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"Their debts follow them into the afterlife": German Settlers, Ethnographic Knowledge, and the Forging of Coffee Capitalism in Nineteenth-Century Guatemala

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In March 1952, on the eve of Guatemala's famed agrarian reform, the German immigrant David Sapper penned a memoir covering his sixty years as a coffee businessman in Guatemala and Germany. Sapper narrated the successes of a man whose astonishing wealth, he claimed, derived from neither luck nor birthplace, or even good timing—his success derived from his savvy business acumen, hard work, and at least on one occasion, his ethnographic sensibilities and keen intercultural awareness. The occasion took place in the early 1890s when Sapper's cousin, Richard, called upon David to quell a rebellion among the Q'eqchi' Maya workers on his plantation called Campur. David recalled: "Since I was familiar with the mentality of the Indians, I wanted to venture the risk … making use of my aptitude [to understand Mayas], immediately going alone to Campur in order to peacefully negotiate with the villagers." Employing his knowledge of Q'eqchi' language and customs, he won them over. By the end of his narrative, Sapper had become the new plantation administrator. "They had total trust in me, not only as their patron, who insisted in the completion of all their obligations," he explained, "but also as their counselor in all life's personal matters and as their spiritual assistant, doctor, administrator of justice, and '*padrecito*' [little father]. How many times I had to smile when,

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an elderly indigenous man or woman addressed me as their '*pequeño gran padre*' (*li china mama*/small great father), an expression of the highest respect and submission."[1] According to Sapper, ethnographic knowledge, acquisition of indigenous languages, and intercultural understanding were crucial to the successful management of coffee plantations and the production of a reliable indigenous work force. A German, he suggested, might become a "good father" to Q'eqchi' laborers. Sapper believed ethnographic knowledge of indigenous languages and customs was required for crafting prosperous coffee plantations.

Some German settlers in late nineteenth-century Alta Verapaz, Guatemala were more than just coffee planters, who dispossessed indigenous lands and drew Q'eqchi's laborers by force, debt, and sometimes violence into relations of economic dependency. German settlers like Erwin Paul Dieseldorff (1868–1940), David Sapper (1876–1966), and David's cousin Karl Sapper (1866–1945) were also ethnographers, archaeologists, and geographers who produced scientific and practical knowledge that informed their efforts to forge coffee capitalism in Alta Verapaz. Like ethnographers in Britain's colonies, settlers like David Sapper understood the potential symmetry between ethnography and the governance of indigenous peoples. As George Stocking argued, colonialism was the "*sin qua non* of ethnographic fieldwork."[2] Colonial expansion provided the context for going into "the field" and the conditions for anthropologists' experiences. Much like early missionaries, German ethnographic investigations in Alta Verapaz helped the new diaspora to make sense of the region's history and to naturalize their roles as heroic nineteenth-century counterparts to Bartolomé de las Casas, the sixteenth-century Dominican friar who had led the "peaceful" conquest of Alta Verapaz.

By the early twentieth century, German settlers also understood that ethnography provided practical knowledge about how to manage plantations and plantation laborers. While ethnographers generally lamented capitalism as an inevitable historical force that devoured non-Western cultures and languages, German coffee planters in Guatemala believed that by modeling plantation management on Q'eqchi' cultural practices and speaking Q'eqchi' they would preserve desirable aspects of Q'eqchi' culture and language and strengthen their commercial enterprises. Karl Sapper, for example, observed that Q'eqchi's allegedly imagined the Christian God as a white person, who runs a plantation in the afterlife "similar to those that the Europeans own in Alta Verapaz." Sapper likewise argued that Q'eqchi's believed that they must atone for their sins in the afterlife and that afterlife resembled life on the

[1] Sapper 1952.
[2] Stocking 1991a, 10.

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plantation. Q'eqchi's, according to Sapper's interpretation, believed "they would have to perform the field labor in the next life as on earth until they have paid off all of their debt." As Sapper explained, Q'eqchi's "debts follow them into the afterlife."[3]

German ethnography in Guatemala was the result of several factors, including both German commercial ambition and scholarly curiosity, a drive toward functionalism, and a cosmopolitan interest in ethnic Others. The alliance between science and German commercial pursuits gave birth to ethnographic studies that later shaped the anti-communist dimensions of twentieth-century anthropological inquiry in Guatemala. This article draws on the scholarly ethnographic writings of Germans in Alta Verapaz, published and unpublished memoirs and letters, coffee plantation records, and manuals and judicial and state archives to argue that ethnographic knowledge was central to German settlers' capitalist efforts to create profitable plantations. While even some non-professional ethnographers in German missionary societies elsewhere sought to halt capitalist encroachment and the proletarianization of indigenous peoples, German coffee planters-cum-ethnographers in Alta Verapaz sought to productively combine ethnographic insights and capitalist exploitation.[4]

ETHNOGRAPHY, COLONIALISM, AND CAPITALISM

German coffee planters in late nineteenth-century Alta Verapaz believed that settlers needed to learn Q'eqchi', the predominant Maya language of the region, live among their Maya laborers, and become like "good fathers" to them. Above all else, the German geographer Karl Sapper counseled his countrymen: "one must first learn to understand the Indians."[5] In addition, German ethnographers, some who occupied posts in German institutions and others who participated in scholarly debates from their plantation homes, published their archaeological, ethnographic, and geographic research in Germany, the United States, and Guatemala. These coffee planters illustrated the central role of ethnographic knowledge in guiding land and labor acquisition, as well as plantation governance.

While Germans in Latin America were diverse, the relatively small number of Germans who arrived during the late nineteenth century were by and large not impoverished peasants or contract laborers, but rather professionals, capitalist investors in banks, agricultural and industrial enterprises, and scientists and intellectuals.[6] This was especially true in Guatemala, where Germans were active participants in coffee planting and

[3] Sapper 2000.
[4] Buschmann 2009.
[5] Sapper, 1897, 129.
[6] von Gleich 1968, 7.

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processing regions like Alta Verapaz as well as in the banking and import-export sectors located in urban centers of Quetzaltenango and Guatemala City. By the century's end, the diverse German population in Guatemala numbered only about nine hundred, yet they controlled one-third of all coffee production in the country and two-thirds of coffee exports.[7] In Alta Verapaz these numbers were even more stark. By 1937, Erwin Paul Dieseldorff alone owned fifteen coffee plantations that totaled at nearly 100,000 acres.[8]

While not all Germans were ethnographers or amateur archaeologists, a few successful German coffee planters produced scientific and practical ethnographic knowledge and became advocates for ethnographic approaches to plantation management. German settlers' ethnographic writings, however, cannot be read for an unmediated access to Q'eqchi' society and culture in the past. Instead, in this article I will focus on the kinds of ethnographic knowledge these settlers produced, and occasionally offer speculative readings about how these writings might offer us unintended glimpses into Q'eqchi' political actions and agency.

German coffee planters-cum-ethnographers' efforts to manage plantation labor in Alta Verapaz contrast sharply with historical accounts of the relationship between ethnography, capitalism, and colonialism. While historians have debated the relationships human sciences like anthropology, cultural geography, and sociology had with colonialism, they have rarely considered this in regards settler's efforts to extend capitalism into indigenous frontiers.[9] Even before Edward Said's *Orientalism*, historians located the intellectual origins of colonialism in anthropology through the discipline's role in producing representations of racial and cultural difference.[10] Since then, historians have complicated the relationship between anthropology and colonialism and expanded such analysis to include other disciplines such as sociology, history, and geography.[11] Nineteenth-century Guatemala further complicates the relationship between colonialism and knowledge production. While Guatemala gained formal independence in 1821, like many Latin American nations it retained key colonial-era institutions such as racialized, coerced wage labor and uneven territorial sovereignties, and these destabilize the conceived boundaries between colonial and non-colonial forms of knowledge production.[12] Historians of ethnographic knowledge, moreover, have often neglected the

[7] Wagner 2001, 113, 385.
[8] Náñez Falcón 1970, 81.
[9] For an overview, see Vermeulen 2015, 23–28.
[10] See, for example, Asad 1973; Kuper 1975; and Said 2014.
[11] See, for example, Vermeulen 2015; Pels and Salemink 1999; Michaud 2007; and Steinmetz 2017.
[12] Gibbings 2012.

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role of ethnographic knowledge in the formation of capitalism, since, as Pels and Salemink, reminded us, "labor power could be conceptualized in purely physical terms, as decontextualized, decultured bodies, for which ethnic identity was only important where it served the maintenance of racial distinctions between white settlers and colored workers."[13] We can deepen our understandings of ethnography's role in the rise of capitalism by shifting our focus from the archive of professional knowledge production in universities to the blurry spaces between academic knowledge production and the popular ethnographic practices of missionaries, government officials, and plantation owners.

Guatemala's plantation ethnography also reframes the history of German ethnography. Historians of German anthropology have emphasized how Germany developed a unique intellectual trajectory because its ethnographic museums and anthropological societies predated the formal acquisition of colonies, and its vast ethnological inquiry took place outside of the colonies Germany began to acquire after 1884. Scholars linked German ethnography instead to a broader counter-Enlightenment historicist tradition that stretched from Humboldt to Herder and was characterized by a deep and abiding fascination with non-European Others.[14] German historians argued that, in the light of this context, "salvage anthropology," which emphasized the preservation of disappearing indigenous artefacts and languages, dominated the German discipline until World War I.[15] By contrast, British anthropology by the early twentieth century had turned toward functionalism, which emphasized the acquisition of detailed knowledge of societies that many believed would facilitate and help maintain colonial administrations.[16] Historians have now begun to question these bounded, national trajectories and periodizations. Rainer Buschmann, for example, revealed how German administrators in colonial New Guinea developed Malinowskian, functionalist ethnographic methodologies most often associated with Britain to facilitate colonial governance.[17] Han F. Vermeulen challenged the periodizations as well as the national foci of earlier work by skillfully tracing the origins of German ethnography to German scholars employed by imperialist Russia in Siberia in the late eighteenth century.[18] Here I will likewise reconsider the boundary between supposed German cosmopolitanism and British functionalism by illustrating the symbiosis between German ethnographic and capitalist pursuits in Guatemala. I will

[13] Pels and Salemink 1999; Michaud 2007.
[14] Marchand 2010; Penny 2006; Stocking 1996; Penny 2002; Penny and Bunzl 2003; Smith 1991.
[15] Smith 1991, 170.
[16] Stocking 1991b, Introduction, 4.
[17] Buschmann 2009.
[18] Vermeulen 2015.

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look beyond the tendency to equate ethnographic knowledge with the scientific discipline of anthropology and instead emphasize scholarly and popular ethnographic knowledge production and the role of other disciplines, including cultural geography, in producing such knowledge.[19]

German coffee planters-cum-ethnographers in Guatemala further demonstrate the need to carefully examine the colonial and diasporic context of ethnographic production. Since Stocking's seminal volume *Colonial Situations*, historians have rightly emphasized the need to pluralize the "colonial situation."[20] Latin American scholars have also uncovered how U.S. archaeologists and anthropologists in the Maya region worked closely with U.S. intelligence efforts, and thus provided even more direct links between ethnographic conversations between scientists and Maya "subjects" and the formation of U.S. empire in the region.[21] Following the work of Ann Laura Stoler, Sebastian Conrad has also called upon German historians to rethink what counts as a colony.[22] These scholars invite us to consider the many historical variants of colonies, ranging from leper colonies, agricultural colonies, penal colonies, and in many instances, plantations. What these colonies shared was not necessarily inclusion in a broader empire, but rather spatial practices designed to create cordoned-off territories where individuals, corporations, and states might exercise a different kind of sovereignty. In Guatemala, plantations were such cordoned-off colonies. There, planters exercised a partial sovereignty in appointing government officials who resided on the plantations and who exercised state power. Planters also built jails and whipping posts for the administration of justice, and prevented state officials coming in to conduct censuses or administer healthcare.[23] The partial sovereignties German planters exercised on their plantations requires us to abandon rigid notions of what counts as a colony and who exercised colonial power.

Understanding the nature of colonialism in Guatemala also requires that we abandon the myth of German diasporic political and social insularity, as well as the tendency to equate the German diaspora with the German state.[24] Matilde González-Izás, a Guatemalan scholar, argued that German ethnographers and cultural geographers in Guatemala produced ethnographic and geographic knowledge that supported the consolidation of Guatemala's exclusionary nation-state, facilitated the expansion of German coffee

[19] See also Steinmetz 2017.
[20] Stocking 1991b, Introduction.
[21] Sullivan, 1991; and Harris and Sadler 2003.
[22] Conrad 2013.
[23] Gibbings n.d.
[24] As Stefan Manz recently argued, there is a tendency to either analyze discourses *within* Germany about Germans abroad or to focus on German ethnic minorities in specific regions or states (2014: 6–7).

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plantations, and contributed to the colonial pretensions of the German state in Guatemala.[25] Recently, H. Glenn Penny, a prominent U.S. scholar, lambasted Gonzalez-Izás for emphasizing the violence and racism of coffee capitalism in Guatemala and its relationship to Germany's imperial interests. Penny called for a "move beyond colonial questions" in order to understand German scientists' true intentions in Guatemala.[26] He argued that German coffee planters-cum-ethnographers there were far more altruistic and cosmopolitan than Gonzalez-Izás suggests, and that their practices emerged from Germany's longer mercantile history. While Gonzalez-Izás over-emphasizes the role of the German state in Guatemala, Penny evacuates Guatemalan historical context and agency. He formulates his analysis by focusing on "Germans in non-German spaces."[27] Those non-German spaces receive insufficient attention and appear as virtual blank slates awaiting complex and diverse German actors, who were networked across national boundaries but largely free from local social and political ties.[28] While Guatemala's German diaspora may have had roots in mercantile trade networks, Germans' late nineteenth-century ethnographic inquiries were driven by their personal and financial investments in coffee plantations and their intimate relationships with Maya labors. The historical record also makes clear that planter-labor relationships in Guatemala were often violent and racist.[29] Furthermore, Germans filtered their knowledge of indigenous culture through a broader understanding of late nineteenth-century imperialism and capitalism, and they often engaged in comparative analysis themselves.

German ethnographers in Guatemala made connections between transnational diasporic and imperial contexts, comparative colonialisms, and ethnographic knowledge production abundantly clear in their own writings. While German immigrants to nineteenth-century Alta Verapaz were not agents of the German state, they did imagine their role in civilizing the Mayas in ways akin to the German settler colonialists in Africa and South Asia, and thus destabilized the boundaries between colonial and diasporic knowledge production.[30] That all German settlers in "uncivilized" worlds imagined that they were participating in a common colonial project in many ways endured even after Germany gained formal colonies of its own.[31] The German diasporas' sense of a common destiny and duty was the product of

[25] González-Izás 2014.
[26] Penny 2017.
[27] Penny and Rinke 2015.
[28] For a counterargument, see Gibbings 2016a.
[29] See, for example, Grandin 2011; McCreery 1994; and González-Izás 2014.
[30] See Sapper 1941.
[31] Naranch 2002, 21–40. For Germans' precolonial fascination with colonialism, see Zantop 1997, Holub 1998, 33–50; and Steinmetz 2007.

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the special place accorded to Latin America in what Susanne Zantop and George Steinmetz have, respectively, called "pre-colonial fantasies," and "pre-colonial ethnographic representation" that proliferated in German popular culture through the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These precolonial ethnographic representations and fantasies imagined a special, privileged, civilizing role for Germans, which Germans were ideally to enact in Latin America. These same precolonial ethnographic representations gave form to practical German colonial activities in the late nineteenth century.[32] In Guatemala, German ethnographers like Sapper and Dieseldorff melded precolonial fantasies with local historical, political, and cultural dynamics. They keenly read and reinterpreted Guatemala's history of colonial conquest, especially Alta Verapaz's special history of "peaceful conquest," to naturalize their own presence in the region. By the 1920s, Guatemala's German coffee planters-cum-ethnographers published works that allied them with some Guatemalan *indigenistas* who promoted limited state reforms in the name of stemming both the tide of socialism and radical Maya demands for rights as citizens.

German settlers' use of ethnographic knowledge to manage their plantations also invites us to reframe subaltern readings of capitalism. In *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, Vivek Chibber recently vivisected subaltern studies scholars' argument about how non-Western cultural difference represented resistance to the completion of capitalisms' universalizing mission to remake the world in the image of a hyper-real "Europe."[33] In his acclaimed *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty, for example, described two sets of historical forces: History 1, the history of modern capital, and History 2, the multiple, incommensurable histories that develop according to their own specific logics. Chakrabarty identifies the main barriers to the complete expansion of capitalist modernity (History 1) in those aspects of social life which resist the "logic of capital" (History 2).[34] As Chibber asserts, however, History 2 does not necessarily destabilize the logic of capital and there is no inherent antagonism between History 1 and History 2. Instead, he argues for the universalizing logic of capital that does not necessarily subsume all aspects of social and cultural life. By highlighting how German coffee planters-cum-ethnographers drew on studies of Maya culture to facilitate the expansion of private property and wage labor, I argue that capitalism in Alta Verapaz blended with local contexts, histories, and cultures to create new hybrid and different forms. German settlers frequently adapted to local contexts and integrated cultural differences into their management strategies in order to create and govern

[32] Zantop 1997, 203; Steinmetz 2007.
[33] Chibber 2013.
[34] Chakrabarty 2001.

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racialized labor.[35] Some German coffee planters in Alta Verapaz thus grasped Maya social, economic, and cultural worlds as aspects of local culture that could be the basis for new capitalist relations of dependency. Cultural difference, then, was not necessarily a residue of anti-capitalism, or a demonstration of the limits of capitalism—it could become an integral part of capitalist logic.

THE ALLURE OF ETHNOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGE

Erwin Paul Dieseldorff and Karl Sapper, two pioneers of ethnography and archaeology in Guatemala, arrived in Alta Verapaz in the wake of a millennial uprising. Two years before, a major frost had interrupted the nation's mid-1880s coffee boom and destroyed both coffee harvests and subsistence crops. Many ladinos (non-Mayas) and Q'eqchi's interpreted the January 1886 frost as the revenge of the powerful mountain deity, Tzuultaq'a Xucaneb, against the "evils of coffee production." As a result, the frost provoked a widespread revolt among Q'eqchi' plantation laborers, and ultimately unleashed vociferous debates about the "slavery" of the state's regime of forced wage labor, known as *mandamientos*.[36] As Maya laborers fled into the mountains, coffee planters faced steep capital losses in advanced wages and stalled harvests. By the time Sapper and Dieseldorff arrived, Xucaneb's revenge was etched firmly into the Altaverapacence imagination.

For Dieseldorff and Sapper, the millennial revolt suggested the need to understand indigenous culture and language and to examine alternative mechanisms for labor acquisition. In a letter penned a year after his arrival, Dieseldorff observed: "One must study their nature, then they are easy to guide."[37] Five years after the frost, David Sapper traveled to Campur to help his brother Richard to quell an uprising among the laborers. David set out armed with nothing more than his Q'eqchi' linguistic skills and ethnographic acumen, and according to his recounting, he succeeded in creating peace and a productive labor force.[38] As Pels and Salemink have noted, resistance to colonial labor regimes, like the Alta Verapaz rebellion of 1886, often provoked investigations into its causes and ethnographic speculations about the indigenous organization of labor. Such speculations, they argue, long underpinned the legitimation of forced labor by colonial administrators and settlers in Africa.[39] The transition to coffee capitalism generated the impetus

[35] Here my argument follows more closely the use of knowledge of local culture as a strategy of governance as discussed in Steinmetz 2007.
[36] Gibbings 2016b.
[37] Dieseldorff 2002[1889], letter to his mother.
[38] Sapper 1952.
[39] Pels and Salemink 1999, 33.

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for German coffee planters to become ethnographers, and transformed their scholarly interests in ancient Maya archaeology into more functionalist inquiries about how best to govern Maya laborers. The historical context of labor debates and revolt may help to explain why German ethnographic practices developed more extensively in Alta Verapaz than in other Maya regions like San Marcos in Guatemala and Soconusco in Chiapas, Mexico.

While German settlers in Alta Verapaz possessed certain economic advantages over Guatemalans in the local land and labor markets, they also came from merchant familial backgrounds that, Penny has argued, primed them to adapt to local linguistic and cultural contexts.[40] German interest in adapting to different circumstances went far beyond simply learning Q'eqchi'; they actively studied Maya history and culture and published their findings in scientific journals and popular travel narratives to gain prestige at home and abroad.[41] Like his mentor Friedrich Ratzel, Karl Sapper believed that specific geographical and historical conditions created the *Volk*—the specific cultural characteristics of a people.[42] Sapper surmised that ethnographic knowledge and the ability to adapt agricultural endeavors to local culture were essential to governing Q'eqchi's as a labor force and reaping the rewards of German investments. While Karl and David Sapper and Dieseldorff were not the first German scientists to merge intellectual pursuits with business interests, the way in which they blended their scientific knowledge with plantation management was unique, and they left us an archival and publication trail that shows how they did it.[43]

The practice of ethnography by these coffee planters was the result of a fortuitous blending of academic and capitalist endeavors. When Dieseldorff, the son of a wealthy Hamburg merchant family, first met Dr. Karl Sapper, Karl was a young cartographer and geologist with an abiding interest in geography, human culture, and history. To complete his doctoral studies at the University of Munich, Karl had traveled to Alta Verapaz, where his older brother Richard had settled in 1884. Recognizing the need to better understand the region's geography, Dieseldorff volunteered to help Karl compile data on rainfall and soil types, and the two men traveled extensively in the area southwest of Cobán, Alta Verapaz's departmental capital. They also explored that region's many caves, in which they discovered ancient Maya burial sites and artifacts. From these trips, both Germans developed a keen interest in Maya archaeology.[44] By the time of his death in 1940,

[40] Berth 2014; Penny 2017.
[41] Steinmetz 2007.
[42] Smith 1991, 140.
[43] See González-Izás 2014; Wagner 2001, 166.
[44] Tulane Latin American Library Dieseldorff Collection [hereafter TULAL DC], Erwin Paul Dieseldorff letters to his mother: letter #9, 22 Nov. 1888; letter #12, 13 Dec. 1888; and letter #14, 3 Jan. 1889.

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Dieseldorff had collected over three thousand artifacts, which his son donated to the National Archaeological Museum in Guatemala City.[45]

When Dieseldorff and Sapper came to work on isolated coffee plantations and in face-to-face contact with Q'eqchi' laborers, their concerns with establishing profitable enterprises helped to transform their interest in ancient Maya civilization into more functionalist inquiries about Q'eqchi' culture.[46] Like missionaries and military officers in French Indochina, their long periods of residence with a local population spurred empirical and methodological approaches for ethnographically understanding cultural Others.[47] In 1891, for example, Dieseldorff moved to the remote plantation Seacté. During his three years there he, like many German plantation owners and administrators, developed an intimate relationship with a Q'eqchi' woman, Luisa Cú. As his cook, companion, and ultimately concubine Cú provided intimacy and Dieseldorff's daily needs, but she also facilitated his language-learning and acquisition of practical cultural know-how.[48] Through these experiences, Dieseldorff "learned to understand their [Maya] psychology."[49] Cú's and Dieseldorff's daughter Matilde later became essential to the administration of his large plantation complex and also an advocate for the preservation of Q'eqchi' folklore.[50] By the time of her birth, Dieseldorff was losing his enthusiasm for excavations and instead focused his intellectual inquiries on Mayan art and religion and their relation to the customs and religious practices of the Q'eqchi's of Alta Verapaz. He acquired a number of manuscripts on Q'eqchi' dance-dramas, as well as ancient land titles and wills, which he sought to use to better understand Q'eqchi' views on land tenure.[51] Dieseldorff also collected medicinal plants and herbs used by his laborers and collaborated with Q'eqchi' shamans who resided on his plantations.[52]

As he expanded his landholdings and came to rely increasingly on plantation administrators, Dieseldorff also urged these administrators to become ethnographers. He instructed them to spend time among Q'eqchi' workers and become accustomed to living in isolation from "civilization." Above all else, he required that they learn the Q'eqchi' language so as to facilitate their communications with workers and their understandings of the

[45] Náñez Falcón 1970, 73.
[46] See Dieseldorff 1929: 337.
[47] Michaud 2007.
[48] Ricardo 1991; King 1974, 58–84, 224–68.
[49] Náñez Falcón 1970, 53.
[50] Gibbings 2012, 526–31.
[51] Dieseldorff 1932; and TULAL DC, draft of article "Old Titles of the Quecchí Indians," 15 Sept. 1903, TULAL DC Finca Bound Volumes, vol. 63, folio 233.
[52] Náñez Falcón 1970, 54. There are examples in TULAL DC Finca records, but see especially, TULAL DC Medical Records Raxaha.

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culture.[53] David Sapper explained how Germans instructed new settlers in Q'eqchi: "In Alta Verapaz … they [the Q'eqchi'] still strongly hold onto their very respectable individuality and language, so that for whoever was going to deal with the Indians it was much more important to know Q'eqchi' than Spanish, the official language of the country. For this reason, Señor Dieseldorff wanted to teach [Jorge] Wagner and me the basic elements of this indigenous language and daily he gave us regular classes…."[54] The ability to guide, direct, and understand Q'eqchi's as laborers required not just linguistic skills, but also the careful observations of an ethnographer and ongoing intimate contact. To overcome Q'eqchi's supposedly natural instinct of "distrust and suspicion that they feel toward those not of their race," David Sapper wrote that it was "necessary to be in constant and intimate contact with *el indio* over a long period of time and to know with some perfection their mother tongue in order to conquer little by little their distrust and suspicion, and be able to familiarize oneself with their ways of thinking, with their strange mentalities and their manners of feeling."[55]

Dieseldorff advocated that, like ethnographers, administrators participate in the religious and cultural life of the resident laborers.[56] David Sapper claimed to have participated in a great part of indigenous communal life, from the administration of justice, to the provision of counsel and medicine, to the celebration of saints' days.[57] Karl Kolth, one of Dieseldorff's administrators, slaughtered a calf, arranged festivals and dances, and participated enthusiastically in the rituals of excessive drink.[58] Another, Paul Wirsing, studied Q'eqchi' language and culture and ultimately produced the first German-Q'eqchi' dictionary.[59]

Dieseldorff published a short manual for coffee planting in northern Guatemala with a Berlin press. It emphasized the need to administer justice and ensure peace, and echoed David Sapper in extolling plantation administrators to "be friendly and fair" so as "to win the hearts of the people." Finally, he counseled potential coffee planters that, "their [indigenous peoples] religion must never be violated."[60] Dieseldorff urged coffee planters to instill in workers the practice of self-surveillance according to the norms of their specific indigenous cultures.[61] When a worker claimed

[53] TULAL DC Fincas Bound Volumes, vol. 67, folios 593 and 601; and vol. 82, folio 586.
[54] Sapper 1952.
[55] Sapper 1926.
[56] TULAL DC Fincas Bound Volumes, vol 78, folio 948; Dieseldorff 1908.
[57] Sapper 1952.
[58] TULAL DC Fincas Bound Volumes, vol. 78, folios 379 and 948; vol. 63, folio 299; vol. 77, folios 722 and 632; vol. 75, folio 375; and vol. 74, folio 771. See also Alemán Bolaños 1946, 24.
[59] TULAL DC, Maya Studies Papers EPD Manuscripts and Typescripts, box 159, folder 23, Pablo Wirsing "Diccionario de Wirsing Deutsch-Kekchi."
[60] Dieseldorff 1908, 33, 36.
[61] Ibid., 35–36.

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innocence in cases of transgression, Dieseldorff judged their sincerity based on their oaths of denial in the name of a mountain spirit.[62] He published the results of his decades of study in the three-volume work, *Kunst und Religion der Mayavölker*, and in several articles and scholarly papers.[63] By the 1920s, Dieseldorff had inverted the logic of the business-scholar relationship: the modern, professional ethnographer should first reside among Mayas as a coffee planter.[64]

Like Dieseldorff, Karl Sapper's interest in Q'eqchi' culture and history spanned well beyond a cosmopolitan curiosity in ethnic Others, and was guided by practical concerns over how to establish prosperous German plantations in the region.[65] Also like Dieseldorff, Karl was an administrator on his brother's plantation Campur, and he departed only a year before David Sapper arrived to quell a worker's rebellion. Karl subsequently worked for an official commission to establish geographic borders between Guatemala and Mexico, and then continued his geographic studies of the region. He hired Q'eqchi' guides to help him traverse Central America and Southern Mexico by foot between 1892 and 1900. During these travels Sapper stayed in indigenous villages and took note of the people's habits, customs, and ways of life generally. He also witnessed the rituals that his Q'eqchi' guides practiced as they passed through territories governed by different mountain deities known as Tzuultaqas. Intrigued by their cultural worlds, he asked his guides to explain their "pagan" gods and beliefs, and he recorded their prayers.[66] In addition to providing German planters with information on Maya religious customs, rituals, and commercial practices, Sapper advised them on soils and climates suitable for coffee production, and about how best to govern their plantations according to Q'eqchi' culture and history. Above all else, he counseled, "One must first learn to understand the Indians."[67]

Late nineteenth-century struggles over land and labor in Guatemala profoundly shaped German planters' turn to ethnography to gain practical knowledge for governing coffee plantation labor. As capitalist entrepreneurs, they played a similar role to missionaries in the rise of anthropology and other human sciences elsewhere. As Stocking argued, "Anthropology needed the missionaries. The shift from amateur ethnographer to the professional fieldworker … was not possible without the help of the missionary ethnographers in the field."[68] Unlike missionary ethnographers, German

62 Dieseldorff 1929.
63 Dieseldorff 1896; 1906; 1926; 1932; and 1933.
64 Dieseldorff 1926: 6.
65 Sapper 1901.
66 Sapper 1897.
67 Ibid., 129.
68 Stocking 1984, 74–76.

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settlers' use of ethnography were driven by their strategies for capital accumulation and plantation management. Writing in a popular German journal, Karl Sapper lamented the hardships endured by indigenous laborers as a result of the *mandamientos* and called for a different form of labor acquisition.[69] Instead of relying on coercive, state-supplied *mandamiento* labor, he advocated for the patriarchal forms of governance found on plantations that housed a resident labor force, known as "*fincas de mozos*."[70] Following Sapper's advice, coffee planters in Alta Verapaz, especially Germans, established such *fincas de mozos*, on which rural Mayas exchanged the right to plant subsistence crops for a certain number of weeks of labor on coffee plantations.[71] Modeled on colonial haciendas, they offered a stable labor force as well as a limited form of sovereignty and patriarchal governance that fit with German planters' understandings of Alta Verapaz's history and culture and their own desires to be respectable and moral patriarchs. These German understandings of Q'eqchi' culture mirrored long-standing German fascinations with Bartolomé de las Casas, and the region's own history of "peaceful conquest."

NARRATIVES OF CONQUEST: BARTOLOMÉ DE LAS CASAS AND THE GOOD FATHER PLANTER

Renowned for its pacification at the hands of the famous protector of Indians, the Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas, Alta Verapaz's sixteenth-century history has often been a flashpoint for struggles over the meaning of conquest and colonialism in Guatemala, as well as romanticized tropes of inter-ethnic harmony and projections for a future capitalist modernity.[72] Q'eqchi's fierce resistance to Spanish conquistadores prompted Nahua allies of Spanish conquistadores to name the region Tezulutlan (Land of War). Armed with a philosophy of conversion rather than conquest, Dominican Friars negotiated the peaceable conversion of Mayas through dialogue and diplomacy with the great Q'eqchi' chief, Juan Matalbatz. As a result, Tezulutlan was rechristened Verapaz (True Peace). In the mid-nineteenth century, the Verapaz was divided into two departments, Alta and Baja Verapaz, and became the source of romantic portraits and national hopes for inter-ethnic harmony and prosperity for having been spared the Spanish conquest's racially degenerating effects. Nineteenth-century narrations of the peaceful conquest celebrated the peaceful and hardworking nature of Alta

[69] TULAL DC, Secol Box, land sale document for Seacté (7 June 1890).
[70] Sapper 1891.
[71] On *fincas de mozos*, see Gibbings n.d., esp. ch. 4; and McCreery 1994, esp. ch. 7. *Fincas de mozos* were much more prevalent in Alta Verapaz than elsewhere in Guatemala because coffee production there overlapped geographically with indigenous communities.
[72] Kistler 2010; Gibbings 2012, 1–15.

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Verapaz's inhabitants and portrayed the region as the ideal landscape for capitalist ventures.[73]

Las Casas also has a long history in German popular culture. According to Susanne Zantop, the *Brevísima Relación*—first translated and published in German in 1597—had by the early nineteenth century become a foundational fiction of Germany's colonial origins and its special calling to colonize Latin America. Las Casas's indictment of the terrors of German colonialism in Spanish America, "*los animales alemanes*," was obsessively reworked until Germany's complicity in colonial atrocities had been repressed in favor of a positive affirmation of Germany's colonial propensity. This foundational fiction, according to Zantop, circumscribed German national identity by creating a national self as colonizer, so that in subsequent interpretations Germany's failure in the Americas was transformed into a question: What if Germany had not failed in its first attempt, and what if Germans had another chance? This hypothetical inquiry then provided the grounds for new fantasies that were blueprints for a future.[74]

Alta Verapaz's romantic history thus, unsurprisingly, inspired Germans like Karl Sapper. German settlers narrated the story of the peaceful conquest as a parable for the contemporary conquest of capitalism and represented some Germans as particularly suited to the task of restoring order, peace, and harmony with the native population and thereby naturalized their presence in the region. German settler's narratives in Alta Verapaz also bear striking resemblance to the fantasies of harmonious relations between Germans and their imagined colonial subjects that emerged in German popular culture in response to the independence movements in North America and the anti-colonial uprisings in the Caribbean and South America in the 1780s.[75] Like these iconic narratives, German settlers in Alta Verapaz rejected revolutionary solutions regarding governing Q'eqchi' laborers, such as the abolition of *mandamientos*, in favor of metaphors of familial and patriarchal relationships within and between nations that accepted the "natural order" as given. Dieseldorff counseled administrators to treat Q'eqchi' laborers as "children," just as David Sapper became "not only their patron," but their "*padrecito*."[76]

In his first explorations of Guatemala in the 1890s, Karl Sapper reenacted both the Spanish conquest and Bartolomé de las Casas' experiment in Alta Verapaz. Armed with Hernan Cortés's descriptions of conquest, Sapper traced his footsteps and recounted the conquest's history, remarking on the veracity of Cortés's descriptions and the effects of conversion and

[73] Rossignon 1861.
[74] Zantop 1997, 18–30, 123–25, 138, 165, 179–80.
[75] See Zantop 1997.
[76] Dieseldorff 1908, 33.

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colonialism. Regarding Lake Izabal, for example, Sapper remarked, "The past cruelty of the Spaniards weighs like a heavy curse on these fertile countries and hinders their agricultural development."[77] As he journeyed through Alta Verapaz, Sapper celebrated the enduring effects of peaceable conversion. He later concluded, "The strength of these people [Q'eqchi' Mayas of Alta Verapaz] has remained outstanding because of the actions and ideas of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas about the best manner of Christian mission work and about the maintenance of racial purity."[78] When he passed through the northern town of Cahabon, Sapper narrated Spanish military efforts to conquer the remaining independent indigenous peoples in distant regions of the Verapaz and lamented how violence had unraveled Dominican efforts. [79] He then noted that an alliance between the Maya nobility and benevolent Dominican friars had established a new, virtuous colony in which lofty missionary ideals could be realized in the harmonious unity of European and Indian.

Reflecting on the practical lessons offered by the region's past, Sapper also remarked that the peaceable conversion illustrated the Q'eqchi's specific need for a compassionate and loving father or husband. If Las Casas represented a morally superior alternative to brute rule, then his methods also revealed the true character of the Q'eqchi's and the means by which to govern them. "A calm and dignified bearing, at times firm and manly, will always have its effect upon the Indians as when, for instance, Fray Francisco Gallegos disarmed them by his courageous but low-key attitude when they opposed him armed with bows and arrows."[80] According to Sapper's account, at the hands of the brutish Spaniard conquistadors or harsh administrators the Q'eqchi's unleashed naked savagery, but a compassionate patriarchal figure elicited their truly peaceful and submissive character, awaiting guidance and civilizing efforts.[81] By establishing a natural patriarchal order, the narrative of peaceful conquest was a vehicle for redemption that provided "good" conquerors with legitimate access to the region.

In his memoirs, David Sapper also revealed how the peaceful conquest tropes guided some Germans' self-understanding of their relations with Q'eqchi' laborers. His memoir begins with an account of an 1891 uprising among the Q'eqchi' inhabitants of his brother's newly titled coffee

[77] Sapper 1897, 39, 30–59.
[78] Sapper 1936.
[79] Sapper 1895.
[80] Ibid., 22.
[81] In a letter to his mother written shortly after his arrival, Dieseldorff told her, "The people here are incredibly peaceful, they are almost like beasts of burden in this department called Alta Vera Paz, or the high lands of true peace." TULAL DC, Erwin Paul Dieseldorff letters to his mother, letter #9, 22 Nov. 1888.

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plantation, Campur, which mirrors narratives of the Spanish conquest. Sapper explained that the rebellion had been incited by the plantation's administrator, Ferdinand von Weyhe, "a ruined ex-official that had the fame of being a very strict and abusive patron."[82] According to Sapper, von Weyhe's harsh treatment of workers and his ignorance of indigenous language and customs engendered unjust punishments, erroneous translations, and intercultural misunderstandings. As a result, one fateful night, the villagers torched the administrator's house and destroyed the symbols of their exploitation: coffee plants. Rather than send a military expedition to quell the uprising, Richard asked his cousin David to restore order. Like the great Indian protector Las Casas, Sapper won over the villagers of Campur through knowledge of the Q'eqchi' language, skillful diplomacy, and intercultural knowledge. "With reasonable treatment and consideration," he explained, "the people would have become accustomed little by little to the new circumstances because of their attachment to their small plots, but von Weyhe did not understand this and believed that through harsh and practically violent treatment he would somehow break the Indians' resistance." Sapper noted that, like the violence deployed by Spaniards, von Weyhe's violent actions were "the worst thing he could have done…. von Weyhe believed that he could remedy this situation by forcing an increase in the amount of work required, but through coercive means and with frequent physical punishment he only achieved the opposite result and awoke a growing unease and dissatisfaction among the workers."[83] By contrast, Sapper listened to Q'eqchi' laborer's complaints and made a "violent military expedition" to the region unnecessary through compromise and mutual understanding. As a result, he won the laborer's trust and became like their father to them.

Both Karl's and David Sapper's narratives illustrate how German fictional romances of the late eighteenth century between conqueror and native princess, loving master and obedient slave, embodied in characters like Incle and Yariko, John Smith, Pocahontas, and Alonso and Cora, found their counterpart in the fabled history of the "peaceful" conquest of Tezulutan. In these narratives, Germans envisioned harmonious relations based on "love," governed by the patriarchal affection and subjection of the weaker to the stronger. Romantic narratives allowed Germans to imagine for themselves a special role in frontier colonization where others, including "bad" Germans, had failed, and new partnerships between Q'eqchi's and Germans would lead German protagonists to cultivate fertile fields and fertile concubines. The good-father planter, just like Las Casas, could unveil the peaceful Q'eqchi' nature, ready

[82] Sapper 1952.
[83] Ibid.

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to be molded into a submissive labor force. Karl wrote, "While, for example, in southern Guatemala almost everywhere a tolerably strict [labor] regime can be maintained, in the Alta Verapaz, the planter must adapt himself, as much as possible, to the more or less patriarchal discipline, the Indians of the latter locality say of their master, that 'he lives as a father among them,' and expect a corresponding treatment from him, and here especially it is important to learn the native language of the Indians, since through translation of the interpreters many misunderstandings arise, which may engender ill feeling."[84]

Images of patriarchal affection between planter and worker and the promise of founding respectable, moral, and civilizing families abroad were central organizing metaphors and models for German settlers in Alta Verapaz. The Germans' sense that they were superior colonizers was grounded in more than just the fantasy that Germans had preserved themselves from the moral embarrassment of the conquest. As Woodruff Smith has argued, their sense of superiority also stemmed from their rationale for colonialism based not on conquest, but rather the desire to found civilized families abroad as replicas of such families in Germany.[85] The familial metaphor was a key reference point for the settler variety of colonial ideology, which was characteristic of Germany. The family model not only legitimated the colonizing enterprise as an educating and civilizing venture in which Europeans uplifted the natives, but the civilizing process could also work in the opposite direction, so that the European would become more self-aware, more capable, and even more ethical as a result of his position as a colonial master. Claims to understand Q'eqchi' culture and possess ethnographic skills thus distinguished between people who could transform the landscape into a productive enterprise and those who were less capable of the task. In short, ethnographic acuity, like in German Samoa as described by George Steinmetz, became a kind of cultural capital in Alta Verapaz that helped German settlers to assert their privileged role in the region and harness discourses that racialized Mayas as submissive laborers.[86]

As scholars have amply demonstrated for a variety of national and civilizing projects, national and colonial elites often employed familial and patriarchal tropes to shore up ties between rulers and ruled, and patriarchal authority could also serve as a model for good governance.[87] These metaphors were powerful discourses that elicited notions of obligation, duty, rights, and loyalty, yet planters' concerns with the familial sentiments that

[84] Sapper 1897, 223.
[85] Smith 2005.
[86] Steinmetz 2007.
[87] Hunt 1992.

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bound planter and worker were not only metaphors. Their attention to affective bonds was also a strategy of governance, often a calculated effort to direct and shape proper conduct, foster desired work habits, and cultivate fidelity and obedience.[88] While German settlers like Dieseldorff often claimed to be loving fathers, the relationships between German planters and Maya laborers were also guided by fear, dependency, and sometimes violence.

Germans' Las-Casas-style patriarchal governance was, in practice, a tentative and unstable project whose efficacy and legitimacy depended on repeated performances of violence, as well as fatherly affection. The planter-laborer relationships that constituted space in the plantation were at once both intimate and violent, while coffee planters' exercise of sovereignty was always partial, incomplete, and unsettling.[89] German coffee planters may have celebrated annual festivities alongside their workers, but their plantations were also defined by jail cells and whipping posts and workers purportedly believed they would be required to work off their debt in the afterlife. Workers also lived in fear of a mysterious half-man, half-cow that roamed the plantation at night stealing from the workers to enrich the planter.[90] German settlers also helped to instilled fear and relations of dependency as they sought to graft capitalist relations onto indigenous culture. Q'eqchi's responded by reshaping their own social and cultural worlds in an often-trenchant critique of plantation life.

ETHNOGRAPHIC KNOWLEDGE, VIOLENCE, AND RACIAL CAPITALISM

Karl Sapper's appropriation of the narrative of peaceful conquest, including the iconic figure of Bartolomé de las Casas, helped to naturalize German presence in the region. Much beyond representing themselves as "good father planters" in the likes of Las Casas, or practicing ethnography by learning Q'eqchi' and participating in ritual life, some German settlers used the territorial space of the plantation to strategically graft a new set of capitalist relations onto indigenous culture. German-owned *fincas de mozos* were also the product of a specific diffusionist model of social change that was popular in Germany in the 1890s. Both Karl Sapper and Dieseldorff paid particular attention to cultural and linguistic boundaries, because they were interested in tracing the movement of different cultures across the earth's surface in order to understand how people culturally adapted to new environments and to predict future social and cultural changes. They also envisioned racial traits as deriving from historically and culturally distinct geographies, and so rather than seeking to destroy indigenous patriarchal customs they worked through and with indigenous systems of authority and tradition, at once

88 Stoler 2002.
89 See Gibbings n.d., esp. ch. 4; and Hansen and Stepputat 2005.
90 Gibbings n.d., ch. 4; Kahn 2010.

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facilitating their endurance and creating new relations of power.[91] German coffee planters-cum-ethnographers thus sought stability by adapting to existing cultural norms and geographies. By understanding Q'eqchi's' true nature, language, and history and reproducing it on *fincas de mozos*, German settlers imagined, they would be best able to govern Q'eqchi's and ultimately shape and manage their sentiments and produce a reliable and hard-working labor force. By the 1920s, *fincas de mozos* were commonplace in Alta Verapaz; according to the 1921 census, as many as 70 percent of rural people lived in them.[92] The relationship between ethnographic production and plantation life would come to shape the anti-communist impulses of twentieth-century Guatemalan anthropology.

Guided by a diffusionist model of social change and an interest in expanding profitable enterprises, German coffee planters studied Maya art and artefacts, and even their prayers, but they also researched Q'eqchi' social and economic practices. Dieseldorff drew from his ethnographic studies of old Maya land titles and his knowledge of Q'eqchi' settlement patterns and commercial relations to actively forge *fincas de mozos* out of Q'eqchi' social, political, economic, and cultural worlds. Karl Sapper, too, wrote extensively on not only Q'eqchi' history and beliefs but also their agricultural production, artisanry, commercial practices, trade routes, and governance structures. From these observations, Sapper advocated the formation of *fincas de mozos*. They were desirable, he argued, because the Spanish colonial system had preserved Maya hereditary structures and laws, including those of reciprocal labor obligations. Therefore, Germans should purchase large parcels of land to ensure that the new landowner also possessed the obligatory labor of the residents, which was based on Maya custom. In exchange for small wages and the right to plant corn, resident laborers worked twelve days a month for a daily wage of two reales.[93] In great detail, Sapper discussed the material needs of the average Q'eqchi' family and how they could be satisfied, in order to make clear how dependent rural Q'eqchi's in Alta Verapaz were becoming on wage labor, especially during Guatemala's hyper-inflationary decade beginning in 1899.[94] These relations of dependency helped to bind Q'eqchi' laborers to the plantation and solidify their loyalty to the German planter. German settlers in Guatemala, then, built and managed their *fincas de mozos* not by eradicating Q'eqchi' social relations and cultural practices but rather by

[91] Smith 1991, ch. 8.

[92] *Censo de la República de Guatemala* 1924, 472–73. These numbers, like all state-collected statistics from the time, likely undercounted actual laborers since coffee planters refused to permit state officials on their plantations and self-reported numbers. Coffee planters had a vested interest in undercounting.

[93] Sapper 1897, 277–78.

[94] Sapper 1901, 120–22.

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grafting capitalist relations onto pre-existing cultural practices. This resembled the way in which sixteenth-century Spanish colonial officials had used ethnographic knowledge to adapt to extant political, economic, and cultural worlds.[95]

German settlers were especially keen to model their new plantations upon Q'eqchi' patriarchal models of land distribution and reciprocal labor obligations. Q'eqchi' patriarchs, as elders and heads of ethnic clans, administered local justice, distributed subsistence land, organized work on communal projects, and sponsored annual religious celebrations. On the new *fincas de mozos*, Dieseldorff charged his administrators with overseeing these same tasks. The plantation administrators' new role as a sort of head of the clan can also be seen in David Sapper's memoir when he claims to have become the "*pequeño gran padre*." The integration of the administrator into Q'eqchi' cultural life may have been extensive. Karl Sapper, for instance, noted that when a foreigner wanted to sow a cornfield, Q'eqchi' plantation officials would perform the necessary prayers and rituals in "silent representation of the European planter," as they might have for a Q'eqchi' patriarch.[96] By replicating Q'eqchi' patriarchal structures as best they could, coffee planters attempted to stabilize an imagined corpus of Maya custom and to protect Mayas against induction into a culture-leveling version of capitalist modernity. In this respect, German coffee planters engaged in a kind of salvage ethnography whereby they tried to preserve elements of a culture they thought was disappearing. Unlike German Samoa as described by Steinmetz, however, planters in Alta Verapaz did not rely upon imported workers to labor on their plantations, but instead worked to reproduce Maya customs as best they could. While scholars like Dipesh Chakrabarty have often understood cultural difference and spirit worlds as resistant to the march of the universalizing practices of capitalism, German ethnographers-cum-coffee planters actively sought to yoke this cultural difference into the formation of productive and profitable enterprises.

At the same time, Q'eqchi's may have harnessed their own cultural and spiritual traditions to offer commentary on, and sometimes overt resistance to, German-owned *fincas de mozos*. Reading against the grain of German ethnographic writings and plantations practices, we catch glimpses of how Q'eqchi's sought to carve out spaces of cultural autonomy and imagine different political and economic worlds. German settlers were frequently troubled by Maya shamans, whom they labelled "witches." They claimed that these shamans could have considerable influence, and Germans warned that they could instigate "insubordinations"; Dieseldorff advised his

[95] See, for example, Mumford 2012.
[96] Sapper 2000, 38.

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administrators to jail them before they could initiate worker uprisings. The aforementioned 1886 frost became a historical marker of the power of millennial interpretations of the "evils of coffee production."[97] Germans may have feared that witches harnessed Maya spirituality to offer radical political alternatives to life on plantations, or they may have racially coded Q'eqchi' political agitators as dangerous irrational Others. Likewise, the half-man, half-cow that roamed plantations at night, stealing from workers to enrich the planter, may offer a Q'eqchi' interpretation of the forms of capital accumulation and moral perversion that marked Alta Verapaz's plantation capitalism.[98]

German ethnographies can also be carefully read for Q'eqchi' commentary on the changes occurring with plantation life. When Karl Sapper observed that Q'eqchi's imagined the Christian God as a white person who runs a plantation in the afterlife "similar to those that the Europeans own in Alta Verapaz," he may have been highlighting a Q'eqchi' interpretation of the all-encompassing potency of German-owned plantations. Similarly, the German observation that Q'eqchi' thought the debts they accrued on plantations would follow them into the afterlife may well have been a Q'eqchi' commentary on the inescapable reality of their dependency on indebted wage labor. "In contrast to the earthly plantations, where they never see the day when they have paid off all advances," Sapper wrote that the Q'eqchi's "hope for a better deal in the next world. There, sooner or later, they would be rid of their debts and would be allowed to listen on the porch as the angels inside the house of god play for them on their celestial instruments (violins, guitars, and harps)." Nonetheless, even in the afterlife, the hierarchies of race and civilization would prohibit the Q'eqchi' from thinking "they would be allowed inside the house of the Christian god."[99] According to Sapper, German coffee planters became like gods to Q'eqchi' workers. When read from the perspective of a Q'eqchi', the blending of life on earth and the afterlife, alongside the potent hierarchies of race and civilization, may reveal Q'eqchi' interpretations of the inescapable and exclusionary violence of plantation life itself. Here Maya interpretations of plantation life might have offered the most trenchant critique of capitalism and plantation colonies, and even at times provided political and economic alternatives. What Chakrabarty calls History 2, composed of particular life-worlds, could, but did not necessarily, mark the limits of capitalism's universalizing tendencies. Rather, capitalism could easily adapt to and appropriate aspects of indigenous culture, while these same appropriations may have provided venues for subaltern actors to critique capitalism itself.

[97] Termer 1957, 194; Dieseldorff 1926: 17–20.
[98] On this, see Gibbings, n.d., esp. ch. 4.
[99] Sapper 2000, 37; 1897, 277–78.

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As such, these cultural differences were hardly static, essential embodiments of Otherness.

For many German planters in Alta Verapaz, *fincas de mozos* constituted a space wherein their entitlements as bearers of civilization translated into sovereignty. Karl Sapper, for example, observed that the government, when it awarded title to land, granted "some of its [the state's] sovereign rights." Since the plantation owners were responsible for appointing local representatives of the state on their plantations, he explained, the coffee planter was awarded a "kind of limited self-government."[100] Viewing this system favorably, Sapper recognized that such planter sovereignty allowed Europeans to form "truly patriarchal relations [with] Indians."[101] In these same passages, Sapper placed Guatemala's German "planter-colony" within the broader German imperial context. He openly lamented that Germans in Guatemala lacked the political backing of the German state. Even more, Sapper proposed that the German colonial state could learn from its planter-settlers about the effective establishment of plantations and governance in the tropics.[102] Guatemala's German "planter-colony," according to him, shared historical genealogies with formal colonies like British India and German New Guinea. Like other colonies, the plantation in Alta Verapaz was considered a cordoned off and designated space where Germans settlers, but not the German state, realized a partial sovereignty.[103]

This partial sovereignty of German planter-colonies, and the production of ethnographic knowledge and representations, were also central to the stabilization of a racial capitalism. Above all else, German planters relied upon racialized representation and affective politics, ideology, and cultural capital to distinguish between new social classes of capitalist entrepreneurs, administrators, and rural laborers. Ethnography, as practiced on plantations, helped the planters represent Q'eqchi's as cultural Others and plantation laborers who were doomed to lose their unique culture to the onward march of civilization, and thus required special protections that only planters could offer.[104] Karl Sapper, for example, argued that Q'eqchi's outside of plantations would eventually no longer "follow in the footsteps of their fathers." While he genuinely lamented this cultural loss, he believed *fincas de mozos* could shield against such loss by maintaining Q'eqchi' cultural traditions and languages and by preserving their isolation from urban centers and ladinos. The desire to "salvage" Maya culture also meant preserving Mayas status as laborers. In the early 1920s, Dieseldorff complained about

[100] Sapper 1891, 45.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Sapper 1901, 1–5.
[103] Stoler n.d.
[104] "La Prosperidad de Alemania" *Diario de Centroamerica*, 7 Oct. 1902.

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legislation requiring plantations to educate the children of resident workers. "Of what value is it to a *mozo* to be able to read and write, or to know about history and geography?" he asked. "Is it not true," he continued, "that giving the Indian classes a higher education than their social position merits only serves to disrupt their work? We have learned from experience that Indians who have learned to read and write are no longer useful as agricultural workers…. We need workers who are content with their social status, not an abundance of learned persons who look upon manual labor with arrogant disdain."[105] Preserving Mayas as laborers meant protecting them from the influences, even via literacy, of the "outside world."

Ethnographic knowledge and skills also had social and symbolic capital for Germans that helped to maintain their status as plantation owners and legitimize their presence in Guatemala. Dieseldorff was known as *Herr Doktor*. For Germans like Dieseldorff, who actively participated in intellectual circles, ethnographic acuity and archaeological writings translated into prestige in Germany, Guatemala, and elsewhere. In the 1920s and 1930s, Germans like Dieseldorff and Karl and David Sapper began publishing their works for Guatemalan audiences. Confronted by anti-German nationalism and popular movements demanding Maya rights, Dieseldorff and David Sapper became advocates for the popularization of knowledge about the nation's Maya population and for participants in Guatemala's liberal *indigenista* movement.[106] They, and later Franz Termer, subverted the more radical aims of some ladino and Maya *indigenistas*. For German settlers, *indigenismo* concerned the preservation and celebration of indigenous languages, traditions, and folklore rather than the expansion of Maya rights or the end of coerced labor. In fact, German settlers' version of *indigenismo* fit neatly alongside the *indigenismo* of many influential Guatemalan intellectuals known as the "Generation of 20."[107] Many of this same Generation of 20 also looked to German immigrants for solutions to the nation's ills. Nobel Laureate Miguel Ángel Asturias, for example, argued that the only solution for Guatemala was the disappearance of Mayas through miscegenation and the further colonization of Guatemala with immigrants from Switzerland, Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands.[108] Even members of Guatemala's radical Unionist party, which had led the overthrow of the dictator Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898–1920), advocated for the model of plantation patriarchy found in Alta Verapaz's system of *fincas de mozos*. That system, one intellectual argued, "pleases the Indians

[105] Náñez Falcón 1970, 344.
[106] Dieseldorff 1928a; 1928b; 1929; 1936; 1940; D. Sapper 1926; and K. Sapper 1928.
[107] See for example Casaús Arzú 2005; 2009; Floyd Casey 1979.
[108] Asturias 1923.

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by giving them lands to plant themselves in exchange for services," and had "given excellent results."[109]

As German settlers participated in Guatemala's *indigenismo*, a new generation of German ethnographers affirmed many of the conclusions of their predecessors. In the late 1920s, Franz Termer, a student of Karl Sapper, traveled by foot throughout Guatemala remarking on Maya culture and history. Like his mentor, Termer's goal was "to construct a total picture of the living conditions of the indigenous population and establish what have been the historical bases of their evolution."[110] Termer was also concerned that his "investigations have the effect of salvaging indigenous cultural remains."[111] Even more than his predecessors, he lamented the Mayas' cultural loss, alcoholism, and racial degeneration due to racial mixing and cultural proximity with ladinos brought about by new modes of transportation and commercial expansion.[112] For Termer, the solution to cultural loss and racial degeneration was still German-owned *fincas de mozos*, where rural Mayas could maintain their customs of living in dispersed huts away from the influences of ladinos, and practice a combination of subsistence agriculture and paid wage labor.[113] Echoing Dieseldorff, Termer advocated that coffee planters "be friendly and fair in their dealings with laborers."[114] He regretted his study's limitations, however, since knowing Mayas required more intimate contact. To solve this problem, he advised that ethnographers first become coffee planters: "Only people who live for years among the Indians and in intimate contact with them are able to obtain more details. In this way, Erwin Paul Dieseldorff's observation is very much on point when he says that in Guatemala the modern ethnographer must reside as a businessman, storekeeper, or planter learning at the same time the indigenous languages."[115] Like Dieseldorff, Termer cautioned that indigenous peoples were susceptible to the socialism taking root in neighboring Mexico and he called for future ethnographic studies to examine indigenous ethno-politics so as to halt its spread.[116] The intimate ties between coffee-planting capitalism and ethnography helped to shape its anti-socialist and eventual anti-communist turn.

Straddling the boundaries between academic and popular worlds, German coffee planters-cum-ethnographers indelibly shaped Guatemalan anthropology,

[109] "El Redenición del Indio" *El Federal*, no. 10, 14 July 1920; no. 12, 30 July 1920; and no. 13, 10 Aug. 1920.
[110] Termer 1957, ix.
[111] Ibid., xviii.
[112] Ibid., xviii.
[113] Ibid., 250–51.
[114] Ibid., 251–52.
[115] Ibid., 155.
[116] Ibid., 249.

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along with a new generation of U.S. anthropologists who undertook field studies in the 1930s and 1940s.[117] The influence of German settlers can be seen most readily through Antonio Goubaud Carrera, dubbed Guatemala's first anthropologist and founder of Guatemala's Instituto Indigenista Nacional (IIN) shortly after Guatemala's famed 1944 October Revolution. Goubaud, the grandson of a French bookstore owner and a polyglot, studied at Guatemala City's German school and thus read German. His first work was translating German scholars' studies of Maya language and history. After studying under Robert Redfield and Sol Tax at the University of Chicago, Goubaud returned to Guatemala in 1944 and lived in Alta Verapaz. There, he remarked upon how Germans participated in Q'eqchi' customs and traditions and made pilgrimages to Q'eqchi' shrines. They consulted Q'eqchi' healers and diviners. While Goubaud was fascinated and enamored by the Q'eqchi's, his work with the IIN was also deeply anti-communist. Through the IIN, he promoted directed cultural change and the elimination of all aspects of Maya culture that impeded modernization. Like Dieseldorff and Termer had suggested in the 1920s, Goubaud proposed that directed cultural change would safeguard the nation against communism.[118] These sentiments were repeated after Guatemala's 1954, CIA-supported military coup. By the 1970s, anthropological support for anti-communist counterinsurgency had helped to spur the field's critique of colonialism.[119]

CONCLUSION

German coffee planters in nineteenth-century Alta Verapaz were also ethnographers, geographers, and archaeologists. German settlers' ethnographic practices represented more than benign scholarly curiosity and cosmopolitan interest in indigenous Others. The work of scholars like Rainer Buschmann and Han F. Vermeulen has convincingly demonstrated that German ethnographers sometimes supported colonial projects. These scholars have expanded the national focus of earlier scholarship.[120]

German ethnographers in Alta Verapaz also illustrate other aspects of the history of social sciences and ethnographic knowledge, namely the functionalist role ethnographic practices and representations played in the rise of capitalism on indigenous frontiers. These ethnographic practices blur the boundaries between colonial and non-colonial forms of knowledge production, and the kinds of sovereignty Germans forged on plantations asks us to consider the many genealogies of what counts as a colony. While German ethnographers were influenced by "precolonial fantasies" or

[117] Pels and Salemink 1994, 3.
[118] González Ponciano 2020.
[119] Wolf and Jorgensen 1970.
[120] Buschmann 2009; and Vermeulen 2015.

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"precolonial representations" of the peaceful conquest and Bartolomé de las Casas, forged in Germany, their desire to use ethnographic knowledge to govern the Q'eqchi's was born of the confluence of specific experiences of Germans on Guatemalan coffee plantations. In particular, the late nineteenth-century struggles over land and labor and German-face-to-face interactions with Maya laborers shaped coffee planters' turn to ethnography. Their desires to possess ethnographic knowledge, to place their planter-colonies in the broader, comparative European imperial context, and to become good-father planters were much more than simply discursive strategies and fantasies—they gave rise to real practices and shaped how some Germans approached the management of coffee plantations.

Attending to this historical context requires critical analysis of experiences of both German planters and Maya laborers. Through a careful reading, we can see how planters' self-representations as good fathers belie an underlying racism and violence, and eventually anti-socialism and anti-communism. Ethnographic knowledge played a central role in the rise of capitalism, just as cultural difference was conceived not as an impediment to wage labor but as integral to it. The situation of these German coffee planters-cum-ethnographers in Alta Verapaz obliges us to move beyond the debate in subaltern studies about whether cultural difference marked resistance to the universalizing tendencies of capitalism. While at times Q'eqchi's drew upon their spiritual and cultural worlds to resist and critique coffee capitalism, cultural difference itself was not innately a reservoir of resistance to the expansion of capital and proletarianization. Rather, German settlers frequently understood cultural difference as the grounds for forging prosperous plantations and submissive laborers. When read against the grain, these ethnographic writings also suggest Q'eqchi' agency and perhaps Q'eqchi' critiques of the plantation economy itself. Like more recent scholarship on alternative modernities, I argue that cultural difference was at the foundations of varied and distinct capitalisms.[121] German ethnographic practices destabilize the boundaries between diasporic and colonial knowledge production, as well as academic and capitalist practices. The historical legacy of the relationship between ethnography and capitalism also shaped the subsequent rise of Guatemala's own anti-communist anthropological tradition.

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[121] See, for example, the *American Historical Review*'s June 2011 Roundtable "Historians and the Question of 'Modernity'"; and especially Gluck 2011.

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Abstract: German coffee planters in nineteenth-century Alta Verapaz, Guatemala were also ethnographers, archaeologists, and geographers who published their works in Germany, the United States, and Guatemala. Their published works, as well as coffee plantation records, government correspondence, judicial records and other archival materials reveal how German coffee planters-cum-ethnographers drew upon ethnographic knowledge and representations to forge a reliable labor force. Like ethnographers in Britain's colonies, German settlers in Alta Verapaz understood the potential symmetry between ethnography and the governance of indigenous peoples. Their ethnographic knowledges also push us to reconsider distinctions drawn between German cosmopolitan ethnographic traditions and British functionalist ones and demonstrate how ethnographic knowledge and cultural difference could be deployed to forge new kinds of racial capitalism. In Guatemala, the intimate relationship between the rise of capitalism and ethnography shaped the anti-communism of mid-twentieth-century anthropology in the region.

Key words: history of ethnography, German diaspora, capitalism, coffee, colony, Q'eqchi's, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala

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