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Citation for published version:

Gibbins, J 2020, “Their debts follow them into the afterlife”: German settlers, ethnographic knowledge, and the forging of coffee capitalism in nineteenth-century Guatemala', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 62, no. 2, pp. 389-420. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417520000092>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1017/S0010417520000092](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417520000092)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version

Published In:

Comparative Studies in Society and History

Publisher Rights Statement:

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**“Their Debts Follow them into the Afterlife”: German Settlers, Ethnographic Knowledge,
and the Forging of Coffee Capitalism in Nineteenth-Century Guatemala**

Contact:

Julie Gibbings

School of History, Classics, and Archaeology

University of Edinburgh

julie.gibbings@ed.ac.uk

Word count: 13,885

Abstract

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

ethnography subsequently shaped the anti-communism of mid-twentieth century anthropology in the region.

Keywords: history of ethnography; German diaspora; capitalism; coffee; colony; Q'eqchi's; Alta Verapaz; Guatemala

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

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

Some German settlers in late-nineteenth-century Alta Verapaz, Guatemala were more than just coffee planters, who dispossessed indigenous lands, and drew Q’eqchi’s laborers by force, debt, and sometimes violence into relations of economic dependency. German settlers like Erwin Paul Dieseldorff (1868-1940), David Sapper (1876-1966), and David’s cousin Karl Sapper (1866-1945) were also ethnographers, archaeologists, and geographers who produced scientific and practical knowledge that informed their efforts to forge coffee capitalism in Alta Verapaz. Like ethnographers in Britain’s colonies, settlers like David Sapper understood the potential symmetry between ethnography and the governance of indigenous peoples. As George

I wish to thank Florencia E. Mallon, Steve J. Stern, Carrie Larson, Karin Roseblatt, and H. Glenn Penny, as well as audience at the 2012 Conference on Latin American History in Chicago, for providing insight and encouragement on earlier drafts of this article. I would especially like to thank the four anonymous reviewers for their substantial feedback and careful reading of this article, which improved it immensely.

¹ David Sapper, unpublished memoir, March 1952. Copy provided by Regina Wagner

Stocking argued, colonialism was the “*sin qua non* of ethnographic fieldwork.”² Colonial expansion provided the context for going into “the field” and the conditions for anthropologists’ experiences. Much like early missionaries, German ethnographic investigations in Alta Verapaz helped the new diaspora to make sense of the region’s history and to naturalize their roles as heroic nineteenth-century counterparts to Bartolomé de las Casas, the sixteenth-century Dominican friar who had led the “peaceful” conquest of Alta Verapaz.

By the early twentieth century, German settlers also understood that ethnography provided practical knowledge about how to manage plantations and plantation laborers. While ethnographers generally lamented capitalism as an inevitable historical force that devoured non-western cultures and languages, German coffee planters in Guatemala believed that by modeling plantation management on Q’eqchi’ cultural practices and speaking Q’eqchi’ they would preserve desirable aspects of Q’eqchi’ culture and language and strengthen their commercial enterprises. Karl Sapper, for example, observed that Q’eqchi’s allegedly imagined the Christian God as a white person, who runs a plantation in the afterlife “similar to those that the Europeans own in Alta Verapaz.” Sapper likewise argued that Q’eqchi’s believed that they must atone for their sins in the afterlife, and this afterlife resembled that of the plantation. Q’eqchi’s, according to Sapper’s interpretation, believed “they would have to perform the field labor in the next life as on earth until they have paid off all of their debt.” According to Sapper, Q’eqchi’s “debts follow

² Goerge W. Jr. Stocking, “Maclay, Kubary, Malinowski: Archetypes from the Dreamtime of Anthropology,” in *Colonial Situations*, 10.

them into the afterlife.”³ German ethnography in Guatemala was the result of several factors, including both German commercial ambition and scholarly curiosity, a drive towards functionalism and a cosmopolitan interest in ethnic others. The alliance between science and German commercial pursuits gave birth to ethnographic studies that subsequently shaped the anti-communist dimensions of twentieth-century anthropological inquiry in Guatemala. Drawing on the scholarly ethnographic writings of Germans in Alta Verapaz, published and unpublished memoirs and letters, as well as coffee plantation records and manuals and judicial and state archives, this article argues that ethnographic knowledge was central to German settlers’ capitalist efforts to create profitable coffee plantations. Thus, while even some non-professional ethnographers in German missionary societies elsewhere may have sought to halt capitalist encroachment and the proletarianization of indigenous peoples, German coffee planters-cum-ethnographers in Alta Verapaz sought to productively combine ethnographic insights and capitalist exploitation.⁴

Ethnography, Colonialism, and Capitalism

German coffee planters in late-nineteenth century Alta Verapaz believed that settlers needed to learn Q’eqchi’, the predominant Maya language of the region, live among their Maya

³ Sapper, “Religious Customs and Beliefs of the Q’eqchi’ Indians,” 37 and Sapper, *Das Nördliche Mittel-Amerika*, 277-278.

⁴ Rainer F. Buschmann, *Anthropology’s Global Histories: The Ethnographic Frontier in German New Guinea, 1870-1935*.

laborers, and become like “good fathers” to them. Above all else, the German geographer Karl Sapper counseled his countrymen: “one must first learn to understand the Indians.”⁵ In addition, German ethnographers, some who occupied posts in German institutions and others who participated in scholarly debates from their plantation homes, published their archaeological, ethnographic, and geographic research in Germany, the United States, and Guatemala. These German coffee planters illustrated the central role of ethnographic knowledge in guiding land and labor acquisition, as well as plantation governance.

While Germans in Latin America were diverse, the relatively small number of Germans who arrived during the late nineteenth century were by and large not impoverished peasants nor contract labourers, but professionals, capitalist investors in banks, agricultural and industrial enterprises, as well as scientists and intellectuals.⁶ This was especially true in Guatemala, where Germans were active participants in coffee planting and processing regions like Alta Verapaz as well as in the banking and import-export sectors located in urban centres of Quetzaltenango and Guatemala City. By the end of the nineteenth century, the diverse German population in Guatemala numbered only approximately 900, yet they controlled one-third of all coffee production in the country and two-thirds of coffee exports.⁷ In Alta Verapaz, these numbers were

⁵ Sapper, *Das Nördliche Mittel-Amerika*, 129.

⁶ von Gleich, *Germany and Latin America, Memorandum RM-5523-RC* (Santa Monica, CA, Rand Corporation, 1968), 7.

⁷ Wagner, *Los alemanes en Guatemala, 1828-1944* (Guatemala: Asociación de Educación y Cultra ‘Alejandro von Humboldt’, 1991), 113, 385.

even more stark. By 1937, Erwin Paul Dieseldorff alone owned fifteen coffee plantations, whose total area amounted to nearly 100,000 acres.⁸

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

German coffee planters-cum-ethnographers' efforts to manage plantation labor in Alta Verapaz however contrast sharply with historical accounts of the relationship between ethnography, capitalism, and colonialism. While historians have debated the relationships between human sciences like anthropology, cultural geography, and sociology with colonialism, they have rarely considered it in relationship to settler's efforts to extend capitalism into indigenous frontiers.⁹ Even before Edward Said's *Orientalism*, historians located the intellectual origins of colonialism in anthropology for the discipline's role in producing representations of

⁸ Nájuez Falcón, "Erwin Paul Dieseldorff, German Entrepreneur in the Alta Verapaz of Guatemala, 1889-1937," 81.

⁹ For overview, see Vermeulen, *Before Boas*, 23–28.

racial and cultural difference.¹⁰ Since then, historians have complicated the relationship between anthropology and colonialism and expanded such analysis to include other disciplines such as sociology, history, and geography.¹¹ Nineteenth-century Guatemala also further complicates the relationship colonialism and knowledge production. While Guatemala gained formal independence in 1821, like many Latin American nations it retained some colonial-era institutions such as racialized coerced wage labor and uneven territorial sovereignties that destabilizes the boundaries between colonial and non-colonial forms of knowledge production.¹² Historians of ethnographic knowledge, moreover, have often neglected the role of ethnographic knowledge in the formation of capitalism, since, as Pels and Salemin, reminded us “labor power could be conceptualized in purely physical terms, as decontextualized, decultured bodies, for which ethnic identity was only important where it served the maintenance of racial distinctions between white settlers and colored workers.”¹³ Understanding the role of ethnography in the rise of capitalism might also be facilitated by shifting the focus from the archive of professional

¹⁰See for example, Talal Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial*; Adam Kuper, *Anthropologists and Anthropology*; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*.

¹¹ See for example, Vermeulen, *Before Boas*; Pels and Salemin, *Colonial Subjects*; Jean Michaud, “*Incidental*” *Ethnographers*; Steinmetz “Sociology and Colonialism in the British and French Empires, 1945-1965.”

¹² Gibbings, “‘Another Race More Worthy of the Present: History, Race, and Nation in Alta Verapaz Guatemala, c.1860s-1940s.’”

¹³ Pels and Salemin, *Colonial Subjects*; Jean Michaud, “*Incidental*” *Ethnographers*.

knowledge production in universities to blurry spaces between academic knowledge production and the popular ethnographic practices of missionaries, government officials, and plantation owners.

Guatemala's plantation ethnography also reframes the history of German ethnography. Historians of German anthropology have emphasized how Germany developed a unique intellectual trajectory because its ethnographic museums and anthropological societies predated the formal acquisition of colonies, and its vast ethnological inquiry took place outside of the colonies Germany began to acquire after 1884. Instead, scholars linked German ethnography to a broader counter-Enlightenment historicist tradition stretching from Humboldt to Herder characterized by a deep and abiding fascination with non-European others.¹⁴ German historians argued that, in the light of this context, "salvage anthropology," which emphasized the preservation of disappearing indigenous artefacts and languages, dominated the German discipline until World War I.¹⁵ By contrast, British anthropology by the early twentieth century had turned toward functionalism, which emphasized the acquisition of detailed knowledge of societies that many believed would facilitate and maintain colonial administrations.¹⁶ Historians,

¹⁴ Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire*; Penny, "Elusive Authenticity;" Stocking, ed., *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic*; H Penny, *Objects of Culture*, Penny and Bunzl, eds., *Worldly Provincialism* and Smith, *Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany, 1840–1920*.

¹⁵ Smith, *Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany, 1840–1920*, 170.

¹⁶ Stocking, "Introduction," in *Colonial Situations*, 4.

however, have begun to question these bounded-national trajectories and periodizations. Rainer Buschmann, for example, revealed how German administrators in colonial New Guinea developed Malinowskian, functionalist ethnographic methodologies most often associated with Britain to facilitate colonial governance.¹⁷ Han F. Vermeulen challenged both periodizations and the national focus of earlier work by skillfully tracing the origins of German ethnography to German scholars employed by imperialist Russia in Siberia in the late eighteenth century.¹⁸ This article likewise reconsiders the boundary between supposed German cosmopolitanism and British functionalism by illustrating the symbiosis between German ethnographic and capitalist pursuits in Guatemala. Likewise, this article moves beyond the tendency to equate ethnographic knowledge with the scientific discipline of anthropology, and instead emphasizes scholarly and popular ethnographic knowledge production and the role of other disciplines, including cultural geography, in ethnographical knowledge production.¹⁹

German coffee planters-cum-ethnographers in Guatemala further demonstrate the need to carefully examine the colonial and diasporic context of ethnographic production. Since George Stocking's seminal volume, *Colonial Situations*, historians have rightly emphasized the need to

¹⁷ Buschmann, *Anthropology's Global Histories: The Ethnographic Frontier in German New Guinea, 1870-1935*.

¹⁸ Vermeulen, *Before Boas*.

¹⁹ See also, Steinmetz, "Sociology and Colonialism in the British and French Empires, 1945-1965," *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 89, no. 3 (2017), 601-648.

pluralize the “colonial situation.”²⁰ Latin American scholars have also uncovered how U.S. archaeologists and anthropologists in the Maya region worked in close relationship with U.S. intelligence efforts, and thus provided even more direct links between ethnographic conversations between scientists and Maya “subjects” and the formation of U.S. empire in the region.²¹ Following the work of Ann Laura Stoler, Sebastian Conrad has also called upon German historians to rethink what counts as a colony.²² These scholars invite us to consider the many historical variants of colonies ranging from leper colonies, agricultural colonies, penal colonies, and in many instances, plantations. What these colonies shared was not necessarily inclusion in a broader empire, but spatial practices designed to create cordoned-off territories where individuals, corporations, and states might exercise a different kind of sovereignty. In Guatemala, plantations were such-cordoned off colonies; there planters exercised a partial sovereignty in appointing government officials who resided on the plantation and exercised state power. Planters also built jails and whipping posts for the administration of justice, and prevented the entrance of state officials to conduct census or administer healthcare.²³ The partial sovereignties German planters exercised on their plantations requires us to abandon rigid notions of what counts as a colony, and who exercised colonial power.

²⁰ Stocking, “Introduction,” *Colonial Situations*.

²¹ Sullivan, *Unfinished Conversation*; and Harriss III and Sadler, *The Archaeologist Was a Spy*.

²² Conrad, “Rethinking German Colonialism in a Global Age.”

²³ Gibbings, *Our Time is Now*.

Understanding the nature of colonialism in Guatemala also requires abandoning the myth of German diasporic political and social insularity, and the tendency to equate the German diaspora with the German state.²⁴ Matilde González Izás, a Guatemalan scholar, argued that German ethnographers and cultural geographers in Guatemala produced ethnographic and geographic knowledge that supported the consolidation of Guatemala's exclusionary nation-state, facilitated the expansion of German coffee plantations, and contributed to the colonial pretensions of the German state in Guatemala.²⁵ Recently, H. Glenn Penny, a prominent U.S. scholar, lambasted Gonzalez Izás for emphasizing the violence and racism of coffee capitalism in Guatemala and its relationship to Germany's imperial interests. In response, Penny called to "move beyond colonial questions" in order to understand German scientists' true intentions in Guatemala.²⁶ Penny argues that German coffee planters-cum-ethnographers in Guatemala were far more altruistic and cosmopolitan than Gonzalez Izás suggests, and their practices emerged from Germany's longer mercantile history. While Gonzalez Izás over-emphasizes the role of the German state in Guatemala, Penny evacuates Guatemalan historical context and agency. Penny formulates his analysis by focusing on "Germans in non-German spaces."²⁷ Those non-German

²⁴As Stefan Manz recently argued, there is a tendency to either analyse discourses *within* Germany about Germans abroad *or* to focus on German ethnic minorities in specific regions or states, see *Constructing a German Diaspora: The 'Greater German Empire,' 1871-1914*, 6-7.

²⁵ González-Izás, *Modernización capitalista, racismo y violencia: Guatemala (1750-1930)*.

²⁶ Penny, "From Migrant Knowledge to Fugitive Knowledge?"

²⁷ Penny and Rinke "Germans Abroad: Respatializing Historical Narrative."

spaces, however, receive insufficient attention and thus appear as virtual blank slates awaiting complex and diverse German actors, who were networked across national boundaries but largely free from local social and political ties.²⁸ While Guatemala's German diaspora may have roots in mercantile trade networks, German's late-nineteenth-century ethnographic inquiries were driven by their investments in coffee plantations and their intimate contact with Maya labors. The historical record also demonstrates planter-labor relationships in Guatemala were often violent and racist.²⁹ Furthermore, Germans filtered knowledge of indigenous culture through a broader understanding of late-nineteenth-century imperialism and capitalism, and they often engaged in such comparative analysis themselves.

German ethnographers in Guatemala also made these connections between transnational diasporic and imperial contexts, comparative colonialisms, and ethnographic knowledge production abundantly clear in their own works. While German immigrants to Alta Verapaz in the late nineteenth century were not agents of the German state, they imagined their role in civilizing the Mayas akin to the German settler colonialists in Africa and South Asia and thus destabilize the boundaries of colonial and diasporic knowledge production.³⁰ The imagination of all German settlers in "uncivilized" worlds as participating in a common colonial project in many

²⁸ For a counter-argument, see Julie Gibbings, "Mestizaje in the Age of Fascism."

²⁹ See for example, Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre*; McCreery, *Rural Guatemala, 1760-1940*; González-Izás, *Modernización capitalista, racismo y violencia: Guatemala (1750-1930)*.

³⁰ See Sapper *Der Wirtschaftsgeist und die Arbeitsleistungen tropischer Kolonialvölker*.

ways endured even after Germany gained formal colonies of its own.³¹ The German diasporas' sense of a common destiny and duty was the product of the special place accorded to Latin America in what Susanne Zantop and George Steinmetz have respectively called "pre-colonial fantasies" and "pre-colonial ethnographic representation" that proliferated in German popular culture through the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These precolonial ethnographic representations and fantasies imagined a special, privileged, civilizing role for Germans, which Germans were to ideally enact in Latin America. These same precolonial ethnographic representations gave form to practical German colonial activities in the late nineteenth century.³² In Guatemala, German ethnographers like Sapper and Dieseldorff melded pre-colonial fantasies with local historical, political, and cultural dynamics. They keenly read and reinterpreted Guatemala's history of colonial conquest, especially Alta Verapaz's special history of "peaceful conquest" to naturalize their own presence in the region. By the 1920s, Guatemala's German coffee planters-cum ethnographers published works that allied them with some Guatemalan indigenistas who promoted limited state reforms in the name of stemming the tide of socialism and radical Maya demands for rights as citizens.

³¹ Naranch, "Inventing the *Auslandsdeutsche*: Emigration, Colonial Fantasy, and German National Identity," in *Germany's Colonial Pasts*, 21–40, for German's precolonial fascination with colonialism see Susanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies*, Robert C. Holub, "Nietzsche's Colonialist Imagination: Nueva Germania, Good Europeanism, and Great Politics," in *The Imperialist Imagination*, 33–50 and George Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting*.

³² Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies*, 203; Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting*.

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

³³ Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*. See also, *The Debate on Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital*, edited by Warren.

³⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

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

The Allure of Ethnographic Knowledge

Erwin Paul Dieseldorff and Karl Sapper, two pioneers of ethnography and archaeology in Guatemala, arrived in Alta Verapaz in the wake of a millennial uprising. In the midst of the nation's mid-1880s coffee boom, a major frost struck the region destroying coffee harvests and subsistence crops. Many ladinos (non-Mayas) and Q'eqchi's interpreted the January 1886 frost as the revenge of the powerful mountain deity, Tzuultaq'a Xucaneb against the "evils of coffee production." As a result, the frost provoked widespread revolt among Q'eqchi' plantation laborers, and ultimately unleashed vociferous debates about the "slavery" of the state's regime of forced wage labor, known as mandamientos.³⁶ As Maya laborers fled into the mountains, coffee planters faced steep capital losses in advanced wages and stalled harvests. When Germans Karl

³⁵ Here my argument follows more closely the use of knowledge local culture as a strategy of governance in Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting*.

³⁶ Gibbings, "'The Shadow of Slavery': Historical Time, Labor, and Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century Alta Verapaz, Guatemala."

Sapper and Erwin Paul Dieseldorff arrived two years later, Xucaneb's revenge was etched firmly into Altaverapacence imagination.

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

³⁷ Letter dated February 4, 1889, "Cartas de E.P. Dieseldorff a su madre, 1888–1890," trans. Regina Wagner in *Anales de la Academia de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala*, LXXVII, (2002), 101.

³⁸ Sapper, Unpublished memoir.

³⁹ Pels and Salemink, "Introduction: Locating the Colonial Subjects of Anthropology," in *Colonial Subjects*, 33.

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

While German settlers in Alta Verapaz possessed certain economic advantages over Guatemalans in the local land and labor markets, these German settlers also came from merchant familial backgrounds, which as H. Glenn Penny has argued, primed them to adapt to local linguistic and cultural contexts.⁴⁰ German interest in adapting to different contexts, however, went far beyond simply learning Q'eqchi', to actively studying Maya history and culture and publishing their results in scientific journals and popular travel narratives as a means to gain prestige at home and abroad.⁴¹ Like his mentor, Friedrich Ratzel, Karl Sapper believed that specific geographical and historical conditions created the *Volk*—the specific cultural characteristics of a people.⁴² As such, Sapper surmised that ethnographic knowledge and the ability to adapt their agricultural endeavors to local culture were essential to governing Q'eqchi's as a labor force and reaping the rewards of German investments. While not the first or only German scientists to merge intellectual pursuits with business interests, Karl Sapper, Erwin Paul Dieseldorff, David Sapper, uniquely combined their endeavors and left an archival and

⁴⁰ Berth, *Biographien und Netzwerke im Kaffeehandel zwischen Norddeutschland und Zentralamerika, 1920-1959*; Penny, "From Migrant Knowledge to Fugitive Knowledge?"

⁴¹ Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting*.

⁴² Smith, *Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany*, 140.

publication trail illustrating how they blended scientific knowledge and plantation management.⁴³

The practice of ethnography by coffee planters was also the result of the fortuitous blending of academic and capitalist endeavors. Erwin Paul Dieseldorff, the son of a wealthy Hamburg merchant family, met Dr. Karl Sapper, a young German cartographer and geologist, with an abiding interest in geography, human culture, and history. In order to complete his doctoral studies at the University of Munich, Karl Sapper traveled to Alta Verapaz, where his older brother Richard Sapper settled in 1884. Recognizing the need to better understand the region's geography, Dieseldorff volunteered to help Karl Sapper with the compilation of geographical data on rainfall and soil type, and the two men traveled extensively in southwest of Cobán, Alta Verapaz's departmental capital. In their travels, Dieseldorff and Sapper also explored the region's many caves, where they discovered ancient Maya burial sites and artifacts. From the trips both Germans developed a keen interest in Maya archaeology.⁴⁴ By the time of his death in 1940, Erwin Paul had collected over three thousand artifacts, which his son donated to the National Archaeological Museum in Guatemala City.⁴⁵

⁴³ See González-Izás, *Modernización capitalista*; R. Wagner, *Los Alemanes en Guatemala, 1828-1944*, 166.

⁴⁴ Tulane Latin American Library Dieseldorff Collection [hereafter TULAL DC], Erwin Paul Dieseldorff Letter to his mother, Letter #9, November 22, 1888 and Letter #12, December 13, 1888, and Letter #14, January 3, 1889.

⁴⁵ Nández Falcón, "Erwin Paul Dieseldorff," 73.

When Dieseldorff and Sapper subsequently worked on isolated coffee plantations and in face-to-face contact with Q'eqchi' laborers, their concerns with establishing profitable enterprises helped to transform their interest in ancient Mayan civilization into more functionalist inquiries about Q'eqchi' culture.⁴⁶ Like missionaries and military officers in French Indochina, their long periods of residence with a local population spurred empirical and methodological approaches for ethnographically understanding cultural others.⁴⁷ In 1891, Erwin Paul Dieseldorff, for example, moved to the remote plantation Seacté. During the three years he resided in Seacté, Dieseldorff, like many other German plantation owners and administrators, developed an intimate relationship with a Q'eqchi' woman, Luisa Cú. As Dieseldorff's cook, companion, and ultimately concubine, Cú not only provided intimacy and Dieseldorff's daily needs, but facilitated language-learning and practical cultural know-how.⁴⁸ Through these experiences, Dieseldorff "learned to understand their [Maya] psychology."⁴⁹ Cú's and Dieseldorff's daughter, Matilde later became an essential asset in the administration of his large plantation complex and an advocate of the preservation of Q'eqchi' folklore.⁵⁰ By the time of Matilde's birth, Dieseldorff began to lose his enthusiasm for excavations, and instead focused his

⁴⁶ See Erwin Paul Dieseldorff, "Religión y Arte de los Mayas (Conclusión)," *Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia* V, no. 4 (Junio 1929): 337.

⁴⁷ Michaud, "Incidental" *Ethnographers*.

⁴⁸ Ricardo Terga, *Almas gemelas*; Arden King *Coban and the Verapaz*, 58–84, 224–68.

⁴⁹ Nández Falcón, "Erwin Paul Dieseldorff," 53.

⁵⁰Gibbings, "Another Race More Worthy of the Present," 526–31.

intellectual inquiries on Mayan art and religion, and its relation to the customs and religious practices of the Q'eqchi's of Alta Verapaz. He acquired a number of manuscripts on Q'eqchi' dance-dramas, as well as ancient land titles and wills, which he sought to use to better understand Q'eqchi' views on land tenure.⁵¹ Likewise, Dieseldorff also collected medicinal plants and herbs used by his laborers, and collaborated with Q'eqchi' shamans who resided on his plantations.⁵²

As he expanded his landholdings and relied increasingly on plantation administrators, Dieseldorff also advocated that these administrators become ethnographers. He instructed his administrators to spend time among Q'eqchi' workers and become accustomed to living in isolation from civilization. Above all else, Dieseldorff required his administrators to learn the Q'eqchi' language, so as to facilitate communication with workers as well as their understanding of Q'eqchi' culture.⁵³ David Sapper explained how Germans instructed new settlers in Q'eqchi: "In Alta Verapaz They [the Q'eqchi'] still strongly grasp onto their very respectable individuality and language, so that for whoever was going to deal with the Indians it was much more important to know Q'eqchi' than Spanish, the official language of the country. For this

⁵¹ Erwin P. Dieseldorff, "A Kekchí Will of 1583," *The Maya Society Quarterly* I, no. 2 (March 1932): 65–68," and TULAL DC, Draft of article entitled "Old Titles of the Quecchí Indians" (September 15, 1903). TULAL DC Finca Bound Volume 63 Folio 233.

⁵² Nández Falcón, "Erwin Paul Dieseldorff," 54, There are examples in TULAL DC finca records, but see especially, TULAL DC Medical Records Raxaha.

⁵³ TULAL DC Fincas Bound Volume 67, Folio 593 and 601, TULAL DC Fincas Bound Volume 82 Folio 586.

reason, Señor Dieseldorff wanted to teach [Jorge] Wagner and me the basic elements of this indigenous language and daily he gave us regular classes”⁵⁴ The ability to guide, direct, and understand Q’eqchi’s as laborers required more than linguistic skills, it also required both the careful observations of an ethnographer and ongoing intimate contact with their indigenous workers. In order to overcome Q’eqchi’s supposedly natural instinct of “distrust and suspicion that they feel towards those not of their race,” David Sapper noted it was “necessary to be in constant and intimate contact with *el indio* over a long period of time and to know with some perfection their mother tongue in order to conquer little by little their distrust and suspicion, and be able to familiarize oneself with their ways of thinking, with their strange mentalities and their manners of feeling.”⁵⁵

Like ethnographers, Dieseldorff advocated that administrators participate in the religious and cultural life of the resident laborers.⁵⁶ David Sapper, for example, claimed to have participated in a great part of indigenous communal life, from the administration of justice, to the provision of counsel and medicine, to the celebration of saints’ days.⁵⁷ Karl Kolth, one of Dieseldorff’s administrators, slaughtered a calf, arranged festivals and dances, and participated

⁵⁴ Sapper, unpublished memoir.

⁵⁵ Sapper, “Costumbres y creencias religiosas de los indios Queekchi,” *Academia Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala* 2, no. 2 (1926): 189.

⁵⁶TULAL DC Fincas Bound Volumes, Volume 78 Folio 948, Dieseldorff, *Der Kaffeebaum: Praktische Erfahrungen über seine Behandlung im nördlichen Guatemala*.

⁵⁷ Sapper, Unpublished memoirs.

enthusiastically in the rituals of excessive drink.⁵⁸ Paul Wirsing, another administrator, studied Q'eqchi' language and culture, and ultimately produced the first German-Q'eqchi' dictionary. Dieseldorff even published a short manual about coffee planting in northern Guatemala with a Berlin press. In the manual, Dieseldorff emphasized the need to administer justice and ensure peace. Dieseldorff also echoed David Sapper as he extolled plantation administrators to “be friendly and fair” so as “to win the hearts of the people.” Finally, he counseled potential coffee planters that, “their [indigenous peoples] religion must never be violated.”⁵⁹ By understanding indigenous norms and culture, he urged coffee planters to instill workers with self-surveillance, according to the specific indigenous cultures.⁶⁰ Dieseldorff himself judged the sincerity a worker’s claim of innocence based on their reference to a mountain spirit.⁶¹ The culmination of his decades of study were published in the three-volume work, *Kunst und Religion der*

⁵⁸ TULAL DC Fincas Bound Volumes, Volume 78 Folio 948, Folio 379, Volume 63 Folio 299, Volume 77 Folio 722 and 632, Volume 75 Folio 375, Volume 74 Folio 771. See also Alemán Bolaños, *Vida agrícola de Guatemala*, 24.

⁵⁹ Dieseldorff, *Der Kaffeebaum*, 33, 36.

⁶⁰ Dieseldorff, *Der Kaffeebaum*, 35–36.

⁶¹ Erwin Paul Dieseldorff, “Religión y Arte de los Mayas (Conclusión),” *Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia* V, no. 4 (Junio 1929): 443–44.

Mayavölker, several articles, and scholarly papers.⁶² By the 1920s, Dieseldorff inverted the logic: the modern, professional ethnographer should first reside among Mayas as a coffee planter.⁶³

Like Dieseldorff, Karl Sapper's interest in Q'eqchi' culture and history spanned well beyond a cosmopolitan curiosity in ethnic others, and was guided by practical concerns over how to establish prosperous German plantations in the region.⁶⁴ Like Dieseldorff, Karl Sapper was an administrator on his brother's plantation Campur and departed only a year before David Sapper arrived to quell a worker's rebellion. Subsequently, Karl worked for an official commission to establish geographic limits between Guatemala and Mexico, and then continued his geographic studies of the region. Karl Sapper hired Q'eqchi' guides to help him traverse Central America and Southern Mexico by foot between 1892 and 1900. During his travels, Sapper stayed in indigenous villages, taking note of indigenous habits, customs, and forms of life. He also

⁶² Dieseldorff, *Kunst und Religion der Mayavölker*, 3 v. (Berlin, 1926, 1931; Hamburg, 1933). Dieseldorff, "A Kekchi Will of 1583," *The Maya Society Quarterly*, I, 2 (March 1932), 65-68; Dieseldorff, "El Tzultacá y el Mam, los dioses prominentes de la religión Maya," *Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia*, II, 4 (July 1926), 378-386; Dieseldorff, "Wie waren die Tolteken?" *Sonder-Abdruck aus der Bastian-Festschrift* (Berlin, 1896), 415-418; Dieseldorff, "Extracto del libro antiguo que conserva la cofradía de Carcha," *Internationaler Amerikanisten-Kongress. Verivehnte Tagung*, Stuttgart, 1904 (Stuttgart 1906), 399-402.

⁶³ Dieseldorff, *Kunst und Religion* (1926), 6.

⁶⁴ Sapper, "Die Alta Verapaz (Guatemala): Eine Landeskundliche Skizze Mit Fünf Originalkarten," *Mitteilungen Der Geographischen Gesellschaft*.

witnessed the rituals his Q'eqchi' guides practiced as they passed through the territories governed by different mountain deities known as Tzuultaqa's. Intrigued to understand their cultural worlds, he asked his guides to explain their "pagan" gods and beliefs, and he recorded their prayers.⁶⁵ In addition to providing information on Maya religious customs, rituals, and commercial practices, Sapper advised German planters on soils and climates suitable for coffee production, and about how best to govern their plantations according to Q'eqchi' culture and history. Above all else, Sapper counseled: "one must first learn to understand the Indians."⁶⁶

Late nineteenth-century struggles over land and labor in Guatemala profoundly shaped German planters' turn to ethnography as practical knowledge for governing coffee plantation labor. As capitalist entrepreneurs, German coffee planters played a similar role to missionaries in the rise of anthropology and other human sciences elsewhere. As Stocking argued, "Anthropology needed the missionaries. The shift from amateur ethnographer to the professional fieldworker . . . was not possible without the help of the missionary ethnographers in the field."⁶⁷ While struggles over labor shaped their turn to ethnography, German settlers' use of ethnography also shaped their strategies for capital accumulation and plantation management. Writing in a popular German journal, Karl Sapper lamented the hardships endured by indigenous laborers as a result of the *mandamientos* and called for a different form of labor acquisition.⁶⁸ Instead of

⁶⁵ Sapper, *Das Nördliche Mittel-Amerika*.

⁶⁶ Sapper, *Das Nördliche Mittel-Amerika*, 129.

⁶⁷ Stocking, *Observers Observed*, 74–76.

⁶⁸ TULAL DC, Secol Box. Land sale document for Seacté (7 de junio de 1890).

relying on coercive, state-supplied mandamiento labor, he advocated for the patriarchal forms of governance found in plantations that housed a resident labor force, known as “fincas de mozos.”⁶⁹ Following Sapper’s advice, coffee planters in Alta Verapaz, especially Germans, established fincas de mozos. On fincas de mozos, rural Mayas exchanged the right to plant subsistence crops for a certain number of weeks of labor on coffee plantations.⁷⁰ Modeled on colonial haciendas, fincas de mozos offered a stable labor force as well as limited form of sovereignty and patriarchal governance that fit with German planters’ understandings of Alta Verapaz’s history and culture and their own desires to be respectable and moral patriarchs. These German ethnographic understandings of Q’eqchi’ culture also mirrored long-standing German fascinations with Bartolomé de las Casas, and the region’s own history of “peaceful conquest.”

Narratives of Conquest: Bartolomé de las Casas and the Good Father Finquero

Renowned for its pacification at the hands of the famous protector of Indians, the Dominican friar Bartolomé de las Casas, Alta Verapaz’s sixteenth-century history has often been

⁶⁹ Sapper, “Die Soziale Siedlung der Indianer in der Alta Verapaz, Guatemala,” *Petermans Mitteilungen*, 44–66.

⁷⁰ On fincas de mozos, see Gibbings, *Our Time is Now*, especially chapter 4; and David McCreery, *Rural Guatemala*, especially chapter 7. Fincas de mozos were much more prevalent in Alta Verapaz than elsewhere in Guatemala due to the fact that coffee production overlapped geographically with indigenous communities.

a flashpoint for struggles over the meaning of conquest and colonialism in Guatemala, as well as romanticized tropes of inter-ethnic harmony and projections for a future capitalist modernity.⁷¹ Q'eqchi's fierce resistance to Spanish conquistadores prompted Nahua allies of Spanish conquistadores to name the region Tezulutlan (Land of War). Armed with a philosophy of conversion rather than conquest, Dominican Friars negotiated the peaceable conversion of Mayas through dialogue and diplomacy with the great Q'eqchi' chief, Juan Matalbatz. As a result, Tezulutlan was rechristened Verapaz (True Peace). In the mid-nineteenth century, the Verapaz was divided into two departments, Alta and Baja Verapaz, and became the source of romantic portraits and national hopes for inter-ethnic harmony and prosperity for having been spared the Spanish conquest's racially degenerating effects. Nineteenth-century narrations of the peaceful conquest celebrated the peaceful and hardworking nature of Alta Verapaz's inhabitants and portrayed the region as the ideal landscape for capitalist ventures.⁷²

Las Casas also has a long history in German popular culture. According to Susanne Zantop, the *Brevisima Relación*— first translated and published in German in 1597— had by the early nineteenth century become a foundational fiction of Germany's colonial origins, and its special calling to colonize Latin America. Las Casas's indictment of the terrors of German colonialism in Spanish America, "*los animales alemanes*," was obsessively reworked until Germany's complicity in colonial atrocities was repressed in favor of a positive affirmation of

⁷¹ Kistler, "Discovering Aj Pop B'atz': Collaborative Ethnography and the Exploration of Q'eqchi' Personhood," Gibbings, "Another Race More Worthy of the Present," 1-15.

⁷² Julio Rossignon, *Porvenir de la Verapaz en la república de Guatemala*.

Germany's colonial propensity. This foundational fiction, according to Zantop, circumscribed German national identity by creating a national self as colonizer, so that in subsequent interpretations, Germany's failure in the Americas was transformed into a question: what if Germany had not failed in their first attempt? And what if they had another chance? This hypothetical inquiry then provided the grounds for new fantasies that were blueprints for a future.⁷³

Alta Verapaz's romantic history thus unsurprisingly inspired Germans, like Karl Sapper. German settlers narrated the story of the peaceful conquest as a parable for the contemporary conquest of capitalism, and represented some Germans as particularly suited to the task of restoring order, peace, and harmony with the native population and thereby naturalized their presence in the region. German settler's narratives in Alta Verapaz also bear striking resemblance to the fantasies of harmonious relations between Germans and their imagined colonial subjects that emerged in German popular culture in response to the independence movements in North America and the anti-colonial uprisings in the Caribbean and South America in the 1780s.⁷⁴ Like these iconic narratives, German settlers in Alta Verapaz rejected revolutionary solutions regarding governing Q'eqchi' laborers, such as the abolition of mandamientos, in favor of metaphors of familial and patriarchal relationships within and between nations that accepted the "natural order" as given. Erwin Paul Dieseldorff counseled

⁷³ Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies*, 18–30, 123–25, 138, 165, 179–80.

⁷⁴ See Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies*.

administrators to treat Q'eqchi' laborers as "children," just as David Sapper became "not only their patron," but their "padrecito."⁷⁵

In his first explorations of Guatemala in the 1890s, Karl Sapper re-enacted both the Spanish conquest and Bartolomé de las Casas' experiment in Alta Verapaz. Armed with Hernan Cortés's descriptions of conquest, Sapper traced Cortés's footsteps and recounted its history, remarking on the veracity of Cortés's descriptions and the effects of conversion and colonialism. Surrounding Lake Izabal, Sapper, for example, remarked that "the past cruelty of the Spaniards weighs like a heavy curse on these fertile countries and hinders their agricultural development."⁷⁶ As he travelled through Alta Verapaz, Sapper celebrated the enduring effects of peaceable conversion. He later concluded that: "the strength of these people [Q'eqchi' Mayas of Alta Verapaz] has remained outstanding because of the actions and ideas of Fray Bartolomé de las Casas about the best manner of Christian mission work and about the maintenance of racial purity."⁷⁷ When he passed through the northern town of Cahabon, Sapper narrated Spanish military efforts to conquer the remaining independent indigenous peoples in distant regions of the Verapaz and lamented how violence had unraveled Dominican efforts.⁷⁸ Sapper then noted that an alliance between the Maya nobility and benevolent Dominican friars established a new,

⁷⁵ Dieseldorff, *Der Kaffeebaum*, 33.

⁷⁶ Sapper, *Das Nördliche Mittel-Amerika*, 39, 30–59.

⁷⁷ TULAL DC Karl Sapper "Fray Bartolomé de las Casas und die Verapaz (Nordost-Guatemala)" *Baessler-Archiv* (1936): 107.

⁷⁸ Karl Sapper, *Verapaz in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*.

virtuous colony, where lofty missionary ideals could be realized in the harmonious unity of European and Indian.

Reflecting on the practical lessons offered by the region's past, Sapper also remarked that the peaceable conversion illustrated the Q'eqchi's specific need for a compassionate and loving father or husband. If Las Casas represented a morally superior alternative to brute rule, then his methods also revealed the true character of the Q'eqchi's and the means by which to govern them. "A calm and dignified bearing, at times firm and manly, will always have its effect upon the Indians as when, for instance, Fray Francisco Gallegos disarmed them by his courageous but low-key attitude when they opposed him armed with bows and arrows," noted Sapper.⁷⁹

According to Sappers account, at the hands of the brutish Spaniard conquistadors or harsh administrators, the Q'eqchi's unleashed naked savagery, but a compassionate patriarchal figure elicited their truly peaceful and submissive character, awaiting guidance and civilizing efforts.⁸⁰ By establishing a natural patriarchal order, the narrative of peaceful conquest was a vehicle for redemption that provided "good" conquerors with legitimate access to the region.

In his memoirs, David Sapper also revealed how the peaceful conquest tropes guided some Germans' self-understanding of their relations with Q'eqchi' laborers. Sapper's memoir

⁷⁹ Sapper, *Verapaz in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, 22.

⁸⁰ In a letter to his mother written shortly after his arrival, Erwin Paul Dieseldorff noted that "the people here are incredibly peaceful, they are almost like beasts of burden in this department called Alta Vera Paz, or the high lands of true peace." Erwin Paul Dieseldorff, Letter #9, November 22, 1888.

begins with an 1891 uprising among the Q'eqchi' inhabitants of his brother's newly titled coffee plantation, Campur, that mirrors narratives of the Spanish conquest. Sapper explained that the current plantation administrator, Ferdinand von Weyhe, "a ruined ex-official that had the fame of being a very strict and abusive patron," had incited the rebellion.⁸¹ According to Sapper, von Weyhe's harsh treatment of workers and his ignorance of indigenous language and customs engendered unjust punishments, erroneous translations, and intercultural misunderstandings. As a result, one fateful night, the villagers lit fire to the administrator's house and destroyed the symbols of their exploitation: coffee plants. Rather than send a military expedition to quell the uprising, Richard asked his cousin David to restore order. Like the great Indian protector Las Casas, Sapper won over the villagers of Campur through knowledge of the Q'eqchi' language, skillful diplomacy, and intercultural understanding. "With reasonable treatment and consideration," Sapper explained, "the people would have become accustomed little by little to the new circumstances because of their attachment to their small plots, but von Weyhe did not understand this and believed that through harsh and practically violent treatment he would somehow break the Indians' resistance." Like the violence deployed by Spaniards, David Sapper noted von Weyhe's violent actions were "the worst thing he [von Weyhe] could have done. . . . von Weyhe believed that he could remedy this situation by forcing an increase in the amount of work required, but through coercive means and with frequent physical punishment he only achieved the opposite result and awoke a growing unease and dissatisfaction among the

⁸¹ Sapper, unpublished memoir.

workers.⁸² By contrast, Sapper listened to Q'eqchi' laborer's complaints and made a "violent military expedition" to the region unnecessary through compromise and mutual understanding. As a result, Sapper won the laborer's trust and he became like their father.

Both Karl and David Sapper's narratives illustrate how German fictional romances of the late-eighteenth century between conqueror and native princess, loving master and obedient slave, embodied in characters like Inle and Yariko, John Smith, Pocahontas, and Alonso and Cora, also found their counterpart in the fabled history of the "peaceful" conquest of Tezulutan. In these narratives, Germans envisioned harmonious relations based on "love," governed by the patriarchal affection and subjection of the weaker to the stronger. Romantic narratives allowed Germans to imagine for themselves a special role in frontier colonization where others, including "bad" Germans, had failed; and new partnerships between Q'eqchi's and Germans would lead German protagonists to cultivate fertile fields and fertile concubines. The good-father planter, just like Las Casas, could unveil the peaceful Q'eqchi' nature, ready to be molded into a submissive labor force. "While, for example, in southern Guatemala almost everywhere a tolerably strict [labor] regime can be maintained, in the Alta Verapaz, the planter must adapt himself, as much as possible, to the more or less patriarchal discipline; the Indians of the latter locality say of their master, that 'he lives as a father among them,' and expect a corresponding treatment from him; and here especially it is important to learn the native language of the

⁸² Sapper, unpublished memoir.

Indians, since through translation of the interpreters many misunderstandings arise, which may engender ill feeling,” Karl Sapper noted.⁸³

Images of patriarchal affection between planter and worker and the promise of founding respectable, moral, and civilizing families abroad were central organizing metaphors and models for German settlers in Alta Verapaz. The Germans’ sense superiority as colonizer was grounded in more than just the fantasy that Germans had preserved themselves from the moral embarrassment of the conquest. As Woodruff Smith has argued, their sense of superiority also stemmed from their rationale for colonialism based not on conquest, but rather the desire to found civilized families abroad as replicas of such families in Germany.⁸⁴ The familial metaphor was a key reference point for the settler variety of colonial ideology, which was characteristic of Germany. The family model not only legitimated the colonizing enterprise as an educating and civilizing venture where Europeans uplifted the natives, but the civilizing process could also work in the opposite direction, so that the European character would become more self-aware, more capable, and even more ethical as a result of the European’s position as a colonial master. Claims to understand Q’eqchi’ culture and possess ethnographic skills thus distinguished between people who could transform the landscape into a productive enterprise, and those who were less capable of the task. In short, ethnographic acuity, like in German Somoa as described by George Steinmeitz, became a kind of cultural capital in Alta Verapaz that helped German

⁸³ Sapper, *Das Nördliche Mittel-Amerika*, 223.

⁸⁴ Smith, “Colonialism and the Culture of Respectability,” in *Germany’s Colonial Pasts*, 3–20.

settlers to assert their privileged role in the region, and to harness discourses that racialized Mayas as submissive laborers.⁸⁵

As scholars have amply demonstrated for a variety of national and civilizing projects, national and colonial elites often employed familial and patriarchal tropes to shore up ties between rulers and ruled, and patriarchal authority could also serve as a model for good governance.⁸⁶ These metaphors were, on the one hand, powerful discourses that elicited notions of obligation, duty, rights, and loyalty. Yet, planter's concerns with the familial sentiments that bound planter and worker were not only metaphors. Planter's attention to affective bonds was also a strategy of governance, often a calculated effort to direct and shape proper conduct, to foster good work habits, and to cultivate fidelity and obedience.⁸⁷ While German settlers like Dieseldorff often claimed to be loving fathers, the relationships between German planters and Maya laborers were also guided by fear, dependency, and sometimes violence.

German's Las-Casas-style patriarchal governance was, in practice, a tentative and unstable project, whose efficacy and legitimacy depended on repeated performances of violence, as well as fatherly affection. The planter-laborer relationships that constituted space in the plantation were at once both intimate and violent, while coffee planters' exercise of sovereignty

⁸⁵ Steinmetz, *The Devil's Handwriting*.

⁸⁶ Lynn Hunt, *The Family Romance of the French Revolution*.

⁸⁷ Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*.

was always partial, incomplete, and unsettling.⁸⁸ German coffee planters may have celebrated annual festivities alongside their workers, but their plantations were also defined by jail cells and whipping posts and workers purportedly believed they were required to work off their debt in the afterlife. Workers also lived in fear of a mysterious half-man, half-cow who roamed the plantation at night, stealing from the workers to enrich the planter.⁸⁹ German settlers also helped to instill fear and relations of dependency as they sought to graft capitalist relations onto indigenous culture. Q'eqchi's responded by reshaping their own social and cultural worlds in an often-trenchant critique of plantation life.

Ethnographic Knowledge, Violence, and Racial Capitalism

Karl Sapper's appropriation of the narrative peaceful conquest, including the iconic figure of Bartolomé de las Casas, helped to naturalize German presence in the region. Much beyond representing themselves as "good father finqueros" in the likes of Las Casas, or practicing ethnography by learning Q'eqchi' and participating in ritual life, some German settlers used the territorial space of the plantation to strategically graft a new set of capitalist relations onto indigenous culture. German-owned fincas de mozos were also the product of a particular diffusionist model of social change, popular in Germany in the 1890s. Both Karl Sapper and Erwin Paul Dieseldorff paid particular attention to cultural and linguistic boundaries, because

⁸⁸See, Gibbings, *Our Time is Now*, especially chapter 4, and Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, eds, *Sovereign Bodies*.

⁸⁹ Gibbings, *Our Time is Now*, chapter 4 and Hilary E. Kahn, *Seeing and Being Seen*.

they were interested in tracing the movement of different cultures across the earth's surface in order to understand how people culturally adapted to new environments and to predict future social and cultural change. Since they also envisioned racial traits as deriving from historically and culturally distinct geographies, rather than seeking to destroy indigenous patriarchal customs they worked through and with indigenous systems of authority and tradition, at once facilitating their endurance and provoking new relations of power.⁹⁰ German coffee planters-cum-ethnographers thus sought stability by adapting to existing cultural norms and geographies. By understanding Q'eqchi's' true nature, language, and history and reproducing it on fincas de mozos, German settlers imagined they would be best able to govern Q'eqchi's, and ultimately shape and manage their sentiments so as to produce a reliable and hard-working labor force. By the second decade of the twentieth century, fincas de mozos were commonplace in Alta Verapaz. According to the 1921 census, the percentage of rural population living in fincas de mozos was as high as 70 per cent.⁹¹ The relationship between ethnographic production and plantation life, ultimately, also shaped the anti-communist impulses of twentieth-century Guatemalan anthropology.

⁹⁰ Smith, *Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany*, chapter 8.

⁹¹ *Censo de la República de Guatemala*, 472-473. These numbers, like all state-collected statistics from the time, likely under-counted the numbers of actual laborers as coffee planters refused to permit state officials on their plantations, and thus self-reported numbers. Coffee planters also had a vested interest in under-counting numbers.

Guided by a diffusionist model of social change and an interest in expanding profitable enterprises, German coffee planters not only studied Maya art and artefacts, or even their prayers, but they also intimately studied Q'eqchi' social and economic practices. Drawing on his ethnographic studies of old Maya land titles, knowledge of Q'eqchi' settlement patterns, and commercial relations, Erwin Paul Dieseldorff actively forged fincas de mozos out of Q'eqchi' social, political, economic, and cultural worlds. Karl Sapper also wrote extensively not only on Q'eqchi' history and beliefs, but also on their agricultural production, artisanry, commercial practices, trade routes, and governance structures. From these observations, Sapper advocated the formation of fincas de mozos. These fincas de mozos were desirable, Sapper argued, because Spanish colonial system had preserved Maya hereditary structures and laws, including reciprocal labor obligations. Germans then, Sapper noted, should purchase of large parcels of land in order to ensure that the new landowner also possessed the obligatory labor of the residents, which was based on Maya custom. In exchange for small wages and the right to plant corn, resident laborers worked twelve days a month for a daily wage of two reales.⁹² In great detail, Sapper discussed the materials needs of the average Q'eqchi' family and how those needs could be satisfied, in order to make clear how dependent rural Q'eqchi's in Alta Verapaz were becoming on wage labor, especially during Guatemala's hyper-inflationary decade beginning in 1899.⁹³ These relations of dependency helped to lock Q'eqchi' laborers to the plantation and to solidify their loyalty to the German planter. German settlers in Guatemala built and managed their fincas de

⁹² Karl Sapper, *Das Nördliche Mittel-Amerika*, 277–78.

⁹³ Sapper, “Die Alta Verapaz,” 120-122.

mozos then not by eradicating Q'eqchi' social relations and cultural practices, but rather by grafting capitalist relations onto pre-existing cultures and practices. Indeed, sixteenth-century Spanish colonial officials also used of ethnographic knowledge to adapt to pre-existing political, economic, and cultural worlds.⁹⁴

Germans settlers sought in particular to model their new plantations upon Q'eqchi' patriarchal models of land distribution and reciprocal labor obligations. Q'eqchi' patriarchs, as elders and heads of ethnic clans, administered local justice, distributed subsistence land, organized work on communal projects, and sponsored annual religious celebrations. On new *fincas de mozos*, Erwin Paul Diesledorff charged his administrators with overseeing the same tasks. The plantation administrators' new role as a kind of head of the clan can also be seen in David Sapper's memoir, where he claimed to become the "pequeño gran padre." The integration of the administrator into Q'eqchi' cultural life may also have been fairly extensive. Karl Sapper, for example, noted that when a foreigner wanted to sow a corn field, Q'eqchi' plantation officials would perform the necessary prayers and rituals in "silent representation of the European planter," as they might have for a Q'eqchi' patriarch.⁹⁵ By replicating Q'eqchi' patriarchal structures as best they could, coffee planters attempted to stabilize an imagined corpus of Maya custom and to protect Mayas against induction into a culture-leveling version of capitalist

⁹⁴ See for example, Jeremy Ravi Mumford, *Vertical empire: The general resettlement of Indians in the colonial Andes* (Duke University Press, 2012)

⁹⁵ Sapper, "Religious Customs and Beliefs of the Q'eqchi' Indians," 38.

modernity. In this respect German coffee planters engaged in a kind of salvage ethnography, whereby they attempted to preserve elements of a supposedly disappearing culture. Unlike German Samoa described by George Steinmetz, however, planters in Alta Verapaz did not rely upon imported workers to labor in their plantations, but instead attempted to reproduce Maya customs as best they could. While scholars like Dipesh Chakrabarty have often understood cultural difference and spirit worlds as resistant to the march of the universalizing practices of capitalism, German ethnographers-cum-coffee planters actively sought to yoke this cultural difference into the formation of productive and profitable enterprises.

At the same time, Q'eqchi's may have harnessed Q'eqchi' cultural and spiritual traditions to offer commentary on, and sometimes overt resistance to, German-owned fincas de mozos. Reading against the grain of German ethnographic writings and plantations practices, it might be possible to catch glimpses of how Q'eqchi's sought to carve out spaces of cultural autonomy and to imagine different political and economic worlds. German settlers were frequently troubled by Maya shaman, whom they labelled as "witches." The influence of these shamans, they claimed, was at times considerable. Germans, like Dieseldorff, warned that they could instigate "insubordinations," and indeed the 1886 frost itself was a historical marker of the power of millennial interpretations of the "evils of coffee production."⁹⁶ Erwin Paul Dieseldorff advised his administrators to jail troublesome "witches" before they could initiate worker uprisings.⁹⁷ Germans may have feared that witches harnessed Maya spirituality to offer radical political

⁹⁶ Franz Termer, *Etnología y etnografía en Guatemala*, 194

⁹⁷ Dieseldorff, *Kunst und Religion* (1926), 17-20.

alternatives to life on plantations, or they may have racially coded Q'eqchi' political agitators as dangerous irrational others. Likewise, the half-man, half-cow that roamed plantations at night, stealing from workers to enrich the planter, may also offer a Q'eqchi' interpretation of the forms of capital accumulation and moral perversion that marked Alta Verapaz's plantation capitalism.⁹⁸

German ethnographies can also be carefully read for Q'eqchi' commentary on the changes occurring with plantation life. When Karl Sapper observed that Q'eqchi's imagined the Christian God as a white person, who runs a plantation in the afterlife "similar to those that the Europeans own in Alta Verapaz," he may have been highlighting a Q'eqchi' interpretation of the all-encompassing potency of German-owned plantations. Similarly, the German observation that Q'eqchi' debts accrued on plantations followed them into the afterlife, may very well have been a Q'eqchi' commentary on the inescapable reality of their dependency on indebted wage labor. "In contrast to the earthly plantations, where they never see the day when they have paid off all advances," Sapper noted that the Q'eqchi's "hope for a better deal in the next world. There, sooner or later, they would be rid of their debts and would be allowed to listen on the porch as the angels inside the house of god play for him on their celestial instruments (violins, guitars, and harps)." Nonetheless, even in the afterlife, the hierarchies of race and civilization would prohibit the Q'eqchi' from thinking "he would be allowed inside the house of the Christian god."⁹⁹

According to Sapper, German coffee planters became like gods to Q'eqchi' workers. When read

⁹⁸ On this, see Gibbings, *Our Time is Now*, especially chapter 4.

⁹⁹ Sapper, "Religious Customs and Beliefs of the Q'eqchi' Indians," 37. Sapper, *Das Nördliche Mittel-Amerika*, 277-278.

from the perspective of a Q'eqchi', the blending of life on earth and the afterlife, alongside the potent hierarchies of race and civilization, may reveal Q'eqchi' interpretations of the inescapable and exclusionary violence of plantation life itself. Here Maya interpretations of plantation life might have offered the most trenchant critique of capitalism and plantation colonies, and even at times provided political and economic alternatives. What Dipesh Chakrabarty calls History 2, composed of particular life worlds could, but did not necessarily, mark the limits of capitalism's universalizing tendencies. Rather, capitalism could easily adapt to and appropriate aspects of indigenous culture, while these same appropriations may have provided venues for subaltern actors to critique capitalism itself. As such, these cultural differences were hardly static, essential embodiments of otherness.

For many German planters in Alta Verapaz, *fincas de mozos* also constituted a space wherein their entitlements as bearers of civilization translated into sovereignty. Karl Sapper, for example, noted that the government, when it awarded title to land, granted "some of its [the state's] sovereign rights." Since the plantation owner was responsible for appointing local representatives of the state on their plantation, he explained that the coffee planter was awarded a "kind of limited self-government."¹⁰⁰ Viewing this system favorably, Sapper recognized that such planter sovereignty allowed Europeans to form "truly patriarchal relations [with] Indians."¹⁰¹ In these same passages, Sapper placed Guatemala's German "planter-colony" within the broader German imperial context. He openly lamented that Germans in Guatemala

¹⁰⁰ Sapper, "Die Soziale Stellung der Indianer," 45.

¹⁰¹ Sapper, "Die Soziale Stellung der Indianer," 45.

lacked the political backing of the German state. Even more, Sapper proposed that the German colonial state could learn from its planter-settlers about the effective establishment of plantations and governance in the tropics.¹⁰² Guatemala's German "planter-colony," according to Sapper, shared historical genealogies with formal colonies like British India and German New Guinea. Like other colonies, the plantation in Alta Verapaz was considered a cordoned off and designated space where Germans settlers, but not the German state, realized a partial sovereignty.¹⁰³

The partial sovereignty of German planter-colonies, and the production of ethnographic knowledge and representations, were also central to the stabilization of a racial capitalism. Above all else, German planters relied upon racialized representation and affective politics, ideology and cultural capital to distinguish between new social classes of capitalist entrepreneurs, administrators, and rural laborers. Ethnography, as practiced on plantations, helped German planters represent Q'eqchi's as cultural others and plantation laborers who were doomed to lose their unique culture to the onward march of civilization, and thus required special protections that only planters could offer.¹⁰⁴ Karl Sapper, for example, argued that Q'eqchi's outside of plantations would eventually no longer "follow in the footsteps of their fathers." While Sapper genuinely lamented this cultural loss, he believed *fincas de mozos* could shield against

¹⁰² Sapper, "Die Alta Verapaz (Guatemala): Eine Landeskundliche Skizze Mit Fünf Originalkarten," 1–5..

¹⁰³ Ann Laura Stoler, "Colony" in *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*, <http://www.politicalconcepts.org/issue1/colony/>.

¹⁰⁴ "La Prosperidad de Alemania" *Diario de Centroamerica*, 7 de octubre de 1902.

such loss by maintaining Q'eqchi' cultural traditions and languages and by preserving their isolation from urban centers and ladinos. The desire to “salvage” Maya culture also meant preserving Maya’s status as laborers. In the early 1920s, Dieseldorff complained about legislation requiring plantations to educate the children of resident workers. “Of what value is it to a mozo to be able to read and write, or to know about history and geography?” he asked. “Is it not true,” Dieseldorff continued, “that giving the Indian classes a higher education than their social position merits only serves to disrupt their work? We have learned from experience that Indians who have learned to read and write is no longer useful as agricultural workers . . . We need workers who is content with their social status, not an abundance of learned persons who look upon manual labor with arrogant disdain.”¹⁰⁵ Preserving Mayas as laborers meant protecting them from the influences, even via literacy, of the “outside world.”

Ethnographic knowledge and skills also had social and symbolic capital for Germans that helped to maintain their status as plantation owners and to legitimize their presence in Guatemala. Erwin Paul Dieseldorff was known as *Herr Doktor*. For Germans, like Dieseldorff, who actively participated in intellectual circles, ethnographic acuity and archaeological writings translated into prestige in Germany, Guatemala, and elsewhere. In the 1920s and 1930s, Germans like Erwin Paul Dieseldorff, Karl and David Sapper began publishing their works for Guatemalan audiences. Confronted by anti-German nationalism and popular movements demanding Maya rights, Erwin Paul Dieseldorff and David Sapper became advocates for the popularization of knowledge about the nation’s Maya population and participants in Guatemala’s

¹⁰⁵ Nández Falcón, “Erwin Paul Dieseldorff,” 344.

liberal indigenista movement.¹⁰⁶ Erwin Paul Dieseldorff, David Sapper, and subsequently Franz Termer subverted the more radical aims of some ladino and Maya indigenistas. For German settlers, indigenismo concerned the preservation and celebration of indigenous languages, traditions, and folklore, rather than the expansion of Maya rights or the end of coerced labor. In fact, German settler's version of indigenismo fit neatly alongside the indigenismo of Guatemala's famed "Generation of 20."¹⁰⁷ Many of these same generation of 20 also looked to

¹⁰⁶ Dieseldorff, "La Arqueología de la Alta Verapaz y los Problemas de los Estudios Mayas," *Academia Sociedad de Geografía e Historia de Guatemala* XIII (1936): 183–91; Dieseldorff, "Religión y Arte de los Mayas (Conclusión)," *Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia* V, no. 4 (Junio 1929): 432–53, Dieseldorff, "Religión y Arte de los Mayas," *Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia* V, no. 1 (1928): 66–85, Dieseldorff, "Religión y Arte de los Mayas (Continuación)," *Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia* V, no. 2 (Diciembre 1928): 184–203, Dieseldorff, *Las plantas medicinales del Departamento de Alta Verapaz*, Sapper, "Costumbres y creencias religiosas de los indios Queckchi," Sapper, "La Población Autóctona de América Central," *Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia* IV, no. 4 (Junio 1928): 334–43.

¹⁰⁷ See for example Casaús Arzú, "El binomio degeneración-regeneración en las corrientes positivistas y racialistas de principios del siglo XX: De la eugenesia al exterminio del indio en la generación de 1920 en Guatemala," *Mesoamérica*; Casaus Arzú, "La generación del 20 en Guatemala y sus imaginarios de nación (1920–1940)," in *Las Redes Intelectuales Centroamericanas*, 253–90; Denis Floyd Casey, "Indigenismo: The Guatemalan Experience."

German immigrants for the solution to the nation's ills. Nobel Laureate Miguel Ángel Asturias, for example, argued the only solution for Guatemala was the disappearance of Mayas through miscegenation and the further colonization of Guatemala with immigrants from Switzerland, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands.¹⁰⁸ Even members of Guatemala's radical Unionist party, which had led the overthrow of the dictator Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920), advocated the model of plantation patriarchy found in Alta Verapaz's fincas de mozos. The system of fincas de mozos in Alta Verapaz, one intellectual argued "pleases the Indian by giving them lands to plant themselves in exchange for services," and had "given excellent results."¹⁰⁹

As German settlers participated in Guatemala's indigenismo, a new generation of German ethnographers affirmed many of the conclusions of their predecessors. In the late 1920s, Franz Termer, a student of Karl Sapper, travelled by foot throughout Guatemala remarking on Maya culture and history. Like his mentor, Termer's goal was "to construct a total picture of the living conditions of the indigenous population and establish what have been the historical bases of their evolution."¹¹⁰ Termer was also concerned that his "investigations have the effect of salvaging indigenous cultural remains."¹¹¹ Even more than his predecessors, Termer lamented Maya's cultural loss, alcoholism, and racial degeneration due to racial mixing and cultural

¹⁰⁸ Asturias, 'Sociología guatemalteca: El problema social del indio.'

¹⁰⁹"El Redención del Indio" *El Federal*, No. 10 14 de Julio de 1920, 30 d julio de 1920 no. 12, 10 de agosto de 1920 no. 13.

¹¹⁰ Termer, *Etnología y etnografía en Guatemala*, ix.

¹¹¹ Termer, *Etnología y etnografía en Guatemala*, xviii.

proximity with ladinos brought about by new modes of transportation and commercial expansion.¹¹² For Termer, the solution to cultural loss and racial degeneration was still German-owned fincas de mozos, where rural Mayas could maintain their customs of living in dispersed huts away from the influences of ladinos and practice a combination of subsistence agriculture and paid wage labor.¹¹³ Echoing Dieseldorff, Termer advocated that coffee planters “be friendly and fair in their dealings with laborers.”¹¹⁴ Termer, however, regretted his study’s limitations, since knowing Mayas required more intimate contact. To solve this problem, Termer advocated that ethnographers first become coffee planters: “Only people who live for years among the Indians and in intimate contact with them is able to obtain more details. In this way, Erwin Paul Dieseldorff’s observation is very much on point when he says that in Guatemala the modern ethnographer must reside as a businessman, storekeeper, or planter learning at the same time the indigenous languages.”¹¹⁵ Like Dieseldorff, Termer also cautioned that indigenous peoples were susceptible to the socialism taking root in neighboring Mexico and called for future ethnographic studies to examine indigenous ethno-politics so as to halt its spread.¹¹⁶ The intimate ties between coffee planting capitalism and ethnography helped to shape its anti-socialist, and eventually anti-communist turn.

¹¹² Termer, *Etnología y etnografía en Guatemala*, xviii

¹¹³ Termer, *Etnología y etnografía en Guatemala*, 250-51.

¹¹⁴ Termer, *Etnología y etnografía en Guatemala*, 251-252

¹¹⁵ Termer, *Etnología y etnografía en Guatemala*, 155.

¹¹⁶ Termer, *Etnología y etnografía en Guatemala*, 249.

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

¹¹⁷ Peter Pels and Oscar Salemink, "Introduction: Five Theses on Ethnography as Colonial Practice," 3.

¹¹⁸ Jorge Ramón González Ponciano, "The 'Indigenous Problem,' Cold War U.S. Anthropology and Revolutionary Nationalism," in *Out from the Shadow*.

coup. By the 1970s, anthropological support for anti-communist counter-insurgency helped to spur anthropology's critique of colonialism.¹¹⁹

Conclusion

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

In Alta Verapaz, however, German ethnographers also illustrate other aspects of the history of social sciences and ethnographic knowledge, namely the more functionalist role of ethnographic practices and representations in the rise of capitalism on indigenous frontiers. These ethnographic practices blur the boundaries between colonial and non-colonial forms of knowledge production, and the kinds of sovereignty Germans forged on plantations asks us to consider the many genealogies of what counts as a colony. While German ethnographers were influenced by "precolonial fantasies" or "precolonial representations" of the peaceful conquest and Bartolomé de las Casas forged in Germany, their desire to use ethnographic knowledge to govern the Q'eqchi's was born of the confluence of specific experiences of Germans in coffee

¹¹⁹ Eric R. Wolf and Joseph G. Jorgensen, "Anthropology and the Warpath in Thailand," *New York Review of Books* 15, 19-11-1970, 26-35.

plantations in Guatemala. In particular, the late-nineteenth-century struggles over land and labor and German-face-to-face interactions with Maya laborers shaped German coffee planters' turn to ethnography. The desires to possess ethnographic knowledge, to place their planter-colonies in the broader, comparative European imperial context, and to become good-father finqueros were also much more than simply discursive strategies and fantasies. They also gave rise to real practices and shaped how some Germans approached the management of coffee plantations.

Attending to this historical context requires critical analysis of experiences of German coffee planters and Maya laborers. Through a careful reading, we can see how self-representations as good father finqueros belies an underlying racism and violence, and eventually anti-socialism and anti-communism. Ethnographic knowledge played a central role in the rise of capitalism, just as cultural difference was not conceived of as an impediment to wage labor but as integral to it. German coffee planters-cum- ethnographers in Alta Verapaz, thus ask us to move beyond the debate in subaltern studies about whether cultural difference marked resistance to the universalizing tendencies of capitalism. While at times Q'eqchi's drew upon their spiritual and cultural worlds to resist and critique coffee capitalism, cultural difference itself was not innately a reservoir of resistance to the expansion of capital and proletarianization. Rather, German settlers frequently understood cultural difference as the grounds for forging prosperous plantations and submissive laborers. When read against the grain, these ethnographic writings may also suggest Q'eqchi' agency and perhaps Q'eqchi' critiques of the plantation economy itself. Like more recent scholarship on rethinking alternative modernities, I argue that cultural

difference was at the foundations of a varied and distinct capitalisms.¹²⁰ German ethnographic practices destabilize the boundaries between diasporic and colonial knowledge production, as well as academic and capitalist practices. The historical legacy of the relationship between ethnography and capitalism also shaped the subsequent rise of Guatemala's own anti-communist anthropological tradition.

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¹²⁰ See for example, the AHR forum on modernity, and especially, Carol Gluck, "The End of Elsewhere: Writing Modernity Now," *The American Historical Review*, Volume 116, Issue 3, June 2011, Pages 676–687, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.116.3.676>

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