

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

‘The Heart of the Country’: The Primacy of Peasants and Maize in Modern Guatemala

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Abstract

Much of the agricultural history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Latin America has been dominated by studies of export products and economies. Yet just as important for national development were domestic markets supplied by small-scale farmers. Using Guatemala as a case study for Latin America, this article examines the challenges faced by farmers producing for local, regional and national markets. Over the course of the national period, state authorities’ sporadic concern for domestic agriculture provided indigenous small-scale farmers with opportunities to advance their agendas, which ranged from resisting forced labour to maintaining their traditional agricultural practices. By the 1930s, domestic foodstuff production had increased markedly because in the early twentieth century state authorities had joined small-scale farmers to actively promote domestic-use agriculture.

Keywords: peasants; maize; agriculture; Guatemala; coffee

Introduction

Much of the agricultural history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Latin America has been dominated by studies of export products and economies.¹ Adeptly exploring how export commodity chains’ backward linkages affected workers’ culture and daily existence, scholars have studied labour and transitions to capitalism. Given that the experience of agricultural export production varied by country, commodity and time, the prevalence of this scholarship compared to

¹William Roseberry, Lowell Gudmundson and Mario Samper (eds.), *Coffee, Society and Power in Latin America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); William Gervase Clarence-Smith and Steven Topik (eds.), *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, 1500–1989* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Robert G. Williams, *Export Agriculture and the Crisis in Central America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1986); Jeffery M. Paige, *Coffee and Power: Revolution and the Rise of Democracy in Central America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); John Soluri, *Banana Cultures: Agriculture, Consumption, and Environmental Change in Honduras and the United States* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006).

the study of domestic-use agriculture (DUA), which comprises subsistence agriculture and foodstuff production for the domestic market, can obscure as much as it enlightens. Domestic markets supplied by small-scale farmers were just as important as the export sector for national development.²

Using Guatemala as a case study for Latin America, I argue that over the course of the national period, state authorities' sporadic concern for domestic agriculture provided indigenous small-scale farmers with opportunities to advance their agendas, which ranged from resisting forced labour to maintaining their traditional agricultural practices. The expansion of export agriculture – particularly coffee – in Guatemala over the second half of the nineteenth century negatively impacted DUA. When state authorities began actively promoting DUA in the early twentieth century, however, foodstuff production of staples such as *maíz* (*Zea mays*; subsp. *mays*; 'corn' in US English; 'maize' in British English) and beans for the domestic market increased markedly. By the 1930s, DUA had become more productive than export agriculture. Generally overlooked in historiography, state authorities who supported DUA, and small-scale farmers who produced it, demonstrated how subaltern officials and indigenous cultivators shaped agricultural policies and production.

Authorities' concern for domestic agricultural production is evident in the archives in the Ministry of Agriculture's missives reminding local officials that DUA was vital to the nation and thus should be encouraged and protected; in the records of the ministers, presidents and governors who exempted indigenous and other agriculturists from military and labour conscription so they could work on their subsistence crops; in magistrates' rulings that privileged indigenous agricultural knowledge and practices; in government requests for DUA products to be displayed at national exhibitions; and in agricultural and landowning censuses; and memorandums of local authorities who facilitated DUA and lauded small-scale farmers.³ Similarly, other documents highlight officials who recognised that both domestic and export agriculture were key to the nation's development.⁴ Public intellectuals and journalists also acknowledged indigenous farmers' vital contributions to the domestic economy. That such memos, absolutions, requests and concessions found throughout the archival records were specific to both

²For the purposes of this article, I define small-scale farmers as those who owned fewer than 15 *cuerdas* (acres) of land.

³Letter to Ministro de Gobernación (Government Minister), 20 Sept. 1859, Loyola Notre Dame Library, Special Collections (hereafter LNDLSC), Guatemala Collection (hereafter GC), box 4, Agricultura, *legajo* (hereafter *leg.*) 28579, *expediente* (hereafter *ex.*) 206, folio 4; 'Estadística agrícola', 19 Oct. 1894 and 'Nómina de las fincas de café', 9 Jan. 1900, LNDLSC, GC, box 9, Agricultura, Ciudad Vieja; 'Dirección general del Cuerpo de Ingenieros – sección agronomía', Sept. 1892 and 'Estadística agrícola de la República de Guatemala, cuadro que demuestra la producción agrícola de Sacatepéquez', 1 Jan. to 31 Dec. 1898, LNDLSC, GC, box 4, Agricultura. The Guatemala Collection is comprised of some 17 linear feet of materials photocopied from the Archivo General de Centro América (General Archives of Central America, AGCA). The majority of the documents are from the Jefatura Política de Sacatepéquez *bultos*. Whatever identifying descriptions from the AGCA survive on the documents are duly noted, though often only provenance, date and office are available; the Guatemalan researchers who photocopied the materials only rarely noted the *leg.* and *ex.* numbers.

⁴Adolfo Vendrell, 'Dirección general del Cuerpo de Ingenieros – sección agrícola', Sept. 1892, LNDLSC, GC, box 4, Agricultura.

subsistence agriculture and foodstuff production for the domestic market speaks to some officials' recognition of the crucial contributions of small-scale farmers.

In all its manifestations from the 1840s to the 1950s, the state periodically accommodated indigenous farmers who provisioned the nation. By organising the article chronologically, I examine the critical role indigenous farmers and DUA played in the nation's nineteenth-century development and official recognition thereof. Less apparent to national authorities, indigenous coffee entrepreneurs embodied the intersections – both competitive and collaborative – of agro-exports and DUA. Even as forced labour mechanisms persisted in the early twentieth century, authorities' concessions to small-scale farmers reveal official priorities during periods of intensive DUA labour. By the 1930s, DUA and small-scale farmers enjoyed a revival that endured dictatorial and democratic rule.

Located close to the capital, Kaqchikel Mayas (henceforth Kaqchikels) in the departments of Sacatepéquez and Chimaltenango were integral to feeding Guatemala City – particularly prior to the 1930s, when the inadequate and costly transportation system precluded the ability to profitably move large amounts of grain.⁵ With responsibilities that ranged from feeding military forces to displaying their products and demonstrating their trades at national fairs, poor indigenous farmers served and shaped their nation. At times, they leveraged their agricultural knowledge and foodstuff production for the domestic market to avert compulsory labour and other mandates.

Guatemala was not unique in its attention to domestic agriculture. Although dramatically distinct from other movements and governments in Latin America, the Mexican Revolution offers a point of comparison, with its emphasis on the importance of small- and medium-scale farming from its inception in 1910. At the same time as President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40) promoted agricultural exports, his administration buoyed DUA. Guatemala never promoted peasant agriculture to the extent Mexico did during the 1920s and 1930s, but some Guatemalan leaders saw the wisdom in supporting DUA.⁶

In addition to their influence on state policy, small-scale farmers also figured prominently in the fate of DUA.⁷ Since maize depleted soil nutrients, its cultivation was dependent on farmers practising careful fertilisation and crop rotation.⁸ If small-scale indigenous farmers, who authorities generally associated with subsistence agriculture and agro-export labour, also produced coffee, the distinction between domestic-use and agro-export agriculture may have been blurred for some officials. In many ways, domestic-use and agro-export agriculture were intertwined. Authorities who promoted labour freedom and removed obstacles to production for small-scale farmers apparently did not consider these concessions a detriment to the agro-export economy. Depending on the motives, ideas and

⁵David J. McCreery, *Rural Guatemala, 1760–1940* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 309.

⁶Ben Fallaw, *Cárdenas Compromised: The Failure of Reform in Postrevolutionary Yucatán* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

⁷Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *Studies in the Economics of Central America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), pp. 114, 161.

⁸Carolyn Hall, *Costa Rica: A Geographical Interpretation in Historical Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), p. 176.

practices of small-scale farmers and government officials, domestic-use and agro-export agriculture could be symbiotic.

Maize, Labour and Indigenous Farmers

Well before the Spanish invasions, maize was the grain around which Meso-American empires and city states were built. The centrality of maize in Mayas' religion and world view speaks to its importance in their agricultural cycle and daily lives.⁹ When locusts and frosts devastated cornfields in ancient Kaqchikel communities, starvation ensued. One Kaqchikel messenger explained to his Quiché rivals: 'In truth, there is great famine, the people have no more strength due to the famine.'¹⁰

During the colonial and early national periods, maize remained one of Guatemala's primary staples.¹¹ To encourage domestic agricultural production, early conservative regimes facilitated conditions whereby indigenous communities and small-scale farmers could continue to pursue *milpa* agriculture (small-scale maize, bean and squash cultivation). As Rafael Carrera's conservative government (1844–8, 1851–65) began encouraging coffee cultivation, it also investigated the possibility of growing maize for export on the coast where it had been sown for domestic consumption for centuries.¹²

To thwart coerced labour, agricultural production was a powerful card to play. In addition to compulsory agricultural labour dating back to the colonial period, military conscription, road work and other forced labour mechanisms snared indigenous men. Because the nineteenth-century state was too weak to capture non-compliant labourers, indigenous labourers regularly avoided conscription.¹³ Flight and deception were not their only strategies, however. When military recruiters arrived in San Antonio Aguascalientes (henceforth Aguascalientes) in Sacatepéquez on 24 July 1849, to conscript 'all robust and rigorous *naturales* [indigenous people]', local officials and the families of those 'torn from their work' protested that 'planted fields and *fincas* [large-landed estates] were ruined, [and suffered] grave losses'.¹⁴ To their minds, both small- and large-scale agriculture were imperilled. In correspondence that belittled indigenous people and the

⁹Servando Hinojosa, 'Ritual Effigies and Corporeality in Kaqchikel Maya Soul Healing', *Ethnology*, 50: 1 (winter 2011), p. 81.

¹⁰*Kaqchikel Chronicles: The Definitive Edition*, trans. and exegesis Judith M. Maxwell and Robert M. Hill II (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2006), p. 196.

¹¹Arturo Warman, *Corn and Capitalism: How a Botanical Bastard Grew to Global Dominance* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 15, 23–4, 181.

¹²Letter to Ministro de Gobernación, Justicia y Negocios (Minister of Government, Justice and Trade), 14 Jan. 1851, LNDLSC, GC, box 4, Agricultura, Ministerio de Gobernación, B, leg. 28552, ex. 1094; Lowell Gudmundson and Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, *Central America, 1821–1871: Liberalism before Liberal Reform* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1995); Ralph Lee Woodward Jr, *Rafael Carrera and the Emergence of the Republic of Guatemala, 1821–1871* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1993), pp. 190–1, 430–2; McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, p. 201.

¹³René Reeves, *Ladinos with Ladinos, Indians with Indians: Land, Labor, and Regional Ethnic Conflict in the Making of Guatemala* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 73–4, 85, 101.

¹⁴Mariano Rosa Blandera, Antigua, to Ministro de Gobernación, 1 Aug. 1849, LNDLSC, GC, box 26, Varios, leg. 28548, ex. 31.

military alike, petitioners warned, '*indígenas* [indigenous people] who were inclined toward vices even when they have full-time work' would become 'terrible instruments against the same society' once they were exposed to the idleness of the military. 'We wish to preserve ... the *naturales*' custom ... we do not want them to lose their love of work and more importantly ... forget the respect that they profess to authorities who are convinced they are the only useful agricultural workers', the community spokesperson José López explained.¹⁵ His mid-century praise for indigenous industriousness stood in stark contrast to his contemporaries and successors who dismissed *indígenas* as lazy drunks, even as the nation depended on their labour. When it served their interests, elites softened racist disparagement and portrayed *indígenas* as noble and hard-working.

Representing municipal officials (whose ethnicity is often unclear in archival sources), López argued conscription violated 1839 laws against abandoning productive properties and 'snatch[ing] *indígenas* from their work or giving them jobs against their will and against their natural inclination'.¹⁶ Perhaps seeking to extend the protected status *indígenas* enjoyed during the colonial period, he insisted, 'The Supreme Government in the end has recognised the force of those laws ... [and] always has exempted indigenous people from military service.'¹⁷ Neither those laws nor the long tradition of exempting indigenous people from military service were compelling enough to sway authorities, however.

The military enjoyed a privileged position over the concerns of indigenous residents. Tasked by Carrera with recruiting a force of 100 men, Commander O. Saenz insisted he had conscripted only 15 men, six of whom he released because they were married. If everyone received an exemption, 'angels will have to descend from heaven to protect Antigua', he quipped.¹⁸

In response, local *indígenas* deployed another vital cog in the country's progress: domestic agriculture. When *corregidor* (magistrate) Mariano Rosa Blandera favoured Commander Saenz' reasoning, four Aguascalientes men whose sons had been conscripted appealed directly to President Colonel Mariano Paredes (1848–51): 'They should be released because ... our *milpas* are going to waste in their absence, no one will do the work that needs to be done.' The men demanded their sons 'be freed immediately and surrendered under the condition that they not be apprehended as soldiers again'.¹⁹

Impressed by the Aguascalientes fathers' argument about the vulnerability of DUA, but also aware of the recruitment decree, President Paredes – a military man – ordered that Aguascalientes *indígenas* be replaced 'with other individuals' and 'returned to their *pueblo* in liberty'. Paredes' insistence that conscription be continued with a different target population demonstrates he was less concerned

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶José López to Corregidor de (Magistrate of) Sacatepéquez, 1 Aug. 1849, LNDLSC, GC, box 26, Varios, leg. 28548, ex. 31. Although Aguascalientes and other villages in rural Sacatepéquez were predominantly indigenous according to census data, determining an individual's ethnicity is difficult because many *indígenas* had Spanish surnames and neither progenitors nor scribes regularly noted their ethnicity.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸O. Saenz to Corregidor de Sacatepéquez, 1849 (n.d.), LNDLSC, GC, box 26, Varios, leg. 28548, ex. 31.

¹⁹Mariano Rosa Blandera, Antigua, to Ministro de Gobernación, 1 Aug. 1849, LNDLSC, GC, box 26, Varios, leg. 28548, ex. 31.

about recruiting young *indígenas* than he was about maintaining their domestic agricultural production. To his mind, *milpas* were as important as the military. Indigenous farmers were wise to insist that harvests would fail without their labour. Throughout the colonial and national periods, indigenous farmers used their involvement in agricultural production as a strategy to avoid conscription and coerced labour.²⁰

If maize shortages between 1840 and 1940 are any indication, highland petitioners were acutely aware of the importance of their agricultural production.²¹ Droughts, downpours, hurricanes, locusts, farming 'tiny plots of exhausted land' and other challenges compelled governments to provide food aid.²² Subsidies, such as the Carrera government's 1847 allocation of funds for seeds, helped stave off the chain reaction of bad harvests whereby the increased price of grains one year contracted cultivation the following year because seeds were subsequently more expensive.²³ Authorities deployed a number of strategies – price controls, tax exemptions, collection of agricultural data, encouragement of increased production – to hold famine at bay. To offset the economic crisis set off by an 1854 locust invasion, the Carrera government controlled the price of maize and stimulated highland farming.²⁴ From the 1850s, when communal land lay fallow, municipalities distributed it among the 'poorest families' so they could grow their own crops.²⁵ Some indigenous groups and government officials mobilised communal labour to plant and harvest communal land.²⁶ Dramatic price fluctuations of maize, beans, rice and wheat in the 1850s and 1860s reflected the instability of daily nutritional and calorific intake, particularly during the winter months from May to October. Between 1853 and 1866, the cost of a *fanega* (bushel) of maize ranged from 50 centavos to 10 pesos; the cost of a *fanega* of beans and wheat flour similarly fluctuated between 1.25 and 9 pesos, and between 2.50 and 11.75 pesos respectively.²⁷ The Aguascalientes justice of the peace was especially thankful when the *corregidor* delivered grains in June 1860.²⁸

Crucial to economic development, foodstuff production for the domestic market often trumped other concerns. In an 1859 letter to the government minister in which he criticised artisans for failing to expeditiously deliver tools to small-scale farmers, the Sacatepéquez *corregidor* insisted: 'The neighbours in agriculture [*vecinos en agricultura*] have become so important that they can be considered the

²⁰Greg Grandin, *The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 179; Reeves, *Ladinos with Ladinos*.

²¹McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, pp. 1–3, 148, 294, 308, 326–33; Daniele Pompejano, *La crisis del antiguo régimen en Guatemala, 1839–1871* (Guatemala City: Editorial Universitaria, 1997), pp. 128–44.

²²*Diario de Centro América*, 1 Feb. 1933, 18, 20 and 22 July 1933, 19 Aug. 1933 and 3 Sept. 1936; McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, p. 308 (quote); Woodward Jr, *Rafael Carrera*, p. 191.

²³Pompejano, *La crisis del antiguo régimen*, p. 123; Woodward Jr, *Rafael Carrera*, p. 191.

²⁴Woodward Jr, *Rafael Carrera*, p. 392.

²⁵Report to Ministro de Gobernación, Justicia y Negocios, 14 Jan. 1851, LNDLSC, GC, box 4, Agricultura, Ministerio de Gobernación, B, leg. 28552, ex. 1094.

²⁶Grandin, *Blood of Guatemala*, p. 136; Pompejano, *La crisis del antiguo régimen*, p. 147.

²⁷Woodward Jr, *Rafael Carrera*, pp. 390–3; Pompejano, *La crisis del antiguo régimen*, p. 123.

²⁸Letter from Juzgado de (Court of) San Antonio Aguascalientes (henceforth SAAC) to Corregidor y Comandante General de (Magistrate and Commandant of) Sacatepéquez, 20 June 1860, LNDLSC, GC, box 14, Agricultura.

greatest and most active source of national wealth.' Being 'convinced of this truth and treasure', he sought to remove any barriers to domestic agricultural production.²⁹ Invoking the term *vecinos en agricultura* to refer to local, primarily *milpa* farmers, the *corregidor* advanced the small-scale farmers' interests.

Amid maize shortages, agro-exports continued to expand. After Carrera's death in 1865, coffee entrepreneurs increasingly accessed indigenous lands and labour.³⁰ Facing a severe grain shortage in 1868, President Vicente Cerna (1865–71) lifted import taxes on maize, beans, lentils, chickpeas, rice and potatoes.³¹ Despite such shortages, many indigenous farmers could not focus solely on these crops because they were indebted labourers on coffee *fincas*.³² A group of Kaqchikel farmers from Tecpán (Chimaltenango) countered: 'The indigenous people believe they are not slaves to anyone and for that reason should not be obligated to work.'³³ Some intellectuals and authorities similarly opposed *mandamientos* (forced or drafted labour). When workers in Sololá resisted *mandamientos* in 1868, the Sololá *corregidor* recommended 'salaried work regulations' for coffee workers.³⁴ At the turn of the century, Guatemalan intellectual Antonio Batres Jáuregui argued forced labour was not only 'barbarous and unconstitutional ... [and] immoral', but it also undermined domestic foodstuff production: 'The Indians are the ones who plant, cultivate, and harvest maize, beans, potatoes, peas, rice, vegetables and all that supplies the markets.'³⁵ He insisted, 'agriculture would undoubtedly benefit if the *mandamientos* were abolished; because free labour is more productive and produces better fruits'.³⁶ The Quiché governor concurred, 'the exploitation of forced labour' was to blame for the department's low food production.³⁷

As the population grew, food shortages persisted.³⁸ Even copious harvests were insufficient. In 1866 an official in Ciudad Vieja – a town in Sacatepéquez that borders Antigua – explained: 'The harvests of maize, beans and cochineal have been abundant ... but the *ejido* [communal land] is very small and is limited to the skirts of Agua volcano, whose lands are worn out from being worked too much.'³⁹ Insufficient farmland compelled 800 residents of Ciudad Vieja to relocate to

²⁹Letter to Ministro de Gobernación, 20 Sept. 1859, LNDLSC, GC, box 4, Agricultura, leg. 28579, ex. 206, folio 4.

³⁰Woodward Jr, *Rafael Carrera*, p. 431.

³¹Pompejano, *La crisis del antiguo régimen*, pp. 126–7.

³²Woodward Jr, *Rafael Carrera*, pp. 431–2; Pompejano, *La crisis del antiguo régimen*, pp. 199–200.

³³Pompejano, *La crisis del antiguo régimen*, p. 200.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 203.

³⁵Antonio Batres Jáuregui, *Los indios, su historia y su civilización* (Guatemala City: La Unión, 1894), p. 162.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, p. 310.

³⁸John Early, 'Population Increase and Family Planning in Guatemala', *Human Organization*, 34: 3 (1975), p. 276; James D. Sexton and Clyde M. Woods, 'Demography, Development, and Modernization in Fourteen Highland Guatemalan Towns', in Robert Carmack *et al.* (eds.), *The Historical Demography of Highland Guatemala* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1982), p. 199; Woodward Jr, *Rafael Carrera*, p. 383; Thomas T. Veblen 'The Ecological, Cultural, and Historical Bases of Forest Preservation in Totonicapán, Guatemala', PhD diss., University of California, 1975.

³⁹Woodward Jr, *Rafael Carrera*, pp. 430–1.

Escuintla in search of sustainable livelihoods.⁴⁰ Once population growth surpassed resources in late-nineteenth-century Guatemala, land pressure seldom waned.⁴¹ On the eve of the twentieth century, the San Andrés Ceballos (Sacatepéquez, henceforth Ceballos) mayor could say with confidence: 'There are no virgin lands here. If it is not planted now, it has been in the past.'⁴² With frequently depressed harvests and growing populations, communities depended on each other and regional markets for provisions.⁴³

In 1887, the government distributed 'special instructions ... to protect agriculture and remove any obstacles ... to its greatest development'.⁴⁴ Even as the Sacatepéquez *jefe político* (governor) who posted those instructions was concerned with coffee theft, he insisted that his job was 'to safeguard the security of the department's inhabitants ... and everyone who possessed property' – small- and large-scale landowners alike.⁴⁵

Guatemala was not alone in facing food security challenges. When severe locust invasions in 1882 destroyed maize crops, Mexico's Yucatán peninsula imported maize. Not until 1892 did the region recover enough to provision itself. Failing harvests at the turn of the century again compelled the region to import maize.⁴⁶ Like Mexico, Guatemala's struggles continued in the late nineteenth century. A June 1895 hailstorm wiped out a third of the bean crops in San Lorenzo El Cubo (henceforth El Cubo).⁴⁷ In the neighbouring town of San Miguel Dueñas (henceforth Dueñas), 'very irregular rainfall' in 1898 undermined a dependable source of water for farming.⁴⁸

Coffee Expansion and Indigenous Investment

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, coffee developed as an agro-export in Guatemala.⁴⁹ From constituting less than 1 per cent of total exports in 1852, coffee revenues increased to comprise half of the nation's exports by the end of Conservative rule in 1871.⁵⁰ With 263,533 trees planted and 69,155 already producing fruit in 1862, Sacatepéquez was one of the first departments to embrace the

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 431.

⁴¹McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, p. 311.

⁴²Report from San Andrés Ceballos (henceforth SAC) to Comisionado Político de (Political Commissioner of) SAAC, 23 Sept. 1899, LNDLSC, GC, box 14, Agricultura.

⁴³Report from San Lorenzo El Cubo (henceforth SLEC) to Comisionado Político de SAAC, 15 March 1898, LNDLSC, GC, box 29, Agricultura.

⁴⁴Secretaría de Gobernación y Justicia (Secretary of Government and Justice), 'Bando del jefe político de Sacatepéquez sobre café', 31 Dec. 1887, LNDLSC, GC, box 4, Agricultura.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*

⁴⁶Warman, *Corn and Capitalism*, pp. 138–9, 145.

⁴⁷Letter to Jefe Político de (Governor of) SAAC, 23 June 1895, LNDLSC, GC, box 14, Agricultura.

⁴⁸Report from Dueñas to Comisionado Político de Ciudad Vieja, 18 Feb. 1898, LNDLSC, GC, box 21, Agricultura.

⁴⁹Julio Castellanos Cambranes, *Café y campesinos en Guatemala, 1853–1897* (Guatemala City: Editorial Universitaria, 1985); Robert Carmack, *Rebels of Highland Guatemala: The Quiché-Mayas of Momostenango* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), pp. 148, 379; McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*; Gudmundson and Lindo-Fuentes, *Central America, 1821–1871*.

⁵⁰Woodward Jr, *Rafael Carrera*, p. 383.

coffee economy. In another indication of Kaqchikel farmers' and labourers' vital role in the coffee economy, Chimaltenango too housed important *fincas*.⁵¹ As the coffee economy grew, so too did the social status of those associated with it.⁵² Beginning in 1873, President Justo Rufino Barrios (1873–85) shepherded a series of decrees that transferred some of the most fertile piedmont to potential coffee planters when local residents could not produce legal land titles. While the loss of maize cultivation on the piedmont contributed to food shortages, increased agricultural investments during the 1880s and 1890s undergirded the expansion of coffee exports.⁵³ Sacatepéquez and Chimaltenango continued to figure prominently in the growth of the coffee economy, harvesting 38,000 and 25,000 quintals of coffee in 1887 from 3.7 and 4.9 million trees respectively.⁵⁴

By shifting land control from indigenous communal holdings to foreign and *ladino* (non-indigenous Guatemalan) private ownership, Barrios also sought to provide a steady supply of labour: dispossessing indigenous people of their livelihoods forced them into the cash economy.⁵⁵ Ranging from adhering to their *milpa* agriculture to embracing coffee production, highland *indígenas*' responses allowed some to maintain their land and autonomy in diverse ways, which at times marginalised their poor and working-class counterparts.⁵⁶ A few indigenous communities expanded their communal land holdings via the coffee economy.⁵⁷

When coffee production infringed upon people's quality of life and well-being, however, residents resisted it. In 1867, *indígenas* from Carchá (Alta Verapaz), who had been displaced from their farms by the expanding coffee economy, decried local officials who were forcing them to grow coffee and work on coffee plantations. The petitioners insisted that planting coffee in their cornfields 'would seem to have no other intention but to exterminate us'.⁵⁸ While some *indígenas* penned petitions, others rebelled.⁵⁹ Maya-Mam farmers in the departments of Suchitepéquez and Retalhuleu destroyed coffee trees that encroached upon their farms.⁶⁰ Infringements on *indígenas*' quality of life elicited firm responses. In 1889, when Don Manuel Quinones' workers used the Choy river in Sacatepéquez to peel and

⁵¹*Ibid.*, p. 384.

⁵²Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since 1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 39, 113.

⁵³*Recopilación de leyes agrarias* (Guatemala City: Tipografía El Progreso, 1881); David McCreery, 'Coffee and Class: The Structure of Development in Liberal Guatemala', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 56: 3 (1976), p. 457; Jim Handy, *Gift of the Devil: A History of Guatemala* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1984), p. 68; Robert Carmack, *Historia social de los quichés* (Guatemala City: Editorial José de Pineda Ibarra, Ministerio de Educación, 1979), p. 248; McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, pp. 214, 236–54, 301.

⁵⁴Reeves, *Ladinos with Ladinos*, p. 40. A quintal equals 100 pounds.

⁵⁵*Recopilación de las leyes de la República de Guatemala*, vol. 1 (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 1881), p. 457; Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since 1920*, p. 277.

⁵⁶David Carey Jr, *Our Elders Teach Us: Maya-Kaqchikel Historical Perspectives. Xkib'ij kan qate' qatata'* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2001), p. 67; Reeves, *Ladinos with Ladinos*.

⁵⁷Jim Handy, 'The Violence of Dispossession: Guatemala in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries', in Sebastian Huhn and Hannes Warnecke-Berger (eds.), *Politics and History of Violence and Crime in Central America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 287.

⁵⁸Woodward Jr, *Rafael Carrera*, p. 431.

⁵⁹Pompejano, *La crisis del antiguo régimen*, pp. 197–9.

⁶⁰Reeves, *Ladinos with Ladinos*, pp. 13, 64–5, 71, 73, 101.

clean the fruit, the waste was 'infesting in a way that at times was unbearable' when it reached the village of Dueñas downstream.⁶¹ 'To avoid illnesses in this town that can be caused' by such sanitation problems, José Mariano Ortiz asked the Sacatepéquez *jefe político* to prohibit that *finca's* practice.⁶² Although the *jefe político's* response is lost, clearly public health was a powerful card to play.⁶³

Despite these drawbacks, coffee cultivation continued to grow. Unlike sugar production, it lent itself to small-scale land ownership, as evidenced in Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Costa Rica and Puerto Rico.⁶⁴ Often associated with coffee labour, indigenous people were also coffee entrepreneurs; many in Sacatepéquez transitioned their *milpa* farms to coffee groves. Of the 4,506 trees in Santa Catarina Barahona (henceforth Barahona) by 1887, the indigenous landowner José María Saqche had planted 1,200 (more than 25 per cent) of them. That year he harvested ten quintals.⁶⁵ Five years later in Dueñas, at least four of the 14 farmers who planted coffee were indigenous (and indebted).⁶⁶ Indigenous coffee farmers in Guatemala enjoyed success similar to that of nineteenth- and twentieth-century small-scale Costa Rican farmers who adeptly managed capital, migration, cyclical production and price crises to become self-sufficient coffee producers, exporters and employers.⁶⁷ While historiography tends to highlight how forced labour mechanisms and other factors compelled indigenous migrants to pick coffee, indigenous coffee producers have yet to receive much attention.⁶⁸

By the turn of the century, coffee had become the principal crop in many Sacatepéquez communities.⁶⁹ The growing, if uneven, trend of shifting from *milpa* to coffee agriculture undermined food security in some places.⁷⁰ In 1895 a Dueñas official lamented that the maize and bean 'quantities are not sufficient to last the twelve months to the next harvest, given the number of inhabitants in the *pueblo*. Only coffee is sufficient for local consumption. It is ... certain [there

⁶¹José Mariano Ortiz to Jefe Político, Dueñas, 7 March 1889, LNDLSC, GC, box 49, Agricultura, San Miguel Milpas Dueñas.

⁶²*Ibid.*

⁶³Steven Palmer, *From Popular Medicine to Medical Populism: Doctors, Healers, and Public Power in Costa Rica, 1800–1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 24, 112.

⁶⁴Thomas Holloway, *Immigrants on the Land: Coffee and Society in São Paulo, 1886–1934* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1980); William Roseberry, *Coffee and Capitalism in the Venezuelan Andes* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1983); Fernando Picó, *Amargo café: los pequeños y medianos caficultores de Utuado en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX* (Río Piedras: Ediciones Huracán, 1981); Laird W. Bergad, *Coffee and the Growth of Agrarian Capitalism in Nineteenth-Century Puerto Rico* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983); Lowell Gudmundson, 'Peasant, Farmer, Proletarian: Class Formation in a Smallholder Coffee Economy, 1850–1950', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 69: 2 (May 1989), pp. 221–4, 248, 251–2.

⁶⁵'Estadística agrícola, producción café, Santa Catarina Barahona' (henceforth SCB), c. 1885–7, LNDLSC, GC, box 31, Agricultura.

⁶⁶'Nómina de mozos colonos de la finca San Sebastián', 5 July 1892, LNDLSC, GC, box 21, Agricultura.

⁶⁷Gudmundson, 'Peasant, Farmer, Proletarian'; McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, pp. 332–3.

⁶⁸Cambranes, *Café y campesinos*; McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*.

⁶⁹Report from SAC to Comisionado Político de SAAC, 23 Oct. 1899, LNDLSC, GC, box 14, Agricultura; Report from Dueñas to Comisionado Político de Ciudad Vieja, 25 Oct. 1899, LNDLSC, GC, box 21, Agricultura; Report from Santiago Zamora to Comisionado Político de SAAC, 26 Oct. 1899, LNDLSC, GC, box 27, Agricultura.

⁷⁰McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, pp. 307–8, 310.

will be] a shortage.⁷¹ Bean cultivation had become scarce in Aguascalientes and Ceballos too.⁷² If such sobering reports discouraged coffee cultivation among local farmers and national authorities, evidence of this is hard to find until the 1910s. In a dramatic shift from a long-standing history of *milpa* agriculture, Ceballos claimed coffee as its 'principal crop' in 1899.⁷³ The allure of agro-exports had similar effects in Mexico. By the early 1900s, henequen production in the Yucatán had so trumped maize production that diets suffered and levels of malnutrition grew.⁷⁴

Experimentation with new crops did not necessarily lead to domination, however. Guatemalan communities like El Cubo continued to dedicate most of their land to maize and bean production and only planted coffee 'on a small scale' in the late nineteenth century.⁷⁵ Because the coffee economy depended on maize, balancing *milpa* and coffee agriculture served indigenous farmers and their communities well.

DUA and Labour

Relying on coercion rather than the free movement of labour, the government and private entrepreneurs invested in means of repression.⁷⁶ With suppressed wages and maize serving as currency in most highland communities into the early twentieth century, few indigenous agriculturists felt compelled to leave their highland plots for wages.⁷⁷ Like the Aguascalientes farmers who insisted 'our *milpas* are going to waste' because their sons had been conscripted, five El Cubo men who petitioned for a two-year reprieve from compulsory labour in 1903 argued that forced labour mechanisms undermined domestic production: 'The *mandamientos* have ... left our families desolate and destitute ... because of the continuous demands, we have neglected our work to the extreme of not having finished harvesting [maize] nor have we prepared our fields to plant garbanzos and sweet potato ... our agriculture has suffered a great setback. How can our families support themselves with the groceries so expensive?'⁷⁸ In addition to warning of impending crop shortages, the petitioners pointed out they were better off producing their own food than earning wages to purchase it. Although the governor's response is lost, if the broader archival record is any indication, like their Quiché counterparts in Quezaltenango who supplied the region with maize and other vital products,

⁷¹Letter from Dueñas to Comisionado Político de Ciudad Vieja, 20 Nov. 1894, LNDLSC, GC, box 21, Agricultura.

⁷²Report from SAAC to Jefe Político de Sacatepéquez, 30 April 1900, LNDLSC, GC, box 14, Agricultura.

⁷³Report from SAC to Comisionado Político de SAAC, 23 Sept. 1899, LNDLSC, GC, box 28, Agricultura.

⁷⁴Allen Wells, *Yucatán's Gilded Age: Haciendas, Henequen, and International Harvester, 1860–1915* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1985); Warman, *Corn and Capitalism*, pp. 139, 143, 145.

⁷⁵Report from SLEC to Comisionado Político de SAAC, 15 March 1898, LNDLSC, GC, box 29, Agricultura.

⁷⁶Grandin, *Blood of Guatemala*, p. 179.

⁷⁷'Nómina de los agricultores del pueblo de Dueñas de Sacatepéquez', 7 May 1888, LNDLSC, GC, box 21, Agricultura.

⁷⁸Letter from Reyes Gonzalez *et al.* to Jefe Político, 4 Feb. 1903, LNDLSC, GC, box 29, Agricultura.

Kaqchikel farmers who provisioned the capital with foodstuffs enjoyed some leverage against *corvée* labour and other directives.⁷⁹

The following year, Guatemala's *jefe político* lamented that he could not send workers to clean the cemetery – an activity he and his counterparts considered crucial to the capital's public health. 'Against my good wishes, I ordered San Pedro Sacatepéquez to suspend the remission of workers to clean the cemetery, because I want the *indígenas* to plant their maize and beans', he explained.⁸⁰ Indicating indigenous farmers' privileges were limited to periods when DUA labour was in great demand, the governor regularly conscripted *indígenas* from surrounding villages when they were neither planting nor harvesting their crops. Although permanent forced labour exemptions were rare, indigenous farmers could expect regular reprieves during certain times of the agricultural cycle.⁸¹

Sacatepéquez officials who enforced national mandates for increased yields in the early 1900s reminded their superiors that farmers had agricultural knowledge based on 'many years of experience', and thus it was best not to 'contradict' the wisdom regarding 'maize, the precious grain and wholesome nourishment, of the sons of the country'.⁸² These officials afforded indigenous farmers crucial concessions with regard to their labour and practices.

In the midst of modernisation programmes aimed at stimulating agro-exports, officials hailed maize as a crucial component to the nation's development. In his 1898 report, the Aguascalientes mayor emphasised subsistence production and the expertise of the Guatemalans who toiled in it: 'With the advantage that farmers always sow what is necessary to live, that very necessary element is always supplied.'⁸³ To underscore the importance of that production, he later explained that the price of maize and beans doubled during shortages.

National authorities too saw the value in the production of basic foodstuffs. In a reflection of colonial-era tributes that suggested how central maize was to the nation, the government collected maize as a form of taxation and municipal leaders submitted lists of people who provisioned troops with *totopostes* (crispy tortillas).⁸⁴ Keen to understand, maintain and expand DUA, in the early 1900s the Guatemalan government distributed census forms to gather information about the planting and harvesting of staples such as maize, beans, wheat, rice and potatoes.⁸⁵ Even as

⁷⁹Grandin, *Blood of Guatemala*, p. 120.

⁸⁰Jefe Político de Guatemala to Director del Hospital General (Director of the General Hospital), Guatemala City, 5 May 1904, AGCA, Ministerio de Salud Pública (Ministry of Public Health), *leg.* 23048.

⁸¹Jefe Político de Guatemala to Director del Hospital General, Guatemala City, 29 Sept. 1904, AGCA, Ministerio de Salud Pública, *leg.* 23048.

⁸²Letter from Alberto Gib to Jefe Político, 5 April 1910, LNDLSC, GC, box 14, Agricultura.

⁸³Report from SAAC to Comisionado Político, 14 March 1898, LNDLSC, GC, box 14, Agricultura.

⁸⁴'Lista de vecinos de San Bartolomé Milpas Altas', 2 Feb. 1903, LNDLSC, GC, box 4, Agricultura.

⁸⁵'Cuadro de producción, municipalidad de SCB, Santiago Zamora, y SAC', 1916, LNDLSC, GC, box 31, Agricultura; Dirección General de Estadística de la República de Guatemala (Republic of Guatemala's General Directorate of Statistics, henceforth DGERG), 'Resumen de artículos de primera necesidad, SLEC', Oct. 1928, LNDLSC, GC, box 29, Agricultura; DGERG, 'Resumen de artículos de primera necesidad, SCB y Santiago Zamora', Oct. 1928 and DGERG, 'Resumen de artículos de primera necesidad, SCB and SLEC', Dec. 1929, LNDLSC, GC, box 31, Agricultura; 'Demarcaciones agrícolas 1904' and 'Demarcaciones agrícolas 1909', LNDLSC, GC, box 4, Agrícola; 'Nómina de los agricultores del pueblo de Dueñas de Sacatepéquez', 7 May 1888, LNDLSC, GC, box 21, Agriculture.

agriculturists increased *milpa* yields and introduced new crops like potatoes and chickpeas,⁸⁶ municipal officials inspected farms to ensure farmers complied with mandates to expand domestic foodstuff production.⁸⁷ If agricultural data is any indication, most did.⁸⁸ As the mayor of Aguascalientes explained in 1917, 'Like other towns ... neighbours have remained well informed about the present need to increase sowing articles of consumption.'⁸⁹ Inspectors and assistants 'monitored the exact compliance of the instructions ... They are taking a census of property owners to see the property area under cultivation, and for those who have leftover land, they will invite and demand that they provide [land] to those who want to plant but do not have anywhere' to do so.⁹⁰ In his report, the mayor detailed the maize, bean, chickpea and sweet potato production in Aguascalientes, Barahona, Zamora, El Cubo and Ceballos. Even though most of these towns also produced coffee, he did not mention it. Indicating the level of detail to which officials monitored towns, he also listed property owners' names and how many *cuerdas* (acres) they sowed of each staple crop. The time, energy and resources authorities dedicated to monitoring and encouraging the expansion of DUA demonstrate how important it was to the region and the nation.

Most domestic-use agriculturists maintained their commitments to their subsistence crops. 'When the workers are engaged in their own farming, they are scarce', explained the Ciudad Vieja mayor in 1899.⁹¹ Even though the coffee harvest coincided with a period in highland *milpa* agriculture when farmers were waiting for maize to mature, local labour was not necessarily abundant. While some labourers were *jornaleros* (day labourers) who seasonally migrated to coastal *fincas* in October and November, others were committed to working on highland estates year-round.⁹²

Officials who regularly engaged with indigenous agriculturists had varied opinions about them that changed over time. Informed by disparaging discourse, many local officials situated indigenous labourers somewhere between 'indolence and activity'.⁹³ The Santiago Zamora (Sacatepéquez) mayor insisted, 'The majority of *naturales* in this town are ... more lazy than active.'⁹⁴ Despite such prejudices and structures that privileged *finqueros* (large-landed-estate owners), local and regional leaders with a keen sense of domestic agricultural production generally knew indigenous labourers to be hard-working, forward-thinking and honest.

⁸⁶Letter from Antigua to Ministro de Fomento (Minister of Development), 27 June 1902, LNDLSC, GC, box 14, Agricultura.

⁸⁷Letter from SAAC to Coronel Ciudadano (Colonel) J. Benigno Pellecer, 21 April 1917, LNDLSC, GC, box 14, Agricultura.

⁸⁸Cuadro del distrito que demuestra cultivos en 1916 y 1917', LNDLSC, GC, box 14, Agricultura.

⁸⁹Letter from SAAC to Coronel Ciudadano J. Benigno Pellecer, 21 April 1917, LNDLSC, GC, box 14, Agricultura.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

⁹¹Alcalde Primero (Mayor) Juan Ponce to Juzgado Municipal de Ciudad Vieja, 26 Oct. 1899, LNDLSC, GC, box 37, Agricultura de Ciudad Vieja, 1899–1916.

⁹²Report from Dueñas to Comisionado Político de Ciudad Vieja, 25 Oct. 1899, LNDLSC, GC, box 21, Agricultura; Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since 1920*, pp. 39, 161.

⁹³Report from SCB to Comisionado Político de SAAC, 25 Sept. 1899, LNDLSC, GC, box 31, Agricultura.

⁹⁴Report from Santiago Zamora to Comisionado Político de SAAC, 29 Oct. 1899, LNDLSC, GC, box 27, Agricultura.

Unlike contemporary elites who assumed labour shortages in the agro-export economy were attributable to indigenous indolence, the Ciudad Vieja mayor's understanding of their realities informed his respect for them. He noted that they were 'robust, active in their work, and the heart of the country'.⁹⁵ Other Sacatepéquez authorities similarly described them as healthy, obedient and committed.⁹⁶ Laudatory descriptions were not limited to local indigenous labourers, as evidenced by the Ceballos mayor's assertion that migrant labourers from Chimaltenango who filled labour lacunas in his town were 'robust ... and without vices'.⁹⁷ Some authorities associated *indígenas* with intelligence.⁹⁸

Although dictators such as Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898–1920) and Jorge Ubico (1931–44) did not tolerate collective labour organisation, occasionally some small-scale agriculturists enjoyed considerable sway during despotic rule. Ubico regularly listened to rural *indígenas*' concerns and granted them concessions (see Figure 1). At times, he adjudicated indigenous land disputes.⁹⁹ As the Department of Public Works sought to extirpate livestock and agriculture from the capital during Ubico's reign,¹⁰⁰ Guatemala City depended on rural areas to feed it. That dependence raised the stakes for foodstuff production. In an indication that political structures at times facilitated DUA, the rural intendants appointed by Ubico in the mid-1930s highlighted maize production in their districts as indicators of economic development.¹⁰¹

Competition and Collaboration in the Maize and Coffee Economies

As the twentieth century progressed, maize and other staple-food production continued to vary dramatically and concern authorities. Like their predecessors, officials focused on indigenous communities and farmers to address shortages. In 1902, the minister of agriculture reported, 'In the past, municipalities had a custom of mandating maize and bean sowing, called communal [planting], but lately that has fallen into disuse in some municipalities.'¹⁰² Compounding this drop in production, the following year the Santa María volcano erupted and covered crops with a 'thick cap of volcanic material' that caused 'the complete loss of the wheat, maize, oatmeal, and potato harvests'.¹⁰³ Indigenous farmers continued to

⁹⁵ 'Agriculture report: Ciudad Vieja', 26 Oct. 1899, LNDLSC, GC, box 9, Agricultura.

⁹⁶ Report to Comisionado Político de SAAC, 23 Sept. 1899, LNDLSC, GC, box 14, Agricultura; Report from Dueñas to Comisionado Político de Ciudad Vieja, 25 Oct. 1899, LNDLSC, GC, box 21, Agricultura; Report from SLEC to Comisionado Político de SAAC, 21 Feb. 1899, LNDLSC, GC, box 29, Agricultura.

⁹⁷ Report from SLEC to Comisionado Político de SAAC, 23 Sept. 1899, LNDLSC, GC, box 28, Agricultura.

⁹⁸ Letter from Alberto Gib to Jefe Político, 5 April 1910, LNDLSC, GC, box 14, Agricultura.

⁹⁹ Carey Jr, *Our Elders Teach Us*, pp. 195–219; David Carey Jr, *I Ask for Justice: Maya Women, Dictators, and Crime in Guatemala, 1898–1944* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2013), pp. 36–40.

¹⁰⁰ J. T. Way, *The Mayan in the Mall: Globalization, Development, and the Making of Modern Guatemala* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 51.

¹⁰¹ McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, p. 311.

¹⁰² *Memorias de la Dirección General de Agricultura, 1902* (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 1902), p. 29.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*



Figure 1. Jorge Ubico with Representatives of the Native Race

Source: *La Gaceta: Revista de Política y Variedades*, no. 42, 10 Nov. 1941. Image courtesy of Hemeroteca Nacional de Guatemala.

leverage low yields and fears thereof to extricate themselves from forced labour. When indigenous wheat farmers from Tecpán complained to the Ministry of Agriculture that local authorities forced them to work on coastal *fincas*, the secretary of agriculture ordered municipal authorities to ‘leave them in peace’.¹⁰⁴

Notwithstanding occasional increases, net capital flows to agriculture decreased in the early twentieth century.¹⁰⁵ Between 1910 and 1914, agriculture investments were only 12 per cent of what they had been between 1895 and

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁰⁵‘Cuadro del distrito que demuestra cultivos en 1916 y 1917’, LNDLSC, GC, box 14, Agricultura.

1899.¹⁰⁶ Even in areas with rich, volcanic, ash-infused soil, growing harvests could not always meet the demand of growing populations.¹⁰⁷ An Aguascalientes *corregidor* reported: 'Many years ago the municipalities in this district did not sow communal land, but today everyone farms according to the land available to them.'¹⁰⁸ Relating low harvests to low wages, he informed residents and mayors they should pay labourers 'a just wage'.¹⁰⁹ Instead of raising wages, however, planters often offered the more powerful incentive of free or below-market-price maize to workers.¹¹⁰ Many planters argued raising wages would only reduce the labour supply because *indígenas* would stop working once they amassed enough income to meet their needs.¹¹¹

Competition for land and labour meant export agriculture and provisional production often worked at cross purposes. With its emphasis on agro-exports, Mexico was harvesting barely 300 pounds of maize per person in 1910 – a nearly 20 per cent drop from the 1890s.¹¹² But emphasising one aspect of the agricultural economy did not necessarily mean discounting another. Introduced in the late nineteenth century and subsidised by São Paulo to address labour shortages, the *colonato* system afforded coffee workers (*colonos*) land on which to farm crops for consumption and the market. By reducing workers' dependence on wages, this autonomous production helped Brazilian planters survive downturns in international coffee prices by keeping wages low.¹¹³ Historian Verena Stolcke asserts:

The belief that monoculture for export expands to the detriment of domestic market crops often rests ... on a misconception that obscures the multiple advantages of self-provisioning by family labour. Under the São Paulo *colonato* system and wherever coffee is grown by family labour units in combination with food crops ... a symbiotic relationship ... between coffee and food crops ... provided planters or merchants a measure of flexibility in the face of price slumps on the world market.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁶McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, p. 214.

¹⁰⁷Letter to Jefe Político de SAAC, 9 Feb. 1924, LNDLSC, GC, box 14, Agricultura.

¹⁰⁸Report from SAAC to Coronel Ciudadano J. Benigno Pellecer, 21 April 1917, LNDLSC, GC, box 14, Agricultura.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*

¹¹⁰McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, p. 229; Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 128–38; *Studies in the Economics of Central America*, pp. 3, 33–5.

¹¹¹McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, p. 307.

¹¹²Warman, *Corn and Capitalism*, pp. 139, 143, 145; Wells, *Yucatán's Gilded Age*.

¹¹³Thomas Holloway, *Immigrants on the Land*, pp. 70, 87–8; Cliff Welch, *The Seed Was Planted: The São Paulo Roots of Brazil's Labor Movement, 1924–1964* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), pp. 28, 127; Mauricio Font, 'Labor System and Collective Action in a Coffee Export Sector: São Paulo', in Roseberry *et al.* (eds.), *Coffee, Society, and Power in Latin America*, pp. 186–91; Verena Stolcke, *Coffee Planters, Workers, and Wives: Class Conflict and Gender Relations on São Paulo Plantations, 1850–1980* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), pp. 24–5, 38–42, 63; William Roseberry, 'Introduction', in Roseberry *et al.* (eds.), *Coffee, Society, and Power in Latin America*, pp. 9, 17–18.

¹¹⁴Verena Stolcke, 'The Labors of Coffee in Latin America: The Hidden Charm of Family Labor and Self-Provisioning', in Roseberry *et al.* (eds.), *Coffee, Society, and Power in Latin America*, p. 81.

So intimately tied were the export and domestic agricultural economies that one agronomist calculated the cost of coffee in maize: processing one quintal of the former required more than ten pounds of latter at the turn of the century.¹¹⁵ Recognising that 'throughout the isthmus ... agriculture for export [was] more important than DUA', economic historian Victor Bulmer-Thomas argues that 'under the appropriate conditions (invariably involving active state policy) the relationship can become, if not complementary, at least non-competitive'.¹¹⁶ Stolcke argues that the relationship in São Paulo was complementary: 'as coffee expanded, so did food crops'.¹¹⁷

The Guatemalan case suggests a complicated relationship between maize and coffee production. In his study of rural Guatemala, historian David McCreery argues, 'Coffee did not so much subtract significant amounts of land from maize production as block the expansion of subsistence cultivation into new areas to help meet the needs of a growing population'.¹¹⁸ While that holds true for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Sacatepéquez, by the late 1910s maize was again reigning supreme as many Kaqchikel agriculturists favoured *milpa* agriculture over coffee cultivation. Within two decades of claiming coffee as its principal crop, *milpa* agriculture reclaimed that title in Ceballos; in 1916, 41 *manzanas* (land areas that average around 1.7 acres) were planted with maize and beans, compared with only two *manzanas* of coffee trees. Santiago Zamora had a similar ratio. For all its coffee trees, Barahona had only ten *manzanas* dedicated to coffee cultivation; it was outnumbered by maize (347 *manzanas*) and bean and chickpea (118 *manzanas*) fields.¹¹⁹ By 1917, El Cubo farmers stopped sowing coffee altogether.¹²⁰ Resistance to coffee expansion in these communities around the capital reflected a national trend of decreased coffee cultivation.¹²¹

A shift in priorities, or at least privileged positions, was also apparent in national exhibitions and fairs. In the 1920s and 1930s, the government asked towns to send samples of their agricultural products to be exhibited in expositions.¹²² That most of these goods were cultivated for the domestic market speaks to the importance of non-export agriculture at the local level in a nation that is most often associated with the export production of coffee, bananas, cattle and sugar.

In addition to individual farmers' decisions, government strategies encouraging agro-export production without undermining domestic production shaped that trend. Although Guatemala never promoted domestic food production as explicitly as did the Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo (1930–8, 1942–52), who initiated

¹¹⁵Augusto Ramos, *O café no Brasil e no estrangeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora Santa Helena, 1923), p. 306.

¹¹⁶Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since 1920*, pp. 9, 160.

¹¹⁷Stolcke, *Coffee Planters, Workers, and Wives*, p. 24.

¹¹⁸McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, p. 311.

¹¹⁹'Cuadro de producción, municipalidad de SCB', 1916, LNDLSC, GC, box 31, Agricultura.

¹²⁰'Producción agrícola de SLEC', 18 Dec. 1916, LNDLSC, GC, box 57, Agricultura, 1898–1928, SLEC; 'Cuadro que manifiesta la cantidad de cuerdas sembradas de SLEC', 10 Aug. 1917, LNDLSC, GC, box 57, Agricultura, 1898–1928, SLEC.

¹²¹McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, p. 301.

¹²²Letter to Director de Agricultura (Director of Agriculture), 2 Aug. 1930, LNDLSC, GC, box 4, Agricultura; *Seis años de progreso, 1931–37* (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 1937).

colonisation projects and doled out land grants,¹²³ neither did it stimulate agro-exports like the Yucatán peninsula, where interest in food production dwindled as the international market for henequen soared.¹²⁴ Whereas Guatemalan agro-exports annually contributed about US\$10 million more to the economy than DUA from 1920 to 1928, this relationship flipped during the Great Depression and the Second World War. In the 1920s, DUA seldom kept pace with demographics, leaving imports to fill the gap. To close this gap, the state began shifting resources to DUA in the 1930s, and gradually it surpassed agro-exports' value added. The concurrent expansion of the road network facilitated the transportation of foodstuffs and provided previously isolated rural communities with access to markets. As DUA expanded to feed the growing population, its production greatly exceeded that of agro-exports from 1929 to 1950.¹²⁵ By the 1940s, DUA was contributing over US\$100 million more to the economy than agro-exports.¹²⁶ The rebound in domestic maize and bean production can be attributed to small-scale farmers who prioritised foodstuff production for the domestic market, and national officials who emphasised increasing yields of 'articles of first necessity'.¹²⁷

Coffee and *milpa* agriculture were complementary in the eyes of many authorities and *indígenas*. The latter farmed maize in the hills and coffee in the valleys in places like San José Poaquil (Chimaltenango).¹²⁸ By 1933, San Miguel Pochuta (Chimaltenango), where *indígenas* comprised 80 per cent of the population according to the 1921 census, was 'strictly coffee-growers'.¹²⁹ In 1934, the Sacatepéquez governor reported that maize, beans and coffee all enjoyed 'excellent cultivation'.¹³⁰ During a time when Chimaltenango harvested 423,035 quintals of maize, it also produced 66,981 quintals of coffee.¹³¹

Despite indigenous farmers who transitioned back to *milpa* agriculture from coffee production during the 1910s, the nation suffered maize shortages throughout the following decade.¹³² Not until 1929 did the nation produce as much maize as it did in 1920. Similarly, the 1921 bean harvest was not reached, let alone bested, until 1928 (see Tables 1 and 2). While wheat production remained relatively constant (except for a precipitous drop in 1924) during the first half of the decade, yields decreased in the second half and did not recover until 1935 (see Table 3).

¹²³Allen Wells, *Tropical Zion: General Trujillo, FDR, and the Jews of Sosúa* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 10–11, 16, 35, 180.

¹²⁴Wells, *Yucatán's Gilded Age*.

¹²⁵Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since 1920*, pp. 39, 57, 80, 316–19; *The Economic History of Latin America since Independence*, p. 246; *Studies in the Economics of Central America*, pp. 174–5, 197, 206–7 (note 45).

¹²⁶Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since 1920*, pp. 57, 80–1, 316–19.

¹²⁷*Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1937* (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 1938), p. 458.

¹²⁸Carey Jr, *Our Elders Teach Us*, p. 67.

¹²⁹*Diario de Centro América*, 17 Feb. 1933; Dirección General de Estadística (General Directorate of Statistics, hereafter DGE), *Censo de la población de la República: levantado el 28 de agosto de 1921, 4º censo, parte I* (Guatemala City: Talleres Gutenberg, c. 1923), pp. 166–8.

¹³⁰*Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1934*, p. 707.

¹³¹*Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1937*, p. 458.

¹³²*Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1923*, p. 28; *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1924*, pp. 57–9.

Table 1. Maize Production in Kaqchikel Departments and Guatemala

<i>Manzanas sown*</i>				<i>Quintals harvested**</i>			
Year	Chimaltenango	Sacatepéquez	Guatemala	Year	Chimaltenango	Sacatepéquez	Guatemala
1920–1	21,265	7,098	238,723	1920–1	221,301	65,881	3,132,402
1921–2	23,763	11,940	263,116	1921–2	215,439	74,532	2,998,325
1922–3	—	—	—	1922–3	188,152	70,389	2,488,972
1923–4	21,918	8,878	247,373	1923–4	171,558	83,731	2,492,973
1924–5	19,292	6,979	221,131	1924–5	185,361	69,946	2,403,440
1925–6	13,194	9,951	145,990	1925–6	146,824	54,944	1,967,310
1926–7	25,574	3,921	167,942	1926–7	291,686	69,331	2,386,190
1927–8	14,865	9,153	153,530	1927–8	201,956	113,485	1,966,594
1928–9	17,166	6,980	198,231	1928–9	230,235	101,981	2,803,618
1929–30	23,341	10,006	242,123	1929–30	376,280	80,387	3,436,621
1930–1	13,382	4,668	177,775	1930–1	230,236	83,576	2,461,759
1931–2	15,152	7,375	210,968	1931–2	289,020	98,344	3,163,184
1932–3	12,246	5,923	192,600	1932–3	250,968	102,194	3,054,744
1933–4	14,789	5,509	202,241	1933–4	206,453	74,804	2,848,061
1934–5	14,523	5,104	199,201	1934–5	300,244	84,053	3,074,760
1935–6	14,523	5,917	195,553	1935–6	300,550	102,373	3,280,096
1936–7	22,362	9,912	401,184	1936–7	423,035	107,022	6,182,224
1937–8	30,895	9,937	444,627	1937–8	418,296	160,022	6,220,928

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued.)

Manzanas sown*				Quintals harvested**			
Year	Chimaltenango	Sacatepéquez	Guatemala	Year	Chimaltenango	Sacatepéquez	Guatemala
1938-9	43,323	17,333	480,252	1938-9	366,784	274,948	7,020,628
1939-40	40,843	20,492	550,999	1939-40	565,925	339,092	10,019,920
1940-1	39,504	24,574	722,920	1940-1	766,126	393,738	13,566,720
1941-2	39,872	26,615	748,292	1941-2	789,451	423,400	14,931,722

Source: *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura* (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional), 1922-44. *A manzana equals roughly 1.7 acres. **A quintal equals 100 pounds.

Table 2. Bean Production in Kaqchikel Departments and Guatemala

<i>Manzanas sown</i>				<i>Quintals harvested</i>			
Year	Chimaltenango	Sacatepéquez	Guatemala	Year	Chimaltenango	Sacatepéquez	Guatemala
1920–1	1,973	1,158	15,557	1920–1	14,446	7,475	122,798
1921–2	2,516	1,386	20,579	1921–2	15,621	9,320	141,031
1922–3	—	—	—	1922–3	13,332	12,078	100,881
1923–4	3,622	2,660	21,038	1923–4	16,670	12,740	117,228
1924–5	2,430	1,199	16,290	1924–5	13,358	7,476	88,079
1925–6	1,248	1,171	10,379	1925–6	10,017	6,236	74,135
1926–7	2,436	976	12,841	1926–7	16,233	9,024	99,514
1927–8	1,426	1,819	13,661	1927–8	14,238	16,219	106,321
1928–9	1,939	1,388	14,775	1928–9	16,592	15,003	145,013
1929–30	2,461	1,591	18,329	1929–30	16,141	11,006	151,595
1930–1	1,216	861	16,262	1930–1	16,658	10,047	148,346
1931–2	1,739	1,379	155,331	1931–2	17,257	15,484	162,984
1932–3	1,276	801	14,073	1932–3	14,397	9,162	144,678
1933–4	1,334	740	14,171	1933–4	12,067	4,931	79,774
1934–5	1,259	665	16,005	1934–5	16,911	6,883	174,288
1935–6	1,259	750	15,738	1935–6	17,500	9,853	174,936
1936–7	9,042	2,479	54,700	1936–7	144,263	39,616	816,778
1937–8	13,393	2,500	69,789	1937–8	194,889	40,899	800,678

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued.)

<i>Manzanas sown</i>				<i>Quintals harvested</i>			
Year	Chimaltenango	Sacatepéquez	Guatemala	Year	Chimaltenango	Sacatepéquez	Guatemala
1938-9	12,258	3,410	86,011	1938-9	124,130	41,374	980,575
1939-40	6,601	5,514	105,674	1939-40	79,212	66,192	1,268,088
1940-1	9,925	5,681	106,516	1940-1	138,590	75,033	1,449,308
1941-2	9,970	5,693	105,203	1941-2	153,584	78,895	1,572,280

Source: *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura* (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional), 1922-44.

Table 3. Wheat Production in Kaqchikel Departments and Guatemala

<i>Manzanas sown</i>				<i>Quintals harvested</i>			
Year	Chimaltenango	Sacatepéquez	Guatemala	Year	Chimaltenango	Sacatepéquez	Guatemala
1920–1	3,021	—	16,594	1920–1	22,826	—	153,113
1921–2	3,427	—	15,970	1921–2	25,640	—	132,024
1922–3	—	—	—	1922–3	24,212	—	87,241
1923–4	2,767	1	19,258	1923–4	18,588	6	134,810
1924–5	3,432	—	12,590	1924–5	23,370	—	88,507
1925–6	2,679	1,150	14,520	1925–6	33,209	11,689	153,754
1926–7	2,657	2	13,112	1926–7	33,932	15	126,192
1927–8	1,391	3	10,177	1927–8	11,992	22	98,632
1928–9	2,368	2	10,209	1928–9	21,705	20	89,891
1929–30	3,391	7	13,291	1929–30	23,528	16	111,665
1930–1	1,387	—	9,003	1930–1	15,144	—	80,106
1931–2	2,379	0	8,205	1931–2	34,292	4	118,232
1932–3	1,318	92	9,473	1932–3	19,884	1,723	114,000
1933–4	1,160	—	9,893	1933–4	13,629	—	—
1934–5	1,237	32	10,585	1934–5	20,867	8	101,168
1935–6	1,237	—	13,234	1935–6	20,950	1	136,239
1936–7	7,517	0	28,510	1936–7	67,063	0	338,802
1937–8	2,435	0	24,174	1937–8	23,338	0	231,555

(Continued)

Table 3. (Continued.)

<i>Manzanas sown</i>				<i>Quintals harvested</i>			
Year	Chimaltenango	Sacatepéquez	Guatemala	Year	Chimaltenango	Sacatepéquez	Guatemala
1938-9	2,703	7	25,498	1938-9	17,994	80	284,743
1939-40	2,783	6	27,577	1939-40	33,397	61	330,912
1940-1	2,968	18	30,397	1940-1	35,850	259	393,665
1941-2	2,355	25	35,550	1941-2	40,680	330	485,011

Source: *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura* (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional), 1922-44.

Having caused 'suffering for some years',¹³³ locust plagues and droughts compelled the government to eliminate import taxes on maize in 1923 and 1924, when the minister claimed the harvest decreased by 10 per cent despite 'energetically combating' plagues.¹³⁴ After scarce rains at the beginning of the 1926 season and prolonged rains at the end of it damned harvests, the government imported 10,000 quintals of maize.¹³⁵ A better than expected harvest of 2.4 million quintals the following year provided a much needed respite, but another 10 per cent drop thereafter compelled the government to import an astounding 411,436 quintals in 1928.¹³⁶ Two years later, the government imported 461,620 quintals of maize, 12,062 quintals of beans and 1,162 quintals of wheat. In short, the government imported the equivalent of more than one-fifth of its maize harvest in 1930. Whereas Sacatepéquez imported only 5,216 quintals of maize for 46,453 residents, Chimaltenango imported 26,294 quintals of maize for 88,030 residents.¹³⁷ With a population of a little more than half that of Chimaltenango, Sacatepéquez imported only one-fifth of the maize Chimaltenango did – suggesting its per capita maize production was more efficient than Chimaltenango's.

To understand why a nation with such fertile land had to import maize and beans, the minister of agriculture commissioned a study. Like his predecessors, his initial inclination was that agriculturists needed to produce more.¹³⁸ Rural indigenous farmers remained central to officials' notions of agricultural production.

The Elusive Elimination of Forced Labour

Although the new government sought to transition to free wage labour after the overthrow of Estrada Cabrera in 1920, *mandamientos* and forced labour in other guises persisted while debt peonage continued to ensnare workers.¹³⁹ To weather the Great Depression, authorities reduced wages and planters paid down workers' debt instead of paying cash.¹⁴⁰ As the economy was recovering, the editors of the *Diario de Centro América* (the official daily of the government) asserted that those who benefitted most from forced labour schemes were labour brokers who earned a commission and authorities whose bribes 'exceeded what the workers earned during a whole season of work'.¹⁴¹

¹³³ *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1926*, p. 105.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12, 105; *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1925*, p. 12 (quote); *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1924*, p. 189; *Recopilación de las leyes de la República de Guatemala, Decreto 810, 24 de enero 1923 and Decreto 852, 18 de enero 1924*; *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1927*, pp. 14–16, 111; *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1929*, p. 6. The minister's calculation does not match the 1924 harvest data (see Table 1). That data reveals an 18 per cent drop from 1924 to 1925.

¹³⁵ *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1926*, p. 105.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12, 105; *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1927*, pp. 14–16, 111; *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1929*, p. 6.

¹³⁷ *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1931*, pp. 165–6; DGE, *Censo de la población de la República, 1921*, pp. 19–20.

¹³⁸ *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1927*, p. 230.

¹³⁹ *El Imparcial*, 26 June 1920.

¹⁴⁰ McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, pp. 313–14; Carmack, *Rebels of Highland Guatemala*, pp. 160–1.

¹⁴¹ *Diario de Centro América*, 4 Dec. 1936.

When Ubico replaced debt peonage with a vagrancy law in 1934, labour relations shifted. Since it applied equally to (poor) *ladinos*, many *indígenas* lauded the vagrancy law.¹⁴² After six years of implementation, the Ministry of Agriculture too praised the law, though from a different perspective: 'Our autochthonous race ... has been liberated with power to find work voluntarily or dedicate all their attention to their own crops.'¹⁴³ According to the Ministry, the vagrancy law precipitated the 'resurgence of a new type of aborigine within whom has been created ambitions and needs, and one can say without exaggeration that this new rural man has abandoned vices like laziness and alcoholism'.¹⁴⁴ In a more balanced assessment, the *Diario de Centro América* asserted: 'If the law is judged to be a slavery measure, it can be criticised, but it merits only praise if analysed from the point of view of the national economy.'¹⁴⁵ Some authorities explicitly related the law to *milpa* agriculture. The minister of agriculture explained how the requisite days of work depended on how much land each individual cultivated. Individuals with little or no land had to work 150 days per year for a landowner, whereas those whose 'crops comprised at least 10 *cuerdas* by 20 *brazadas* of maize, bean, etc.' only had to work 100 days per year for someone else.¹⁴⁶ By specifically identifying small-scale *milpa* agriculture, the minister highlighted its vital role in the nation's economy. Reduced forced labour requirements for those farmers underscore their crucial contributions and influence vis-à-vis officials. Even as the nation was modernising with a view toward emulating industrialised economies, DUA continued to figure prominently in its plans for progress.

The vagrancy law did little to alter plantation power relations, however. In 1934, the Chimaltenango governor explained that his office 'attended in a special manner to *finqueros*' petitions, punishing and ordering the capture of fraudulent workers'.¹⁴⁷ Taking a different tack, the minister of agriculture was convinced that the new law had ended 'work slavery' and undercut 'those who previously ignominiously exploited' workers.¹⁴⁸ The chief of police offered a more nuanced analysis: 'Some reactionary elements, taking advantage of indigenous ignorance, tried to distort the indisputable benefits of the law ... [particularly] resentful *finqueros* and *habilitadores*.'¹⁴⁹ Despite 'a few difficulties between owners and workers not worth mentioning', the Chimaltenango governor reported that *finqueros* enjoyed sufficient access to labour and increased agricultural production in his jurisdiction in 1937.¹⁵⁰

Even as claims that the vagrancy law would facilitate the 'liberation of the *indio*' seemed disingenuous,¹⁵¹ Ubico's praise of indigenous people's diligence shaped broader discourses about indigeneity. In contrast to many labour brokers, *finqueros*

¹⁴²Carey Jr, *Our Elders Teach Us*, pp. 203–5.

¹⁴³*Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1939*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁵*Diario de Centro América*, 4 June 1936.

¹⁴⁶*Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1936*, p. 18.

¹⁴⁷*Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1934*, p. 472.

¹⁴⁸*Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1935*, p. 17.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹⁵⁰*Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1937*, p. 460.

¹⁵¹*Diario de Centro América*, 31 Aug. 1936.

and others who considered laziness indigenous people's 'natural inclination',¹⁵² the *Diario de Centro América* portrayed indigenous people as hard-working contributors to the national economy, especially regarding the production of maize. Stressing the importance of teaching 'rural people' about 'scientific agriculture', one journalist insisted, 'the *indio*' was quick to learn a new technique 'even though he did not understand the scientific reasoning'.¹⁵³

Celebrating indigenous diligence, if not intelligence, spread beyond agricultural toil to the infrastructure that facilitated the domestic distribution of foodstuffs. 'The municipalities that have the best roads are those where the indigenous population is plentiful; they prefer to provide two weeks of service annually than to commute the ticket.'¹⁵⁴ In calling attention to the ethnicity of road building, the *Diario de Centro América* editors glossed over its relationship to class: few rural indigenous people could afford to pay the tax that would have relieved them of their obligatory labour.¹⁵⁵ By 1936, the *Diario de Centro América* editors had noted road construction advanced foodstuff production by facilitating the movement of 'the abundant harvests that descend from the farmhouse to the city, where they inundate the markets to satisfy the demands of millions and millions of consumers'.¹⁵⁶ References to the farmhouse and urban markets highlight these consumers as national, not foreign. Providing the vast majority of road and agricultural labour, indigenous people were vital to the nation's economic development and sustenance.

By the 1930s, indigenous coffee-growers had been all but forgotten as Ubico refashioned the Oficina de Café, 'to conquer new markets' and elevate Guatemalan coffee's international reputation.¹⁵⁷ 'The experts are our coffee-growers and their indigenous helpers', reported one journalist in 1933.¹⁵⁸ Relegating *indígenas* to subservient roles by ignoring their entrepreneurship played into the image Guatemalan capitalists wanted to project to the world. The government assured US, European and Cuban consumers that 'the best coffee in the world' benefitted from highland climates and 'indigenous Guatemalans' who carefully handpicked each bean 'to prevent green coffee from mixing with the ripe [coffee]'.¹⁵⁹ Even as the nation promoted its coffee abroad, it continued to celebrate domestic agriculture at national fairs and remained vigilant about provisional production.

Modernisation, Indigeneity and Increased Production

As pressure to modernise mounted during the twentieth century, false dichotomies set progress against tradition (read indigeneity); in turn, authorities decreasingly championed indigenous people. By the early 1930s, the Ministry of Agriculture's chemical laboratory had 'conducted various important technological studies of

¹⁵²*Diario de Centro América*, 4 Dec. 1936.

¹⁵³*Diario de Centro América*, 23 Jan. 1933.

¹⁵⁴*Diario de Centro América*, 30 Dec. 1936.

¹⁵⁵Carey Jr, *Our Elders Teach Us*, pp. 200–3.

¹⁵⁶*Diario de Centro América*, 30 Dec. 1936.

¹⁵⁷*Diario de Centro América*, 25 July 1933; *Diario de Centro América*, 14 Feb. 1933 (quote).

¹⁵⁸*Diario de Centro América*, 23 Jan. 1933.

¹⁵⁹*Diario de Centro América*, 25 July 1933.

scientific and industrial character'.¹⁶⁰ Even as Guatemalan intellectuals hailed science, they recognised how crucial the 'hard-working man' was to agriculture. But they denigrated the particular men who dominated agricultural labour. One 1933 editorial contrasted indigenous people and Africans, who enjoyed rich natural resources but never fully capitalised on them, with western Europeans, who maximised the limited resources available to them.¹⁶¹ Less than two decades after Sacatepéquez authorities lauded indigenous agricultural knowledge and practices, national officials were convinced that modern agronomy was as much about introducing new techniques as 'removing the superstition that still reigns among campesinos, like a harvest of closed ignorance'.¹⁶² According to Guatemalan elites, rural farmers had not emerged from the 'primitive stage' of agriculture. The *Diario de Centro América* criticised farmers for ignoring foreign brochures and other publications distributed by the Ministry of Agriculture, which helped explain why 'our harvests [are] poor in comparison to those obtained in North America'.¹⁶³

To help rural populations evolve beyond their 'customs and superstitious beliefs', the Ubico administration 'organised missions of experts ... to replace true prejudices that have hindered our agricultural evolution'.¹⁶⁴ The goal was not to incorporate new techniques with time-proven practices of indigenous farmers (let alone learn from those approaches), but rather to encourage rural agriculturists to abandon their approaches for modern agronomy.

Aware that science alone could not expand yields, officials deployed other strategies to increase harvests. In a government publication that otherwise touted science as crucial to the nation's agricultural production, some agronomists encouraged homemade remedies for combatting locusts and plagues, thereby facilitating small-scale farmers' pursuit of practical solutions.¹⁶⁵ Other experts warned that 'continued use of chemical fertilizers exhausts the supply of [natural] minor elements'.¹⁶⁶ In a nod to domestic foodstuff production, Ubico sought to 'promote the cultivation of wheat' by banning San Juan Ostuncalco's (Quezaltenango) wheat tax.¹⁶⁷ When landowners neglected their farms, local officials informed national authorities.¹⁶⁸ Identifying another problem, the Guatemalan intellectual Carlos Wyld Ospina was convinced that maize shortages were not the result of 'weather or sowing but ... an army of hagglers and speculators of all sorts' whose 'punishable activities' were shorting the market.¹⁶⁹ Ever promoting its accomplishments (and often denying that the country imported maize), the Ubico administration tended

¹⁶⁰*Diario de Centro América*, 14 Feb. 1933.

¹⁶¹*Diario de Centro América*, 4 Aug. 1933.

¹⁶²*Ibid.*

¹⁶³*Diario de Centro América*, 3 Sept. 1936.

¹⁶⁴*Diario de Centro América*, 4 Aug. 1933.

¹⁶⁵*Diario de Centro América*, 7 and 9 Sept. 1936.

¹⁶⁶*Diario de Centro América*, 3 Sept. 1936.

¹⁶⁷*Diario de Centro América*, 9 Sept. 1936.

¹⁶⁸Letter from Francisco Hernandez to Jefe Político de Santiago Zamora, 19 Jan. 1932, LNDLSC, GC, box 27, Agricultura.

¹⁶⁹Carlos Wyld Ospina, 'Redacción y corresponsalia en Occidente', *Diario de Centro América*, 17 Oct. 1936.

to highlight (and manufacture) data that demonstrated its agricultural mandates' effectiveness and attributed shortcomings to external malevolence.¹⁷⁰

Even during Ubico's authoritarian regime, agricultural production took precedence over military training. Shortly after assuming the presidency, he reminded local authorities that militiamen were only to train twice a season, 'with the objective that workers can attend to their commitments and crops and gather maize and other essential grain harvests'.¹⁷¹ While the military served a number of important purposes, DUA was paramount.

When Ubico assumed office, Guatemala enjoyed bumper crops. The campaign against locusts had become increasingly efficacious by 1931, which coincided with a 'very rainy year' and a 'considerable increase in land sown [with maize] and [thus] in the harvest obtained'.¹⁷² Bean harvests also increased in 1931.¹⁷³ Since the administration celebrated domestic agriculture at national fairs, maize regularly caught officials' attention. 'The maize harvest was sufficient, there was no need to import it from other parts. Maize is our most important product', insisted the minister of agriculture in 1933.¹⁷⁴ The next few years, however, were worse. In 1933, the Chimaltenango governor reported that four Kaqchikel towns suffered 'enormous frosts' that caused 'considerable losses in the bean and maize seeding'.¹⁷⁵ Production in Chimaltenango dropped by nearly 44,515 quintals and national production fell by 206,683 quintals (see Table 1). Nationally, maize production dropped each year from 1931 to 1934. As more efficient mechanisms and access to labour permeated agriculture, national maize, bean and wheat harvests generally increased between 1933 and 1942, with the exception of wheat from 1937 to 1939 and beans from 1937 to 1938 (see Tables 2 and 3). Nationally, land sown with maize continued to increase from 1935 to 1942 and production increased each year from 1933 to 1942 (see Table 1).

Indigenous farmers in Sacatepéquez and Chimaltenango contributed to increased production. In 1933, Sacatepéquez produced a surplus of staple goods.¹⁷⁶ The late-1930s surge in maize and bean harvests was largely attributable to the dramatic increase in *manzanas* sown with these grains (see Tables 1 and 2). In 1940, the minister of agriculture noted: 'Despite the bad atmospheric conditions and shortage of rain, maize and beans achieved a volume that satisfied demand and [facilitated] exporting beans'.¹⁷⁷ National officials' concessions to small-scale farmers and the push to expand land dedicated to maize, bean and wheat sowing (which increased by 509,569, 89,646 and 18,596 *manzanas* respectively from 1920 to 1942), alongside small-scale farmers' commitment to staple crops, increased DUA production. From 1922 to 1942, maize, bean and wheat harvests increased by 12.4 million, 1.5 million and 397,770 quintals respectively. From having to

¹⁷⁰*Diario de Centro América*, 17, 22 and 28 Feb. 1933.

¹⁷¹ *Telégrafo Nacional* (National Telegraph), Comandante de Armas de Casa Presidencial (Presidential Commander of Arms), 12 Oct. 1931, LNDLSC, GC, box 4, Agricultura.

¹⁷² *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1931*, pp. 3–8, 32.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6, 44.

¹⁷⁴ *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1933*, p. 50.

¹⁷⁵ *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1934*, p. 472.

¹⁷⁶ *Diario de Centro América*, 28 Feb. 1933.

¹⁷⁷ *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1939*, p. 61.

import nearly half a million quintals of maize in 1928 to no longer needing imports in 1933 to producing enough in 1939 to export beans, the nation's domestic agricultural economy was on solid footing. Hints of collaboration and respect emerge in the archival record in officials' appreciation for indigenous agricultural wisdom and small-scale farmers' favourable responses to inspectors' requests to cultivate more land. As these relationships developed, officials continued to remove obstacles to DUA, as we will see.¹⁷⁸

Even as national authorities encouraged an expansion of cultivated land, not all local officials facilitated that process. To make up for low yields the previous year, in 1934 the Chimaltenango governor encouraged mayors to increase farming on 'communal, municipal, and *baldío* [fallow] land'.¹⁷⁹ When Poaquil residents requested communal land be distributed among them, however, municipal authorities neglected to do so because the petitioners could not afford to pay a surveyor. Such obstacles were likely the exception, though, as the governor boasted that his intensification programme went beyond supplying his own department to producing a surplus for surrounding ones.¹⁸⁰ He concluded: 'Harvests were abundant and the price of grains is completely low, avoiding in this manner the hunger that the farming people have felt.'¹⁸¹ Proud of this progress, a few years later the governor noted, 'following the instruction I received for the agriculturists ... to intensify their plantings, managing in that way that when the country suffered scarcity of articles of first necessity, especially maize, this department not only had what was needed for its inhabitants' consumption, but also redistributed great quantities to the capital and neighbouring departments'.¹⁸² Like their counterparts in Sacatepéquez, many small-scale farmers in Chimaltenango embraced the call to expand cultivated land. Such collaboration helped to increase DUA production in both departments and the nation during the 1930s (see [Tables 1, 2 and 3](#)).

Democratic Continuity and Change

When domestic production increased and staple goods became more affordable in the 1940s, the nation remained vigilant about expanding maize production. After the 1944 Revolution, officials buttressed domestic foodstuff production by providing financing for small-scale farmers.¹⁸³ Trying to intensify maize planting in the 1940s, 'with the goal of propelling what for our nation is a principal economic resource',¹⁸⁴ Sacatepéquez Governor Juan Sierra insisted 'that fundamental article is a vital point in our general economic development'.¹⁸⁵ By highlighting that

¹⁷⁸Audiencia del día 11 de diciembre de 1945', LNDLSC, GC, box 31, Agricultura; 'Intendencia municipal: SCB', 19 Dec. 1945, LNDLSC, GC, box 31, Agricultura.

¹⁷⁹*Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1934*, p. 628; *Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1938*, p. 458.

¹⁸⁰*Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1934*, p. 628.

¹⁸¹*Ibid.*

¹⁸²*Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1937*, p. 458.

¹⁸³Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since 1920*, p. 114.

¹⁸⁴Juan Sierra, Antigua, to Ministro de Agricultura y Minería (Minister of Agriculture and Mining), 11 April 1945, LNDLSC, GC, box 4, Agricultura.

¹⁸⁵*Ibid.* See also 'Informe de Dueñas', 4 June 1945, LNDLSC, GC, box 20, Informes.

'beans and maize [comprise] the basic diet of our indigenous class', Sierra pointed to the ethnicity of subsistence agriculture.¹⁸⁶

Municipal officials depended on the new democratic government (1944–54) for food aid to cover low maize production in 1945 and 1946.¹⁸⁷ Despite what Sierra considered a decent harvest in 1946, Sacatepéquez faced a maize deficit of 34,765 quintals.¹⁸⁸ By 1949, efforts to stimulate DUA had paid off – that sector grew by 3.6 per cent from 1944 to 1949, while agro-exports increased by only 0.3 per cent.¹⁸⁹

In some places, agricultural exports stimulated food markets. Such was the case in Nicaragua and El Salvador, where the cotton boom in the second half of the twentieth century invigorated the market for maize and other basic grains. When cotton agriculture usurped the best lands, fewer farmers could survive on subsistence crops so they had to purchase basic grains. Cotton wages pumped cash into the pockets of rural migrants, who spent it on foodstuffs.¹⁹⁰ As coffee marched toward agricultural dominance in the Central Valley of Costa Rica, a similar process unfolded whereby the coffee economy displaced domestic agriculture in some areas and catalysed the rapid commodification of foodstuffs in others.¹⁹¹ The *colonos* who produced surplus foodstuffs while working in coffee plantations enriched São Paulo's domestic market. Although Guatemala did not follow this broad pattern of agro-exports stimulating the commodification of foodstuffs, Costa Rican farmers on the frontiers of coffee regions, who mixed commercial and subsistence crops, and Brazilian *colonos*, who also farmed both, mirrored highland Guatemala farmers who combined coffee and *milpa* production. As was true in some areas of Costa Rica and São Paulo, the combination of mixed farming routines and labour shortages (real or imagined) retarded dependence on coffee monoculture in the central highlands of Guatemala.¹⁹²

Unlike in São Paulo and Costa Rica, where slavery and forced labour schemes gave way to a free labour market by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, *corvée* labour persisted in Guatemala, even under its democratic government, as authorities enforced vagrancy laws to 'expand cultivation'.¹⁹³ Guatemala's contradiction of democracy and forced labour stood in stark contrast to São Paulo, where historians have argued that increasingly autonomous *colonos*, particularly those who parlayed their foodstuff production into savings that allowed them to

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷Letter from López to Gobernador Departamental, 15 June 1945, LNDLSC, GC, box 60, Economía, 1900–1948, SCB; León Corzo to Director General de la Oficina de Estabilización Económica (Office of Economic Stabilisation), 18 June 1946, LNDLSC, GC, box 32, Economía, Antigua.

¹⁸⁸León Corzo, Antigua, to Ministro de Economía y Trabajo (Minister of Finance and Labour), 29 April 1946, LNDLSC, GC, box 4 Agricultura.

¹⁸⁹Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since 1920*, p. 115.

¹⁹⁰Williams, *Export Agriculture*, pp. 69–70.

¹⁹¹Mario Samper, *Generations of Settlers: Rural Households and Markets on the Costa Rican Frontier, 1850–1935* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 131–3, 194–7, 202–11; Hall, *Costa Rica*, p. 156–8, 161–2, 177–9; Gudmundson, 'Peasant, Farmer, Proletarian', pp. 223, 229, 237.

¹⁹²Samper, *Generations of Settlers*, pp. 100–7, 131–3, 159–60, 195–7, 202–11, 220–1; Stolcke, *Coffee Planters, Workers, and Wives*, pp. 34, 38–42, 63.

¹⁹³Report from Ernesto Ramirez to Ministerio de Agricultura y Minería (Ministry of Agriculture and Mining), 11 Aug. 1945, LNDLSC, GC, box 31, Agricultura.

purchase land, helped to democratise the state and nation by undermining traditional large-landed coffee planters' political and economic hegemony.¹⁹⁴

Prioritising road building and foodstuff production, some Guatemalan officials kept the demand for coffee labour at bay in Sacatepéquez' indigenous communities. Conscripting had so skewed labour relations that even those who advocated fair pay warned about its unintended effects. Explaining that paying men 35 centavos a day to work on the roads (10 centavos more than they could earn on *fincas* in 1945) produced good results, Sierra cautioned authorities to 'take into consideration the agricultural needs of each zone'.¹⁹⁵

With officials trying to balance competing concerns, some mandates contravened proven agricultural practices. On 11 December 1945, two literate farmers complained that the *intendente* (mayor) insisted they plough their sweet potato fields horizontally instead of vertically. For 'many years' they had been working with vertical furrows because horizontal sowing did not yield a good harvest. To compromise, 'they offered to use vertical furrows on land that was not level, but the *intendente* would not accept it'.¹⁹⁶ When the governor's inspector sided with the *intendente*, farmers from Aguascalientes and Barahona refused to cultivate their land, even though they had tilled it. 'That prohibition does us grave harm because we will lose our work and the means to support our families', they explained.¹⁹⁷ Reconsidering his initial decision, the governor asked the Barahona mayor to investigate. Noting that farmers in the area had been growing sweet potato 'for about 100 years ... and experience has advised them to do it that way', the investigative commission suggested adhering to that wisdom.¹⁹⁸ Conceding local expertise, the governor concurred.

During the democratic government and subsequent military rule, officials reserved the right to intervene in agriculture and the economy. 'As an emergency measure and ... to avoid improper speculation', the Revolutionary government set prices for 'articles of first necessity' such as maize, beans and other staples.¹⁹⁹ Ten years later, in 1955, the military government initiated a 'programme of maize cultivation intensification, as a necessary measure to counteract the scarcity of that article of daily consumption'.²⁰⁰ The government also tasked 'vegetative health agents' with intensifying their fight against locusts.²⁰¹

Conclusion

In a nation bent on modernising its economy to buoy its international standing in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the export production of coffee, sugar

¹⁹⁴Welch, *The Seed Was Planted*, p. 26; Font, 'Labor System', pp. 187–91, 195.

¹⁹⁵Juan Sierra, Antigua, to Ministro de Comunicaciones y Obras (Minister of Communications and Works), 11 May 1945, LNDLSC, GC, box 6, Fuerza de trabajo.

¹⁹⁶'Audiencia del día 11 de diciembre de 1945', LNDLSC, GC, box 31, Agricultura.

¹⁹⁷Luis Saqché *et al.* to Gobernador Civil Departamental, 13 Dec. 1945, LNDLSC, GC, box 31, Agricultura.

¹⁹⁸Intendencia Municipal: SCB', 19 Dec. 1945, LNDLSC, GC, box 31, Agricultura.

¹⁹⁹Alfonso Arís, Antigua, to Presidente de la República, Ministro de Gobernación, Jefe de Prensa (Press Officer), 11 June 1945, LNDLSC, GC, box 13, Informes.

²⁰⁰*Memoria del Ministerio de Agricultura, 1955*, p. 27.

²⁰¹*Ibid.*, pp. 27, 118.

and bananas was paramount to achieving that goal. While historians have shed a bright light on these economies, DUA has received comparatively little attention despite feeding the nation and adding more value to the economy than agro-exports from 1929 to 1950.²⁰² According to oral histories and ethnographies, maize was regularly on the minds of most highland denizens.²⁰³ Archival records reveal government officials and regional authorities too paid careful attention to it and other subsistence crops. So crucial was *milpa* agriculture to sustaining life in rural and urban Guatemala that its decline threatened national calorific intake. Faced with food insecurity, nimble indigenous farmers who had embraced coffee production had transitioned back to *milpa* agriculture by 1920. Afforded their own land for DUA, *colonos* on Brazilian coffee plantations helped that economy survive volatile drops in coffee prices. The importance of DUA and small-scale farmers' ability to adapt to changes in agricultural export and domestic markets was also evident in Costa Rica where the two economies often complemented each other. In addition to revealing symbiosis between coffee (if not other agro-exports) and foodstuff production, the Costa Rican, Brazilian and Guatemalan cases demonstrate how the combination of mixed farming routines and labour shortages retarded dependence on coffee monoculture.

As forced labour mechanisms funnelled workers to agro-export economies, some indigenous and other small-scale agriculturists used their domestic production to exempt themselves from compulsory labour. Their intermittent efficacy suggests authorities recognised the importance of DUA and the small-scale farmers who fuelled it.²⁰⁴ Corrupt, exploitative and racist officials notwithstanding, some authorities respected local agriculturists' epistemologies. Indigenous farmers – some of whom planted coffee – and their knowledge enjoyed sway that a scholarly focus on agro-exports in Guatemala and elsewhere in Latin America has largely overlooked. By highlighting the importance of their agricultural production for the domestic economy, indigenous and other small-scale agriculturists could buoy their positions within the nation. The same was true of Costa Rican farmers and Brazilian *colonos*, whose agricultural production afforded increased autonomy which in turn undergirded democratic development in their nations. Although identifying a causal relationship between indigenous agricultural entrepreneurship and the national turn toward democracy begs further research, *indigenas'* increased autonomy and power vis-à-vis local and regional officials, even when only temporary, speaks to the ways indigenous peoples shaped their communities and nation.

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²⁰²McCreery, 'Coffee and Class'; Cambranes, *Café y campesinos*; Williams, *Export Agriculture*; McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*; Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since 1920*, pp. 316–19.

²⁰³Sol Tax, *Penny Capitalism: A Guatemalan Indian Economy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1963); Charles Wisdom, *The Chorti Indians of Guatemala* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1940); Carey Jr, *Our Elders Teach Us*, pp. 82–114, 147–51; David Carey Jr, *Engendering Mayan History: Kaqchikel Women as Agents and Conduits of the Past, 1875–1970* (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp. 97–108.

²⁰⁴Grandin, *Blood of Guatemala*, p. 111.

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Spanish abstract

Mucha de la historia de la agricultura latinoamericana de los siglos XIX y XX ha estado dominada por los estudios de productos de exportación y sus economías. Sin embargo, igualmente importante para el desarrollo nacional fueron los mercados domésticos abastecidos por pequeños agricultores. Utilizando a Guatemala como un estudio de caso para Latinoamérica, este artículo examina los retos que enfrentaron campesinos que producían para los mercados locales, regionales y nacionales. Durante el transcurso del periodo nacional, la preocupación esporádica de las autoridades estatales por la agricultura doméstica proveyó de oportunidades a pequeños agricultores indígenas para que avanzaran sus intereses, que iban desde resistir al trabajo forzado hasta mantener sus prácticas agrícolas tradicionales. Para la década de 1930, la producción alimenticia doméstica se había incrementado notablemente debido a que a principios del siglo las autoridades estatales se unieron a los pequeños agricultores para promover la agricultura de consumo doméstico.

Spanish keywords: campesinos; maíz; agricultura; Guatemala; café

Portuguese abstract

Grande parte da história da agricultura dos séculos dezenove e vinte na América Latina tem sido dominada por estudos sobre produtos de exportação e economias. Entretanto mercados domésticos abastecidos por pequenos agricultores foram tão quanto importantes para o desenvolvimento nacional. Utilizando a Guatemala como estudo de caso para a América Latina, este artigo examina os desafios enfrentados por produtores rurais dos mercados local, regional e nacional. Durante o período nacional, a preocupação esporádica das autoridades do Estado para com a agricultura doméstica gerou oportunidades para pequenos agricultores indígenas, que puderam avançar seus objetivos que iam desde a resistir ao trabalho forçado a manter suas práticas tradicionais de agricultura. Em 1930, a produção de comestíveis já haviam crescido significativamente. Isso porque no início do século autoridades do Estado se juntaram aos pequenos agricultores para promover a agricultura de fins domésticos.

Portuguese keywords: camponeses; milho; agricultura; Guatemala; café

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