German History Vol. 34, No. 2, pp. 214–236

Mestizaje in the Age of Fascism: German and Q'eqchi' Maya Interracial Unions in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala*

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The German filmmakers Uli Stezlner and Thomas Walther may have suspected that their documentary film, *Die Zivilisationsbringer/Los Civilizadores* (1998), would ruffle a few feathers among Guatemala's German diasporas, when the film premiered two years after Guatemala's thirty-six-year genocidal civil war came to an official close.[1] They were scarcely prepared, however, for their film equipment to be stolen and for team members to be threatened, or for the reaction that they would receive from Q'eqchi' Mayas of German descent in the northern department of Alta Verapaz. The documentary was bound to be controversial: the film exploded received national narratives that either leave out German immigrants altogether, or present them as apostles of national progress. Yet, few would expect the array of emotional reactions that followed the public screening in Alta Verapaz, a region transformed not only by the settlement of German coffee planters from the 1860s, but also by state-sponsored genocide in the late twentieth-century. In the city of Cobán's jam-packed town hall, stories of rape by German coffee plantation administrators and conditions of virtual slavery bled into more recent blood-soaked memories of the genocide. In the midst of these denunciations of German 'colonialism', a woman of Q'eqchi' Maya and German descent stood up in the crowd and announced, 'I want to give a voice to those of us in the middle. To those of us who are half *indio*, half German, and half I don't know what: of us who are the improved race (*la raza mejorada*)'.[2] In a single instant, this daring Q'eqchi'-German woman revived a nostalgic narrative harkening back to the eve of World War II, a time when German immigration was seen as the racial solution to Guatemala's stalled development. Upon closer analysis, the notion of hybrid Q'eqchi'-Germans also unravels dichotomous interpretations of German 'colonialism' in Guatemala and *a priori* assumptions of German diasporic political and social insularity.

A eugenic concept, the 'improved race' seems jarringly out of place in Guatemala's postgenocide reckoning. Yet, it is not uncommon to hear urban, middle-class German-Q'eqchi's in Alta Verapaz claiming identities as 'the improved race' and thus staking a place for themselves in a postwar social order where Maya ethnic revitalization has

* The author would like to thank Guntra Aistara, Paul D. Jenkins, Jennifer Lee Johnson, Florencia E. Mallon, H. Glenn Penny and Steve J. Stern as well as the attendees at the German Studies Association 2013 meeting, the 2011–2012 fellows at Humanities Institute at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the two anonymous reviewers for their comments on this article. Funding for research was generously provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

[1] Uli Stelzner and Thomas Walther, *Los civilizadores: Alemanes en Guatemala* (Alemania, 1998). Stelzner and Walther produced a second documentary about the screening of the documentary in Guatemala from which this discussion is drawn, see *Las aventuras de una gata: Apuntes de una proyección en tiempos de postguerra* (Alemania, 2000).

[2] Stelzner and Walther, *Las aventuras de una gata*.

 doi:10.1093/gerhis/ghw017 Advance Access publication 28 March 2016

left some non-Mayas (*ladinos*) feeling like they lack an authentic identity or tradition.[3] The resurgence of the 'improved race' in postwar Guatemala resurrects a unique racial mixing (*mestizaje*) project that took hold in Guatemala in the interwar period when Guatemalan statesmen and intellectuals looked to German–Maya sexual unions as the racial solution to Guatemala's failure to develop a modern, unified nation state. While Guatemala's *mestizaje* project has been long neglected in historical scholarship, the 'improved race' is also jarring in another way: it challenges the myth of German diasporic insularity in Latin America. As Sana Aijar has argued for the Indian diaspora in South Asia, there is a pervasive myth that diasporas were socially and politically insular.[4] This a priori assumption of diasporic insularity is particularly prevalent among scholars of German diasporic communities in Latin America, resulting in a focus on the internal social and economic organization of German communities in Latin America. This myth of German diasporic insularity has obscured the intimate relationships Germans forged with non-Germans in Latin America and the political, material and social importance of these ties. Yet, as scholars of colonial empire have demonstrated, the definition of 'European' selves was both produced and transgressed through the management of sex and particularly interracial sex.[5] This emphasis on internal organization and insularity has, in turn, resulted in a privileging of territorially or ethnically bounded narratives, rather than on transnational connections among Germans abroad or among Germans and non-Germans. As 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.[6] This article argues that breaking open the myth of insularity reveals not only a diversity of German diasporas who maintained competing ethnic and national affiliations, but also that what and who counted as 'German' was constantly changing and the subject of considerable debate with important political consequences.

Guatemala's 'improved race' mirrored contemporary nationalist ideologies of *mestizaje* that celebrated the new *mestizo* race born of Spanish and Indian blood, and that circulated across Latin America in the aftermath of the 1910 Mexican Revolution and World War I. The leading light of the Guatemalan lettered bourgeoisie, Nobel laureate Miguel Ángel Asturias, for example, was inspired by the new, 'robust' Q'eqchi'-German race in Alta Verapaz, and proposed racial whitening through the colonization of Guatemala with immigrants from Switzerland, Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands as a solution to Guatemala's failure to become a nation.[7] Another intellectual called for national 'redemption through the fertilization of our Indian women with Saxon semen!'[8] Yet, the 'improved race' did not endure nearly as long as other ideologies of *mestizaje*. As the

[3] Charles A. Hale, *Más Que un Indio: Racial Ambivalence and Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Guatemala* (Santa Fe, New Mexico, 2006).

[4] Sana Aijar, *Indians in Kenya: The Politics of Diaspora* (Cambridge, Mass., 2015).

[5] This literature is by now large, see for example, Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power* (Berkeley, 2002).

[6] Stefan Manz, *Constructing a German Diaspora: The 'Greater German Empire', 1871–1914* (Routledge, 2014), pp.6–7.

[7] Miguel Ángel Asturias, 'Sociología guatemalteca: El problema social del indio' (Dissertation Thesis, Universidad de Nacional de Guatemala, 1921).

[8] Cited in Joseph A. Pitti, 'Jorge Ubico and Guatemalan Politics in the 1920s' (Ph.D. Thesis, University of New Mexico, 1975), p. 217.

Guatemalan national project of the 'improved race' reached its peak in the mid-1930s, Germans and their mixed-race offspring confronted another set of nationalist pressures and questions. Nazi Party officials raised concerns about the racial and political status of interracial children and began to place pressure on German settlers to secure 'proper' German wives, which had also long been a symbol of prestige in Guatemala. Germans responded in diverse ways. Some went to Germany to find a 'proper' German wife, or returned home permanently, giving rise to a discourse of 'abandoned' Guatemalan children and mothers and feelings of betrayal as Guatemalan mixed-race families were relegated to the status of 'second families'. Others, confounding distinctions between Germans and Guatemalans, sent their mixed-race children back to Germany to participate in the Hitler Youth, or even participated in a bourgeoning, home-grown antifascist movement that would eventually overthrow the Guatemalan government in 1944.

Growing anti-German sentiment in Guatemala coincided with the expansion of popular resistance to the Napoleon-loving Guatemalan dictator, Jorge Ubico, which increasingly articulated itself as part of a global struggle against fascism, at home and abroad.[9] Indeed, by the time the antifascist movement overthrew Ubico in Guatemala's famed 1944 'October Revolution', Guatemala had already entered the war on the side of the Allied Forces and begun intervening German properties and interning Germans who appeared on US elaborated 'black lists'. As the situation of Germans and their racially mixed families radically altered, so did the nationalist ideal of the 'improved race'. Where the Nobel laureate Miguel Ángel Asturias had once shouted 'new blood!' he now wrote literature that celebrated Maya culture and helped define Guatemala's democratic socialist revolution.[10] Where German immigrants had once been celebrated for racially improving the population, they now faced deportation or internment in the United States. Where Germans had once been hailed as harbingers of national progress, they now found their properties intervened (managed by the Guatemalan government) and their assets frozen. By the mid-1940s, the 'improved race' had virtually disappeared from the national imagination.

The rise and fall of the improved race, and the debates about who counted as 'German', underscore not only the deep social and political ties of German diasporas in Guatemala, but also the importance of interracial unions to the articulation of both German and Guatemalan nationalisms. In moving the study of German diasporas in Latin America beyond their business practices and associational life to explore nationalisms and ethnic affiliations across territorial boundaries and in taking seriously political and social ties with non-Germans, it is possible to think of a new approach to analysing diasporic politics and nationalisms that places them squarely in the transnational space between homeland and hostland, and in the process highlights the potent racialized hierarchies dividing 'civilized' and 'uncivilized' nations.

Drawing on a combination of oral and archival sources, this article examines first the historical background to the development of a Guatemalan *mestizaje* project based on German–Maya unions and the conflicting German and Guatemalan nationalisms at work in the 1930s, and then the lives and memories of interracial families.[11] These

[9] Medardo Mejía, *El movimiento obrero en la Revolución de Octubre* (Guatemala, 1949).

[10] Miguel Ángel Asturias, *Hombres de Maíz* (Buenos Aires, 1949).

[11] The author conducted over fifty oral history interviews between 2006 and 2008. These oral histories are analysed not for an immediate or accurate window into past events, but for their qualities of tone, emotion, rumour and omission; these affective qualities of memory - including inaccuracies - are the subject of analysis and a wedge for

memories open a window onto the diversity of Germanness in Guatemala and the often painful racial and class hierarchies that resided in the potent intersection of conflicting nationalisms between 'enlightened' Germany and 'uncivilized' Guatemala. While familial bonds between German men and their offspring seemed to express equality, they were also based on hierarchy and patriarchy, divisions between 'pure' Germans and their illegitimate 'mixed-race' counterparts. As one German son of a prominent German coffee planter noted in describing his Maya–German siblings, his half-brother 'was not quite like a brother, but like a brother who's an employee'.[12]

I: The Intimate and Affective Politics of 'German' Diasporas in Latin America

Scholars have argued that Latin American German diasporas tended to 'follow the ancient Greek rather than Jewish model, as their members immigrated voluntarily to improve an already privileged economic position, and not to escape persecution'.[13] Traditional diaspora studies dominated by the Jewish and African histories do not fit neatly with German experiences, and the themes of traumatic and involuntary exile, dispersal, and a desire but inability to return to the homeland as preconditions for the diasporic condition cannot provide adequate analytical frameworks.[14] While German settlement patterns and timing varied greatly within and across Latin American states, and German settlers themselves were very diverse, the relatively small number of German settlers who arrived during the late nineteenth century were by and large not impoverished peasants nor contract labourers, but professional, capitalist investors, scientists and intellectuals.[15] This was especially true in Guatemala, where Germans were active participants in the coffee production and processing centred in the regions of Alta Verapaz and the Costa Cuca as well as in the banking and import-export sectors located in the 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.[16] By the end of the 1920s, there were approximately 3000 Germans resident in Guatemala and many who had arrived in the postwar years found jobs as administrators of German-owned coffee plantations and as technicians and mechanics in coffee processing.[17] German settlers, especially the wealthier investing

cracking open the past. See, Allesandro Portellini, *Death of Luigi Trastulli: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (New York, 1991).

[12] Quoted in Daniel Wilkinson, *Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal, and Forgetting in Guatemala* (Durham, 2004), p. 90.

[13] Jürgen Buchenau, *Tools of Progress: A German Merchant Family in Mexico City* (Albuquerque, 2004), p. 7.

[14] See Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle, 1997); James Clifford, 'Diasporas', *Cultural Anthropology*, 9, 3 (1994), pp. 302–38.

[15] Nor were German migrants especially numerous when compared to the waves of immigrants from other parts of Europe, and the numbers of Germans who went to Latin America paled in comparison to the flood of Germans that swept across North America during the nineteenth century. Ninety per cent of German emigrants went to North America, while the remaining 10% went to Latin America, Albert von Gleich, *Germany and Latin America, Memorandum RM-5523-RC* (Santa Monica, CA, 1968), p. 7.

[16] Wagner, *Los alemanes en Guatemala, 1828–1944* (Guatemala, 1991), pp. 113, 385.

[17] Wagner, *Los alemanes en Guatemala*, p. 291.

classes, also brought a sense of their own cultural superiority that fostered an idealization of the homeland and a desire to circumscribe social interactions with 'racially degenerate' or 'uncivilized' Latin Americans.[18] Consequently, studies of immigrant German subjectivity have been overwhelmingly concerned with the transplanting of German culture across time and space and German connections with the homeland seemed to outweigh those with the hostland.[19] These works, however, downplay both the diversity of Germans in Latin America and the intimate social and political connections German settlers forged in their hostlands while they were reproducing the 'Heimat' abroad.[20]

Recent scholarship emphasizing the diversity and hybridity of Germans in Latin America offers an important starting point in moving away from the assumption of diasporic insularity. During the first half of the twentieth century, politicians across the Americas often regarded the German diaspora's strong ties to their homeland as a sign both of their unitary character and of their susceptibility to the plots of Imperial, and especially Nazi, Germany.[21] This unified image has been challenged on two fronts. First, new scholarship has demonstrated that while German settlement ran parallel to a newly unified German state's imperial project, German migrants were not mere lackeys of the German state and thus their individual and collective histories cannot easily be mapped onto the German state itself.[22] As one recent overview of the literature argued, new transnational scholarship on Germans in Latin America, 'encourages us to rethink the role of political borders and geopolitical structures in our historiography and suggest some of the benefits that could accompany an effort to respatialize our notions of German history by more actively pursuing studies that include German spaces on both sides of the Atlantic'.[23] Second, scholars have begun to emphasize how German communities in Latin America were fractured by class, confession, region, and cultural distinctions, provoking some historians to begin talking not about the German diaspora, but German diasporas.[24] Likewise, scholars have begun to examine how German-Latin Americans also moved between different cultures and language contexts, displaying remarkable hybridity and flexibility. In fact, who counted as German and by what standards or measures was subject to constant change and depended upon social and historical context.[25] Yet, the myth of German

[18] Buchenau, *Tools of Progress*; Ronald C. Newton, *German Buenos Aires, 1900–1933: Social Change and Cultural Crisis* (Austin and London, 1977).

[19] H. Glenn Penny, 'Latin American Connections: Recent Work on German Interactions with Latin America', *Central European History*, 46 (2013), pp. 362–94.

[20] Kirsta O'Donnell, Renate Bridentahl, Nancy Reagin (eds), *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness* (Ann Arbor, 2005).

[21] Gleich, *Germany and Latin America*, p. 9

[22] Stefan H. Rinke, *'Der letzte freie Kontinent': Deutsche Latinamerikapolitik im Zeichen transnationaler Beziehungen, 1918–1933*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart, 1996) and Penny, 'Latin American Connections'.

[23] Penny, 'Latin American Connections', p. 365, and see also Geoff Eley, 'How and Where Is German History Centered?', in Neil Gregor, Nils Roemer and Mark Roseman (eds), *German History From the Margins* (Bloomington, 2006).

[24] Ann Saint Sauveur-Henn, 'Deutsche Einwanderung an den Río de la Plata während des Dritten Reiches und die Polarisierung der deutschen Gemeinschaft in Argentinien', in Holger M. Medding and Georg Ismar (eds), *Argentinien und das Dritte Reich: Mediale und reale Präenz, Ideologietransfer, Folgewirkungen* (Berlin, 2008), pp. 60–9; and Kerstin Hein, *Hybride Identitäten: Bastelbiografien im Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Lateinamerika und Europa* (Bielefeld, 2006).

[25] See especially, Hein, *Hybride Identitäten.*

diasporic insularity remains entrenched because few scholars have examined the social, political, and familial ties between Germans and Latin Americans and the ways that these reveal not only how some German settlers were able to set- up successful business enterprises, but also how these relations were frequently vectors of the tense and shifting boundaries of what it meant to be German.[26] Like nineteenth-century European settlers in Africa and Asia, German immigrants in Latin America, particularly in rural and largely indigenous frontier zones such as Alta Verapaz in Guatemala, southern Chile and the state of Chiapas in Mexico, relied upon concubinage to facilitate permanent settlement. In Alta Verapaz, Q'eqchi' women of wealthy landowning families afforded German immigrants the means to quickly acclimatize to the region by providing local medical and cultural knowledge, access to land, and a quicker way to learn the language. In many cases, concubinage entailed demands on a woman's labour and legal rights, and was simply portrayed as companionship or cohabitation outside of marriage.[27] The common discourse of 'living maritally' (*viven maridablemente*), in fact, suggested more social privileges than most women who were involved in such relations would have actually enjoyed. They could be dismissed without reason, severance or even pay.[28] Women who worked as domestic and sexual servants provided the daily needs of coffee plantation administrators, without imposing either the emotional or financial obligations of a German family. In other cases, Q'eqchi' and sometimes *ladina* women became abiding and faithful companions who shared the same quarters as the German man. The mixed-race children of these unions, the 'improved race', also became crucial intermediaries between their German fathers and his Q'eqchi' labourers and frequently had important roles to play in the operations of a coffee plantation. In addition to these longer-term relationships, German men often had sexual intercourse with lower-class Q'eqchis', most often their plantation labourers, that amounted to little more than rape.

Interracial unions were an expression of both German patriarchal authority and racial hierarchies in the region. As Lora Wildenthal has argued in German colonial contexts, the European idea of patriarchal authority over an extended household of social inferiors came to include authority over racial inferiors.[29] For German coffee planters, racial hierarchy did not require racial purity; sexual relationships with Maya women, far from damaging German authority, expressed that authority. 'There is no sin once you are up in the mountains', explained the German coffee planter Adrien Rösch in referring to the normality of a German man having both German and Guatemalan families.[30] German sexual unions with Mayas also conformed to Guatemalan elites' desires to 'racially whiten' their nation via the importation of Europeans. As one

[26] H. Glenn Penny, 'Latin American Connections', pp. 362–94; Dirk Hoerder, 'The German-Language Diasporas: A Survey, Critique, Interpretation', *Diasporas* 11, 1 (2002); pp. 31–2; Ann Saint Sauveur-Henn, 'Deutsche Einwanderung an den Río de la Plata', pp. 60–9.

[27] Adrian Rösch, *Alleri aus der Alta Verapaz: Bilder aus dem deutschen Leben in Guatemala, 1868–1934* (Stuttgart, 1934) and Ricardo Terga Cintrón, *Almas gemelas: Un estudio de la inserción alemana en las Verapaces y la consecuente relación entre Alemanes y los K'ekchies* (Cobán, 1991), pp. 7–21.

[28] Archivo General de Centro-América (hereafter, AGCA), Jefe Político de Alta Verapaz (hereafter JP-AV) 1936 Paquete 2 'Carta de Angela Xoy al Jefe Político' 29 Oct. 1936.

[29] Adrian Rösch, Alleri aus der Alta Verapaz, p. 12.

[30] Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire* (Durham, 2001), pp. 80–1.

Guatemalan coffee planter explained, 'The only solution for Guatemala is to improve the race, to bring in Aryan seed to improve it. On my plantation I had a German administrator for many years, and for every Indian he got pregnant I would pay him an extra fifty dollars'.[31] The practical dimensions of these sexual unions also cannot be separated from cultural and symbolic meanings crucial to both Guatemalan and German nationalisms and diasporic subjectivity. As historians have long recognized, gender and sex were foundational discourses and practices through which nationalism was imagined and governance realized. Nationalism was infused with familial metaphors and women were typically constructed as the symbolic bearers and reproducers of the nation, and thus female sexuality was often highly regulated and the site of political contestations, including the rise of anticolonial movements.[32] While the appropriation of indigenous female bodies was often part and parcel of colonial encounters, Ann Laura Stoler and others have demonstrated how the racially mixed children produced by these unions called into question the criteria by which the 'European' and 'non-European' selves could be identified, and hence how citizenship could be conferred and nationality adjudicated. It was also the symbolic power of interracial unions that made them potent discourses through which anticolonial nationalism was first articulated.[33] While German National Socialists grew concerned about the dangers of racial mixing, Jorge Ubico's populist and eugenic nationalism emphasized the welfare of illegitimate children and their mothers, granting the concubines of German men new power in these relationships and fomenting an anti-German discourse of irresponsible and exploitative fathers. The tension between these German and Guatemalan nationalisms raised questions about national loyalty and betrayal, ethnic affiliation and racial division——about where racial and national boundaries began and ended.

Tumultuous changes took place in the 1930s and 1940s across the Atlantic, which had a significant impact on German diasporic communities in Guatemala, forming the contours of the political imaginaries through which several debates took place: the role of German settlement and interracial mixing in the forging of a modern Guatemalan nation, the growth of National Socialism and the political allegiances of Germans and their interracial children, the rise of antifascism and revolutionary, anti-imperial nationalism that ultimately led to Guatemala's October Revolution of 1944. These histories have been obscured by the exclusion of German settlers from Guatemalan national narratives and the concomitant myth of German social and political insularity.

II: A Different Kind of *Mestizo* Nation

Guatemalan celebrations of German–Maya racial mixing had roots in nineteenth-century ideologies of racial whitening via European immigration and reverberations with new ideologies of *mestizaje* that spread across Latin America in the 1920s and 1930s. In the late nineteenth century, a wide variety of Latin American intellectuals advocated

[31] Marta Elena Casaús Arzú, *Guatemala: linaje y racismo*, Tercera edición: revisada y ampliada (Guatemala, 2007), p. 251.

[32] See for example, Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat (eds), *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives* (Minneapolis, 1997).

[33] See for example, Carina E. Ray, 'Decrying White Peril: Interracial Sex and the Rise of Anticolonial Nationalism in the Gold Coast', *American Historical Review*, 119, 1 (2014), pp.78–110.

European immigration as the most effective means to populate their frontiers, promote industry and progress, and bring enlightened reason to their nations.[34] In response to growing US imperial pretentions and nationalist movements, the region's intellectual elites and statesmen began to articulate new national racial ideologies of *mestizaje* that celebrated how conquest and colonization had given birth to a new, hybrid, *mestizo* race. Perhaps most famously, José Vasconcelos, an intellectual in Mexico's postrevolutionary government, reimagined Mexico as home to a new 'cosmic race' (*la raza cósmica*)—a fusion of the enlightened reason of Spaniards with the passion and enduring traditions of Aztecs. Variations on *mestizaje* discourse found expression in such diverse places as Nicaragua, Colombia and Argentina.[35] Ideologies of *mestizaje* articulated by Vasconcelos and others provided a robust nationalist ethos, emerging from a regional history and landscape, which countered the imperialism of European and US American claims that racial mixing, such as that found in Latin America, led to degeneration.[36] While intellectual debates in Europe and North America affirmed that hybrid societies were unstable and disorganized, Latin American elites' new revolutionary mythohistory of *mestizaje* revalued mixture in positive terms and became the cornerstone of a new nationalist project, a state-led 'cultural revolution' that was explicitly anti-imperialist and anticolonial.[37] In defiance of Anglo-Saxon notions of mixture as degeneracy, Mexican official discourses promoted 'racial and cultural intermixture' as the only way to create homogeneity out of heterogeneity, unity out of fragmentation, a strong nation that could withstand the internal menace of its own failures to overcome injustices of its colonial past and the external menace of US imperialism. Revolutionary intellectuals revised old narratives of history, imposing a new teleology that located the beginnings of Mexican history even more firmly in the Aztec past and the Spanish Conquest, and made the revolution the harbinger of Mexico's 'second independence'. For example, Manuel Gamio declared in his *Forjando Patria* (*Forging the Nation*) in 1916: 'In the great forge of America, on the giant anvils of the Andes, virile races of bronze and iron have struggled for centuries'. From this struggle emerged the *mestizo*, the 'national race' of Mexico, the carrier of the 'national culture of the future'.[38] Individuals such as Gamio and Vasconcelos critiqued social Darwinism, arguing that Mendel's or Lamark's philosophies of biology

[34] Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (Durham, 1993); Frank Safford, 'Race Integration, and Progress: Elite Attitudes and the Indian in Colombia, 1750–1870', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 71, 1 (1991), pp. 1–33; Nicolas Shumay, *The Invention of Argentina* (Berkeley, 1991).

[35] Jeffrey Gould, *To Die in This Way: Nicaraguan Indians and the Myth of Mestizaje, 1880–1965* (Durham and London, 1998); Peter Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture in Colombia* (Baltimore, 1995); Oscar Chamosa, 'Indigenous or Criollo: The Myth of White Argentina in Tucuman's Calchaqui Valley', *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 88, 1 (2008), pp. 71–106.

[36] Ana María Alonso, 'Conforming Disconformity: '*Mestizaje*', Hybridity, and the Aesthetics of Mexican Nationalism', *Cultural Anthropology*, 19, 4 (2004), pp. 459–90; Alexander Minna Stern, 'From Mestizophilia to Biotypology: Racialization and Science in Mexico, 1920–1960', in Nancy Appelbaum, Anne S. Macpherson and Karin Rosemblatt (eds), *Race and Nation in Modern Latin America* (Chapel Hill, 2003), pp. 187–210.

[37] Aline Helg, 'Race in Argentina and Cuba 1880–1930: Theory, Policies, and Popular Reaction', in Richard Graham (ed.), *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940* (Austin, 1990), p. 37; on debates see Robert J.C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race* (London and New York, 1995).

[38] Manuel Gamio, *Forjando Patria* (Mexico, 1960), pp. 5–6, cited in Alan Knight, 'Racism, Revolution and Indigenismo: Mexico, 1910–1940', in Richard Graham (ed.), *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870–1940* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1990), p. 85.

provided better frameworks for making sense of the Mexican past. Against charges of Mexican degeneration, these intellectuals articulated a place for Mexico and Latin America as centres of democracy and civilization in a new world order.

Guatemala's *mestizaje* project, however, did not fit neatly within the model of *mestizaje* found in Mexico and elsewhere.[39] While in neighbouring Mexico the ideology of *mestizaje* grew out of romantic images of Aztec warriors and colonial narratives of sixteenth-century Spanish conquest and colonization, Guatemala's narrative of *mestizaje* did not derive from an era of Spanish empire. Rather, Guatemalan narratives found their romantic origins in a late nineteenth-century, postindependence conquest via European immigration and frontier colonization, exemplified by the building of railways and the rise of coffee, and symbolized by the union between a Maya woman and a German man. Yet, like ideologies of *mestizaje* across Latin America, Guatemala's urban intellectuals postulated that the 'mixing of blood' would result in racial improvement because 'superior' European racial characteristics would dominate both the inferior indigenous and Afro-Latin American ones.[40] Nor were Guatemalan intellectuals entirely alone in their efforts to incorporate diasporas into Latin America's *mestizaje* ideologies. At a conference in Stockholm in 1960, the renowned Peruvian activist and intellectual Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre exclaimed that 'Today a new *mestizaje* is emerging in Latin America'. '*Mestizaje* can be studied retrospectively speaking of the *indio,* of the *español*, of the *portugués*, and of the *negro*', Haya de la Torre explained, but it was time to examine an important new *mestizaje* including 'Italian-Latin America *mestizaje*', an 'Asian-Latin American *mestizaje*', and even a 'Scandinavian *mestizaje*'.[41]

One of the most well-known advocates of German–Maya racial mixing was Miguel Ángel Asturias, an urban intellectual who was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1967. Asturias was one of the founding members of Guatemala's 'Generation of 20', a group of intellectuals who came of age during the dictatorship of Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898–1920) and became architects of social reform for subsequent governments.[42] Like many reform-minded students and intellectuals who travelled to Mexico to see the cultural revolution under way, Asturias, a law student at Guatemala's National University, travelled to Mexico City as a delegate to the First International Student Congress. In Mexico City, Asturias met José Vasconcelos, who was developing the basis of his book on the cosmic race. Upon his return to Guatemala, Astrurias travelled throughout the Guatemalan countryside visiting indigenous villages with the express purpose of seeing for himself how Mayas lived.[43] Later that year, he wrote his

[39] Scholars have long claimed that what made Guatemala unique in Central America and Latin America more broadly was its lack of a *mestizaje* ideology, see Arturo Taracena, *Etnicidad, estado y nación en Guatemala, 1808 1944* (Guatemala, 2002); Darío A Euraque, Jeffrety L Gould and Charles R. Hale (eds), *Memorias del mestizaje: Cultura política en Centroamérica de 1920 al presente* (Guatemala, 2005).

[40] See Nancy Leys Stepan, *'The Hour of Eugenics': Race, Gender, and Nation* in Latin America (Itaca and London, 1991); Ronald Stutzman, 'El *Mestizaje*: An All-Inclusive Ideology of Exclusion', in N. Whitten (ed.), *Cultural Transformations and Ethnicity in Modern Ecuador* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1981), pp. 45–94.

[41] Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, 'Intervenciones en la discusion libre: Resumenes', in *El mestizaje en la historia de Ibero-America* (Mexico, D.F, 1961), p. 99.

[42] On the Generation of 20, see Marta Elena Casaús Arzú and Terresa García Giráldez, *Las redes intelectuales centroamericanas: un siglo de imaginarios nacionales (1820–1920)* (Guatemala, 2005).

[43] Richard J. Callan, 'Introduction', in Miguel Ángel Asturias, *Guatemalan Sociology: The Social Problem of the Indian,* trans. Maureen Ahern (Tempe, Arizona, 1977), pp. i-xi.

famous thesis, *Guatemalan Sociology: The Social Problem of the Indian* (1921), in which he passionately argued that the future of the nation resided in sexual unions between Mayas and northern European immigrants, preferably Germans.[44] Asturias most probably developed his ideas about German-Maya miscegenation during his visit to the northern department of Alta Verapaz, home to a small number of German immigrants, who had settled during Guatemala's late nineteenth-century coffee boom. Alta Verapaz, along with the Costa Cuca region in Guatemala's southwest, was an important enclave for German immigrants who wished to invest in coffee plantations. By 1921, when Asturias visited Alta Verapaz, there were approximately three hundred Germans living among a population of 161,000, most of whom were involved in either commerce or coffee planting, or both.[45] Out of the total 328 plantations in the region, 108 were owned by Germans, 135 by *ladinos* and 45 by Mayas.[46] Yet, Germans controlled over 80% of all coffee exports.[47] In addition to a prosperous German community, Asturias would also have encountered a self-identified community of approximately 400 mixed-race children of German settlers.[48] Indeed, the German community in Alta Verapaz took root in a frontier space, where rural isolation in the mountainous terrain of Alta Verapaz meant few German women could be found among the settlers and German men thus often took Q'eqchi' Maya concubines.[49] In comparing the lives and customs of the offspring of these unions to those of the plantation workers and urban poor, Asturias was led to conclude that a new model of national development was needed:

> In the past it was thought that in order to improve the native, one should make him a small landowner, oblige him to grow new crops, clothe him, and, to say it once and for all, stimulate his physical-psychic faculties, creating material needs and spiritual aspirations in his life . . . That was fine yesterday. But today in this new movement . . . such measures are rejected as inefficient. The Indians are overworked! They sleep on mats or on the ground! They do not wash themselves and are filthy and lice-ridden! They get drunk! All this fades in importance when the problem is considered from its gravest and most significant aspect, his profound defects stem from a racial background that is insufficient.

Education and hygiene were not enough. What was needed was new blood. 'Let us transform the indigenous environment by means of immigration, honouring the confidence the future has deposited in our hands in the form of a second life, nothing more', he concluded.[50]

As the work of Asturias demonstrates, German settlement in Guatemala, while never prolific numerically, shaped ideologies of nationhood among a section of urban, elite Guatemalans as they sought to forge a modern, unified and racially whitened nation out of a heterogeneous postcolonial society.[51] Guatemalan historians, however,

[44] Asturias, *Sociologla guatemalateca*.

[45] Arden R. King, *Cobán and the Verapaz: History and Cultural Process in Northern Guatemala* (New Orleans, 1974), pp. 285, 340.

[46] *Ibid.*, pp. 298–9.

[47] Wagner, *Los alemanes en Guatemala*, p. 210.

[48] Adrien Rösch, *Allerlei aus der Alta Verapa*, p.12; see also King, *Cobán and the Verapaz*, pp. 234–68, 453–379.

[49] Before World War I, only eight German women were recorded as having arrived in Alta Verapaz, King, *Cobán and the Verapaz*, p. 338.

[50] Astrurias, *Sociología guatemalteca,* pp. 105–06.

[51] As a variety of scholars have argued, Latin American urban intellectuals profoundly shaped ideologies of nationhood and projects of state reform: Nicola Miller, *In the Shadow of the State: Intellectuals and the Quest for National Identity in Twentieth-Century Spanish America* (London, 1999); Angel Rama, *The Lettered City*, ed. and trans. John Charles Chasteen (Durham, 1996).

have largely neglected German diasporas, writing their histories instead from within the racial binary of *ladinos* and Mayas that has defined the nation since the 1871 Liberal revolution.[52] The German diaspora have largely received attention as discrete objects of historical analysis, living within but apart from the nation and the major economic, political and social events that defined Guatemala.[53]

III: Intersecting Nationalisms and Diasporic Political Imaginaries

When Guatemalan intellectuals such as Miguel Ángel Asturias began to articulate an alternative *mestizaje* project in the 1920s, the country was in the midst of profound political and economic shifts that made desirable a new imaginary of the nation and its future. In April of 1920, after twenty-two years of brutal dictatorship, Guatemala's president, Manuel Estrada Cabrera, was declared insane and removed from office by his hand-picked National Assembly. The dramatic end of Estrada Cabrera's dictatorship also marked a final blow to an era of *ladino* nationalism that had dominated national politics since a band of politically insurgent and upwardly mobile Liberal *ladinos* from Guatemala's western highlands had taken state power in 1871.[54] Rallying against the entrenched wealth and status of American-born Spanish creoles, these mixed-race *ladinos* generated a new nationalist mythology that reduced Guatemala's complex racial scheme—which included *mestizos*, *ladinos*, creoles and Mayas—into a simple binary of Mayas and *ladinos* and celebrated the hard-working *ladino* artisan of humble origins as the ideal citizen.[55] By the time Estrada Cabrera was forced from office, many Guatemalan intellectuals from the 'Generation of 20' understood the 1871 Liberal revolution as a failure and blamed this period of state repression, surveillance and failed economic development on the mixed-race status of *ladinos* and their racial attributes. This new generation of intellectuals now argued that *ladinos*, once celebrated as hard-working citizens, embodied all that was wrong with Guatemalan society: their avarice, corruption and barbarism were the principal causes of Guatemala's long reign of dictatorships. Guatemalan intellectuals thus began to revisit Guatemala's racial make-up and ask questions about how to achieve political modernity. Jorge García Granados, a member of the 'Generation of 20' and Asturias's classmate, declared that *ladinos*' preference for military rule was an innate racial defect and argued that the nation was made up of *mestizos*, creoles and Mayas.[56] Miguel Ángel Asturias likewise argued that the 'peak' of the *ladino* population could only be considered 'semi-civilized'.[57] Could they, Asturias posited, be charged with the regeneration of an entire nation? No, the

[52] This includes many excellent works, such as Tarcena, *Ethnicidad, estado, y nación*; Greg Grandin, *The Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation* (Durham and London, 2000); Carol A. Smith, 'Myths, Intellectuals, and Race/Class/Gender Distinctions in the Formation of Latin American Nations', *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, 2, 1 (1996), pp. 148–69.

[53] Wagner, *Los alemanes en Guatemala;* Julio Castellanos Cambrances, *El imperialismo alemán en Guatemala* (Guatemala, 1977).

[54] Julie A. Gibbings, '"Another Race More Worthy of the Present": Race, History, and Nation in Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, c.1860–1940s', (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2012), pp. 276–361.

[55] Taracena, *Ethnicidad, estado, y nación*.

[56] Jorge García Granados, *Ensayo sobre sociología guatemalteca* (Guatemala, 1927), pp. 41–2. García Granados was also the grandson of one of the creole (Spanish-descended) leaders of the 1871 liberal revolution.

[57] Astrurias, *Sociología guatemlateca*, pp. 63, 65–6, 86–7.

indigenous problem was 'too urgent' to hang the nation's hopes on *ladinos*. In 1930, the Mexican anthropologist Manuel Gamio, who celebrated *mestizaje* in his native country, echoed Asturias's and García Granados's conclusions in a devastating critique of racially mixed *ladinos* in Guatemala. Guatemala's small island of 'civilized' peoples was, Gamio argued, too miniscule in relationship with the ocean of 'backward Indians' that surrounded it. *Mestizaje*, he reasoned, would swallow the island up and result in overall racial degeneration, as evidenced by contemporary *mestizos*. In Guatemala, a productive *mestizaje* 'could only be achieved by means of a profuse immigration, sensibly selected . . . which depended not only upon the number of immigrants but also and principally upon their racial characteristics'.[58] For this, Asturias and others looked to German and other Ango-Saxon settlers for the racial solution to the nation's stalled development.

In search of ways to forge a modern nation out of a heterogeneous society, Guatemalan intellectuals found natural allies in the nation's small, but influential, German diaspora. The idea of racially improving the population through the immigration of European settlers had been popular among Latin American intellectuals since the late nineteenth century.[59] Indeed, they were also understood to exercise a civilizing influence on Guatemalan *mestizos* and creoles. For example, Alfonso Bauer Paiz, a Communist organizer during Guatemala's October Revolution (1944–1954), noted that

> The governing Guatemalan families favoured the interweaving of this European immigration with Guatemalan nationals . . . people spoke of 'improving the race' so that instead of *mestizaje* between Creoles and Indians, there would be mixing between Creoles and Germans or between *mestizos* and Germans.[60]

Similar ideas abounded among other Latin American nations, including Argentina.[61] Likewise, by the early 1920s, Germans in Guatemala were rebounding from the war and the coffee economy boom between 1924 and 1928 provided job opportunities for new German immigrants.[62] The postwar context also made possible further immigration of Germans who had been displaced by the war and the loss of German colonies. Moreover, German settlers and the economic ties they forged with Germany had long provided a counterweight to US imperial interests in the region.

The economic crisis of 1929–1930, the Central American 'red scare' of 1932, and growing tensions in the countryside brought about the rise of the strong-arm presidency of General Jorge Ubico (1931–1944), an admirer of fascist regimes in Europe.[63] Instituting vagrancy laws and sanitation campaigns, expanding the national police apparatus and militarizing education, Ubico was a populist dictator who both

[58] Manuel Gamio, 'El *mestizaje* eugenésico en la América Indo-Ibérica', *Anales de la Sociedad de Geografía e Historia,* 6 (1930), pp. 335.

[59] Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought* (Durham, 1993); Stepan, *The Hour of Eugenics;* Charles Hale, *The Transformation of Liberalism in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexico* (Princeton, 1989).

[60] Alfonso Bauer Paiz, *Memorias de Alfonso Bauer Paiz: Historia no oficial de Guatemala* (Guatemala, 1996), pp. 34–5.

[61] Newton, *German Buenos Aires,* pp. 61–9.

[62] This was true for Germans in Latin America more generally, see Rinke, '*Der letzte freie Kontinent*', pp. 41, 61–9.

[63] Kenneth J. Grieb, *Guatemalan Caudillo: The Regime of Jorge Ubico in Guatemala 1931–1944* (Athens, 1979) pp.78–83.

intervened in local affairs on behalf of the poor and defended the German diaspora.[64] Ubico lavished praise upon German coffee planters and entrepreneurs, and his desire to promote scientific eugenics in Guatemala easily translated into support for Q'eqchi'-Germans in Alta Verapaz.[65] Not only did Ubico celebrate Q'eqchi'-Germans as an 'improved race', he facilitated the expansion of their local political power. As part of his campaign to reduce corruption in public offices and centralize the administration of the state, Ubico removed locally elected officials from municipal office, replacing them with personally appointed ones. In Alta Verapaz, many of these new state-appointed positions were bequeathed to Q'eqchi'-Germans. Likewise, as Ubico rapidly expanded the state's tentacles deeper into the countryside, Q'eqchi-Germans found new positions as sanitation officials and rural police officers. Juan Turkheim, the son of a Q'eqchi' mother and German father, took the region's most prestigious municipal seat for nearly the entire duration of Ubico's rule.[66] Domingo Winter Tot was one of three rural mounted police, and Victoriano Yat Wellmann was the sergeant in charge of roads in Chahal.[67] Yet, their new positions as agents of law and order and authors of racial whitening and civilization campaigns in relationship with the largely Maya rural masses were also complicated by the rise of National Socialism, and new pressures for German men to marry a German woman that disrupted the ties and bonds between Q'eqchi'-German children, Q'eqchi' concubines and German fathers.

For Germans and Q'eqchi'-Germans in Alta Verapaz, memories of Ubico's dictatorship speak to the privileged place he granted them within the nation. 'Ubico was very German-friendly', explained the coffee planter Hugo Droege, 'because he knew that we were the main producers in his country. And we brought capital from Germany . . . He was a colossal help to us. The country was clean and there was no corruption under him'.[68] According to Mynor Winter, a manager at Cobán's Banco Rural, his great-grandfather, Udo Winter, had been brought to Guatemala along with other Germans during Ubico's presidency. 'The idea of the General [Ubico]', Mynor explained, 'was to change the race a little bit, to improve it. He wanted to mix a little German blood with indigenous blood'.[69] Although Udo Winter arrived in Guatemala long before Ubico's dictatorship and did not live to see the rise of Nazism, Mynor's memories speak to the enduring association between the 1930s and the rise of a national racial improvement ideal. In this sense, Ubico validated the racial and gender hierarchy that had been established on German coffee plantations. Their sense of sexual entitlement, however, was challenged by the rising tide of Nazi influence, where such sexual laxity not only was understood as a threat to the racial purity of Germans abroad, but raised questions about loyalty to the German nation.

Nazi influence in Latin America spread through long-established networks of associational life. Alta Verapaz was no different. After Hitler's rise to power Nazi Party

[64] *Ibid.*, pp. 248–51.

[65] See for example 'Ubico visit Petén y Alta Verapaz', *Diario de Centro-América* (14 Feb. 1931).

[66] Cobán Municipal Archive, Libros de Actos Municipales 1932–1939.

[67] AGCA, JP-AV 1939 Paq. 2, La Policia Rural Montada, 8 Jan. 1939; AGCA, JP-AV 1939 Paq. 3, 'Cuerpo Militar de Caminos', 18 Nov. 1939.

[68] Cited in Max Paul Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors: The United States Campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 83.

[69] Mynor Winter, interview with the author, 03–12–07.

officials marched into a meeting with the board of directors of Cobán's German Club—the oldest in Central America—to demand control as the true representatives of the new nation.[70] 'With the majestic inscription of the German National Socialist Party in January 1933, a true renovation has happened', wrote Martin Frey in 1938. 'Since then, the German Club is the place where all the official festivals are celebrated'.[71] As Oda Droege, the wife of coffee planter Hugo Droege, recalled,

> The German Club became National Socialist, as well as the Club in Guatemala City . . . Some hid the Party's insignia underneath the flap of their bag, while others wore it with great joy. There were also those armbands with the Swastika, all of it.[72]

The Nazi Party supported demonstrations, festivities and holiday celebrations and made efforts to provide financial support to poor Germans.[73]

Even though the Nazi promise of a unified ethnonational community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) drew upon the deep ties fostered by German associational life in the region, support for the Nazis was not uniform, just as the German community in Alta Verapaz was not unified. By the 1930s, Germans were divided along class and generational lines, as well as by political affiliation, religion, and region of origin. The generation of settlers who had arrived in Alta Verapaz in the late nineteenth century were well established, prosperous and generally less inclined to join the Nazi Party. The older members of Cobán's German Club, for example, resisted the efforts of a younger generation to remove iconography of the Kaiser, at least in part because German national politics was not relevant to cultural affairs for many of them.[74] While some of the German and Q'eqchi'-German sons and daughters of this generation had lived or studied in Germany, many had never touched German soil nor breathed German air. Younger generations of immigrant settlers, however, who had left Germany after World War I and who worked largely as administrators, mechanics, technicians and gardeners welcomed the advent of a strong leader promising economic renewal and national greatness in Germany. Nazism's violent hostility to Communism also appealed to German coffee planters in Alta Verapaz, for whom labour strikes, land invasions and 'Bolshevik' agitators' had been a vivid reality in the 1920s.[75] Tailored for a Latin American audience, Nazi propaganda emphasized anti-Communism.[76] Nazism also struck a chord with many Germans whose sense of racial superiority had been bolstered by the racial stratification of Guatemalan society. Yet, some Germans were offended by the Nazi Party's antisemitism and others simply stopped spending time at the German Club.

[70] See Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors*.

[71] Martin Frey, *Deutschtum in der Alta Verapaz: Erinnerungen Herausgegeben Anläßlich des 50 Jährigen Bestehens des Deutschen Vereins zu Coban, Guatemala, 1888–1938* (Stuttgart, 1938), p. 48.

[72] All oral testimony from Oda Droege, unless otherwise stated, comes from the transcripts of an interview with Oda Droege by Uli Stelzner for the documentary *Los Civilizadores.* Uli Stelzner and Thomas Walther, *Los Civilizadores: Alemanes en Guatemala*, Colección DVD Guatemala (Alemania, 1998).

[73] See for example, Cobán Municipal Archive Estantería 3 Paquete 19, 'Deutsches Konsulat, Cobán, Guatemala al Sr Alcalde 1°' Cobán 15 de Noviembre 1933. See also Gerhard Enno Buß, 'Zur Biologie des Deutschtums in Guatemala' (Hamburg, Institut für Schiffs- und Tropenkrankheiten, 1942), 17, Thesis.

[74] Hugo Droege, transcribed interview with Uli Stelzner and Thomas Walter, *Los Civilizadores.*

[75] See Gibbings, 'Another Race More Worthy of the Present', Ch. 6, and Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago, 2004), pp. 19–46.

[76] Buchenau, *Tools of Progress*; Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors*, p. 30.

By the end of the war, Guatemala—and especially Alta Verapaz—had become a Nazi stronghold. Yet, only approximately 10% of Germans residing in Guatemala were members of the Nazi Party.[77] This figure does not, however, represent the extent of Nazi support, since party membership often also entailed an interest in activism—a willingness to organize and attend meetings, engage in fundraising, and submit to party discipline (including the maintenance of racial purity).

Nazi obsessions with racial purity clashed with sexual and social practices in Alta Verapaz. Party standards explicitly rejected a large segment of the German population in Guatemala—those who married non-Aryans, who did not speak German in daily life, who dedicated themselves to local political issues, or who adopted Guatemalan citizenship. The Nazi Party in Guatemala went so far as to expel members who 'profane the race' by marrying Guatemalans.[78] Yet, in Alta Verapaz these rules regarding racial hygiene became more flexible and the question of who counted as German and by what measure was fluid and now highly problematic. Federico Schleehauf, for example, married a Q'eqchi' woman, Teodora Pacay, and joined the Nazi Party on 4 February 1934.[79] Federico and Teodora's son, Otto, was sent to Germany for education where he learnt German and participated in the Hitler Youth. According to family members, when Otto returned to a Guatemala he hardly knew, adorned in Nazi garb, he felt alienated and confused—was he German, Guatemalan or something else altogether?[80] The experience of Nan Cuz also illustrates the complex and changing positions occupied by Q'eqchi'-Germans. Unable to have children of her own, Elfriede Schaffert travelled to Guatemala for the first time in 1934 to collect her husband's illegitimate daughter, Nan Cuz. Renamed Imgard Carmen Heinemann, Nan adjusted to life in Germany, where her father, Hermann Heinemann, served as an expert on Central America in the Nazi Ministry of Propaganda.[81]

Nazi Party concerns about German racial purity and reproduction in the tropics fostered new scientific investigations into the living conditions of Germans in Alta Verapaz. In 1938, Gerhard Enno Buß, a senior physician in the Germany military, travelled to Alta Verapaz to study German racial preservation abroad among the children in Cobán's newly operating German school. At the school, Buß explicitly set out to 'certify the thesis of Aryan superiority' and examined the genealogical composition of the 'pure Aryan German', 'half–German', 'non-Aryan Northern European', and *ladino* children. This genealogical composition was the basis for comparisons in mental acuity, weight and other racial characteristics. The doctor's study confirmed the thesis of Guatemalan intellectuals such as Miguel Ángel Asturias. Half–Germans, he claimed, had significantly higher level of psychological maturity than either their indigenous or *ladino* counterparts, and had adopted many German physiological characteristics.[82]

[77] Guatemala was only surpassed by Honduras (20%) and Haiti (30%). Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors*, p. 27. Compare 10% party membership to the less than 5% for Latin America as a whole, Jürgen Müller, *Nationalsozialismus in Latinamerika: Die Auslandsorganisation der NSDAP in Argentinien, Brasilien, Chile und Mexico, 1931–1945* (Stuttgart, 1997), p. 100.

[78] Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors*, p. 13.

[79] NSDAP List provided by Christiane Berth.

[80] Helen Schleehauf, interview with the author 12 April 2008. Helene also shared Otto's personal diaries from his time in the Hitler Youth.

[81] Nan Cuz, interview with the author, 14 June 2008, see also Anja Krug-Metzinger, *Blazing Feather, Discerning Heart/Brennende Feder. Sehendes Herz* (Film, Germany, Anja Kruj-Metzinger Filmproduktion).

[82] Buß, 'Zur Biologie des Deutschtums in Guatemala'.

Q'eqchi'-German children, however, posed thorny questions about ethnic affiliation and loyalty to the German nation. While Buß only spent a short time in Alta Verapaz, he confidently asserted that Q'eqchi'-German interracial mixing was politically and socially 'dangerous'.[83] Being almost but not fully German meant that many Q'eqchi'-Germans were imagined to have intimate, but possibly volatile relationships with Germans. Interracial mixing posed significant dangers to the German colony in Guatemala; dangers which, Buß argued, the German colony was only beginning to recognize. In an ominous warning, Buß claimed that a Q'eqchi'-German had instigated a pro-Jewish demonstration in Guatemala City.[84] Yet, for Germans such as Federico Schleehauf, who educated their mixed-race children in Germany or who ensured their children's wellbeing and upbringing within their means, there was no contradiction between German nationalism and sexual unions with Q'eqchi' Mayas.

Many Germans in Guatemala, including Enno Buß, advocated mitigating the dangers posed by interracial unions and mixed-race children by encouraging men to seek a German wife. German women, he argued, played a central function in racial purity and survival, in the reproduction of German social norms and values abroad. Of course, the idea that women had a special duty and ability to preserve Germanness had been formed in the context of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century German colonialist women's movements and debates about the dangers of interracial mixing.[85] In Guatemala, long before the rise of National Socialism, German men had also understood setting up a 'proper' German household in Guatemala as a powerful symbol of prestige.[86] A trip home to Germany in search of a German wife demonstrated one could afford the highest social and cultural luxuries that defined German lifestyle and privilege. German women, because of their supposed delicate sensibilities and weaker physical and psychological constitutions, required more metropolitan amenities than did men, more spacious surroundings and more servants. As Buß suggested, German women, too, must be cautiously guarded: how they brought up their children and with whom they socialized were important concerns.[87] Nor was a German wife sufficient to ensure the rearing of faithful German citizens. According to Buß, German children needed to return to Germany for extended periods to ensure bonds to the fatherland.[88] Germans settlers in Alta Verapaz thus straddled Guatemalan and German nationalisms and political agendas and their diasporic subjectivity and political motivations were not determined by either the German or the Guatemalan state. For Germans such as Fredrico Schleehauf, it was important for his Q'eqchi'-German son, Otto, to be raised in German culture and to be loyal to the German state; so he sent Otto to Germany to participate in the Hitler Youth. For others, the resurgence of Germany economically and politically, alongside a stagnating coffee industry in Guatemala, signalled a

[83] Buß, 'Zur Biologie des Deutschtums in Guatemala', pp. 27–8. See also Mary von Kreutzer, '"Der Auslandsdeutsche kann nichts anderes sein als Nationalsozialist!" Deutsch-österreichischer Faschismus in Guatemala', *Context*, 21, 3–4 (2002), pp. 3–4.

[84] *Ibid.*, pp. 27–9.

[85] On German women's promotion of overseas expansion and their role in maintaining racial purity, see Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884–1945* (Durham and London, 2001).

[86] Wagner, *Los alemanes en Guatemala*, pp. 314, 324–5.

[87] Buß, 'Zur Biologie des Deutschtums in Guatemala', p. 29.

[88] Ibid.

time to return home and approximately one third of Germans living in Guatemala returned permanently to Germany between 1933 and 1940, sometimes leaving behind mixed-race children and their mothers.[89] Yet others made the transatlantic voyage to find a German wife and thus established what are commonly known in Guatemala as 'first' and 'second' families: proper and pure German ones, and their mixed-race counter-parts. The permanent return home and the procurement of German wives fostered the rise of anti-German discourses that inverted claims that Germans had fostered national development. Increasingly, German men were blamed for 'abandoning' Guatemalan mothers and children, for symbolically forsaking the Guatemalan nation and for leaving both the nation and its children economically impoverished. These feelings of betrayal, and racial hierarchies between German and Guatemalan families, would erupt when Guatemala entered World War II on the side of the Allied Forces in December 1941—as they did with the Droege-Winter Tot families.

IV: Conflicting Nationalism, Racial Hierarchies and Familial Tensions

One can only imagine the shock that Dorotea Winter Tot would have felt when she discovered that Hugo Droege, the father of her four children, had left for Germany in early 1936 to find a German wife. Hugo Droege was born in Hamburg on 6 March 1901. In 1920, he fled Germany as his family, once important in politics, had been impoverished by the war. Hearing rumours of wealth and coffee, Hugo travelled to Alta Verapaz where he had distant relatives and where he could put into practice his training in agricultural sciences. Hugo soon began working as an administrator on the coffee plantation 'Los Alpes' owned by Robert Hempstead, a North American settler immigrant with familial ties to the German diaspora. Not long thereafter, Hugo took Dorotea Winter Tot, the Q'eqchi'-German daughter of Udo Winter and Trinidad Tot, as a concubine. Together they raised four children and Hugo eventually saved enough to start his own coffee plantation. In 1936, after more than a decade of living together and unbeknownst to Dorotea, Hugo made the voyage across the Atlantic in search of a German wife. 'I wanted to find myself a wife', explained Hugo in an interview, 'a German wife'. Upon his return with his new wife Oda, Hugo built an impressive, four-story German-style home on their coffee plantation, San Vicente, for his new German wife. As was common practice, Hugo gave Dorotea a modest house on a small adjacent coffee plantation, called Chipac.

Two of Dorotea's children, Gustavo and Elisabeth, remember their mother's shock and anger at discovering that Hugo had married while in Germany. Yet, in their own narratives they emphasize familial harmony and closeness between their mother, father and new stepmother. In our interview at Elisabeth's corner store, adorned with photographs of Cobán's beauty pageant queens, souvenirs and decorative plastic flowers, Elisabeth, for example, immediately explained how Oda, whom she affectionately calls Mutti, treated her as her own daughter and raised her in German traditions. Oda, for example, taught Elisabeth German songs and cooking. Gustavo, a retired schoolteacher, emphasized how his father loved all his children, German and mixed-race, equally. Such close relations with their German father and stepmother allowed Gustavo

[89]Wagner, *Los alemanes en Guatemala*, p. 291.

and Elisabeth to claim access to German culture and a higher level of civilization. Just as nationalism draws on familial metaphors, discourses of family are infused with metaphors of national progress, and unions with 'advanced' races such as Germans hastened the distance and speed one could travel towards civilization.[90] As Elisabeth explained, 'She taught us everything, to sit up straight, to not put our elbows on the table. And now I tell my children and grandchildren these things and when they ask why, I tell them because Oda taught me that way.'

While familial bonds seemed to express equality, they were also based on racial hierarchy and patriarchy. In contrast to Gustavo and Elisabeth's descriptions of equality and love, Oda recalled with seeming indifference that her husband 'had an indigenous family, but really they were Indians, in all their behaviour, you know what I mean. His family never knew what to do with them'. Hugo's Q'eqchi'-German family is also often omitted from public family narratives. In the Droege family story that appears in the German-American Internee coalition websites, there is no mention of Hugo Droege's Q'eqchi'-German family, even though both families were left behind when Hugo was interned in the United States. Descriptions of hardships and tribulations, warm and bittersweet reunions after the harsh experience of deportation and internment are reserved for Hugo, Oda and their children.[91]

Elisabeth and Gustavo's desires to move forward in time and be seen as modern and civilized also often involved erasing the presence of their Q'eqchi'-German mother or placing her in the past as a relic of Maya authenticity and tradition, which they had now surpassed. When I asked Elisabeth about her mother and her mother's family, she responded, 'Who knows who they might be, who knows?' and when I pressed further, Elisabeth said, 'I don't have much to say about my mother, she was a poor, uneducated, *muchacha* (servant)'. Yet, Dorotea could, in fact, read and write with a degree of eloquence that reflected her basic education; nor need her years as Hugo's concubine be interpreted solely as those of a servant to a coffee administrator. Gustavo, on the other hand, relegated his mother and grandmother to the realm of folklore and tradition. With unmistakable pride, Gustavo narrated how his mother and grandmother were the source of a folklore story about indigenous cosmology that won him a literary prize in high school. This ambivalence—between closeness and distance—at once separated them from the negative associations of illiteracy, poverty and ignorance among contemporary 'Indians' and yet also reaffirmed their heritage and authenticity.

Even while some Q'eqchi'-Germans preferred to distance themselves from contemporary Mayas, it was precisely their cultural hybridity and ties that made them strategic intermediaries between their German fathers, Q'eqchi' labourers and the state. For example, Dorotea's brother Carlos Winter Tot was charged with ensuring that indigenous labourers signed new work contracts, and with tracking down workers who had fled the plantation.[92] Francisca Wellman Coc similarly worked for her father and some of his German friends. Using her 'in-between' status to great effect, she presented herself as Francisca Coc in her dealings with her father's indigenous labourers but, when dealing with state authorities, as Francisca Wellman.[93] Many Q'eqchi'-Germans were

[90] Peter Wade, 'Hybridity theory and kinship thinking', *Cultural Studies*, 19, 4 (2005), pp. 602–21.

[91] German-American Internee Coalition website, *http://www.gaic.info/real_dreoge.html*.

[92] AGCA, Juicios-Alta Verapaz, 105 Legajo 37 G Expediente 26 1936.

[93] AGCA, Juicios-Alta Verapaz, 103 Legajo 33 B Expediente 18 1932.

thus able to move strategically between racial categories and ethnic affiliations.[94] Yet, their uncertain status also elicited anxieties about affiliation and loyalty—what if a Q'eqchi'-German opted to side with their indigenous brethren?

Indeed, Q'eqchi'-Germans, who had been betrayed or abandoned by their German fathers, often forged alliances with supposed Q'eqchi' 'Bolshevik agitators'. After Carlos Chub Sarg's German father lost his job as a plantation administrator and abandoned his Q'eqchi'-German family, Carlos joined forces in the early 1920s with the radical Club Unionista 'Freedom of the Indian'.[95] Vehemently opposed by German and Guatemalan coffee planters alike, this political movement responded to claims that indigenous people were 'not yet' ready for full citizenship, by demanding the end of forced wage labour and the realization of the promise of equality and freedom 'now' rather than in some hazy distant future. Jesus Pacay Turkheim, whose father Juan von Turkheim had lost his highly indebted plantation to another German coffee planter, became a radical advocate of Q'eqchi' labourers and a perennial 'troublemaker' in the eyes of *ladino* and German coffee planters.[96]

In the 1930s, National Socialism, new German wives, and Ubico's populist eugenics and support of motherhood combined to politicize deeply the relations between German men and their Guatemalan concubines and mixed-race children. In 1936, for example, Fidelia Bol from the village of Caquiton wrote to the departmental governor requesting his support. 'I am a single woman and I live in great poverty for the following reasons', she began, 'Sixteen years ago, as a domestic servant in the plantation "Sacoyou" and since don Oscar Flohr had need for love, I accepted his propositions, procreating with him four children'. Fidelia went on to explain that after twelve years of marital living Flohr had abandoned her for a German wife. 'It is custom', she explained to the departmental governor,

> that the majority of the German men resident in our country not only take advantage of our personal labour but also satiate their appetites with us. Afterwards, they leave their children abandoned, increasing the bitterness of the Republic's needy citizens as they flee very smugly and satisfied to enjoy in Europe the capital they have amassed with our sweat. In this we can see the scorn with which they view our poor nation and its inhabitants.[97]

Most surprising, Federico Caal Stalling, a Q'eqchi'-German, signed the petition on behalf of Fidelia as her legal representative. Through such petitions, and many others like it that swamped the departmental governor's office, Q'eqchi' elites and Q'eqchi'-Germans contested the idea that Germans were inaugurating a new, desirable era of modernity. Absent and negligent German fathers were evidence that a desire for the accumulation of wealth, combined with an excessive individualism, led not to national progress, but to impoverished children and exploited mothers. As the narrative of German abandonment gained force, it not only elicited images of children,

[94] See also, Michaela Schmölz-Häberlein, *Die Grenzen des Caudillismo: Die Modernisierung des guatemaltekischen Staates under Jorge Ubico, 1931–1944: Eine regionalgeschichtliche Studie am Beispiel der Alta Verapaz* (Frankfurt, 1993), pp. 144–52.

[95] AGCA B Legajo 29466, Club Unionista Libertad del Indio al Presidente 3 April 1920.

[96] AGCA, JP-AV, 1936, Paquete 1, Señor Jefe Político de Guillermo Wellman, 3 March 1936; AGCA JP-AV, 1936 Paquete 7, Señor Jefe Político de Angela Wellman, 3 Nov 1936; AGCA Juicios-Alta Verapaz 105 Legajo 37 G Expediente 24 1936.

[97] AGCA JP-AV 1936 Paquete 5, Señor Jefe Político de Fidelia Bol 1° Apr 1936.

economically impoverished, morally neglected and politically dangerous, but it also acted as a metaphor for the exploitation of an entire nation at the hands of the Axis forces. By 1939, newspaper articles began to appear in the regional newspaper, *El Norte,* decrying the inequality generated by Germans the world over and the 'potency of totalitarianism' and calling upon the nations of America to unite in the name of democracy and freedom.[98]

From 1938, Germans in Alta Verapaz also began to recognize their children born years, if not decades, earlier at an unprecedented rate. In fact, of all the legal recognitions of German children, fully sixty-nine per cent occurred between 1938 and 1945.[99] More often than not, these were pragmatic efforts to secure their property in the region, in addition to shoring-up the loyalty of their mixed-race children. After the intervention of German properties by the Guatemalan government during the First World War, it was commonly believed that having legally recognized Guatemalan children could protect Germans from such interventions. Few mixed-race children possessed German citizenship; those who had taken it, such as Matilde Dieseldorff, reverted their status to Guatemalans.[100] Efforts to protect German property through the legal recognition of Guatemalan children, however, proved insufficient. In July 1941, the Guatemala government published a 'Proclaimed List' elaborated by the US government that named 254 German businesses and plantations, as well as schools and clubs, operating in Guatemala.[101] Less than six months later on 11 December 1941, President Ubico declared war on Germany. On December 23, the Guatemalan government declared a limit on constitutional guarantees, froze German assets and deported Germans in Guatemala whose names appeared on the List. Yet, many of these Germans had never been members of the Nazi Party, nor had they sympathized with it. Of the 558 Germans brought from Guatemala to the US between 1942 and 1945, only 120 were members of the Nazi Party.[102] More than half of the local Nazis were left behind. Those deported ranged from flag-waving patriots who hoped for a German victory in the war to planters with little connection to the German community, Jewish refugees, social democrats or other opponents of Hitler's regime.

The intervention of German properties and deportations ruptured tensions within mixed-race families. For the wives, concubines and children of the German men who had been deported, the intervention of German properties inaugurated a period of poverty and social marginalization that accentuated already existing hierarchies between 'first' and 'second' families. If German women and children wanted to continue a business or look for work, they found their companies blacklisted or ruined by war, their savings frozen, their property confiscated, and employers unwilling to hire Germans and their families for fear of landing on the Proclaimed List themselves. Many German families who obtained meagre stipends from the government relied upon relief funds provided by the German government through the Spanish and Swiss embassies and a

[98] 'America Piensa y Trabaja por la Paz sin Desmayar', *El Norte* (4 Feb 1939).

[99] King, *Cobán and the Verapaz*, p. 86.

[100] See 'Reconoce a Doña Matilde Diesledorff de Quirin. Nacionalidad Guatemalteca', *Recopilación de leyes de la República de Guatemala*, Tomo LVII: *1938–1939* (Guatemala, 1940), p. 731, and Archivo del Ministerio de Gobernación, Sección de la Escribanía, Caja 553, Asunto Alemanes, Expediente 363 'Diesledorff'.

[101] AGCA Asuntos Alemanes Legajo 704 and Legajo 716, Wagner, *Los alemanes en Guatemala,* p. 372.

[102] Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors*, p.119.

network of supportive friends.[103] Those women, however, who were concubines, who were not German citizens, or who had been expatriated by Nazi anti-Jewish laws, were ineligible for German relief payments. Frequently, they had to fight to receive the meagre stipends offered by the Guatemalan government to the German wives of internees. In November 1943, Modesta Paau demanded a government allowance since she had 'procreated several children with the German Alfredo Christ, who was deported and whose properties have been totally lost, having been intervened'.[104] The intervention thus raised questions about which women and children would be cared for, which would be forgotten, and which ones counted as a German or Guatemalan.

The Droege-Winter family fortunes dramatically changed on 1 September 1942, when their coffee plantation, San Vicente, appeared on the Proclaimed List.[105] The threat of intervention of their property and deportation accentuated anxieties about racial hierarchies and secondary status, about who would be taken care of and who would be forgotten. Only days later, Dorotea in fact wrote to President Ubico, reinterpreting her years as Hugo's concubine as ones of unpaid service as his domestic servant:

> The German citizen Hugo Droege is the father of my four young children . . . As it is the custom of German men, I lived with him as a servant and concubine, while he had the need of me, that is, until he made his fortune and was able to go over and get married in his country . . . When his wife arrived, he tried to cover appearances, deceiving me with a false remuneration for my many years of service . . . in reality he gave me nothing . . . For these reasons, I turn to you for help to ensure the recognition of my rights as a child of Guatemala, and of those of my four young children . . . I ask you to intercede so that señor Droege effectively guarantees the subsistence of his children and THE PAYMENT OF MY SERVICES that I provided in a legal and credible way.[106]

Dorotea's betrayal by Hugo Droege became that of the entire Guatemalan nation, and Guatemala's betrayal by Germans, her own. As a result of her appeal, President Ubico, who frequently intervened on behalf of poor mothers in their cases against negligent fathers, gave Dorotea sole control over the modest Chipac coffee plantation.

Shortly after Hugo had signed the rights of Chipac over to Dorotea, six Guatemalan policemen arrived with guns drawn to take Hugo away. With their properties intervened and Hugo lodged in an internment camp in the United States, conflicts between Dorotea and Oda over scarce resources grew as did battles over Dorotea's attempts to have her children legally recognized as Hugo's own.[107] Hugo eventually returned in 1948 to Guatemala, where his families resided, and in hopes that the government would return his coffee plantations. Instead, however, he returned to working as an administrator, but was eventually able to save enough to purchase a new plantation in the Polochic Valley. On this new farm, Hugo employed his Q'eqchi'-German sons and Dorotea's brothers in low-level administration, including overseeing workers and operating machinery, eventually sending some, such as Gustavo, to public school in Cobán. Oda's children, however, travelled to Germany to receive their education and

[103] *Ibid.*, p.151.

[104] AGCA Asuntos Alemanes, Legajo 307 'Modesta Paau al Dept de Plantaciones Nacionales e Intervenidas' 10 Feb. 1956. Coffee plantations were 'intervened' (managed by the Guatemalan government) before being fully expropriated.

[105] 'Lista Proclamada' *Diario Oficial*, 1 Sept 1942, see also Cobán Municipal Archive, 'Actas Levantads en plantaciones intervenidas por el Banco Central mes de Mayo, Junio, y Agosto de 1943'.

[106] AGCA Asuntos Aleamnes Legajo 505, emphasis in the original.

[107] AGCA Asuntos Alemanes, Legajo 505.

returned to run and later own Hugo's plantation. Indeed, Dorotea's children were not quite brothers, but like brothers who were employees.

The memory of the conflicts between Oda and Dorotea during the war, however, are like a closed box, locked away from familial conversations and public narratives. Instead, they place an emphasis on the time before Guatemala entered the Second World War as a moment of inter-familial harmony, prosperity and great optimism. According to Elisabeth, Oda and Dorotea had been friends before the war and the families lived together in harmony. 'We grew up all of us together, we would go to study in San Vicente, Mutter was teaching us everything. Then the Second World War came and everything changed', she explained. Hugo also remembered how his plans to educate his Q'eqchi'-German children in Germany were thwarted by the war. These familial recollections articulate broader collective memories: the time before the war is one of hope, peace and prosperity in which Germans were leading Guatemala towards modernity. The interventions, like the disappointments and conflicts that followed them, signal a dramatic end to this era, when the Guatemalan nation had forsaken its loyal German settlers and brought this period of prosperity and progress to a sudden halt. It is this nostalgic narrative of a German Guatemala that people——like the Q'eqchi'-German women who responded to the Stelzner's and Walther's documentary *Die Zivilisantionsbringer/Los Civilizadores*——are now, in postwar Guatemala, reclaiming by calling themselves 'the improved race'.

V: Conclusion

Just as Dorotea, Gustavo and Elisabeth were erased from the story of Hugo Droege's family in the German-American Internee coalition website, the myth of German diasporic political and social insularity has obscured the crucial familial, social, political and economic ties that German immigrants in Latin America forged with non-Germans, and the mixed-race children they produced. More than just a benign absence, the erasure of interracial sexual unions and mixed-race children from histories of German diasporas in Latin America also elides the potent practical and symbolic dimensions that these unions had for German settlement and the definition of Germanness abroad. These mixed-race children ambiguously straddled, crossed and at times threatened divides between Germans and Guatemalans. They did so because such mixing called into question the very criteria by which both Germanness and Guatemalanness could be identified, citizenship conferred and nationality ascribed. As neither fully German nor Guatemalan, their cultural hybridity had long served important practical functions in the management of German coffee plantations, but racial purity and nationality were conflated with political sensibilities and cultural norms, and fears of racial degeneration bled into fears of political betrayal. Yet, in Guatemala, for at least a time, the 'improved race' born of German and Maya blood also embodied hopes that Guatemala would become a modern, unified nation state and Q'eqchi'-Germans held important positions of local power and prestige.

The ambiguous place occupied by Q'eqchi'-Germans in German and Guatemalan social worlds became particularly tense in the 1930s as German National Socialism spread through the region and as Q'eqchi'-Germans took up new positions of local political power. That German settlers would respond in diverse ways that did not

always correspond with either the will or ideology of the Nazi state is by now well known and accepted. Yet, the ways German settlers did respond was a product not just of their diversity, but of the complex political, social and familial ties they held in Guatemala, of the ways that they were situated in the transnational space between competing nationalisms and political agendas. These complex, transnational negotiations also illustrate the urgent need to bring German and Latin American historiographies into sustained dialogue. The German diaspora may not have been of Latin America, but they certainly were in it in more profound ways and with deeper ties than is often recognized by scholars in either field.

The erasure of Q'eqchi'-German children from both German and Guatemalan historiographies is also part and parcel of a history that relegated them to secondary status within the German diaspora, particularly after the Second World War, and the corresponding decline of narratives celebrating European immigration as a new form of *mestizaje*. In this way, mixed-race families reveal the desires of many Guatemalans, both urban intellectual elites and ordinary workers, to be considered part of the modern present. The means to gain access to this much-desired present also changed over time. The relegation of Q'eqchi'-Germans to secondary status was also a product of the very potent and deeply entrenched racial and gender hierarchies demarcating the civilized and uncivilized, the developed and undeveloped, that defined the limits of their inclusion in the present and the emptiness of the liberal promise of equality. These vivid racial and gender hierarchies, and the role of German settlers in reproducing them, must be central to analysing the transnational space occupied by German diasporas between homeland and hostland.

Abstract

In contemporary Guatemala, Q'eqchi' Mayas of German descent are reclaiming identities as 'the improved race' (*la raza mejorada*), which allows them claim both tradition and authenticity as well as racial whiteness and modernity. While surprising to contemporary observers, these identities have longer histories, rooted in the interwar period, when Guatemalan urban intellectuals and statesmen looked to German-Maya sexual unions as the racial solution to Guatemala's failure to forge a modern and homogenous nation. Like national racial mixing (*mestizaje*) projects found in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, Guatemalan intellectuals in the 1920s and 1930s argued that racial mixing with Anglo-Saxons led not to racial degeneration, but—potentially—to new and more vital races. While long ignored by historical scholarship, hybrid Q'eqchi'-Germans, however, unravel a priori assumptions of German diasporic political and social insularity. By examining the potent symbolic and cultural dimensions Guatemala's unique *mestizaje* project had for the formation of both German and Guatemalan nationalist projects during the rise of German National Socialism and Guatemala's own populist dictatorship under President Jorge Ubico (1931–1944), this article argues for an understanding of German diasporas in Latin America that places them squarely in the transnational space between competing nationalisms and political agendas. By further examining the important material and social dimensions of mixed-race families, this article reveals the crucial ties Germans forged in Latin America and how who counted as German and by what measure was a subject of considerable debate with important political consequences.

Keywords: German diaspora, Latin America, Guatemala, transnational, family, race, sex, gender

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