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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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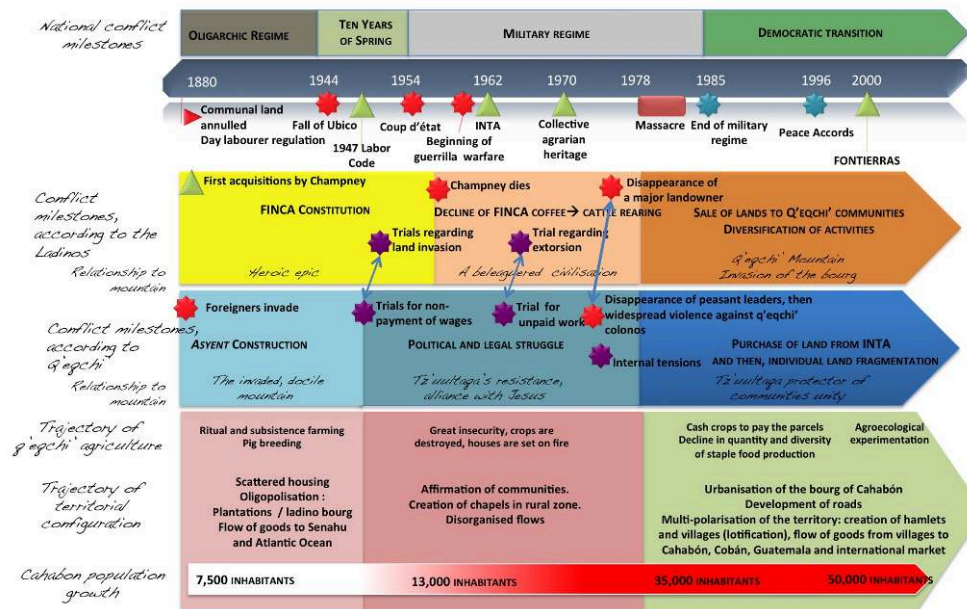
Introduction

- 1 When the territory of the mountains in Cahabón (a municipality in north-eastern Guatemala, in the Alta Verapaz department) is considered on a local scale, the Guatemalan Civil War¹ (1960-1996), which pitted the country’s military regime against communist guerrillas, takes on an altogether different aspect: that of an extremely violent land dispute whose origins go back to the ways in which land was appropriated by coffee growers arriving from the West at the end of the 19th century. This conflict process (in the sense defined by Cadoret, 2011) transformed a land once dominated by a single large coffee estate into a new, highly fragmented spatial configuration of little villages populated by small-scale farmers where land ownership inequalities remain pronounced.
- 2 We broach the territory of the Cahabón Mountains by defining its geographic, geopolitical and economic specificities through the “area intersections” in which it lies (Lacoste, 2002, p. 9-14) and by characterising its historical relations with the

surrounding plains, towns and central authorities (Hewitt and Metha, 2012, Mouthon, 2011) and the forms of territoriality established as a result (Méo, 1996). These mountains are also a category of regional knowledge and action (Bozonnet, 1992, Debarbieux and Rudaz, 2010).

- 3 Understanding the conflict infers crossing different focal points in time and space, and analysing archives and the accounts of local actors: the Mayan-Q'eqchi' and the Ladinos (Bergeret, 2012). This serves to reconstruct the successive actions and justifications (where one responds to the other) of the Cahabón's various social groups, their very different forms of attachment to the land, their values (Graeber, 2001) and the "morality" of the various forms of exchange (Parry and Bloch, 1989) in a process of monetising and commercialising the products of the land, as well as the labour and the land itself.
- 4 In the case of Cahabón, we can recognise similar identity processes between the Q'eqchi' on the one hand and the Ladinos on the other, whose frictions have fuelled the conflict. In fact, once ascribed and mobilised, these identities are inseparable from the land conflict (as in many other Latin American cases; for example, see Véran, 2003 for a study on Brazil) and the way in which the mountains are seized to define its inhabitants. This is a local rendering of the concept of "normative naturalism" described by Debarbieux and Rudaz (2010, p. 236).
- 5 The Mayan-Q'eqchi'² form the overwhelming majority of the Cahabón's inhabitants: Former subjects and *indios* of the Spanish colony, they were referred to as *colonos* on the large coffee estate, then as *peasant communities* under the military dictatorship, before taking on their present-day Q'eqchi' identity. For their part, the Ladinos, a mixed-race population of various origins (Spanish, German, English, French and from the United States, to the extent that they are now often defined by the negative "non-indigenous" formula), highly disparate in their lifestyles and political involvement, represent 2% of the Cahabón population. They are the descendants of wealthy landowners or plantation administrators, and the Q'eqchi' have always referred to them as foreigners (*kaxlan winq*).
- 6 Here, the underlying objective is to show the ties between the radical transformation of social relations and the competing modes of land appropriation and use through changes in the fragile sovereign schemes set up in the Cahabón Mountains (in terms of their political, economic and symbolic aspects, Aglietta and Orléan, 1998). Three phases in the conflict process are successively described through their legal framework, power relationships, identity-related processes, forms of monetary circulation, labour and agricultural assets: the Hacienda (1880-1944), the struggle for land (1944-2000) and the new configuration established after the democratic transition. Their versions of the conflict and the sequences that we set out to analyse are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Timeline of the land conflict



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Coffee haciendas: the mountains tamed

Tropical mountains and coffee growing

- 7 Cahabón is a municipality in the Guatemalan department of Alta Verapaz covering a surface area of 750 km² and having a population of 55,000 inhabitants (73 inhabitants/km²) in 2009. The powerful Cahabón River runs through this region made up of a multitude of small, steep mountains that reach altitudes of up to 700 metres. To the north, it is bordered by the Sierra de Chamá mountain chain (whose Qana Itzam summit is 1,439 metres above sea level, Figure 2), which separates it from the Petén plateau. To the south, it is dominated by the Senahú mountain range, which includes a number of peaks that reach between 1,500 and 2,000 metres. In the south, these mountains overshadow the Polochic Valley, a major route between the capital of Alta Verapaz and the Atlantic coast.

Figure 2: The Qana Itzam mountain dominates the Cahabón bourg



Photo: Agnès Bergeret

- 8 The Cahabón region is an example of so-called “tropical mountains” (Bart, in Veyret *et al.*, 2001, p. 77), composite objects in terms of human densities, temperatures, hygrometry, ecosystems and generators of mixed production systems. They are conducive to growing corn, beans and many other foods for self-sufficiency, as well as cocoa, cardamom, bija (annatto), chilli pepper and especially coffee. These commercial crops are a part of global trade flows.
- 9 Coffee cultivation involves “artisanal” work: ongoing, year-round care by a large workforce (Tulet, 2008, p. 176). This cultivation confers a form of complementarity between coffee growing and peasant mixed farming (Bart, in Veyret *et al.*, 2001, p.65). Coffee can be produced both on large plantations and in small-scale farming systems: The land configuration is therefore mainly contingent upon the power relationship between the social groups concerned.

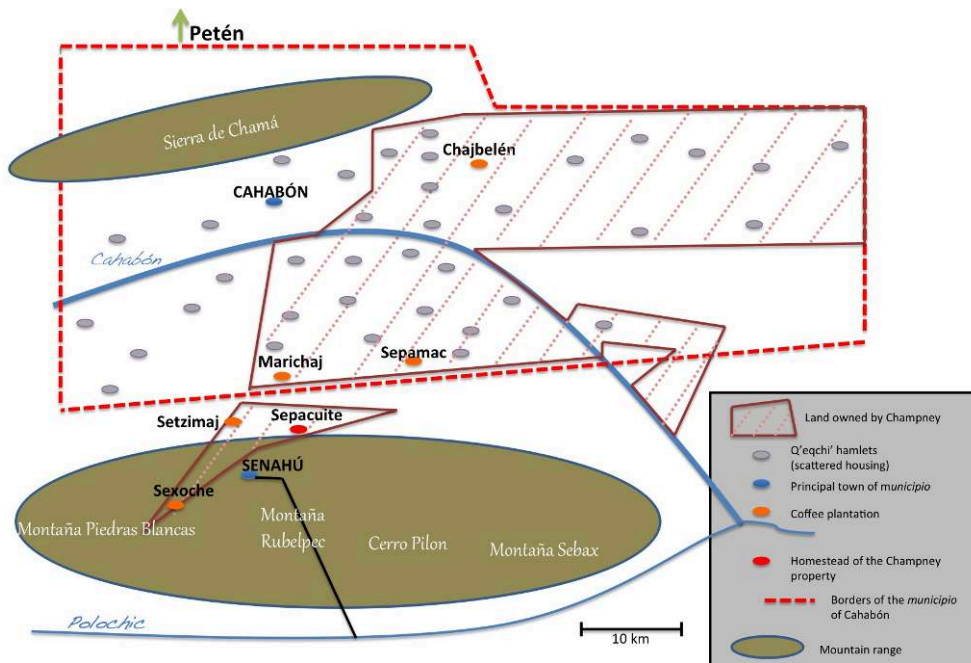
The Hacienda regime in Cahabón

- 10 Cahabón can be described as a borderline area in Guatemala’s colonial history. For a long time, it was the last municipality in north-eastern Guatemala, 90 km from the region’s seat of Cobán. The site lies at the heart of colonial “pacification” with the creation, back in 1542, of one of three Dominican convents that underpinned the evangelisation of the large rebel area of Verapaz. After the withdrawal of Spain in the 19th century, the newly proclaimed independent republic sought to push back its agricultural frontiers, maximise returns on all its lands and tighten the administrative network. It sent out Ladinos (a population that until then had been mainly of Spanish origin) to the isolated provinces to take responsibility of the *jefaturas políticas* (the town

halls), thereby replacing the *principales indígenas* (native leaders) and the missionary orders that had made up the local authorities. Religious leaders were finally ousted by the Liberal Reform of 1871. The status of “communal land” was annulled in 1877. Numerous territories opened up to a new form of colonisation by Western migrants seeking to deploy export-oriented agriculture and pampered by authorities eager for what they perceived as the migrants’ civilisation and modernity. In a “disqualification” speech typical of post-independence Latin American societies regarding its indigenous populations, which national politicians called *mountain* populations (Debarbieux et Rudaz, 2010), President Justo Rufino Barrios remarked that “100 foreign families were worth as much as 20,000 Indians” (Cambranes, 1996, p. 221). Via the *denuncias* procedure, he established the possibility for the administrations to grant, for a modest sum, very large parcels of land to these newcomers and organised the work of the Q’eqchi’ living on these parcels with the *habilitaciones* (requisitioning of labour with an advance salary). However, faced with the advancing large landholdings and obligations to work, the indigenous populations fled (Cambranes, 1996, p. 150). The “logic of the latifundio” (Edelman, 1998) thus became a strategy for securing labour, aided by the “day labourer regulation” in 1877, and the “law against vagrancy” of 1934. By 1880, Verapaz had become the world’s leading coffee-producing region, resembling a German trading post that enjoyed a considerable degree of independence from the Guatemalan State and had ties to major English and German banks and companies (Wagner, 1996). Meanwhile, all financial and agricultural production flows were oriented directly from Verapaz to Europe or the United States (Figure 4).

- 11 Cahabón, a hot zone slightly less favourable to coffee cultivation, was one of the last to interest coffee growers. In 1879, a family of young North American cousins, the Champneys, established their first plantations in Sepacuite, a town adjacent to Senahú. In the space of about 20 years, from one *denuncia* to another and from one land purchase to the next, the Champneys founded a small empire of 450 km² (Figure 3) stretching to the north and comprising five main coffee plantations (Chajbelén, Sepamac, Marichaj, Setzimaj, Sexoche). On these lands, (two-thirds of which belong to the Cahabón municipality), the workers’ *minifundios* no longer formally existed.

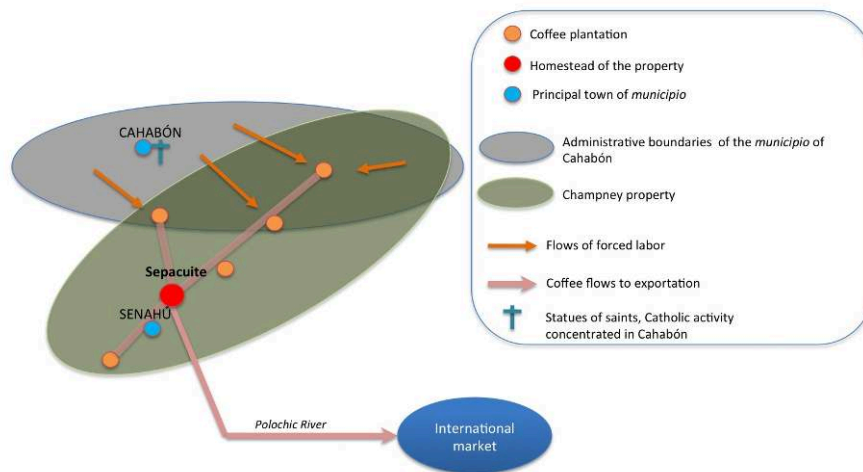
Figure 3: Geographic situation of the Champney estate



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- 12 They are entirely integrated into the large landholding based on the *colonato* system (Birou, 1970, 43). These lands are somewhat less fertile and lie on very steep slopes subject to heavy erosion, left to the *colonos* to allow them to subsist. These parcels were intended as a form of “payment” against one week’s compulsory labour for men (often performed by women and children) every three weeks. The territory’s indigenous population was dominated in every respect: Commercial production was forbidden (the *colonos* were only authorised to practise the pork trade), while festivities, rituals and indigenous women were all controlled.
- 13 The system set up in Cahabón can be compared to that of the Hacienda, as opposed to the plantation system by Wolf and Mintz (1975) or the seigneurial latifundio system by Birou (1970, pp. 38-41). It is characterised by the paternalistic authority of the owner, for whom the Hacienda is a source of social prestige, one that effectively enslaves its workers while giving them a certain identity and lifestyle. The owner was often physically absent, leaving the administrator, called the *patrón*, to oversee the plantations and the work of the *colonos*.

Figure 4: Flow of work and goods at the time of the Hacienda



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Ladino and Q'eqchi' territorialities: crossed recollections of the Hacienda

- 14 For the Ladino population, the act of buying land marked the “start” of their history and the legitimation of their position, where the land was considered as an economic resource. The first families arrived in the region starting in 1830. Others followed in the 1930s and 1940s. At this time, they gained access to political and administrative positions, as well as policing and plantation management duties.
- 15 The Ladinos speak of the “Finca”, a term that can be reconciled with the “plantation” concept (Wolf & Mintz, 1975) and reveals a conceptual framework focused essentially on the coffee plantation (and casting a veil over the remainder of the land passed on to the *colonos*), a supranational investment model, rational management, technological innovations for treating and transporting the coffee, and the construction of railway lines or waterway transport to reach the ports of export (well described by Wagner, 1996). Their mindset was forged by the conquest of this “frontier” and the ambitious creation of the large “civilising” estates of yesteryear (typified by beautiful houses and their outbuildings, places for organising festive occasions or cultural events) that expressed the refinement of their European identity. The merit of their forefathers was further enhanced by the mountainous environment of hostile forests and uncooperative natives whom they managed to “tame” and towards whom they developed a folklorist attitude. Given demographic relationships that were very unfavourable to them, accounts by the Ladinos are imbued with the feeling that they represented a “beleaguered civilisation” (Bergeret, 2012, p. 153).
- 16 As for the Q'eqchi', their relationship with the land is marked by what is seen as a thousand-year stronghold and a vital interdependence between men and mountains at

the centre of the word, junctions between the heavens and the underworld. For this people, each of these mountains is inhabited by a life force, a spirit that can appear in different forms (both human and animal), called *Mountain-Valleys* (*Tzuultaq'a*, literally 'high-low'), whose dominion over the land is indisputable and indestructible: All surrounding living things owe gifts and sacrifices to these *Tzuultaq'a*, in return for which they will gain their sustenance. Indeed, any social relationship (blood ties, workday exchanges, ritual requests to the Mountain-Valley) must be validated by the act of "giving food" (a ceremonial meal). The region's highest mountain, Qana Itzam (Figure 2), is one of the only "female" figures in the pantheon of the mountains of the Q'eqchi' area, placing Cahabón as the "original mother" of the Q'eqchi' territory. Established as of 1542, the alliance with Catholicism fostered a relationship of "civilised humanity" with the Ladinos, guaranteeing a diplomatic status quo that allowed them to live in the mountains from which the Chol, a rebellious population that was ultimately wiped out, had been ousted, and that, in Q'eqchi' imaginings, continues to be associated with savagery and animality (Bergeret, 2012, p. 241-243).

- 17 For the Q'eqchi', the arrival of the *Asyent*³ and the Ladinos meant a new attempted invasion of their territory by white and bearded foreigners. And yet, their relationship with the mountains offers a framework of values that initially allowed a submissive relationship to be established with the *Asyent*, before legitimising the subsequent revolt. Such was the impact of the *colonato* system that it seems to have accentuated the severity and supremacy of the frontiers of each *Tzuultaq'a*: Inhabiting the land of a Mountain-Valley is perceived according to the theory where all territories are the "domain" of a lord, to whom deference and tribute are owed. In particular, the myths gathered during this period emphasise the isolation and jealousy of the *Tzuultaq'a* over its properties. In parallel, arguments explaining how the large landowners' increased wealth came about as a result of a "pact with the devil" (Taussig, 1980; Edelman, 1994) developed, embodied by the figure of the *Negrito*. Ultimately, such a pact could lead only to the overthrow of the Haciendas and the return to power of the *Tzuultaq'a*. Moreover, the plantation owners themselves sowed the seeds of revolt by forcing the Q'eqchi' to work while refusing to feed them or even acknowledge their efforts (Bergeret, 2012, chapter 11).

The fight for land, warring strategies and the mountains as a place of refuge

- 18 The *colonos*' struggle against the Hacienda is tied to the national context of change marked by four decades of violence after the coup in 1954. This struggle typifies how indigenous populations seized upon democratic laws to petition for payment of their labour, before having to yield to the bureaucracy of the dictatorship and of the fragile democratic transition to obtain land titles. This conflict process goes hand in hand with a radical transformation of the ways in which the mountain was occupied, whether in its religious symbolism or in its forms of agriculture.

The failure of the agrarian revolution on a national scale

- 19 During Ubico's dictatorship, resistance to the installation of large coffee estates was expressed by sporadic outbursts of violence, to which the authorities reacted brutally.

The Ten Years of Spring (1944-1954) attempted to break the domination of an oligarchy, in particular by declaring a new constitution, reorganising the justice and establishing a new labour code in 1949. The goal was for the *colonos* to be justly compensated as “agricultural workers”. The agrarian reform of 1952 allowed them to acquire parcels of uncultivated land on the large estates. The idea was to create a dynamic class of small and medium-sized agricultural operations.

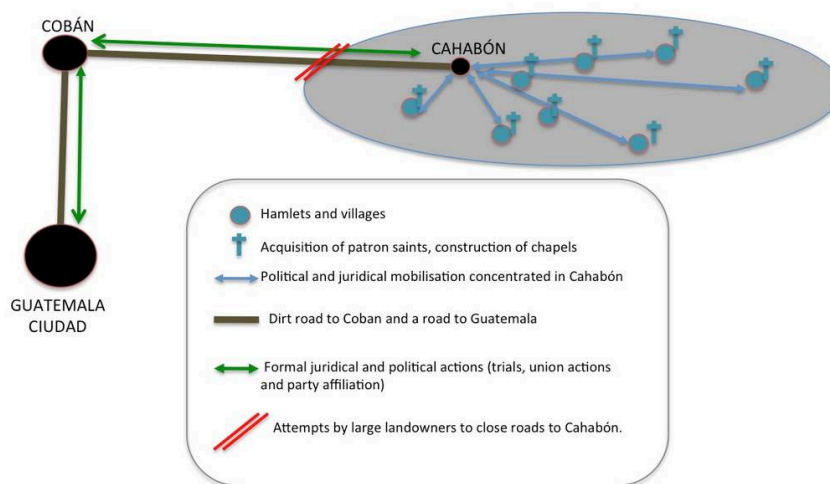
- 20 However, the agrarian reform would fail to bring about any profound changes in society, for a number of reasons that have been analysed in some depth in other works (Birou, 1970, p. 193; Gleijeses, 2005; Handy, 1994; Paige, 1983; Skocpol, 1982, p. 213-215). The Guatemalan coup of 1954, organised by the CIA, established a military dictatorship; one of its first decrees was to hand the lands affected by the agrarian reform back to the large landowners. The military regime lasted until 1985, after constant negotiations between the Army (far from holding the keys to hegemonic power), right-wing parties, the bourgeoisie and the US government, as well as repeated confrontations with guerrilla movements (Bataillon, 2003, 2011; Le Bot, 1992; Wickham-Crowley, 1993).

The local revolution: a legal, political and symbolic revolution

- 21 According to local accounts, the process of change began with the revolt of a handful of leaders, owing to their feelings of injustice and powerlessness (Wolf, 1974) resulting from the abuse resulting from the Hacienda. In his writings about his grandfather, crippled after a beating by the Hacienda’s foremen, Luisa explains that “he turned around his thinking, his pain, his anger” (Bergeret, 2012, p. 305). These leaders turned to third parties to find the resources needed to transform their situation, rallying regional and national actors to their cause. They became integrated in the political parties (Figure 5), joined forces with the Ladinos on their own territories, took advantage of certain rivalries between the big landowners and turned to lawyers in Cobán and elsewhere in Guatemala to formalise the legal argument at a time when the new labour code was once again being enforced. Faced with the argument of private ownership for the Ladinos, the Q’eqchi’ put forward their own argument for the obligation of *monetary* payment for work done on the coffee plantation. The first trials for non-payment of wages led to the recognition of land concessions in compensation for this unpaid work. The agrarian reform would often merely confirm these local victories. The Q’eqchi’ began to see the possibility of generalising this process and creating a breach in the large landholding system.
- 22 To rally the other *colonos* to their cause, the leaders of the Q’eqchi’ in Cahabón drew on their institutions and on the values of rights on the land for those who work it, as well as the obligation to feed those who work. They denounced the fact that the landowners increased their wealth on the backs of their misery and subservience: “they become rich because we are on our knees” (Martin, in Bergeret, 2012, p. 693).
- 23 Symbolic authority over the territory was also contested: To offset the exclusive presence of the patron saints in the cathedral and in the Ladinos’ private dwellings (Figure 5), statues were erected in the chapels that had been newly built in the villages as a result of the Catholic movement to reconcile the people in the 1950s and 1960s. Mountain territoriality oriented towards the creation of new centralities in villages that carry the classic imaginary of heroic resistance and the creation of new political models (Bozonnet, 1992, p.159).

- 24 Meanwhile, the Ladinos believed the “Finca” to be based on an equitable exchange between work and land. Requisitioning was also practised for community service work;⁴ this balance would be broken by the “law”: “There were families, as we called them before the colonos, who had all the land at their disposal, provided they did some work... They grew corn and beans and also sowed for themselves. We didn’t pay them, but we made up for that as much as we could with the land. [...] Then suddenly, when the other generations came along, everything changed [...] ‘the land is theirs, they are entitled to it’ [...]. So to avoid any trouble with the people, concerning the laws and everything, the best thing was to sell the land [...]. We couldn’t pay any wages. It would have cost too much!” (Lucy Azurdía, *in* Bergeret, 2012, p. 142, 161-162).
- 25 It became clear that imposing the monetary payment of a wage nullified the balance on which the Hacienda system was based: It instituted a radical transformation of the socio-economic system. In order to delay this enforcement of national law, the Ladinos sought to maintain the face-off, which effectively guaranteed their domination. For this purpose, they guarded the only three access roads to Cahabón, closing them when they imprisoned the local indigenous leaders (Bergeret, 2012). Each legal action by the Q’eqchi’ automatically led to reprisals by the Ladinos, usually for “invasion” or “degradation” of the land⁵ (see Figure 1). However, in the Ladino accounts, another event carries much greater weight than the overthrow of the large landholding system: the accidental death of Benjamin Champney in an aircraft accident in 1956, which brought about the division and the decline of his empire (Figure 1).

Figure 5: Legal, political and religious mobilisation in the 1940s and 1950s: escaping the local face-off

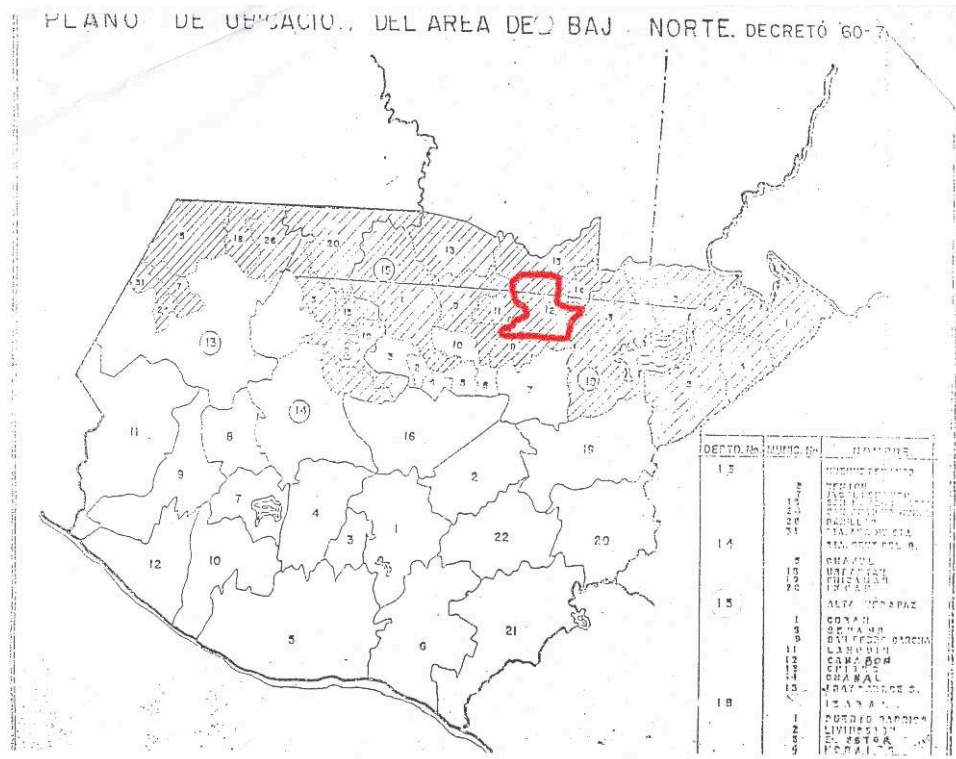


Military dictatorship and the mountains: the “Northern Transversal Strip”

- 26 The military regime integrated Cahabón in the strip called the “Franja Transversal del Norte” (Figure 6). The mountainous morphology of this “frontier” region favoured the circulation of guerrillas: It is riddled with caves and forests and offers a rugged landscape in which to flee and hide (Lacoste, 2002, p. 4-6). To prevent this

phenomenon, the Northern Transversal Strip became the focus of attention for surveillance and military actions. The military regime also sought to take advantage of the region's natural wealth: oil, ore and hydroelectric power (Le Bot, 1992; Grandin, 2004; Solano 2012).

Figure 6: Cahabón is integrated in the Northern Transversal Strip



The “great suffering”

- 27 By the end of the 1960s, the conflict had deteriorated: The “national security” policy became more radical through close surveillance and the targeted assassination of political leaders. At the end of the 1970s, this situation veered towards a strategy of terror, leading to the forced enlistment of men from the Cahabón area in the so-called Civil Self-Defence Patrols, as well as the creation of torture centres, the destruction of villages (houses burned, women raped, peasant leaders or Catholics murdered) and the bombing of the village of Sewamo in 1982. The bodies of the victims of this repression were hidden in mass graves (in caves, natural openings, mountain recesses) or thrown into the river. For the Q’eqchi’, the mountains became a place of refuge during the “Great Suffering” caused by military and paramilitary violence: “Nos salvó la sagrada selva” (The sacred mountains saved us) is the title of a collective work of Q’eqchi’ testimonials (Huet, 2006).
- 28 In this context of radicalization, some local leaders established links with the guerrillas. Initially committed to the revolutionary party, some turned, after 1966⁶, for their legal struggle towards lawyers of FASGUA, Autonomous trade Union Federation of Guatemala, attached to the Guatemalan Labour Party (Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo). Thus, they meet some local leaders of this party banned by the dictatorship

and engaged in guerrilla actions (Grandin, 2004). Their local actions mainly centred on political awareness-building, mountain survival training, and creating caches of weapons. However, to the murder of a peasant leader (Grandin 2004), would have responded the killing of one of the finca owners and administrators from Cahabón responsible for this disappearance (Bergeret, 2012, p. 342).

The purchase of land: trajectories of land ownership distribution and transformation of local identities

- 29 Right from the first guerrilla uprising in 1960, the regime's main concern was to tightly control and "develop"⁷ the indigenous populations, to prevent them from supporting or joining the communist movements. The Northern Transversal Strip was declared an "Agrarian Development Zone of public interest and national emergency" in Decree 60-70 of 1970. The military state designated the natives as peasants and came up with a new legal status for the land: The "collective agrarian patrimony", a horizontal co-ownership system among *all* the families within a "community", was designated as the "legal form that allowed for optimal entrepreneurial organisation" (INTA, n.d.). This system was managed by the National Institute of Agrarian Transformation (INTA), created in 1962 to serve as an intermediary between vendors and small peasant purchasers (via the organisation of a payment spread out over time), or to sell land that had no owner.
- 30 The strategies chosen by the large landowners were a first explanatory factor for the divergences in Cahabón's land ownership trajectories. We can distinguish three such divergences. The first was the acceptance to sell land to the Mayan-Q'eqchi' *colonos* via the process put forward by the INTA. This explains why Benjamin Champney's son Edgar Champney, who owned land to the north of the Cahabón River,⁸ chose to sell in the early 1960s. The second was the refusal by some to sell their land, and who sought to maintain the status quo in terms of work on the coffee plantations.⁹ This was the stance adopted by Edgar Champney's brother, Jaime Champney, along with his plantation administrator, Nacho Preto, a military commissioner and informant. Together, the two became a particularly violent and murderous pair (Grandin, 2004, p. 117). The third concerned those who sought to shift to livestock production, which no longer required a large workforce, and who thus decided to throw out the populations living on their lands. The rivalries that prevailed within this local bourgeoisie, which was in the throes of renewal, are one of the keys to understanding the high levels of violence, like on the national level (Bataillon, 2003, p.18).
- 31 A second factor concerns the options taken by the different villages faced with the conflict. Certain communities became unanimously involved¹⁰ in the struggle for political resistance, organised and disciplined on the basis of illegal political structures (Grandin, 2004, p.149). Conversely, others¹¹ opted to negotiate collectively with the large landowners. Lastly, some communities were divided between those families that agreed to live in the Fincas, those who agreed to buy a plot of land (*aj loq'ol ch'och*, purchasers of land) and those who refused to pay and joined forces with the guerrillas (the *campesinos*, referred to as *aj elq'* - "robbers" by their detractors), all of which led to a great deal of intra-community tension. In many divided communities, some families "decided" to migrate in order "to avoid conflicts" (Grandia, 2006, p. 72). The

subsequent waves of migrating Cahaboneros towards the Petén region in the 1970s and 1980s were massive.

- 32 As of 1979, once the peasant resistance had been crushed, the communities resigned themselves to buying land via the INTA's highly bureaucratic procedures (Bataillon, 2011), which led to further disparities in terms of land ownership. Villages that had consented to purchase land over a minimum 20-year period often fell victim to deceit at the hands of false intermediaries. The INTA sets the price.¹² In some communities, the sharing is done equally, where each family pays an equivalent share to obtain a same-size parcel of land. In other communities, the sizes of the parcels differ depending on the distributions inherited from the time of the Asyent, where the price paid depends on the size of the parcel. In all cases, the payment is made collectively. It is thus considered a collective tribute to the Guatemalan State. In the 2000s, co-ownership titles posed all sorts of problems: Many families had already migrated, and for those whose parents had failed to leave a will, handing down land to their children required complicated administrative procedures.

By now, there were many incentives for the Q'eqchi' (on behalf of INTA personnel and technicians from cooperatives initiated by regional and national coffee federations) to switch to intensive monoculture for cocoa, coffee or cardamom on dedicated parcels. Commercial cultivation (which had been prohibited in the days of the Hacienda) offered the possibility of becoming a part of the national economy and gaining access to the currency and the market. More than anything else, it was the condition for gaining access to the land: "The law required us to plant cocoa", explains Ricardo (Chipoc), "if you wanted to sow cocoa, then they gave you land to buy, that way you could pay your debt. If you replied that you would sow cocoa, they bought the land for you, and if you didn't sow cocoa, they didn't buy it" (Marco, Chiakte, in Bergeret, 2012, p 529).

- 33 As of the 2000s, FONTIERRAS (*Fondo de Tierras*, which replaced the INTA) has imposed individual land fragmentation. This required a new and substantial payment. We can thus consider that families paid for their land a second time (monetarily) – or even a third time, if we take into account their unpaid work.

Reconfiguration of the conflict: Cahabón Mountains in globalisation issues

- 34 During the 1980s, the decline (albeit relative) of large landholding and the widespread development of micro-farming in Central America and the Caribbean raised the issue of the appearance of a "peasant" society (Deverre, 1987, p. 8; Kearney, 1996). This was really a time of adjusting forms of dependency to the benefit of the big economic players, new forms of poverty and an acceleration in emigration. The Cahabón Mountains became an example of globalisation issues: The land pressure, urbanisation and agro-industrial model endanger natural environments and the autochthonous way of life.

New forms of agriculture and territorial reconfiguration

- 35 Cahabón became a mountainous region of small landowners. However, any reduction in land ownership inequality is quite relative: In 2003, some 15 large landowners owned more than 45 hectares covering 43% of the surface area of Cahabón. With less than 7

hectares, the smallest landowners (64% of all owners) occupied 20% of the territory. These families are unable to sustain themselves without resorting to the leasing of parcels, or else they must buy corn for part of the year. The poverty rate reached 93%, and income inequality (Gini index) 62.7%. Land pressure has multiplied threefold in the space of 30 years, while the population density increased from 27 inhabitants / km² in 1980 to 73 inhabitants / km² in 2010.

- 36 The mountainous landscape has changed: A mountain that was once covered in forest and dotted with farming households that cultivated – on a rotating basis – food crops (corn, beans, pepper, gourds, etc.) and ritual crops (tobacco, cocoa, etc.) has since become deforested. The surface is mostly occupied by fields for growing coffee, cardamom and cocoa intended for export, and crop rotations are reduced (Figure 7). However, the Cahaboneros have maintained the wooded protection of the coffee plants. Tulet (2008, p. 176) refers to a *coffee farmer's guide* that recommends vegetation cover in order to maintain the quality of national coffee, “the best of the world”.
- 37 Some villages are more conducive to growing cocoa (south-west Cahabón), while others have become specialised in cardamom (centre-north). Coffee plants were pulled out following the coffee crisis in the early 2000s and then replanted following the cardamom crisis and the renewed increase in coffee prices starting in 2006. Pig farming and corn production have fallen back considerably since the days of the Hacienda. Agricultural activity is often insufficient. The Cahaboneros are dependent on the Petén region's plains, where they work in the African palm plantations, and on the towns, where they work via short-term contracts (a few months) in guarding and security services.¹³

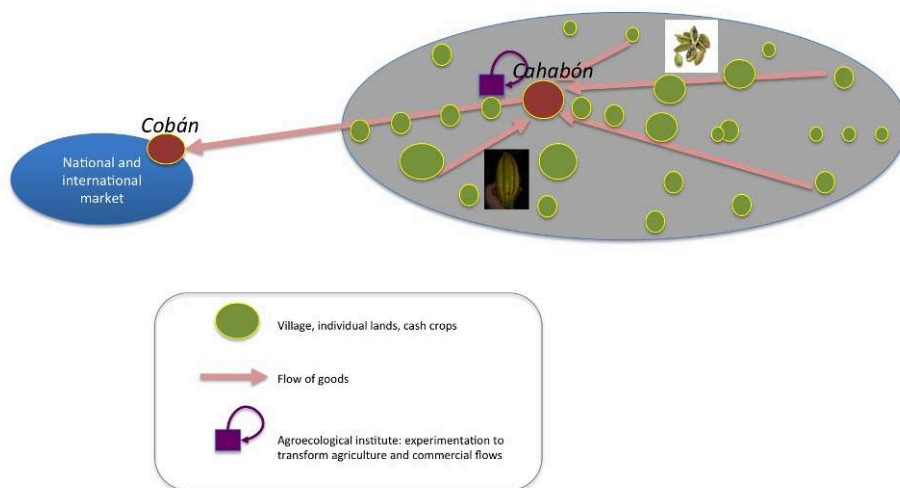
Figure 7: The Cahabón River and deforested mountains



Photo: Agnès Bergeret

- 38 Commercial intermediaries, based in the Cahabón bourg and in each village (earning them the nickname of “coyote” or “dealer”), travel the length and breadth of the territory to purchase cocoa, coffee, cardamom and chilli for the national market and for export. In Central America, coffee has often come to represent a path to the promotion of Indian communities through fair trade or organic produce (Tulet, 2008). This has not been the case in Cahabón, where only one cooperative subsists from among the many created in the 1980s. Production has moved on from the territory, leaving the populations little other choice than to purchase – at high prices – food products from the outside.

Figure 8: Present-day trade flows



Agnès Bergeret

The urbanisation of the mountains

- 39 The process for measuring and purchasing land has brought about a new conception of the mountains, no longer dotted with households but structured and multipolarised around villages. The Cahaboneros now define themselves in terms of their belonging to the village. The reason for the delimitation of fields in the peripheral area lies with the inhabitants' right to a “lot” for their dwelling, in accordance with an urban model in which the houses are gathered in the centre of the village, around the chapel and the school.
- 40 For their part, the way in which the Ladinos occupy the territory has seen a reversal. Whereas many of them used to live on the plantations and would travel to the bourg – mostly occupied by other Ladinos – for political or religious activities, they now mostly live in the bourg, where they have paying jobs in trade, administration, education and NGOs (in which they hold between 60 and 80% of the positions). Those of them who still have land go there during the day or at the end of the week. Family ties link them to

Cobán, Carchá, Chamelco and Fray Bartolomé de las Casas (neighbouring towns three hours away by road). The bourg's urbanisation further intensified with the installation of a great many indigenous families, whose siblings are usually dispersed among the rural areas and the urban zone, since the father's attested parcel is often not enough to provide for all his children and their families. These urban families often look to cultivate their corn on the outskirts of the bourg: The institution according to which families related by lineage would freely loan their land in the hamlets has disappeared near the boroughs, where such solidarity of kinship is no longer necessarily the norm. The fact that families have to pay to cultivate their corn fuels the land commodification process across an increasingly expansive belt. Rural village communities have invested in homes and are involved in religious responsibilities in the bourg's various neighbourhoods. The Ladino families' old concrete houses with tiled roofs have been surrounded by an increasingly dense mesh of Q'eqchi' family dwellings. Initially, these were built from wood with thatched roofs, but they are now increasingly made of concrete with tin roofing. Cahabón suffers from serious problems in terms of waste management, water distribution, electricity supply and roads. The mountain context quickly raised issues with regard to environmental fragility, demographic "overload" (Bart, in Veyret *et al.*, 2001), the capacity to develop urban services that would protect the mountain's agricultural and natural spaces from pollution, but also from the destruction of soils conducive to torrential floods, landslides, etc.

- 41 These tensions are reflected in the reconfiguration of the social conflict and of opposing identities: "Our bourg is full of garbage and dust", explains Juan, son of a plantation administrator, expressing a sense of "dispossession" of the bourg that previously had mostly been "reserved" to them (in Bergeret, 2012, p. 166). The Ladinos have thus developed "double standards" that often find an echo among the local elite (Bierschenk, 2010): They are all for progress, democracy and development but are anxious to protect their privileges, all the while fuelling racist stereotypes.
- 42 The dividing lines are no longer between the Q'eqchi' *peripheral rural area* and the *Ladina centralities* of the bourg and the plantation home stations: Q'eqchi'/Ladino divisions are no longer spatial; they now pass through the bourg and its neighbourhoods. They are combined with fresh inequalities and cultural oppositions, both between urban Q'eqchi' and rural Q'eqchi' (brought about by their different lifestyles, despite their strong ties of interdependence) and also within the villages themselves, where land measurements have led to inequalities between lineage and families, leading to numerous disputes.

Protection of nature and the forest

- 43 The "conservation of nature" international movement, often associated with conflicts between national authorities and inhabitants (Debarbieux and Rudaz, 2010, pp. 195-199), has been embodied on a national level via a fight against slash-and-burn agriculture, the protection of the forest and reforestation. The policy of taxation on cut trees and allowances on uncleared or replanted forests monetise forest preservation and place this responsibility on families and villages. Reforestation has been a bargaining chip when groups claimed a compensation for the forced labour executed in the Civil Self-Defence Patrols: *Bosques y Agua para la Concordia* program delivers money to Cahaboneros in exchange for replanting parcels.

Reinvesting in the mountain identity

- 44 While impunity for crimes committed during the civil war was customary on both a national and a local level, villages are reinvesting their efforts in a ritual activity intended to “re-establish the community” and to maintain, restore and safeguard the generosity of the mountains in this new context: Agricultural rituals are on the increase in relation to corn, coffee, cardamom and even drying sheds, trucks, etc. It is interesting to note two parallel sets of dynamics: The one (very much the minority) appropriates new spiritualities and Mayan ritualities in an attempt to establish links between Guatemala’s various Maya populations after having rebuilt a pantheon and re-established practices that they claim to be “original” (actually, among the Q’eqchi’ in Cahabón, the idea of a Mayan identity essentially meets with a degree of mistrust). The other (the majority) is a reworking of Q’eqchi’ ritual practices, non-exclusively from Catholic practices, where the Q’eqchi’ designation is a source of pride and carries claims of identity (Wilson, 1995).
- 45 Since the early 2000s, a think tank has been initiated by a school of agriculture to reflect on what type of territoriality needs to be established. Specialised in agroecology, this school specifically invites Q’eqchi’ people living in rural areas to foster a resurgence of Q’eqchi’ values relating to the land in order to experiment with more sustainable agricultural practices and to curb the process of erosion. This movement tries out new approaches such as vertical stratification and intercropping (Bart, in Veyret *et al.*, 2001, p. 65; Tulet, 2008, p.176). It suggests diversifying food and commercial productions, planting more trees around productions, putting an end to slash-and-burn, revalorising old and typical varieties, and the widespread use of vegetable gardens, including old varieties that are not only perfectly suited to local conditions but also contribute to dietary diversity and promote exchange among neighbours, thereby integrating a historical process of re-association between agriculture and food (Bricas, Lamine & Casabianca, 2013).
- 46 This set of dynamics, which goes beyond the issue of individual transitions, requires an overhaul of the production and transformation networks and marketing channels. In Cahabón, it is not supported by any state or municipal structures; on the contrary, these tend to encourage productivist agriculture dedicated to a single activity and requiring phytosanitary products. It mobilises local modes of sociability, spirituality, the rituality of Q’eqchi’ agricultural work, as well as institutions for exchange and community work to spread its innovations. In terms of marketing, the school’s proposals are models of hybrid territoriality that promote local exchange (Figure 9) while seeking to develop high value-added niche channels on the regional or national market. This form of territoriality generates artisanal products that uphold the Cahabonero identity as a business rationale.
- 47 As a result, the mountains become “terroirs”, i.e. places for regenerating peasant lifestyles and Mayan culture. International institutional links and knowledge exchanges are developed, integrating Cahabón into the global issues for the defence of indigenous peoples (Debarbieux and Rudaz, 2010), agroecology and *territorial* agri-food systems (Lamine, 2011, p. 129-130).

Figure 9: English translation of an awareness-building panel at the entrance to the agroecology school

<p><i>Laa'o aj awinel, ixq ut winq, riki'in a'in yo'yooko.</i> <i>Lix Mar 'an aj k'ay re xkok'awimq ut na patz'ok re aj</i> <i>Lu': «¿Lu, k'a'ut ink'a nakaloq'lin pix? »</i> <i>« Ink'a Mar; k'ajwi'us li awimq nachal chi najt »</i> <i>Joke'taatikib'roxloq'inkil li qe laa'o ut joke'taakanab'</i> <i>chi junajwa li kaqalink?</i> <i>Loq'li awimq laa wechk'ab'al.</i> <i>Laa'at taakol rix hoonal ut laatumin re xtojb'al laa</i> <i>b'elebaal ch'ich</i> <i>Laa wechkab'al k'ul xtz'aq li rawimq ut li tumín</i> <i>taakanaq sa'li k'aleb'aal</i> <i>K'ama'an chijunil too'elq chiub'ej</i></p> <p><i>Qa k'e'hak xloq'al li ru li awimq, laa'o aj Chi k'ajb'om</i></p>	<p><i>We, farmers, men and women, we are living off our crops.</i> <i>Maria sells products from her vegetable garden and asks Pedro:</i> <i>"- Pedro, why do not you buy my tomatoes? "</i> <i>"- No, Maria, the good products are those who come from far away."</i> <i>When will you start to value to what is ours, and when will you stop being envious?</i> <i>Buy products from your neighbours.</i> <i>You will save time and money transport.</i> <i>Your neighbours will receive the payment for their products and the money will stay in the community.</i> <i>Thus, everyone can move forward.</i></p> <p><i>Let us, the Cahaboneros, value our products.</i></p>
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Translation Agnès Bergeret

Conclusion

- 48 This study stresses the importance of the link(s) between land distribution, type of agriculture, agriculture-food relationship, authority regime, identification process and the valorisation of mountain land. Cahabón's different land and agricultural configurations show that they do not proceed in any way from territories that are "backward" or marginal but from a function that is essential to the type of development specific to each sequence in the process (Birou, 1970, p.172), typical of many Latin American situations in terms of the relationship between latifundios and minifundios. These configurations include dynamics of substance as well as geopolitical and economic dynamics. However, Cahabón's present spatial configuration shows the importance of the local form of conflict, in this case centred on the competing values ascribed to land and work, and the weight of local actors. The divergences observed in the trajectories of the different villages reveal the impact of the strategies adopted by each village and every large landowner.

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NOTES

1. The Historical Clarification Commission (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico, or CEH, 1999) estimated that the conflict caused 250,000 deaths and more than 1.5 million displaced people and refugees.
2. Between 50 and 60% of Guatemala's inhabitants are autochthonous (usually referred to as native or indigenous). They comprise 21 Maya peoples (each of which speaks a distinct Maya language), one *garifuna* population and one *xinka* population. The Q'eqchi' represent a population of more than 800,000 people, situated in the northern and central/eastern regions of the country, i.e. in Alta and Baja Verapaz, Izabal and the Petén region.
3. Q'eqchi' term to designate large landowning, adapted from the Spanish term "hacienda".

4. A thinking pattern that authorises a certain amount of misuse, entrenched in practices, as shown by the archives of a trial in 1965 (AGCA-1965) in which the Ladino mayor, a major landowner, was prosecuted for making at least 285 people work during 12 days for nothing on his land.
5. *Colonos* who refused to work in the plantation could no longer justify the right to live on and cultivate – for their livelihood – the lands of the large landowner (AGCA, 1949).
6. The Revolutionary Party won the presidential elections of 1965 with Mendez Montenegro. It's quickly discredited in the eyes of his electors, because of the enforced disappearance of 33 political and trade union leaders in 1966 (Grandin, 2001)
7. In the sense of the developmentalism of Latin American military regimes via agricultural development programmes (loans, technical modernisation, promotion of chemical products, cooperatives, etc.), which maintained central decision-making, the ongoing relationship of trusteeship with the natives, and the agro-export model of development.
8. Sactá, Gualibaj, Sepoc, Sequixpec.
9. In the communities of Seasir, Setzacpec, Chiaux, Balamte, Salac and Chiacach.
10. The communities of Seasir, Setzacpec, Chiaux, Balamte, Salac, Chiacach, Chiis, Chipoc, Sewamo, Jacolol, Chipajché, Secacao...
11. Sepoc, Sactá, Sekaltakab, Champerico, Tamax.
12. The price increased from 10 Q/ha in 1979 to 30 Q/ha in 1984, to reach an average 12,605 Q/ha in 2003 in Alta Verapaz, according to Grandia (2006, p. 208).
13. Emigration to the United States is less prevalent among the Q'eqchi' than with other Mayan populations. Although children and young people are increasingly migrating to the towns given the scarcity of available land, it must be noted that a number of young people have returned to the villages of Cahabón. According to studies conducted, this is due to urban employment experiences and the dangers inherent in migrating to the United States.

ABSTRACTS

In the course of half a century, the tropical mountains of Cahabón (a municipality in north-eastern Guatemala) have undergone a radical transformation of their land and agricultural configuration. Accounts from local actors have led us to examine a conflict that has proved to be very violent for the land and whose origins date back to the “colonato” system established at the end of the 19th century. These accounts provide additional elements that help to understand the Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996), often interpreted through the prism of the Cold War, i.e. counter-revolutionary strategies led by a military regime against communist guerrillas. This article cross-analyses different observation points on a conflict process that has transformed a territory once dominated by a single large coffee estate into a new, highly fragmented configuration of villages populated by small-scale farmers. At each sequence in this process, social and territorial organisation patterns have been transformed by the confrontation between the region's two local social groups: the mixed-race Ladinos and the native Mayan-Q'eqchi'. The ways in which the mountains have forged the identities of each group and shaped the frameworks of reference and collective actions are key to understanding the strategies adopted by the players in the conflict.

INDEX

Keywords: Q'eqchi', Ladinos, agriculture, latifundio

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