later became patrolmen, while others were victims who were forced to join the military or patrol as young as fourteen. In another instance, I was with two people who did not know each other and during a conversation found out they had been on opposite sides of a battle since one was a soldier in the military and the other a guerrilla fighter. This occurred in other parts of Guatemala too; I once met a K'iche' man who was in the military in the Ixil Region in the 1980s, migrated to the US in the 1990s, and returned to Guatemala and became a community leader who now promotes Indigenous rights.

The third invasion occurred during the war; the invaders consisted of the military and the Guatemalan state, which committed genocide against the Ixil. As we saw in the first and second invasions in the previous chapters, the Ixil resisted in various ways: using the state to denounce *finqueros*, the Catholic Church, and abusive gringos like Jeremiah Curtin, attempting to use laws like Decree 900 to recover their lands, and peacefully organizing to resist *finqueros* and the abuses of forced labor laws, only to be persecuted, kidnapped, and disappeared. When reform using state structures and peaceful resistance led to further state violence, some Ixil decided to organize and fight with the guerrilla movement, which formed a part of a long legacy of uprisings and historical rebellions.

Many stories, testimonies, and investigations reaffirm the agency and autonomy that Ixil women and men had in the guerrilla movement and demonstrate that Indigenous Peoples were not manipulated by outsiders or caught “between two armies” (Ceto 2011; González S. 2011; Flores 2021a; Forster 2012; Reyna Caba 2001). Starting in the 1970s, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) operated through the Ho Chi Minh front in the Ixil Region, where it received popular support from the communities of the Ixil Region (González S. 2011, 163). According to Pablo Ceto (2011), a member of the EGP and Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), “The substratum of the Indigenous resistance came to plant and develop

the seeds of the Guatemalan revolutionary project, in a context of growing non-conformity, organization, and struggle of the popular sectors in the decades of the '60s and '70s" (229). This "allowed the confluence of that Indigenous resistance and the revolutionary project" (229). The historian Cindy Forster characterizes the guerrilla movement in the department of Quiché as "the first unequivocally Indigenous and revolutionary guerrilla resistance" (2012, 130).

Anthropologist Alejandro Flores argues against the view that the Ixil were just passive victims during the war; instead, they were "protagonists . . . for whom the armed struggle was only an expression of dispute over the future" that challenged "the power of the *finquero* state" (2021b, 8, 20). Flores analyzes an anonymous document titled "El Señor de San Juan," written in the 1970s or 1980s, to elaborate what he calls the "two rivers theory," to describe the way in which the Ixil and guerrilla movements came together. A portion of the document reads: "The river of our people's struggle has joined the river of the guerrillas' struggle. From the two a single river, a great river, is formed. It is because of this meeting that neither the army of the rich nor the army of the gringos will be able to stop our pueblos" (quoted in Flores 2021b, 10).

In Cotzal, there are those who remember that some Ixil were the ones who invited the guerrillas to the region.⁴ Don Concepción affirms this: "The population of Cotzal invited the guerrillas so that they could be their allies, that is, to recover the land" belonging to their "grandfathers and grandmothers," who were displaced from it by the *finqueros*. He adds:

The emergence of the guerrillas or the armed force was not optional, it was not in vain, let's say, but rather, out of just necessity, because here in Cotzal the *finqueros* had invaded the land, let's say, then it is likely that the campesinos organized to recover the land because their voices were never heard. They claimed their rights, but they were never listened to until the [guerrillas] emerged. . . . So [the people] had no choice, they had to take up arms to recover their lands, and we would say that it was for a just fight, for the land, for the life of all the pueblos, the campesinos who suffered, let's say, at the hands of the *finqueros*. . . . If the mountains spoke, well, they know how many bodies were left there, of our brothers who also fought. . . . There were many deaths, many disappeared, many kidnappings by the state. I think that the *compañeros* who died, died for a just cause, it was for the life of the people and to recover the land that the *finqueros* had invaded.

This perspective reveals the relationship with the guerrilla movement as part of a struggle to recover the lands from which the Ixil had been dispossessed during the second invasion. The fact that many Ixil joined the guerrillas or supported them does not justify the Guatemalan government's claim that all Ixil were guerrillas and "naturally" opposed *finqueros* and the state. The resistance to repressive *finqueros* was a result of the second invasion and historical processes, not a biological determination. More importantly, the fact that many Ixil joined the guerrillas

does not justify state-sponsored genocide against the Ixil population and civilians. And the fact that some Ixil did not join or support the guerrillas, or even aligned themselves with the military (though often they were compelled to), should not undermine Ixil agency and political subjectivity in taking up armed struggle as a path toward liberation.

Given the vast amount of research, testimonies, and human rights reports on the war, in this chapter I first provide a brief overview of the conflict in the Ixil Region. This includes data on violence committed by the state and the role of *fincas*. I then examine the assassinations of three *finqueros*: Jorge Brol Galicia, Enrique Brol Galicia, and José Luis Arenas. Finally, I present the oral histories and testimonies of two Ixil leaders from Cotzal who had different experiences during the war: don Nicolás Toma Toma (La's Tom) and doña María Sajic Sajic (L'i I'ch), both persecuted and forced to seek refuge in the mountains. Their stories provide deep insight into how some Ixil suffered during the war and how their personal tragedies continue to mark them today.

GENOCIDE AND WAR IN THE IXIL REGION

The Guatemalan Civil War saw the worst violence against the Maya since Spanish colonization. Beginning with General Fernando Romeo Lucas García (1978–82) and continuing with General José Efraín Ríos Montt (1982–83), the Guatemalan state carried out a counterinsurgency campaign meant to displace, massacre, and eliminate Maya communities that the military viewed as safe havens for the guerrillas. The horrifying statistics on lives lost and human rights atrocities committed during this era have been well documented and widely published elsewhere.⁵ Human rights reports by the United Nation's Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) and the Catholic Church's Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica, Guatemala Nunca Más (REMHI) provide in-depth exploration of the root causes of the violence (CEH 1999b, 1999c; REMHI 1998). The proceedings from the 2013 genocide trial against General Ríos Montt also provide testimonies from Maya survivors of the war and expert witnesses, as well as a legal analysis of the crimes committed by the Guatemalan state and military (Tribunal Primero de Sentencia Penal 2013). The search for truth in Guatemala has been and continues to be risky (Weld 2014). For example, days after the REMHI report was published, Bishop Juan José Gerardi Conedera was assassinated by military officials (Goldman 2007). In addition, several witnesses in the genocide trial received threats for their role or have been the victims of accusations that seek to discredit their testimonies (Sesé, Burt, and Colardelle 2013).

There are various estimates of the amount of violence suffered in Guatemala. The CEH reported 669 massacres that left two hundred thousand dead at the national level, of whom 83 percent were Indigenous; they also reported that up to 1.5 million people were displaced (CEH 1999b, 17, 30, 83, 85). The same report

found that the armed forces were responsible for 93 percent of the deaths and that state agents had committed “acts of genocide” against Maya peoples (38). The department of El Quiché, particularly the Ixil Region, where the EGP had much support, was among the heaviest hit during the war (Garrard-Burnett 2010, 87–88). The CEH found that the department of El Quiché suffered 344 massacres (CEH 1999b, 83). Between 70 and 90 percent of the communities of the Ixil Region were razed (40). Furthermore, the CEH reported multiple forms of violence that the Ixil suffered, such as torture, massacres, kidnappings, sexual violence, disappearances, and displacement. With regard to the Ixil, the CEH concluded that the military campaigns between 1980 and 1983 resulted in

the murder of at least 6,986 people, including women, the elderly, and children, of whom 97.8 percent were Ixil, and victimized 14.5 percent of the Indigenous population, who suffered serious human rights violations such as torture, rape, and forced disappearances. Along with the perpetration of massacres and other acts of serious injury to physical and mental integrity, the army devastated at least 70 percent of the communities in the Ixil area, sometimes accompanying these actions with the occupation or destruction of sacred Maya places. This violence caused the displacement of more than 60 percent of the population, who were subjected to conditions that could lead to death from hunger, cold, and disease. (359)

The CEH reported that at least ninety communities were destroyed at the height of the violence between 1980 and 1983. In Cotzal these included Asich, Namá, Cajixay, Chisis, Quisis, Villa Hortensia, San Felipe Chenlá, Chichel, Xeputul, and San Marcos Cumlá (346).⁶

The military viewed the Maya and the Ixil as natural allies of the guerrillas and saw their repression as justified for that reason. The military’s allies such as the US were well aware of the violence occurring in Guatemala and the Ixil Region, as well as the specific targeting of the Ixil. On February 20, 1982, days after the massacre in Chisis (the one that don Juan survived), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reported the following, which is quoted at length because of its historical importance:

In mid-February 1982, the Guatemalan Army reinforced its existing force in the Central El Quiche Department and launched a sweep operation into the Ixil Triangle. The commanding officers of the units involved have been instructed to destroy all towns and villages which are cooperating with the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) and eliminate all sources of resistance. . . . Since the operation began several villages have been burned to the ground, and a large number of guerrilla and collaborators have been killed. . . . *When an Army patrol meets resistance and takes fire from a town or village it is assumed that the entire town is hostile and it is subsequently destroyed.* The army has found that most of the villages have been abandoned before the military forces arrive. An empty village is assumed to have been supporting the EGP, and it is destroyed. . . . The army high command is highly pleased with the initial

results of the sweep operation, and believes that it will be successful in destroying the major EGP support area and will be able to drive the EGP out of the Ixil Triangle. Indians who have historically been hostile to the army are now collaborating to the extent that the army has successfully formed a self-defense force of Ixil Indians in the town of San Juan Cotzal to protect the town against attacks by the EGP, the army has yet to encounter any major guerrilla force in the area. Its successes to date appear to be limited to the destruction of several "EGP-controlled-towns" and the killing of Indians collaborators and sympathizers. . . . The well documented belief by *the army that the entire Ixil Indian Population is pro-EGP* has created a situation in which the army can be expected to give no quarter to combatants and non-combatants alike. (emphasis mine, CIA 1982).

There is ample evidence, such as this cable, that the Ixil Region suffered genocide during the counterinsurgency and that military campaigns viewed the Indigenous population of the Ixil Region as an internal enemy that needed to be eliminated (CEH 1999b; Ejército de Guatemala 1982; REMHI 1998).

The persecution against the Ixil extended to all of Guatemala, and dressing in Ixil clothing or speaking Ixil was considered a death sentence. An Ixil from Nebaj remembers how women were persecuted: "She and her family were able to get to work on the Southern Coast, but other people couldn't because they were killed between Santa Cruz and Sacapulas. They were killed when the soldiers recognized that they were from Nebaj. [Also] in Patulul Suchitepequez they killed people who were identified as Ixil, they were recognized by women's *cortes*. They were accused of being guerrillas. To survive, they had to change their clothing to K'iche' dress" (quoted in CEH 1999b, 332). Another witness claimed that a group of women who were washing their clothes were shot at by the military since they noticed that their *cortes* were red, which meant they were Ixil (332). I heard similar stories of men having to stop wearing their traditional clothes such as white pants or *cotón* to avoid being detained.⁷ In other cases, boys captured by the military were forced to dress in military uniforms. Some were kidnapped, adopted, and raised by the same soldiers who had killed their parents and relatives and destroyed their community.

Following the displacement and destruction of these communities, the military government created model villages, development poles, and local militias known as Civil Defense Patrols (PAC), which were meant to control and oppress the Ixil. In Cotzal three model villages were created from the Fincas Pantaleón and Pacayal after being sold by their owners. These villages, San Felipe Chenlá, Vichivalá, and Santa Avelina, were later at the center of resistance against Palo Viejo. Children as young as twelve were forced to join the PACs, and people in these model villages remember living under military surveillance and repression. At the time, these model villages and development poles were supposedly meant to showcase the military's and the state's commitment to contributing toward the development of the region. These efforts included highly publicized inaugurations of model villages by ministers and high-level officials. For example, San Felipe Chenlá was

created by the military as a model village under General Oscar Humberto Mejía Víctores in 1983 and was officially inaugurated in 1986 during a visit by minister of development René de León Schlotter (WOLA 1988, 61–63). Yet despite the publicity and rhetoric, development was far from being achieved. For instance, in Vichivalá, a model village constructed in 1983 at a cost of Q96,635, the only government agency present in the village was the Ministry of Education, which appointed a temporary teacher and assistant to teach ninety-eight monolingual Ixil children. Most families could not afford to buy pencils and paper for their children, and the health post lacked medical supplies and proper staff (WOLA 1988, 61–63).

Sexual violence was also used as a tool of war and genocide (CEH 1999b; Crosby, Lykes, and Caxaj 2016; Oglesby and Nelson 2016; Reyna Caba 2001; Sesé, Burt, and Colardelle 2013; Velásquez Nimatuj 2019). The CEH (1999b) states that women were victims of “all forms of human rights violations” during the armed conflict and “also suffered specific forms of gender-based violence” (13). According to the CEH:

In the case of Maya women, in addition to armed violence there was gender violence and ethnic discrimination. This section refers in particular to sexual violence against women. Rape was a widespread and systematic practice carried out by state agents within the framework of the counterinsurgency strategy, becoming a true weapon of terror and a serious violation of human rights and international humanitarian law. . . . In general, the cases of individual or selective rape occurred in the context of the detention of the victims and were often followed by their death or disappearance. The cases of massive or indiscriminate and public violations were registered in areas of large Indigenous concentrations, as a common practice after the installation of military garrisons and PACs, prior to massacres or as part of scorched-earth operations. They were also accompanied by the death of pregnant women and the destruction of fetuses. (13)

The Maya witnesses in the trial against Ríos Montt denounced this type of violence and recognized the military government’s role in using it as a tool of war. According to a report by the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) describing testimonies from the trial:

Ixil women who were victims of sexual violence by the Army between 1982 and 1983 testified before the court. Their testimonies revealed that these were not isolated incidents, nor were they merely acts committed by troops beyond the control of their commanders. Rather, the testimonies revealed that it was these commanders who ordered, approved, and legitimized these acts. “It was a sergeant who gave the orders to the soldiers.” One woman survivor gave evidence that she had heard one soldier say, “Ríos Montt told us to get rid of this Ixil rubbish because they collaborate with the guerrillas.” The details of the terrible crimes perpetrated against Ixil women showed that rape was a premeditated, systematic, generalised practice, used as a form of warfare and part of the counter-insurgency policy of José Efraín Ríos Montt’s government. (Sesé, Burt, and Colardelle 2013, 13)

Because of this campaign of terror, girls and women lived in fear and in some cases were not allowed to leave the house because there was “a lot of fear that [they could] get caught” by the soldiers (Forster 2012, 140).

Survivors have fought to seek justice for these crimes and have organized, founded, and participated in organizations and collectives such as Flor de Magüey and the Association for Justice and Reconciliation (Lykes, Crosby, and Alvarez Medrano 2021). As mentioned in the previous paragraph, during the trial against Ríos Montt, several witnesses denounced the sexual violence they had suffered from the soldiers and PAC. In 2016, the Sepur Zarco case, the first criminal trial for sexual slavery as a weapon of war, found that Q'eqchi' women were kept on military bases, forced into sexual slavery, and forced to cook and clean for soldiers; the accused soldiers were found guilty of these crimes (Burt and Estrada 2022; Velásquez Nimatuj 2019). On January 24, 2022, in the Achí Women case, five former PACs were “sentenced for being found guilty of enslaving and raping Achí women during the internal armed conflict” (España and Pitán 2022).

While there are those who deny genocide occurred in Guatemala, the evidence presented at the 2013 trial against Ríos Montt did not leave any doubt (Oglesby and Nelson 2016). The ruling was overturned ten days later by the Constitutional Court (CC), not because of the evidence presented at trial, but because of an alleged due process violation.⁸ In 2014, Congress approved Resolution Point 03-2014, which denies genocide during the war (*Prensa Libre* 2014; Rojas 2014). For many Ixil and Guatemalans, the 2013 ruling never ceased to be valid and remains intact today, despite the ruling of the CC. In relation to the annulment of the trial against Ríos Montt and Resolution Point 03-2014, don Concepción told me that it was worrying that the Guatemalan state and its allies deny genocide today, since these same powers had caused a lot of damage during the violence. As he held up a copy of the 2013 ruling against Ríos Montt, he stated: “Here is everything that Ríos Montt has done, [it is in] the ruling. . . . We regret the attitude of those who financed the war. . . . They themselves have declared that there was no genocide. It is they who are responsible for the massacres, the razed lands, the disappearance of communities. . . . They continue to violate the rights of Indigenous Peoples, they have authorized mining, hydroelectric plants, exploitation of the assets that we have, without consent of Indigenous Peoples, without the consent of the legitimate owners. . . . In Guatemala, the violence continues.” The trial was sent to an initial judicial phase and repeated, and in 2018 the courts again ruled that the Guatemalan government and army had committed genocide during the war. However, Ríos Montt died during the course of this second trial, before the new sentence was handed down.

As noted, the US government supported military dictatorships with weapons, advisers, and political support, and can be considered intellectual authors of genocide in Guatemala and against the Ixil people. President Ronald Reagan famously said that Ríos Montt was being criticized too much and that he was “a man of great personal integrity” who was “totally dedicated to democracy in

Guatemala” (Cannon 1982). The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) “provided several million dollars to the army’s rural security” and supported the construction of model villages (Sanford 2003, 170). In addition, several gringos supported military dictatorships, especially missionaries and evangelicals like those of the Iglesia Cristiana Verbo, which supported Ríos Montt (Garrard-Burnett 2010; Forster 2012, 137–45; Sanford 2003, 171). President Bill Clinton (1993–2001) acknowledged and apologized in 1999 for the role played by his country during the civil war.

Apart from the US, other international actors supported Guatemala’s military dictatorships. These included Israel, which provided arms, helicopters, boats, military advisers, and police training, working with the secret police in interrogation tactics and urban counterinsurgency (Bahbah and Butler 1986, 162). The Israeli press referred to the 1982 coup that was led by Ríos Montt and that placed him into power as “the Israeli connection.” There were as many as three hundred Israeli advisers in Guatemala, and Ríos Montt himself told US reporters that many of Guatemala’s soldiers had been trained by Israelis (cited in Bahbah and Butler 1986, 161). The Israelis even aided in building a “munitions plant to manufacture bullets for M-16 and Galil assault rifles” which started operation in Coban, Alta Verapaz, in 1983 (162). During the EGP occupation of Nebaj in 1979, an eyewitness account claimed that one of the gringos in town had turned out to be an Israeli army instructor who was not recognized by the EGP and who left Nebaj after the guerrillas departed (“La toma de Nebaj” 1982). The Guatemalan military and right wing spoke of the “Palestinianization” of the Maya (Black 1983, 43). Other countries that provided support such as military advisers, counterinsurgency training, ammunition sales, and police intelligence included Argentina, Chile, South Africa, and Taiwan (Bahbah and Butler 1986, 161; Jamail and Gutierrez 1986, 56; Rostica 2016).

The violence in the Ixil Region was brutal and was committed by the Guatemalan state in conjunction with other governments such as the US and Israel. In addition, some Ixil and other Maya were forced to participate in massacres. Fincas and *finqueros* also played a violent role in persecuting and repressing the Ixil, particularly when the latter demanded that their labor and human rights be respected.

FINCAS DURING THE WAR

The fincas worked with the army and the Guatemalan state to militarize the Ixil Region and contribute to violence against the civilian population. The army created garrisons in La Perla and San Francisco after the assassination of *finquero* Luis Arenas in 1975 (González S. 2011, 190). Also, during the civil war, Finca Pacayal (owned by the Hodgson family), and Finca Pantaleón (owned by the Herreras) would be sold since the violence made it difficult for them to operate. The Finca San Francisco continued to operate and has been accused of contributing to the massacres and terror in the Ixil Region. According to REMHI (1998), the army

had a large presence in the region, including a platoon on the Finca San Francisco: “The military—which in 1981 had a brigade deployed with a command post in Nebaj, one company in Chajul, another in Cotzal, and another one in Nebaj, in addition to two platoons at the plantations of La Perla, two at La Tana, one at San Francisco, and another at La Panchita, the most remote places in the area—immediately initiated actions against those populations that showed greater support for the guerrillas, and scorched earth in the communities closest to the safe havens of the guerrillas” (306). The troops stationed at Finca San Francisco have been implicated in the massacre in Chisís. According to the CEH (1999c, 90–91):

On Saturday, February 13, 1982, around five in the morning, some two hundred soldiers from the Cotzal, Nebaj, and Chiul detachments, and one hundred civil patrolmen from the Finca San Francisco de Cotzal and from the villages of Santa Avelina and Cajixay, surrounded Chisís, forming a fence to prevent [people] from escaping. . . . The soldiers opened fire on the population and began to burn the houses. . . . After the massacre, the survivors of Chisís saw, from their refuge in the mountains, how the soldiers and patrolmen were heading back toward the village. It had already been abandoned. The soldiers burned all the houses. They then continued to Villa Hortensia Antigua, where they spent the night. In the early hours of Sunday, February 14, they set fire to the houses of Villa Hortensia. They then marched to the Finca San Francisco.

Chisís was destroyed, and survivors either fled into the mountains or sought refuge in the town center of Cotzal. An Ixil leader who had lived through the war told me:

During the internal armed conflict, the army came to stand out there on the [San Francisco] finca, and they kidnapped many people and killed many people. The army did not arrive as security for the population, it arrived as security for the *finquero* Brol, not for the population, but when the people claim their rights, saying that their ration is not enough or they get low pay, they are taken out of their house and the next day they are disappeared, so that was the great violation that took place at that time.

Communities such as Cajixay were also destroyed and abandoned for years, thus contributing to the internal displacement of thousands in the Ixil Region (Manz 1988). Others fled to the mountains to form CPRs or joined the guerrillas. Still others fled to Guatemala City, or to refugee camps in Mexico (Lovell 1990).

Fincas discriminated against the Ixil and perceived them as a threat, particularly when Ixil workers demanded that their rights be respected. According to an Ixil who testified for the CEH report, in 1980, during a worker strike, “Seven thousand indigenous Ixil participated. . . . They worked mainly on the Finca Pantaleón, but when the owners realized that the Ixil were very combative and that they actively participated in campesino struggles, they no longer wanted to hire them. . . . For the *finqueros*, all the Ixil were insurgents” (quoted in CEH 1999b, 328). People

from the CPR of Santa Clara, Chajul, similarly remember the ways that fincas treated them: “In the years 1975, ’76 and ’77, the Ixil campesinos who went to the Southern Coast began to protest the bad pay, the bad salary, and the bad food that the farmers gave; they began to organize and demand their rights. . . . And then when they [the fincas] saw that the Ixil people were organizing, and in this way manifesting and demanding their rights, the *finqueros* imagined that the Ixil were insurgents and guerrillas, and so they informed the army” (quoted in CEH 1999b, 328). The Ixil did not protest against the fincas because of their “nature,” as the military argued; rather, they were responding to harsh working conditions, exploitation, discrimination, abuse, and historical inequalities. Fincas and *finqueros* were actively collaborating with the military to discriminate against, persecute, and repress the Ixil. During the war, three *finqueros* were killed in each town of the Ixil Region, along with finca workers and their allies.

THE DEATHS OF THREE *FINQUEROS*

Plantation owners in the Ixil Region worked in collaboration with the military during the war and became a target for the guerrillas. First the *finquero* Jorge Brol Galicia was killed in Cotzal by unknown assailants in 1969 when he was driving on the main road to San Francisco to hand out pay. Then in 1975, José Luis Arenas, the owner of Finca La Perla, Chajul, known as *el Tigre del Ixcán* (the Tiger of Ixcán) on account of his brutality, was murdered on his finca. Last, in 1979 Enrique Brol Galicia was murdered in Nebaj by the EGP. Of the three assassinations, the murder of Jorge Brol Galicia has been the least examined; the deaths of Enrique Brol Galicia and Luis Arenas have been well documented (Flores 2021a; “La toma de Nebaj” 1982; Palencia 2021; Perera 1993; Stoll 1993, 61, 71–73).

The death of Jorge is unclear. Some have claimed he was killed by a group of local Cotzalsenses who knew he would be carrying a lot of money and have attributed his death to robbery (Perera 1993, 71). Others claim it was orchestrated by the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR). Mario Payeras, in *Los días de la selva* (1998, 102), suggests that Domingo Sajic Gómez, an Ixil labor contractor, was involved in the assassination of Jorge; as a result, he was later captured by the military police, tortured, and murdered in a coffee toaster located inside Finca San Francisco. In discussing this case I am not trying to demonstrate who was responsible for the murder of Jorge Brol but to show how the state and the armed forces implemented legal violence to arbitrarily persecute, detain, and interrogate several Ixil in connection with it.

According to police reports, Jorge was carrying Q8,000 and was traveling with Domingo Vicente Pastor on June 20, 1969, when they were ambushed ten kilometers before reaching San Francisco, where they were going to distribute a biweekly payment to workers (AHPN, GT PN, 50, So09, F51335). Between 10 and 11 a.m., they encountered rocks blocking the road to stop them. When Pastor got out of the vehicle to remove them, Jorge was shot three times by the assailants with

a 45-caliber rifle, killing him instantly (AHPN, GT PN, 50, S009, F51335). Realizing he was dead, the assailants pushed him over from the driver's seat and then seized his briefcase that contained Q8,000, a rifle, a watch, a wallet, and personal documents. The assailants allegedly fled to the town center of Cotzal. Enrique Brol would urge the police to investigate Jorge's murder (ADAHPN, GT PN, 50, S001, 957022). Pastor was arrested soon after, and not much is known of his fate or his role in the murder (ADAHPN, GT PN, 50, S001, 437202).⁹

After a year without additional arrests for the murder of Jorge, his brother Edmundo Federico Brol Galicia complained to the police on August 21, 1970 (AHPN, GT PN, 50, S009, F51335). He implicated the former municipal mayor Pedro Medina Rodriguez as the intellectual author of the murder and accused Domingo Sajic Gómez, Emilio Rivas, and Ildefonso Galicia of being the assassins. Juan Cruz Toma was named as an informant to the "assassins" on "the movements" of Jorge. Miguel Sanchez de la Cruz would also be arrested (AHPN, GT PN, 50, S009, F51335). It is not clear why Edmundo made these accusations or what proof he had to implicate those he named to police. Days later, five detectives of the Judicial Police drove to Cotzal to arrest those Edmundo had named. On August 23, at 9 p.m., the detectives arrested Pedro Medina Rodriguez and interrogated him. According to one detective: "[Rodriguez] was serving as municipal mayor and justice of the peace of the Municipality of San Juan Cotzal. . . . Around 11 a.m. on June 20, 1969, he [went with] his secretary to the place where Mr. Jorge Brol Galicia was assassinated to write up a report [on the case], having supervised the first proceedings of the case" (AHPN, GT PN, 50, S009, F51335). It makes sense that given his position as mayor Rodriguez would go to the scene of the crime and write a report. Regarding the others who were detained, Juan Cruz Toma was accused and interrogated for being a "courier" who had tracked the "movements" of Brol. Domingo Sajic Gómez and Miguel Sanchez de la Cruz were also interrogated and accused of being part of "the group of assassins" (AHPN, GT PN, 50, S009, F51335). These police reports do not contain evidence to place the accused at the scene of the crime; nor do they provide a motive. All of those captured would be further implicated in the crime by two witnesses.

A father and son, Felino and Alejandro Vasquez Martinez, gave a "voluntary declaration" to the police on August 27, 1970, claiming that they had been renting a room at Domingo Sajic Gómez's house at the time of the murder (AHPN, GT PN, 50, S009, Doc. No. 9, [14.0117.1233] 539). They told police that they were from Chinaca, Huehuetenango, and that they lived next to the Finca Sabina located in the municipality of Patulul, Suchitepéquez. The father and son said they were in Cotzal to make baskets and were present when Domingo Sajic Gómez received the news of Jorge's death. According to the police report, Alejandro mentioned seeing Rodriguez meet with Domingo and others, and heard them mention the Brols (AHPN, GT PN, 50, S009, Doc. No. 14, [14.0117.1233] 539). Alejandro's father, Felino, gave a similar statement and added that "he did not fully understand what

the meeting was about” since he did not speak Ixil (AHPN, GT PN, 50, So09, Doc. No. 13, [14.0117.1233] 539). It is not clear how the declaration was obtained, why Felino and Alejandro came forward to provide their testimony a year after the murder, and whether it was actually voluntary.¹⁰

This case illustrates how the police would arbitrarily detain the Ixil at the request of a *finquero*. Edmundo’s complaint mentioned no evidence against those implicated and no possible motives. The testimony of the father and son did not present sufficient evidence to implicate those named in the murder of Jorge Brol. Their testimony mentions that there was a gathering at Domingo’s house shortly after the time of the murder, that they heard the group speak Ixil, and that they heard Brol’s name being mentioned. But this does not show culpability, especially since the witnesses could not understand Ixil, and since uttering Brol’s name would make sense given the magnitude of the crime; the town must have known, for word would have traveled fast.

In Cotzal, this would be an era in municipal politics when the municipal mayor Gaspar Pérez Pérez (Kax Pi’y; 1974–78) was known for his brutality and collaboration with the military. He was the political rival of Concepción Santay Gómez’s father (Gregorio Santay) and uncle (Concepción Santay), Baltazar de la Cruz Rodríguez’s granduncle (Nicolás Toma Toma), and María Sajic Sajic’s father (Domingo Sajic Gómez) (figures 8, 9 and 10). Gaspar told the military that these individuals were collaborating with the guerrillas, and Domingo Sajic Gómez was subsequently kidnapped and disappeared a year after the death of Jorge Brol. He would last be seen on September 25, 1971, on the Finca Magdalena Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa, Escuintla. After his disappearance, his family was persecuted, including María Sajic Sajic, whose testimony is presented later in this chapter.

The second assassinated *finquero* was José Luis Arenas, who was on the Finca La Perla on June 7, 1975, when he was killed by the EGP while he was paying workers. On that morning, between two hundred and three hundred workers were waiting for their biweekly payment from Arenas. Four EGP members went among the workers, and at approximately 4:30 p.m., two of them entered Arenas’s office. According to the CEH: “They drew their weapons and ordered: ‘Do not move, all hands up, we come for Mr. Arenas, to avenge the blood of the *colonos* who have been mistreated and harassed.’ They told the people who were receiving payment, ‘We are not going to do anything to you, lie on the ground face down.’ At the moment when the people lay down on the ground, the attackers opened fire on José Luis Arenas. The victim fell dead as the result of six bullet wounds, three in the chest and three in the forehead” (CEH 1999c, 201). The death of Arenas is still remembered today. It marked one of the turning points of the war, when the military government increased its presence in the area (Flores 2021a).

The third *finquero*, Enrique Brol, was assassinated in Nebaj on January 21, 1979, during a one-day occupation of the town center by the guerrillas.¹¹ During the takeover of Nebaj, the guerrillas went to Enrique Brol’s house to confront him. According to one account:



FIGURE 8. Concepción Santay Gómez with a photo of his father, Gregorio Santay Ajanel, who was kidnapped and disappeared during the war. Courtesy of Monika Banach.

Don Enrique Brol, one of the owners of the Finca San Francisco, was also sought, like other contractors, at his home. They introduced themselves as soldiers of the estate. While the maid went to prepare coffee for them, [Brol] himself opened the door for them. A guerrilla entered, and she [checked] him to see if he had any weapons. Don Enrique screamed for help from his son and jumped forward, trying to escape. So she shot him, not to kill him, but the shot was deadly. They didn't want to kill him,



FIGURE 9. Nicolás Toma Toma and Baltazar de la Cruz Rodríguez in 2023. Photo by author.

they just wanted to take him to the rally to publicly expose the acts of his exploitation. The son came out in his underpants, and they took him to the market. In that house, there was very good hunting equipment. (“La toma de Nebaj” 1982)

Journalist Victor Perera (1993) has written a similar account: “A woman in olive fatigues who had been abused as a servant in the Brol household was the first to approach Enrique after her companions disarmed his son and bodyguard, Fita Brol. Confronted by a former servant clasping a submachine gun, Enrique cursed and reached for his holster. She shot him through the jaw, and he fell to the ground. . . . The executioner and her companions then led Fita to the square and placed him on public exhibition together with their other captives” (70). In comparison to Jorge Brol’s murder, Enrique’s assassination is better remembered today. It also marked an escalation of the war. Perera argues that the “political execution” of Enrique Brol and Luis Arenas, “two widely hated ladino landowners, . . . won the EGP hundreds of Mayan recruits” who were “willing to risk their lives to provide food, shelter, and military intelligence” to the guerrillas (71).

TWO ORAL HISTORIES

To humanize much of the data presented above, I provide two oral histories below. The first is that of don Nicolás, whose story is about the challenges he faced struggling against structural inequalities and about how he joined the guerrillas. The second is the story of doña María, the daughter of Domingo Sajic Gómez, who was persecuted after his death. Both stories illustrate the complicated history and legacies of the armed conflict.



FIGURE 10. María Sajic Sajic with a photo of her father, Domingo Sajic Gómez, 2022. Photo by author.

Don Nicolás Toma Toma

Don Nicolás is known in Cotzal for his story of being elected municipal mayor, an election that was subsequently stolen from him by alleged fraud, and of being tortured, escaping from the army, and joining the guerrillas. He is commonly known by his two noms de guerre, “Rolando” and “Kaliman.” His life demonstrates the Ixil’s multiple forms of resistance and the repressive response of the state and

the military. Below are several pivotal points in his life, including his early life, candidacy for mayor, persecution, capture by the military, joining the guerrillas, and life after the war.

I met don Nicolás for the first time in 2011; I interviewed then and would do so again four more times in 2014. These conversations took place in San Felipe Chenlá and his home in Paal, Chajul. In addition, he provided me with a written testimony about his life, titled *Historia por la justicia: Historia personal de la vida de Nicolás Toma Toma* (Toma Toma 2005). The interviews and the written document are the basis of this section.

Early Life. Don Nicolás was born in 1940 in the canton of Tzixecap, Cotzal, and was the son of Juan Toma Marroquín and Juana Toma. His father was a merchant who sold various products in Chajul, Chel, Ilom, Sotzil, Ixcán, and elsewhere. He went to school when he was about ten years old, where many of the ladino teachers were abusive and did not allow children to speak Ixil. When don Nicolás did not pass the second grade, he began to work “with a hoe and a machete” in the field. Despite not continuing with formal schooling, he managed to learn to read and write.

Don Nicolás shares the stories he heard about the first Pedro Brol, who arrived in the Ixil Region after fleeing Italy because of “a war.” He says the first Brol was poor but was soon able to trick and use municipal mayors to lend him land. As a result of this request, the municipal mayor gave Pedro Brol approximately eight to ten *cuerdas*. Later, this first Brol requested land documents, which he used to claim additional land:

“That’s fine” they told [Brol]. He always seemed like good people, right? [With the document they gave him he [claimed more] land; it was no longer just ten *cuerdas* [it was now] *caballerías* [that he claimed]. So there he stayed, [and soon] many *Brolitos* [little Brols] appeared. . . . Soon after, the son of the first Brol had sons. . . . There are many Brol, but recognized children are very few, and there are other children not recognized. . . . Then he denounced the land and the people were displaced. “They are no longer going to work there because the land is already mine,” said [Brol]. So every time there were political parties, he became a very good friend as a partisan, and he helped the mayors a lot in the government as well so that they wouldn’t [kick him out]. . . . The Brols always have a political party. . . . They must support a party so that they don’t get hurt by them.

While don Nicolás is not aware of the type of paperwork the first Brol used to take the land, his narrative reaffirms the Ixil perception that the Brol family used deception and corruption to secure and register large properties in Cotzal. Don Nicolás states that the Brols would force their finca workers to vote for a particular candidate, and that if not enough votes were cast, the workers would be accused of being “rebels.” But he notes that the finca’s support for a candidate was not always a guarantee that they would win since there were also oppositional movements, and the people would sometimes win.

Don Nicolás adds that with the agrarian reform under Arbenz, “people organized themselves into peasant league unions,” which included his father. Don Nicolás remembers the efforts that the people of Cotzal made to organize and demand better living conditions, and says they had more opportunity under Arévalo and Arbenz. He says that people “rose up” and organized into unions and peasant leagues, but that “the rich saw what they were doing [and] staged a coup d’état against Arbenz”; then “All the people that had organized were captured” and imprisoned. Don Nicolás makes a clear connection between *finquero* land ownership and resistance movements at that time:

San Felipe Chenlá is the Finca Pantaleón, and the lands of Chichel were from the Finca Soledad, and Santa Avelina belonged to Pacayal, [it belonged to] don Donald. . . . All the lands were owned by *fincas*. . . . But the people rose up [as they realized] that what [the *finqueros*] were doing was not good, so they organized unions, peasant leagues, although the government did not like it. . . . I got into the peasant leagues and the unions, I organized unions on the Finca San Francisco and also organized a peasant league in Cotzal because there was no sewage system, there was no drinking water, there was no electricity, and there were no roads, and there was no schools, that’s why [we] organized.

Following Arbenz’s overthrow, don Nicolás claims, his father was among those arrested and imprisoned for supporting peasant leagues and expropriation efforts: “The lands were distributed, they were parceled out. But when Arbenz fell, what happened? They went to jail. . . . My dad went to jail for about six days, [those who organized] went to jail and [later] were released. . . . The struggle continued through political parties. . . . That’s when all the unions ended.” Don Nicolás was about twenty-years old when he began to organize in peasant leagues. In the late 1950s, the communities of Cotzal reelected “the leaders of peasant unions, the leaders of Catholic Action, and the leaders of the cooperative,” and these people later became part of the leadership that began to organize for the improvement of Cotzal. Approximately four hundred people joined and demanded better social services from the government:

We demanded that there be washbasins, that there be drinking water and that there be drainage. . . . We didn’t have anything, so the people liked [our work]. After we saw that [we had] a lot of people [supporting us], we went down to the Finca San Francisco to organize the unions, and [the people] liked it too, . . . About a hundred people joined there on the finca. . . . The unions were organized and then we started struggling [against] the Brols.

The workers of the Finca San Francisco demanded better working conditions, such as pay (since workers were not always paid by *finqueros*), better wages, and construction of latrines. Don Nicolás says that organizers and the people then came to question the legitimacy of Brol landholdings: “So the finca was already afraid . . . and it was already moving a little when the war broke out and every-

thing was stalled. . . . We couldn't do anything, so that's where it ended." Don Nicolás claims that the *finqueros* and the government persecuted organizers and forced some of them into exile, ultimately inhibiting the momentum of their organizational efforts.

At some point in the early 1970s, during his trips to Ixcán as a traveling merchant, don Nicolás conversed with members of the guerrillas. He recalls a conversation he had with a guerrilla who said that it was impossible to recover stolen lands and make structural changes through reform, since the system and the government were controlled by the rich. As don Nicolás cited and remembered the words of the guerrilla member:

"University graduates [and professionals] are children of the rich, doctors are children of the rich. All those high officials are children of the rich. And when a complaint or something comes, they go to their parents; then they, their parents [tell their children] not to pay attention to it, because they are guerrillas. [That's why] we can't do anything," said [the guerrilla]. "[Change through] the law in Guatemala cannot happen because all the laws belong to the rich, they made it, it's not for us. . . . The best way [is] through revolution, because with that we are going to make it tremble, we do not ask for forgiveness. . . . Everything is done with weapons, that will be in the mountains," he said. "The peasant league is very good, the unions, the cultural organizations, they are very good, but it [what they are trying to do] does not fit within the law of the rich. They are never going to do it, they are only going to spend money on lawyers; a year, two years go by, and it is never resolved."

The conversation that don Nicolás had with the guerrilla reveals the debate at that time between strategies of reform and revolution, where the limitations of structural changes and the recovery of lands using the Guatemalan state were noted. Don Nicolás decided not to join the guerrillas at that time. Instead, he continued selling as a merchant and became increasingly involved in municipal politics, in which he would eventually be named as a mayoral candidate. Growing violence, selective criminalization, and kidnappings targeting community leaders and activists would increase in the 1970s and 1980s. Don Nicolás would continue to be involved in local politics and became an influential actor in the Christian Democratic (DC) political party.

Running for Mayor. In 1970, don Nicolás was named leader of the DC in Cotzal. He was then proposed as a mayoral candidate for the 1974 elections, and although he did not have many funds to run a campaign, many people in Cotzal supported him because he was active in the community as part of the union, the peasant leagues, and the cooperatives. Gaspar Pérez Pérez was the candidate of the right-wing political party, National Liberation Movement (MLN). Don Nicolás says, "I got 1,300 votes, something like that, and he only got 900, it was well won. But what did [Gaspar] do? Fraud. . . . I won, but I didn't get in because they committed fraud, because the MLN was the ruling party in government."

This was the same year that Ríos Montt lost his election as a presidential candidate for the DC-led National Opposition Front (FNO) to the MLN candidate, General Kjell Eugenio Laugerud García (1974–78), because of fraud.

Gaspar Pérez Pérez assumed the position of municipal mayor in 1974. Shortly afterwards, he would call on the military to come to the Ixil Region, in addition to persecuting his political rivals. Don Nicolás remembers that Gaspar (whom he also refers to by his Ixil name, Kax Pi'y) traveled to gain the support of the central government: "[Gaspar] said it himself, 'I went to Quiché and the governor did not accept me. They are guerrillas too,' said Kax Pi'y. 'I'd better go to [Guatemala City to speak with] Laugerud [the president of Guatemala].'" And Laugerud told him, "Ah, it's very bad that you come to denounce the guerrillas because the guerrillas are strong." Though it is unknown if Gaspar Pérez Pérez actually met with the president, don Nicolás claims that Laugerud rejected Gaspar's request for support but that one of the Brols ended up helping him:

After [the meeting with Laugerud] Kax Pi'y came out sad. So he was sitting in the park, just like that. [Then came] Edmundo Brol. "Gaspar, what are you doing here?" "I went to . . . denounce the guerrillas because they killed your brother and . . . this government doesn't believe it." . . . "That's not right, I'm going to ask for a hearing, and we're going to go in and see what they tell me, wait for me here." And [Edmundo] went in to ask to meet the president. . . . When [Gaspar entered] the meeting, they told him, "Okay, I'm going to send the soldiers, but one warning: the soldiers are just like fire. When the fire takes hold, it burns all things, it doesn't matter if everything is cultivated, and that's how it has to be. That's why I tell you, very dangerous."

The military was sent to the Ixil Region, and shortly after, they began to kidnap leaders and people from an assumed list they had (which included don Nicolás). According to don Nicolás, some of those initially kidnapped included Juan Chamay, Domingo Aguilar, Concepción Santay, and Tomás Santay, some of whom were leaders of the PR and political rivals of Gaspar Pérez Pérez. In the 1980s, scorched earth was implemented, which was foreshadowed in the narrative where the soldiers are like the fire that burns everything.

Persecution and Capture by the Military. Don Nicolás affirms that after the elections he was persecuted by soldiers who tried to kidnap him on multiple occasions. He identifies Gaspar Pérez as one of those responsible, since Gaspar had reported him as a guerrilla to the army. On one occasion in Cunén, the military had a list with his name but another young man who had the same name was disappeared. He later went to live in Ixcán in search of refuge. There a soldier told him that he wanted him to go to the military detachment, but he did not accept because he knew that it was "a very formal kidnapping [that] they wanted to do. . . . I didn't go, I hid more." After some time, he decided to return to his house in Cotzal since he believed that the situation had calmed down, but he was soon kidnapped by

the military in July 1976. According to don Nicolás in his testimony *Historia por la justicia* (Toma Toma 2005):

The soldiers captured me very early, perhaps at six in the morning above my house in the canton of Tu Putzaay when I was going to see the cornfield and buy a cow from a friend. . . . Suddenly the army appeared from their hiding place and they said, "Hands up." First, they [searched and] checked my identification card, and my business license, and I had 2,500 quetzals in my pocket. The person who captured me was a second lieutenant officer. . . . At that moment he hit me a lot and tied me with a new rope and took me to meet the lieutenant at Gaspar's [Pérez Pérez's] house. Gaspar gave a house to a group of soldiers, and the other group was on the soccer field. The lieutenant gave me a punch and told the second lieutenant to take me to a tent and that's how it happened. I got to the tent, and he threw me to the ground very hard. There were already three people kidnapped in that tent. The people were named Juan de la Cruz, Domingo Velasco, and Francisco [Córdoba] from the community of Chisís. This second lieutenant interrogated me for six days. . . . Every so often he hit me, and the other three soldiers asked me where the guerrillas were and they were telling me the names of the guerrillas. I told him that I didn't know them. Then I explained to him that I was a worker and [that] I was with the peasant league, the union, [and the] cooperative [and] in the political party (DC). But they were not satisfied, [and] after thirteen days they took me out of the tent at night and we went to Gaspar's house where the lieutenant was, but with me blindfolded and well tied up. . . . They gave me a push over to where a person was tied to a stake. The lieutenant put a gun in my mouth, as if he was going to force me to shoot myself with my own hand, but he wouldn't let me do it, and what did he do to me? He hit me several times in the face, and a lot of blood came out of my nose. I was at the point of death. He put us in a jeep along with the one who had been tied to the stake, and the other three stayed in the tent where I was. The car started on the way to Quiché around three in the morning. Tied by the hands they put us in a jail. . . . We couldn't lie down, [there was] just a little [room] to sit up, it was very small. We woke up in that jail. (3–4)

After don Nicolás was taken to Quiché, the interrogation continued for around three months, where he suffered additional torture.

The four of us were already half dead, [one] already had his back all peeled from the blows, the others too, one broke a hand, another a foot from the blows, we were already ready to die. . . . Four soldiers were guarding us in a garage. Sometimes they gave us food, sometimes not, sometimes they burned us with cigarettes and tortured us however they wanted without any remorse. One day a car entered the garage to leave a grenade in the middle of a table; smoke began to come out from it, and the soldiers who were guarding us were afraid and left their posts. But the grenade did not explode, it was only meant to scare us. (4)

At one point, don Nicolás was detained in a cell with another man from Cunén accused of being a guerrilla, who asked him if don Nicolás could kill him before he was tortured by the military. Don Nicolás refused to do so; they took the man away

and it is not known what happened to him. During his detention, the military kept him blindfolded, and on one occasion they took his photograph.

Shortly after, don Nicolás along with three other captives was taken to be killed near San Lucas Tolimán in the department of Sololá. Before this happened, he had a dream in which he was assured that he would escape from the army and survive.

The next day the judicial officers arrived at around three in the afternoon. They didn't give us breakfast or lunch. They put us in a pickup truck with four judicial officers. We were well covered by the canvas of the car without knowing where we were going. At around nine or ten we arrived where they [were going to kill us], which was below San Lucas Tolimán . . . across a bridge. They said, "We are going to brutally kill the leader of the guerrillas," and they did so with an iron bar. They only hit me on the neck, face down, I bled. I didn't hear the blows that were hitting me because of the blood, and then a star appeared above where I was. Then they said, "He is already dead," and they hit me again with the bar, hitting my hand. It hurt a lot, but I didn't move at all. And they said I was already dead. They looked for their knife and took off my clothes, cut my pants and shirt, and left me completely naked. They grabbed me, one by my hands and the other by my feet, and they threw me into the ravine, and I went through the bushes. (5)

One of the captors was ordered to ensure his death: "You are going to shoot a *tiro de graica* [death shot],' they told one of them. . . . He had his gun, [and] I heard he was going to go down to where I was. . . . I decided to roll a little, [did a turn], and fell to the bottom of where the river ran." After falling into the river, don Nicolás heard the execution of the other captives who were with him: "The shots rang out, *paq paq*, they killed one. Five minutes later *paq paq*, they killed the other, and then they killed the other. . . . [They killed] the other three compañeros and I stayed alive. . . . That was very hard."

The river was dry at the time when don Nicolás fell, but he was able to find some water to drink. He then slowly crawled and walked to a nearby house, but because of his injuries after months of torture, he was very weak:

Little by little, I returned, little by little. . . . I walked like this, crawling. [I went] among the coffee plantations and I heard . . . a dog, that dog, I'm sure he's a campesino. . . . Step by step, after three, four steps, I fell to the ground. . . . It was nine or ten at night, [little by little I moved forward], and I didn't arrive until five in the morning, maybe it wasn't that far. [When I came to the house], there the children were already playing. [They yelled at their mother when they saw me], "Mom! The gringo who got lost in the Volcano is coming." And I answered, "I am not a gringo, I am a Guatemalan, a *paisano* [countryman]."

In this house he talked to a couple and asked for some clothes, which they gave him, and they helped him clean up. After they bathed him, don Nicolás asked the couple if he could stay with them for a month to recover from his injuries, and said he would work for them in exchange once he was healthier. They rejected his offer

out of fear of the military: “[They said], ‘I’m very sorry, but the army is coming to look for their dead, and if they don’t find them, they search house by house, and if they find you here, they’ll kill us. Better go [this way], cross that mountain and then continue.’” They told him to travel to Sololá and ask for help from the priest who was known for supporting the people. They gave him three tortillas and salt for the road.

After leaving the house, don Nicolás wearily climbed a mountain and was accompanied by a dog that began to follow him:

A dog was behind me. He arrived and went in the woods with me, in the mountains, *puchicas*, the dog followed me. . . . I got a pain, and I didn’t want to get up anymore. “I’m going to die here; I’d better lie down,” and the little dog lay down too. “I’m dying here,” I said, [and I fell asleep]. When I woke up, I no longer had much pain. Right now, I was going up, I had to grab the trees and the roots on the stones, and I managed to climb up. I told the dog, “Go back, thank you for accompanying me, you’re not going with me anymore.” And with that he went, the dog heard, and he returned. And I continued.

Upon arriving in Sololá, don Nicolás came to the church to ask the priest for help. He was given enough money to travel to Huehuetenango, where his sister was studying. When he arrived, his sister was not there since she had gone away on a trip, so he went to the Catholic church, where another priest helped him by giving him another pair of pants and bus fare to return to Cotzal after they told him that he could not stay there. In Sacapulas, two soldiers stopped the bus he was on and told the passengers to get off. Don Nicolás was in the last seat. He managed to slip away and get into another bus that was going from a coastal finca to Cotzal. People recognized him and were happy to see him since they had thought he was dead. Despite this reception, he decided to get off at Chiul because he was worried that someone would tell the military that he was alive when he arrived in Cotzal. From there he began to walk in the mountains toward the community of Ojo de Agua, where he had family. “I stayed in Chiul until around four in the afternoon and went down the mountain . . . walking all night, but slowly because I was badly beaten. And that’s how I survived. There was nowhere to go.” He arrived at a relative’s house around three in the morning. “I had to go wake up my relative, and I said, ‘Please open up for me, I am here, and I have arrived,’ but they didn’t believe me.” He stated that after being welcomed, he decided to hide to avoid being captured again and to save his family from any repercussions: “But look, I told them, I have to go to the mountains because if not, the army will know that I am here, and they will kill them.” Don Nicolás moved from house to house, with no place to go that was safe; a quiet life and a secure and peaceful future in Guatemala was impossible. At that time, he was under a death sentence from the military state; he was a refugee in his ancestral lands.

Joining the Guerrillas. With nowhere else to go and with the military looking for him, don Nicolás decided to join the guerrillas, after discussing and consulting with his family. He remembers that after he made the decision, a friend contacted the EGP, and he headed to the mountains. "I'd better go, there is no other way. There's no other way. . . . So, I'm beaten. I left and went up again into the Cuchumatanes, the mountains, they took me there. There [with the guerrillas] were the medical [services], the nurses, they gave me *suero* [serum] and everything, I was there for about fifteen days, and then they took me to Guate [to cure me]." Don Nicolás would go to Guatemala City, where he was housed, fed, and cared for by the guerrillas for a year so that he could recover from the wounds from the torture he had suffered by the military.

After his recovery, he was instructed to return to the Ixil Region to organize the people. "[We] had to continue fighting, and that's how I was saved." That he survived the army and joined the guerrillas caused his family to be persecuted. His house in the Tutucuy canton would be burned down during this time: "The army found out I was alive . . . and they persecuted my family. In 1979 or in 1980 they burned my house, the first house here in Cotzal. . . . They burned everything that was inside . . . everything burned. My dad, my mom, my wife were all left poor." Isabel Rodríguez Ordóñez, don Nicolás's wife at the time, would be murdered in 1982, after she and another woman, Susana, were accused of collaborating with the guerrillas. He remembers:

The army organized a demonstration in Nebaj against the guerrillas. The revolutionaries stopped the trucks and executed an army cook. They blamed Isabel for passing information to the guerrillas along with Susana Zacarías, but it was not true. The information that the army had received was false. On May 3 they kidnapped Isabel and Susana during the day at 7 in the morning. They took them to the detachment and the two women disappeared. . . . [One of my sons] went to the capital for fear of the PAC, [but] the patrol went to look for him in the capital and he disappeared. (Toma Toma 2005, 9)

Isabel and Susana were exhumed in 1998 by the Fundación de Antropología Forense de Guatemala (FAFG) in the military detachment in Cotzal (FAFG n.d.).

After the death of his wife, the patrolmen killed his father with a machete. Other family members would suffer the same fate: "They killed my wife. . . . They killed my dad and one of my sisters, and they killed another, my son, and my eldest son. So it made me angry, and it made me feel *pena* [sorrow], but it also gave me more courage . . . and that's how it was." Joining the guerrillas was not an easy decision and contributed to the persecution of his family and the deaths of those closest to him. This violence affected him, and he remembers: "After my wife died, I became mentally sick. The revolutionary leaders organized my departure to . . . Mexico for a full year. In Mexico, I received the news of my dad's death" (Toma Toma 2005, 9).

In the EGP, don Nicolás would hold several positions. He remembers, “So, little by little we organized ourselves. We went to all the mountains of the Ixil area.”

According to don Nicolás, before the violence of the 1980s, the Brol family used to be protected by mobile military police. After the military began operating from the Finca San Francisco, the violence increased along with the bombing of people seeking refuge in the mountains, particularly those of Chajul: “Well, after that, the army stayed there and lived [on the Finca San Francisco]. . . . There were battles around here everywhere . . . but where it was most burned was in the Chajul area—for example, Salcho, Santa Rosa, Xexah. . . . They threw bombs . . . from the Finca San Francisco . . . and they killed a lot of people, sometimes in the morning . . . sometimes in the afternoon, there were airplanes, and people continued working, sowing.” He remembers the destruction caused by the military in collaboration with the Finca San Francisco:

[Between] 1982 [and] 1995, the army continually raided, with many beatings, shootings, murders, burning ranches, destroying cornfields. They threw bombs from the Finca San Francisco and bombed them by air force planes, and helicopters strafed and bombed hundreds of thousands of people dead, and many died from torture and kidnappings that turned into disappearances, and many died of hunger and thirst because the army did not allow people to leave to look for food and collect water. . . . Totally naked, without clothes, we barely survived. They cut production, people died in the salt mines just for going to look for salt, and they didn't finish us because nature protected us, and God. (Toma Toma 2005, 9–10)

When the war ended, don Nicolás would still be without peace of mind, as the consequences of the war would continue to affect him.

After the War. Don Nicolás states that after the end of the war and the subsequent demobilization, he was not able to return to Cotzal. He claims that two of his sons forged documents and stole his land after discovering he had remarried, raising concerns about their inheritance. As a result, he settled in Paal, Chajul, with his family. Don Nicolás would run again (unsuccessfully) for municipal mayor of Cotzal in the 2019 elections, with the left-wing political party Movement for the Liberation of the People (MLP).¹²

Don Nicolás says that, compared to the past, the social, economic, and political situation is “worse now, people are more exploited.” He maintains that this has to do with a lack of land and job opportunities and the inaccessibility of social services such as education. He connects the past with the present by referring to the Spanish colonizers and the arrival of extractive industries: “So maybe in fifteen or twenty years . . . you will no longer see production, because of the mines, which . . . are going to [extract and] remove *la fuerza* [energy] from the land, the trees. . . . When [Pedro] Alvarado arrived, they deceived our relatives with a mirror and now they deceive us for five *laminas*, with beer, they deceive us for a few

thousand quetzals, which do not have value. . . . Many people fall into individualism.” Don Nicolás sees mining and deforestation as serious threats to the environment and future livelihoods of the Ixil people. He identifies individualism as a negative quality that has led people to accumulate wealth at the expense of collective well-being and highlights the continued negative effects of capitalism.

Don Nicolás’s life is characterized by resistance and the fight for his community’s right to live with dignity and respect. He points to the role the Brol family played in using the municipality to obtain large tracts of land, as well as aligning with the military during the war. That he tried to fight for a better life for the people of Cotzal, from peasant leagues to electoral politics, only to be kidnapped and tortured by the military, demonstrates the limitations of reform at that time during the war. Don Nicolás joined the guerrillas and the revolutionary armed resistance because it was his only solution at that time to survive and continue his fight for a more just society. When the war ended, he found himself unable to return to his home in Cotzal as his land had been taken over by members of his family. Doña María also had some of these experiences of persecution and displacement. We now turn to her story.

Doña María Sajic Sajic (Li’ I’ch)

Doña María Sajic Sajic was born in 1967 in Cotzal, and today she is an ancestral authority in Nebaj. After her father, Domingo Sajic Gómez, was kidnapped and disappeared, her family moved to Tuban, near Chisis, and was persecuted by the military in the 1980s. Doña María was forced to seek refuge in the mountains and to join the CPR. Upon her return to Cotzal, her family’s lands were occupied. As a result, she decided to move to Nebaj. Her life is presented in four sections: her childhood and the kidnapping of her father; fleeing from the military; the occupation of her land; and life after the war.

I met with Doña María in 2014 to present her with AHPN documents detailing her father’s multiple arrests, which included arrests in 1951 and 1969. Some of these documents also included basic information about Domingo Sajic Gómez, such as the names of his parents (Magdalena Gómez and Juan Sajic), his fingerprints, his occupation as a farmer, and the charges against him. One police file documented his being accused of “assault, robbery, and murder” against Jorge Brol and stated that he was “pending capture” (AHPN, GT PN, 50, 5001, F51329). In the same file, two additional entries from October and December 1971 show the efforts of relatives who tried to locate Domingo at police stations after he went missing (AHPN, GT PN, 50, 5001, F51329). After I gave copies of these documents to doña María, she began to remember her life when she was a child.

Childhood and the Kidnapping of Her Father. Doña María remembers that she was four or five years old when her father disappeared. She claims that before his disappearance, there was another time when he was detained by the police in Santa

Cruz del Quiché, upon his return from the coast. Doña María shares that, given her father's role as contractor, he was summoned by an administrator via telegram on one occasion to go to the coastal finca to ensure payment of the workers, which was something that his job required and thus did not raise suspicions. Upon their return, doña María's father was detained in Santa Cruz del Quiché, and her paternal grandmother had to go on foot to look for him and free him. The AHPN records show several arrests of Domingo and the encounters he had with police. Doña María claims that some people envied him for his economic success and for having served in the municipality as municipal police chief.

Among his political rivals was Gaspar Pérez Pérez (Kax Pi'y), whom doña María holds as one of those responsible for her father's death. She says her father had a working relationship at that time with the Brols because of his role as contractor and that this caused envy among some, particularly since he was smart and had a store. Doña María states that Gaspar did not like her father and accused him of killing Jorge Brol. One day, Domingo was to take a group of workers to the coast as part of his job as a contractor. Doña María remembers that when her father was about to leave on the bus that belonged to Gaspar and that would be used to transport the workers, the latter allegedly made a threat: "[Gaspar] got into the bus: 'Well, right now, yes, you're going to leave, but you're not going to come back, . . .' Don Gaspar said to my father. . . . 'Now you're going to say goodbye to Cotzal,' he said mockingly. . . . 'You're not coming back,' he told him. So that's how they took him, and my dad left by bus." This would be the last time that Domingo would be seen publicly alive in Cotzal, as he would be kidnapped once he arrived at the coastal finca.

Doña María says that upon arriving at the coastal finca, Domingo ate with the workers and everything was normal. Shortly afterward, the administrator told Domingo that they were going to inspect the coffee plantation. It was the finca manager's suspicious request that Domingo go alone with him that alarmed the workers, who reportedly did not want to leave him alone: "'No, we are not going to let don Domingo go, we have to go also,' the people said. . . . 'We don't want him to go alone.' [The administrator responded], '[You all are] going to stay here.' But then they took him in a car, they say, they put him in a car . . . and so they left. . . . [They say that my dad] already knew, they scared him, my dad didn't speak anymore, and he got into the car and left." Some of the workers tried to see where the car went, but they could not see where it went and Domingo did not reappear. Doña María reaffirms other stories that after her father was kidnapped at the coastal finca he was allegedly taken to the Finca San Francisco: "According to what they say, they brought [my] dad here [to Cotzal] and took him to San Francisco. They say that they ground him up in a coffee machine." To this day, the disappearance of Domingo Sajic Gómez remains unpunished, and his remains have never been found.

Doña María remembers the pain she felt as a child when her father did not return, along with the difficulties her family faced after his disappearance. She

adds that it was during this time that one of her little brothers died from an illness. Doña María's childhood was marked by the disappearance of her father, which was only the beginning of the persecution that the family would suffer during the war. She affirms that her father was the first of many missing and that his disappearance signaled the starting phase of the war: "First they killed my father, then they chased the others, saying that they were guerrillas. . . . That's when the war started and the violence started."

Fleeing from the Military. After the disappearance of her father, doña María's family moved to live with her grandmother in Tuban, near Chisís, where the February 1982 massacre mentioned at the start of the chapter occurred. Doña María affirms that her family was in danger because they were heirs to her father's land and also because her father was accused of being a guerrilla and murdering Jorge Brol.

Violence reached Doña María's family after the massacre in Chisís. She remembers when news came that the military and patrolmen were committing massacres. She recalls a family who fled the massacre coming to their home and giving them warning: "Look, the army has already arrived in Chisís, and they have burned many houses and killed many people, and now we can no longer be in the house, they are coming after us," said the family [who] came to us." Doña María's family was then forced to flee from Tuban and go into the mountains to join the CPR.

Shortly after the Chisís massacre, Doña María was concerned about being caught by the armed forces after bombs were thrown at her family:

We stayed there [in the mountains]. Then [once] we reached the river bank that comes from Chipal . . . we went down there, into that river. Oh my God! But no more, no more, I don't feel like being there anymore. The patrolmen came to throw bombs, to take us out of the house, but what shootings they caused . . . me shaking [with] my mother and my grandmother, and the other neighbors. . . . But after that, we went to another place. But deeper in the mountains. Then we organized a group of people there, families and neighbors.

Doña María's difficult experiences continued while her family and neighbors continued going deeper into the mountains to seek refuge from the military and patrolmen. This led them to walk toward Xeputul and then to Chajul to join the CPR:

We went [from] Villa Hortensia Antigua [to] Xeputul, toward San Francisco, so we'd better go there, they said. The people are free there, we'd better go there. . . . Well, the army had already chased us, so we couldn't live in the house, we couldn't return [or] they would kill us. And then we organized ourselves, we went to Villa Hortensia Antigua and we left at night, we went down . . . behind San Francisco. . . . We crossed the river and we arrived in Guacamaya at night . . . near Xeputul, and we passed there and then we took refuge there. . . . There we went to live in the high mountains. . . . There were quite a few of us. People left Chipal, people left Chisís,

[people from] Santa Avelina . . . we went there, we met there. . . . [Later] we went [into the mountains of] Chajul. We arrived there [and] there were cornfields, there were oranges. . . . The army did not go there. . . . I was [in the mountains] for about fifteen years. . . . When peace was signed, we had already come back here.

Doña María, along with thousands of others, and like their ancestors who fled persecution, found refuge in the mountains as a means of survival.

Doña María remembers that at one point her mother and siblings were captured by the military. They would be sent to a military base in Vipatna, Chajul, where one of her great-uncles would go to rescue her. After her mother was freed, she went to Cotzal, where she was in danger for being the widow of Domingo Sajic Gómez and for claiming her lands that had been occupied:

So what did the patrolmen say . . . “Does your husband have assets or not?” . . . Well, my mother was afraid . . . to say that she had her land from my dad. [After a relative motivated her to recognize her land, my mother said,], “Well, since my husband was not a thief, they killed my husband . . . out of envy, it is not because my husband hurt people, but because [they] just accused him. . . . I’m going to claim his assets, why should I be afraid?”

From then on, she began making maguey ropes and sold them in the Chajul market. One day,

My mother was going to go [to the market in Chajul] to sell rope. . . . But [some municipal officials told her,] “You are not going to go [to sell] anymore, they are going to take you to [the Finca] San Francisco . . . and they are going to give you a place there, they are going to give you a piece of land, there is a house there, there is land. You’re going to go to San Francisco,” they told my mother. . . . And my mother left.

After municipal officials told her that she could go to the Finca San Francisco to receive land, *doña María*’s mother became worried and suspicious of this offer, fearing for her safety. At the same time, she feared staying in the town center of Cotzal since the patrolmen occupied her lands. Ultimately, she decided to go to the finca, but she was reportedly worried before the trip. According to what people told *doña María*, her mother sensed that they were going to hurt her. She says that the municipal mayor “contracted an army truck” carrying some patrolmen to take people to San Francisco. When they arrived at a place, reportedly the patrolmen ordered people to come out to be killed: “[The truck] arrived in San Francisco. So, they told [the people] that [they were] going to dig a hole. . . . [Then] they raped my mother, they raped my aunt, everyone, my grandmother. . . . My cousins and my brothers were lined up, they say that, with a machete, they knifed them in the head. . . . And like that, they died, that’s how they killed them. What sadness. *Me da pena* [It gives me sorrow]. . . . That’s what happened to my mother, they killed her in San Francisco.” *Doña María* states that people have told her that some people were buried clandestinely in the finca and that some were thrown into the river. According to this story, the municipality, the patrolmen, and the

military collaborated to falsely promise a safe life on the Finca San Francisco, but this was a deceptive way to commit a massacre. The remains of those murdered have not yet been found.

Occupation of Her Family's Land in Tixelap (Ti' Xelab'). After his disappearance, one of Domingo Sajic Gómez's uncles watched over his lands in Tixelap (near the town center). During the war, the military would occupy Tixelap and settle internally displaced people there as a form of control and as a counterinsurgency strategy. Doña María recognizes the long-standing impacts of this occupation in that she has shared that allegedly part of the land taken would later be used by Enel during the construction of Palo Viejo, as they built and used an alternative route around the town center toward the Finca San Francisco, known as *el periférico*: "The army occupied . . . Tixelap. All the people came from Cajixay, from Chisís, were given pieces [of land and they stayed]. . . . The man who stole that land [from my dad] sold to the company [Enel]." When she tried to recover the land in Tixelap, her efforts were unsuccessful because of the long and arduous process of reclaiming land in Guatemala. "Well, a long time ago, when my husband was alive, I did start looking for [the land titles], but since the lawyers are *mañosos* [sneaky], they didn't do the job for us [but just charged us a lot of money for his services]. . . . He started the process and then realized that it was no longer possible. The lawyer left it like that. . . . I didn't continue because a lot of money [was needed]." Doña María ended up selling part of Tixelap to the people who were resettled there by the military, but only after suffering threats, intimidation, and persecution from neighbors who were part of the paramilitary forces. She felt compelled to sell approximately seventy-five *cuerdas* at a reduced price. One of those involved in threatening her was a former police officer and patrolman who had become an evangelical pastor. On one occasion this man threw tear gas into her house while the family was having dinner (in 2009, he would be sentenced to three years in prison for his role in the lynching of a police officer led by José Pérez Chen, explored further in the next chapter). Doña María describes the insecurity that her family experienced after returning to Cotzal from the CPR: "When peace was signed [in 1996, the people of Tixelap] told me, 'We want to buy that land, and we know that it belongs to your father.' . . . But there are many people, now there are more. . . . [Before they arrived at the beginning], some grabbed five *cuerdas*, ten *cuerdas*, and so on. But after that they started selling it. Now maybe it's worth 35,000 [quetzals] per *cuerda*, that's how they're selling it. I sold it for 200 quetzals [per *cuerda*], nothing more." Doña María sold the land at that price because of the threats she had received from some people, specifically former paramilitaries. She continues:

[A former police officer] went to throw a tear gas bomb at me in the house. . . . "Look, doña María, be careful," the people told me, "because notice that this man was always surveilling you." . . . [On one occasion] he came to throw tear gas at us around eight at night. We were having dinner and eating, we were joking with my family and my

daughter, my uncle . . . that house is simple, with *lamina*, nothing else, and sticks. . . . Then he threw [the tear gas] like a stone, it fell [like a] grenade in the middle [of the kitchen]. Boom! It fell, it exploded. . . . Since at that time we already had practice because the army had been throwing several bombs at us, so we [dived to the ground]. They threw that thing in there and it burst. [I had my baby on my back], and what did I do with my baby? I grabbed my baby [and] I got on the ground, if he kills me, well, let's see, but my child, I'm going to save him, I said. I stayed like that, spread out on the ground, when [the tear gas] went off, but pure *cal* . . . pure chili, how it hurt. . . . When I looked, the food was already full of tear gas bomb powder, full. Even my son became intoxicated, and my daughter became intoxicated. . . . We began coughing. So we went out of the house, we went to [another neighbor's house]. . . . We came out coughing, and [there was a] group of kids [who were next to] a big *pila* (water basin) [laughing at us]. . . . One of them was the son [of the former police officer].

Some people told doña María that it was the former police officer and another man who had launched the tear gas. It is concerning to note that the former police officer who harassed and threatened her and whom she accused of throwing tear gas into her house continues to live on her father's land in Tixelap. The fact that the former police officer was convicted for his involvement in the lynching of a police officer in 2009 along with the municipal mayor was a reminder of the real threat they continued to present.

Life after the War. Doña María moved to Nebaj during the time of the peace signing in the mid-1990s because of the threats she had suffered in Cotzal: "I no longer wanted to live in Cotzal. It was not because I did not want to live there or did not love my town. What happened is that because of the threats that this [former police and patrol officers] made against us, [I left]." She adds that she and her family had suffered harassment and insecurity. On one occasion, she had planted corn on her father's land, but one of the men who had persecuted her occupied it and claimed the corn as his own, stealing it. She also claims that her uncle was the victim of an attack on his livelihood because of their familial relationship:

[They went] to steal my [corn] cobs. . . . [One of the men who was persecuting me] stole them and ate them. . . . "The land is mine," he says. . . . It is not his. We checked that one, he doesn't have a [land title] document. The document he made was just a forgery. Not my father, not even my grandfather, sold that land; [the document was] falsified. . . . And those men are the ones who killed [my entire] family. . . . [They burned] my uncle's barn there in Pulay, they burned a *troja de mazorca* (cob barn), that's how my poor uncle remained there. . . . [They] burned all his hoes, his property, everything.

Doña María reflects on the injustices that happened to her, since those who occupied her father's lands were the same former patrolmen and the people who had murdered her family:

They should not be on my father's land. They killed my mother, and they killed my brothers, uncles, all my nephews, my cousins, and other people, other people who were not my family. . . . [One of the patrolmen] sold the land to the Enel company. . . . What money did that man receive? It's not even his, he doesn't have a [land] title. We once called the man to tell him he had no right to that land, but what did he do? He didn't want to hand it back, he didn't want to vacate.

She points to her inability to pay a lawyer to pursue legal avenues to recover her land.

Doña María, when reflecting on the war, refers to Ríos Montt and the lack of justice and accountability for the violence committed. "Ríos Montt says that 'it wasn't me.' . . . All that damage he did to the people. . . . I was left without a mother, I was left without a brother. . . . But it's a pity that the law doesn't do justice to that man, they say they are doing justice, but [no]." After doña María moved near the town center of Nebaj, her husband died of cancer in 2004. She would be left to care for her children as a single mother. From then on, she would be elected by her community to take the position of Second *regidor*. Given her strength as a leader, she would later be selected as community mayor, one of the few women to take that position, and as part of the Alcaldía Indígena of Nebaj. Doña María is a committed leader within her community and the Ixil Region who fights for the dignity of her people.

From the disappearance of her father, to fleeing the army to join the CPR, to returning to Cotzal only to be harassed by patrolmen, to becoming a community authority in Nebaj, doña María's life is marked by persecution and resistance. The fact that she points to the Finca San Francisco as the place of her parents' death illustrates the perceptions and fears that many people in Cotzal hold about the finca and the Brols. That the men who occupied their land are allegedly involved in providing stolen land for Enel to build the *periferico* also symbolizes the relationship that multinational companies have with agents of state terror during the war.

REFLECTIONS ON THE THIRD INVASION

When I was talking to people about how the war had affected people in the Ixil Region, one leader told me, "Giovanni, es que quemaron todo!" (Giovanni, they burned everything!). Fincas were sold during the war and became model villages, spaces of control and military surveillance. The Brol family would remain in Cotzal, and the grandchildren of the original *finquero* took over the family business. The people who committed genocide and violence continue to walk freely with impunity, whether in a small community or as elected officials in all branches of government at the highest levels. The stories of don Nicolás and doña María give us crucial perspectives on the impact of the third invasion on daily life and the ways in which the military, authorities, patrolmen, police, and *finqueros* persecuted the

Ixil. Furthermore, they show us how the Ixil were dispossessed of their lands during and after the war.

The three invasions are based on a history of extraction of natural resources, labor, and knowledges. The colonial system that “officially” ended in 1821 became the Guatemalan state and maintained a colonial logic of extraction that viewed Indigenous Peoples as a problem, often one to be solved violently. The legacies of these previous invasions remain embedded within Ixil society and have manifested themselves in further violence today.

Land inequalities since the arrival of the *fincas* in the second invasion were contested by the Ixil in multiple ways. From open protest that led to the execution of seven *principales* in Nebaj in 1936, to legal channels for recovering land through the 1952 Agrarian Reform, the Ixil resisted the *finca* system. When these attempts led to state and military intervention and violence, many Ixil joined the revolutionary movement, which led to the third invasion by the military government. The response of the state was genocide and scorched earth.

The arrival of megaprojects and their relationships with these same *fincas* (La Perla and San Francisco) that have historically repressed the Ixil is not a coincidence; rather, it is a continuation of preexisting colonial and extractive institutions that often comes at the costs of Ixil lives and suffering. That the Palo Viejo hydroelectric plant was constructed by an Italian company on the Finca San Francisco by Italian Pedro Brol’s grandson of the same name represents a cyclical history. The lessons from these previous invasions have continued to inform the movements that emerged in postwar Guatemala.

Since the war, many do not see the viability of or have the desire for another armed movement. An ancestral authority said on one occasion, “Now we no longer fight with arms, now we fight with the *vara* (rod of authority). Don Concepción says of the guerrillas, “We are in the same lineage that they were, always demanding rights.” That the children and relatives of leaders such as Domingo Sajic Gómez, Nicolás Toma Toma, and Gregorio and Concepción Santay Ajanel today form part of the ancestral authorities and are actively resisting against megaprojects is proof of the legacy of struggle of the Ixil people in Cotzal. In the second part of this book, the resistance in Cotzal against Palo Viejo and future paths are examined.