

Second Invasion

Land Grabs, Plantation Economy, and Forced Labor

One June morning in 2012, I was invited to join community leaders who would be hosting two journalists to visit the river in Santa Avelina, which had begun to flood because of Enel's building of a diversion dam. As we arrived at the edge of the flooded river, the water was visibly cloudy and muddy. Don Jose said the river had begun to get polluted about fifteen days prior and pointed to some crops that were drowned underwater: "Look at all the crops, all the crops are being killed" (by Enel). As we started to go downhill and reached the elevated river next to the diversion dam, the *alcalde indígena* Concepción Santay Gómez explained the impact that the flooding of the river in Santa Avelina had had:

This path has existed for thousands of years ever since the first grandfathers and grandmothers settled here in the region, and we are genuinely concerned about what is happening because this project [Palo Viejo] will not bring benefits to the Indigenous communities of Cotzal, and the only ones who will benefit are the Enel company, the Finca San Francisco, the Brols, because they will have [millions] in profit. . . . This land was stripped from the hands of our grandfathers and grandmothers in the year 1902 . . . when the Brols came here to the Ixil Region.

As don Concepción talked, he pointed to the people standing next to the diversion dam a short distance from us, who turned out to be security and the owner of the finca, Pedro Brol Cortinas (the grandson of the first Pedro Brol), who was observing the infrastructure. Don Concepción went on to discuss more environmental impacts that the Palo Viejo hydroelectric construction had caused, such as the blowing up of a hill that had unleashed bats with rabies that bit livestock, and the flooding of the river where animals such as armadillos, deer, and tepesquintle

had been found dead. Moreover, don Concepción noted that archaeological and sacred sites had been destroyed during the construction: “The brothers who have arrived [from the finca] say that [the project] has destroyed an archaeological site, a sacred place where our grandfathers and grandmothers conducted their ceremonies and had their relationships with nature, the sky, the earth. But they have destroyed without the central government verifying and investigating this matter; rather, the company and the Brols have taken ownership of the things they have taken from that sacred place.” He concluded that while “the company says it brings development, it brings destruction, really destruction to the population of San Juan Cotzal, and not only Cotzal but also the Ixil Region, so we want to tell them that there really have been extreme violations.”

After the visit to the river, I accompanied the two journalists to the Finca San Francisco to try to get an interview with Enel officials or Pedro Brol Cortinas. As we drove into the finca, we were stopped at the checkpoint, where four armed men began asking who we were. The journalist driving asked to speak with someone from Enel, and soon after, we were informed that we were not authorized to enter. Then one of the journalists asked to talk to Pedro Brol Cortinas. Some time passed as we sat there in the car with the armed guards still surrounding the car. Soon a helicopter hovered up in front of us, circled clockwise around the vehicle, and went down near where it had taken off. The armed men came to us and said to proceed to a house near the church. As we drove down the road, we were stopped at multiple points by security guards who were confirming our destination. Near the road was a *galera* where workers would sleep, and it seemed as if we had traveled back to the times of Justo Rufino Barrios. We arrived at some housing structures that looked empty. We waited twenty to thirty minutes outside a guarded building and then were brought in to talk to one of Pedro Brol’s sons along with the administrator of the finca, who sat at a desk. The son said he had to consult with his father before giving an interview, and after about an hour, we were informed that an interview was not possible.

The trip to Santa Avelina and the Finca San Francisco demonstrates the historical inequalities that exist between the fincas and the communities of Cotzal in at least three ways: the effects of the construction of the diversion dam in muddying and contaminating the river and flooding it to levels that were harmful to animals, land, crops, and residents; second, don Concepción’s comments showing how the Ixil remember the second invasion, which saw fincas displace their ancestors from their lands; and third, the militarization of the Finca San Francisco—aggressive interrogation conducted by the armed guards and the use of a helicopter to circle the vehicle, perceived by the two journalists and myself as an intimidation tactic.

The second invasion in the Ixil Region was characterized by the creation of fincas by military men, Europeans, and ladinos that displaced the Ixil from their ancestral lands, creating a vicious cycle of debt servitude and forced labor. With the introduction of coffee and an increased demand for labor to work on fincas

being created across Guatemala, the state and outsiders found a renewed interest in invading the Cuchumatanes to obtain the wealth their Spanish predecessors had so desperately wanted. The state and the *finqueros* (plantation owners) were able to achieve their goals through military force as well as an emphasis on private land titles and legal documents that privileged *finquero* and capitalist interests.

During the second invasion, almost half of the municipality and ejido of Cotzal were converted into fincas by the new invaders (González S. 2011, 178; Stoll 1993, 35–37).¹ These fincas include San Francisco (Brol family, Italian), Pantaleón (Herrera family, of Spanish descent and one of the most powerful families in Guatemala), Pacayal (Hodgson family, Euro-American), Esmeralda (ladino family), and Soledad (ladino family), among others. Today, these fincas are associated with memories of harsh working conditions, inequality, forced labor, sexual violence committed by *finqueros*, abuse, displacement, and the fincas' involvement in aiding the military in committing massacres during the war. At the same time, the Ixil resisted this invasion by protesting and organizing, as well as using legal mechanisms to contest their displacement. The struggle for the recovery of stolen land, and for justice in redressing structural and historical inequalities continued throughout the second invasion and was characterized by challenges to land grants made to *finqueros*, the use of the 1952 agrarian reform, electoral politics, and eventually armed struggle when all other channels for reform and justice were blocked and met with repression. Armed struggle aimed at rectifying the injustices that were created by fincas and led to the war, which will be explored in the next chapter.

The second invasion also witnessed the arrival of European and Euro-American academic men, explorers, and others who engaged in unethical and violent practices for the purposes of knowledge extraction. They often relied on colonial powers such as the central government, the military, the Catholic Church, the oligarchy, and the new *finquero* class to give them access to the Ixil Region. Often the Ixil and other Indigenous Peoples were exploited and forced to provide labor without their consent, compensation, or benefits from the researcher. While these academics are often understood as providing research to understand Ixil society and culture, my intention in this chapter is to also demonstrate how they reinforced global racial hierarchies, contributed to Indigenous repression, and extracted knowledge through unethical means.

The second invasion was characterized by the imposition of a capitalist and extractivist model through the plantation economy. It revealed the global interests and agents that began to establish themselves more in the Ixil Region, such as gringo, Italian, and Spanish actors, among others. In this chapter, I first analyze liberal dictatorships and plantation politics. This includes an analysis of the largest plantations in Cotzal, which include San Francisco, Pantaleón, and Pacayal and their owners. In addition, the creation of the municipal ejidos of Cotzal, Chajul, and Nebaj is documented. Life on the plantations and Ixil resistance against them

are also analyzed. The chapter then presents a Euro-American scholar, Jerimiah Curtin, who came to the Ixil Region, to demonstrate the colonial relations that existed during this time. Finally, I present the efforts of the Ixil to expropriate plantations in Cotzal through the agrarian reform of 1952, to show the way in which the Indigenous communities fought for the recovery of their lands.

LIBERAL DICTATORSHIPS AND FINCAS

The imposition of state-sponsored, external development schemes in the Ixil Region to stimulate the (national) economy dates to the nineteenth century, when Liberal dictator Justo Rufino Barrios promoted the creation of fincas and monoculture cultivation in the form of coffee. It was during this second invasion that the Ixil were displaced from their lands by ladinos and Europeans, and land and nature were commodified and privatized via a Western capitalist vision for development. Take, for instance, the case of Chajul during a time when the municipality was seeking ejido land titles in the 1890s. Assessing these requests in 1894, the national government described "the insatiable thirst that devours some towns, particularly Indigenous ones, to claim vast extensions of land, in whose hands they are completely unproductive, thus leaving them deprived of important agricultural projects, the main source of Guatemala's public wealth. *Communal properties are a serious delay to the progress of industrial agriculture* and conflict with good economic principles" (emphasis mine, AGCA, ST, Quiché, P. 16, Ex. 10). In their response, the people in Chajul saw the situation differently: "What greater gift can be given to an Indian than to give him a piece of land so that he can plant his milpa, raise his pigs and chickens, and entrust his entire patrimony to it?" (AGCA, ST, Quiché, P. 16, Ex. 10). The government's position was in accordance with the racist ideology of *el problema del indio* (the Indian Problem), which viewed Indigenous Peoples as a roadblock to national development (C. Smith 1990).

Throughout Latin America, governments adopted racial whitening or *blanqueamiento* policies that would import Europeans as a means to rectify the "Indian problem" and, in their colonial view, as a positive step toward progress. In Guatemala, this meant displacing Indigenous Peoples from their lands and giving them to Europeans and ladinos. Often this took the form of claiming lands as *baldíos* (lands that were deemed empty or without owner), even when they were registered ejidos.

The first significant settlement of ladinos occurred in the late 1800s, with many settling in the town centers of the three Ixil municipalities (Colby and Van den Berghe 1977, 87).² According to Benjamin N. Colby and Pierre Van den Berghe (1977), many of these Europeans came from Spain, Italy, and France. They were able to acquire land by getting the Ixil to sign fraudulent contracts, selling them liquor, providing them with loans, and trapping them in debt (87). Many of the early finca owners were military members and *milicias* who were granted land by

the Liberal regimes as a form of payment. For example, the *milicianos* of Momostenango were given land in Las Pilas and Ilom, located in both Nebaj and Chajul, as a reward for their military service (AGCA, ST, Quiché, P. 17, Ex. 10). Gringo or Euro-American *finqueros* also invaded Guatemala and the Ixil Region during that time and benefited from US intervention and growing imperialism.

One of the first Europeans to arrive in the Ixil Region in search of land during the second invasion was Isaías Palacios, a Spaniard who came to Nebaj in the 1890s, served in the Guatemalan army, and became the town secretary and “Nebaj’s first labour contractor, forwarding loans in return for commitments to work on coffee plantations” (Lovell 2000, 131). Pointing to his military service, in 1902 he asked dictator Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898–1920) to give him land in Nebaj after his house was destroyed in an earthquake (AGCA, ST, Quiché, P. 18, Ex. 3). Estrada Cabrera granted Palacios fifteen *caballerías* in Acul within the ejido of Nebaj. In response, the municipal authorities and *principales* of Nebaj wrote to Cabrera and complained since these lands were being used by the Ixil: “We petition the president to take into consideration that we have possessed all of these lands since time immemorial, having them all cultivated; and therefore, we ask you . . . to kindly suspend all operations attempting to displace us from them, particularly those granted at the request of Isaías Palacios, who aims to take away from us fifteen *caballerías*” (AGCA, ST, Quiché, P. 16, Ex. 8). The land grant was suspended. In response, Palacios appealed and wrote directly to Estrada Cabrera to reconsider. The suspension was eventually overturned and the land grant was given to Palacios. He would then return part of the land under certain conditions and keep a piece that would later be sold to the Azzari, an Italian family who today produce *queso Chancol* and have a hotel there (Durocher 2002, 53).

One of the largest fincas in Cotzal was Pantaleón, owned by the Herreras, which functioned as a *finca de colonos* (plantation of colonists). The Herreras forced *colonos* or those who lived on their plantation to work in their coastal fincas as a way to pay “rent” to live and cultivate on the finca. Pantaleón was administered by the Herrera Ibargüen Company, which owned between two to three hundred *caballerías* and almost the entire valley between the Finca San Francisco and the town of Cotzal. The Herrera family created annexes for Pantaleón in various parts of Cotzal, including San Felipe Chenlá, Villa Hortensia Antigua, Villa Hortensia I, and Villa Hortensia II. According to the 1950 Census, San Felipe Chenlá measured approximately 10.7 *caballerías* (691 *manzanas*), and Villa Hortensia and its annexes measured approximately 57.8 *caballerías* (3,707 *manzanas*) (Ministerio de Agricultura 1957). In the 1980s, outside observers would comment that “it [was] not unreasonable to assume that the lands owned by Herrera Ibargüen alone, with investments similar to those made in the San Francisco plantation, could support the entire Ixil [Region] population at a standard of living well above that which now prevails” (WOLA 1988, 69–70).

In the community known today as San Felipe Chenlá, *colono* families in Pantaleón were organized into seven groups, each consisting of between eight and sixteen families. These families lived in different parts of the finca, such as Xepalma, Chenlá, Jucubá, Xotopze, Tupoj, Jacuintau, and Mutzil (S. Flores and Chávez 2005, 132). The *colonos* were forced to work on the Herreras' finca on the coast to pay rent to live on the finca, as well as cultivating corn and beans for the landowners. A community leader born in San Felipe Chenlá remembers the brutal reality of the finca's residents: "Before the finca where we are, everything was Indigenous. *Those who came to invade were the Herreras, Spanish descendants. They occupied these lands, they occupied the people to exploit them and forced them to work:* that is, the *finquero* would come and say, 'This is my land, you are mine too, you are going to be my worker and you are going to serve me'" (emphasis mine). The trips to the coast were made on foot and took several days. Some people died from the harsh labor conditions and the arduous journey.

Another significant finca was San Francisco, founded in the early 1900s by Pietro Brollo Manzano (1877–1942), more commonly known as Pedro Brol, an Italian immigrant who arrived in Cotzal as a labor contractor in the late 1800s.³ San Francisco took over the richest and most fertile lands that were ideal to produce coffee. Many members of the community retell the story of the arrival of the Brol family, who systematically stole the lands that their elders had worked to clear and cultivate. In one version, the Ixil cleared and cultivated the land where the Finca San Francisco would later be located. It took them years to work the land, and once it was producing crops, the Brols came and bribed the municipal mayor to help him claim the valley of Cotzal and displace the Ixil who had worked the land.

Jackson Steward Lincoln, an anthropologist who came to the Ixil Region in the 1930s, in writing about his conversation with Pedro Brol, whom he referred to as either "P. Brol" or "Pedro B.," stated: "He told me he first visited Nebaj in 1894 and during the same year as *habilitador* he took the first group of Ixil-speaking Indian labor to the Finca Chocola. He described how he and his companions, when they used to see the *zahorines* praying in front of the great cross in the Plaza, threw oranges at them and poured water on them" (1945, 64).⁴ Lincoln added, "Don P. admitted that some of the early *ladinos* stole Indian lands and began the *aguardiante* trade. When he first arrived in Nebaj there were only two *estancos* and not much of drinking" (64). Lincoln's notes reveal the violence and intimidation that Brol directed against Maya spirituality, as well as tensions between fincas and the Ixil.

Don Miguel, who was born in 1943 and raised in the Finca San Francisco, told me that the Brols bought twenty *cuerdas* from another *ladino* and from there began "to invade more" into surrounding lands and slowly acquire more land. He added that his grandfather had moved from the town center of Cotzal to San Francisco in order to avoid forced labor laws and that his father had been born in 1927 on the finca. In remembering the stories that he had heard about how the Brols had invaded Cotzal, don Miguel stated: "My grandfather did not notice, not all people

noticed [that he came], but yes, I heard that don Pedro Brol was the one who came first. . . . He arrived alone there, and they say he was poor, but maybe he wasn't poor, he looked poor, to mess around, like the gringos do when they put on their *caites* [sandals]. . . . *He invaded*, he just got in there. . . . Maybe he gave the mayor a little money, for sure he paid a little, but only to the mayor" (emphasis mine). Other elders also mentioned that Pedro Brol seemed to be acting poor in order to receive food, shelter, and land, and that he stole land by bribing the municipal mayor, or getting people drunk, among other deceptive means to gain land titles. It is interesting that don Miguel compared Brol to gringos of today who wear *caites*, a reference to backpackers and tourists, and was skeptical of those who tried to gain favor and come off as humble, sympathetic and friendly with local Indigenous communities without revealing their intentions. What is evident in don Miguel's and other elders' stories regarding Pedro Brol's arrival is that he disingenuously presented himself as poor, accepted shelter from the Ixil, and took advantage of their trust to seize many of their land holdings through trickery.

A third significant finca was Pacayal, owned by the Hodgson family.⁵ It was an annex to the larger finca of the same name located in San Miguel Pochuta, Chimaltenango, and mainly served as a *finca de colonos*. The Finca Pacayal was created by Daniel Bascome Hodgson Driscoll (1862–1954; hereafter Daniel B. Hodgson), who represented the growing power of the US in Guatemala and US relationships with military dictatorships, oligarchy, and exploitation of the Ixil. Hodgson had his early professional training with the Southern Pacific Railroad Company and then went to Guatemala in 1892. He served as an auditor and assistant manager for the Guatemala Central Railroad until 1895, when he was appointed as the general manager (*Pan-American Magazine* 1908). He also served as director of the Guatemalan Bank and president of the American Club and was reportedly "an all round popular representative American" (*Pan-American Magazine* 1908).

The close relationship between the US and Liberal dictators from Guatemala was primarily based on economic interests. For instance, in 1909, New York congressman William Sulzer stated that Guatemala was "one of the richest and most progressive republics in Latin America" and that he had "had the pleasure of meeting Emanuel Estrada Cabrera" (*New York Times* 1909). The congressman claimed that the dictator was "very much misunderstood . . . and has been grossly misrepresented." Sulzer praised Daniel B. Hodgson and others such as General Thomas H. Hubbard, Sir William Van Horne, and William C. Keith for their work in building railroads and developing "the great natural resources of Guatemala" (*New York Times* 1909). During World War I, after resisting US pressure to seize all German property because of the influence that Germans held in the country, Estrada Cabrera agreed to do so after the "U.S. War Trade Board refused to sell replacement parts to the German-owned Empresa Eléctrica de Guatemala," which led to blackouts (O'Brien 1999, 42). As a result, the Guatemalan government seized all German assets in February 1918. In June 1918, Daniel B. Hodgson was

offered the position of “Alien Property Custodian for Guatemala” and controlled German-owned assets (Parrini 1969, 134). Hodgsdon had close relations with Estrada Cabrera because of his work with the railroads, and he would eventually become the owner of Pacayal.

The Hodgsdon family purchased land in Cotzal from another *finquero* in 1913, converting the finca into a *finca de colonos* and forcing residents to pay rent in the same way that residents did on Pantaleón. The Hodgsdons are interesting in that they are the only Euro-American and gringo *finqueros* in the Ixil Region, and their presence represents US imperialism in the area. Today, residents of Santa Avelina and Vichivalá, which formed Pacayal, remember the finca owner known as “don Donald,” Daniel’s son Donald Brian Hodgsdon Invernizzio, who was the legal owner of the Finca Pacayal before it was sold during the war. While living in Cotzal, I heard more stories about the Broles and the Herreras than I did of the Hodgsdons, but the Hodgsdons were just as repressive as the other *finqueros*.

Other significant fincas were Soledad and Esmeralda, which were owned by ladinos. Finca Soledad was located in present-day Chichel (a community founded by people from that finca), and Finca Esmeralda near Chenlá (Comunidad Lingüística Ixil 2004, 183). There are fewer popular narratives regarding these landowners, but they recount systematic displacement of the Ixil by non-Indigenous peoples. Outside of Cotzal, another significant finca in the Ixil Region was La Perla, a plantation also characterized by a bloody history, and the site where Hidro Xacbal and Xacbal Delta would be constructed in the 2000s. La Perla is emblematic of the ways in which outsiders and invaders displaced Ixil and used legal mechanisms to formalize their illegal claims of land ownership.

Ejidors of Cotzal, Nebaj, and Chajul

Before land titles, the Ixil had their own norms and practices of land management. According to Durocher (2002), before the creation of the SRP, the Ixil had “already drafted their own property attestation documents that they call ‘certificates’ or ‘simple documents,’” but the selling and purchasing of land were rare and “almost nonexistent, since there was still enough space to inhabit” (32–33). Attesting to property ownership included drawing a *croquis* (sketch) of the land with the *mojones* (landmarks) and indicating neighbors. An *acta* was created and validated by the municipality in front of two witnesses, often neighbors of the land in question. Land could be transferred or sold without the presence of municipal authorities, but at least two witnesses needed to be present. Deals could be completed verbally since “one’s word, backed by the testimony of the neighbors was, for the Ixil, enough” (32–33). Land was also obtained through inheritance. For example, a document from 1813 refers to a man from Chajul who wrote to the *alcalde mayor* of Totonicapán and Huehuetenango about lands given to him through inheritance by his father (AGCA A1.57, Exp. 56,482, Leg. 6116). Finally, the

Ixil had their own systems of conflict resolution regarding land that included the intervention of elders, spiritual guides, and community leaders; these continue to be used in certain cases today.

The creation of ejidos and fincas and the registration of other land titles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a very long, messy, and complicated process.⁶ The titling of land in Guatemala involved various stages: *denuncia* or request phase; application approval phase; measurement phase; measurement review phase; award phase; and registration phase. Lands located in the departments of Mazatenango, Huehuetenango, Sololá, Totonicapán, Quiché, Retalhuleu, San Marcos, and Quetzaltenango were registered in the Segundo Registro de la Propiedad located in Quetzaltenango. Measuring by surveyors was not always accurate, and sometimes surveyors had difficulty locating particular *mojones*, which might consist of rocks, crosses, trees, or other objects. According to David McCreery (1994),

After independence there was no formal training available for surveyors until the 1870's. Some surveyors were honest and skilled, but many others were clearly incompetent, corrupt, or simply lazy. Required by law, for example, to measure property boundaries with a chain of a prescribed length, surveyors routinely substituted irregular instruments or simply took visual bearings and estimated distances and areas, claiming that the boundary lines were too "broken" to transverse. . . . Remeasurements sometimes led to bizarre and even deadly results. (59)

In addition, McCreery noted that surveyors sometimes had to work alone, which in some circumstances made them decide to take measurements to please the mapping requestor. This could lead to measurements not being "mathematically perfected" (60). In Cotzal, plantation owners who requested new measurements often received additional extensions of land. For example, when in 1906 Pedro Brol asked that a recently purchased piece of land be measured again, he ended up being given more *caballerías* of land, and similar results occurred with other *finqueros* (AGCA, ST, Quiché, P. 3, Ex. 4; SRP, #3677, Fol. 72, Lib. 21).

The ejido of the pueblo of Cotzal (SRP, #4403, Fol. 164, Lib. 25) was officially registered on January 22, 1885, through a title issued by dictator Justo Rufino Barrios and was granted to the *municipalidad* (municipality) (figure 6). At its founding, the ejido measured 379 *caballerías*, 29 *manzanas*, and 6,558 *varas cuadradas*. On February 26, 1914, the area was increased by 9 *caballerías*, 14 *manzanas*, and 3,693 *varas cuadradas* after the conflict regarding the disputed territory of Pulay mentioned in the previous chapter between neighboring Nebaj was resolved (SRP, #4403, Fol. 164, Lib. 25). The report on the ejidos of Cotzal in AGCA contains documents dating between 1883 and 1885, mainly written by the surveyor measuring the territorial boundaries of the municipality (AGCA, ST, Quiché, P. 3, Ex. 11). These documents show the conflict that existed between

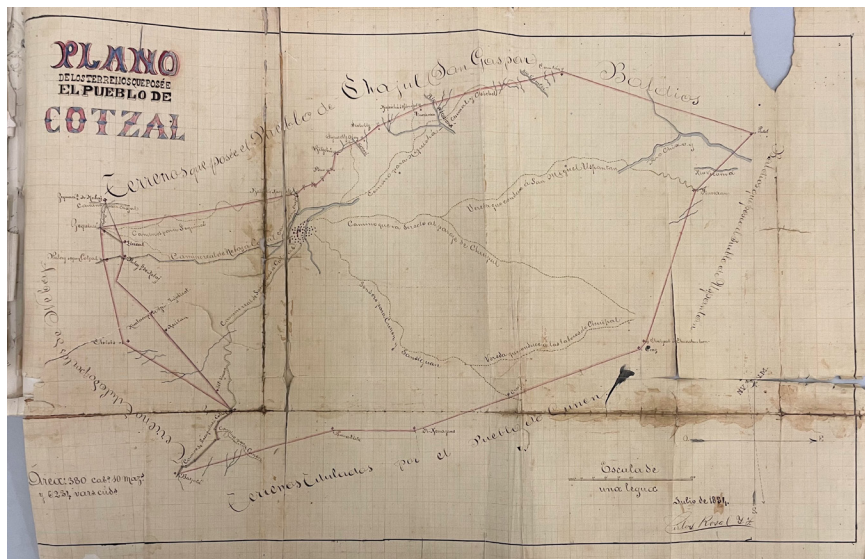


FIGURE 6. Ejido map of Cotzal, July 1884. Source: General Archive of Central America.

Cotzal and their neighbors, and include disputes between Cotzal and Nebaj over Pulay, and between Cotzal and Chajul over Batzul (AGCA, ST, Quiché, P. 3, Ex. 11).

Cotzal's ejido begins to experience a dramatic increase of *desmembraciones* (partitions) in 2011. Its registration record located in the SRP shows that there have been (as of November 2023) twenty-six *desmembraciones* since 1885 (when the ejido title was issued) (SRP, #4403, Fol. 164, Lib. 25). Only one of the *desmembraciones* occurred in the first 125 years of the ejido, between 1885 and 2010, but twenty-five occurred in the twelve years between 2011 and 2023, demonstrating new efforts to further privatize the ejido and communal lands with the consent of the municipality, which approved them. In the case of one of these *desmembraciones*, the owner used the land as collateral to take out a loan from the bank. In these types of cases, if the debt is not paid, the land is lost to the bank, threatening Ixil communal and ancestral lands. The twenty-five *desmembraciones* since 2011 measure approximately 3,549,605.45 square meters in total or approximately 7.86 *caballerías* (354.96 hectares).

The first *desmembración* was “Lote Xetzac,” given to the K’iche’ community of Chiul in Cunén on October 11, 1946, measuring 2 *caballerías*, 57 *manzanas*, and 9,955 *varas cuadradas* (SRP, #4403, Fol. 164, Lib. 25). Table 2 shows the *desmembraciones* between 2011 and 2023, the *fecha de escritura autorizada* (date of the authorized deed), the size of the property that was *desmembrado* (partitioned), and its location. Properties that were *desmembrado* are officially listed in square meters in the SRP. One hectare is equivalent to 10,000 square meters, and one *caballería* is equivalent to 451,256.54 square meters (Aguilar 1928, 17, 19).

TABLE 2 *Desmembraciones* numbers 2 to 26 of the ejido of Cotzal between 2011 and 2023

Number of <i>desmembración</i>	<i>Fecha de escritura autorizada</i> (date of authorized deed)	Size in square meters (m ²)	Location
2	May 31, 2011	335,253.74 m ²	Nueva La
3	September 30, 2011	100,220.94 m ²	Canton Coala'
4	October 30, 2012	1,019.96 m ²	Tu Coral
5	November 28, 2012	333,117.16 m ²	Visibanco
6	December 27, 2013	179,895 m ²	Tu Van, Aldea Chisis
7	December 27, 2013	407.50 m ²	Canton Xecurux
8	February 26, 2014	74,046.37 m ²	Bichapchamil
9	February 5, 2015	756.07 m ²	Calle Principal del Canton Batzcantiox y Calle de Canton Vitenam
10	July 27, 2016	1,035.86 m ²	Cantón Saji
11	November 22, 2016	338,238.57 m ²	Vimatil de Pulay
12	January 30, 2017	352,026.32 m ²	Chinimaquin
13	February 9, 2017	208,563.45 m ²	Caserio Vivitz
14	May 17, 2018	102,671.28 m ²	Tuban
15	November 30, 2019	872.87 m ²	Xechicha
16	July 8, 2021	41,951.31 m ²	Municipio Cotzal (next to municipal cemetery)
17	July 12, 2021	332.34 m ²	Batz Q'antioxh
18	November 28, 2022	71,111.46 m ²	Bichax Chamil
19	December 24, 2022	46,181.35 m ²	Tuputz Cuy
20	December 12, 2022	71,134.21 m ²	Chisis
21	December 12, 2022	284.67 m ²	Sal'a
22	December 12, 2022	1,211,769.55 m ²	Cajixay
23	December 12, 2022	22,828.50 m ²	Tuson
24	May 10, 2023	90.80 m ²	Vatzcalvario
25	August 28, 2023	230.1681 m ²	Cantón Xeusinay
26	August 7, 2023	55,566 m ²	Xexaj

SOURCE: SRP, #4403, Fol. 164, Lib. 25.

The registration record of the ejido of Cotzal states that a usufruct of 174.68 square meters for twenty-five years was given to Guatemalan Institute on Social Security (IGSS) on February 13, 1967, and was approved by then-municipal mayor Gaspar Pérez Pérez (Ixil name Kax Pi'y). In addition, a *servidumbre* (a right to use another's property) for 227,226.79 square meters was given to the Transportadora de Energía de Centroamérica, Sociedad Anónima (TRECSA) to build eighteen electrical towers on the ejido of Cotzal in Xeputul I, Xeputul II, and Vichemal.

According to the document, “The present *servidumbre* is constituted prior to the delivery of an economic contribution as an agreed voluntary contribution and the compensation established by law in relation to the aforementioned right to *servidumbre* in the amount of Q700,000.00. Deed No. 147 authorized September 26, 2013” (SRP, #4403, Fol. 164, Lib. 25). Many people and community leaders I talked to in Cotzal were unaware of this payment to the municipality, were concerned that it involved ejido lands, and were surprised to learn this when I presented them with these documents from the SRP.

It is unclear how *fincas* in Cotzal such as the initial private properties that would form Fincas San Francisco, Santa Avelina, and Pantaleón were registered in the SRP, since all of these properties fell within the titled ejido. According to lawyer Juan Carlos Peláez Villalobos, who has accompanied various communities in their struggle for land over three decades, “After the creation of the land registry with the first Civil Code in 1877, a land title for its public recognition and legal protection against third parties had to be duly registered” in the property registry. Furthermore, he told me that if, as in the case of Cotzal, an ejido land title was “granted before other titles, and private titles have been registered after those of the ejido, such registrations are illegal.” Peláez Villalobos added, “Then if the communal title was granted or registered before any other title, it is the one that has preeminence over any other title: claim of vacant land, supplementary titling, or registered public deed. . . . The granting or registration of subsequent private *fincas* superimposed on the base of the municipal ejido would be illegal, the product of abnormal dispossession against communal lands.” An Ixil leader from Cotzal, when I asked him why there were no *desmembraciones* to form these *fincas*, stated: “It’s because they occupied it [the ejido], they invaded it a long time ago, they gave legitimacy to their lands, they obviously have their *finca* [titles]. In complicity with the government they created their registry without needing to have a *desmembración*, but that is another area where the municipal mayors played with previous governments to favor these people.” While I provide some details below on the origins of some of these *fincas*, it is not clear how these lands were registered without a *desmembración* of the ejido, which they all fall into; its absence is characteristic of the irregularities, and most likely illegalities, that occurred in the dubious registration of these *fincas*. From what I have examined in the SRP and AGCA records, some lands have at least two owners, the people and municipality of Cotzal, who have had the ejido land title since 1885, and the *finca* owners, who hold a form of private title on the same lands but issued after 1885. In these cases, the ejido land title should supersede all other, private titles.

Corruption and fraudulent land titles were common in Guatemala during this time, especially in displacing Indigenous Peoples from their ancestral territories. One person interviewed by the historian Cindy Forster (2012) stated that the Brol family had been “taking over land by deceitfully or forcibly evicting poor peasants and registering communal land in their name” (129). Corruption and courts’

legalization of “fraudulent” titles played a role in the titling and privatization of the land, particularly when outsiders with “enough money [could] sway the courts in [their] favor” (Stoll 1993, 34). According to Forster, the *finqueros* began to empower themselves in political and military spaces to further consolidate their power to obtain land and forced labor:

They ruled as lords in their personal jurisdiction. Using the practice of violent eviction endorsed by the judges, they undertook another, more sinister alliance with the modernizing army of the new dictatorship. It was almost a rule that the landed class placed loyal allies in local state positions. In the case of the Brolos, people said that “they maintain a gang of thugs headed by the [Movimiento de Liberación Nacional, MLN party] Gaspar Pérez, an imposed mayor.” (Forster 2012, 129)

This context demonstrates the manner in which the *finqueros* invaded ejido lands and used the courts and state to privatize these lands, gain a false legality through land titles, and displace the Ixil. It is important to note that even if a person or entity buys or becomes owner of land that was illegitimately/illegally privatized (knowingly or unknowingly), that land is still illegitimate/illegal. During this time, it is likely that municipal mayors served as accomplices to *finqueros* and in some cases supported the illegitimate registration of these fincas. Today, there are movements and efforts by the Ixil to recover their stolen lands, as in the cases of Xonqa, Acul, and Tzalb’al in Nebaj.

After the people of Nebaj sought their ejido title for more than a decade, surveying began with *agrimensor* Felix Vega in 1878. Although Vega measured almost 900 *caballerías*, the measurements “were disputed by the people of Chajul, who presented an armed opposition,” and “he was unable to close” or finish measuring (Durocher 2002, 50). Consequently, Nebaj’s request for the measuring to be completed was not granted until 1894, when *agrimensor* Francisco Castillo Mendez was brought in (AGCA, ST, Quiché, P. 3 Ex. 6; AGCA, ST, Quiché, P. 16, Ex. 8). In August 1903, the land was registered and measured 1,428 *caballerías*, 21 *manzanas*, and 1,400 *varas cuadradas* (SRP, #3022, Fol. 260, Lib. 16). After the conflict over Pulay with Cotzal was resolved by dividing up the land, Nebaj gained another 9 *caballerías*, 15 *manzanas*, and 9 *varas cuadradas* (AGCA, ST, Quiché, P. 27, Ex. 3). In total, the ejido of Nebaj measures over 1,437 *caballerías*. There has been several *desmembraciones* to the ejido of Nebaj, including an illegal one committed by the Guatemalan state during the war in the 1980s, when they stole Tzalb’al and Acul and turned them into model villages (O. Hernández 2013b). This has led to legal battles where the people of Nebaj have actively sought to have their lands returned as part of the ejido. In 2020, the Constitutional Court ordered the return of the lands of Tzalb’al and Acul (*Prensa Comunitaria* 2020).

The people of Chajul initially sought their land titles on April 26, 1894, and requested 300 *caballerías*. They justified their reasons in a letter dated April 27, 1894, addressed to the *jefe politico*:

The municipal trustees of the town of Chajul . . . want to secure the part of the land that is essential for its inhabitants to dedicate themselves to agriculture. In order to provide their families with subsistence and to avoid the risk that all the lands will be appropriated by other people, leaving us reduced to only a small extension, I come to request the redemption of 100 *caballerías* squared around the town and one hundred in the villages of Ilom and Chel, for which of course we offer to pay to the engineer who is going to carry out the respective operations. (AGCA, ST, Quiché, P. 16, Ex. 10)

This request for an ejido title came six months after a ladino, Joaquín Fernández, sought a *baldío* known as Shamac, located near Ilom, and could have served as the motivation for the people of Chajul to seek it since they cite the threat of others obtaining titles to most of their land (Elliott 2021, 122). Shamac would later form part of Finca La Perla, where Hidro Xacbal and Hidro Xacbal Delta would be constructed more than a century later. Thus in hindsight the people of Chajul had good reason to seek out their ejido title.

A month after their initial request, the people of Chajul solicited an additional 300 *caballerías* in the town center, for a total request of 600 *caballerías*: 400 in the town center, 100 in Ilom, and 100 in Chel. In the following years, there were delays in measuring, followed by remeasuring of the ejido because of objections to the size of Chajul's request and conflicts with neighboring municipalities who had competing claims to particular areas of land, such as Las Pilas, which was also being claimed by Nebaj (Elliott 2021, 119–21). In 1899, Chajul's ejido was over 1,238 *caballerías* but eventually it was reduced by more than 50 *caballerías*. Thus, in May 1900, the ejido of Chajul would be registered and come to measure 1,186 *caballerías*, 345 *manzanas*, and 4,280 *varas cuadradas* (Durocher 2002, 56).

San Felipe Chenlá / Tu Poj

The community known today as San Felipe Chenlá was founded through the consolidation of various lands that were united through time and by multiple owners. Jacinto Castillo M. was the first person to register San Felipe Chenlá with the state after buying land from various Ixil. He obtained a "supplementary title issued by the First Municipal Court of Cotzal" on July 14, 1910 (SRP, #5587, Fol.188, Lib.31). It is unclear how the Ixil from whom he bought these lands laid claim to them and what documents, if any, they had. According to an *asiento* (an original document used to register and give legality to land titles) at the SRP, Castillo purchased five properties (Jucubá, Xotopsé, Tzuy, Mutzil, and Lovancharaché) and converted them into four fincas, which had not been previously registered (SRP, A. 127, Fol. 136, T. 5). These four properties were officially registered at the SRP on December 10, 1910, twenty-five years after the ejido of Cotzal was registered. They measured a total of 4 *caballerías*, 28 *manzanas*, and 2,829 *varas cuadradas* (AGCA, ST, Quiché, P. 27, Ex. 2). The four fincas were then consolidated into one larger finca (finca #6972) on June 20, 1914 (SRP, #5584, Fol. 182, Lib 31; SRP, #5585, Fol. 184, Lib. 31; SRP, #5586, Fol. 186, Lib. 31; SRP, #5587, Fol. 188, Lib. 31). In addition, Castillo became the owner of a territory called Chenlá, which after measurement

had a size of 2 *caballerías*, 5 *manzanas*, and 9,809 *varas cuadradas* (AGCA, ST, Quiché, P. 27, Ex. 2; SRP, #6971, Fol.129, Lib.38). In 1917, Juan Méndez registered the lands called “Tupoj,” measuring 375 *cuerdas*, which also later became part of San Felipe Chenlá (SRP, #9523, Fol.160, Lib.14). These lands do not appear as *desmembraciones*, bringing into question how Jacinto Castillo M. was able to register land that was within the ejido of Cotzal.

The company Herrera y Compañía Limitada purchased Castillo M.’s lands and registered and consolidated them at the SRP in July 1924 under the name San Felipe Chenlá (SRP, #10,584, Fol. 223, Lib. 52). The fincas that consolidated to form this new one consisted of fincas #6971 (Chenlá), #6972 (Jucubá, Xotopsé, Tzuy, Mutzil y Lovancharaché), #9523 (Tu Poj), and #6386 (which formed part of Santa Avelina, as explained below). At the time, the newly consolidated finca measured 10 *caballerías*, 61 *manzanas*, and 5,438 *varas cuadradas* after they were remeasured with the approval of the *revisor general* (SRP, #10,584, Fol. 223, Lib. 52).

On November 30, 1982, the Guatemalan government became the owner of San Felipe Chenlá and in 1983 General Oscar Humberto Mejía Víctores forcibly turned it into a model village during the civil war (SRP, #10,584, Fol. 223, Lib. 52). The land title was then sold to the inhabitants of San Felipe Chenlá as a *patrimonio agrario colectivo* on September 19, 1994, with 151 people inscribed in the registry (SRP, #10,584, Fol. 223, Lib. 52). In July 2011, through the community’s Act Number 23–2011, San Felipe Chenlá declared itself a *Comunidad Indígena* and renamed itself Comunidad Indígena Tu Poj (Tu Poj 2011). The name Tu Poj was selected because the homes of residents were located there and the community wanted to recover Ixil place-names.

Finca San Francisco

The Finca San Francisco is located in Cotzal and Uspantán and is made up of mainly two fincas: Finca Empresa Agrícola San Francisco Cotzal, S.A. (figure 7; SRP, #15,588, Fol. 143, Lib. 81), and Finca Agrícola Cafetaleras Palo Viejo, S.A. (SRP, #24, 977, Fol. 215, Lib. 103). The origin of San Francisco, like that of San Felipe Chenlá, involved the consolidation of multiple lands and fincas in the valley of Cotzal. I found at the SRP that the Finca San Francisco is composed of at least thirty-nine properties in Cotzal and Uspantán that in 1960 were consolidated into a larger one measuring 315 *caballerías*, 45 *manzanas*, and 360 *varas cuadradas* (SRP, #15,021, Fol.284, L.69). Twenty-one of these properties were in Cotzal and were registered without being *desmembradas* from Cotzal’s ejido, which had been registered previously in 1885. The eighteen properties in Uspantán measure a little over 254 *caballerías*.

Elliott (2021) states,

Pedro Brol, an Italian labor contractor, purchased land to form Finca San Francisco, the largest in the Ixil area. He purchased 16 *caballerías* in 1904 and continued to buy land from neighboring farms during the 20s and 30s from others who had purchased vacant land or received grants from the state. . . . Rifling through registry records, the image emerges of a man constantly on the alert for opportunities to

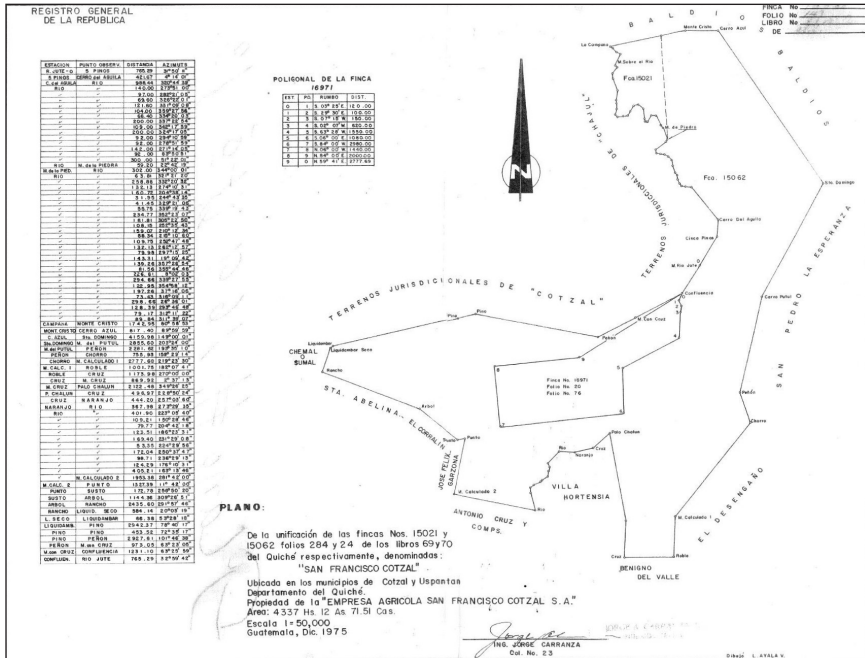


FIGURE 7. Map of the Finca San Francisco in 1975 where fincas registered under the “Empresa Agrícola San Francisco Cotzal, S.A.” appear. Source: Second Property Registry.

buy more. His name reoccurs as a lender or an adjacent owner in all three [Ixil] municipalities. (122)

The property referenced by Elliott that Brol purchased in 1904 was most likely that of Ismael Orellana described below. The Brol family also acquired lands in various parts of Nebaj, where many resided in the town center. Below are just two examples of lands bought by Brol to illustrate the process of land accumulation in Cotzal and the irregularities that existed in properties’ registration in the SRP.

Ismael Orellana registered one of the first lands that would later form part of the Finca San Francisco (SRP, #3677, Fol. 72, Lib. 21). There is no record of a *desmembración* for this finca from the ejido. According to records at the AGCA, Orellana wrote to the *jefe político* on March 22, 1904, to lay claim to land in Cotzal that he said was “approximately fifteen *caballerías* that ha[d] not been *denunciado* [denounced/claimed] by any person” and were *baldías* (vacant) (AGCA, ST, P. 18, Ex. 8). He said that this land was “called San Francisco” and that “its boundaries in the four cardinal directions are with the ejidos of Cotzal itself” (AGCA, ST, P. 18, Ex. 8). Orellana argues in his letter: “Using the powers that the agrarian law grants to every Guatemalan, I come to *denunciar* the fifteen *caballerías* of land described

in order to acquire them as property” (AGCA, ST, P. 18, Ex. 8). As part of his claim, Orellana obtained various witnesses, who included members of the municipality such as first municipal alcalde Pedro Aviles, second municipal alcalde Domingo Toma, and second *regidor* Nicolas Toma, among others (AGCA, ST, P. 18, Ex. 8). Orellana and the municipal authorities went to visit the land that was to be measured; the municipal mayor stated there was no challenge to Orellana’s claim, although it is unclear why there wasn’t (AGCA, ST, P. 18, Ex. 8). As a result, Orellana registered 14 *caballerías*, 36 *manzanas*, and 1,376 *varas cuadradas* in 1904, and the SRP shows that he received his land title through President Manuel Estrada Cabrera (SRP, #3677, Fol. 72, Lib. 21). The boundaries of this property to the north, south, east, and west were recorded as the “ejidos de Cotzal,” which suggests that this land was from the ejido and privatized after being claimed as *baldío* (vacant) (AGCA, ST, Quiché, P.18 Exp. 8; SRP, #3677, Fol. 72, Lib. 21). The location of this property also falls within the boundaries of the ejido map shown in figure 6. Pedro Brol bought the lands owned by Orellana in 1906 for 3,650 pesos and remeasured the lands, with the result that the finca gained another two *caballerías*, leading him to take possession of more ejido lands (SRP, #3677, Fol. 72, Lib. 21). In 1942, Pedro, Enrique, Edmundo, Jorge, Elena, Nicolás, Catarina, and Augusta Brol Galicia became the new owners of the finca through inheritance after their father’s death (SRP, #3677, Fol. 72, Lib. 21).

Another section of land that would form part of the Finca San Francisco consisted of 9 *caballerías*, 61 *manzanas*, and 540 *varas cuadradas* and was first owned by Francisco Chavez, who was awarded this property by the Supreme Government (SRP, #4413, Fol. 176, Lib. 25). Estrada Cabrera expedited the land title on February 7, 1907. According to the inscription in the SRP, the lands to the north, south, and east were *baldíos*, and to the west was the property (the one purchased from Orellana) of Pedro Brol (SRP, #4413, Fol. 176, Lib. 25). As noted in Ismael Orellana’s registration, this land was bounded by “ejidos de Cotzal,” but here the surrounding land is listed as *baldío* (vacant), demonstrating the irregularities that existed in the registration and inscriptions of these properties. It was not legal to declare the ejidos of Cotzal as *baldíos* since these lands were registered in 1885. After a sale to Angela Cárdenas de García and Moisés García, Pedro Brol bought these lands for 1,500 pesos in 1913 (SRP, #4413, Fol. 176, Lib. 25).

Santa Avelina and Vichivalá

Over a century of archival records from the SRP and AGCA detail how the communities known today as Santa Avelina and Vichivalá were once part of multiple land holdings, under different names. What remains is a paper trail of land titles and reports that can make for a confusing situation in knowing who owned what and when. The lands known today as Santa Avelina and Vichivalá were measured, remeasured, consolidated into one finca only to be *desmembrado* again, and then consolidated again, sold to other members in the family and then sold back,

or used as collateral for loans, and passed through the hands of various *finqueros* and their companies.

One of the first records of Santa Avelina appears in a request made by the inheritors of the properties known as Las Galeras and Las Pilas, owned by the Spaniard Manuel Pendás (AGCA, ST, Quiché, P. 3, Ex. 4). Upon his passing, Ramón, Avelina, Evorista, and Carolina Pendás inherited the property, and in March 1911, they asked the *jefe de la sección de tierras* to authorize remeasuring of these lands, which at the time measured 5 *caballerías*, 19 *manzanas*, and 3,516 *varas cuadradas*. Their justification was that the *mojones* and boundaries had disappeared because of “time and other circumstances,” causing difficulties with their neighbors (AGCA, ST, Quiché, P. 3, Ex. 4). After the remeasurement, it was found that an additional 3 *caballerías*, 28 *manzanas*, and 2,044 *varas* belonged to them. During this remeasurement the lands known as Las Galeras and Las Pilas were renamed Santa Avelina in the registry.

Two years after the remeasurement, Euro-American Daniel B. Hodgsdon, the representative of C. Mirón y Compañía, bought two fincas, Santa Avelina and another piece called El Comalin, in 1913 from Ramón Alonzo Pendás, who was then the representative of the Sociedad S y R. Alonzo. These two properties measured 32 *caballerías*, one *manzana*, and 147 *varas cuadradas* and were registered as finca #6385. On the same day of the sale, 3 *caballerías*, 51 *manzanas*, and 3,840 *varas cuadradas* were *desmembrado* from Santa Avelina and kept by “S y R. Alonzo” to form a new finca (finca #6386). In 1925, C. Mirón y Compañía was officially dissolved, but all landholdings continued to belong to Daniel B. Hodgsdon. In 1936, a second *desmembración* of finca #6385 would take place, as 8 *caballerías*, 47 *manzanas*, and 5,920 *varas* would form a new finca, #12,869, owned by Daniel’s son Willard Tisdell Hodgsdon Invernizzio (SRP, #6385, Fol. 45, Lib. 36).

In 1941, finca #6385 was given to Daniel’s wife, Maria Invernizzio y Alvarez de Hodgsdon, who would take control of 40 percent, and his son Donald Brian Hodgsdon Invernizzio, who would take the other 60 percent. In 1973, Donald Brian Hodgsdon Invernizzio partnered with investor Edward Alexander Bartón Scott Skilling to create the Empresa Agrícola El Pacayal, Sociedad Anonima (or El Pacayal, S.A. for short) (SRP, #6385, Fol. 45, Lib. 36). Because of the war, the finca was eventually sold to 322 people on September 30, 1982, for the amount of Q320 and was turned into a model village by the military government.

Returning to the first *desmembración* that created finca #6386 of over three *caballerías* that were kept by “S y R. Alonzo,” these would later be sold to Jacinto Castillo for 55 pesos by “S y R. Alonzo” in 1914. That same year, Castillo would take out a loan with the Herreras for 10,000 pesos with a 1.5 percent monthly interest rate to be paid back in six months. Castillo would later lose this finca to the Herreras in 1921 after he was unable to pay back another loan he had taken out in the amount of \$80,000.⁷

The second *desmembración* mentioned, which created finca #12,869, consisted of over eight caballerías and was bought by Daniel B. Hodgson's son Willard Tisdell Hodgson for Q500; it would later be sold back to Daniel for the amount of Q1,988.03 in 1948 (SRP, #12,869, Fol.163, Lib.61). Ownership was then split between Daniel's other son Donald and his wife Maria in 1960, until Donald became the sole owner in 1973 through his new company, La Pacayal, S.A. This finca was also sold during the war to the same 322 people mentioned above.

Chipal, Tuban, and Villa Hortensia

In the southeastern part of the municipality of Cotzal, multiple landowners in the 1910s claimed lands to form fincas that would eventually be purchased by the Herreras. In 1923, the Herrera Company bought the three fincas of Chipal, Tuban, and Villa Hortensia, which they remeasured and consolidated into one finca that was registered under the new name of "Villa Hortensia y Anexos" (AGCA, ST, Quiché, Paq. 28, Exp. 10; SRP, #10,489, Fol. 127, Lib. 52). After the land was remeasured, the Herreras were granted an additional 5 *caballerías*, 61 *manzanas*, and 396 *varas cuadradas*, making Villa Hortensia y Anexos measure 28 *caballerías*, 1 *manzana*, and 6,319 *varas cuadradas* (SRP, #10,489, Fol. 127, Lib. 52).

Other Properties

Small landowners purchased land or obtained it through inheritance. For example, in 1922, in *El Guatemalteco—El Diario Oficial* (1922, 98), there was a notice that Teresa Chamay requested a supplementary title to a territorial lot that she had in her possession through inheritance and that over the previous forty-five years she had "owned, publicly and continuously." The notice also mentioned her neighbors and their territorial boundaries and symbols. These included a boundary of five *cuerdas* with Miguel Chamay to the north, marked by trees; a boundary with Andrés Torres to the east, marked by trees and a rock; a boundary of six *cuerdas* to the south with Antonio Cruz, marked by a tree; and a boundary to the west with Antonio Cruz and Juan Medina Zarcariás. Teresa Chamay estimated the worth of her land to be "\$200 national currency." Its claim was recognized by the municipality of Cotzal (98).

Finca La Perla, Chajul

As mentioned above, Finca La Perla has its origin in a land claim by Joaquín Fernández, who sought to claim 30 *caballerías* in the land known as Shamac in 1894, of which 22 *caballerías*, 15 *manzanas*, and 9,455 *varas cuadradas* would be measured by a surveyor. The people of Chajul contested this claim, saying these lands were not *baldíos* as they belonged to their ancestors of Ilom. Proof of this was the surveyor's inability to measure the full 30 *caballerías* since that area included land that was cultivated by the people of Sotzil. That the land was cultivated meant it was not a

baldío. The lands measured were auctioned off and bought by Jesús Rivas (Elliott 2021, 122). In 1900, Shamac was sold for 800 pesos to Lisandro Gordillo Galán, a Mexican national who at the time served as the secretary of the municipal council. He would put up the land as collateral to take out loans; Gordillo himself would give loans to Ixil who put up their own land as collateral. Shamac would later form part of the Finca La Perla, Santa Delfina y Anexos, which included other pieces of land that he was able to acquire from the Ixil, often through seizing their lands when they could not pay him back their loans (Durocher 2002, 58). According to Elliott, “Gordillo acquired two more caballerías from Chajul in 1917 and another caballería from two Ixil in 1921. He made seven more purchases from the soldiers of Momostenango who had received the land as a reward for military service. Gordillo purchased 15 caballerías in 1923, 24 caballerías in 1925, and 2 caballerías in 1927. Twenty of the caballerías purchased in 1925 belonged to former President Estrada Cabrera. The community of Ilom protested that the land Gordillo bought belonged to them. Today’s records show they were right” (2021, 123). In the 1930s, Lisandro Gordillo would sell Finca La Perla to Franz Fernando Egger Forster, also known as Francisco. Egger Forster would lose the finca because of bankruptcy, which led the Guatemalan Central Bank to take over the land. The bank would then try to sell the land to the people of Ilom by having them pay off Egger Forster’s debt. The *principales* and people of Ilom rejected the bank’s offer since they argued, correctly and justifiably, that they could not purchase land that belonged to them (Durocher 2002, 58).

In August 1941, Luis Arenas began paying and buying the Finca La Perla from the bank and “immediately set barbed-wire fences around his property . . . limit[ing] the use of the lands” for people to cultivate, and building an airstrip to export coffee (Elliott 1998, 55). In 1946, “Arenas gave the people of Ilom the use of 4 caballerías,” although they did not receive any land titles or ownership to the land (55–56). Luis Arenas would lose the finca to the bank in 1962, but it was eventually bought back by his children in 1971 (Durocher 2002, 58). The finca was renamed in 1977 as La Perla Sociedad Anónima y Anexos (58).

There is evidence that *milicias* from Momostenango were given land that belonged to Ilom and Sotzil. The land was eventually purchased by Lisandro Gordillo, who held a fraudulent land title that belonged to Ilom and Sotzil in the 1920s. A judge would rule on October 24, 1928, that Gordillo should return this land, but it would be overturned by the Supreme Court (Durocher 2002, 60–61; Elliott 2021, 124). The case demonstrates how the state, in registering land, would overlook Indigenous claims and complaints in favor of ladinos and Euro-descendants.

Rebellion, Resistance, and Life in the Fincas

Resistance against the *finquero* invaders was prevalent during the second invasion. During General Jorge Ubico’s dictatorship (1931–44), the Ixil were forced to work for 100–150 days a year, usually on the fincas, the same land that had been taken from them. As a result of this abusive and unequal relationship between the Ixil and ladinos and Euro-descendants, on June 21, 1936, many Ixil from Nebaj

revolted against plantation owners and forced them to leave town (Ceto 2011; De León Ceto 2013; A. Flores 2021b).⁸ The government responded by sending in the military to Nebaj, which led to the arrest of at least 150 protesters and the public execution of seven *principales*: Pap Xha'p Ak'ul (Sebastián Cedillo), Pap Lu Ch'ib' (Pedro Guzmán), Pap Ve's (Vicente Guzmán), Pap Xhun Ijom (Juan Brito), Pap Xhun (Juan Brito Brito), Pap Te'k'ach (Diego Cuchil), and Pap Lu' (Pedro Cedillo) (Universidad Ixil 2021). According to Pablo Ceto (2011), "When communal lands were stolen to be converted into coffee fincas, Maya communities took their lives and futures [to] the sacred mountains. And when it was necessary to rise up against oppression and colonial domination, it was done hundreds of times, in many cases with results such as the execution of the seven Ixil *principales* of Nebaj in 1936, results that were always overcome by the decision to continue trying to bring about a new dawn for future generations" (230). Today, the Ixil commemorate the Day of Ixil Dignity on June 21 as an "homage" to the "*principales* who were shot in 1936" (Herrera 2020; Universidad Ixil 2021).

Debt played a crucial role in forcing the Ixil and other Indigenous peoples into forced labor. Early *contratistas*, ladinos, and outsiders used nefarious means to displace Indigenous peoples from their ancestral territories, which included the use of debt. Often *contratistas* would lend money to the Ixil to get them trapped in debt and force them to pay it off by working at the coast. The introduction of aguardiente, which was stronger than *kuxa*, the traditional and ceremonial alcoholic beverage, led to many ladinos deceiving the Ixil and having them take out loans or selling their lands when they were inebriated. An Ixil elder stated that this was not in accordance with the traditional ways of exchanging lands, in which one cannot consent to taking out loans or transferring lands when one is under the influence. Government officials and the armed forces criminalized *kuxa*: according to Sergio Palencia (2021), the "Guardia de Hacienda's main task was to control, persecute and confiscate [*kuxa*], which they called clandestine liquor. Since its beginnings, the goal was to protect local contractors and traders' monopoly of legal liquor, a strategy linked to controlling labor mobilization, the debt system and ritual celebrations" (221). Outsiders arriving to the Ixil Region would often comment on the role that alcohol and debt played in ensuring finca labor. Robert Burkitt, an archaeologist from the US who visited the Ixil Region in 1913, describes the relationship between the Ixil, the newly founded fincas, and the role of alcohol: "The plantation agents were at the height of their activity, scattering money, advance pay for work, and every Indian was able to buy rum. *The rum business and the coffee business work together in this country, automatically.* The plantation advances money to the Indian and the rum seller takes it away from him and the Indian has to go to work again. Work leads to rum, and rum leads to work" (emphasis mine, Burkitt 1930, 59). Burkitt's description demonstrates the changing power dynamics among the Ixil during the second invasion, which included the role of fincas in controlling Indigenous labor through the repressive use of alcohol and debt.

In recalling life on the fincas, don Miguel told me about growing up on the Finca San Francisco and working with his father on the plot they rented from the Brols. He recalls the day Celestino Brol noticed that he had gotten bigger and was ready to work:

Then the boss realized that I was older and I still was not working, and he told me, "You are going to work on the finca." He told me, "You are a man, you are older, you are going to work." . . . It is always hard, because you go to work around five in the morning or five-thirty at the latest, and you get under the coffee trees, and the leaves are wet, well, you get in there, your whole back is very wet, you finish your tasks, very tired, it is always hard, and little is earned . . . 50 cents per task, and the women and children earn less per group.

Don Miguel continued to describe the harsh conditions that he and others endured on the finca, which were really a form of slow death: "The people get sick, little by little they die, they don't die at the moment, but little by little they die." He could see the precarious nature of their lives on the finca when he recognized that although residents had a house, they lacked land titles, and the property belonged to the finca. Land titles became a repressive tool to alter the relationship between the Ixil and the land, in which the latter became a commodity that could be owned and sold. The Ixil were displaced by capitalist notions of private property and then condemned to harsh working conditions on their ancestral lands.

Don Miguel recalled an incident sometime in the 1960s when workers protested against the Finca Pantaleón and the Herreras, demanding better labor rights: "A group of workers who didn't grow coffee began to come together. They formed a group and fought with the boss, and they complained in Xela that they weren't getting paid. . . . People organized and sued the boss in Xela. In those times there were no human rights. . . . Although they denounced the boss, no one supported them because ever since the government has been there, *it has been the government of the finqueros*" (emphasis mine). Don Miguel portrayed a situation in which workers organized and complained to the central government about the *finqueros*' abuse of workers, only to find that the government worked in favor of the *finqueros*. After asking what happened to those who protested the Herreras, don Miguel responded: "They kicked them out of the finca, that's why they kicked them out, they no longer gave them work. They were left poor, very poor; they could no longer go out, they could no longer travel without money. They [the finca owners] no longer gave them work." Don Miguel revealed how the Ixil, after being displaced by fincas, were again forced to leave their lands by the *finqueros*, with the backing of the government.

It is important to note that don Miguel was not involved with the guerrillas during the war. He was the commander of a civil patrol unit of a model village during the 1980s, though he stated that he had been forced by the military to serve. From talking to him, it was clear that he felt that the government

represented only the interests of the rich and the fincas, as reflected in the above quotes. He told me that there was always resistance, but that it was not openly discussed because of the fear of reprisal, and thus there was a culture of silence surrounding these narratives.

Other stories involving labor disputes were occasionally mentioned, but the details were sometimes unclear. Many stories were lost with the genocide during the war, especially since community leaders, labor organizers, spiritual guides, and others were persecuted, killed, or disappeared. Still, some narratives of resistance remain. For example, between 1968 and 1969, there was an uprising against Carlos Herrera after he tried to introduce coffee on the Finca Pantaleón, mainly since it would displace people from their lands and force them to work more (S. Flores and Chávez 2005, 134). The movement against the Herreras, said to have various leaders, was successful. Community leaders from San Felipe Chenlá told me they remembered it: “The Herreras wanted to get the people out of Chenlá to settle them here [where the community is now]. . . . The Herreras were going to get the people to relocate and were going to plant coffee all over that part [Chenlá], so that’s where they rose up. . . . They allied with the others there; the ones who led were [Gregorio and Concepción Santay Gómez], Basilio Itzep, Diego Chel, [and Pedro Ajanel].” According to Sergio A. Flores and Jaime Roquel Chávez (2005, 134), “A similar movement occurred in 1970 on the Finca San Francisco” against the Brols, “but it was unsuccessful, since [the finca] had the support of the mobile military police to suppress the uprising.”

Two figures who are remembered by the people of Cotzal are the K’iche’ brothers Gregorio Santay Ajanel and Concepción Santay Ajanel, who are mentioned to have led the movement against the Herreras. Both grew up and lived on the Finca Pantaleón after their parents migrated to Cotzal during the early twentieth century, and both were known to be organizers and community leaders. Gregorio was the father and Concepción the uncle of Concepción Santay Gómez, the *alcalde indígena* of Cotzal cited in the beginning of the chapter. Don Concepción, who is K’iche’ through his father and Ixil through his mother, mentioned how his paternal family came to the Ixil Region: “My father was born in San Felipe, also on the land of some *finqueros*, because my grandparents . . . came from the [department of] Totonicapán. [The people there were being forced] to open a tunnel in Xela, but my grandparents did not want to work in that, so they went further into the mountains and then came here. . . . They arrived with my grandmother. My father was born in Cotzal. . . . When one is born in a place, it is their land, their children are born there.” Reflecting on his father’s and several of his uncles’ organizing work toward social justice, and framing it within a larger Guatemalan context, don Concepción stated:

In developing their lives, they looked at the exploitation, the slavery that existed. There was no land, the land was occupied by the *finqueros*, but why? . . . According to

my uncle, my grandfather said that this president [Arbenz] was going to be good, so they also fought to have the president, but they [Arévalo and then Arbenz] lasted for only ten years, [and then there was] a coup. . . . Then the US came with their power, new ones to invade the land. . . . My father, my uncles fought to rescue the land, so a part was achieved, so that people do not have to pay rent.

According to many in San Felipe Chenlá, it was the actions of Concepción's uncle and father that led to the *colonos* no longer having to pay rent by working at the coast for the Herreras.

Like other Indigenous leaders and organizers, Gregorio and Concepción Santay Ajanel were disappeared during the 1970s. Concepción Santay Gómez was a child when this happened and recalled how they had been criminalized and kidnapped by the military for their activism and for being land defenders:

So my dad fought for the land, *they* [the military state apparatus] told him they [those who struggled] were communists, they were guerrillas, and *they* had to make him disappear. [My father and uncle] were struggling alongside with other people, important people, who did not want the *finqueros'* exploitation, so they allied together. But when the armed conflict came, when the military garrison was installed in Cotzal, the leaders who led the fight against the exploitation of the people began to disappear. Then several people disappeared—they were captured in their homes by the army, and they never returned. They never came back.

Concepción Santay Ajanel was kidnapped in September 1971, and his family began searching for him in various police stations (AHPN, GT PN, 50, 5001, F51310). Gregorio was kidnapped in 1976, and his family also searched for him. Records from the police archives at the AHPN show family members who were concerned and continued asking police officials and offices if they had been detained. According to a report from the Cuerpo de Detectives de la Policía Nacional, one of Gregorio's sons declared that his father had been "kidnapped by armed men" and claimed that other men had been recently disappeared as well, including Juan Ordoñez Aguilar, Domingo Aguilar, Domingo Cavinal Rodriguez, Juan Cavinal Toma, Francisco Sanchez, and Nicolas Poma (AHPN, GT PN, 50, 5004, [11.0623.1450]1809). Neither Gregorio's nor Concepción's body has ever been recovered, and their kidnapping and disappearance remain unpunished.

ACADEMICS AS NEW INVADERS

The late nineteenth century witnessed the rise of US imperialism in Latin America, and alongside it, an increase of European and US academic researchers who benefited from and promoted it. This was particularly true for anthropologists, who were in the business of salvage ethnography and whose purpose was to obtain physical artifacts such as archaeological pieces, Indigenous dress, and other "treasures" that they could preserve in museums abroad. In the satiric novel *The*

Adventures of Mr. Puttison among the Maya (2002), Victor Montejo tells the story of a US ethnographer who visits a rural Indigenous community in the early twentieth century and whose research is characterized by deceit to gain entrance in the community, the use of alcohol to obtain knowledge from the Maya, and eventually the theft of artifacts from the community, among other unethical research practices. The protagonist, inspired by Euro-American anthropologist Oliver La Farge, who visited the Cuchumatanes in the 1930s, represents the ways academics knowingly or unknowingly served as agents of colonialism, reinforcing racist attitudes, anti-indigeneity, and a global racial hierarchy that privileged Euro-Western peoples and knowledges. Other outsiders such as explorers, artists, and missionaries have also been arriving to the Ixil Region since the late nineteenth century. Their arrival correlates with the arrival of coffee, state incursion into the highlands, and US imperialism and intervention in Central America.

These Euro-American outsiders provide a different perspective on fincas in Ixil society. Their writings provide us with the closest thing we have to an “insider’s” look into the lives of those who benefited from, enjoyed, and formed part of the colonial power structure and its agents such as priests, *finqueros*, ladino officials, and others. At the same time, they reveal the extremely racist, sexist, and violent relationships that existed between foreigners, academics, landowners, priests, and Indigenous Peoples, as well as growing US imperialist power, which was often the basis for their arrival and their capabilities to conduct work in Guatemala. These researchers include Jeremiah Curtin (1835–1906), an ethnologist and folklorist who visited the Ixil Region in 1896; archaeologist Robert Burkitt, who visited in 1913; Addison Burbank, an artist who visited Guatemala in the 1930s; and Alfred Ruhl, a journalist and explorer who traveled to Central America in the 1920s (Burbank 1939; Burkitt 1930; Curtin 1940; Ruhl 1928).⁹ Of these various researchers and travelers, I present the case of Curtin, who forced twenty-two Ixil men of Cotzal to travel with him to Mexico as part of his search for the Lacandon.

Jeremiah Curtin was an ethnologist, folklorist, and translator who traveled to different parts of the world and worked for the Bureau of American Ethnology. His travels with his wife, Alma Cardell Curtin, were documented in the posthumously published *Memoirs* (Curtin 1940).¹⁰ In 1895 he went to Mexico, where he met with Mexican president José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz Mori (512). In that meeting, Curtin told Díaz that “for a dozen years or more [he had had his] eye on the country of the Lancandones” and explained that he wanted to research them, collecting “mythologic and linguistic materials, and deciphering, if possible, the Maya hieroglyphics” (514–15). Díaz agreed to provide Curtin with “letters to all the governors on the western side of the republic from Sonora to the Guatemalan boundary, and a document to all local authorities, which [he] could retain and use as occasion required” (515). Díaz also gave Curtin a letter of introduction to the “Mexican minister in Guatemala and to the president.” He also invited Curtin to “correspond with him directly, avoiding the secretary of state.” Curtin would remark, “I could

not have asked for a more whole-souled enthusiastic helper. The readiness with which he offered every aid surprised me. . . . Besides Diaz' letter I had an American introduction to [Guatemalan] President Barrios" (516). He planned to reach Lacandon territory by going through Guatemala rather than the southern Mexican state of Chiapas because he thought the Guatemalan route would be easier.

In 1896 Curtin arrived in Guatemala, where he met with President José María Reina Barrios (the nephew of Justo Rufino Barrios), who spoke English fluently (548). Barrios agreed to aid Curtin, offering letters of support and even "a military force" to be sent ahead of him (549). Curtin set off to northern Quiché and eventually visited the Ixil Region, where he believed he could find a way to the Lacandon. When Curtin arrived in Nebaj he presented himself to the "cabildo" and showed his letters from Barrios to the alcalde (566). Curtin settled in the convent and used to house the priest during his infrequent visits (566). According to Curtin, Nebaj had a population of four thousand and was a "metropolis for Chajul, Cotzal, and other smaller villages," but he described the town as "unspeakably dirty" and held a paternalistic, racist, and demeaning attitude toward its inhabitants and Indigenous Peoples, whom he often compared to "children" (567).¹¹

After Nebaj, the Curtins traveled to Cunén and Sacapulas, where the rainy season was obstructing Jeremiah's longer objective of traveling to Lacandon territory. He was told that the rains would lessen toward the end of August but would be heavy in September until November (582). On August 30, 1896, the Curtins traveled to Cotzal. Once they arrived there, they were received by the municipal mayor, don Patrocunio. As he had done in Nebaj, in Cotzal and Chajul Curtin began to try to collect stories and find more information on the Lacandon but was unable to find anyone who had contact with them. The alcaldes of Chajul and Cotzal told him that because of the rainy season "it would be impossible to find men to go with [the Curtins] over mountains which they did not know [and] into a strange district which bore a bad name" (585). Jeremiah stated that he could not wait until January, especially since he was unsure if anyone would be willing to travel with him by then (586). He recognized that he could not go "alone" since he "might get astray and starve." In his plans, he had assumed that someone in Cotzal or Chajul would have contact with the Lacandon, but he was disappointed to learn that they did not. He then decided that instead of waiting for the rainy season to end and trying to go north into Lacandon territory, he would go to Mexico and to Comitán, San Cristóbal, and Palenque, then travel down the Lacantun River and see if it would be possible to cross "the unknown country" that way (586). The trip to Comitán was estimated to take at least eight days and would not be easy on account of the rains.

Curtin began to try and recruit men to go as *cargadores* with him to Comitán. But the *cargadores* who had taken him to Cotzal refused to go since it "was too far away; the weather was too bad for traveling and camping out; the Indians across the Mexican border were bad Indians" (587). Curtin wrote: "I knew that I could

not get Cotzal men to go with me to the Lacandonese, for they were by nature timid. To enter the country on that side *it would be necessary to have a large party of white men*, a few would not do, for food would have to be carried, and the distance over unknown trails might be greater than supposed" (emphasis mine, 587–88). Curtin's racist views are on clear display here: he believed "white men" would fare better in journeying to Comitán—ironically, though he wrote throughout his trip in Guatemala of the difficulties he had on hikes and walks. If it were not for Indigenous Peoples and guides, he would not have lasted long in Guatemala, and he knew this. Curtin relied on the municipal mayor of Cotzal to help him find some *cargadores*:

The alcalde called the men together, talked to them, told them of their president's letter and instructions. At last, though very reluctantly, they took the money for the journey, and the affair was apparently arranged. The following morning the men walked into my room and placed the money on the boxes; they did not want it, they were not going. I told them to take the money to the alcalde, for I could talk only with him. Soon seven of the leading members of the squad appointed to go with me were in prison. There was great excitement! (588)

According to Curtin, after the alcalde imprisoned the reluctant *cargadores*, "The whole town took an interest in the affair. Wives and sweethearts wailed and protested. When night came, rather than spend it in prison, the men promised to go. They were liberated, then came endless talking and disputing. The women had as much to say, or more, than the men. The alcalde stood by me faithfully. He threatened imprisonment and told the men what would happen if the president's anger met them" (588). After forcing the men from Cotzal to go with him, backed by the pressure and the compliant alcalde, Curtin set off to Comitán on Friday, October 9, 1896. In total, the Curtins had twenty-two men, eight of whom were to carry baggage and food, and the others to carry the food for the *cargadores* or to go as "company, or protection, for the others" (589). The Ixil's food "consisted chiefly of corn meal cakes; the cakes were dry and hard, but heating made them soft. If broken in bits and dissolved in boiling water, they made an agreeable drink" (588).

Curtin thus engaged in what could be labeled a state-sanctioned kidnapping of the Ixil. With the aid of the municipal mayor and the Guatemalan state through the letters he was given, he forced them against their will to travel to Mexico on foot during the rainy season, where many others refused to go because of weather conditions and the dangers of the journey. Though the *cargadores* who refused to travel were eventually forced to go, they tried throughout the trip to return to Cotzal. When the party arrived in Nebaj, two of the *cargadores* were "missing," though both eventually returned to the group after Curtin refused to alter his plans.

Curtin would prove to be abusive toward the *cargadores* and unconcerned for their well-being during the trip. Most days of travel featured rain and mud to contend with, hills and mountains to climb and descend from, and often a lack of shelter provided to the *cargadores*. On some nights, the Curtins would secure a

place to sleep and the *cargadores* would be forced to sleep outside after full days of walking in the rain. Throughout the trip, Curtin distrusted the *cargadores* and would keep an eye on them, stating, "I felt uneasy. I was uncertain of my men" (590). When they arrived in Huehuetenango, the Curtins secured a room, leaving the *cargadores* to camp in the plaza. After meeting a Spaniard to whom Curtin delivered a letter from the president, the two men went together to see the *jefe politico*, where they found that the *cargadores* were making a formal complaint against Curtin. As Curtin reported,

My *cargadores* were there with a complaint. They would not go to Comitán. The *jefe politico* asked if they had been paid. "Yes." Then they must go. There was no way to avoid going, for they were sent by government. They went off grumbling. . . . Then [the *jefe politico*] gave me an "order of arrest," so if I had trouble with the men I could have them arrested in any small village. Every *alcalde* along the road was ordered to see that I was not delayed. (591–92)

The *cargadores* then followed Curtin and the Spaniard to the hotel, "begging" the Spaniard to "have them released." Here we see an example of a foreign Euro-American male academic using and being aided by the state to commit violence and extract forced labor from the Ixil against their will. The *cargadores* attempted to denounce the crime being committed against them, but to no avail, and the government instead opted to serve the interests of gringos such as Curtin.

The *jefe politico* of Huehuetenango provided Curtin with a guide who knew the way to Comitán. When they arrived in Chiantla, the *cargadores* camped out on the plaza, and the guide went with one of the *cargadores* to buy shoes. Soon the *cargadores* again refused to go further and stated that the guide had a fever and was sick. Curtin would not let them go home, so the *cargadores* from Cotzal took another course of action:

When the "fever" racket didn't work, the men changed tactics; they went to the *alcalde* and complained of being overburdened, they would not go to Comitán. The *alcalde* telegraphed to Huehuetenango, which was unnecessary, as I had the paper instructing all *alcaldes* along the road to see that I was not delayed. After waiting several hours, the answer came: "The *cargadores* must go on." The *alcalde* summoned the men, read them a lecture, and told them not to repeat such a scene, that they were revolting against the orders of their president and would have serious trouble if they kept it up. That they should have regard for Guatemala, not give it a bad name in other countries. The guide was called and warned. (592–93)

The *cargadores* and the guide were told to listen to Curtin and follow him into Mexico, a country that was outside of the jurisdiction of the *alcaldes* and *jefe politicos* who warned them. Still, the fear of persecution and reprimand by the Guatemalan state was severe, so the *cargadores* from Cotzal were forced to continue against their will.

The Curtins and the Ixil crossed into Mexico and a few days later arrived in Comitán, where their “procession, twenty *cargadores*, guide, and two travelers attracted much attention” (598). Curtin was received well by Mexican officials after showing them his letter from Díaz. Once done with their commitment to Curtin, the *cargadores* were free to return to Cotzal. Curtin writes: “The journey safely over, the *cargadores* were happy. I made each man a present of money and, after they had fed and rested the mules and bought Mexican hats, they started back. I think that as long as those *cargadores* live, they will have stories to tell about their journey to far off Mexico. We were eleven days on the road from Cotzal to Comitán and were nine days in the saddle” (599). The fate of the *cargadores* from Cotzal is unknown. Jeremiah Curtin would never achieve his objective of studying the Lacandon and would eventually return to the US.

THE 1952 AGRARIAN REFORM

By the 1930s, many *fincas* and *finqueros* had consolidated their land holdings and presence within the Ixil Region, and Cotzal had lost almost half of its ejido. While the Ixil were resisting Ubico’s forced-labor laws, there were also calls and protests in Guatemala City to end the dictatorship. These protests eventually led to the 1944 October Revolution, in which mainly middle-class, urban ladinos demanded Ubico’s removal from power (Glejeses 1991). The October Revolution ushered in the Ten Years of Spring characterized by democratic rule that led to a wide array of educational, social, and political reforms under the administrations of Juan José Arévalo (1945–51) and Jacobo Árbenz Guzmán (1951–54). Among the most significant reforms was the 1952 agrarian reform, known as Decree 900, which sought to redistribute land by expropriating large uncultivated *fincas* that were in the hands of large landowners and foreign entities like the US-based United Fruit Company (UFCO). According to Jim Handy (1994), by the time Árbenz came to power, “twenty-two owners controlled more land than 249,169 peasant families” (88).

Decree 900 was passed by Congress on June 17, 1952 (86–92).¹² There were certain criteria and rules for expropriation, and only certain types of lands could be affected by the law. Decree 900 stated that no *finca* that was less than two *caballerías* could be expropriated (91). A *finca* that was two-thirds cultivated and was between two and six *caballerías* was also not affected by the law (91). Lands that could be expropriated and denounced included national *fincas*, *fincas* measuring more than six *caballerías* and not in use or being rented, and “municipal land denounced by *comunidades indígenas* or *comunidades campesinas*” (91). As a result of the agrarian reform and its impact on *fincas* that included the UFCO, Árbenz was overthrown by Carlos Castillo Armas, who led a counter-revolution with the support and aid of the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in June 1954 (Forster 2001; Glejeses 1991; Handy 1994; Immerman 1982; Schlesinger 1982). The coup led to the cancellation of expropriation orders and the persecution of

peasants and Indigenous Peoples involved in agrarian movements (Forster 2001; Handy 1994). The Castillo Armas coup ushered in decades of military dictatorship with the support and backing of the US, large landowners, and the oligarchy.

While extensive research has been conducted on the impact of Decree 900 in Guatemala, little work has been done on its effect in the Ixil Region (Forster 2001; Handy 1994). Data from the 1950 Census reveals that there were at least fifty-nine fincas with one or more *caballerías* in the Ixil Region: twenty-three in Cotzal, nine in Chajul, and twenty-seven in Nebaj (Ministerio de Agricultura 1957). Data on land extensions was most complete for Chajul, with all fincas being accounted for, and the least complete for Cotzal, with data being available on land extensions for only six, or 26 percent, of listed fincas. In Chajul, the nine fincas accounted for at least 7,005 *manzanas*, and in Nebaj 70 percent of these fincas accounted for 3,512 *manzanas* (Ministerio de Agricultura 1957).

In Cotzal, the Ixil used the agrarian reform to call for the expropriation of three fincas: San Francisco, Asich, and Chenlá (AGCA, Decreto 900, P. 1, Ex. 1; AGCA, Decreto 900, P. 15, Ex. 3; AGCA, Decreto 900, P. 16, Ex. 11). The largest expropriation effort targeted the Finca San Francisco. Interestingly, Árbenz's minister of agriculture was Nicolás Brol Galicia, the son of Pedro Brol Manzano, who along with his four brothers owned San Francisco. Nicolás Brol was a leader within the National Integrity Party (PIN), which initially hesitated to support agrarian reform, and had "difficulty gaining the support of party members" (Handy 1994, 87). But after Carlos Manuel Pellecer "provided some persuasion of his own by denouncing the labor practices Brol employed on his finca and threatening a strike," PIN began to support agrarian reform (87).

The first *denuncia* (claim or denunciation) for expropriation of the Finca San Francisco was presented by Rosendo Girón Toledo in representation of the *campesinado* Cotzal on February 25, 1953 (AGCA, Decreto 900, P. 1, Ex. 1). A second *denuncia* was carried out by "Juan Rodríguez y compañeros," who claimed that the finca qualified for expropriation since it had an extension of 350 *caballerías* (AGCA, Decreto 900, P. 1, Ex. 1). A third *denuncia* was made by "Miguel García y compañeros" regarding "San Francisco Cotzal y anexos, El Putul, Ticajpubitz"; it claimed that the finca qualified for expropriation because between six hundred and eight hundred *caballerías* were uncultivated (this later turned out to be a miscalculation of the size of the finca) (AGCA, Decreto 900, P. 1, Ex. 1).

A fourth *denuncia* was presented by the workers of San Francisco on February 28, 1953, by "Aureliano Vásquez y compañeros" (AGCA, Decreto 900, P. 1, Ex. 1). It included the signatures and fingerprints of the workers from the finca located in Cotzal as well as their holdings in Uspantán. What is unique about this list is that it includes surnames associated with various other locations and ethnicities. While traditional surnames from Cotzal are listed such as Toma, Sambrano, Gómez, Avilez, and Cordova, you also find Ixil surnames associated with Nebaj, such as Ceto and Brito. Moreover, there are K'iche' names such as Lux and Us,

Q'eqchi' names such as Chen, and others that may be from neighboring Q'anjob'al. There are also ladino names such as Cano and Méndez. In their *denuncia*, the finca workers state: "The owners of [San Francisco] have provided us, as *mozos colonos* [tenant workers] on the finca, with parcels free of charge, which we have been cultivating personally with crops of corn, beans, and other products, to meet the needs of our families. . . . We are poor *campesinos* [farm laborers] with families, and we do not have our own land to cultivate" (AGCA, Decreto 900, P. 1, Ex. 1). The multiple *denuncias* for San Francisco created confusion among agrarian officials, who noted the competing expropriation claims but ultimately decided to allow the fourth *denuncia* made by the finca workers to move forward. The move can be seen as the best of the bad options for the Brols, as these workers lived within their finca.¹³

The finca workers in their *denuncias* identified various properties that formed San Francisco, including Cualá, Sacajabitz, Ticapubitz, Alcalatzé, Ticajpubitz, San Francisco Pinal del Río, San Francisco Cotzal, San José Cotzal, Perú Grande, Perú Pequeño, Buenos Aires, Monte Arturo, Argentina Putul, Putul Chiquito, El Putul, and the plots that the workers already had. They requested to obtain priority for their *denuncia* over any other people who sought expropriation since they had been working on these lands for years (AGCA, Decreto 900, P. 1, Ex. 1). In response, the five Brol brothers reported to the Departmental Agrarian Commission with a list of their agricultural activities of growing coffee and sugar, raising cattle, running a seed nursery, engaging in reforestation, and providing land for their workers so that they could grow their food. In what seems like the Brols' attempt to subvert expropriation efforts, they agreed to give their workers the plots they had worked on, "provided that the petitioners prove, in due form, that they are the workers" of the finca (AGCA, Decreto 900, P. 1, Ex. 1). Girón Toledo objected to the *denuncia* of the workers, wanted to know how much land they would receive, and demanded that the case be taken over by neutral people since the owner included Nicolás Brol (AGCA, Decreto 900, P. 1, Ex. 1). The ocular inspection reported on July 12, 1953, that San Francisco consisted of 114 *caballerías* and 58 *manzanas*, of which only a little over 18 *caballerías* of land were directly cultivated and 16 *caballerías* were uncultivated. Other parts of the plantation were used for pastureland (12 *caballerías*), used as forestry land (47 *caballerías*), or cultivated by third parties (20 *caballerías*) (AGCA, Decreto 900, P. 1, Ex. 1).

In addition, the finca had 510 families and houses located in two *caseríos* and in dispersed locations. The Consejo Nacional Agrario ordered the expropriation of 86 *caballerías* later that year. But the expropriation was interrupted by the 1954 coup and was officially overturned on July 5, 1956 (Elliott 2021, 127). According to Handy (1994, 200), Pedro Brol Galicia was at first "denied the return of four *caballerías* expropriated," but "after a number of prominent people wrote to government officials explaining that Pedro and his brother [Nicolás] had been estranged and that Pedro 'always has been and still is completely anticommunist' was his

land returned.” Nicolás was temporarily forced into exile following the 1954 coup (ADAHPN, GT PN, 50, S001, 959821).¹⁴

The expropriation efforts of Asich and Chenlá were not as extensive as San Francisco because of the size of the land. The *denuncia* for Asich, whose owner was listed as the “Mortual de Juan Sajic Velasco,” was presented by Domingo Saquic Aviles and *compañeros* on April 25, 1953 (AGCA, Decreto 900, P. 15, Ex. 3). Their *denuncia* did not meet the requirements of the agrarian reform since the land being sought was less than two *caballerías* and was deemed *inafectable* for expropriation (AGCA, Decreto 900, P. 15, Ex. 3). The expropriation claim for Chenlá, which formed part of the Finca Pantaleón owned by Carlos Herrera, came from the *colonos*, who submitted their application on April 10, 1953 (AGCA, Decreto 900, P. 16, Ex. 11). Diego Cordova was listed as the *denunciante* along with twenty other *colonos*. In their application, the *colonos* stated that for approximately forty years they had been living and cultivating the lands they were seeking and that the Herreras had given them a plot of land to cultivate. This *denuncia* was later denied by the government after the Herreras’ legal representative argued that the finca did not qualify under the agrarian reform since the majority of the land was being cultivated (AGCA, Decreto 900, P. 16, Ex. 11).

Another expropriation order that occurred in the Ixil Region involved the Finca La Perla, Santa Delfina y Anexos, located next to Ilom in Chajul, which measured more than 86 *caballerías*, with only 5 in use for cultivation and 7 for “pasture for cattle” (Elliott 1998, 56). The owner, Luis Arenas, upset with the agrarian reform, went to talk with US Embassy officials and offered “to lead a revolt under his Anti-Communist Unification party” that could help overthrow the government (56–57). The US at that time was already plotting to overthrow Arbenz, and Arenas’s offer was not taken, much to his annoyance. By the end of March 1954, 52 *caballerías* were expropriated by “Andrés Pérez y compañeros” and “Girón Toledo, a representative of the Confederación Campesina of Chajul” (57). After the coup, on June 4, 1956, this expropriation was cancelled and the leaders involved distanced themselves from this land movement (58).

In addition, to *denunciando* La Perla, Santa Delfina y Anexos, the people of Chajul claimed the following four fincas: Los Cimientos de Xetzunu Chaj, owned by Herederos de Miguel Gómez y Manuel López; Los Cimientos de Xezupuchy, owned by Mortual de Máximo y Pedro Tzep; San Juaquin y Anexos, owned by Francisco Tello; and Estrella Polar, owned by Daniel Tello (AGCA, Indice No. 21, Decreto 900, Depto. El Quiché). In Nebaj, there were at least four *denuncias* through Decree 900; these included the properties of Las Amelias, owned by Segundo Ardavin Escandón; Las Pilas, owned by Rodolfo Avila G.; Nueva America, owned by Alejandro del Valle Tello; and Xaxan y Anexos, owned by Francisco Pascual (AGCA, Indice No. 21, Decreto 900, Depto. El Quiché).

Information on the events surrounding the agrarian reform and 1954 coup in Cotzal is scarce. Again, time, war and genocide have contributed to the loss of

stories. Still, many people remember land reform as an important moment. One community leader I spoke with reflected on the historical exploitation his people had suffered and the hope that the October Revolution created: "People did hard work on the road to Sacapulas for a month, and when they returned home they already had debt, so they went to work on the finca. It was heavy exploitation, [but] thanks to the revolution of '44, the people woke up. The revolution of '44 was like a salvation of the people." Moreover, though archival sources for counterrevolution in the Ixil Region are scarce, there are traces of persecution against some of the leaders involved in Decree 900 who were forced to flee Guatemala after the coup. For example, a *ficha* in the police archives shows that Girón Toledo, who was involved in expropriation efforts in Cotzal and Chajul, returned from exile in 1956 (ADAHPN, GT PN, 50, 5001, 936812). While the October Revolution is remembered for its potential, it is crucial to point out that the Ixil had already been resisting and organizing since the invasion of the *finqueros*, especially since there is a misconception that the people of Cotzal are motivated and organized only by non-Indigenous outsiders.

REFLECTIONS ON THE SECOND INVASION

The arrival of ladinos and Europeans in the Ixil Region in the early twentieth century was characterized by violence, by displacement from lands through legal means of land titles and deception using alcohol, by repression, and by forced labor and subordination under *finqueros*. The arrival of the fincas was another wave of colonization that established a kind of structural land inequality not present before. This inequality would begin to build, and as seen with the 1952 agrarian reform, the Ixil attempted to recover the lands that were taken from them. The private fincas in Cotzal exemplify the way the invaders treated the land as a commodity.

I have narrated how some fincas, such as San Francisco, Pantaleón, and Pacayal, were established in the Ixil Region without being *desmembradas* from the ejido. Landowners and *finqueros* used deception, fraudulent titles, and corruption, within a government that viewed Indigenous Peoples as a problem, to obtain large amounts of land. That many initial landowners in the Ixil Region were military men, such as Isaías Palacios and the *milicianos* of Momostenango, highlights the militarized ways that the central government attempted to intimidate Indigenous communities into ceding their lands. Though the Ixil were displaced and forced to work on their occupied lands, they continued to resist, as is evident from the 1936 uprising and their use of Decree 900. When these struggles were repressed by the government, calls for armed struggle began.

The role of academics, particularly Euro-American men and Euro-descendants, in reinforcing US imperialism, global patriarchal and racial hierarchies, and gringo arrogance was evident in their collaboration with dictators, abusive *finqueros*, and

military and government officials who were their allies and accomplices. Curtin's state-sanctioned kidnapping of the Ixil who were forced to work and travel with him to Mexico was possible only through approval from dictators and other state agents. Foreign academics, researchers, advisers, and travelers continued to arrive in Guatemala for various reasons in the third and fourth invasions.

The next chapter focuses on the war in the Ixil Region, one of the most violent periods in Cotzal since European invasion. Armed rebellion was another stage of resistance against a repressive system built on the displacement and destruction of Indigenous territories, knowledges, spirituality, identity, and dignity. The legacies of these invasions are apparent in the fourth invasion, as will be explored in Part II of the book.