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## Urban Indigeneity: Constructing and Mediating an Indigenous Identity in Guatemala City

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This paper examines how development provides a site for particular performances of indigeneity in Guatemala. It explores the product of NGO (non-governmental organization) governmentality amongst a group of indigenous students participating in private scholarship programs in Guatemala City. The article draws on existing literature and ethnographic material to analyze three different outcomes when indigenous students engage with development NGOs that are trying to “empower” them and enable them to *superarse*, or overcome their conditions. First, an example of Hale’s “*indio permitido*” (permitted Indian); second, one of the erasure of indigenous identity, where success means assimilation into mainstream white/non-indigenous society; finally, a “third space” where indigenous actors become agents of their own development.

**Keywords:** *Indigeneity; Governmentality; Maya; Identity; Empowerment; Superación; Neoliberalism; Mestizaje; Resistance; Guatemala*

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### Introduction: Empowering Indigenous Women

Among the glossy papers of Amiga—the Sunday special edition magazine within Guatemala’s most important daily newspaper, Prensa Libre—I learned about Sheva, an NGO that works with women’s health and hygiene. Between “healthy” diet recipes and ads for Guatemala’s most expensive jewelry store, the article detailed a story that was becoming commonplace in my experience with development in Guatemala. Amid a barrage of daunting statistics about the conditions indigenous women in Guatemala face, it described how one of the country’s trendiest NGOs on social media is working to empower rural, indigenous girls. This effort sounded similar to many other organizations started and managed by either Guatemala’s elite or foreign groups, whose work, geared towards impoverished indigenous women, is described as a virtuous attempt at the “*capacitación*” (training) and “*empoderamiento*” (empowerment) of disadvantaged populations. It joins a field of development interventions that, as Ferguson (1990) has pointed out, erases politics from issues that are not only deeply political, but

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have no hope of improving without political action. To make matters worse, this type of discourse most often engages in a form of victim-blaming, where many of the nation's troubles are said to originate from the bodies and livelihoods of the very people they are trying to empower.

Most commonly in Latin America, development discourse is aimed at the impoverished, racialized "other," making the category of the "indigenous woman" highly desirable for such moral labor (Radcliffe 2015; Nelson 1999, 272-274). In this way, women's bodies become sites of neoliberal indoctrination, where the consequences of deep racial and socioeconomic inequality are taken up by the elites through care and development work in a way that maintains the current power structures (Ferguson 1990; Stevenson 2014; Li 2007, 4993). Women's bodies are singled out as "corrupt," inferior, or uncivilized, thus making them suitable sites for surveillance and "improvement" (Li 2007). These bodies, then, are conceptualized as the site for the formation of docile citizens. Through what are often condescending and patriarchal relationships, NGOs and governments obscure the gendered and racialized structural violence against indigenous women, and so attempt to turn their bodies into productive neoliberal subjects who continue to preserve current power imbalances—including deep systems of inequality. That is, NGOs take up the work of conducting conduct and so produce "subjects who are increasingly 'empowered' to discipline themselves" (Ferguson and Gupta 2002, 989; Rose 1996; Foucault 1977). Despite this pessimistic tone, in this paper I look at how the notion of *superación*<sup>1</sup> (betterment or overcoming)—often used to reinscribe sociopolitical inequalities—can also enable women's bodies as places of resistance and contestation to elite power.

*Superación* and its sister words, "empowerment" (*empoderamiento*), "training" (*capacitación*), and "moving forward" (*salir adelante*), are terms used to describe the perceived transformation of indigenous, rural individuals into "ideal" neoliberal citizens. This includes not only the material acquisition of wealth and work, but also a less tangible integration into the westernized, ladino (or non-indigenous) culture of Guatemala City. The terms suggest a paternalistic attitude that relies on the "assumption that indigenous peoples [need] help from benevolent outsiders—and a firm belief that indigenous culture had inherent deficiencies that would only be remedied when Indians became more like ladinos" (Hale 2006, 59). Understanding where these terms come from, what they imply, how they are used, and especially who they are intended to describe is crucial to shedding light on power relationships between not only elite NGOs and indigenous women, but on a larger scale, between ladino and indigenous citizens.

*Superación*, like Li's *will to improve*, "is situated in the field of power Michel Foucault termed 'government.' Defined succinctly as the "conduct of conduct," government is the attempt to shape human behavior by calculated means" (2007, 203). I suggest that those in power<sup>2</sup> use *superación* as a discourse and technique to govern people, encouraging them to comply with current political objectives: those that promote and maintain elite ladino power. In what follows, I describe three different outcomes of this exercise of power. The first is an example of Hale's *indio permitido* (permitted Indian); the second, of the

erasure of indigenous identity (where success means assimilation into mainstream white/ladino society); and finally, one of the “third space” (where indigenous actors become agents of their own development). While this “third space” has many manifestations, all of them can be taken, to varying degrees, as political acts of resistance to the hegemonic power of non-indigenous elites. To construct this argument, I look at how NGOs’ use of development and notions of modernity positions indigenous subalterns as objects in need of improvement<sup>3</sup>, thereby reinforcing negative connotations surrounding indigenous life. In many instances, NGOs associate indigenous identities with negative notions of rural, backwards, traditional peoples who are confined to endemic poverty.

More importantly, by analyzing how this process plays out, I examine how asserting or suppressing a strong indigenous identity is related to each of the three outcomes. In doing so, I consider the influence that NGO governmentality has on indigenous peoples’ habitus, particularly in terms of embodiment (Bourdieu 1977). This includes behavioral patterns—such as eye contact or clothing and food preferences, as well as hygiene and domestic practices. I also consider some psychological effects, such as having particular career goals<sup>4</sup> and economic or lifestyle dispositions. Using this theoretical framework, which combines Foucault’s notions of governmentality, biopower, and discipline with Bourdieu’s conception of habitus, allows me to create a framework that clearly highlights the power relations at play between NGOs and indigenous peoples. It also allows me to question what is produced by these relations—that is, it makes visible the processes and the outcomes of discourses and techniques of *superación* in Guatemala.

Previous literature demonstrates how governmentality and discourses of improvement are used by those with power to control those without. For instance, in her work on Indonesian development NGOs, Tania Li shows how ultimately, “the will to empower others hinges upon positioning oneself as an expert with the power to diagnose and correct a deficit in power in someone else” and as such, “empowerment is still [...] a relationship of power” (2007, 4996). Similarly, in her work on Mexico, Vania Smith-Oka describes how such power imbalances in developmental interventions “set up systems to shape, integrate, and control the population” into idealized neoliberal citizens (2013, 30). As I show below, despite the problematic nature of the ways in which NGOs and governments use biopower and governmentality<sup>5</sup> to control indigenous women (and their reproductive bodies) and the racialized and gendered nature of this oppression, the heterogeneity of the very category “indigenous women” opens spaces of resistance. I suggest here that understanding the interdependent relationship between indigenous women and those carrying out the work of governmentality—both the state and NGOs—along with the complex politics of identity they come into contact with, makes clear the new spaces of contestation and community within these asymmetrical power relations.

In this paper, I bear in mind how women’s experience with development programs interacts with concepts of gender, class, and nationality in their articulation and performance of identity. I also take into account the relational and contingent nature of identity (Postero, n.d.; Nelson 1999) by looking at the ways that

the discourses of improvement used by those working with governmentality affect people's understanding of indigeneity. Lastly, I analyze how this mediation of indigeneity feeds *back* into their interaction with development, producing communities of solidarity that have the potential to overcome certain problems that arise with NGO work. In this way, I view the notion of development as merely problematic and apolitical, instead showing how it interacts with complex notions of indigeneity to open spaces of potential resistance to hegemonic power.

That is, I ask: how does development provide a site for particular performances of indigeneity? Answering this question means analyzing the categories of the *ladinoized* Indian<sup>6</sup> (those who have turned their backs on their indigenous identity) and “*indio permitido*” (or authorized Indian) (Hale 2002; Hale and Millamán 2006) as well as the identities belonging in the “third space” that do not fall in either of these categories. Before examining those categories, let me briefly describe first, the methodology of the paper; second, how the theories of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu provide the necessary analytical base for conceptualizing these three categories; and third, how these categories have been defined and managed historically in Guatemala.

### Methodology

This paper draws on my own research in Guatemala as well as a variety of existing literature on development, governmentality, and NGOs. While my own research in Guatemala certainly informs the questions I ask and the analysis I develop, I use the data presented by other authors—such as Smith-Oka (2013), Nelson (1999), Radcliffe (2015), Li (2007), and Hale (2002, 2006)—to make a more substantive argument about the nature of the interactions between the fetishized state and the overdetermined indigenous woman, and how these inform indigenous subjectivities. The work of these authors illuminates how the forms of disciplinary power accompanying development reinforce colonial conceptions of race by asserting non-indigenous ways of being. I use their arguments to analyze my own experiences in order to look at how these “modernizing” projects affect indigenous identities, making it evident that a “third space” is needed to fully explain what is produced by this exercise of power.

I draw on ethnographic research I conducted in 2013 and 2015 to examine the ways that various forms of governmentality associated with *superación* can have negative effects on indigenous identities and livelihoods, while at the same time creating spaces for other, more positive practices to develop within a community. The latter became especially clear while working with two education programs in Guatemala City: ITA and UVG, both of which provided grants for underprivileged rural students as well as a health and hygiene organization that aimed to “teach” indigenous women about ladino nutrition and child-rearing practices<sup>7</sup>. Focusing on the experience of this group of students and indigenous mothers as they entered development institutions that not only uphold, but also instill neoliberal values, makes clear how mainstream conceptualizations of indigeneity affect people's understanding of what it means to be indigenous in Guatemala. I describe some of the experiences indigenous youth had with these programs in

the sections that follow. As I interviewed program directors, undergraduates and graduates of the program, one word was repeatedly used to describe what the students and mothers were accomplishing for themselves: *superación* (betterment or overcoming)<sup>8</sup>. The reason this term is troublesome is that people—both ladinos and indigenous—would use it to express the low expectations many Guatemalans had for indigenous youth. It is related to what Hale (2006) argues when he analyzes an informant's desire to be "*Más que un indio*" (More than an Indian). Since being "indigenous" is associated with poverty, backwardness, and inferiority, the notion that these students can have such neoliberal accomplishments—that is, attending prestigious, private universities; having good positions in major companies in Guatemala City; and having escaped the cycle of poverty—signifies that they have exceeded the expectations for being indigenous.

Furthermore, the emphasis on *superación* creates a notion that anyone can improve their situation in life through hard work—a concept that does not consider the structural inequalities and lack of opportunities in the country (again the notion of victim-blaming). Due to the apolitical nature of development, many of the students did not criticize or denounce larger structural problems during my interviews, but rather blamed the nature of Guatemalans (suggesting the image of a wounded body politic, see Nelson 1999). They spoke of Guatemala as a divided nation, thus creating people who are competitive and selfish, and consequently cannot "progress."

My research takes into consideration the idea that, "Culture has often served as a 'therapeutic myth, meant to explain why we fall ill and why we get well'—(and) in Guatemala, poverty, backwardness, and other social ills have been blamed on indigenous culture" (Nelson 1999, 125; See also Merry 2003, 64). In the case of the students in this development program, they were taught that part of "succeeding" in the elite economic sphere was adopting westernized habits, such as styles of dress and eating customs. As part of the program they underwent etiquette classes, where they were told how to eat "properly" with a fork and a knife, as well as how to have a "powerful" handshake and dress accordingly for business interviews. Moreover, living in a Catholic residency in the city changed their diet from tortillas to bread, from pure coffee to the sweeter kinds, and to a larger quantity of meat and desserts than any of them were accustomed to. It placed them in spaces of elite power, while reminding them, through their habitus—including their limited purchasing power, their darker skin, their different clothes—that they were never fully part of the elite. In this way, *superación* can work subtly, suggesting to students in bodily and intimate ways, that their own culture is "backwards," and that their upbringing is what marks them as "uncivilized." It is important to take these negative conceptions of "indigenous culture" into account when considering the formation of indigenous identity and to understand the ways indigenous people are affected by, and react to, the associations and implications of belonging to this ethnic minority.

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### **Moving Towards a Theoretical Base: Incorporating Foucault and Bourdieu's Contributions**

Foucault's genealogy of power is useful not only because it makes visible the power inequalities at play in the interaction between indigenous women and NGOs, but also because it illuminates how the bodies of indigenous women are disciplined as part of the larger mechanism operating within development work. His work has allowed us to understand how biopower and techniques of the self are used to govern and control populations through the body. The human body is often a contested site of power and dominance, where subjectivity is formed. Throughout this paper, I use Foucault's notions of biopower and techniques of the self to show how bodies are policed through forms of governmentality in Guatemala. That is, I focus on how power is exercised on the bodies of indigenous women and young students to mold them into ideal neoliberal citizens through their participation in development programs.

For Foucault, power is invested throughout society, immanently present in relations so that there is no one person or state in charge, but rather, there are various forms of power. He writes of the body as a site of power and explains how the body is disciplined (1977, 129-131, 136). There are many techniques that aim to normalize populations, such as the development of a work ethic or a time schedule, documentation and examination, space, and even the development of efficient bodily motions. Foucault recounts how throughout (Western) society these forms of practice and discipline are being used to create docile and functional bodies needed for capitalism. This new form of normalizing power makes the disciplining of our own bodies a form of power that feels natural, in such a way that those who are outside of it are considered dangerous and unintelligible<sup>9</sup>. Here, the term unintelligible is used to refer to the "abnormal individual" such that "all the mechanisms of power [...] are disposed around" the unintelligible subject in an attempt to alter her (Foucault 1977, 199).

Foucault describes power as immanent in every relation, and argues that power and knowledge come together (100). It is in discourse that power is both reinforced and exposed "render[ing] it fragile and mak[ing] it possible to thwart it" (101). As a system of shared representations, discourse not only produces resistance, but it also produces subjects by making certain people visible. In this way, discourse and power/knowledge, like normalizing power, differentiate between docile bodies (or intelligible subjects) and those who are outside of intelligibility and who must be disciplined. While in this scenario, discipline is enacted on individuals, and biopower is conceiving these individuals in terms of populace, as members of a whole healthy population. In order to access intelligibility, the body must be subjected to all of this, and so becomes disciplined and normalized.

Because power is not an institution or a structure—nor does it stem from a central point or actor—it is ultimately individuals themselves (as opposed to a dominant class or government) that exert these disciplining techniques of the self on themselves. Producing a category of bodies that falls outside of this intelligibility means that they become the object of a gaze. Foucault is speaking of an instrument of governance concerned with populations: a power fundamentally concerned with the management of the

body politic, which has “as its principal form of knowledge political economy, and as its essential technical means apparatuses of security” (1978, 102). Thus, Foucault introduces the governmentality of non-state mechanisms: something that can be particularly applied to NGOs.

This is evidenced when NGOs take up the concept of *superación* in the neoliberal attempt to “better” rural indigenous peoples and overcome their rural, underdeveloped dispositions. By analyzing *superación* as a discourse, two different subjects are produced: the first is the underdeveloped, poor (and in most cases, female) indigenous target of NGO *capacitación*<sup>10</sup>, the unintelligible subject. The second is the “modern,” urban (and in most cases, male) ladino who is seen as the ideal citizen, the intelligible subject. While NGO technicians themselves may not necessarily be male (even, in a few cases, not necessarily ladino), the discourses of improvement make it clear that, as subjects of development, being poor, indigenous, and female means you are at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder. Moreover, in the interaction between NGO workers and their indigenous counterparts, what emerges are systems of power inequalities that continually reinforce both beliefs and behaviors that promote ladino and male superiority. Through the normative implications of governmentality in this discourse, indigenous people are brought into development as docile bodies, a category that immediately marks them as lesser—i.e., not as full citizens or “Guatemalans.”

Having been imagined so, indigenous women are disciplined: the discourses of *superación* are tied to the apparatus of governmentality, which, using a wide range of technologies, attempts to normalize alterity into ladino forms of being. In this scenario, the aim of development work is to manage this population of unintelligible (indigenous) subalterns and shape them into intelligible subjects. This is possible, in part, due to the constant surveillance that occurs in the uneven interactions between NGO workers and their “target populations.” In this process, technologies of discipline come in the form of hygiene training, etiquette classes, self-esteem talks, and generally promoting practices and ideas that arise from, and reinforce, the superiority of the Westernized ladino elite. Those subjects who fail to become docile bodies are labeled recalcitrant, backwards, underdeveloped, and are blamed for their own poverty.

A Foucauldian analysis is certainly helpful for understanding power and its workings. However, the literature I analyzed, as well as my own research, made it clear that the indigenous body is a site of both discipline *and* resistance. Foucault’s model leaves little room for agency and individual resistance. In this regard, Bourdieu’s model—albeit, while still restricting individual agency—is useful in his use of habitus, which is helpful in conceptualizing how certain structures such as the past, political economy, racism, poverty, culture, etc., shape individual behavior. In a way, Bourdieu’s framework has more room for an analysis of subjectivity where the “third space” is present. Here, I outline the concept of habitus more carefully and state how it informs my analysis of power relations between NGOs and their indigenous subjects.

Although Bourdieu describes habitus in many different ways, we can understand it to be grounded in practice and defined as “systems of durable, transportable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (1977, 52-53). As a system of dispositions, habitus is also a consequence of history, meaning that it is shaped by past experiences. Habitus, Bourdieu adds, is also generative: “embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history—is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product” (1977, 56). By using past experiences to shape these structures, habitus conditions and shapes practice in a way that, despite being slightly unpredictable, is also limited. In this way, Bourdieu introduces the concept of structures, and how these govern our practice through habitus (1980, 55). This does not mean that the social actor has no agency, but rather that it is through habitus that we are both constrained and given the independence to act in different manners<sup>11</sup>: “the habitus is an infinite capacity for generating products—thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions—whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production” (1980, 55).

For Bourdieu, domination is established through habitus, which reinforces the established social order. It does so by creating practices that make it “unthinkable” to conceive reality in a different manner. Moreover, Bourdieu argues that “habitus and its strategies in setting up and perpetuating durable relations of domination is once again an effect of the structure of the field” (1980, 130). Furthermore, we find the question of structure versus agency: how much of our habitus is structured by doxa and the dominating field<sup>12</sup>? How much agency is allowed within habitus to a variety of practices? How much power do individuals have to notice and struggle against the institutionalized and symbolic strategies that give dominant groups control over social structure and consciousness (1977, 138)? This struggle, Bourdieu acknowledges, gives social science its objective: making it “a reality that encompasses all the individual and collective struggles aimed at conserving or transforming reality, in particular those that seek to impose the legitimate definition of reality, whose specifically symbolic efficacy can help to conserve or subvert the established order” (1977, 141).

Using Bourdieu to deconstruct *superación* makes evident how important the role of habitus is when it comes to establishing and sustaining relations of ladino domination. While habitus is structured by one’s socio-economic status, family, religion, education, and ethnicity, NGOs can also have an effect on it. I argue that development works first to internalize the inferior position of indigenous peoples in the country’s class and ethnic hierarchy, and second to reinforce behaviors that either erase indigeneity or police it so that it does not threaten the current order of things. My analysis of development in Guatemala makes clear use of how habitus works (or does not work), how it comes into existence, how it is propagated by institutionalized modes of domination, and how it affects future behavior or practice. As I expand throughout the paper, ladino superiority is reinforced through practices and bodily hexis that build on Guatemala’s long history of racial hegemony.



However, the result is not a simple equation where input and surveillance from NGOs is taken up by their beneficiaries to conform and adapt their habitus to this regime. Rather, the resulting practices that emerge can have unintended consequences on the subjectivity of those involved. Thus, while in most cases NGOs teach submission and conformity with the hegemonic world order that places indigenous ways of being at the bottom of the social ladder, it also gives these people tools that can be used to challenge this same order. Changing bodily practices on the one hand erases indigenous practices in favor of ladino ones, but on the other hand it makes people more intelligible in the eyes of that same ladino society. In this way, NGOs enable traditionally disenfranchised people to make demands according to the conventions of the ladinoized political society.

In many instances, what development programs attempt to teach (in terms of behavior modification) is quite different from their actual results. In some cases people react against the impositions of NGOs by asserting their own ways of being and not conforming to the hegemonic conceptions of social difference and hierarchy that are being imposed on them. Here, the spaces where NGOs work become sites of resistance, where people can come together to protest the harmful ways that mainstream *mestizo* society treats them.

To summarize, Bourdieu and Foucault provide lenses and analytical models by which we can make sense of society, particularly the way power and discipline affect a person's understanding of the self and the behaviors that are accorded to such a person through habitus. However, their theories leave little room for explaining the work that occurs at the interstices between habitus and field, and outside of binomial classifications of normal/abnormal individuals. The framework that arises from combining Foucault's notions of discipline provides a conceptual model that effortlessly explains how the forms of governmentality associated with development produce *indios permitidos* and erasures of indigeneity, suggesting that a third theoretical conception must be added to this base in order to build an analytical model that can account for all that is being produced by *superación*.

### **Indigeneity and Difference in Guatemala**

Indigeneity is a central category of difference in Guatemala. Statistically speaking, the last governmental census in Guatemala identified around 4.4 million people of Mayan descent out of a total population of 14 million, and despite a certain unreliability of census numbers due to the self-identification variable—which may vary depending on factors such as how the question is framed—these percentages do convey a sense of just how sizable this minority group is. It is also exceedingly important to note that, although the term *the Mayas* is used to talk collectively about the indigenous peoples of Guatemala as a single indigenous group, this obscures the degree of linguistic, social, and cultural diversity possessed by the different ethnic groups within Guatemala. Similarly, this collective language should not be interpreted to mean that their own ethnic consciousness and culture is homogenous or static.

With the end of the military dictatorship in 1986 and the rise of the Maya cultural rights movement, the Guatemalan state has become a site of demand, where Maya activists and popular groups can petition and claim certain rights (mostly regarding citizenship) from the state (Nelson 1999). It would be impossible to analyze the current affair of ethnic relations and identifications in Guatemala without taking into consideration the long history of nation-building practices and policies that have been enacted in the name of building and consolidating the “imagined community” (Anderson 1983). Much of the perceived power of the state comes from first, its presentation of itself as clearly bounded and second, the way it is able to associate itself with modernity. Thus, the state comes to be shaped through “struggles over culture and history, over modernity and tradition, and over Mayan and national identity [which] articulate the state, modify its identity, and penetrate the apparent boundaries between state and civil society” (Nelson 1999, 76-77).

As early as the nineteenth century, and certainly throughout the twentieth, Central American states adopted liberal ideas that prompted a variety of reforms in the name of modernization (Hale 2002). During this time, nation-states developed discourses of *mestizaje* as a tool of nation building, seeking to address “the indigenous question,” which presented indigenous cultures (and their status as “other” or different) as a hindrance to development and modernity. Fundamentally, the indigenous “problem” boiled down to the issue “that ‘the Indian question[ed] the very existence of the nation’ and did not allow it to be a unified entity (Sanz Jara 2009, 262)” (in Smith-Oka 2013, 33; See also Nelson 1999, 181). Ultimately, *mestizaje* discourses maintain “that indigenous culture is inevitably, almost naturally, destined to disappear, replaced by a hardy and unique hybrid national culture that draws sustenance from both indigenous and European traditions” (Hale 2002, 500). Thus, in everyday practice and policies, such discourses<sup>13</sup> tend to be quite discriminatory against indigenous cultures, valuing European and ladino identities above indigenous livelihoods (doing very little to alleviate the marginalization of these populations).

The twentieth century also saw an attempt at liberal “modernization,” which tended to aggravate the problems of discrimination and poverty issues already present in rural and indigenous communities. This endeavor is described by many as “a homogenizing political and cultural project” (Similox 2005),<sup>14</sup> which promoted assimilation by discouraging communal life and confiscating communal lands, and by encouraging monolingual education (in Spanish) and liberal economic policies, which stressed the importance of developing a market economy (Similox 2005; Stavenhagen 2002). Many of these “modernization” plans became policies of exclusion, the most notable being the “asymmetric distribution of land and the unequal access to the territorial property”<sup>15</sup> (Cayzac 2001, 39, translation. See also Casallas and Padilla 2004; Stavenhagen 2002), which led to the systematic impoverishment of not only indigenous populations, but also of the ladino rural populations, with over fifty percent of the population living below the poverty line. Indeed, some scholars suggest that this economic factor played one of the

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most significant roles in the uprisings against the government that began the Civil War (Cayzac 2001; Stavenhagen 2002).

In this way, *mestizaje* joins discourses of modernization to create a “narrative of progress” that was reinforced through political tracts, educational textbooks, and even novels (Stephenson 1999, 809). In most instances such progress was equated with the three basic themes of modernity: “the great divide between nature and culture (or society), the colonial difference between moderns and nonmoderns, and a unidirectional linear temporality that flows from past to future” (Blaser 2010, 4). This colonial divide is particularly important for the maintenance of current power imbalances and the implementation of state power.

Thus, despite the strong attempts at forming a single ethnic identity within the country and uniting the nation under a homogenous imagined community (Anderson 1983), the Guatemalan nation-state is still characterized as a broken body politic (Nelson 1999). This fact carried on after the civil war, and led many to fear that Guatemala’s next conflict would be a violent ethnic confrontation—especially with the rise of the Maya cultural rights movement (Hale 2006; Nelson 1999). Indeed, “the failure of Ladino elites to construct a cohesive national identity and constitute the majority of the population as citizens” led directly to the “ideological struggles surrounding national identity” (Grandin 2000) that characterize the subsequent rise of multiculturalism.

Debates surrounding nation-building and national identity were also relevant during the armed conflict that ravaged the country for over 30 years (1960-1996) and have had a profound influence on the Maya cultural rights movement. With over 200,000 people dead or disappeared—the majority of them indigenous—the atmosphere that pervaded was one of terror. Arising from an oppressive and monopolized power scheme, Guatemala entered a period characterized (even more than ever) as one of intolerance and exclusion, as well as by a lack of accountability, legal order, and respect for the law (Cayzac 2001). The war has been labeled genocidal<sup>16</sup> due to the brutal repression against indigenous communities, even when it was not solely indigenous peoples who were the subject of ruthless killings. Indeed, “the counterinsurgency discourse that justified killing off peoples ‘to the last seed’ targeted indigenous people, but primarily as they were seen as subversives and thus subsumed in the larger category of adversary to the health of the body politic” (Nelson 1999, 95). Thus, examining the vicious atrocities and aftermaths of the Civil War is crucial to understanding both the rise of a Pan-Maya identity and the cultural rights movement as well as understanding how indigenous peoples see themselves and are seen in relation to the Guatemalan body politic.

In recent years, the neoliberal era has brought about an age of NGO professionalization and multiculturalism, which have taken over the nation building project and are now charged with dealing with indigenous peoples (that is, in managing difference, including gender). While the end of the Civil War made it impossible to deny that indigenous peoples have been oppressed and discriminated against

since colonial times and that their socioeconomic marginalization continues today, the question of how to redress thousands of years of mistreatment is still spiritedly debated. While some disagree on how to carry out this compensation—with minority rights, government ministries, women's rights groups, land compensation, to name a few—others with more neoliberal agendas still dispute the very idea of collective rights.

Even when neoliberalism acknowledges difference (cultural, ethnic, linguistic) “the hierarchies upon which they rest—gender, race, and sexuality—remain firmly in place (Wade 2009, 217-8)” (in Radcliffe 2015, 324). What's more, the discourses of development and human rights need the modern-traditional dichotomy—with culture and indigeneity falling into the latter—just as much as the discourses of nation-building do (Merry 2003, 58). Moreover, the era of multiculturalism brought with it a new version of Foucault's (1997) panopticon in the form of the professionalized NGO (Hale 2002, 496). The governmentality exercised by development experts and NGOs is deeply tied to colonial legacies of racism and hegemony, something that deeply affects indigenous women. A recent study done by the National Survey of Living Conditions (Encovi, Encuesta Nacional de Condiciones de Vida), carried out by the National Institute for Statistics (INE, Instituto Nacional de Estadística) and the World Bank (MSPAS 2017), shows how indigenous women continue to be disproportionately impoverished and uneducated<sup>17</sup>. Beyond statistics, “the biopolitics of postcolonial intersectionality bring power relations down to the scale of the body, linking identities to bodies, thereby naturalizing routine exclusion” (Radcliffe 2015, 300). Radcliffe also describes how, in Ecuador, “*Indígenas*’ poverty, racialization and abjection in postcolonial hierarchies remained yet again outside the factors to be considered in policy that focused excessively on their bodies and reproduction” (2014, 327). She asserts that in the Ecuadorian case, neoliberal development has maintained both colonial racial categories and the sexualized conceptions of these, something that is also true of Guatemala (2014, 339).

While such sobering interpretations may appear as major setbacks, there is no denying the fact that the stage has changed dramatically in regards to both articulating and negotiating an indigenous identity, as well as negotiating with the state. Nelson reminds us that the rise of cultural identities can be used for political gain (to make demands, to gain power, etc.) by arguing that culture can be both a technique of governmentality used by the state and a strategy of resistance used by Maya activists (1999, 115). Similarly, Mario Blaser argues that activist movements involving indigenous groups can have powerful results: “Indigenous peoples’ agency and their alliances with wider movements themselves can have, and sometimes have had, transformative effects on the emergence of alternative structures of governance that are not rooted in globalizing development” (Blaser et al. 2004, 2). That is, while discourses of indigeneity, in all its formulations (as part of *mestizaje* or multiculturalism) can have very clear negative effects on indigenous identities and livelihoods, they can also have positive consequences for these same communities.

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*Indio Permitido*

As suggested in the previous section, the way government (both the state and NGOs) has managed difference has had a lasting effect on indigenous identities and subjectivities. While governmentality can certainly produce a complete erasure of identity (see section below), in the neoliberal context certain applications of this exercise of power can also retain Maya subjectivities while impeding significant social reform. Hale (2002) describes a form of governmentality he calls “neoliberal multiculturalism,” which conducts behavior and is enacted through non-state transnational organizations. In the case he describes, the normalizing effect of discipline and power-knowledge (menacingly) produced two types of indigenous subjects: the neoliberal Indian (or “*indio permitido*”<sup>18</sup>) and the dangerous, revolutionary Indian (or “*indio prohibido*”). By “endors[ing] some facets of multiculturalism, so long as it does not go too far” (2002, 490), multiculturalism shapes Mayan subjectivities and aims to “re-activat[e] the community as [an] effective agent in the reconstitution of the Indian citizen-subject” (2002, 496). In this way, through various power relations (or structures) indigenous bodies and behaviors are disciplined by professionalized NGOs, which Hale describes as the new panopticon (2002, 491; Foucault 1997).

The result is a recognition of difference that does not translate into tangible rights or privileges. Instead, the state and its allies work to conduct the habitus of civil society and indigenous culture in a way that instills techniques of the self that ensure non-radical, neoliberal subjects (Hale 2002, 496). As I discussed earlier, modernity and ladino identity are linked together: “speaking Spanish, wearing ‘western’ clothing, and enjoying access to advanced technology has historically defined ladinos as against the tradition, superstition, and backwardness of indigenous culture” (Nelson 1999, 78). Consequently, when indigenous peoples perform these “modern” behaviors they are seen as leaving their indigenous identity behind in favor of a ladino one. Alternatively, there are also people who choose to assert their indigenous identity while integrating themselves into ladino cultural spheres. In these cases, their indigenous identity is perceived by the ladino elites as non-threatening due to their endorsement (openly and implicitly) of neoliberal and multicultural ideals.

Many NGOs work with these ideas in mind, aiming to “modernize” the indigenous, impoverished, and oftentimes, rural populations they work with. In many instances this is seen as a socioeconomic question, where empowerment is achieved by economic integration and the adoption of westernized customs. The notion that *superación* is about class is also touched on by Nelson (1999)<sup>19</sup>, who suggests that for many, “Indians will be freed from their chains when they unite behind the battle fatigues of the guerrilla (for neoliberal ladinos, behind a three-piece Armani business suit)” (233).

During my work with the ITA and UVG scholarship programs, most of the workers and the majority of the students who were part of the program appeared to feel that a rise in class would erase the low status of their indigeneity. Take, for example, Carlos<sup>20</sup>, the first student to become part of the UVG program. Dressed in a sharp business suit, he was one of the few indigenous informants to openly speak about his

Mayan descent from the very start. His office, which was located in one of the many high-rises that make up Guatemala City's business district, provided a stark contrast to any of the stereotypes commonly held about Guatemala's indigenous populations. The building was extremely busy, with men and women in suits or company uniforms bustling about, and private security workers visible everywhere. Upon arriving there, I presented my ID at the street entrance, walked through a metal detector while a security guard wrote down my information, and then waited ten minutes for an elevator to arrive. After getting off the elevator on the tenth floor, another security guard, this time sitting at a desk in front of what clearly looked like a bullet-proof glass wall, wrote down my information. He buzzed the front desk so another security-guard-turned-receptionist could open the door and let me in to the waiting area. Once inside, I was pointed to a tiny sitting area in between two thick, bullet-proof doors where I was to wait. The security guard then informed Carlos through an intercom that I had arrived.

Such increased security has become commonplace in the elite business world of Guatemala City. With the rise in violent crimes and murders throughout the country<sup>21</sup>, privatized security has become yet another means by which the poor are segregated from the rich.<sup>22</sup> The consequences of such segregation only exacerbate the rising levels of income inequality in the country by making those who cannot afford private security vulnerable to extortions and theft at the hands of violent gangs and criminals. Moreover, security procedures such as the one in Carlos' high-rise mark a clear divide between those who belong inside the air-conditioned buildings and those who are left outside to face the harsh realities of the Guatemalan capital.

After a few more minutes of waiting for Carlos in this setting, he came to this second, also bullet-proof glass door and let me in to where the offices were. The elegant, double ceilinged hallway leading to his office was lined with professionally taken pictures of Mayan people in traditional clothing. As we sat down to begin our interview, a uniformed employee brought us glasses of water and asked if we would be needing anything else. We thanked the *señorita* for our water, he silenced his blackberry, turned down the air conditioning, and we began our interview. Carlos was an alumnus of one of the prestigious, private universities in Guatemala City. Unlike most of the people graduating from these institutions, however, he had grown up in an underprivileged family, in a rural area of the country. Like many of the indigenous students I interviewed, Carlos had been the recipient of a comprehensive scholarship meant to give bright, disadvantaged students the opportunity to attend college in the private universities of the City. His story is remarkable: not only was he the first student to have received the scholarship and attended UVG with it, he was now both a professor there and held a very successful job at one of Guatemala's largest and wealthiest corporations.

Coming from a rural area of the country and born of indigenous parents, his profile was markedly different from the rest of Guatemala City's top executives. Carlos recounted the challenges and pressure he felt growing up to quit school to work and start a family (both direct pressure from his family and

societal pressure from his peers). After having failed out of school and working as a carpenter for a couple of years, Carlos decided to go back to school. After winning first place in a national science championship, he was chosen by the scholarship program, JBG (a privately founded non-profit that had decided to expand by finding talented youth and providing scholarships for them). As he sat there in front of me dressed in a blue suit and tie, playing with his blackberry, it was hard to imagine him in any other context, much less a small rural town. To those who had introduced me to Carlos and the JBG and ITA programs, he was living proof of how development through education can break the cycle of poverty and backwardness associated with being indigenous. What these elite program directors and ladino university staff failed to acknowledge, however, was that—because of Guatemala’s extremely high levels of income inequality as well as racist attitudes<sup>23</sup>—Carlos was a very small exception, rather than the rule.

He repeatedly told me how his success, and that of other JBG students, was a question of attitude, emphasizing that the combination of high self-esteem and hard work he had developed during his years with the program had led to strong “self-empowerment.” Carlos insisted on distancing himself from those indigenous activists he saw as “*tajantes*” (stubborn or backward)<sup>24</sup>, and instead embodying the “modern businessman” (Hale 2002). On one occasion he denounced the notion of collective rights, and argued vehemently against the government providing special rights for minorities:

I don’t want, just because I am indigenous, I don’t want to be gifted a job or be gifted a house, or be gifted a piece of land, like, if my being indigenous is the reason you want to give me all these things, just because I am from that place, then you are cutting off my feet and my hands! I want to be recognized for my talent and my capacities and for what I am.<sup>25</sup>

In this way, by embodying the *indio permitido*<sup>26</sup> role Hale describes, Carlos was able to openly admit he was indigenous (notably, one of the few students who did so with ease and detail), and that he came from a rural background, while at the same time distancing himself from the perceived negative stereotypes of being associated with such identities. Moreover, distancing himself from the “extremists” of the Mayan rights movement served to promote the notion that development truly is the solution to the poverty and marginalization of Guatemala’s poor. What’s more, Carlos was also taking up the neoliberal discourse of the entrepreneurial individual who achieves success solely through his or her hard work.

### Erasure of Identity

While discourses of development have the potential to mold indigenous identities into neoliberally permissible categories (see above, Hale 2002), this is not always the case. Governmentality work can also come to stamp out—often through very violent and intimate ways—an indigenous livelihood and identification (though these are hard to define in and of themselves). In this sense, NGOs take up “the indigenous problem” in such a way that Guatemalan society’s ambivalence towards its indigenous

components leads to “the pervasive sense that Indians must be brought out of those spaces, assimilated into a larger community and national project” (Nelson 1999, 87). This means that on many occasions, the work of development NGOs pressures and urges people to abandon their indigenous identification altogether in favor of assimilating into the ladino majority. For many, including both NGO professionals and those they work with, development is seen as a linear project as indigenous, rural, and backwards at one end (the beginning) and ladino, modern, prosperous on the other (the goal). Moreover, keeping indigenous peoples at the beginning of this linear progress myth means that “as long as this catching-up process remained incomplete, Indians could be considered legitimate objects of intervention” (Blaser 2010, 50).

The strength of this push to erasure was clear in an interview I had with Rafael<sup>27</sup>, an indigenous entrepreneur who ran a very successful and profitable business in the city. While he was not a graduate of the ITA or JBG program, I had been introduced by two former JGB students who regarded him highly. Though his last name and accent attested to his being considered indigenous, I was still very careful about bringing up the subject of his ethnic identity<sup>28</sup>. When we finally touched the topic of his hometown in the highlands, I attempted to ask a question that would go into more depth about his background; however, his answer provided the background to how he had managed to establish his business in the city. Thinking I had been misunderstood, I rephrased the question to ask about his learning of Spanish (something that other informants had brought up when talking about being indigenous). Again, he avoided the question and proceeded to talk about more specific aspects of his commerce.

Though I was puzzled at the moment, understanding this as a desire to distance himself not only from an identification as “*tajante*” (Hale 2002), but from an indigenous identity altogether indicated more than a mere misunderstanding of a question (as I had originally thought). By blatantly refusing to even acknowledge my question, Rafael was in fact communicating that he did not wish to elaborate on the topic of his hometown or the language he spoke because they are both clear indications of, or ties to, being indigenous. In a country, and particularly a city, that juxtaposes indigenous and ladino negatively, it would make sense for people to want to distance themselves from being indigenous and thus from all the things that indigeneity can come to evoke. Moreover, there is also an influence from a “cultural discourse” (*discurso cultural*), which “associates the indigenous with a fixed series of ‘cultural’ attributes and supposes that when these attributes fade or change, indigenous identity decreases accordingly” (2004)<sup>29</sup>.

Rafael and many of the other students’ hesitation to identify as indigenous can be interpreted first, as part of this cultural discourse that suggests economic success and urban life as incompatible with indigeneity. Second, it can also be considered as an aversion to being associated with the stigmas related to being a minority in Guatemala, exemplifying how the “subtle assumption of superiority permeates—not automatically, but as strong, diffuse propensities and patterns—the entire range of life experiences” (Hale



2006). It is no surprise then, that with the added pressure of NGOs' discourses and technologies of development—explicitly stating that they aim to improve and train (*capacitar*) those who are seen as inferior, and producing the practices it deems necessary to achieve such an improvement—the desire to leave an indigenous identity behind intensifies.

*“Nosotras no somos castellanos, pero con la ayuda de GuateAyuda lo estamos logrando”*

I was sitting inside a darkened, small meeting room in a village close to Tecpán, Guatemala. Magdalena<sup>30</sup>, the woman I was speaking to, had just completed the first phase in a two-part women's empowerment program run by the Guatemalan NGO GuateAyuda<sup>31</sup> and we were celebrating her graduation (along with nine other women). We had left the city early in the morning, and after stopping for breakfast in Tecpán we met up at the local office with the rest of the team's technicians and Tecpan's priest. We followed GuateAyuda's pickup truck through the unpaved, bumpy road, eventually arriving at the village community room, amid breathtaking views of the surrounding mountains. During our journey up, the director and co-founder of the program, Esteban<sup>32</sup>, had been explaining to me how the ceremony was the culmination of a year and a half of *capacitación* or “training”<sup>33</sup> as well as distancing GuateAyuda from the various other NGOs that worked in the same village (as evidenced by the many posters and flyers on the road advertising a myriad of development agencies around the area).

During multiple occasions both volunteers and workers told me that the organization's goals were “to leave the women's culture intact.” Esteban said that this meant that “we don't want to influence the women's language or dress or really their culture.” For this reason, most of the *capacitación* the women got was taught in their native languages, in their own villages. It was interesting, however, that he had specifically mentioned language and dress as the main component of women's culture and did not consider how *habitus*, household organization, or any other component of daily life could be considered a part of culture. The association's separation between what they perceived as “secular” hygiene and nutrition instruction and the racialized indigenous bodies they aimed to work with was not clear in real life, however. That is, there was no way to talk about these topics (hygiene, nutrition, and childcare) without touching on cultural traditions.

Moreover, when I asked who was able to participate in the program, or who counted as a “*socia*,” a businesslike term used to describe the women that chose to work with GuateAyuda, I was told it was “mothers—or future mothers!” Thus exemplifying again the way indigenous women's bodies are both gendered and radicalized as they are chosen to be the targets of elite development organizations. In this case the indigenous maternal body was seen as faulty and as such “needing help” or improvement. For it was on the body of the mother, “*la mujer encinta*” (the pregnant woman), and of the mother's children that the organization focused. A woman who was not a mother, or a future mother, was not even considered as existing by the program. In addition, there was also a patriarchal relationship between the organization itself and the “*socias*” (business partners) apparent in the language with which the women

expressed their fear of “graduating” from the first phase of the program and being abandoned. More specifically, however, it was clear in the (often condescending) way the organization’s technicians and volunteers regarded and spoke of these women.

This is emblematic of the larger hegemonic system within the country, which places indigenous women at the lowest rung of society. Moreover, it also reinforces the idea that in order to *superarse*, even in the domestic realm, there needs to be an adoption of white, western customs and values. Furthermore, the structuring of the program seems to suggest that, in order to achieve economic advancement and independence, women must first be taught how to become “*castellanas*.” This implied correlation—perhaps even causation—between household and bodily improvement and economic growth once again reinforces the notion of indigenous inferiority and victim-blaming. What’s more, it also reinforces the patriarchal belief that women’s value and productivity lies merely in her household work and reproductive body (an ironic fact considering that the organization strictly avoided any topics regarding reproductive and sexual health).

### **The “Third Space”; Forming Communities and Finding Resistance at the Interstices**

The struggle to mediate and define an indigenous identity encompasses both the long history of colonialism and marginalization, and the way that *indigenous* is associated with poverty, backwardness, and inferiority, especially for those coming from rural areas of the country—which has similar connotations of “underdevelopment” and “traditional.” These associations are necessary in order to present ladinos and the state as “developed” and “modern,” thus creating a codependent relationship between feminized indigenous tradition and masculine ladino modernity. Despite these negative and neo-colonial connotations ascribed to indigeneity, culture can also provide a “third space” beyond the binomial of oppressor and oppressed (Hale 1997; Bhabha 1990; Nelson 1999; Radcliffe 2015, 302). In such a way, Hale reminds us, “the term ‘subversion’ sheds its former meaning of ‘conspiring against the system’ and refers instead to the art of working at the interstices, finding the inevitable cracks and contradictions in the oppressor’s identity, discourse, or institutional practice, and using them to the subaltern’s advantage” (1997, 581).

Bhabha’s original conception of the term is tied to representational strategies of hybridity, where he analyzed “hybridization as subversion of authority in a dialogical situation of colonialism” (Wolf 2000, 133; Bhabha 1990). For Bhabha, understanding the power relations at play in postcolonial contexts makes evident an “in-between space” of hybridity between the elite and the subaltern “other” because these categories are continually influenced by each other (Bhabha 1990). Thus, the possibility for the renegotiation of these oppositional and seemingly binary categories exists in this third space of hybridity. Building on this, Wolf establishes that “the space in-between [...] exists in everyday life [and] It is in this everyday encounter that new meaning can be produced” (2000, 137). In her analysis she adds to Bhabha’s understanding of the “third space” by drawing from feminist theory<sup>34</sup> to argue away from a “clash of

civilizations” and into one of intertext (in the sense of a semiotic transformation), which consciously creates an in-between space. By bringing together Bhabha with feminist and linguistic theory, Wolf demonstrates how this concept of the “third space” remains useful for ethnographers (and translators), in order to conceptualize the ways in which subalterns can find spaces beyond the damaging binaries of oppressor and oppressed—of ladino and indigenous. More importantly, she shows how this space contains the potential for an intervention of hegemonic dominance (2000, 140).

For Hale, the “third space” (1997) can be a transformed way of “doing politics” such that subversion exists outside of the elite and subaltern categories in what he cites as a space of “multidimensional political subjectivity” (Bhabha 1990 in Hale 1997, 581). For him, this space-in-between (the interstices) contains possibilities for new strategies and tactics that subaltern groups can use to challenge hegemonic power and assert their subjectivities (Hale 1997). Hale applies this to Guatemala, citing how Maya cultural activists “have found ways to hack out<sup>35</sup> a space within the national political arena, subverting the traditional-modern dichotomy that has always been used against them, and at the same time helping to dispel the impression that they are engaged in radical, frontal opposition to ‘the system’” (1997, 281; Nelson 1999). Taking all of this into consideration, here I take the “third space” to be both material and discursive, located at the interstices of development such that the uneven power relations between NGOs and the subjects they discipline create the possibility for subversion and resistance. This space can take the form of challenging elite discourses and practices as well as producing certain bodily habits<sup>36</sup>, both of which help in asserting indigenous subjectivities, producing indigenous knowledge and forming meaningful subaltern communities. Hale (1997) and Wolf (2000) inform this framework by showing how subalterns can find productive and political ways to challenge hegemonic structures<sup>37</sup> and damaging conceptions of indigeneity from within the political and socioeconomic system by asserting politicized identities.

In this section I analyze how this “space-in-between” applies to my own work in Guatemala. I show how certain articulations of identity bring people together in order to subvert the dichotomies between modern/traditional, oppressor/oppressed, ladino/Indian, and so challenge power inequalities. This space of resistance is one where the system itself is not changed in a revolutionary manner, but rather where identity is used strategically to undermine the authority of those in power. More importantly, identity and culture are used to bring people together into meaningful communities where subalterns come together with a common cause: it can be to actively resist discriminatory power, as in the case of Maya activists, or it can be in smaller ways, in order to improve the lives of those who have previously fallen into a category of non-agentive “other” in need of development. By illustrating how this happens in each of the three ethnographic works I am analyzing as well as in my own work, I demonstrate why the analytical frames of the *indio permitido* and of an erasure of identity cannot fully explain what is occurring when development projects attempt to police and discipline indigenous women and youth.

In my own research, I was able to witness this process of discovering the “third space” through my interviews with Carmen<sup>38</sup>—a graduate of ITA’s development program and someone who now works for an NGO herself. During one of our interviews, she detailed the significance of both “hacking” her identity as a rural indigenous student and of forming a supportive community that brought new meaning to development work. She began by detailing the shame she felt about her socioeconomic background when she came to the city to join the ITA program, and the challenges of joining a private university in the city.

Carmen recounted how, upon first arriving at the Catholic residency where they housed scholarship students, she was embarrassed to realize that her background was completely different from the “modern” ladinos she was now living with. She recounted how being told to eat with a fork and a knife, and with bread instead of tortillas made her feel uncomfortable. Even the coffee, her favorite drink, tasted different, sweeter, making her realize that she was not “like the other students.” Moreover, she recounted how her economic position set her apart, as she was not someone who could spend Q120 (\$15) on a meal at *Saúl*<sup>39</sup>, the trendy café where other students would go for group meetings and study sessions. Carmen confided that she even felt ashamed that her clothing was not from *Zara*<sup>40</sup> or other Westernized luxury stores.

The pressure of becoming “*superada*” in these two forms, of joining the elite socioeconomic world of UFM (Universidad Francisco Marroquín) and the sphere of higher education in a private university are two things that ended up manifesting themselves in very real physical illness for Carmen. After a particularly bad and painful episode that landed her in the hospital<sup>41</sup>, Carmen told me, she realized how absurd her feelings were. By recognizing—and then refusing—her shame and her feelings of being “less than” (that is, needing to *superarse*) the other students at UFM, she came to see herself as powerful and to understand her role in “constructing a city of honorable and responsible people (*personas dignas y responsables*),” the university’s original motto. She had taken this neoliberal phrase<sup>42</sup>, understanding it to be “promoting a philosophy of life that is egocentric” and focused on the neoliberal individual, and given it her own meaning. For Carmen, this motto encouraged her to value her own worth and to acknowledge her privileged position by helping others who, like herself, had been born into structural poverty and lack of education. Another student from the same program summarizes this process of becoming proud of their background and of rearticulating notions about their identity perfectly, explaining how “On the way, one also changes certain mental structures and beliefs, transforming certain paradigms.”<sup>43</sup> She recounted how overcoming the negative stereotypes surrounding her “story” had helped her become a confident public speaker, and now she gave encouraging talks (“*pláticas*”) to other students to encourage them to find the self-confidence that she did.

Another student also spoke of breaking these “mental structures and beliefs” by changing the paradigm that structures relationships between ladinos and *indios* through eye contact. My experience with this subject began not with one of the students in the programs, but rather with a member of the UVG’s (Universidad del Valle de Guatemala) board of directors. During one of our meetings she said something

that at the time I wrote off as nothing more than a stereotype, but later became one of the most interesting and influential aspects of our interview. During a story about a “*superada*” indigenous student at the Altiplano campus, she mentioned how “indigenous people don’t really look you in the eye, they sort of speak down [at this she lowered her head and looked away] like this,” citing how this pattern was changing in young women thanks to UVG’s education (for more on eye contact, see Hale 2002, 515). Though at the time I ignored this comment and focused on other aspects of her story, I was reminded about the power-laden implications of eye contact in further occasions. For example—while very few of those I worked with seemed particularly averse to eye contact, and in fact were quite talented at public speaking (many of them citing how they now gave “*pláticas*” at universities or business conferences)—the topic did come up in one conversation with Carlos, who told me the following story:

When I came to Guatemala for the first time, I interviewed with Isabel, who had already given me a scholarship, but it was the first day I came to Guatemala City in order to meet her. That's where I was going to officially receive the scholarship, and you know—Doña Isabel was sitting on this side, and I went in and what I did was, I was like [imitates a meek-sounding tone, eyes are downcast] ‘Look, Doña Isabel, thank you, for the opportunity, the truth is that I am very happy,’ and I never looked into her eyes. And that was a very important lesson I learned from her. Until she, at that meeting, told me: [*slaps table once, enthusiastically*] ‘Stop, Carlos, do you owe me something?’ ‘No’. ‘Then why the hell do you not look me in the eye’. And that's a... it's a behavioral factor that you bring from home you see, when one is—especially among the indigenous populations, the famous beatings right, so beware if you look your grandfather in the eye! Or even your dad, because that's like... almost that, it's a challenging right, like you get there and, [imitates a meek-sounding tone] ‘goodnight’ and lower your head. And one comes with these behavioral patterns, right.<sup>44</sup>

Anecdotes like these exemplify the way that *superación* is intimately tied to the body. For Cordelia and Carlos, the state of being *superado* is not relegated solely to economic prosperity or an academic degree. Rather, there is also an implied change in bodily practices; in this case eye contact, but also in cases such as GuateAyuda’s personal hygiene training. Since the discourses of *superación* emerge from unequal power relations, its disciplining nature is utilized by those in power to control and curtail difference, starting with the body. First, *superación* enacts power differentials because it produces the hierarchical idea of inferior objects in need of improvement (usually indigenous, poor, and female) and reaffirms those in the higher position of force relations, the superior subjects who manage this path to improvement (usually ladino, wealthy, and male). Second, *superación* limits difference by dictating which forms of cultural alterity are acceptable and which are not. That is, it conditions people into conducting themselves

in ways that do not question the existing capitalist power structure or disrupt elite notions of indigenous inferiority. In this way, the management of the body is a strategy of the larger socioeconomic and political management of a population (Foucault 1977, 25-27).

Additionally, Carlos and the others are exemplifying (and even describing) here Bourdieu's notion that bodily practice—arising directly from habitus—reinforces belief, identity, and domination. That is, they exemplify his argument that “relations to the body are charged with [...] relations to other people, time and the world” (Bourdieu 1977, 70). In this case, eye contact serves to “reinforce belief in the prevailing system of classification by making it appear grounded in [a] reality” (1977, 71), where Europeanized ladinos are considered naturally superior. Moreover, unspoken in these comments about bodily hexis is the notion of racial domination and Guatemala's long history of indigenous subjugation both by physically and psychologically violent means.

For this reason, the fact that the students had become proficient public speakers and looked people in the eye was taken to mean that they had overcome (*superado*) their inferior or antiquated behavioral patterns. While this belief may have arisen out of the policing power of *superación*, it also shows how powerful it can be to break these behavioral molds. As Carmen expressed, being part of this development program had transformed certain paradigms in her life, the first of which being that as an indigenous woman she is submissive. For these students, eye contact can be seen as the first step towards being treated like equals and believing themselves to be on par with other citizens, regardless of socioeconomic background or ethnicity, overcoming the negative connotations associated with being indigenous and rural. Carmen and Carlos' stories can be interpreted both as “*indios permitidos*” (or even as *ladinoized* individuals) and also as examples of people challenging colonial stereotypes and problematizing ladino identities<sup>45</sup>.

These are two very distinct approaches that nevertheless reveal important aspects of governmentality in development work, making it important to analyze what discourses of development produce in their entirety. That is, understanding that the same elements of discipline can have different results amongst individuals: creating both *Indios Permitidos* and “third spaces,” as well as completely erasing indigenous subjectivities. Deconstructing *superación* through a Foucauldian lens makes evident that there are two types of government: self-government, and government enacted by state and non-state apparatuses. Both of these work to extend and reaffirm current power inequalities (Foucault 1977, 78). NGOs manage conduct through both of these means, first by virtue of being “the new panopticon” and making westernized ladino lifestyles the ideal that people should aspire to live by (but can never truly attain) (Hale 2002, 491). Second, NGOs manage indigenous bodies and populations by explicitly teaching their target populations how they should behave and perform their identities and making sure these instructions are followed (through systems of punishment or rewards). For example, in the case of the students, one of the program managers explained how etiquette classes were a crucial aspect of the program so that

students could adopt behaviors that were more in line with the elite sensibilities of those attending the university.

These exercises of power, however, cannot be expected to produce the same type of docile bodies in the subjects of development. Indeed, the “double mode[,] that of binary division and branding” that Foucault describes accounts for the types of discourses surrounding *superación*, but not the types of subjects produced (1977, 199). For this reason, it is important to analyze the spaces of hybridity and resistance that are created in relation to NGOs and development. This “third space” became evident in my own research, when, despite the heavy policing of these students during their participation in the scholarship programs, in many instances they reflected upon their journey through development as a process of self-discovery and identification—a process that really made them question and consider not only their distinct background, but also their privileged position after having graduated from UFM and UVG.

As part of this self-discovery and articulation of her own indigenous background, Carmen had joined CUE<sup>46</sup> (a development program aimed to “empower” indigenous women in *La Limonada*, one of Guatemala City’s poorest and most dangerous zones<sup>47</sup>), and now worked at the development agency, bringing other women into this space of resistance. That is, she took a stand against being labeled as inferior and against being molded into a neoliberal businesswoman: she refused to work for the private sector, choosing instead to work somewhere where her talents can help others. Thus, despite the problems with development NGOs, they cannot be seen merely as “bad.” This would be oversimplifying, ignoring the complex ways in which development joins nationalism, race, and class in the formation of intricate identities. By participating in this development program, Carmen and her classmates managed to form a community of solidarity.

Moreover, she was changing the trend where, as I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, it is primarily foreigners and the elite who work in development. As Radcliffe (2015) suggests, such transformations open up space for development work that does not reinforce current inequalities, but rather works to fight against them. Not only was Carmen now actively working to “improve” the lives of other indigenous women by helping them take development into their own hands, but she also told me the story of how the students from the scholarship program worked together to form a supportive community for themselves.

After a particularly bad tropical storm during Guatemala’s rainy winter, one of the student’s childhood homes had collapsed. Immediately, the other students in the program came together and pooled their already limited stipends (limited because many of them were already sending most of it back home every month) and giving this young man’s family enough money to rebuild his childhood home. The irony, that the poorest students of the university would contribute their scarce income to this cause when the majority of UFM’s students come from the wealthiest families in the country, demonstrates the way that this program brought people together in a powerful community—a space that resists hegemonic power through solidarity.

I argue that this type of community formation, even though it is arising from the “anti-political” machine that is development (Ferguson 1990; See also Li 2007), is still political. For me, it is a very clear sign of resistance—resistance to neoliberal values of the university, resistance to the larger society that has abandoned them to structural poverty, and resistance against the very hegemony of such an elite institution. While being cautious, and understanding that development can also end in an erasure of indigeneity or in “*indios permitidos*,” it is important to remember that identities can be continually articulated to change what they mean and no identification is truly binomial or bound (Nelson 1999). The acts of these students coming together to raise funds for a fellow classmate, to recruit their neighbors and cousins to join these programs, and to take development into their own hands illuminate a way to view these students in their agentic capacity, carving out their own subjectivities in a hostile environment.

In these situations, they are by no means the “easily duped” or passive receivers of a problematic development program, but rather they are central actors in their own quest to create a better life for themselves, their families, and their communities. In these instances, the categories of *indios permitidos*, or assimilated Indians,<sup>48</sup> cannot explain why or how students such as Carmen contested the selfish, individualizing nature of a school founded after the Austrian School of Economics. It cannot account for the way Carmen found dignity in her background despite being subject to etiquette classes that sought to erase her habitus as a rural, “backwards” student. It *can* be explained in terms of a semiotic and political transformation that allowed her to assert her own subjectivity outside of this problematic *india permitidia/asimilada* dichotomy and within the boundaries of the “third space.”

### Conclusions

Understanding how Guatemala has managed difference throughout history reveals the extent to which (male) ladino elites are preoccupied with controlling indigeneity (Smith-Oka 2013; Nelson 1999). While seemingly ignoring cultural difference (and denying indigenous peoples full rights and citizenship), this elite desire to form a cohesive nation-state has actually had the opposite effect: an obsession with controlling indigenous identities. Decades of assimilationist policies (in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century) and the subsequent multicultural policies have left behind significant consequences for how being indigenous is conceived and policed. Part of this process has involved the “NGOization” of development (Cody 2009; Radcliffe 2015), which brought about a depoliticization of problems that are inherently political (Ferguson 1990). This process involves creating a discourse surrounding development that treats indigenous peoples as the “other” within the nation, as those who are traditional and backwards, while at the same time presenting itself as the harbinger of modernity. In this way, development can negatively affect indigeneity in ways that can both erase strong articulations of Mayan identities and police those that are left in ways that depoliticize<sup>49</sup> their grievances and conform them to multicultural principles.



I use *superación* to account for both the discourses of indigenous inferiority as well as the disciplining of indigenous habitus by NGOs. The term is useful in its ability to encompass the complexities of development: the historically nuanced way elites conceptualize indigenous peoples “as the objects of debates, not as debating subjects;” the overt ways indigenous peoples are disciplined; and the types of subjects that are produced both as discursive categories and in praxis (Blaser 2010, 102; Smith-Oka 2013). This latter is extremely important, for it distinguishes between the *intended* subjects, indigenous peoples who *superado* their backwards ethnic associations, and the *produced* subjects, which cannot be described as easily.

As such, an analysis of *superación* necessitates an interpretive framework that can account for this diversity of subjects. That is, a model that includes the erasure of identity, the creation of “*indios permitidos*,” and the space-in-between (Bhabha 1990; Hale 1997; Wolf 2000). Thus, analyzing development work merely as apolitical or problematic may obscure other processes occurring around humanitarianism and development. Analyzing development with a fluidarity (Nelson 1999) approach—that is, outside dichotomies such as political-apolitical, oppressor-oppressed, nation-state-civil society, etc.—can make visible the ways in which governmentality work produces a “third space” where subaltern can “work at the interstices” (Bhabha 1990 in Hale 1997 and in Radcliffe 2015). While the examples that I have provided do support the notion that governmentality both effaces indigenous identities and produces “*indios permitidos*” (permitted Indians), they also support the idea that development has other, positive effects. In the case of the ITA and JBG students, these programs provided not only communities of solidarity, but were also a way for these students to gain agency, and to take their futures into their own hands.

Consequently, what this analysis exemplifies is how techniques of disciplinary power (as a form of governmentality tied to *superación*) are not just top-down exercises of power, but rather they are reworked at every level, taken up in diverse ways by different people. In some cases, this process can lead to the formation of agentive subjects—as opposed to passive subjects or even objects. This fact opens up the complex process of *superación* to practices that end up contesting the very elite power that sought to discipline subaltern subjectivities. In these occasions, the techniques of the self that are taught by NGOs become useful to indigenous peoples in asserting their rights and responsibilities as citizens; in crafting subversive responses to the hegemonic world order that casts them as inferior; and finally, in establishing a community of solidarity among other subjects of development. For these reasons, I argue that once development is co-opted by subalterns themselves to assert and articulate Maya identities, then it is likely that there will be many more examples of communities working in the “third space” against hegemonic power, and less “*indios permitidos*.”

Thus, despite valid criticisms that can be made of the development programs discussed in this article, it is important to remember that the situation of the country in general is weak and the structural issues facing

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most of Guatemala's (and Latin America's) youth are overwhelming (see also Smith-Oka 2013, 190). For this reason, the programs stand out for their ability to provide an opportunity for bright, talented students to take matters into their own hands and substantially increase their agency. In the end, the students are the ones who craft their own road towards *superación* and give the term a whole new meaning. Their resilience in the face of what can be an overwhelming exercise of governmentality in *superación* suggests this form of power, while it may be ubiquitous or inescapable, does not always produce docile bodies. For many subjects of development, the power and means gained from having been a part of these programs outweigh any negative connotations that, in analyzing the biopolitics at work behind these programs, are ascribed to the condition of being *superado*.

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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>While *superación* (as a noun) and *superarse* (as a reflexive verb) are hard to translate outright, they connote an idea of both betterment and of overcoming—essentially, overcoming a combination of indigenous, rural, and impoverished identity. In a sense, these terms imply the following: first, rising above an identity that is seen as "lacking," and second, an improvement of the overall quality or esteem of a person. Indeed, Hale writes that while "'superarse' is a tricky verb, whose meaning changes with context [...] If the reference is to an Indian, [...] the effort to 'better oneself' is apt to take on an additional charge. In the traditional ladino mindset, an Indian could not substantively 'better himself' without becoming less Indian" (Hale 2006, 238).

<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* non-indigenous and for the most part male.

<sup>3</sup>As Li (2007) reminds us, "planned development is premised upon the improbability of the 'target group' [and] also posits a boundary that clearly separates those who need to be developed from those who will do the developing" (339).

<sup>4</sup> Related to white collar work as opposed to manual labor.

<sup>5</sup>For an elaboration of the usage of these Foucauldian terms, see below.

<sup>6</sup> Which I also call the erasure of indigenous identity.

<sup>7</sup>This fieldwork was part of an undergraduate senior thesis project, funded by the Institute for Scholarship in the Liberal Arts at the University of Notre Dame, which took place in the summer of 2013. This research is supplemented by a second summer of research during the summer of 2015 thanks to a grant from the Tinker Foundation as well as my own lived experiences as a Guatemalan. These two fieldwork periods generated over 30 interviews, the ones presented here were chosen for the way the words of those participating in these development programs captured the tensions, relations, and resistance I theorize about.

<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed clarification of the term, please see intro section, endnote 1.

<sup>9</sup> "Generally speaking, all the authorities exercising individual control function according to a double mode; that of binary division and branding (mad/sane; dangerous/harmless; normal/abnormal); and that of coercive assignment, of differential distribution (who he is; where he must be; how he is to be characterized; how he is to be recognized; how a constant surveillance is to be exercised over him in an individual way, etc.)" (Foucault 1997, 199).

<sup>10</sup> The word *capacitación* is not exactly like training, and carries a connotation of development, especially or preparing oneself to improve. For a more detailed explanation see section on Erasure of Identity.

<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that this is a rather restrained notion of "freedom" to act, as it must always be in accordance with the structuring structures already in place.

<sup>12</sup> That is, the field of possible discourse, which shapes what people think and say by making it appear as self-evident (Bourdieu 1977).

<sup>13</sup> Not just *mestizaje*, but also *indigenismo*, the political and cultural movement that arose in the twentieth century as a response to such qualms about the divided nation. It was contradictory in that it sought to elevate or defend indigenous cultures, but was carried out by non-indigenous elites in often paternalistic and racist ways (see also Smith-Oka 2013, 31-33).

<sup>14</sup> "un proyecto político y cultural homogenizador."

<sup>15</sup> "La marginación de importantes sectores de la población empieza por una repartición asimétrica de la tierra y el desigual acceso a la propiedad territorial."

<sup>16</sup> A term that is still widely and vehemently debated both in the public spheres (from newspaper articles and television shows to governmental press releases) as well as in the private domain (such as Facebook, Whatsapp groups, and everyday conversations).

<sup>17</sup> From "Siete datos que debes saber para debatir sobre Guatemala" (or "Seven Facts You Need to Know to Debate About Guatemala") in the independent newspaper *Nómada*.

<sup>18</sup> While Hale and Millamán have fine-tuned the term (Hale and Millamán 2006), they acknowledge that it is a phrase first used by Rivera Cusicanqui: reminding us that, "the phrase 'indio permitido' names a sociopolitical category, not the characteristics of anyone in particular. We borrow the phrase from Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, who uttered it spontaneously, in exasperation, during a workshop on cultural rights and democratization in Latin America" (Hale 2004, 17).

<sup>19</sup> Drawing on C. Smith (1991).

<sup>20</sup> Pseudonym.

<sup>21</sup> Both in part of the police and army as well as in the growing violent threat presented by gangs and drug cartels. The newspaper *Prensa Libre* reported that there were 5,259 homicides in 2013 alone (from Lara, Julio F. “El 2013 cerró con 2,259 homicidios,” in *Prensa Libre*, Guatemala, January 2, 2014), a number that surely does not represent the cases of people who disappeared at the hands of cartels, or as victims of police corruption.

<sup>22</sup> Earlier in 2015, *Prensa Libre* reported that there are 128 legal private security firms and over 30 clandestine ones (Lemus 2015). Between them, they employ over 88,000 private security agents (police records show that only 28,000 of these are legally registered with the National Police, or PNC).

<sup>23</sup> See Hale 2002, 2004; Nelson 1999.

<sup>24</sup> A word with strong negative connotations, it is usually utilized to describe people who are stubborn in an extremist way, closed to any form of negotiation.

<sup>25</sup> “Yo no quiero que a mí, por ser indígena me puedan regalar un trabajo, o que me puedan regalar una casa, o que me puedan regalar un pedazo de tierra pues, ósea si por indígena me estas queriendo dar eso solo porque yo soy de esa parte, me estas cortando los pies y las manos pues! Yo quiero que me reconozcas por mi talento, por mi capacidad y por lo que yo soy.”

<sup>26</sup> That is, be a non-radical, neoliberal subject that still retained his identity as someone who grew up in a rural, indigenous environment.

<sup>27</sup> Pseudonym.

<sup>28</sup> I had been warned by a fellow Guatemalan anthropologist that this could be a source of discomfort for people who might feel the negative connotations of being indigenous.

<sup>29</sup> This “Asocio lo indígena con una serie fija de atributos ‘culturales’ y supone que cuando estos atributos se desvanecen o cambian, la identidad indígena disminuye en consecuencia,” is my translation.

<sup>30</sup> Pseudonyms.

<sup>31</sup> GuateAyuda, an NGO aimed at providing nutrition information and microloans to indigenous women in rural areas.

<sup>32</sup> Pseudonym.

<sup>33</sup> The word *capacitación* is not exactly like training, and carries a connotation of development, especially or preparing oneself to improve. Upon asking a couple of people to define what *capacitación* meant to them, one of them explained that it was meant “to overcome (*superar*) educational differences...in education, or technical, like they can’t even cook or sew” (“para superar diferencias educativas... de educación técnicas, que no pueden ni cocinar ni coser algo”). Usually *capacitación* is used in either development or business training settings.

<sup>34</sup> Feminists have taken up this concept of the “third space” in order to locate spaces beyond the male-female dualism.

<sup>35</sup> In reference to Nelson’s metaphor of the “Maya hacker” (1999).

<sup>36</sup> Bodily habits that are not prescribed by the NGOs per se, but that were reformulated and reworked in assertive, bold, or confident manners to support indigenous subjectivities, indigenous knowledge, or the formation of meaningful subaltern communities. For example, a person’s politically conscious decision to use *traje* or Mayan greetings.

<sup>37</sup> Here, I take “structures” to be influenced by Foucault and Bourdieu’s notions of the unconscious apparatus that guides habitus and the behavior of the social body.

<sup>38</sup> Pseudonym.

<sup>39</sup> A chain of Cafés (as well as men’s high fashion and suits boutique) throughout the City. They describe themselves as “combining European avant-garde with a solid Latin-American identity” (from <http://www.saulemendez.com/site/es/gastronomia.html>). While they have dishes inspired by traditional Guatemalan cuisine, they are best known for their crepes and passion for Nutella. Their all-male staff’s uniforms as well as their upholstery frequently have “traditional” Mayan cloth sewn on.

<sup>40</sup> Spanish clothing, shoes, and accessories chain, located in the elite shopping centers of the city, it models its clothing after European runway fashion.

<sup>41</sup> She exemplifies the ways in which governmentality work negatively affects those employed in very powerful, intimate, and bodily ways. To respect her privacy, I do not detail her illness, but after consulting various doctors, she realized that it was caused by stress.

<sup>42</sup> Neoliberal because it was inspired by libertarian, Austrian School of Economics principles. With auditoriums and conference rooms named after figures such as Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek, and where the entire front of an academic building is devoted to a statue of Ayn Rand's *Atlas Shrugged*. A school of philosophy and economics that continues to ignore the country's alarming growth of income inequality, promoting instead a linear, modernist path towards "development" (Blaser 2010).

<sup>43</sup> "Uno en el camino también va cambiando ciertas estructuras mentales y creencias, se van transformando ciertos paradigmas."

<sup>44</sup> "Cuando yo vine a Guatemala, la primera vez que yo me entrevisté con doña Isabel Gutierrez, ya me habían dado la beca, pero fue el primer día que yo vine a Guatemala a conocerla. Que es donde me iban a entregar oficialmente la beca, yo sabe como- Doña Isabel estaba sentada en este lado, y yo entraba y [blackberry vibrates] eh, y yo lo que hacía era, eh, hágase cuenta que es Doña Isabel, yo [imitates a meek-sounding tone], eyes are downcast] 'mire doña Isabel, muchísimas gracias, por, por la oportunidad, la verdad es que yo estoy muy feliz,' y yo nunca le miraba a los ojos. Y esa fue una lección muy importante que yo aprendí con ella. Hasta que ella, en esa misma reunión me dijo: [slaps table once, enthusiastically] 'Momento Carlos, vos me debes algo?' 'no'. 'Entonces porque chingados no me miras a los ojos'. Y eso es un- es una factor conductual que uno trae desde su casa vea, Cuando uno es- sobre todo en la población indígena, el famoso mento verda, usted cuidado que le vea a los ojos a su abuelo. O incluso al papá, porque eso es como.. Casi que le esta, lo esta retando verda, uno es como llega, [imitates a meek-sounding tone] 'buenas noches' y agacha la cabeza. Y uno trae esos patrones conductuales verda."

<sup>45</sup> Carlos often joked that he was an interesting candidate for many interviews as he broke down the stereotype of the traditional CEO of a company as white and from an elite Guatemalan family.

<sup>46</sup> Pseudonym.

<sup>47</sup> By teaching them to upcycle materials into crafts that they could later sell for cash.

<sup>48</sup> That is, whose indigenous identities have been effaced and they can now "pass" as ladino.

<sup>49</sup> In the sense that these problems are labeled "economic," "cultural," and "social" woes rather than as the result of a long-standing oligarchic and now neoliberal regime that favors only a few. That is, it does not call for political changes like land or labor reforms or constitutional amendments that favor the majority of Guatemalans.