



Photo: Carlos Fredy Ochoa

## Means and End/s of Clandestine Life<sup>1</sup>

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### **Abstract:**

How do we know in places and after-times where and when counterinsurgency, insurgency, and counter-counterinsurgency embodied clandestinity so deeply that some people can still barely speak of what occurred? If concealing a political agenda is the same as defending it how can it come into the light “even” now, when the dead are still not safe? This essay explores the civil war, genocide, and its aftermath in Guatemala through clandestinity as means and ends (both intention and the finishing of something). It explores the troubles we have with memory and history when hiding is both a violent state strategy and a desperate mode in which the subaltern seek to survive.

**Mean 1. to have in mind, intend 2. to be used to express, signify, or indicate 3. between extremes, in an intermediate position as to place, time, quantity, quality, kind, value, etc. 4. vicious, contemptibly selfish, malicious.**

**End 1. point of beginning or stopping 2. the last part, completion 3. what is desired or hoped for.**

## Janus in Guatemala

**FACE 1. I am very sure about what I'm going to tell you. I am an anthropologist with 25 years experience in the field of Guatemala.**

**FACE 2. As I've tried to think about what and how to tell you about clandestine life I feel I'm reaching through a fog, that what I want to explain and make clear slips away. There is a confusion, as if the thing were pressed close by glammers.**



Daniel Hernández Salazar, from the triptych *No oigo, no veo, me callo, nunca más* (I can't hear, I can't see, I am silent, never more), 1997.

Photo: Daniel Hernández Salazar

"With clandestinity," a Guatemalan friend told me, "the main thing is that you are never ever direct about anything. You go around (she motioned with her hands). Round and round about. You take the back ways. And that's not just in the everyday world, how you get from one place to another, but in how you talk, how you relate to people. And it's still strong." A priest who was sitting with us nodded in emphatic agreement. "It's part of every relation, every decision," he said.

A Mayan activist who was forced to lead the army-imposed "civil patrol" in his rural village during the war said, "I have two faces. One I showed to the army. One I showed to my people." Through the patrol system the Guatemalan army conscripted the majority of highland men, indigenous and non-indigenous, into the counter-insurgency state. The UN truth commission report holds the patrols responsible for 12% of the wartime violations, including some of the most horrific massacres (CEH 1999).

Guatemalan anthropologist Carlota McAllister says: "among the Maya, to conceal a political agenda is the same as defending it" (McAllister 2003, 46).

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**FACE 1. Don't do anything dangerous.**

**FACE 2. What was safe yesterday may be dangerous today.**

*Are you following me?*



Daniel Hernández Salazar, from the triptych *No oigo, no veo, me callo, nunca más*, 1997.

Photo: Daniel Hernández Salazar

Contemplating clandestine life – and what McAllister calls political agendas - muddles colonial ambivalence and stereo/typing; it troubles power's in/security in facing "Indian givers," "idols behind altars," "revolting subjects." Clandestine life is hedged by the sneaking suspicion that one is duped. It worries us, us - the more and less powerful, us, the analyst and analysand – it trembles us with the epistemic murk of nervous systems, with the uncanny dialectics of counterinsurgent states and counter-counter insurgent cloaking devices. We are afraid. We are distrustful. We want to act. But by what means do we face a power so mean, so "vicious, contemptibly selfish, malicious"?

Approaching the means and ends of clandestine life—developed over 36 years of civil war and "still strong" today, in the aftermath of the 1996 peace treaty—means trying to think through living with "assumed identities." A polymorphous pun, this triple word score emphasizes the epistemological and ontological puzzles of living with "two faces" like the simultaneous Mayan activist and civil patrol commander. Assumption One is that which is taken for granted, the unconscious, unexamined prerequisite for those identities that appear self-evident. The default mode, the status quo, it is expressed in the old saw "What happens when you assume? You make an ass out of you and me." Assumption Two carries the sense of false pretenses, an assumed identity is one that is not true, one taken on for nefarious purposes. It is duplicitous, two-faced, the "also known as" or "a.k.a." of FBI wanted posters. Its exposé brings the glee of truth telling, of being the non-duped. Contrariwise, Assumption Three

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means to take on an identity, to become - as in the ecstatic Virgin Mary's assumption to heaven, ensconced in her true, eternal identity. Judith Butler says, "Subjection is [...] a power *assumed* by the subject, an assumption that constitutes the instrument of that subject's becoming" (1997, 10).

Approaching the means and ends of clandestine life means trying to think through duplicity. It means trying to think through and with generative contradictions between identity essences and identity-ties, or perhaps better said, b/identity-ties: subjects formed through connections, lashings-together. It is to twine through the assumptions of identity and to ponder if *les nons-dupes errant* (the non duped err) (Zizek 1989). If we are to begin to work through the smokescreens and defensive formations thrown up in order to create a space in which to work, in which to carry through a political agenda, we'll need a Janus-like double vision.

***FACE 1. The state must defend itself against great threat, unconventional forces, terrorist subversives. To do so, it might need to take extraordinary measures.***

***FACE 2. We can't be naïve. Above-ground work will only get us so far against these cabrones, these hijos de puta, this 500-year old system of exploitation. Go too far you'll get yourself killed.***



Masked performer participates in the Baile de la culebra (Dance of the Snake) in Joyabaj, Guatemala, August 15 2007.

Photo: Carlos Fredy Ochoa

A Janus face reminds us that Guatemala is bifurcated, half its population Mayan indigenous people, half called "ladino" or non-indigenous, and the means and ends of insurgency, counterinsurgency and counter-counterinsurgency were sometimes different for the two parts. In Guatemala as elsewhere, moreover, the ends or goals of the right and the left, the state and opposition, the elite and the wretched, tend to be diametrically opposed. One seeks to maintain the structures of power, the Assumption One of accumulation, the other to disrupt and re-make

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those structures. Yet both often deploy the means—a.k.a. the tactics—of secrecy, of clandestinity. Both work in complex ways, simultaneously desiring and veering away from outside attention, publicity, and notoriety, deploying cover-ups, secrets, and plausible deniability.

Beginning in 1954 with the CIA-backed coup against President Jacobo Arbenz, the Guatemalan state functioned as a military dictatorship, fighting openly against “communism” (imprisoning activists, carrying out a public war against insurgents that was covered in the press and received funding and training from other states like the US, Israel, Argentina and Taiwan) and at the same time clandestinely (creating death squads and units within units—an entire para-state—that carried out assassinations and “disappearances,” organized secret detention centers, hid massacre victims in mass graves, and exiled or murdered witnesses). In interviews with Guatemalan sociologist Manolo Vela, soldiers admit they felt safe massacring entire Mayan villages because given that they had no roads or phones, they didn’t think anyone would ever know (and because they were Indians, that no one would really care) (pers. comm.). They followed this up with labors to create assumed identities. Anthropologist Simone Remijnse says “[C]ivil patrol indoctrination and military propaganda [...] told [residents of the highland town of Joyabaj] over and over again that, if you behaved well, went about your work and did nothing wrong, you had nothing to fear. If you actually became a military target and got killed, you must have been doing something wrong, like belonging to the guerrilla. Getting killed proved someone’s guilt” (2002, 199).

Counterinsurgency’s means divided people, sowed distrust, warped people’s memories about the ends—intentions—of the left, and has hamstrung post-war organizing. As with the patrol commander cited above who showed one face to the army and the other to his people, the army pushed the subaltern to assume (Three) an identity as two-faced, untrustworthy (Assumption Two). This reverbs back, as Taussig reminds us, to produce the paranoia beyond reason that is greater than the sum of its parts, irreducible to a cost-benefit analysis. It explodes into the extravagant violence that the UN, in its report titled *Memory of Silence* declared as genocide under international law. Yet in a dialectics of deception, state power both practices and produces clandestinity and also re/produces itself through these fantasmatics of threat.

## Are You Following Me?



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Three masked dancers interact in the Baile de la culebra (Dance of the Snake) in Joyabaj, Guatemala, August 15 2007.

Photo: Carlos Fredy Ochoa

The end of the war—its official completion with the peace treaty signed in 1996—has unleashed battles over assumptions, over what can go without saying. It is a difficult process, as terror has been deeply implanted. Thirteen years later, in 2009, “basic facts,” like how many people were killed, how, and by whom, are still being produced through exhumations and testimonials from victims who, until now, have been too frightened to come forward. The Guatemalan state killed hundreds of thousands of people and sought to inculcate, inculcate and muzzle the rest in a massive clandestinization of collective memory. In 2006 Dr. Héctor Nuilá, former guerrilla and Secretary General of the political party formed from the guerrilla organization URNG (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity) said, “we are really seeing the effects of the army's slogan '*muera la inteligencia!*' (death to thinking!). They killed anyone who thought, our best minds. People ask why Guatemala has no Nelson Mandela and I have to remind them that there were no political prisoners here. They killed everyone, and now it's almost the reverse of Descartes: I don't think, therefore I am.” An important means of the end of war has been dis- and un-covering the army's cover-ups. Human rights, popular, leftist, and Mayan organizations have struggled to gather testimonies, empanel truth commissions, open clandestine mass graves, publish reports, and bring perpetrators to justice. They reveal the army's assumed/false identity as savior of the nation as, really, barbaric genociders. They work against the assumptions of hiddenness, as their titles suggest: *Silence on the Mountain* (Wilkinson 2002), *So That All Shall Know* (Maldonado 2007), *Memory of Silence* (CEH 1999). In the images by Daniel Hernández Salazar that grace the covers of the four volumes of the Catholic Church's truth commission report (REMHI 1998), we see an angel whose wings are the scapula of a victim exhumed from a mass grave and who first sees no evil, then hears no evil, then speaks no evil until the final image in which he is screaming forth the horror that has occurred (Maldonado 2007).

***FACE 1. 'Trust is, quite literally, the great civility. Mundane reason is the space across which trust plays. It provides a set of presuppositions about self, others, and the world which embed trust and which permit both consensus and civil dissensus to occur' (Steven Shapin in David Turnbull 2000:20).***

***FACE 2. Trust will get you killed. How can there be consensus when they steal our land? Steal our labor? And kill us when we protest peacefully? Where is the great civility for the wretched of the earth?***

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While the civil war in Guatemala dates to 1962 when nationalist army officers took up arms against the US-backed state, Mayan activists point to the 500 years of accumulation by dispossession and the enforced assumptions of identity through which Mayan life and its rich spatio-temporal-spiritual-productive realities were reduced to “*indio* life” (a word, similar in its intent to the N-word in the US). Through forced labor and debt servitude, they must assume the identity (at least the face they show to power) of those who work for nothing (González 2002, Martínez Pelaéz 1990), of those whose deaths are so meaningless that soldiers aren’t afraid to kill them. This bi-identification, this “stain on their name” has kept “war in their veins,” sometimes emerging as open rebellion, and other times cloaked, retained in masked dances until an auspicious moment arises (Martínez Pelaez 1985, Williams 1991). In the Baile de la Culebra (the serpent dance) performed in Joyabaj, Guatemala, masked indigenous men act out scenes of being contracted to work on export-crop plantations, being doubled over as the labor contractor uses their backs as a table to note down their debts in an accountant’s ledger, and rising up, using (real and deadly) snakes to murder the contractor who, unfortunately, is brought back to life by his own indigenous shaman.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this foretells the massive indigenous participation in the popular and revolutionary movements, and in the counterinsurgency.

## **MEAN: to have in mind, intend.**

By the late 1970s in Guatemala, in the context of African decolonization and U.S. defeats in Vietnam, Iran, and Nicaragua, grassroots organizing was widespread. Activism took many forms, from Bible study groups to electoral campaigns; from colonizing jungle areas inspired by utopian visions of dignified human communities and unalienated production to re-conceptualizing the alphabets of Mayan languages; from unionizing workers across ethnic and linguistic identities to massive strikes for better wages and working conditions; from teaching in shantytowns to joining one of the guerrilla movements. There was enormous hope, enthusiasm, effort, and learning. Then and now, people use terms like “*aceleración*” (acceleration), “*euforia insurreccional*” (insurreccional euphoria), and “*calor del momento revolucionario*” (the heat of the revolutionary moment) (Bastos and Camus 2003, 57), or they remember being “swept up in this dynamic,” this “vortex” (McAllister 2003, 268). The mobilizations were laboratories, sites for trying things out and experimenting, then contemplating the outcomes. Remembering his student days, an urban psychologist confided that “you didn’t really know from one day to the next if you were going to get up and head for the mountains. It seemed like every day someone else from our circle had gone to join the guerrilla.” The Mayan leader Rigoberto Quemé recalled those times: “In the 80s there were three possibilities for the people in [the highland city of] Quetzaltenango working for social change: join the rebels, go into exile or stay in Quetzaltenango. The last option was, for many, a death sentence” (Grandin 2000, 236).

The very breadth of the mobilization (above and under ground, in the legal, religious,

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educational, military and productive realms) gave rise to classic counterinsurgency prose (Guha 1988) denouncing it as "two-faced." The military state insisted that legal protests and human rights work were nothing but a front for the lawless guerrillas, designed to dupe the government, international observers, and maybe even the activists themselves. In 1978, the army massacred hundreds (the numbers are still contested) of peacefully protesting farmers in the town of Panzos and began to assassinate and disappear activists (Grandin 2004).

**FACE 1. Don't get involved in stupid things.**

**FACE 2. How do we make sure everyone has enough to eat?**

In 1985 I began working in the Guatemalan highlands. Between 1978 and 1984, the army had carried out scorched earth counterinsurgency, annihilating 626 indigenous villages, and massacring tens of thousands of people—indigenous and non-indigenous (ladino). That kind of violence was no longer occurring when I arrived, accompanying Catholic priests and nuns into the indigenous highlands, but terror was lodged deeply. As were counter-terror mechanisms—secrecy, duplicity, living with two names, two faces. People would stop talking if even a child came by to stare at the *gringa*—for fear the kid was a spy. Even inside houses with the doors closed, and no one around but us, people would lower their voices almost to a whisper when they talked about certain things.

Clandestinity is a bodily discipline, deeply incorporated, that creates a deep fog around attempts to be "in the know." Experience has taught Guatemalans that a careless word—especially one uttered near an outsider, even a well-intentioned one who had not incorporated the techniques of secrecy into her body—could mean death or even worse, torture for you and others. In 1987 I volunteered with a Guatemalan NGO based in Mexico City and lived with two Guatemalan exiles in a small apartment. There, even in our shared house among the most everyday tasks and in the relative security of living in exile in Mexico, the rules of clandestinity held firm. Four months into sharing our lives, including accompanying them through the birth of their daughter, I ventured to ask my roommates how they'd "gotten involved" in politics. It seemed an innocent question and it was just the three of us in our kitchen but conversation halted, they looked at me in shock, and said, "You should know never to ask about that!" Our relationship cooled. Just asking the question showed I couldn't be trusted. I didn't know the rules.

I was again reminded how deeply assumed clandestinity is when I interviewed a former guerrilla member in 2001, five years into the post-war. We had a great conversation about election plans and other work the new URNG party was doing, but when we started talking about his past he started coughing until it got so bad that we couldn't continue. He told me his body itself would not let him speak about the time he spent underground.

**FACE 1. Just be an anthropologist. Get the facts straight and write your book.**



## **FACE 2. What if I say something that gets someone killed? What if my study helps the enemy?**

Dr. Nuilá, a ladino, former guerrilla and now the URNG's party secretary, said that the culture of clandestinity has been a big problem for the struggling left party. "It's a way of life. Many former combatants have a hard time projecting, speaking, making themselves known. And there is still a lot of fear." I asked if this might be why some people claimed there were no Maya in the guerrilla. "The indigenous have always been two-faced," he said. "This has always been true, from way back. They have always had to hide as a way to survive. They would go to church so no one suspected they didn't believe and then go to the mountains and pray to their gods. They are very good at keeping secrets... You know," he said, "we never had any security problems among the indigenous people. Among the ladinos, yes, but never with the indigenous."

"I know that all of my neighbors thought I was a whore" said Claudia (not her real name), laughing, about her years of leading a double life, half of it "above ground" with a development NGO and the other half clandestine as she collaborated with the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (member organization of the URNG). "I would come home with the car all muddy from working in the countryside, get some dinner for the kids, then clean up and go out again. All the *señoras* in our apartment building were scandalized. But as long as that is what they thought, I was OK."

A means of bi-identification deployed by the Guatemalan left was using assumed identities or *noms de guerre*. (It's exciting, yet discombobulating to find out the "real" names of people I've "known" for some 20 years.) Many took the names of comrades killed by security forces as a way to keep history alive and they talk now of feeling almost possessed by their dead, able to do things and take risks "in their name" that alone they would never have had the courage for. Many activists also played with "passing." As one friend said, "Most of the ladinos from the city would choose names like Baltazar, stuff like that. They wanted to sound as *campesino*, as peasant as possible. The indigenous *compañeros* tended to choose names that sounded as foreign as possible—Harvey, etc. I chose different names for different operations. It's a different self. It inspires you to try harder." "Claudia" remembers being assigned the name Wendy. "Ugh! I hated that name!! It was just so cheesy!" Rodrigo Asturias, Commander of the URNG-member organization ORPA, used the *nom de guerre* Gaspar Ilom from his Nobel Laureate father's novel *Men of Corn*. In 1993 he told the US journalist Peter Canby, as he handed him his business card, "I've legalized Gaspar Ilom. Now I have two names" (Canby 1999:30). There were other ways to assume identities: indigenous people began wearing "Western" clothing; many people changed their names, their addresses, or their work ("I hid in the private sector," one activist told me). They developed two faces and by doing so hoped to escape the singular identity of victim.

Here I am relating to you stories of the clandestine life whose means were

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successful—all of these people survived. On Sept. 11, 1990, Myrna Mack Chang, a Guatemalan anthropologist, was murdered by Army Specialist Noel Beteta in front of AVANCSO, the research institute she had helped found. While her research work with refugees was definitely controversial, friends, family, and colleagues struggled to understand why she was murdered—discounting immediately the “official story” that it was a robbery, as her wallet and car keys were found on the body. Why her? Why then? Why so brutally—27 stab wounds, and she was a small woman? They slowly became aware that she had a double life—both as an above-ground researcher, and maintaining links to people connected to the guerrilla. Perhaps most uncanny was realizing that the *hermenéutica militar* (counterinsurgency hermeneutic) of the army—the “intellectual author” of her assassination—knew her with terrible intimacy. They surveilled her, listened to her phone calls, read her mail, followed her research carefully, watched her child at play, and knew her friends, lover, family, and all the networks in which she was a node. They knew what she hoped for and dreamed of, perhaps as well as or better than her closest friends.

## Are You Following Me???



Masked and unmasked performers in the Baile de la culebra (Dance of the Snake) in Joyabay, Guatemala, August 15 2007.

Photo: Carlos Fredy Ochoa

Clandestinity is a means, as the dictionary says, both a tactic and intention, that lies “between extremes, in an intermediate position as to place, time, quantity, quality, kind, value.” And this betwixtness may further animate the double/ambi-valence of bi-identifications. As an assumed identity, people may feel possessed to be braver and stronger by taking the names of their fallen comrades or loved ones. But assumed identities open a gap at the core of knowing and being. People are also possessed by the fear that they never know who to trust, suspicion mediates every relation. When an activist was arrested, disappeared, or killed, friends and family who had been kept in the dark (often to protect them) frequently felt betrayed at not being

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in the know, at being distrusted - especially if they agreed with the cause. "Why couldn't she tell me?" For many, finding out someone they love lived a double life shattered their un/shared past, propelling it into new and uncanny configurations.

More horrifying, by far, however, was beginning to suspect that someone you trusted was an infiltrator, an *oreja*, an "ear" or spy for the enemy. It wasn't just them, out there, horrible as that was—the faceless bureaucrats listening to your conversations, the lurking strangers surveilling your child, your trysts, your quotidian trajectories. It was "one of us," with whom you'd shared food, tears, laughter, maybe love. When one of Myrna's colleagues accepted a job with the intelligence services of the FRG party government—whose leader, General Rios Montt, was the military dictator responsible for the majority of massacres in the early 1980s—people began to wonder if maybe he had always had two faces, seeming to work for human rights but really a double crosser.

"Did you know," said an elderly friend, "that the Jesuits found out how brainwashing works? After the Pellecer case they had to study the techniques, the special ones developed here in Guatemala, with help from the gringos, of course. The *chafas* [disrespectful term for the military] had lots of people to work on, to experiment with. Many didn't work. They turned into zombies so they would kill them or sometimes just let them go. But Pellecer, they brainwashed him. I remember seeing him on TV, his eyes, his face. It was him but not him."

Jesuit priest Luis Eduardo Pellecer Faena was disappeared in early June 1981 and in late September appeared on national television denouncing his former colleagues, saying they had forced him to join the guerrillas. My friend told the story much as one would a ghost story, her voice lowered, pulling me close to her. Imagine the terror of seeing a companion, a friend, so doubled over, his words justifying a more violent crackdown, putting you in even more danger. The spectacle itself was a mechanism of horror leading to "paranoia within reason" (Marcus 1999), forcing one's thoughts into the panic cycle: how did they make him assume this other identity? Make him so two-faced? What possessed him? Could it happen to me?

Paralleling this horror is the fact that the Guatemalan genocide was frequently carried out by neighbors, friends, even family. These are people with assumed identities—they were turned, forced to *delatar* or were "*forcivoluntariamente*" made part of the Civil Patrols, like the two-faced activist who was both a liberation theology-influenced catechist and a local leader of these paramilitary death squads. It was often victims who assumed the identity of perpetrators.

A woman who took testimony for the CEH recalled a man who couldn't speak because of what he'd done. "Usually," she said, "once they got started it would just flow out of people. But this guy came really late, after we'd been in the village for several weeks, and we had to leave the next day. He came at 12:30 at night to give the testimony of how he had killed his own son. It was so hard, his whole body, his throat, the *vergüenza*, the *culpa* (the shame, the guilt) [she was speaking in English but said

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these words in Spanish]. It really hurt me to watch. It was maybe the hardest testimony I took in all that time. The next day he came to us as we were leaving with his hands held out for us to tie him up and take him to jail. He felt he belonged there because of what he'd done... The CEH opened up these areas for people. I wonder if perhaps that was the worst part of it? There has been no follow up. What has happened to these people?" While the end of war has enjoined the struggle against impunity for war crimes, and to reverse the injunction to "speak no evil," how is responsibility to be justly reckoned in the face of "two faces" (Nelson 2009)? And with the means and ends of clandestine life?

***FACE 1. Figure out what is risky. Make your calculations based on statistical tables establishing the regularity of certain events and calculations of probabilities.***

***FACE 2. They've killed Myrna! They've killed Oliverio! 30 union leaders have been disappeared from a single meeting! They turned Pellecer!***

In 1999 the U.S.-based National Security Archive obtained and released a Guatemalan army dossier from the mid-1980s that documented the fates of "disappeared" people (NSA 1999). It revealed what had been assiduously covered up as well as proving that the left's insistence on clandestinity was not so paranoid. A document of the bureaucracy of death, it consists of page after page of names, photos, affiliations, activities, and fates. In its pages, 183 people appear kidnapped between Aug. 1983 and March 1985. One hundred of them were killed. The military at first claimed it was a fake. Then, after a week of investigating, claimed it could not be military because they always use letterhead (Remijnse 2002, 255). For many families it was the first official acknowledgement of the fates of loved ones. It caused a huge sensation as photocopies and CD-ROM versions were feverishly produced and distributed hand to hand. One of the more terrifying aspects of the dossier was when one name was followed by the name of someone from the same cell. Clearly people were tortured and forced to *delatar* (betray or denounce), leading to the capture, torture, and often murder of their comrades. It also turned out that the army had released some of those who had "confessed," making them work as spies. After the dossier was made public, several of them contacted the newspapers to explain their experiences and offer tear-filled apologies to families of their former compañeros. "I couldn't help myself," said one (Rosales O. 1999). Activists remember that during the war, immediately upon hearing that anyone from their group had been arrested, everyone tried to get out of the country. "We knew we had less than 48 hours. We told each other, try to hold out at least that long so we can save ourselves, but we knew that no one, no matter how strong, could withstand the torture any longer than that."

Assumed names, going round and round and round about, only having contact with a few members of your cell, were counter-strategies of the clandestine life, meant to limit the devastating effects of these chain reactions. But, as power hoped, these means often limited counter-power's ability to reach its ends. The compartmentalized structure of cells meant one

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or two people lost could lead to the whole thing falling apart. I know people who lived underground and who recall waiting at the designated time and place for a contact who did not show up. With no other way to connect, knowing the person was undergoing torture, but cut loose from all the security of an organization, they went into freefall. At times an entire guerrilla front was cut off from information and supplies, left starving in the mountains as the result of the capture of a single person.

And those who made it out of the army's clandestine prisons? Are they daring escapees or are they now a person you once knew but know no longer? What if they were doubled over, possessed? What if you are being duped? Fear of this strategy of army hermeneutics created a two-faced reaction to those who managed to escape—had they made it out on their own or were they now double-crossers? To those raised in peace time, the suspicions of the Guatemalan left look overdone, almost psychotic. In fact, we laugh in Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 911* at the ludicrousness of infiltrating the cookie-eating peaceniks in Fresno. (The recent discovery that US gun control groups were infiltrated by a National Rifle Association spy [Schechter 2008] was rather less humorous, evoking the epistemic murk of wondering not only if you can trust your colleagues, but if can you trust yourself.) YOU thought she was a friend. YOU relied on her. YOU gave her responsibilities in campaigns with life and death consequences. And it made an ass out of you. In Guatemala, the experience of suffering the devastation produced by a single informer made it quite rational to compartmentalize and to cultivate distrust and a secrecy so deeply assimilated that the body itself would not let one speak.

Clandestinity is counter-counterinsurgency. It is also part of an articulatory practice, joining people in networks, sometimes without them even knowing it. As a response to violence and state terror, the vital importance of keeping secrets can make particular deaths—of spies (*orejas*), people who gave up names (*delataron*), those without the "proper" consciousness—seem to be "for life." Clandestinity is a means and an end. But it can also turn identities into chains that pull one into the abyss, dragged by the weight of falling comrades. As such, it disarticulates. It can divide those in the know from those who aren't, sowing suspicion, undermining trust. It reinforces "verticalism" and military forms of discipline as life and death practices, supplanting more drawn-out discussions, critical questioning, and the consensus-oriented interactions of political and social organizing. It insinuates itself into already-raced and gendered assumptions about who is educated and who "naturally" functions as the "head," the "hand," or the "heart." When attacked, bi-identifications—like catechist and peasant organizer, researcher and undercover activist—get flattened into one, cutting connections held together by the two-faces.

"Risk culture" assumes that they should have known. The state's brutality should have been calculable based on statistical tables establishing the regularity of certain events and calculations of probabilities (Ewald 1991). This assumes, however, that nothing new ever happens and the end of war is always the same. Yet most accounts emphasize the absolute

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irregularity of the state's response, the improbable way it blasted the known world, changed time, ripped up the fabric of certainty. It is also incumbent upon us to remember genocide (and an army partly in the know) as we try to reckon with these histories. The vast majority of indigenous people and many of the ladinos who wholeheartedly supported the guerilla were murdered, died from exposure and starvation, or went into an exile they have not returned from. They are not here to co-memorate with us. A ladino in Joyabaj explained the effects of the war to Remijnse: "they were like frozen people...[they] had learned a lot, they had learned to shut their mouth and not to protest, they had learned not to talk and not to ask, they had learned to obey when you were called for patrol duty... The ones who did stand up to the military are the ones that are now in the graves behind the convent" (2002, 284).

Guatemalans have a reputation in Central America for being *enconchados*, *encerrados*, closed off or turned inwards like a snail in its shell. When asked about the effects of the war many say it only increased these tendencies. "People, families, they shut down. They don't talk about things. There's a generation gap because young people don't know what happened in their families, if people were involved," said a young ladina woman. The violence against the Mayan community was so harsh, so genocidal, and the re-education was so intense—"If you actually became a military target and got killed, you must have been doing something wrong, like belonging to the guerrilla. Getting killed proved someone's guilt"—that memories of the mass organizing throughout the indigenous highlands and across the Maya-ladino divide have been clandestine.

Between 1985-1996, when the war was first "ending"—with the draw-down of the scorched-earth policy, the elections for a civilian government and the final peace accords - indigenous activists struggling for cultural rights (or any political space at all) had to strongly dis-identify with the guerrilla in order to survive. Calling oneself a "Maya" was to differentiate from the "*populares*," referring to peasants or more class-based movements ("subversives"). While many "Maya" (in the sense of urban activists) *had* come through the guerrilla movement, they strategically essentialized when that face seemed expedient to hide (assumed identity two). As time goes by some are increasingly "coming out," as an activist told me as we passed a video store on our way to lunch some five years after I'd met him. "In the guerrilla we were like that" he said, pointing to an ad for a Rambo movie. "Only we killed soldiers, not Vietnamese." But for others, the essentializing has become more of an assumed identity (Three). One activist has even claimed that people who remember him being part of the movement are confusing him with his (apparently non-existent) twin brother. Fierce desires to assume identities that won't get you killed mix with habits of clandestinity that die hard. As a result, many younger Mayan adepts, especially those maturing in the later 1990s and without personal memory of the war, have assumed (Three and One) the more culturalist identity, leading to increasing reification of a split between Maya and the popular sectors, weakening the potential of the vibrant movement that began to come of age with the hemisphere-wide reactions to the Columbus Quincentennial in 1992. In part because "[a]mong the Maya to conceal a political agenda is the same as defending it," it has become possible,

among some Mayans, Guatemalans, and a gringo anthropologist or two, to claim that the left and the right were all ladino and both killed indigenous people. (The UN found 93% of the war crimes they investigated were the responsibility of the military state, 3% of the armed insurgents.) In Bolivia and Ecuador, spared genocide and Guatemala's clandestine counter-insurgency, the left/indigenous/mass movement/intellectual connections have been strong enough to take power. In postwar Guatemala, in contrast, such identities are tenuous at best, armed camps at worst. Many "Maya" are seen as elites and urban professionals, out of touch with the true experience of rural indigenous life, which consists of poverty, racism, and sometimes, revolutionary consciousness.

## Post-War Clan-Destinations



Portrait of Anthropologist Myrna Mack Chang, who was brutally murdered by the Guatemalan Army in 1990.

Photo courtesy of Fundación Myrna Mack

A central component of the postwar, of Guatemala's shedding of its pariah status and re-installation in the family of nations, has been a sharp increase in different forms of monitoring and "audit culture" intended to institutionalize accountability and increase transparency (Strathern 2000). Millions of dollars of international aid and the labor of legions of foreign advisors have been invested in internationally certified elections, UN peacekeepers (and report writers), truth commissions, IMF missions, and computer systems to better track taxes paid and other economic indicators. The U.S. lifted its official ban on military aid because, as former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said: "I've been impressed by the reforms that have been undertaken in the armed forces. I know it is a difficult thing to do but it's been done with professionalism and transparency" (Thompson 2005, A7).

The new transparency, however, may cover new forms of clandestinity. Like the violence of the war, postwar poverty linked with neoliberal policies puts intense pressure on families and communities to find escape routes and devise survival strategies, many

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of them in the “gray,” informal, or frankly criminal economies that remain mostly off the books. The statistics on pick-pocketing, armed robbery, car jackings, and kidnappings suggest that many people subsist on such activities. Illegal border crossings were frequent during the war as refugees fled the violence and guerrillas retreated to safe zones (and the army followed), but over the past ten years unauthorized migration has skyrocketed. At the precise moment that transnational capital is insisting on “transparency” and imposing increasingly onerous accounting procedures, migration is part of a larger “graying,” or clandestining of the economy, as remittances flow through semi-shadow economies as neither employers nor employees declare the wages, and as money transfers operate on the edges of banking systems and via far flung networks of human traffickers and “informal” exchanges of many kinds—which often include a great deal of violence, especially for women. The liminality of the “illegal” immigrant produces many modes of insecurity. The shadow world of traffickers or *coyotes* operates both against and through state and military networks and human trafficking flows through similar corridors as other substances. Postwar clandestinity both deeply distorts on-book accountability and produces magical profitability in ways both newly terrifying and deeply familiar (Nordstrom 2006).

In 2008, when I visited Livingston, Guatemala’s Caribbean outpost accessible only by air or water, I heard several versions of the avioneta story. An avioneta is a small propeller plane and several years ago one fell out of the sky a few kilometers from town. It is a vivid memory for many people because it marks the date of a major and terrifying transformation. One storyteller told me candidly that before the avioneta fell she literally had been unable to give away a bag of cocaine left with her by a visitor. People thanked her kindly but were uninterested. But when the plane crashed loaded with cocaine, “Who knows?” said another storyteller, “curiosity, avarice, aspiration, the devil. Who knows? But people went out there and took the stuff.” Soon addictions took hold with accompanying robberies and sex work, and nasty characters from the “*Oriente*” (reputed to be the center of the national drug trade) began to show up. People began to die, some of overdoses, some of violence, with some of the violence deeply horrifying, leaving mangled corpses. Because this is all clandestine, Livingston at first looks like a laid-back tourist town until someone points out the drug deals going down by the playground, or tells you her mother was found dead in the cemetery, her breasts cut off, her body partly burned, raising fears that satanism accompanied the other hellish effects of the drug.

While on the one hand U.S. financial foreign policy encourages the free market play of supply and demand, its other hand is hard at work keeping the Latin America drug supply away from eager gringo consumers. This increases the incentives to take the risk of trafficking. Just as with the circulations of remittances, gray networks develop to facilitate—and take advantage of—these flows of *narcodolares*, and they easily outwit the audit procedures meant to keep legitimate profit-making cleanly separate from tainted money. Guatemala is periodically rocked by scandals - like a bank going broke or a



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state official charged with drug interdiction being found guilty of trafficking - that remind us of the power of off-the-books narcoprofits. They also offer a stark reminder that what human rights activists call the Illegal Bodies and Clandestine Security Apparatuses (CIACS) may be almost indistinguishable from the official, vetted, light-of-day workings of government.

The way narcomoney and narconetworks have coiled through the intestines of the politics and economics of a peripheral country like Guatemala is both a general phenomena, what Carolyn Nordstrom calls "extrastate globalization of the illicit" (2005), and a shadow of the particular war that was fought there. The jungles and mountains that provided refuge to guerrilla fronts, and were subsequently militarized through the counterinsurgency, are also congenial for airstrips and marijuana plantations. The "FARCization" of the Guatemalan military—its transformation, in many of its operations, from an institution with a national mission to one in business for itself—is the culmination of decades-long trajectories of mixing national security with profit making, and army members moving from protecting the interests of oligarchs to protecting their own.

The "illegal apparatuses" of un/official clandestine organizing, the death squads and units within units of the war years—protected by the same cloaking devices of wartime impunity - are re-woven for these new worlds of lawlessness unleashed by the free market. Jennifer Schirmer, in her unsettlingly titled book *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy* says: "the Guatemalan military have crafted a unique Counterinsurgent Constitutional State... [in which] [c]ounterinsurgency structures are incorporated into the very heart of the State" (1998, 258) via co-governance with the civilians. She says this "gives new meaning to 'civilian oversight' as purposeful blindness to violations" (263). Juan Hernández Pico says: "our countries live subject to impunity and we are blackmailed by the lords of the war, today transformed into *empresarios del capital delincuencia*" (entrepreneurs of criminal capital) (2005, 118). More specifically, he says that during the war

the economic, political and military leadership hid behind clandestine groups that sowed terror through assassination [...] They also used the death squads to carry out economic kidnappings to extort members of the oligarchy and Guatemalan bourgeoisie and to allow high military officials to become unwanted stakeholders in various industrial monopolies [...] The military also has a history of controlling the country's imports and exports, customs, revenue service and taxes, civil aeronautics, and the ports. Through these offices they formed alliances with [many economic sectors] [...] The war, with its military "aids" to the Army was also a dark wellspring of illicit businesses. Another source of the "hidden powers" of the state has been narco trafficking and all the other prohibited traffics, beginning with arms, that created the *capital delincuencia* and the organized crime it finances - with its transnational connections - allowing them to rise into the oligarchy even as it strengthens the inequality and poverty for which it was first responsible [...] The grafting of the army to the tree of the State, with its branches of the hidden powers vigorously fed by the sap of corruption, will not be easily undone. (227–228)

In turn, without a victory or even much negotiating power, the guerrillas got very little for their fighters in the peace treaty—a few household goods and several thousand dollars from the UN to relocate, but nothing to compensate for the years without schooling or to cover the holes in people's resumes, much less a jobs program or retraining. What is one to do when you may be quite good at tactics and using a weapon but there are no jobs? Clandestinity goes from being a revolutionary/counterrevolutionary tactic to being standard modus operandi in the new gray world.

## The End/s

***FACE 1. I am very sure about what I'm going to tell you. I am an anthropologist with 25 years experience in the field of Guatemala. I've read Marx, Freud, and Foucault. I understand the hermeneutics of suspicion. I'm in the know.***

***FACE 2. As I've tried to think about what and how to tell you about clandestine life I feel I'm reaching through a fog, that what I want to explain and make clear slips away. There's a confusion, as if the thing were pressed close by glimmers.***



Daniel Hernández Salazar. *Sacro escarabajo* (The Sacred Scarab), 1997.

Daniel Hernández Salazar

Duplicity—the sense that the world available to our senses hides another face behind it—is a site of intense affective and hermeneutic investment in the aftermaths (and ongoing experiences) of war and violence. Clandestinity is a means of surviving horrific violence and a means of enacting that violence. At the “end” of war, notions of reckoning, transparency, accountability, and audit circulate with the promise of “fixing” singular identifications (like victim or perpetrator), the promise of assumption three—living our true identities. But uncertainty about assumptions in the epistemic sense—what you can take for granted that you know—is lashed to nervousness about assumed identities - what you can take for granted about who you (or others) are.

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Claiming to be duped is a way to admit you did something, but to disclaim full responsibility. It occurred but it's not your fault. If you've been duped, the deflation felt when the con is revealed can be laughing bewilderment or red-faced embarrassment about being taken in (say, by the market!). You assumed and it made an ass out of "u" and me. You're a sucker, a rube.

But it can also be world-shattering. Trust is deceived, betrayed. You've been double-crossed. Not only is confidence in the other shaken, but so is faith in one's own judgment. At the moment of becoming conscious of the duplicity the self splits into the pre-self that didn't know and the new self that is in the know. A familiar narrative is shattered and the pieces fall together in a new configuration. The very "I" that thinks—and therefore is—becomes uncertain. If confidence can be defined as self-possession, its loss raises the question of who then possesses the self? And how does one continue to act in the world after such revelations? These suspicions are simultaneously everyday, enmeshed in the smallest calculations of lived sociality, and horrifyingly existential, constantly threatening to engulf one in the dark night of the soul.

Reckoning with the means and ends of clandestine life is troubled by suspicions of duping and saturated by loss and hope. People make war to achieve certain “ends,” a.k.a. “what is desired or hoped for,” and when war “ends,” when it is over, they continue to struggle, if by other means.

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## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> Maury Hutcheson, who has assiduously studied Mayan dance forms, sees quite different meanings in this dance (Hutcheson 2003).

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