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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Consumer Culture in Guatemala City during the 'Season of Luis Mazzantini', 1905: The Political Economy of Working-Class Consumption

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Abstract

In 1905, world-renowned bullfighter Luis Mazzantini arrived in Guatemala City for a number of corridas. Despite the excitement of the urban elite, the matador's fights were poorly attended by the working class due to high ticket prices. This article uses the 'Mazzantini Season' as a case study of working-class consumer culture in Guatemala City to trace shifts in Guatemalan political economy through the 1890s and early 1900s, analysing the constraints on popular consumerism such as price inflation, currency deflation, food shortages and other factors affecting working-class urban Guatemalans. It also demonstrates the manner in which responses by the state and coffee planters to economic crises to protect elite interests fundamentally undermined the ability of working-class residents of Guatemala City to participate in consumer culture.

Keywords: commodity culture; political economy; urban history; working class

In late 1904, a handbill was distributed by pamphleteers in the streets of Guatemala City that simply read, '*Mazzantini viene*' – Mazzantini is coming.[1] As far as Guatemalan bullfighting aficionados were concerned, no further explanation was required. For several years, they had heard gossip that the celebrated Spanish matador Luis Mazzantini planned to fight several bulls to the death in their city's Plaza de Toros.[2] Finally, after much rumour, local promoters Barnoya y Compañía confirmed

[1]'Mazzantini viene', 1904, Fondo Antiguo, Biblioteca Nacional de Guatemala, Guatemala City, Colección Valenzuela, Hojas Sueltas (BNGCV-HS), Paquete (Paq.), 1994.

[2]Héctor Gaitán suggests these rumours were spreading as early as 1902; see *Memorias del siglo XX*, vol. 1 (Guatemala City: Artemis Edinter, 1999), p. 20. For histories of Guatemala City and urbanisation, see Gisela Gellert and Julio César Pinto Soria, *Ciudad de Guatemala: Dos estudios sobre su evolución urbana (1524–1950)* (Guatemala City: Centro de Estudios Urbanos y Regionales, 1990); Gisela Gellert, *Ciudad de Guatemala: Factores determinantes en su desarrollo urbano (desde la fundación hasta la actualidad)* (Guatemala City: FLACSO, 1995); Ana María Urruela Villacorta de Quezada (ed.), *La Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción: 230 años de historia* (Guatemala City: Grupo Financiero de Occidente, 2006); Óscar

that an agreement had been negotiated bringing the celebrated bullfighter, his *cuadrilla* – the matador's ensemble of picadors and banderilleros – and a herd of foreign-bred bulls to Guatemala by steamship from Mexico. As if to counter the public's disbelief that Mazzantini would ever visit Guatemala, when telegrams reported that a shipment of his bulls had just disembarked at the port of Champerico on Guatemala's Pacific Coast the major newspaper *La República* assured the public, 'As you can see, things are moving.'[3] Yet the Mazzantini affair ultimately betrayed the expectations of promoters: despite the enthusiasm of the urban elite, the capital's working class – whose attendance was vital for the spectacle's financial success – would be conspicuously absent from the corridas.[4]

Among the urban elite, Mazzantini's seven-week visit confirmed the cosmopolitan magnitude of their city and gave them reason to pride in their cultural modernity.[5] They purchased clothing, accessories and new technologies then fashionable in Europe and the United States with relatively little time lag. Cinema, for example, premiered in the capital in October 1896, roughly nine months after the Lumière Brothers opened the first 'Cinématographe' theatre in Paris.[6] Indeed, by the time of Mazzantini's arrival in Guatemala, the city boasted many modern urban amenities: electric light, trams, photographic studios, bicycles, telephones, and even its first automobile.

To focus solely on the consumer extravagance of the urban elite is unhelpful, however, as extreme wealth and social disparities co-existed in Guatemala City. The republic's richest families and its most destitute citizens – homeless and itinerant populations – populated the ranks of the capital's inhabitants. And consumption levels reflected urban social differentiation. Increasingly in the 1880s and 1890s, Liberal intellectuals concluded that the consumer habits of the well-to-do alone were not sufficient for economic well-being; rather, working-class *ladinos* in the capital needed to consume more.[7] For these Liberals, consumerism afforded

Peláez Almengor, *El pequeño Paris* (Guatemala City: Centro de Estudios Urbanos y Regionales, 2008); J. T. Way, *The Mayan in the Mall: Globalization, Development, and the Making of Modern Guatemala* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

[3]'Toros', *La República*, 3 Jan. 1905, p. 1 (all primary newspaper sources are available at the Hemeroteca Nacional de Guatemala unless indicated otherwise).

[4]'Urban elite' refers to members of the planter, merchant and land-owning classes and of the 'industrial oligarchy' who participated in the bourgeois culture common to the North Atlantic world. In this article, 'working class' is a descriptive rather than an analytical category. It refers to the collection of people defined primarily by their place in the production process or by the fact that they laboured for wages or were artisans. It is not contingent on the level of their class consciousness in the Thompsonian sense. As such, working class here describes tailors, masons, day-labourers, domestic servants, laundresses, low-level civil servants and others employed in similar work. See E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963) and Paul J. Dosal, *Power in Transition: The Rise of Guatemala's Industrial Oligarchy, 1871–1994* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995).

[5]See Michael D. Kirkpatrick, 'Phantoms of Modernity: The 1894 Anarchist Furor in the Making of Modern Guatemala City', *Urban History*, 44: 2 (2017), pp. 231–52.

[6]*Diario de Centro-América*, 2 Oct. 1896, p. 1.

[7]An extensive literature exists on racial differentiation in Guatemala, demonstrating the permeability of race. '*Ladino*' here refers to those who were culturally non-indigenous but lacked the claims of 'blood purity' made by criollos of Spanish descent. See Charles R. Hale, '*Más que un indio': Racial Ambivalence and Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Guatemala* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2006), pp. 16–20; Todd Little-Siebold, '"Where Have All the Spaniards Gone?" Independent Identities: Ethnicities, Class and the Emergent National State', *The Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 6: 2

by wage labour and reliance on the cash economy was the hallmark of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century urbanity. To this end, the government endorsed initiatives to encourage wage labour and disposable income such as the creation of mutual aid societies for workers and granting more pawnshop licences in Guatemala City.[8] Ultimately, however, Liberal thinkers and the urban elite prioritised their own class interests in times of economic crisis, and exposed their insincerity in respect of consumer modernity by fundamentally undermining working-class engagement with commodity culture.

This article argues that Liberal capitalist modernity, and the social relations it generated, transformed urban life in Guatemala City during the 1890s and early 1900s through consumerism. Import houses and speciality stores in the commercial district complemented markets and annual fairs as venues for the purchase of mass-produced merchandise from abroad as consumerism became more deeply embedded in the social life of the capital's inhabitants. During this time, working-class *capitalinos* (residents of Guatemala City) utilised a range of strategies to engage with consumer culture: from purchasing poor-quality manufactured wares or imitations to accessing collateral credit through pawnshops or by committing petty crimes. These material practices were always subject to market forces, whether local production, regional and national political economy, or global coffee markets. In 1897, the price of coffee collapsed on the New York, Hamburg and London markets. In the wake of the ensuing economic crisis, the administration of President Manuel Estrada Cabrera and the National Legislative Assembly responded by promoting the interests of coffee planters and exporters. Inadvertently, the policies they adopted engendered food shortages, inflation and currency devaluation, which undercut the ability of the working class to purchase consumer goods. Opportunistic monopolists who artificially raised the price of foodstuffs in the capital's markets and the unwillingness of the state to accommodate pay rise requests from government employees placed additional stress on working-class purchasing power in the opening years of the twentieth century.

Luis Mazzantini's stay in Guatemala City in 1905, which provides the narrative thread for this article, must be understood in the context of competing class

(2001), pp. 106–33; Greg Grandin, *The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Marta Elena Casaús Arzú, *Guatemala: Linaje y racismo*, 5th edn (Guatemala City: F&G Editores, 2018).

[8]The dynamics of consumption were highly racialised. In rural Guatemala, promoting wage labour and consumerism were implicit motivations for the abolition of forced labour – the *mandamientos* which obliged Maya men to labour on coffee estates – in 1894. That same year, President José María Reyna Barrios opened the Indigenous Agricultural Institute in Guatemala City. The directors of the Institute sought the 'civilisation' of the Maya, encouraging indigenous communities to take up modern agricultural practices, produce for export markets and become consumers. Such sentiments were echoed by Liberal thinkers like Antonio Batres Jáuregui, who advocated the creation of consumer desires among the Maya. See 'Reglamento interior del Instituto Agrícola de Indígenas', *Recopilación de la leyes de la República de Guatemala, 1893–94*, vol. 22 (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 1895), pp. 554–72 (available at the Biblioteca Central at the University of San Carlos [USAC]); Bienvenido Argueta Hernández, *El nacimiento del racismo en el discurso pedagógico*, vol. 1: *El Instituto Agrícola de Indígenas* (Guatemala City: PACE-GIZ, 2011); Antonio Batres Jáuregui, *Los indios: su historia y su civilización* (Guatemala City: Tipografía La Unión, 1894; facsimile at http://bibliotecadigital.aecid.es/bibliodig/es/consulta/registro.cmd?id=687 [last accessed 20 June 2020]), p. 188.

interests and responses to economic and financial turmoil. Mazzantini's sojourn in the Guatemalan capital was a financial failure and an embarrassment to promoters and bullfighting aficionados. While the city's well-to-do used the event to showcase their high fashion and consumer indulgences, the venture failed to recuperate its expenses because the working class largely avoided the spectacle until the price of admission was dropped to a small fraction of the original. Responses to economic crisis by the government, coffee planters and the urban elite over the preceding years had helped preserve their social and class status. In pursuing these policies, however, they contradictorily subverted their own visions of consumer grandeur by preventing working-class bullfighting fans from watching Mazzantini's corridas for want of disposable income.

Historiographical debates over the past three decades on the nature of the 1871 'Liberal Reforms' – which saw modernising coffee producers overthrow the Conservative government and use state resources to promote their own economic interests – have focused on the limited extent of state power, economic modernisation during the Conservative interlude (1839–71), and the degree to which Guatemala remained a maize republic in spite of emphasis on coffee production.[9] Such arguments reflect regional differentiation and vary according to whether the focus is on Huehuetenango and Quetzaltenango in the Western Highlands, or on the eastern departments. More recently, Heather Vrana has remarked on Guatemala City's historiographical invisibility.[10] Responding to these historiographical trends and Vrana's observation, this article examines the Guatemalan capital, where state power and the Liberal Reforms variously affected social life across classes. After 1871, and from the perspective of *capitalinos*, it was coffee revenue, not maize, that filled the national treasury and the pockets of planters and merchants, prompted the importation of foreign merchandise, and encouraged the spread of wage labour. Urban elites, a fledgling middle-class sector, the working class and the urban poor experienced and responded to Liberal political economy and the instability of the Export Age in a myriad of different ways.[11]

More broadly, the historical literature on Latin American consumerism has expanded since Benjamin Orlove and Arnold Bauer's call to investigate material life.[12] This literature has given serious consideration to questions of race, sexuality,

[9]John M. Watanabe, 'Culturing Identities, the State, and National Consciousness in Late Nineteenth-Century Western Guatemala', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 19: 3 (2000), pp. 321–40; Todd Little-Siebold, 'Guatemala and the Dream of a Nation: National Policy and Regional Practice in the Liberal Era, 1871–1945', unpubl. PhD diss., Tulane University, 1995, pp. 106–33; David Carey, *I Ask for Justice: Maya Women, Dictators, and Crime in Guatemala, 1898–1944* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2013); David Carey (ed.), *Distilling the Influence of Alcohol: Aguardiente in Guatemalan History* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2012); René Reeves, *Ladinos with Ladinos, Indians with Indians: Land, Labor, and Regional Ethnic Conflict in the Making of Guatemala* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).

[10]Heather Vrana, *This City Belongs to You: A History of Student Activism in Guatemala, 1944–1996* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017), p. 16.

[11]For more on the Export Age, see Ericka Beckman, *Capital Fictions: The Literature of Latin America's Export Age* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America since Independence*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[12]Benjamin Orlove (ed.), *The Allure of the Foreign: Imported Goods in Postcolonial Latin America* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997); Arnold J. Bauer, *Goods, Power, History: Latin America's Material Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

gender and class; Regina Root's research on the gendered dimension of republican-era fashion in Buenos Aires and Greg Grandin's work on Maya modernism in *fin-de-siècle* Quetzaltenango serve as noteworthy examples.[13] Captivated by the analytical insights of the cultural turn and intrigued by discursive and semiological representation, however, historians have often paid but lip-service to political economy in their discussions of material culture – not accounting for how national production and land use, internal and external trade and markets, currency variability and inflation, and banking all affected consumption. Consider the historiography of Mexico City:[14] historians have been very attentive to class, discussing how the urban practices of the working class were often antagonistic towards what William French called the *gente decente*.[15] Apart from recognising class differentiation, the spread of wage labour during the Porfiriato (1876–1911) and the general poverty accompanying urbanisation in the 1880s and 1890s, however, there is little sense of the economic vagaries that altered the environments in which working-class people operated and consumed. The currency instability associated with the 'Panic of 1890' resulting from poor investments in Argentina by London-based Barings Bank or the generalised economic crisis in the decade leading to the Mexican Revolution, for example, have no place in these works. Instead, working-class consumption, the spread of urban crime and the development of bourgeois moralising appear to progressively unfold in a linear fashion, moved by unknown forces.[16] To the contrary, I suggest that in Guatemala City working-class consumerism was always contingent on matters of political economy and fraught with instability. Such insights nuance our understanding of commodity culture.

Methodologically, this article assembles a rich array of primary sources from the 1890s to the mid-1900s to illustrate material practices, fluctuations in local markets and bullfighting customs. Documents from the office of the governor of the department of Guatemala reveal a range of letters and petitions from citizens and reports from pawnshops. The Ministry of Governance and Justice provided daily police briefings and requests from state institutions like hospitals and the Plaza de

[13]Regina A. Root, *Couture and Consensus: Fashion and Politics in Postcolonial Argentina* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); Grandin, *Blood of Guatemala*.

[14]William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club and Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico*, 2nd edn (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); Steven B. Bunker, *Creating Mexican Consumer Culture in the Age of Porfirio Díaz* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2012); James Alex Garza, *The Imagined Underworld: Sex, Crime, and Vice in Porfirian Mexico City* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); Robert M. Buffington, *A Sentimental Education for the Working Man: The Mexico City Penny Press, 1900–1910* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015).

[15]See William French, *A Peaceful and Working People: Manners, Morals, and Class Formation in Northern Mexico* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

[16]There have been exceptions, such as Ann S. Blum, *Domestic Economies: Family, Work, and Welfare in Mexico City, 1884–1943* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), in which the author details the economic fluctuations affecting orphanages during the 1890s. Similarly, Natalia Milanesio's analysis of consumption of Argentine workers during the late 1940s and early 1950s follows the downturn in the Peronist economy: *Workers Go Shopping in Argentina: The Rise of Popular Consumer Culture* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2013); see also Ernesto Semán's *Ambassadors of the Working Class: Argentina's International Labor Activists and Cold War Democracy in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017).

Toros, as well as from customs offices. Public and private correspondence from the foreign consuls of the United States and Great Britain describe economic and trade conditions, in addition to providing insights into local consumption habits. Finally, published materials in the form of *hojas sueltas* – handbills, advertisements and pamphlets distributed in the city's streets – and newspapers serve as windows into the everyday lives of *capitalinos*, and their frustrations, conflicts and desires. Together, these materials are the basis of this analysis of commodity culture in turn-of-the-century Guatemala City.

The Export Age in Guatemala City

The participation of Guatemalans in the Latin American Export Age was facilitated by the large-scale production of coffee beginning in the 1850s and 1860s, and the Liberal Reforms of 1871.[17] As regards consumer culture, in the last decades of the nineteenth century a triad of factors coalesced: the reorientation of regional economies raised demand by wage-earners for consumables while planters' and merchants' increased export earnings gave them the means to purchase foreign-manufactured wares; this demand was matched by a push from industrial centres like the United States, Great Britain, Germany and France to offload surplus manufactured goods to peripheral zones such as Latin America in the wake of depressions and periodic crises of overproduction commencing in the 1870s and 1880s.[18] The well-being of the export economy had vastly different implications for coffee planters who had recently migrated to the city, for civil servants working at the telegraph office, for tailors and cobblers in working-class neighbourhoods like La Parroquia and for merchants with stores along Sixth Avenue, the city's premiere shopping district. Far from following a linear trajectory, consumer culture in Latin America was exposed to the extreme vacillations of the export economy, with short-term boom and bust cycles, and longer depressions that countered periods of growth.

The dawning of a coffee-fuelled culture of modernity in the capital was intrinsically bound to global commodity chains and subject to international coffee production and demand. On the domestic side, failed regional harvests, varying amounts of capital and bank credit available for new plantations in the Western Highlands, Pacific Piedmont and Verapaces regions, and an unpredictable supply of labour for harvest affected state revenues and private profits. During the 1880s, global coffee prices were unstable due to increased production and speculation.[19] Crisis in Brazil at the decade's close associated with the abolition of slavery,

[17]For Guatemalan coffee production see Regina Wagner, *The History of Coffee in Guatemala* (Bogota: Villegas Editores, 2001); J. C. Cambranes, *Coffee and Peasants: The Origins of the Modern Plantation Economy in Guatemala, 1853–1897* (Stockholm: Institute of Latin American Studies, 1985); David McCreery, *Rural Guatemala: 1760–1940* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

[18]For the importation of US goods, see Thomas D. Schoonover, *The United States in Central America, 1860–1911: Episodes of Social Imperialism and Imperial Rivalry in the World System* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991); Jason M. Colby, *The Business of Empire: United Fruit, Race, and U.S. Expansion in Central America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011).

[19]Manuel Rubio Sánchez, 'Historia del comercio del café en Guatemala, siglos XVIII y XIX, quinta parte', *Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala*, 55 (1981), pp. 233–5.

collapse of the monarchy and ecological exhaustion in the Paraíba valley saw a precipitous drop in production from the world's largest coffee supplier. Planters throughout Central America eagerly filled the void and profited immensely from a years-long boom in prices for high-quality beans.

The coffee bonanza was experienced in a number of ways in Guatemala City during the 1890s. First, the government generated revenue through the taxation of coffee exports and the imports of foreign goods by its customs houses. Proceeds funded the expansion of the civil service: the police force was modernised, teachers were hired, and new positions opened in telegraph, telephone and post offices. Local and national governments beautified the capital by constructing Parque La Reforma – a suburban park modelled on New York's Central Park – and a Parisian-style avenue, the Boulevard 30 de Junio. The government also invested in railway projects like the Northern Railway from Guatemala City to the Atlantic coast to aid the movement of coffee, imported goods and people.[20] Such initiatives were costly and, despite the coffee boom, the national treasury relied on foreign loans to pay for infrastructure and salaries. Indeed, the government weathered numerous financial crises during the 1890s, delaying interest payments to London banks and frequently being in arrears in respect of civil servants' salaries.[21]

A second major change associated with the coffee boom in Guatemala City was the slow migration of the coffee oligarchy from their estates in San Marcos, Quetzaltenango and the Verapaces to downtown Guatemala City and suburban neighbourhoods like Jocotenango. With their disposable income, they frequented restaurants, hotel lounges and billiards halls, the shops and department stores of Sixth and Seventh Avenues and Eighth and Ninth Streets, and sites of bourgeois culture from the Parque La Reforma and the capital's *paseos* to the cinema and the Teatro Colón. The population of the capital increased from 55,728 to 71,527 between 1880 and the early 1890s, with many of the migrants coming from wealthy families in coffee zones.[22]

The repercussions of government indebtedness and of the planters' migration to the city were twofold. First, debt service drained national gold and silver reserves, prompting the treasury to distribute bonds or permit banks to print banknotes to stimulate business. The absence of metallic coin precipitated currency devaluation which in turn provoked uncertainty in the capital's stores and markets. Henceforth, perennial currency issues and devaluations marked urban life until the 1920s. Secondly, urbanisation generated a housing shortage and a dearth of goods in the marketplace. Throughout the 1890s, for example, foreign diplomats protested to their respective governments about their declining purchasing power, claiming

[20]Paul J. Dosal, *Doing Business with the Dictators: A Political History of United Fruit in Guatemala, 1899–1944* (Lanham, MD: SR Books, 1993); Delmer G. Ross, 'The Construction of the Interoceanic Railroad of Guatemala', *The Americas*, 33: 3 (1977), pp. 430–56.

[21]Gosling to the Earl of Rosebery, 12 Jan. 1894, British National Archives, London, Foreign Office (BNA–FO) 15/282.

[22]Ana María Urruela de Quezada, 'Siglo XIX: Luces y sombras en el surgimiento de la ciudad', in *La Nueva Guatemala*, p. 99 and Dirección General de Estadística, *Censo General de la República de Guatemala* (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 1894), p. 12 (available at the Biblioteca Central at USAC).

that Guatemala City was one of the most expensive cities in the world, dearer than London, Paris, New York and even St Petersburg.[23]

Working-Class Consumption during the Guatemala *Fin-de-Siècle*

The urban working class, based out of neighbourhoods like La Parroquia, Candelaria and El Calvario, consisted of 33,000 paid labourers in 1893. Day-labourers, who performed various duties for a wage, made up a quarter of the workforce. Other common labourers included bricklayers, domestic servants, carpenters, peddlers, seamstresses, laundresses, tailors, cobblers, tortilla-makers, cigarette rollers, mule drivers, spinners and weavers, bakers, butchers and distillers of *aguardiente* (sugarcane liquor).[24] Beginning in the 1880s, skilled labourers responded to economic instability by forming mutual-aid societies and printing working-class publications like *El Eco del Trabajo* and *La Voz del Obrero*. The 'Porvenir de los Obreros' association, for example, was founded in 1892 for the social betterment of artisans like tailors and cobblers.[25] On an individual level, economically compromised families relied on charity.

Workers and their families bore the brunt of the economic pressures associated with the Export Age, often struggling to pay rent and afford household expenditures. Thus, working-class engagement with commodity consumption was generally characterised by several factors: the accessibility of products in the form of low-quality goods or knock-offs that violated intellectual property rights, the extension of credits by merchants, and the existence of collateral credit to facilitate exchange. But, as will become clear, working-class participation in consumer culture often involved practices unpalatable to the urban elite, such as theft. Thievery afforded the urban poor goods or currency to purchase necessities but also prompted demands by *capitalinos* for police protection of private property. These strategies will be examined in detail.[26]

Unsurprisingly, working-class consumers were most concerned with the affordability of items, prompting merchants to stock an array of goods of different grades. Prior to the second decade of the twentieth century, relatively few domestically manufactured products were available for purchase: factories, workshops and individuals working from their homes produced cotton garments, matches, cigarettes, furniture, shoes, flour, bottled beer and rope.[27] Virtually all other manufactured items were imported from abroad, primarily from Great Britain, Germany and France during the 1880s and 1890s then increasingly from the United States.

[23]Gosling to Marquess of Salisbury, 13 Jan. 1897, BNA–FO 15/313. At that time St Petersburg was considered to be the most expensive city in Europe.

[24]*Censo General*, 1894.

[25]Mario López Larrave, *Breve historia del movimiento sindical guatemalteco* (Guatemala City: Editorial Universitaria, 1979), p. 9; Secretaría de Gobernación y Justicia, 'Estatutos de la Sociedad de Artesanos "El Porvenir de los Obreros"' (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 1897); facsimile at https://archive.org/details/estatutosdelasocie00guat/mode/2up (last accessed 30 June 2020).

[26]For strategies developed in Mexico City, see Buffington, *A Sentimental Education* and Blum, *Domestic Economies*.

[27]Foreign Office, *Guatemala: Report for the Years 1894–95 on the Trade, Finances, &c., of Guatemala* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1896), pp. 6–7.

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Purchasing preferences confounded merchants at times, as better-quality and more durable items were spurned in favour of shoddier but cheaper goods.[28] The British-made 'Guatemala hoe' grossly outsold a US-made product with better finish but retailing at a higher price. 'Generally speaking an inferior article of bright and lurid finish will find a ready sale here', reported the US Consul General James C. McNally.[29] A flourishing market also existed for cheap imitation products that copied respected trademarks.[30] Guatemala City stores sold, for example, 'cheap imitations of our sewing machines, Smith & Wesson and Colt's firearms, Collins's cutlery, and American hardware generally'.[31]

The ability of manufacturers to produce imitation goods or knock-offs was increasingly limited by laws adopted to protect intellectual property and trademarks. Consider the court case of Eduardo Lainfiesta, owner of La Cruz Roja, a company manufacturing soda waters and syrups. In 1905, a twenty-year-old mason named Alberto Martínez testified that he frequented establishments where La Cruz Roja's distinctive bottles were being used for fizzy drinks sold by Enrique Castillo's Central American Beverage Company. Castillo was the younger brother of Rafael and Mariano, the famous 'Hermanos Castillo', proprietors of the largest brewery in Guatemala. Similarly, Joaquín Mena Ayala, a young driver, declared he had seen Lainfiesta's trademarked bottles being used to sell Enrique Castillo's beverages in *cantinas*. The judge ruled in favour of Lainfiesta, who was deemed to have properly registered his bottles with the Office of Patents and Certified Factory Trademarks, and Castillo was ordered to respect La Cruz Roja's trademark.[32]

Likewise, in October 1903, Benseñ y Baldomá, manufacturers of the cigarette brand La Chapina, objected to the departmental governor that A. García y Compañía, a rival producer, had been granted permission to register their brand of cigarette, La Charina, a name they contended was too close to that of their brand. In the past, Benseñ y Baldomá had successfully threatened legal action against other producers for either using similar names – Vicenta Zúñiga's La Chepita and Rosa Contreras' La Nueva Chapina – or, in the case of Jesús María Jiménez's brand Remeneu, brandishing a logo that appeared too similar to theirs. For working-class consumer, these imitations meant cheaper cigarettes. But from the perspective of Benseñ y Baldomá, they compromised their business interests and La Chapina's reputation for quality.[33]

Crucially, manufacturers provided lengthy credits – up to six months – to retail houses in Guatemala City. Willingness to extend credit, of course, depended on the economic and financial conditions at a given time. Merchants offered credit to

[28]*Ibid*., p. 7.

[29]James C. McNally, 'Markets of Guatemala', *Reports from the Consuls of the United States*, Aug. 1900 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1900), p. 448.

[30]For more on trademarks and piracy in contemporary Guatemala, see Kedron Thomas, *Regulating Style: Intellectual Property Law and the Business of Fashion in Guatemala* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016).

[31]Samuel Kimberly, 'Trade and Commerce of Guatemala', *Reports from the Consuls of the United States*, July 1891 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1891), p. 354.

[32]Archivo General de Centro América, Guatemala City (AGCA), Juicios Criminales (JC), Índice 45, 1905, Juzgado 6a de la 1a Instancia, 9A, Exp. 18.

[33]AGCA, Sig. B, Gobernación (1904), Legajo 29081, Exp. 9.

consumers, allowing them to purchase goods they might not be able to otherwise afford, and manufacturers who could offer the best credit terms were said to reap competitive advantage.[34] Long-term credit allowed workers to engage in commodity culture, albeit in limited and tenuous ways.

In Guatemala City, *casas de préstamos* – pawnshops – were critical for facilitating working-class consumption in a twofold sense: first, by auctioning cheaper second-hand items to interested parties; secondly, and more importantly, these institutions permitted the exchange of personal items for cash for people in need. Marie Eileen Francois has noted the tremendous importance of collateral credit provided by pawnshops – both private and the state-operated 'Monte de Piedad' – in facilitating working- and middle-class consumption in Mexico City. She argues that these businesses – accessed primarily by women – were essential in producing and reproducing both status and everyday existence.[35] In Guatemala City, the *casas de préstamos* were often conveniently located close to working-class neighbourhoods like El Calvario or El Incienso, accessible to those likely to require means of exchange. Privately owned, these businesses were nevertheless closely monitored by the state authorities, who issued licences and established regulations covering lending practices. In the opening years of the twentieth century, licences were typically granted allowing an establishment to lend money in exchange for personal items at a monthly interest rate of 6.25 per cent. The items were held for eight months, during which time the owner could reclaim their property by repaying the loan plus interest. After the requisite time had passed, proprietors of pawnshops auctioned unclaimed items to cover their expenses, while the proceeds were donated to charity.[36]

Since the circulation of specie was a crucial function of *casas de préstamos* – providing people with currency to purchase other commodities, settle debts or pay fines – operators required sufficient monetary reserves to provide loans. So pawnshops were financially backed by personal capital, property or a guarantor. Ysabel Álvarez and her children were allowed to open their pawnshop on Eighth Street West through the guarantee of a mortgage that the matriarch obtained on an estate she owned in the capital.[37] In order to make ends meet or to overcome temporary economic hurdles, the Guatemala City working class pawned all sorts of objects for coin. Businesses were required to submit *libros de actas de remate* to the governor – records of sales detailing costs of, and profits on, auctioned items. Any number of personal or household possessions were hocked. In December 1903, Damián Francisco Ortiz's pawnshop sold, among other things, a plate and candlestick holder, a hat and small watch, a bottle of ink, a little old mirror, dirty curtains, a bricklayer's spoon, a broken umbrella, a silver brooch, a book on German history and an old military frock coat.[38] At Manuel Ortega's first sale in November

[34]Henry C. Stuart, 'Guatemala', *Reports from the Consuls of the United States*, Jan. 1894 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1894), p. 32.

[35]Marie Eileen Francois, *A Culture of Everyday Credit: Housekeeping, Pawnbroking, and Governance in Mexico City, 1750–1920* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

[36]See, for example, Manuel Ortega's request to license the Casa de Préstamos del Calvario in May 1904: AGCA, Sig. B, Jefatura Política de Guatemala (JP-G) (1904), Paq. 1.

[37]*Ibid.*

[38]See Ortiz's 'Libro de actas de remate', Dec. 1903, *ibid.*

1904, items sold included a flute, a shawl, handkerchiefs, a machete, a sewing machine and an adze for woodworking.[39]

The wide variety and quality of items indicates that the pawnshops played an important role in helping circulate commodities and cash among the working class, finding new owners for goods while facilitating future exchange by providing money for merchandise. In October 1904, a petition crossed the desk of Governor Enrique Arís relating the lamentable state of Salvador Robles. Robles was required by law to pay his estranged wife monthly alimony in addition to covering her medical treatments because she suffered an ocular condition that left her blind. He eventually sold his household furnishings and placed other items and clothing in a *casa de préstamos*. Ultimately, these measures for procuring money were finite and Robles was arrested for falling into arrears over his payments to his wife.[40]

Pawnshops were the destination for stolen goods as well. In February 1905, eleven-year-old Esther Díaz stole an iron bed frame, a gold ring and a clothing trunk that held one pair of ladies' booties, a petticoat, hankies, stockings and other effects. Her victim was María Gómez, a twenty-one-year-old domestic servant. Díaz had managed to pawn some of the stolen merchandise to the state-run Monte de Piedad near the Portal de Comercio along the Plaza de Armas by the time she was apprehended. At her trial, Díaz insisted that she had been given permission to take the items and had presented Gómez with a slip for the items that she pawned. The judge rejected Díaz's account but, after over three months of detention, and following a guarantee by a bondsman, the young girl was released on bail.[41]

As the anecdote of young Esther Díaz makes apparent, the working class and urban poor did not always engage in consumer culture in the manner intended by the state and bourgeoisie. With or without the aid of pawnshops, city inhabitants found means to engage in commodity culture. Historian David Carey, for example, has shown how the illegal distilling and sale of *aguardiente* was crucial to augmenting household incomes as modern economies developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The relatively inelastic demand for alcohol, he argues, provided steady income for moonshiners and, in the event that these clandestine producers were brought before a judge or police magistrate, they defended their actions by citing the high cost of living.[42] Arrests for making moonshine were not infrequent in the capital. In mid-October 1904, for example, Fernando Arévalo was arrested for a clandestine *aguardiente* operation, and his equipment was confiscated by the police.[43]

While some authorities may have been ambiguous in their responses to clandestine distilleries, they were much more pointed in their defence of private property. Daily police reports are filled with instances of working-class *capitalinos* stealing from each other, the bourgeoisie and private businesses. Whether stolen goods were resold for cash or put to use by thieves, pilfering was an everyday form of

[39]See Ortega's 'Libro de actas de remate', Nov. 1904, *ibid.*, Paq. 2.

[40]'Notas Varias, octubre de 1904', AGCA, Sig. B, JP-G (1904), Paq. 2 and Sig. B, Gobernación (1905), Leg. 29089, Exp. 2.

[41]AGCA, JC, Índice 45, 1905, Juzgado 6a de la 1a Instancia, 9A, Exp. 33.

[42]David Carey, 'Distilling Perceptions of Crime: Maya Moonshiners and the State, 1898–1944', in Carey, *Distilling the Influence*, pp. 121–2.

[43]AGCA, Sig. B, Gobernación (1904), Leg. 29067, Exp. 220.

engagement with commodity culture. Consider a non-exhaustive list of larcenies during the closing months of 1904: on 20 September, four men were arrested for stealing mirrors, frames and mouldings from the factory of J. B. Seigné; on 6 October, servant Guillermo Samayoa was arrested for stealing 10 gold pesos, 30 silver pesos and 700 pesos in bank bills from a house on Sixth Avenue; on 25 October, Corporal José Francisco García and an accomplice were apprehended, having broken into a shoe store on Eighth Street and fleeing with shoes and slippers; in mid-December, crooks broke into a shop on Avenida de San José and stole 2,311 pesos worth of merchandise; and on Christmas night, Antonio Amado, Fulgencio Rodriguez and Arcadio Fobar – crooks by profession – were arrested while roaming the streets on suspicion that they were responsible for a number of recent thefts.[44] While participating in illegal activities such as theft, and to a lesser extent clandestine distilleries, afforded members of the working class and urban poor with a means to engage with commodities, the Guatemalan state made it abundantly clear that the protection of private property was paramount.

The 1897 Coffee Crash and its Fallout

In spite of the multitude of strategies employed by the working class to engage with consumer culture, prevailing economic conditions sometimes forced them to abstain. In the few years preceding Luis Mazzantini's arrival in Guatemala City, the working class faced serious insecurities and shortages. Renewed crises stemmed from the continuous oversupply of coffee on global markets commencing in 1897 and the collective responses of the state, planters and merchants. Brazilian coffee production rebounded less than a decade after its collapse, and in late 1896 coffee began flooding global markets as the value of beans depreciated by roughly one-half on the New York stock exchange over the next several months.[45] The coffee depression had two important ramifications for working-class consumption, stemming from the contraction of planter incomes and depletion of state coffers. Planters responded to the depression by expanding production and cultivating new lands, thus reducing both labour and cultivable lands for subsistence crops. As a consequence, food supplies dwindled and their prices rose. Planters also petitioned state governors to supply forced labour, primarily to harvest coffee at low wages. *Mandamientos* (forced drafts) were unofficially reintroduced during the 1898 harvest despite being abolished in 1894 as contrary to Liberal ideals. Forced labour was not restricted to coffee plantations, as *mozos* (workers) from Indigenous villages were conscripted for public works projects.[46] This use of forced labour brought a collapse in demand for paid urban day-labourers and, consequently, their wages fell.

For its part, the state encouraged agricultural diversification into areas like banana and rubber plantations, while attracting foreign investment with lucrative

[44]These police reports come from *ibid.* and Leg. 29069, Exp. 172.

[45]Frank D. Hill, 'The World's Production and Consumption of Coffee', *Advance Sheets of Consular Reports*, 29 June 1898, p. 2 (available at the University Libraries at the University of Nevada, Reno).

[46]For example, *mozos* from Mixco were sent to work at the hippodrome in October 1904 on government orders. See 'Varias notas de octubre de 1904', AGCA, Sig. B, JP-G (1904), Paq. 2.

concessions for agriculture, railways and mahogany-felling contracts.[47] In 1899 President Estrada Cabrera's regime organised the first Minervalia, or Festival to Minerva, an annual celebration held in late October to pay homage to the Greek goddess of wisdom.[48] Ostensibly the Minervalia – complete with a mock Parthenon constructed at the city's hippodrome – was intended to honour 'the studious youth' of Guatemala.[49] But the pageantry ultimately functioned to attract foreign investors by showing off Guatemala's stability and the regime's commitment to progress.

The responses of the state and planters set processes into motion that allowed the elite to resume their hedonistic lifestyles after 1900 – despite occasional interruptions – but that simultaneously jeopardised working-class security. By the eve of Mazzantini's arrival in early 1905, urban elites enjoyed the considerable fruits of economic recovery; in contrast, the working class languished in recurring economic uncertainty. The collapse of 1897 had drained the treasury as taxes from imported merchandise and coffee exports – accounting for the vast majority of government revenue – dried up. The shortfall had two major implications, for the currency and for food supply. Firstly, the government struggled to honour its gold and silver debt obligations, primarily to London-based bondholders, and, together with hoarding and the smuggling of silver out of the country, coin for everyday transactions was in short supply. In response, in mid-1897, banks were permitted to issue paper currency, as had happened earlier in the decade. For many years henceforth, bank and treasury bills (i.e. non-metallic specie) were subject to wild swings in their rates of exchange.

For planters and importers with access to foreign currency, this was at most merely an inconvenience. But civil servants' salaries were paid in bills and market women, butchers, peddlers, tailors, cobblers and other working-class people were obliged by law to accept the highly unstable currency. In mid-1901, a US diplomat reported to the State Department that 'exchanges rise and fall in leaps and bounds, the value fluctuating daily, so that it is impossible to give the Department the value in gold, of the paper peso, from this point', noting that he had 'personal knowledge of a fluctuation … of 200 points in one day'.[50] In late October 1902 merchants in Guatemala City could not fix prices for their merchandise, given the unstable rate of exchange, which 'had risen at a bound from 800 to about 1,300 per cent premium'.[51] Yet another exchange crisis broke out in mid-1903 after volcanic eruptions in the Western Highlands in October 1902 and military tensions between

[47]McNally to Department of State, 28 Sept. 1900, United States National Archives, College Park, PA (USNA), Despatches from United States Consuls in Guatemala, 1824–1906, T-337/13. See, for example, the contract of the Guatemala and Mexico Mahogany and Export Company, *Memoria que la Secretaría de Estado en el despacho de Fomento presenta á la Asamblea Nacional Legislativa de 1899* (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 1899), pp. 239–41 (all government *Memorias* are available at the Biblioteca del AGCA).

[48]A replica of Estrada Cabrera's handwritten Decree 604 for the Festival to Minerva was circulated at subsequent Minervalias: 1904, BNGCV-HS, No. 1994.

[49]For more on efforts by the various Liberal Party dictatorships to honour students, see Deborah T. Levenson, *Adiós Niño: The Gangs of Guatemala City and the Politics of Death* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), pp. 13–14.

[50]McNally to Department of State, 23 June 1901, USNA, T-337/13. This report is archived under the cover letter dated 15 June 1901.

[51]McNally to Hill, 31 Oct. 1902, T-337/14; Trayner to the Marquess of Lansdowne, 12 Nov. 1902, BNA–FO15/348.

Guatemala and its neighbours placed stress on the treasury and brought about the issue of more paper currency.[52]

Secondly, beginning in 1899, residents of Guatemala City also began to periodically experience significant food shortages.[53] The British Consul to Guatemala reported,

> Before the enthusiasm for coffee cultivation had reached its climax in Guatemala the necessaries of life, grown here, were so cheap that it was impossible to import them even when exchange was at par, but with the introduction of coffee as the staple cultivation of the country, these products got gradually scarcer and scarcer, and the prices rose until it was absolutely necessary to import them to supply the deficiency which arose.[54]

There were multiple reasons for the instability in the supply of foodstuffs. In expanding the acreage of land under cultivation for coffee and drawing peasants away from their fields through forced-labour drafts, planters – with the tacit approval of the state – had triggered scarcity as grain production dropped precipitously. Hostilities with Mexico, Honduras and El Salvador, as well as insurrectionary movements led by internal adversaries, caused considerable hardship. The mobilisation of *campesinos* as soldiers further reduced crop yields. Finally, northwestern Guatemala was struck by a partial failure of the maize crop, due first to drought then to excessive rains. The departments of Huehuetenango and Quiché were reported to be 'very near a famine' as the price of maize in Huehuetenango jumped fivefold.[55] By redirecting grains destined for the capital, relief from neighbouring departments indirectly impacted supplies in the city.

These natural and human-made shortages were exacerbated by the actions of opportunistic schemers. Throughout 1904, the authorities combatted individuals and groups in Guatemala City and neighbouring towns who hoarded food supplies to artificially drive up prices. Residents in the municipality of Villa de Guadalupe fell victim to one such scheme. The town lay just to the south of the former grounds of the Central American Exposition and was connected to the capital by the Decauville tram line that ran along Boulevard 30 de Junio. While later annexed by the city and gentrified (today the area includes the ritzy Zona Viva of Zone 10), in the late nineteenth century the denizens of Villa de Guadalupe supplied day-labourers to the capital and engaged in agricultural production.[56] In early February 1904, a group of concerned residents appealed to Governor Arís to prevent small-time dealers from manipulating local food prices through a monopoly. Earlier protests to the municipal government proved fruitless: the leader of the extortionists

[52]*Memoria de la Secretaría de Fomento presentada á la Asamblea Nacional Legislativa en 1904* (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 1904), p. 18; Thornton to Marquess of Lansdowne, 14 July 1903, BNA–FO15/354.

[53]'Los abastos', *La Revista Municipal*, 15 June 1899, p. 1.

[54]Diplomatic and Consular Reports, *Guatemala: Report for the Year 1899* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1905), p. 38.

[55]Diplomatic and Consular Reports, *Guatemala: Report for the Year 1904 on the Trade of Quezaltenango* [*sic*] (London: Harrison and Sons, 1905), p. 4.

[56]*Memoria de fomento* (Guatemala City: Tipografía La Unión, 1888), p. 37.

was María Guevara, the spouse of the town's first deputy mayor. Indeed, in his first week of public service, a local bricklayer-*cum*-councilman caught Guevara red-handed transporting rice with cart and mules, and ordered her arrest, but charges were not pressed. Guevara's band of monopolists mostly consisted of women from the town of Santa Catarina de Pinula and surrounding areas. Using carts and the Decauville line, the group monopolised provisions entering Villa de Guadalupe, the neighbouring Ciudad Vieja and the southeast corner of Guatemala City, extorting profit from consumers. Dozens of Villa de Guadalupe residents denounced the scheme to President Estrada Cabrera claiming that they were unable to meet their own daily needs owing to the high prices and shortages of comestibles triggered by the monopoly.[57]

Villa de Guadalupe dwellers were not the only consumers affected by price manipulation. In March 1904, a woman was arrested for forcing *campesinos* to sell staple foods to her outside the working-class neighbourhood of La Parroquia, where they entered the city. Cornering the market, she likewise practised extortion on consumers in Guatemala City's northeastern sector.[58] In mid-July, opposition newspaper *La República* praised Governor Arís for taking steps to offer relief to working-class families gravely threatened by the cost of provisions. At the same time, the editors of the newspaper denounced hucksters who pressured Indigenous producers to sell them their goods and called on police agents to assiduously prosecute the law against these monopolies.[59] By early October, the merchants Schwartz y Compañía had won plaudits for importing large quantities of quality white maize which they sold at cost, ostensibly in a bid to end the abuse carried out by unscrupulous speculators who profited from food shortages at a time of high demand.[60]

Surges in the cost of living owing to food shortages as well as the gradual increase in rents caused by urbanisation brought heightened levels of hardship among the urban working class, even among skilled labourers and professionals. In such a context, civil servants petitioned government officials for higher salaries to reflect food prices. Popular and official acknowledgement of the food crisis was so commonplace that those seeking rises simply referenced 'the economic situation' or 'the economic difficulties' as justification. In her job as a teacher at one of the city's poorhouses, María Vides earned a monthly salary, in March 1904, of 30 pesos. Petitioning President Estrada Cabrera, she reasoned this amount was a 'relatively small salary under current circumstances due to the exorbitant price reached by items of primary need', especially compared to teachers in the capital's primary schools, who earned three times Vides' salary for approximately the same work. Ultimately, upon investigating the matter, Governor Arís concluded that no rise was warranted because Vides had access to food purchased by the state at her place of employment, and thus denied her request.[61] Miguel Flores G., an employee at the Government General Archive, wrote to the minister of governance and

[57]Letter to Jefe Político, 6 Feb. 1904, AGCA, Sig. B, JP-G (1904), Paq. 1.

[58]'Asuntos locales', *El Cronista*, 15 March 1904, pp. 1–2.

[59]'La cuestión de abastos', *La República*, 19 July 1904, p. 1.

[60]See Schwartz advertisement, *La Nación*, 9 Oct. 1904, p. 7; 'Granos de primera necesidad', *El Cronista*, 2 Oct. 1904, p. 8.

[61]AGCA, Sig. B, Gobernación (1904), Leg. 29080, Exp. 6.

justice, declaring that the salary he earned was insufficient to fulfil the urgent needs of his family. He proposed a promotion to a higher-paying position that he believed to be vacant, but was informed the post had been filled by someone else.[62] Professionals who struggled to make ends meet included Dr J. Valentín Rodas, doctor to the capital's police corps, who spoke of the pecuniary difficulties of covering not only the needs of his family, which had sunk into extreme poverty, but also credit owed to individuals and assistance funds.[63]

Deficient salaries for public employees was symptomatic of a wider crisis in public services in early 1905 as the national treasury struggled to provide adequate funding for hospitals, hospices and prisons. In May 1905, Mariano Castillo C. and Nicolas Zuñiga, the co-directors of the General Hospital, petitioned government officials for funds to purchase new hospital clothing for patients as constant washing, disinfection and general wear and tear had damaged it. Some months earlier, Castillo warned the minister of governance about the critical situation of the hospital treasury, as the institution was sinking under a deficit of over 100,000 pesos. The hospital, according to Castillo, along with the orphanage, asylum and other charitable organisations, were at risk of not being financially capable of carrying out their services to the public. Now, the situation had only worsened and it appeared likely that there would be a delay in the payment of employees. No more savings could be made without harming patient care and salaries were already too low to reduce them further, while shortages of supplies grew.[64]

Similarly, scarcity prevailed in other public institutions in early 1905, such as hospice care and the women's correctional service.[65] The capital's hospice supplied food, shelter and instruction to children and cared for elderly who were unable to provide for themselves. Funded by government and charitable donations of money and essentials like milk, the hospice supported upwards of over 400 people at a given time, two-thirds of whom were children.[66] Nevertheless, such efforts did not always match the needs of the urban poor. In mid-January 1905, Juana Polanco pleaded with authorities to accept her nine-year-old child into the hospice because she was 'extremely poor.' Director Javier A. Padilla turned down Polanco's request: the orphanage was at capacity and there was no space available for the child.[67]

Throughout 1904 and 1905, the government scrambled to dispense relief to the urban working class. For a number of years, different levels of government had made efforts to relieve food shortages either by promoting the cultivation of foodstuffs or by importing foreign-grown provisions such as maize. In June 1904, Minister of Development José Flamenco ordered departmental governors to devote special attention to the cultivation of maize, rice and wheat. The order encouraged landowners and residents living on common lands to plant foodstuffs, and financial incentives were offered to those who grew wheat and rice.[68] Meanwhile, the authorities tapped into foreign markets to relieve shortages. In April 1904, shipments of

[62]*Ibid.*, Exp. 13.
[63]*Ibid.*, Leg. 29067, Exp. 23.
[64]See letters dated 4 Feb. and 11 May 1905, *ibid.*, Gobernación (1905), Leg. 29091, Exp. 7.
[65]See letters dated 3 Feb. and 24 April 1905, *ibid.* and Leg. 29095, Exp. 20, respectively.
[66]Javier A. Padilla to Ministro de Gobernación, *ibid.*, Leg. 29088.
[67]Letter dated 12 Jan. 1905, *ibid.*, Leg. 29094, Exp. 11.
[68]Circular, June 1904, AGCA, Sig. B, JP-G (1904), Paq. 3.

maize arrived at the port of San José from California destined for the departments of Jutiapa and Santa Rosa, to be distributed by train and mule drivers. The following month, additional grains arrived for markets in the capital to the amount of 1,000 quintals.[69] Despite efforts to import foreign foodstuffs and sell them at cost, and to curb monopolist abuses, the price of provisions remained high in early 1905.

The contradictory nature of the export economy was laid bare in early 1905. While the working class passed from one crisis to the next, merchants and planters were enjoying a reprieve from the economic woes of previous years. Not just raw materials and industrial goods but also luxury goods like fine fleece and silk fabrics, alcohol, speciality tobacco, porcelain pottery, toys, jewellery, musical instruments and perfume started to be imported once again.[70] The currency regained half its value in the run-up to Luis Mazzantini's arrival, but prices in the markets and stores did not fall correspondingly, owing to shortages. Indeed, the British Consul at Quetzaltenango reported in early 1905, 'consumers will have little or no money to spend on commodities which they do not consider as strictly indispensable'.[71] Based on the rate per inmate at the women's correctional facility at the close of 1904, the cost of supporting prisoners increased by roughly one-third.[72] In fact, on the day that the steamer carrying Luis Mazzantini arrived at the port of San José, yet another circular was issued to municipalities demanding that staple grains be immediately planted to combat scarcity.[73]

Guatemala City during the 'Mazzantini Season', 1905

The corrida – bullfighting – has a long history throughout Europe and Latin America. The subjection of the corrida to market forces brought important changes in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that standardised and modernised the practice. After Central American independence, the Plaza de Toros in Guatemala City was a popular site not only for corridas but for the circus, acrobats, exhibitions and other performances. As was commonplace elsewhere, the bullring was under the supervision of the General Hospital, providing a source of income for the hospital and its dependencies, and was leased out for events or for entire seasons or years to operators who organised corridas at an agreed-upon rate. At least once per year, a charity event was held in which the leasee donated all proceeds from a corrida to the hospital, hospice, or one of the capital's asylums. Often, contracted matadors agreed to fight without a fee for these benefit events.[74]

[69]'Banco de Guatemala, Ministerio de Fomento, Dirección de Aduanas', AGCA, Sig. B, Gobernación (1905), Leg. 29090.

[70]José J. Sánchez, 'Informes y cuentas de la Dirección General de Aduanas', *Memoria presentada por el Secretario de Hacienda y Crédito Público á la Asamblea Nacional Legislativa de 1905* (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 1905), pp. 188–9.

[71]Diplomatic and Consular Reports, *Report 1904 on Trade of Quetzaltenango*, p. 4.

[72]AGCA, Sig. B, JP-G (1904), Paq. 3, Exp. 140. While it would be speculative to assume that the general public faced the same increase, such numbers indicate heightened costs of living in general.

[73]*Memoria de la Secretaría de Fomento presentada á la Asamblea Nacional Legislativa en 1905* (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 1905), p. 76.

[74]José Flamenco, *La beneficencia en Guatemala: reseña histórica* (Guatemala City: Tipografía Nacional, 1915), pp. 123–4, available at https://archive.org/details/labeneficiencia00flamguat (last accessed 1 July 2020).

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Generally speaking, for entertainment, urban elites in Guatemala City frequented events at the Teatro Colón, gambled at casinos, watched the Cinématographe at the Pasaje Aycinena, attended horse and bicycle races at the hippodrome, and socialised and drank at society dinners and club dances. In contrast, the working class went to the circus, amused themselves at *variety shows*, threw dice, played billiards and bet on cockfights. While there was no concrete class demarcation between most of these activities (i.e. workers might go to horse races or urban elites watch *variedades*) – and while both might stroll around plazas and parks or drink at *cantinas* and brothels – the Plaza de Toros was unique for drawing all sectors of society together. As historian William Beezley has argued in the case of Mexico City, the corrida brought the *gente decente*, oligarchs, workers and the urban poor to the same venue but segregated them by class through seat prices: expensive seats in the shade and the cheaper seats in the sun.[75] In the opening years of the twentieth century, the list of those who sat in the shaded balconies of Guatemala City's Plaza de Toros was a 'Who's Who' of illustrious citizens, public officials and businessmen. Members of prominent families like the Samayoas, Aycinenas, Aparicios and Herreras frequently attended corridas and, on given Sunday afternoons during the winter, the balcony seats were occupied by minister of development and man-of-letters Rafael Spínola, Carlos Klée of the German merchant family, La Cruz Roja's Eduardo Lainfiesta, Foreign Minister Juan Barrios M. and the celebrated sibling medical doctors Juan and Salvador Ortega.[76]

Across from the urban elite, in the sun seats, sat members of the working class, the attendance of whom was vitally important to the economic success of the event. In Mexico, preferences over matadors' styles split along class lines in the 1880s, the working class celebrating the Mexican style of *rejoneo* or fighting on horseback and the elites opting for the more refined aristocratic styles of Spanish matadors.[77] And disagreements over fighting styles, or general frustration at the poor quality of a corrida, could be grounds for disorder. As at other events, the crowd at the Plaza de Toros in Guatemala City occasionally manifested popular grievances. For this reason, the behaviour of the crowd was closely monitored both by the press and by government officials. At a bullfight in late 1905, the newspaper *El Cronista* called out young men for acting inappropriately, making lewd and obnoxious jokes in the presence of women and, according to the editors, demonstrating their lack of urbanity.[78] More frequently, newspapers commented on the size, enthusiasm and frustrations of the crowd. The preoccupations of the government were similar. Justices of the Peace, for example, submitted brief summaries of the ongoings of every event at the Teatro Colón and the Plaza de Toros. All went well at a corrida in early November 1904 according to Justice Felipe Carrascosa; it lived up to the desires of the public with no interruptions taking place. In contrast, later in the

[75]See Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club*.

[76]'Plaza de Toros, Años 1900–1909', AGCA, Sig. B, Leg. 23578. See reports for years 1901, 1902, 1904 and 1906 in which names of those occupying balcony seats are recorded for select corridas.

[77]Patrick Frank, *Posada's Broadsheets: Mexican Popular Imagery, 1890–1910* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), pp. 135–7.

[78]'Reprochable', *El Cronista*, 17 Dec. 1905, p. 4. The crowds at the corrida were generally heterogeneous. Aficionados of all ages came from various class backgrounds, distinguished by the cost of seats. Although men dominated the stands, women often accompanied family members and spouses.

month, Carrascosa reported to the governor that a function at the Teatro Colón and the corrida the previous Sunday were of poor quality, and the public was left dissatisfied.[79]

Popular dissatisfaction from the sun seats at Guatemala City's corridas can be reduced to two factors: the performance of the matador and his cuadrilla and, often more importantly, the quality of the bull. In the early 1900s, these factors often determined crowd sizes. The matadors were most frequently local talent or hailed from Mexico, and only rarely did they travel from Spain. Their quality varied immensely, often depending on the commitment and knowledge of the enterprise leasing the Plaza de Toros at the time.[80] Matadors who fought numerous times tended to lose their novelty, especially if they lacked talent or were seen as haughty, while newcomers to the city's bullring drew the interest of the public. Attendance at José Machío Trigo's fights in late 1904 dwindled into the New Year with the press regarding him as lacking in charisma and defeatist; it rebounded at the next fight to a near sell-out, however, with the arrival of a new matador, José Alcantarilla.[81]

The class of the bull was the other key factor. Aficionados favoured bulls with *bravura* – ferocity and spirit – and great importance was placed on the willingness of a bull to bravely accept the provocations of the cuadrilla. Breeders staked their reputation on the aggression of their bulls, the number of *puyazos* (blows with the lance) they could withstand from the picador, and the number of horses they killed in the average fight.[82] The greatest obstacle faced by Guatemalan audiences to a good corrida was the general inferiority of locally raised bulls; this was overcome via the more expensive option of purchasing the animals from Mexican breeders and transporting them to Guatemala City. Advertisements for upcoming bullfights invariably listed the breeders and prominence was granted to those with better reputations. *La Lidia*, a local newspaper devoted to bullfighting – '*lidia*' means 'bullfight' – demanded in 1900 that promoters improve the quality of bulls.[83] Similar concerns were echoed a half decade later. In November 1904, in a bid to please the crowd while encouraging ranchers, promoters offered a silver medal to the breeder who could produce the best bulls for the Plaza de Toros. Selections were presented by the *haciendas* El Frutal and El Naranjo; however, *El Cronista*'s disheartened reviewer concluded that the animals from both lacked quality.[84] During the following month, attendance dropped in part because of the poor reputation of the livestock.[85] Indeed, the crowd jeered promoters in mid-January 1905, objecting to the immaturity of the bulls that were being sent out to die.[86]

[79]'Corte Suprema de Justicia y Juzgado de Paz, julio–noviembre de 1904', 7 Nov. and 29 Nov. 1904, AGCA, Sig. B, JP-G (1904), Paq. 1.

[80]Poor corridas in early 1904 were blamed on those leasing the plaza, Barnoya y Compañía: 'De aquí y de allá', *El Cronista*, 28 Feb. 1904, p. 3.

[81]See 'Desde el tendido' in *El Cronista*, 24 Dec. 1904, p. 3 and 14 Jan. 1905, p. 5.

[82]Adrian Shubert, *Death and Money in the Afternoon: A History of the Spanish Bullfight* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 36–42.

[83]'El ganado de lidia', *La Lidia*, 4 Nov. 1900, p. 1.

[84]'Toros', *El Cronista*, 16 Nov. 1904, p. 3.

[85]See 'Desde el tendido' in *El Cronista*, 2 Dec. 1904, p. 4, 8 Dec. 1904, p. 3, and 17 Dec. 1904, p. 5.

[86]*Ibid*., 21 Jan. 1905, p. 5.

Luis Mazzantini's visit to Guatemala promised to address the central concerns of aficionados: not only was Mazzantini world class but he brought a number of bulls from the highly reputed Mexican *haciendas* of Piedras Negras and Tepeyahualco. For nearly 20 years, Mazzantini was among the most internationally renowned matadors. In 1886, having taken his *alternativa* (graduation from novice to full matador) two years earlier, he travelled to Havana and stayed for several months. While there, he developed a close bond with French actress Sarah Bernhardt, a relationship that drew considerable attention from the Parisian press.[87] Before long, European wholesalers began selling Mazzantini hats, Mazzantini ties and Mazzantini canes.[88] Herein lies one of Mazzantini's greatest legacies to bullfighting: the dawning celebrity cult.

No doubt aware of criticisms levelled against Guatemalan promoters Barnoya y Compañía, Mazzantini's company wired telegrams to the Guatemalan media in late December indicating that one of his picadors would soon sail by steamship to Guatemala with a number of bulls from Mexico.[89] The bulls alone generated great excitement among aficionados: at the invitation of Mazzantini's company, *La República* sent reporters to Guatemala City's Plaza de Toros to examine the bulls. 'What bulls, dear Lord, what bulls! It's such a pleasure to see them', the newspaper reported.[90]

Mazzantini arrived in Guatemala City on 21 January 1905 to much fanfare. A huge crowd assembled at the train station hours before his express train was scheduled to arrive from the coast. When Mazzantini disembarked from the locomotive, the mass erupted into hurrahs and applause. The congregation then followed his carriage step by step along the kilometre journey to the Gran Hotel on Ninth Street East.[91] For the several weeks that Mazzantini was in Guatemala City, he maintained a public profile, attending events as well as granting interviews and socialising with the press. After one brief chat, the *Diario de Centro-América* described him as a perfect gentleman with the 'finesse of a Renaissance artist'.[92]

Downtown merchants capitalised on the Mazzantini affair to sell merchandise. La Libertad, a clothing and novelty store on Sixth Avenue, encouraged consumers to look their best at the Plaza de Toros. To this end, they advertised the newest and widest selection of parasols, artificial flowers, gloves and silk specialities to adorn those frequenting the attractions.[93] Francisco Gual marketed items in his store, El Sol, by appealing to Mazzantini's reputation as a man of multiple talents. When the torero's bullfighting season was completed, Gual insisted, he dedicated himself to hunting game: 'And so don Luís, who is truly a prototype of elegance, wears a classic hunter's outfit made from the superior *pana española*.' Such

[87]Juan Miguel Sánchez Vigil and Manuel Durán Blázquez, *Luis Mazzantini: el señorito loco* (Madrid: Librería Gaztambide, 1993), p. 212.

[88]Shubert, *Death and Money*, p. 77.

[89]'Empresa Mazzantini', *Diario de Centro-América*, 23 Dec. 1904, p. 1 and 'Cable', *El Cronista*, 24 Dec. 1904, p. 4; 'Toros', *La República*, 4 Jan. 1905, p. 1.

[90]'¡Qué toros!', *La República*, 7 Jan. 1905, p. 3.

[91]'La llegada de Mazzantini', *La República*, 23 Jan. 1905, p. 2.

[92]'Una visita a Mazzantini', *Diario de Centro-América*, 4 Feb. 1905, p. 1.

[93]'¡Novedades!', *La República*, 14 Jan. 1905, p. 9.

velveteen – durable and form-fitting – was available for purchase at El Sol.[94] Anticipation of Mazzantini's first event ran high and amongst the city's inhabitants there was considerable chatter about the 'Mazzantini Season'. One could scarcely pick up a newspaper without reading a story about the torero or viewing an advertisement for his performances.

Adorned in their finest clothes, the urban elite flocked to the Plaza de Toros. Sixth and Seventh Avenues – passing either side of the city's main plaza – were usually the thoroughfares most frequented by frolickers, parading in their latest fashions. But for the seven weeks that Mazzantini was in Guatemala, the peacocking on the days of the corrida shifted a couple blocks over to Ninth Avenue, which terminated at the Plaza de Toros. A tram line ran from the Plaza de Armas to the bullring and the cars were constantly full for their trips between the two destinations. One journalist compared Ninth Avenue to Madrid's Calle de Alcalá, the Spanish capital's longest street, which includes the famous Plaza de Toros de las Ventas.[95] As in Madrid, hours prior to the event, the well-to-do arrived in luxurious carriages and promenaded.

Despite the enthusiasm of elites, working-class attendance was key to the success of the venture. In early-twentieth-century Guatemala City, the cost for workers to attend spectacles and performances varied depending on the venue and event. The widest range in prices existed at the Teatro Colón and was determined by the nature of the performance and the type of crowd promoters sought to draw. Tickets for Spanish *zarzuelas* – musical comedies – were inexpensive, reaching 0.5 pesos, while the cheapest seat for an operatic performance by Adelina Padovani of the Lombardi Opera Company effectively excluded working-class audiences at a prohibitive 10 pesos. Generally speaking, ticket pricing for corridas was less variable as workers were considered essential consumers for the events' success. Between 1903 and 1906, the inexpensive sun seats ranged from 0.5 to 2 pesos depending on the reputation of the matador and the quality of the bulls. Typically, however, the cheapest seats cost 1 peso.[96]

In contrast, to ensure a return on investment, the promoters Barnoya y Compañía elevated ticket prices for Mazzantini's fights well beyond the usual. They had invested a large sum of capital to stage the event: the matador received 150,000 pesos and another 50,000 was spent on marketing. The contract also required the promoters to renovate the Plaza de Toros by improving pens and building luxury balcony seats.[97] Thus, for Mazzantini's first fight in late January, front row sun seats sold for 15 pesos while the most inexpensive tickets were 8 pesos. Weeks prior to the first event, however, the press was already expressing concern over the ability of the working class to afford entrance costs. *La Cronista*, for example, recommended that the price of cheaper seats be reduced to guarantee the greatest number of spectators.[98] Promoters did not heed the suggestion.

[94]'Luis Mazzantini', *La República*, 2 Jan. 1905, p. 5.

[95]'Toros', *El Cronista*, 4 Feb. 1905, p. 2.

[96]See various advertisements in BNGCV-HS, No. 1993–1996, Year 1903–1906.

[97]'Acontecimiento taurino', *El Cronista*, 24 Dec. 1904, p. 4; 'Mazzantini en Guatemala', *Diario de Centro-América*, 20 Dec. 1904, p. 4.

[98]'Desde el tendido', *El Cronista*, 31 Dec. 1904, p. 4.

After Mazzantini's first event, the press noted that the while the shade seats had been full, there were many empty seats in the cheaper sun sector: the working class had failed to attend in numbers, surprising given the quality of the matador and bulls. For subsequent appearances by the matador, promoters were forced to reduce ticket prices for sun seats to attract a larger audience. The press claimed the decision was an act of benevolence: Mazzantini desired that the 'proletarian class' have the opportunity to attend a true corrida without financial sacrifice.[99] Thus, front row sun seats were reduced from 15 pesos to 10 while the cheapest sun seats dropped from 8 pesos to 5.[100] Despite these efforts, attendance remained low for the second corrida the following Sunday. One aficionado castigated the Guatemalan public, suggesting they would rather buy sugar or grimy handfuls of shrimp than purchase tickets to see Mazzantini.[101] Faced with too many vacant seat, prices were again dropped for Mazzantini's fourth corrida, this time to 5 and 2.5 pesos, while the press called on the public to sell out the Plaza de Toros.[102] Only once prices were comparable to typical corridas did the working class fill the sun seats. What had started as a desire to have a widely applauded matador tour Guatemala City in the twilight of his career, and what presented itself as an opportunity for the city's urban elite to demonstrate their cosmopolitan chic, descended into an embarrassing struggle by promoters to fill the cheapest seats. The inability of working-class *capitalinos* to afford tickets to the Plaza de Toros revealed the contradictions of government, urban elite and planter responses to economic crises. Efforts by coffee growers, merchants and others to protect their financial interests by turning more land to export agriculture, hoarding silver, manipulating currency and avoiding taxes on exports and imports ultimately hampered working-class consumption of entertainment by raising the cost of living in Guatemala City.

Conclusion: 'Corrida-as-Society' in Guatemala City

In many regards, consumer culture in Guatemala City during the 'Season of Luis Mazzantini' reflected the uncertainty and contradictory nature of Guatemalan political economy during the Export Age in Latin America. The relative strength and weakness of global coffee markets and Guatemalan national production tells but a fraction of the story about the engagement with commodity culture by *capitalinos*. The activities of the Guatemalan state, merchants and coffee planters in response to the boom and bust cycles of global coffee markets had direct consequences for consumption among the urban working class. This article has shown that currency instability, demand for items of primary necessity and the availability of affordable manufactured items – or, in the case of the Mazzantini affair, entertainment – and international coffee prices were limiting factors in popular consumer habits in Guatemala City.

[99]'Rebaja', *El Cronista*, 4 Feb. 1905, p. 6.

[100]'Plaza de Toros', *La República*, 14 Jan. 1905, p. 3; 'Empresa Mazzantini', *La República*, 31 Jan. 1905, p. 2.

[101]V. Manuel Leal, 'Ayer', *Diario de Centro-América*, 6 Feb. 1905, p. 1.

[102]'El señor Mazzantini', *La República*, 14 Feb. 1905, p. 3; Emilio, 'Toros', *El Cronista*, 11 Feb. 1905, p. 2; 'El beneficio de don Luis', *La República*, 13 Feb. 1905, p. 2.

When Luis Mazzantini and his entourage arrived in Guatemala City in January 1905, the capital's elite were enjoying a respite from the damaging economic conditions that had prevailed from 1897 to 1900. Prosperity among planters and merchants had not returned to their pre-1897 levels; nevertheless, many of the features of the economy – price and currency fluctuations, for example – were more inconveniences than threats to their class positions. For many day-labourers, artisans, civil servants, domestic servants and small-scale producers, however, oscillating economic conditions were more menacing. During Mazzantini's stay in the city, low levels of rural production and monopolies inflated food prices, conditions aggravated by government and planter responses to economic crisis. As such, it is hardly surprising that members of the working class were conspicuously absent from Mazzantini's opening corridas. Their attendance at the Plaza de Toros rose only when the price of the cheapest admission fell to one-quarter of the original price, a little higher than the usual range. But these low prices imperilled the profitability of the venture for promoters.

Leading up to Mazzantini's first corrida, a number of Guatemala City newspapers reprinted an article written by the famed Italian novelist Edmondo de Amicis in praise of peninsular bullfighting. For de Amicis, the corrida was a social drama that unfolded in acts, 'a circus for an entire people'. At the Plaza de Toros in Madrid, all elements of society were present, from the king in his box, ministers, governors, municipal officials and ambassadors, to peasants, artisans and the working class. Together, they formed an organic whole, 'an immense sea of heads, hats, fans, and hands waving in the air', with everyone yelling, ladies gasping at the spectacle, and all forming 'an immense masquerade'. And yet, the crowd was spatially segregated with the sun providing a stark reminder of rank and hierarchy. The elite and the bourgeoisie sat in the coolness of the shade, while 'in the sun where the lower classes sit, [there are] a thousand lively colours of clashing apparel, parasols, and paper fans'.[103] Similarly, Beezley argued that the bullfight was a metaphor for life and society, most expressly illustrated by the seating arrangement, which ensured spectators never forgot their social position.[104] The metaphor was extended, however, to the entire drama of the bullfight, with rules of etiquette guiding the proceedings. While the person presiding over the event determined when the music commenced and orchestrated other key moments, everyone in attendance played a role. The Mazzantini affair in Guatemala City offered a curious contradiction. Despite the matador's universal acclaim and his high-quality bulls, the capital's working class did not attend until the price of entrance tickets was drastically reduced. In the context of commodity culture in Guatemala City at the start of the twentieth century, the corrida-as-society metaphor is particularly illuminating of illusions of consumer modernity held by the urban elite and the precarity of urban life for members of the working class during the 'Mazzantini Season'.

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[103]'Las corridas de toros', *Diario de Centro-América*, 28 Jan. 1905, p. 1.

[104]Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club*, pp. 5–6.

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Spanish abstract

En 1905, el mundialmente conocido torero Luis Mazzantini llegó a la Ciudad de Guatemala para presentar varios espectáculos taurinos. Pese al entusiasmo de la élite urbana, las corridas del matador fueron pobremente atendidas por la clase trabajadora debido a los altos precios de los boletos. Este artículo utiliza la 'Temporada Mazzantini' como un caso de estudio sobre el consumo de la clase obrera en la Ciudad de Guatemala para rastrear los movimientos de la economía política del país durante los 1890 y principios de 1900, analizando los factores que limitaban el consumo popular, como la inflación de precios, la devaluación de la moneda, la escasez de alimentos y otros que afectaron a los trabajadores urbanos guatemaltecos. También demuestra la manera en la que las respuestas del Estado y de los cafetaleros a las crisis económicas destinadas a proteger los intereses de las élites minaron radicalmente la posibilidad de los trabajadores capitalinos de participar en la cultura de consumo.

Spanish keywords: cultura de mercancías; economía política; historia urbana; clase obrera

Portuguese abstract

Em 1905, Luiz Mazzantini, um toureiro então mundialmente conhecido, chegou à Cidade da Guatemala para uma série de corridas. Apesar do entusiasmo da elite urbana, pouquíssimas pessoas da classe trabalhadora foram às touradas do matador devido ao alto preço do ingresso. Este artigo utiliza-se da 'Temporada de Mazzantini' como um estudo de caso da cultura do consumo da classe trabalhadora na Cidade da Guatemala, que permite identificar mudanças na economia política ao longo da década de 1890 e começo dos 1900. Além disso, analisa os fatores que limitavam o consumo da classe trabalhadora da Guatemala, tais quais inflação, deflação de moeda e escassez de alimentos entre outros. Também demonstra a maneira com a qual algumas soluções propostas pelo Estado e pelos produtores de café para lidar com a crise econômica – visando proteger os interesses de sua elite – enfraqueceu fundamentalmente a habilidade da classe trabalhadora da capital de participar na cultura de consumo.

Portuguese keywords: cultura de consumo; economia política; história urbana; classe trabalhadora

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