

# Introduction

## *Conservation and Settler Logics of Elimination*

### THIS LAND IS MY LAND, THIS LAND IS YOUR PARK?

In 2008 against the advice of development professionals to choose a less “conflictive” community, I decided to live in and research a community located near Lake Lachuá National Park, which today spans almost 15,000 hectares. I partnered with a sustainable development consortium, which I call the “Project,” that enjoyed significant international conservation funding for reforestation easements and productive cooperatives. Both the park and the multiuse buffer zone enjoy international recognition as a Ramsar wetlands site, conservation easement funding, and inclusion in climate mitigation through reforestation REDD<sup>1</sup> projects. My impression of these projects was fundamentally shaken by a hostage standoff I witnessed my first day on site (an incident I return to in Chapter 2). Instead of learning about the benefits of community-based reforestation, my original research question, I sought to understand how and why these seemingly benevolent projects could lead to violence. I came to see that differential processes of ownership exclusion and inclusion played a major role.

While Project employees and documentation told me that nobody was excluded from forestry benefits, the land-titling archives told another story. In the archives I found the name of one community, Quixpur (pronounced “keesh-puur”), that had legal land titles in a core park area but no longer existed on the map. When I asked the project director if he would help me contact Quixpur leaders, he first quizzed me at length about how I discovered this community’s existence and what I hoped to accomplish by meeting them. The director agreed to arrange the interview with Quixpur leaders but warned me that they might take me hostage. He

first suggested that I summon them to the Project offices, but I demurred because there was no place where they could speak without being overheard. We compromised. A Project driver delivered a letter suggesting a neutral meeting place: not the Project's office but a building that Project employees have keys to so that I could not be held hostage (as happened to a park administrator in 2005). The building was a community cooperative; Quixpur families lived in this community but were not considered part of it. Instead, they were landless, did not participate in the cooperative or local governance structures, and were excluded from reforestation projects. I was not particularly concerned about my safety, as I had never heard of dispossessed communities physically harming administrators.

I arrived at the community center in a truck with a Project driver about an hour late, and the association building was empty. The Project employee asked if we should leave, and I told him to park in the shade and wait a few more minutes. I walked away from the truck on the dusty road in the suddenly empty town, trying to look as gringa—foreign, harmless, maybe a little naive—as possible. A man walked in my direction, nice and slow, so I said (in Q'eqchi'), "Hey, you wouldn't happen to be a Quixpur leader, would you?" He stopped, glanced sideways, and said, "I got your letter." After a long pause, I stumbled through an explanation of who I am and why I wanted to hear his community's history. He said that he would see if he could find some people to talk to me. I went back to casually hanging out, a gringa by herself in the scorching sun in front of a locked association building, for more than thirty minutes, assuring the driver at regular intervals that we would probably leave soon. Just as I thought I might actually give up and leave, I saw four, five, six, seven, and then eight men materialize, carrying time-worn envelopes full of documents that had been painstakingly protected from tropical weather over decades. Although our conversation started slowly in Q'eqchi', they mercifully switched to Spanish and told gentle jokes to put me at ease. I quickly understood that they would not take me hostage as long as I didn't join any park guard/police/military patrols of their land.

I was not afraid of them, but they were afraid of what I represented. Gringos seek to work in solidarity with Indigenous peoples, wielding their political power to change a settler system that demands their death, and simultaneously support land-extensive conservation that makes their life impossible. I argue below that the indigenous right to life has no role in this kind of conservation, and I use the analytic of green wars to describe how conservation practice maps criminality onto rural Q'eqchi's and legitimates state violence. In this, I call attention to the ways that state violence works through both structural impoverishment and spectacle violence to sever Indigenous peoples from their land.

At the same time, Q'eqchi's seek the promise of gringo solidarity for survival as a people: the repatriation of land and life (Tuck and Yang, 2012). In an international conservation project that does not speak their language or respect their lived experience, these men present receipts, legal documents, and maps to anyone

who might legitimate them. Their experience rests on a struggle that stretches over decades of violence, both threatened and realized, in which the military repeatedly dispossesses them of their land. Whereas many communities have only their lived experiences to rely on, Quixpur leaders showed me many documents that the National Institute of Agrarian Transformation (Instituto para la Transformación Agraria, INTA), the state land agency, had made to map out their community boundaries, which predated Lake Lachuá National Park. Even more unusual, community members paid taxes on their land and had receipts dating back to the early 1970s to prove it. When the land-titling agency first contemplated a park in the 1970s, Quixpur—a dispersed community consisting of Q'eqchi' homesteaders who practiced swidden agriculture<sup>2</sup> but also had cardamom plants and cattle pastures—was one of several communities that had legally recognized property rights. These are particularly important because they demonstrate investment in private property in the eyes of the liberal capitalist state. In the late 1970s, military officials and foresters arrived in Quixpur and told residents that they had to move outside the park's boundaries. When I asked how the park was explained to them, Quixpur leaders said they were told that “this is a place for animals, not people.”<sup>3</sup> While they vociferously challenge this framework today, they did not during the 1970s. This is because Guatemala was at the height of a violent civil war (1960–1996), and challenging military officials easily led to violent death.

So, the community of Quixpur moved and built new homes, planted new crops and pastures, and completed the required down payment to receive state recognition in a “colonization zone.” In return, the INTA issued them a provisional land title; they still have the original, and the copy in INTA archives was how I discovered them.<sup>4</sup> During the early 1980s, military officials told Quixpur residents that they had to leave their rural community for a more central village in order to prove that they were not “subversives”<sup>5</sup> hiding out in the jungle. Quixpur residents moved to this central village, where they still live today, but many continued to harvest crops on their land within the park, especially cardamom. They all considered themselves owners of Quixpur, and they have an uneasy relationship with the community they live in; likewise, community leaders would rather not host Quixpur “troublemakers.” In the 1980s, a military cartographer came through. Quixpur leaders remember his promise that their lands would be outside the park; instead, he mapped their land inside the newly expanded park boundaries (see Figure 3 in Chapter 2). It is from this point on, they say, that they had no home they could legally return to. This is how state and nonstate conservation agencies could reframe war survivors as migrants on their own land (see Chapter 2).

By the mid-1980s, the army encouraged many people to return to their homes in the civil war demobilization. When Quixpur residents attempted to return home, however, they discovered that their interpellated identities had morphed from civil war “subversives” to “park invaders.” While the park system acknowledges

the community's legally recognized land rights, it asserts the primacy of its claim to administer the land in the name of the nation. Quixpur leaders say that both park and Project administrators lied repeatedly. Among other things, Quixpur leaders showed me signed copies of agreements with a National Council of Protected Areas (Consejo Nacional de Areas Protegidas, CONAP) representative that indicated they would receive titles to their land and that it would be excluded from the first 2000–2001 park measurements.<sup>6</sup> In a 2008 interview, a CONAP representative denied that the agency owes people compensation for the land, even as he acknowledged that they had legal title.

In the late 1990s, park and military officials began arresting people who were supposedly harming the land—a political forest that existed by decree if not in terms of trees—by, for example, harvesting cardamom crops in farm plots. Although international and national designations labeled these as core protected areas, they were working lands. In response, Quixpur residents have taken park officials hostage, burned down a building for ecotourism activities, and repeatedly stated that they will only abandon their land when the park officials kill them. These statements are poignant in both their emotion and their stark evocation of unequal power relations: land activists do not threaten others with death but assert that they are willing to be killed for their land. If land activists go to jail, bail is often higher than what a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) worker makes in one month—significantly more than a landless farmer can pay. In tracing historical continuities in standoffs between land activists and state officials, however, it becomes clear that activists' fears have deeper roots than contemporary law and order.

Park officials, in tandem with the military, utilize scorched-earth tactics from counterinsurgency campaigns. Scorched earth generally refers to harsh, take-no-prisoners counterinsurgency that characterized collaborations between the U.S. and Latin American militaries during the Cold War (Danner, 1994; LaFeber, 1993). As during the war, state officials repeatedly burn down cardamom plants, swiddens (both fallows and active plots used for maize, beans, and other food crops), cattle pastures, and any homes that Quixpur residents attempt to rebuild. During the civil war, there were over 400 documented village massacres in a country the size of Tennessee: mass killing, displacement of survivors, and burning of all crops, legal documentation, and homes. Since the 1996 Guatemalan Peace Accords, Quixpur has been in multiple hostage standoffs with park officials and police. While Project and park officials suffered significant distress from being held hostage for an hour to two days (see Chapter 2), community members have been fined, jailed, and even shot.

When I asked conservation professionals about these repeated rights standoffs, they said that it was a problem of social marginality rooted in poverty. When I asked Quixpur leaders, they told me it was racism. They asserted that the army only could evict them from their land in the first place because they are Q'eqchi'

and specifically because they could not read or write Spanish. They did not speak the state's language, and so they could not claim their rights (provisional titles and paid taxes notwithstanding). Nonetheless, Quixpur leaders insisted that their dispossession was temporary and only became permanent when the military and conservation big international nongovernmental organizations (BINGOs) expanded the park and hired guards at the end of the civil war. When I asked about the possibility of reparations, Quixpur leaders flatly rejected financial compensation. They said that as long as they survive, the land is theirs.

This book does not attempt to resolve the case of Quixpur and instead makes a broader claim about the relationship between postwar law enforcement and Indigenous land activism. In the context of conservation and the wartime laws that created the protected-areas system for the Maya Forest, the fact that communities such as Quixpur have state records of their settlements, maps, provisional titles, blueprints, and even signed agreements with CONAP simply does not matter. Under protected-areas management, park officials have decided that no communities can live in core protected areas, and no communities are eligible for reparations. They have no right to their homeland or to any payments for environmental services from that land.

There was a key disjuncture between the meaning of land for the Q'eqchi' Maya community and for urban conservation and development professionals. Whereas for conservation professionals land was a source of possible conservation, housing, and ecotourism revenues, for Quixpur leaders land is more than a resource. In effect, they rejected the premise that they would cede land control for a social wage, such as financial compensation or a basic income grant (Ferguson, 2015; Hart, 2002). They take hostages not to enact harm or to ask for a seat at the negotiating table but instead to demonstrate that a project premised on taking land is not negotiable.

Q'eqchi' leaders do not accept that their ties to the land have been severed and that land is commodified. They seek survival as a people, and indigenous survival requires land. I use the term *land* here as is common in both the Q'eqchi' language and indigenous studies (Deloria and Wildcat, 2001), referring to land, water, air, subsoil, and caves. While this is related to the ways the political geography literature describes territorialization, it does not share the roots of *terroir* (Elden, 2009) and the notion that people are the only being with agency who can make rules about property relations (Agnew, 2003). Indigenous calls for decolonization demand a rethinking of people to the land, one of mutual human/land recognition. When I write about Q'eqchi' territoriality, I am also invoking a collective identity that Tuck and McKenzie (2016, 56) explain as "land is, therefore we are" (see also Bang et al., 2010). In Q'eqchi' ontologies, then, there is no amount of incentive, compensation, or social wage that can substitute for the land. Rather, the land constitutes their life chances as a people.

This book critiques the ways Guatemalan and international conservation organizations have rationalized their indifference toward Indigenous war survivors' land claims by criminalizing them as kidnappers, park invaders, and drug traffickers. This is in stark contrast to influential ethnographies that posit the limits of Maya self-determination in the neoliberal state's choice to recognize them—or not—as multicultural subjects (Hale, 2002; Wainwright and Bryan, 2009). Instead, I argue that conservation is a global project that authorizes violence in protected areas, which I call "green wars." In so doing, I evoke the longer arc of social wars—particularly the Cold War and the drug war—that map criminality onto entire peoples and authorize violence against them. Green wars limit the life chances of Indigenous peoples<sup>7</sup> in protected areas through their legal dispossession, denial of basic state services (such as running water, electricity, and schools), explicit military dispossession, and tacit sanctioning of private violence against "conflictive" communities.

Beginning in the 1980s, the tropical lowlands have come to be known as the Maya Forest, which must be conserved. At the same time, civil war survivors who were known as land-poor peasants are coming to call themselves Maya peoples. Today, the fight to save the Maya Forest is often waged against Maya peoples. This is only possible because state and nonstate conservation professionals interpellate Q'eqchi's as immigrants without historical ties to any land. I begin by briefly sketching Guatemala's civil war and the struggles over memory, names, and material stakes that emerged at the end of the war. Was the war about land, labor, or democracy? In the wake of United Nations (UN) determination that the military state committed genocide, are land reparations needed? If the state participated in genocide, when did genocide begin, and when did it end? Rather than restricting genocide to two distinct moments—500 years ago and the height of the civil war in the early 1980s—Indigenous land activists claim that the settler state has long been in the making, no less powerful in each iteration. In claiming the civil war as part of a longer racial project to erase Maya peoples from the Guatemalan nation, Indigenous activists called the legitimacy of the state and its *ladino* leaders into question.

I then turn to the role of territory in reworking the postcolonial, postwar state. I trace how the military state justified its intervention in the lowlands, first by taming the dangerous jungle for intrepid settlers and then by claiming that it was the protector needed to save the endangered Maya Forest. While it was primarily foreign scientists and archaeologists who envisioned the value of the Maya Forest (including naming it), the state collaborated to create protected areas as a source of income and to legitimate its claims to territory. I then explain the analytic of racialized dispossession and how this racial project works to undermine Maya territoriality by framing Q'eqchi' Mayas as little more than a needy, conflictive ethnic minority rather than an Indigenous people with territorial rights. Finally, I trace how narco-narratives articulate with racialized dispossession to authorize violence in the name of conservation: green wars. Even as the settler state subjects

Q'eqchi's to individualization and criminalization, they seek material decolonization and relationships of repair with both other peoples and the land.

#### IS GENOCIDE LIMITED TO GUATEMALA'S CIVIL WAR?

The creation of a protected-areas system was only possible in the midst of a civil war with the fate of the countryside at its core, a war so violent and one-sided that survivors were afraid to speak up for decades. A political movement for land throughout the country emerged in the ten years of "spring" (1944–1954) when democratically elected presidents addressed massive inequality. In the 1950s, President Jacobo Arbenz announced a sweeping agrarian reform in which the state expropriated land from unused plantations.<sup>8</sup> Arbenz said that the state would pay landowners according to the value claimed when they filed their taxes. Transnational corporations (including the United Fruit Company) and plantation owners protested that their land was worth much more than they claimed on their tax returns, tacitly acknowledging their tax evasion. As land reform gave to the poor and slowly reimbursed the rich, U.S. State Department fears of spreading communism coalesced with U.S. capitalist interests in banana plantations and potential oil production (Gleijeses, 1991; Solano Ponciano, 2005). In 1954, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency supported a coup d'état with a Guatemalan military dictator who immediately rescinded the agrarian reform. The civil war officially began when Marxist guerrillas challenged the military dictatorship.<sup>9</sup> Both inside and outside Guatemala, civil war in the 1960s and 1970s was understood as a battle between military dictators who supported capitalism and Marxist guerrillas who tried to foment peasant revolution in the countryside. During this phase of the war censorship and political murder were common, but massacres were not.

By the late 1970s, however, counterinsurgency shifted from targeted killings to mass genocide. A key turning point was the 1978 military massacre of rural Q'eqchi's who were marching for their land rights. While Greg Grandin (2004) called this the country's "last colonial massacre," Guatemala's present-day colonial project requires repeated violence to prevent Mayas from reclaiming the land that was taken from them.<sup>10</sup> The military and paramilitaries committed large-scale massacres that targeted the rural poor, Catholics who might have been influenced by liberation theology (privileging the poor and empowering laity to interpret the Bible were seen as potentially subversive), and people with Maya signifiers (phenotype, language, and dress). In a country with at most a few thousand guerrillas by the military's own estimation, over 200,000 people were killed or disappeared, and over 1 million were internally displaced from their homes for months or years. Those killed and displaced were disproportionately Maya. One Q'eqchi' massacre survivor (who heard his mother and sisters die violent deaths at the military's hand when he was just six years old) told me that of his belief that targeted political

violence of *ladinos* demonstrates that *ladino* lives have value, whereas mass murder demonstrates that Q'eqchi' lives did not have value. Civil war violence peaked in the late 1980s, at which point the military declared success and demarcated the conditions for peace (Schirmer, 1998).

It was not until the 1990s that the UN successfully brokered peace processes between military and guerrilla leaders. The military and guerrilla representatives were beginning to negotiate for an end to ideological war, so it was a shock for them when Maya peoples took to the streets. Pan-Maya activists claimed that their loved ones were killed not due to Marxist ideologies but instead because of state racism. This is important, because “Maya” is *not* a “minority” category in terms of population. Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil (1992, 2007) is prominent among Maya scholars who demonstrate that the official census systematically undercounts Maya peoples.<sup>11</sup> He and others argue that this is because Maya peoples are probably 60 percent of the population. The application of the term *minority* naturalizes the massive underrepresentation that Indigenous peoples suffer in access to education, health care, and the country's wealth. Likewise, the term naturalizes the ways that one group, *ladinos*, dominate state institutions and purport to represent the national body politic.

The UN-sponsored Commission for Historical Clarification (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico) condemned as genocide the systematic killing of Maya peoples and policies to destroy their culture and way of life (CEH, 1999). Non-Indigenous guerrillas felt betrayed by comrades in struggle (*compas* in Spanish) who alienated them by referring to them as colonial invaders (*kaxlan* in Q'eqchi'). These fissures were mirrored in the formation of a separate representative for Indigenous peoples in the peace negotiations and the splinter of peasant organizations. While many Pan-Maya activists and intellectuals have worked with and/or consider themselves Marxian thinkers, others critique the ways that class-based guerrilla recruitment hailed them as revolutionary subjects and then abandoned them to murder (Bastos and Camus, 2003; Cojtí Cuxil, 1997; Konefal, 2010; Warren, 1998a; Ybarra, 2013). Pan-Maya activists used the peace accords process as a forum to claim that the war was just the latest iteration of colonialism, beyond a three-decade struggle against capitalism. In this interpretation, military massacres of Maya villages were acts of genocide that followed a pattern of five centuries.

Across the Americas, the 1992 celebration of Christopher Columbus's supposed discovery of the Americas was an opportunity to call into question the erasure of genocide. Against a tide of politically correct claims of an “encounter,” Indigenous activists condemned Columbus Day as a celebration of violent invasion. Indigenous peoples in Latin America likewise condemned Spanish speakers' celebration of Columbus Day as *día de la raza* (day of the race) because it privileges the mixing of Indigenous and Spanish peoples, claiming that all citizens have a common mixed heritage (*mestizo*). Indigenous peoples took to the streets to proclaim their place in the future, rejecting their relegation to the past as keepers of colorful folk-

lore and “ancient” languages.<sup>12</sup> In recognition of Indigenous peoples’ calls to rethink colonialism as central to the histories of the Americas, the 1992 Nobel committee awarded Rigoberta Menchú Tum the Peace Prize. Rigoberta Menchú is a K’iche’ Maya who became an international celebrity after she fled military violence, calling for U.S. solidarity and activism against military repression. Her work became emblematic of the Pan-Maya movement, which calls for accountability for racial violence committed in the civil war and seeks to recuperate indigenous identity after centuries of genocide. Maya land activists argue that they cannot recuperate their identity without their land.

### SETTLER COLONIALISM: GENOCIDE AS A TERRITORIAL PROJECT

While many people think that genocide is limited to physical massacres of a racialized group, the legal definition includes forcibly taking children, preventing births, causing mental harms, and inflicting conditions that bring about a social group’s destruction (Article II, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court). I argue that settler-state subjections that sever Q’eqchi’s from the land constitute such a harm. According to Wolfe (2008, 108), “settler colonialism is an inclusive, land-centered project that coordinates a comprehensive range of agencies, from the metropolitan center to the frontier encampment, with a view to eliminating Indigenous societies.” Just as colonialism is not a singular event that occurred when Germans appropriated Q’eqchi’ territory in the nineteenth century, settler colonialism is invented and reworked every time the settler state weaves indigenous extinction into the workings of contemporary property structures, the rule of law, and everyday life. When Guatemalan conservation practitioners express sympathy for the plight of Indigenous land activists but tell me that considering changes to protected-area laws is “impractical,” they are signaling that the Maya right to life is not possible in the contemporary settler state.

Scholars critique settler colonialism in the context of how British settlers created societies that were predicated on logics of native elimination in the United States, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. Rather than a historical moment of indigenous elimination for settler life, settler logics of elimination are at the foundation of political-economic structures and can help scholars and activists alike understand why these countries voted against the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous and Tribal Peoples or recognize indigenous territorial rights that are not contingent on settler benevolence.

The first prominent volume examining settler colonialism, *Unsettling Settler Societies* (Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995), was not limited to British colonialism and instead included case studies ranging from Palestine to Mexico. Latin Americanist scholars need not privilege Anglo colonial powers with the exceptional ability to

impose a settler colonial project. In recent years, scholars have been delving into the nuances of settler colonialism in the Americas, including Saldaña-Portillo's (2015) pathbreaking book on formations in Mexico and the United States and a forthcoming special issue on settler colonialism in latin america in *American Quarterly* (Bianet Castellanos, in press; Loperena, in press; Speed, in press). This book does not argue that Spanish colonialism is settler colonialism. Rather, post-Hispanic independence and debates over the national body politic clearly reject Spanish colonialism while using debates over racial purity and disappearing natives to forge a new settler state (see also Gott, 2007). More than traces of Spanish colonial discourses, the materiality of Q'eqchi' moves to decolonization can only be understood in the context of the present-day settler state. I draw on settler logics of elimination to explain the military state's efforts to colonize the lowlands in the mid-twentieth century as well as subsequent claims that Maya peoples are invaders in the Maya Forest. My use of a settler colonial analysis is informed by Q'eqchi' land activists' speeches that date their dispossession back 200 years, to the liberal nineteenth century, when Spanish-descended elites wrote settler logics of elimination into land allocations to entice West European settlement (Casaús Arzú, 2010; McCreery, 1994; Wagner, 2001). Many Q'eqchi's suffered their first land dispossession in the nineteenth century when the new Guatemalan state took their territory and gave it to Germans for coffee plantations. Q'eqchi's were then forced to labor on their own land.

During World War II, the Guatemalan military expropriated lands from supposed German Nazis. Rather than return these lands to their rightful owners, the military state declared these and the rest of the lowlands *terra nullius*, an empty frontier to be populated with loyal citizens. Even though Q'eqchi's were often living on the land and investing their labor to improve it, state agencies wanted them to continue working for low wages on someone else's plantation. Nonetheless, with the exception of a few politically important cooperatives (e.g., Falla, 1993; Manz, 1988), Q'eqchi's were major participants in militarized colonization of the lowlands. When Q'eqchi's did not settle the land in centralized villages or farm according to central planners' dictates, the military increasingly imagined them as unruly and unknown subjects on the frontier. In military logics of elimination, the body politic *includes* loyal capitalist citizens who learn Spanish and improve the nation, while it *excludes* disloyal citizens who do not speak Spanish, make claims that the state should change its rule of law (to reflect indigenous conceptions of justice or property), and value reciprocal relationships over capitalist markets. This is part of a broader Latin American move toward liberal dominance and a politics of racial whitening after independence from the Spanish (Gordillo, 2004; Mollett, 2016).

By the mid-1970s, military planners marked large swaths of land encompassing many villages as "red" for elimination, killing off all people, livestock, and crops (Black, 1984; Huet, 2008; Schirmer, 1998).<sup>13</sup> Military and paramilitary scorched-earth massacres sent families into hiding, where they lived in the jungle for days,

months, or even years. The military forcibly recruited boys and men into paramilitary patrols tasked with hunting their neighbors down in the jungle. Paramilitary leaders ruled over villages with iron fists (and the only guns in town), and people were forced to live in close quarters in densely designed model villages, where they were encouraged to spy and report on each other to authorities. In the same way that Rifkin (2009, 94) argues that a brutal “sovereign violence” was necessary for the “(re)production and naturalization of national space” in the U.S. Western frontier, military violence at once sited the jungle as a frontier and incorporated it into the Guatemalan nation. While civil war violence in Chile, Argentina, and Brazil relied on the violent spectacle of thousands but many survived their torture as a warning to others, Guatemala’s military and paramilitary forces committed mass killings that numbered into the hundreds of thousands, taking on a distinctly genocidal character (Grandin, 2005; Menjívar and Rodríguez, 2005; Taylor, 1997).

Whereas the military framed the lowlands as a dangerous jungle filled with subversives in the 1970s and 1980s, state planners and international conservation BINGOs saw a tropical forest beginning in the 1980s. Even though these imaginaries seem disparate and are rarely acknowledged in the same forum, they articulate in today’s green wars to legitimate violent dispossession. At first, the military state drew on settler logics of elimination to rationalize successive military campaigns. While the original intent of those campaigns was to incorporate the lowlands into a national civilizing project, conservation interests beginning in the 1970s led to a reimagining of the lowlands as the “wilderness,” leaving the highlands as a site of “civilization.” The community described at the beginning of this chapter was effectively written out of military narratives and erased from conservation maps before its members could move back home. While conservation BINGOs did not call for violence, their forest imaginaries were predicated on state violence that makes Q’eqchi’ territoriality unthinkable.

#### FROM UNTAMED JUNGLE TO MAYA FOREST

This book brings together settler colonialism’s emphasis on the relationship between logics of extinction and land expropriation and on political ecology’s concern for the creation of protected areas as primitive accumulation, whereas British colonies in America and Africa share a history of creating parks to preserve wilderness and create elite hunting reserves. It is for this reason that the U.S. model of imagining the relationship between an urbanized civilization in contrast with the preserved wilderness, known as the Yellowstone model, is paradigmatic for how it enacts violent land expropriation while denying the capability of Indigenous peoples to understand property relations (Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe, 2008; Cronon, 1983; Dowie, 2011; Jacoby, 2001; Rifkin, 2009). The importance of fortress conservation in protecting keystone species, fostering national pride, and fund-raising has been

absorbed by conservation organizations, with key personnel trained and based in the United States. These assumptions do not hold for former Spanish colonies, which mostly created national parks in a context of overlapping property rights in the twentieth century (Brockington et al., 2008; Wakild, 2011).

Beginning in the 1970s, BINGOs focusing on conservation, notably the World Wild Fund for Nature and the Nature Conservancy, began replicating the U.S. model in poor postcolonial countries. Subsequent decades witnessed the creation of a new environmental paradigm that rapidly progressed from documenting deforestation crises to creating the subdiscipline of conservation biology based on the urgent need to protect nature, today called biodiversity (Farnham, 2007). By the late 1980s, a Conservation International (CI) scientist proposed that conservation efforts concentrate on areas of high biodiversity that were endangered by logging and “shifting cultivation,” referring to swidden agriculture (e.g., Myers, 1988). Conservation BINGOs participated in planning the Maya Forest, which was the centerpiece of a new national protected-areas system in Guatemala in 1990. By the late 1990s, CI focused its fund-raising and advocacy efforts around “biodiversity hotspots” (Mittermeier et al., 1998), of which the Maya Forest was the third largest in landmass.

The Maya Forest is comprised of Belize, Mexico’s southeastern coast, and Guatemala’s northern lowlands (Figure 1). Conservation biologists, archaeologists, and ecotourism operators focus on the similarities of the region in terms of contiguous habitat for fauna and flora, pre-Columbian archaeological sites, and adventure opportunities (Nations, 2006), but these countries have distinct historical and political trajectories. In 1981, Belize both became an independent nation and created its national park system, which today encompasses one-fifth of the nation’s territory and is the foundation of a strong tourism industry.<sup>14</sup> The Mexican Maya Forest includes areas with high concentrations of poverty and Indigenous peoples. In 1978, the central Mexican government created the Montes Azules reserve, which U.S.- and UK-based conservationists argued only the Lacandón Mayas could lay claim to (Nations and Nigh, 1978), thus delegitimizing Tzeltal and Chol Indigenous land claims. By 1994, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation criticized the Mexican government’s cooperation with international interests (corporate and conservation) to dispossess non-Lacandón Indigenous peoples (Harvey, 2001). While these three nations are distinct in terms of politics, history, and ethnicities, each nation-state manages protected areas in the face of Mayan demands for self-determination.

For its part, the Guatemalan government actively promoted homesteading in the northern lowlands beginning in the late 1950s, where landless settlers could become farmers and plantation owners through the state land-titling program.<sup>15</sup> In 1990, state priorities made an abrupt about-face when the legislature created a national protected-areas system that encompasses more than one-third of the



FIGURE 1. Extent of the Maya Forest, based on the Nature Conservancy and Conservation International promotional materials. (Blackmer Maps)

nation's territory. As it had been during the war, land was a central issue during the 1994–1996 Guatemalan Peace Accords negotiations. This final set of negotiations took as a given that fully one-third of national territory had conservation as its primary purpose, trumping claims to indigenous and agrarian land justice. Thus, the peace accords were restricted to debates over how to manage property in and reparations for the remaining two-thirds of the nation's territory.

In Guatemala's Maya Forest, more than two-thirds of the Alta Verapaz and Petén Departments have some protected-area status that requires land-use restrictions. The problems facing the displaced community I described earlier are all too common, as Q'eqchi's are the majority population living in the Maya Forest. Wilson (1995) estimates that more than 80 percent of Q'eqchi's in Alta Verapaz were displaced during the late 1970s and early 1980s; there are no comparative figures for Petén, as these are typically assumed to be "immigrants" irrespective of military violence. Many people were uprooted and hid in the jungle for years, many lost

documentation of their land tenure (whether abandoned, molded, or burned in massacres), and it was unusual for them to negotiate with a militarized government that actively sought their death. While few people openly contested territorial claims over protected areas when they were created in the early 1990s, people have contested protected areas more with each passing year. Rather than view land activists as new “park invaders,” I suggest that the lack of contestation during the civil war and peace negotiations can be understood as a survival strategy in the wake of racialized state violence. In other words, past silence was not acquiescence.

In the postwar political project, the civilian state has imagined Maya peoples as ethnic minorities in need of liberal benevolence rather than as Indigenous peoples with the right to collective self-determination as ethnic minorities. What the liberal government and military state stole collectively—land—they now reserve the right to allot on an individualized basis using conditions they declare. This bestows on the postwar multicultural state a claim to benevolence for the global good, whereby Q’eqchi’s are at best supplicants with needs that may be subordinate to the need to save the Maya Forest. At worst, they are subversives, immigrants, wood-eating termites who deforest the land thoughtlessly, invaders, and even narcos.

#### CONSERVATION’S ROLE IN RACIALIZED DISPOSSESSION

Political ecologists have amply demonstrated that conservation leads to “winners and losers” (Brockington et al., 2008), with the losers often rural, indigenous, and poor. Lowland Q’eqchi’s territorial relationships have been punctuated with struggles against dispossession—against the Spanish, then the Germans, then military officers, and now transnational capitalist speculators (Solano Ponciano, 2013). Marxian analysis often frames dispossession as primitive accumulation, or a process that separates farmers from their land, often in repeated historical processes (De Angelis, 2001; Kelly, 2011; Perelman, 2000). While some political ecologists use the term “land grabbing” to explain large-scale land transactions that dispossess rural farmers (Alonso-Fradejas, 2012; Borrás et al., 2012; Borrás et al., 2011; Fairhead, Leach, and Scoones, 2012), others emphasize sedimented histories in land dispossession (Grandia, 2012; Mollett, 2016; Sundberg, 1999; Wainwright, 2008). Beyond capital accumulation, the conservation of protected areas begins with the settler’s wilderness imaginary. Protected areas rest on sedimented histories of settler colonialism that prefigure the death of the indigene from whom we inherit the land (Saldaña-Portillo, 2015; Tuck and Yang, 2012).

While Marxian analysis of repeated capitalist dispossession as primitive accumulation is an important critique of capitalism as imperialism, it does not fully capture the noncapitalist ontology of territory as identity (Coulthard, 2010). Many Q’eqchi’ communities understand their spiritual relationship with the land as

more important than (or encompassing) their productive farming relationships. Q'eqchi' see the land as part of the *tzuultaq'a*, the spirit that grants them permission to work the land and live from its bounty. In so doing, the *tzuultaq'a* affirms their indigenous identity. Thus, processes of repeated dispossession work to alienate communities from their affirmative Q'eqchi' identity and produce a negative identity: native in opposition to the dominant settler society.

A central claim of my work is that Guatemala's protected-areas system employs a settler logic of elimination (Wolfe, 2008). This indigenous studies analytic is a way to think about settler colonialism as a geographic imaginarity (Gregory, 2004; Said, 1978), a territorial project that changes even as it reproduces a vision of the native's elimination. Transnational indigenous studies scholars have critiqued the ways that Western rule of law effaces and elides accountability to its own commitments in international treaties and national peace accords. At the heart of liberal (mis)recognition of Indigenous peoples are two foundational notions: individual citizenship rights and group ethnicity needs.

First, liberal nation-states are founded on a notional relationship between individual citizens and the nation as imagined community (Anderson, 1991). Rather than individual rights, however, Indigenous peoples often focus on the needs of the entire body politic for political survival. For Q'eqchi' Mayas, justice is not about individuals being treated the same under a universal rule of law but instead is about honoring relationships with territory (*tzuultaq'a*), family, and community (Grünberg, 2003). Whereas some liberal and critical race frameworks argue that a history of oppression and marginality demands action in order to ensure equal protection, this critique still imagines the unit of analysis as the individual, a vision too narrow to encompass indigenous rights to collective self-determination.

Second, the multicultural liberal state seeks to racialize Indigenous peoples as one of many competing minority groups in need. Saldaña-Portillo (2015, 124–125) notes that Mexican elites “privileged abstract principles of citizenship, in the process reducing indigenous difference to an ethnic variation within Mexican character. But indigenous identity was produced and reproduced through specific modes of indigenous territoriality, through punctual uses of space sanctioned, in whatever abridged form, under Spanish dominion.” Her intervention is salutary in that it does not privilege Anglo countries as the site of liberalism and shows how liberal models of nominally universal citizenship work to make this impossible for all but a propertied “white” man (see also Appelbaum, Macpherson, and Roseblatt, 2003; Silva, 2007). Rather than disputing liberal frameworks of deserving/undeserving poor, Saldaña-Portillo reminds us that indigenous difference is manifest in spatial practice, including conceptions of property relations.

Racial liberalism not only articulates race, class, and religion in state subjections (Pulido, 2016; Ranganathan, 2016; Silva, 2007) but also subsumes indigenous collectives in logics of individual rights and needs. In the linked projects of militarization

and conservation, the divide between individual and collective property marks *ladino* and Maya identities in a manner similar to that of racialized identities under allotment and reservations in U.S. settler colonialism.<sup>16</sup> In racializing Indigenous peoples, the liberal state refuses to acknowledge how identity is articulated through a relationship to land. Rather than imagine a carceral native who must be sedentary to be authentic, I mean that Indigenous peoples have ontologies that are distinct from Western ontologies and thus the rule of law; they have a different relationship to national time and space (Povinelli, 2002, 48). This relationship means that the Guatemalan state's inscription of territory into a national registry, as though it were newly created, is an act of epistemic violence. Rather than understanding how peoples' identities are defined in dialogue with place, the liberal state's racialization of Maya peoples as a minority group works to dispossess them.

The contemporary Maya Forest allows for multiple property regimes: state-owned protected areas, community-owned forestry cooperatives, and privatized landownership. This precludes the possibility of collective self-determination through territorial management. While many Indigenous people make claims on war reparations as individuals (for the loss of loved ones and land) and seek development assistance (*tenq'*, or "help"), they know that this framework recognizes them on the basis of their need and marginality and that development's trusteeship reproduces unequal power relations. Indigenous peoples may decide to participate in discursive frameworks that frame them as people to be pitied, but they may simultaneously invoke sovereignty as a positive assertion of rights claims and entitlements (Kauanui, 2008). This is not an either/or relationship to liberal states but rather a both/and relationship: Q'eqchi's accept liberal recognition as individuals and know themselves as a people. Some Q'eqchi' organizations work through current legal structures for their own ends in search of collective self-determination (see Chapter 4).

I draw on three key strands of thought to understand how conservation conflicts have normalized this level of crisis: postcoloniality, feminist political ecology, and indigenous studies. While many Latin Americanists have an ambivalent relationship with the postcolonial literature due to its spatial-temporal orientation toward post-World War II Africa (Coronil, 2008), a postcolonial critique of Occidentalism (defining the West in opposition to its Other) is helpful in letting go of the obsession with bureaucratic rationalities of capitalism or looking for the "success"/"failure" of states that haunts much of the development literature. My use of postcolonial theory draws more on works that emphasize the material implications of racial geographies than those that have a philosophical approach to decoloniality that dates to the Frankfurt School (e.g., Dussell, 1995; Mignolo, 2007; Moraña, Dussel, and Jáuregui, 2008). Postcolonial thought offers significant insights into how the national body politic is read as a racial body, one that is weak in the face of threats to the fragile racial supremacy project (Coronil, 1997; Coronil and Skurski, 2006b; Saldaña-Portillo, 2015; Silva, 2007). At the same time I read

the Guatemalan national project as weak, because it is premised on the notion of a supposedly universal *ladino* settler state. From the perspective of lowland Q'eqchi's who suffer its violence, the settler state seems strong indeed. One of the goals of this ethnographic project is to explain why the same state practices seem weak from the point of view of settlers vulnerable to decolonization and strong from the point of view of Indigenous peoples subject to state violence.

Feminist political ecology offers a way to think through power relations in ethnographies of nature and conservation, particularly those that continue to grapple with the interpellation of those considered less than human. In this, I draw on the ideas of Caroline Faria and Sharlene Mollett as well as Andrea Nightingale and Juanita Sundberg in looking at power relations in nature imaginaries. White wilderness fantasies at once instantiate whiteness and masculinity (Cronon, 1995a; Kosek, 2006). Feminist political ecologists have called attention to the ways that our identities shape access and the ways that we are recognized as gendered and racialized subjects in ethnographic exchanges (Mollett and Faria, 2013; Sundberg, 2003b, 2005). In making claims about my relationship to indigeneity, land, and conservation practice, research participants were explaining their understanding of these themes and how they relate to them through difference. Even as I honor these differences, I focus on what the settler state is stealing from Q'eqchi's, both spiritually and materially. To do so, situated knowledges require us to question both what nature is (ontology) and how we can come to know it (epistemology). Following Andrea Nightingale (2003, 2016), I employ epistemological pluralism. Rather than triangulate data for complementarity, I look for divergence. It is when our results diverge that we are challenged to think of new explanations. This framework is best applied when thinking through axes of human difference in nature-society relations, even as it highlights the material urgency of the ontological underpinnings of more than human relations among peoples who have been denigrated as less than human (Pellow, 2016; Sundberg, 2014; Tallbear, 2011). In settler colonial states, it may be useful to think about multiple epistemological frameworks that operate simultaneously on the same terrain.

I complement postcolonial theory and feminist political ecology with insights from indigenous studies, which is crucial to understanding the present political structures of settler colonialism. In thinking about the importance of land beyond capital, I look to Glen Coulthard, Beth Rose Middleton, Audra Simpson, and Eve Tuck. This requires understanding land and spirituality as the conditions of material possibility for indigeneity (Coulthard, 2010; Tuck and McKenzie, 2016; Tuck and Yang, 2012). Rather than demanding state recognition and thus being defined by it, Indigenous peoples are engaging in what I call a both/and politics that engages within and beyond settler-state subjections (Middleton, 2011; Simpson, 2014). Each of these helps me suspend the urge to confine Indigenous land activism to what is practical in the eyes of the settler state and look to the horizons of new possibilities for repatriation. While Q'eqchi' interlocutors willingly discussed

the damages of the past, they continually look beyond survival to an indigenous futurity (Coulthard, 2014; Middleton, 2010, 2015; Tuck, 2009).

#### NARCO-NARRATIVES, REMILITARIZATION, AND CRIMINALIZATION OF DAILY LIFE

Guatemala legally recognizes Q'eqchi's as an Indigenous people in its constitution, and the government legally recognizes Indigenous peoples' right to territorial autonomy (such as through ILO 169). So, why can't Q'eqchi's exercise these rights in the Maya Forest? The reason is that the nation-state's settler identity effaces indigenous sovereignty, and its logics of elimination privilege global conservation imaginaries over indigenous survival. The project of green security articulates globalized fears of the loss of the Maya Forest with national fears over the ways drug trafficking organizations use the Maya Forest as part of their trafficking networks. In Guatemala, people who might otherwise support Maya land activism are swayed by their fear of drug war violence, leading them to accept remilitarization and criminalization of daily life.

Some people in rural Guatemala say that today's drug war is worse than the recent civil war.<sup>17</sup> In the civil war, violence seemed to have a clear Cold War purpose with set (if covert) warriors, but in the drug war, shifting alliances mean that people understand killings as random. The idea of a "drug war" is not restricted to drug trafficking and sale. Rather, this has come to signal the vast connected networks between drug trafficking organizations and gangs that fight each other and the police over the ability to control trafficking routes for drugs, guns, people, and other contraband. The use of the war metaphor at once fails to identify who is fighting whom while signaling that those who did fight in the drug war were "combatants" who knowingly made such a choice. The problem is that sweeping narco-narratives engage in mass criminalization, which goes beyond assuming someone committed a crime to preventing them from being law-abiding (Cacho, 2012, 4).

At the same time, most people know that there is little they can do to shield themselves from violence. The global average homicide rate stands at 6.2 per 100,000 people, but Guatemala's is currently hovering around 40 homicides per 100,000 people (UNODC, 2013), on par with mid-1980s civil war levels. Many families are affected at higher rates because these statistics do not account for people who have become *desaparecidos* (disappeared) on their way north, usually losing contact with their families in Mexico. Whereas during the civil war the army took away *desaparecidos*, today migrants headed north are disappeared when they are kidnapped and family members cannot pay high extortion rates. All of this is to say that drug war violence is real, and it is scary. Fear of drug war violence shapes how people think, where and when they travel, what they say, and how they present themselves to friends and strangers alike.

On November 6, 2011, Guatemalans elected retired military general Otto Pérez Molina as president on a *mano dura* (iron fist) platform: deploy more military troops to bring security. Pérez Molina's election can be understood as public approval for the recent resurgence in militarized violence. As Guatemalans immediately recognize from the clenched fist that is the Patriotic Party's logo, Pérez Molina explicitly told Guatemalans that he would use his military experience to bring back an "iron fist" that is tough on crime. To the extent that Guatemalans now live in a culture of terror (Taussig, 1987), they may be trading what they hope is someone else's freedom for their own security. Recent years have witnessed a massive return to remilitarization. Under the previous presidency of Alvaro Colom, the administration declared states of emergency in Alta Verapaz (December 2010–February 2011) and Petén (May–July 2011); during those periods habeas corpus rights were suspended, and the military waged massive territorial campaigns against the narcos. Subsequent presidents made temporary practices and military formations permanent.<sup>18</sup>

But who is a narco? People who farm inside parks were accused of drug trafficking, apparently because parks were framed as ungovernable spaces. Whereas military and paramilitary forces criminalized people as "subversives" during the Cold War and then as park "invaders" when they reclaimed their lands after the peace accords, today the military is criminalizing populations as "narcos" in the drug war. While the stakes in the drug war are high enough in terms of money, lives, and territorial control, in the lowlands they articulate with what I call "green security." Lunstrum (2014, 817) identifies the resurgence in conservation violence as "green militarization," in terms of the use of paramilitary and military actors and techniques and technologies in conservation practice (see also Büscher and Ramutsindela, 2016; Duffy, 2016; Dunlap and Fairhead, 2014).<sup>19</sup> I emphasize the ways that green security limits life chances for people who are framed as dangerous to protected areas (Kelly and Ybarra, 2016; Ybarra, 2016). In Guatemala, this is not specific to the military but is a series of violent practices sanctioned among the military, police forces, and private security firms. When I write of limiting life chances, I draw on critical race frameworks that emphasize that racism is "state sanctioned and/or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death" (Gilmore, 2004, 261). My attention to Indigenous peoples' life chances moves away from state violence in general and toward the specific ways that racialization makes some people expendable in the name of conservation (see also Bocarejo and Ojeda, 2016; Lunstrum and Ybarra, in press; Mollett, 2011, 2016). When I bring in the insights of critical race theory (Cacho, 2012; Gilmore, 2007; Hall et al., 2013) to think through the ways the settler state demands indigenous death, I make a distinction from the liberal conception of life as housed in the individual. And when I write of indigenous life chances, I signal the (im)possibility of a collective Indigenous people's survival (Coulthard, 2014; Middleton, 2015; Simpson, 2014).

The logics of green security rationalize increasing militarization and also connect it with structural violence that limits life chances for people who are seen as dangerous to protected areas. In other words, green security refers to the social logics that underpin coordinated state and NGO actions to limit life chances through a series of actions, including militarized evictions from protected areas, burning subsistence crops, and arresting farmers. Courts of Narco-Activity and Crimes against the Environment find men guilty and force families to pay high fines for their release from jail. The state refuses these same families access to roads, electricity, running water, and schools for their children. I use the term “green security” to signal the ways that military troops evicting families with guns are connected to the day-to-day practices of denying basic social services to those same families, limiting the life chances of Maya children in order to save the Maya Forest.

Thus, “green wars” refers to the articulation of the drug war and green security, where narco-narratives render people as dangerous and conservation practice renders them as environmental threats. Green wars serve to strip Maya land activism of its political claims, where state and conservation BINGOs claim that drug traffickers and park invaders are simply greedy. In other words, the Guatemalan Army claims that it is not at war with rural peoples in the Maya Forest, but its claim that those same peoples are narcos means that the state does not have to engage with their territorial claims. The disavowal of politics in postgenocide Guatemala is particularly potent, because many Guatemalans are comfortable with the idea that the military does not respect the human rights of drug traffickers, but they would be concerned about the military displacing Indigenous genocide survivors for conservation.

Building on commonsense ideas from the civil war and the drug war, contemporary green wars operate in a truth regime where anyone in the lowlands jungle must be involved with drug trafficking, however tangentially. Foucault (2008) uses the analytic of a truth regime to explain how criminal justice systems can operate independently of empirical evidence. In truth regimes of social wars, policing is no longer about tracking and proving criminal *acts* but instead is about discerning the truth of who is a criminal *person*. If a person is pathologically criminal, there is no need to look further to understand his actions. In the process of arresting a Q'eqchi' farmer in a protected area and hearing his case in the Court of Narco-Activity and Crimes against the Environment, his machete is transformed from a tool that brings life from the earth into an instrument of death.

Green wars is the territorial project that makes it not only easy for the Guatemalan state to ignore Indigenous land claims but also further facilitates the criminalization of Maya peoples and the act of farming. Rather than engage with complicated histories and incomplete archival evidence, international conservationists and state agencies have posited the global good of conservation against the global

evil of the so-called narco. I write to call attention to the role of the U.S.-based funding (through the U.S. Agency for International Development [USAID], the State Department, and many NGOs) in promoting what we call “citizen security” and “conservation,” because they are all too often experienced as rural repression. Even though the narrative frameworks that justify global interests in mitigating climate change through forest conservation and increasing policing in the name of security seem disconnected, they work together to limit the indigenous futures that Maya activists imagine for themselves.

### OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

In Chapter 1, I trace histories of how state violence criminalizes lowland Q'eqchi's. The chapter draws on Said's imaginative geographies, beginning from the proposition that there is no innocent or objective representation, and then traces how a group's representation of an Other place reveals power relations between peoples and places (Gregory, 2004; Said, 1978). I bring these together with political ecology's insights on political forests, in which the military state imagined a dangerous, subversive jungle to be tamed and eventually remade into an endangered forest to be saved (Peluso and Vandergeest, 2001, 2011; Ybarra, 2012). During the civil war, the military posited the jungle as unknown, harboring subversive guerrillas, and dangerous to the urban capitalist core. In this imaginary, the jungle and the people in it were an existential threat to the Guatemalan way of life, one that justified massive scorched-earth campaigns. While the international community disavowed this reasoning at the end of the Cold War, it is finding new purchase in contemporary drug war fears.

Chapters 2 and 3 unpack what Sundberg (1998a) refers to as the “migrant-as-culprit” narrative in Maya Forest enforcement, asking how Q'eqchi's came to be immigrants in their own land. I argue that the answer lies in the conjunctural moment when conservation organizations descended on Petén with a mandate to save the Maya Forest, while over 1 million people were still displaced by war. The liminal moment between war and peace afforded key opportunities for the military and international conservation organizations to engage in supposedly apolitical projects for the global good. Though international conservationists argue that they are not responsible for Guatemalan politics, I trace their role in advocating for the protected-areas system and framing affected communities as threats that endanger the forest.

In tracing the racialized identities of land “owners” and park “invaders,” I argue that U.S.-based scientists and conservationists cannot save the Maya Forest without engaging in postgenocide politics of race and accountability. To explain why this is so, Chapter 2 shows a conservation project that cannot compete for reforestation projects because it cannot guarantee that communities will respect, much

less protect, reforestation zones. The reason for this is one of radically different visions of the same park: where conservationists see an opportunity for climate change mitigation through carbon forestry, massacre survivors see their family graves and the land their fathers died for enclosed in a park. The case raises difficult questions of racism and reparations, asking how paramilitary and military authorities made decisions in drawing—and redrawing—the park’s boundary lines. I argue that we must consider genocide survivors’ claims that racialized repression made them into “park invaders,” while those who benefited from war violence now stand to benefit from community-based reforestation payments as “landowners.” While Spanish-speaking former paramilitaries dominate the community’s Land Committee, Q’eqchi’-speaking massacre survivors dominate the community’s Victims Committee. In this context, I argue that racialized dispossession made paramilitary landowners into *ladino* settlers and that international sustainable development partnerships with them serve to exacerbate economic inequalities and criminalize postwar land activism.

After truth and reconciliation commissions, how do killers and survivors come together as a community in conservation and development projects? Chapter 3 lays out a provisional answer, arguing that *ladinos* engage in postplantation paternalisms by claiming their role as intermediaries between international funders and poor Indigenous peoples. Whether with benign or malicious intentions, these new relationships are established on sedimented histories of unequal power relations. These families wield their historical privilege, and their children, who have grown up without land, go into politics, conservation, and development. In the postplantation era, *ladinos* step seamlessly into the role of trustee, where they know how the rural poor should live, what they need, and what is best for them. They both defuse incendiary Indigenous claims of what they are owed and offer an inventory of how gringos can help. At the same time, I reflect on what is at stake in the meaning of the *ladino* identity as a settler identity. Rather than a politics of pigmentation, the meaning of *ladino* identities is centered on their role in a property regime that posits them as owners of property and trustees of natives, who need their help to modernize and get ahead. While many *ladinos* likewise lost their land in recent decades, they have found new prosperity in their role as cultural brokers in the development of Indigenous peoples. I recognize the complicated constellations of identity politics where *ladino*, mestizo, and white have different meanings and reveal the tensions between celebrating racial mixing (*mestizaje*) and whitening the nation (*blanqueamiento*). Even as this chapter elucidates those tensions, it explores the limits of these debates by comparing with the Q’eqchi’ constant that holds all of these as *kaxlan*, or settlers.

Chapter 4 traces a case of settler colonialism underneath a thin veneer of conservation, in which a European used a park-declaration process to legitimate his illegal expropriation of caves and land for an ecotourism venture. The case of Can-

delaria Caves National Park shows the role of protected areas in reproducing territoriality as a racialized identity practice. While the figure of “private property” was powerful in the hands of a gringo, it was revealed as worthless in the collective hands of an Indigenous community. The lesson this community learned was that the “rule of law” and private property would not be enforced on their behalf, evidence be damned, and that conforming to conservation respectability politics awarded no meaningful alliances.

In the wake of these events some people have fallen into despair, while others rearticulate a radical politics of hope in reimagining collective self-determination. Rather than choosing between the twin poles of liberal recognition and indigenous refusal, I posit a cartography of refusal<sup>20</sup> that rejects the authority of the settler gaze while engaging in settler legal systems. Instead of seeking legibility within the state, this entails a strategic engagement with settler legal systems that is not defined by that engagement. As with identity politics more generally, the communities I worked with do not see the need to engage in either/or strategies; rather, their lives necessitate both/and engagements with settler states to survive the present while envisioning decolonized futures. Their engagement with indigenous futures ranges from communal property titles to taxing foreign African palm oil corporations. While few attempts are entirely successful, they point to the resilience of Q'eqchi' territoriality.

In the conclusion, I apply the lessons of the civil war legacy to the present. In our present political conjuncture, what is the fate of Maya activists seeking land in a forest that the military says is full of dangerous drug traffickers? In recent years, the military has conducted many evictions under states of emergency that have suspended habeas corpus rights as part of drug war campaigns. When they clear out the forest, military and park officials claim that families are living in drug trafficking routes, so they must be collaborating with cartels. The association between park invading and drug trafficking is so strong in state imaginaries that the same court that hears drug cases also hears cases on crimes against the environment. Thus, a farmer caught planting beans inside a park is processed through the same court as a cartel assassin. Have yesterday's guerrillas become today's narcos?

In postwar Guatemala, narco-narratives work to shape the urban poor and the rural Indigenous alike as peoples who are worth more in death than in life. Civil war counterinsurgency sought communists, drug war policing seeks narcos, and green war conservation seeks park invaders—all three social wars operate on a racialized terrain that disproportionately limits indigenous life chances. I argue that racialized rightlessness limits Q'eqchi' life chances in three distinct but articulated ways: first, life chances are limited in the public health sense, where Indigenous peoples are more likely to suffer malnutrition, low literacy rates, and shorter life spans. Second, life chances are limited in the ways that Indigenous peoples are read

as the affectable subject, one who cannot be rational. Third, building out from these insights, I argue that racialized rightlessness limits indigenous life chances by individualization. In treating lowland Q'eqchi's as narco-peasants, state and nonstate agents refuse to recognize them as part of a broader indigenous body politic.

In revealing the racial and geographical politics of who we let die in order to make others live and whose land we appropriate in the name of the global good, I conclude with thoughts on the responsibility of those of us whose security is ensured at the expense of others. While I enjoin English-speaking readers to rethink their relationship to conservation and indigenous rights, I conclude with a call to the uneasy and unfinished work of solidarity.

#### METHODS AND APPROACH

I set out to research Q'eqchi' struggles for lowland territory in the hopes that explaining how Maya war survivors are remaking their lives on scorched earth could inspire Latinx<sup>21</sup> solidarity and mobilize land recognition. I found myself understood as a rich European-descended woman from Guatemala City (*capitallina*) with whom conservation and development professionals assumed a shared perspective on rural Maya communities.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, Q'eqchi' Mayas did not accept me as a Latina because they did not share my presumption that theirs was a Latinx culture. While I sought to establish myself as a scholar of agrarian political ecology, the Q'eqchi' communities I lived in felt a distant solidarity with peasant politics akin to how they felt about me. Even as they eagerly traded gossip about which peasant group had what kind of funding and who was marching on the capital, they were not particularly interested in learning more about international peasant alliances such as Via Campesina, much less Marxian theories about them. While I asked about labor politics or invoked transnational Latinidades, my friends would gently redirect me. They asked if there were any Indigenous peoples where I lived, what land rights they had, and what their relationship was like with the U.S. government. I had read about the history of American Indian dispossession for national park establishment, but it was not until my friends expressed delight, concern, and solidarity with my thumbnail sketches of indigenous presents and futures that I sought to learn more.

My listening abilities in Q'eqchi' were good during the year I spent in the field, but my spoken skills were poor. It is telling that Guatemalans I meet in the region are often proud to spot me as a gringa—signifiers include my clothes, my height, and my accent—but Q'eqchi's often tell me that they were not sure until I greeted them in Q'eqchi', something only a gringa would do. While I still write this as a Latina who feels solidarity across the Americas,<sup>23</sup> my positioning is primarily that of a gringa who is concerned about the ways that global conservation practices limit the possibilities of Indigenous land activism.

Q'eqchi' leaders hailed me as a foreigner, calling on me to learn the Q'eqchi' language and Q'eqchi' history as a first step in recognizing my identity as a settler who could help them decolonize conservation. In so doing they call me *kaxlan*, a word that dates back to the description of the Spanish invasion 500 years ago, the German plantation owners who enclosed Q'eqchi' land 200 years ago, and present-day conflicts with nonindigenous Guatemalans, whom they also call *kaxlan*. For this reason, I translate *kaxlan* into "settler," as it carries the same connotations of taking what is not yours and imposing laws as an owner rather than asking permission as a guest. When I explained my proposed use of "settler" and "settler colonialism" to Q'eqchi' and other Maya activists, they approved of it. Nonindigenous Guatemalans who are offended when Q'eqchi's refer to them as *kaxlan* are likewise offended by the idea that Guatemala is a settler state.<sup>24</sup>

My interest in Q'eqchi' territoriality has led me to frame my work in terms of the Maya Forest, but the heart of my research—like Q'eqchi' territoriality—is in Alta Verapaz. Those who focus on Maya Forest conservation center their research in the department of Petén, with attention paid to key sites of cultural reproduction and ecotourism politics; many others, including Juanita Sundberg (1998a, 1998b, 1999, 2004) and Liza Grandia (2009c, 2012), have done this work. With a focus on land tenure, Norman Schwartz (1990, 2000) has traced the making of Petén as a land frontier, Laura Hurtado Paz y Paz (2008) has traced peasant movements in the Sierra de Chinajá, and Kevin Gould (2006, 2014; Gould, Carter, and Shrestha, 2006) and Alberto Alonso-Fradejas (2012, 2015) look at contemporary land grabbing in the context of land titling. As I explain below, this is because conservation organizations mapped and named Guatemala's portion of the "Maya Forest" in territories that overlapped considerably with that of Q'eqchi's, whom they framed as land-hungry immigrants. Given that prominent gringo scholars of the region often bring in grant funding (including CI, USAID, World Bank, etc.), conservation practitioners and scholars alike expect social scientists to focus on NGO interventions. My research included case studies of communities that had minimal interaction with international conservation and development organizations, which helped me understand how negotiations with these organizations reshape how people identify their understandings of nature, place, and themselves.

After two years as a development practitioner (2003–2005), I subsequently conducted three years of ethnographic fieldwork over the last decade, with the longest continuous period of eleven months in 2008. I spent three months each in two development poles: one where community leaders allied with the army and the other where community leaders allied with guerrillas—with the goal of land-tenure recognition. Both communities suffered massacres and are shaped by the contradictory politics of racialization and conservation. I also conducted two ethnographic cases focused on the development practice of land-tenure recognition: one with an international NGO that promotes land privatization and another with

## TIMELINE: GUATEMALA'S LOWLANDS

- 1500s Spanish invaders arrive in present-day Guatemala. While the highlands fall to the Spaniards relatively quickly, the Tayasal stronghold in the lowlands is the last to fall, in 1697.
- 1821 Central American independence from Spain. While the federal republic initially included Guatemala (with a separate state of Los Altos, contemporary Quetzaltenango, and parts of Chiapas), El Salvador, Honduras, and Costa Rica, these split into individual countries.
- Late 1800s The liberal Guatemalan government encourages German, Swiss, and other West European immigration to Q'eqchi' lands. Some Q'eqchi' elders remember their arrival as marking the physical loss of their lands and forced labor on coffee and other plantations.
- 1944–1954 Guatemala's "democratic spring," in which elected presidents passed sweeping reforms. Most notably, Decree 900 (1952) would have expropriated and redistributed 17 percent of all privately held land to farmers.
- 1954 The U.S. Central Intelligence Agency sponsors a coup d'état in collaboration with conservative Guatemalan military leaders. The authoritarian government rescinds all agrarian reforms and plunges the country into a thirty-six-year civil war.
- 1959 The Company for the Promotion and Development of Petén (La Empresa para el Fomento y Desarrollo de El Petén, FYDEP) is created to promote agro-industrial development and land settlement in Petén Department. Within ten years, people submit claims for over half the "available" land, which the FYDEP would process sometimes within months and other times left unfinished for decades.
- 1962 The Law of Agrarian Transformation (Decreto 1551) establishes the Franja Transversal del Norte (Northern Transversal Strip) as an agricultural frontier for government-sponsored colonization, with assistance from the newly created U.S. Agency for International Development.
- 1989 The Law of Protected Areas (Decreto 4-89) establishes the National Council of Protected Areas (Consejo Nacional de Areas Protegidas, CONAP) and the National Parks System (Sistema Guatemalteco de Areas Protegidas, SIGAP), including the Maya Biosphere Reserve (Decreto 5-90), with little knowledge or participation of affected communities.
- 1990–1996 The United Nations sponsors a peace accords process that officially ends the civil war. Key accords for the lowlands are the 1995 Agreement on the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which established recognition and rights for Q'eqchi's as Indigenous peoples,

- and the 1996 Agreement on the Socio-Economic Aspects and the Agrarian Situation, which was meant to address land-tenure issues.
- 1996 Government Decree 110-96 makes Lake Lachuá a protected area with the management category “national park,” without specifying its measurements.
- 1999 A Ministry of Culture and Sports (Ministerio de Cultura y Deportes) decree makes Candelaria Caves a national park. CONAP does not incorporate the park into SIGAP due to concerns about land conflicts.
- 2004 The General Property Register (Registro General de la Propiedad) inscribes Lake Lachuá National Park to CONAP.
- 2010 Guatemalan president Álvaro Colom declares a state of siege (*estado de sitio*) to combat drug trafficking organizations in Alta Verapaz Department and subsequently renews it (Decreto Gubernativo No. 23-2010 and Decreto Gubernativo No. 1-2011).
- 2011 President Colom declares a state of siege to combat drug trafficking organizations in Petén (Decreto Gubernativo No. 4-2011).
- 2015 Faced with national protests and significant evidence, retired general President Otto Pérez Molina resigns from office and is jailed pending his trial.
- 2017 Rodrigo Tot becomes the first Q’eqchi’ Maya to win the Goldman Environmental Prize for defending territory against foreign corporations seeking to extract resources. Abelino Chub Caal and other Q’eqchi’ land activists are still held pending trial through the Court of Narco-Activity and Crimes against the Environment on charges including land encroachment, arson, coercion, illicit association, and illegal armed groupings.

a Q’eqchi’ association that promotes collective land titles. For the latter work I lived in a Q’eqchi’ community for three months, traveling with community leaders on a regular basis to regional and national capitals to seek recognition of a sacred place. I present here only those cases where Q’eqchi’ territoriality and conservation claims to the Maya Forest articulate.

I use pseudonyms to describe NGOs, communities, and individuals where possible. I do this for organizations because one director thought that my findings might inhibit their funding and asked me not to name them. Moreover, informal conversations with conservation and development practitioners shaped some of my ethical concerns, and I would hate to see a willingness to engage in self-reflection become detrimental to their careers. The extent to which I present a unified narrative of conservation practices reflects how national-level directors promote these projects in

Spanish.<sup>25</sup> That said, I would not have known to raise difficult questions had practitioners themselves not generously given me helpful nudges.

Beyond confidentiality, safety concerns mark key silences in my work. Over the last decade, I have conducted interviews and participant observation in varying contexts of violence and political uncertainty to the point that some people on my interview list have been killed—in some cases before I got to interview them—and in other cases my interview notes are haunted by the knowledge of their subsequent death. At a minimum, I have honored the wishes of any persons who asked me not to write about them. In particular, a group of Q'eqchi' women organizing for land rights withdrew permission due to fear of reprisals after I had included their work in a case study, and the book accordingly fails to address gender dynamics in territorial struggles.

I have attempted to honor the wishes of families and communities who shared their perspectives with me as a conduit to a broader audience. To the extent that the ethnography is not “thick,” this is because my interlocutors expressed skepticism about the usefulness of catering to Western wishes to know our Other. Though most Q'eqchi' leaders have not read colonial ethnographies written by anthropologists and geographers, who were sometimes also plantation owners (as in the cases of the Dieseldorff and Sapper families), they nonetheless critique “a direct relationship between the expansion of [Western] knowledge, the expansion of trade and the expansion of empire” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, 92). As such, I am less concerned with explaining who lives in the Maya Forest than why living Mayas are unable to exercise indigenous territorial autonomy.

Following the lead of indigenous and native studies scholars, I seek to write a geography of collective self-determination that “basically, involves a calculus ethnography of what you need to know and what I refuse to write” (Simpson, 2011, 72). Since a gringa outsider cannot truly know Q'eqchi' life by walking a mile in Q'eqchi' shoes, I strive to respect the ethnographic refusal of peoples who reject the ways that gringo imaginative geographies work to limit their rights to collective self-determination. This means insisting on an emphasis on the context of racism and colonization over ethnographic storytelling, lest the reader finish with a story of damage that is vulnerable to a pathologizing analysis (Tuck, 2009, 415). Against a scholarly history of contributing knowledge to empire (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012), I call on English-speaking audiences to rethink our imaginative geographies of the Maya and seek a relationship of repair.