The Ship of Theseus and the Problem of 'Postwar' Answers to Contemporary Guatemalan Problems.

Gavin Weston and Natalie Djohari.

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Keywords: Guatemala, postwar, conflict, violence, continuity.

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> "The vessel in which Theseus sailed, and returned safe […] was preserved by the Athenians […] being so pieced and new framed with strong plank, that it afforded an example to the philosophers, in their disputations concerning the identity of things that are changed by growth; some contending that it was the same, and others contending that it was not" (Plutarch 1850 [c. 75 A.D.]: 26).

Introduction

The term 'postwar' and its synonyms 'post-war', 'post war', 'post-conflict' and their Spanish equivalents have come to dominate writing on Guatemala in recent years for obvious reasons. It has been used in discussions of anthropological topics as diverse as the problems facing the contemporary Guatemalan state (Stepputat 2000) and Christian eroticism (O'Neill 2010). It has been the banner under which excellent collections of anthropological writing have been amassed such as Little and Smith's (2009) *Mayas in Postwar Guatemala: Harvest of Violence Revisited* and has been embraced by non-academic sources such as websites on Guatemalan protest graffiti (Freewebs 2006).

The primary concern of this paper regards how 'postwar' and 'postconflict' have come to dominate the literature on Guatemalan violence. As McIlwaine and Moser (2000) note, making distinctions between the violence of war and other forms of violence in countries such as Guatemala is becoming increasingly difficult. Yet despite this, the term 'postwar' – a term which seems to emphasise continuity even as it draws a line between 'past' conflict and the present — has become ubiquitous to the point where it overshadows anything 'new' in contemporary violence. Maintaining a sense of continuity when analysing

Guatemalan violence is perhaps unavoidable when the uneven transition to democracy itself appears to contribute to ongoing violence. Shaw (2002) notes that a rise in crime is a ubiquitous feature in transitions to democracy. But rises in crime are also a regional factor across Latin America, both within transitional societies and in those which have not experienced recent conflict. This is particularly the case regarding violence connected to *linchamientos* (lynchings) and *maras* (gangs), which plague multiple countries across Latin America.

While we recognize the importance of history, we suggest here that there are dangers in the continued use of 'postwar' in analysis of Guatemalan violence. Drawing metaphorically on the ancient thought experiment 'The Ship of Theseus', we explore the way in which the 'postwar' risks becoming a potentially infinite period of time within which distinctions between past conflict and present violence are collapsed. This collapse sails close to "culture of violence" arguments which Guatemalanists have steadfastly avoided elsewhere. In order to give these ideas context, it is first necessary to give some brief context regarding the war. Following this we will explore the metaphorical grounding to our ideas, what this looks like in relation to anthropological analysis of the violence of gangs and lynchings and why this is a problem.

THE CONFLICT – A BRIEF CONTEXTUAL HISTORY

The roots of the conflict are often traced back to the conquest of Central America by Spain and the inequality left behind by colonial rule. In 1523 led by Pedro de Alvarado the Spanish 'conquered' Guatemala (Handy 1984: 20-21, Immerman 1982: 21). Due to the disparities this left behind, colonialism could be seen as the root cause of most social problems in Guatemala. However, this approach implies that it was President Arbenz' (in office between 1951 and 1954) attempt to redress this imbalance that was at the heart of the war, an assumption which does Guatemala, and Arbenz in particular, a disservice. At the heart of the conflict there were ostensibly two key factors: US Cold War foreign policy and US economic interests.

Latin America in general was, and still is, a source of fear for the United States. The Panama Canal, strategic US bases and the US/Mexico border accentuate the political and economic importance of the region. The Cold War provided the necessary motivation for the US to exert forms of subtle and not-so-subtle pressure to curtail any leftist tendencies throughout Latin America. While the Cold War was largely bloodless for the US, the machinations of the CIA made sure this was not the case for much of Central and South

America. "The cold war was not so cold in countries like Chile, Argentina, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. It put fuel and not lids on fires" (Löfving 2005: 77).

In 1954 the CIA organized a coup in Guatemala to remove the democratically elected socialist leaning government of President Arbenz. Arbenz's government planned to establish comprehensive education for all Guatemalans and land reforms that would have seen land owned by the US based multinational, the United Fruit Company (now Del Monte) and the Guatemalan land owning elite returned to ownership of peasant farmers (Immerman 1982: 8; Handy 1984; Melville & Melville 1971). The US suspected that Arbenz' government represented a direct communist threat to stability and US economic interests in the region and as a result they armed and trained a mercenary army led by Colonel Carlo Castillo Armas (McClintock 1985). The coup led to protests directed towards the United States and the United Fruit Company across Latin America (Bucheli 2005: 4). While the coup was successful, it was not until 1960 that the Guatemalan civil war properly began when discontented army officers attempted a counter coup against the corrupt and unpopular government of General Miguel Fuentes, a coup that represented the beginning of "Guatemala's modern revolutionary movement" (Ball, Kobrak & Spirer 1999). In response to this new threat Guatemala's counterinsurgency state was formed.

In the early stages the conflict was treated as a "Gentleman's War" (Ball, Kobrak & Spirer 1999) fought largely between members of the urban middle classes. However violence soon escalated as each side became increasingly determined to defeat the other. In 1966 the civilian President Montenegro was forced to sign a document that allowed the military to fight the guerrillas on whatever terms they saw fit (Ball, Kobrak & Spirer 1999, Immerman 1982, Handy 1984). This policy opened the doors to the widespread use of disappearances. While Argentinian disappearances attracted more international press attention, particularly through the iconic protest of the Mothers of the Plaza del Mayo and lurid admissions of individuals being thrown from planes into the sea, the scale of disappearances in Guatemala were far greater. The Guatemalan Truth Commission (*Comisión para Esclararemiento Histórico* - CEH 1999) estimated around 45,000 to have been disappeared between the mid 1960's and early 1990's. When compared to UN working group estimates, truth commissions and public prosecutor figures collated by Amnesty International's for other Latin American countries, Guatemala had more disappeared citizens than Argentina (around 8960 - Amnesty 2007), Chile (over 3000 – Amnesty 2001), El Salvador (around 2598 – Amnesty 2003) and Peru (around 5000 – Amnesty 1996) combined. While these figures are inevitably imperfect, due to the secretive and unsolved nature of disappearances and disparity in collection methods, they give some illustration of the extent of disappearances that occurred in Guatemala. The initial targets for

disappearances were radicals and intellectuals, but as the violence progressed the disappearances began to shift along with the conflict from urban to rural areas and from predominantly Ladino victims towards increasing numbers of Maya victims.

This shifting emphasis reflected a changing ideological focus amongst the guerilla antagonists. While Che Guevara had played a minor role in the Arbenz' land reforms (Gall 1971) his ideological stance, alongside Marxism and Liberation Theology (Nelson 2009: 56) played an increasingly prominent roll in shaping the revolutionary mindset during this shift towards the guerilla focus on the rural poor. In 1972 the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (*Ejercito Guerillero de los Pobres* or EGP) was established. They differed from the students, intellectuals and disenfranchized military members of the 60's in that they saw both their purpose and their support lying within the poorest of the poor (Kobrak 2003: 25). Inevitably this led to them seeking support amongst the rural poor in an attempt to find tactical advantage in areas without significant military bases (Kobrak 2003: 69). In 1981 the EGP began its major offensive, vastly increasing its attacks on military patrols coinciding with the election of Lucas Garcia. The violence escalated with counter insurgence policies resulting in mass disappearances, massacres, rape, torture and murder of civilians at the hands of the increasingly merciless military.

Prior to General Lucas Garcia's assent to power in 1978, the scope and intensity of the violence had undergone a series of peaks and troughs (Ball, Kobrak and Spirer 1999). Even his early rule was characterized by the selective killing of targeted militants and activists. However in the early eighties the conflict shifted its battlefront into the poor, rural, predominantly Maya areas where state apparatus was more sparse (May 2001). Responding to guerrillas tactics that attacked military targets and then made use of the mountain terrain and forests to hide, Garcia began a 'scorched earth policy.' As part of 'Operation Cinders' (Zur 2001) entire villages were attacked, burning houses and farms to the ground in order to destabilize the areas which provided the rebels with potential food and shelter.

March 1982 saw General Efrain Rios Montt seize power from Garcia. While high levels of violence were maintained by the new regime, they were now coupled with increasingly sophisticated methods of population control. Montt instigated a civil patrol system (Patrulleros Autodefensa Civil – PACs or Civil Autodefence Patrols), whereby the men in rural areas were armed and trained to police their own villages. This PAC system was coupled with food for work schemes and a system of relocating rural Maya to model villages (Wilson 1991). Surveillance methods became ever more sophisticated as Montt's military sought out networks of informers (Remijnse 2003, Wilson 1995) extending the military's gaze into the very hearts of communities.

Ladinos dominated the early revolutionary movement (Stoll 1993: 67) yet it was the Maya that bore the brunt of violence, with Maya being victims of 83% of human rights violations during the conflict (CEH 1999; Stanford 2003). Also at this time some disappearances appeared to become more random, targeting people with little or no connection to the war, a new tactic designed to inculcate fear in rural Guatemalans in order to force them into compliance. Using these tactics Montt was able to pacify the vast majority of the countryside within six months. The remainder of the eighties saw a relative decline in incidents of mass violence, although murder, torture and disappearances continued. It is important to note that the guerrilla forces were not innocent bystanders within this period. While 93% of Human Rights violations were perpetrated by the military during the conflict (CEH 1999), this attributes 7% of violations, equating tens of thousands of acts to the guerrillas.

Within Guatemala the most intense period of violence is commonly referred to as *la violencia.* It roughly covers the period 1978-1983 – although Sanford [2003: 15] notes that the term can be used differently in different contexts. During this time "[There were] 440 massacres in villages burned off the map by the Guatemalan army, one and a half million were displaced, 150,000 fled into refuge, and 100,000–150,000 were dead or disappeared" (Sanford 2003: 14). While such statistics can demonstrate the scale of the violence, they do little to illustrate its brutality or the lasting psychological impacts of experiencing such a prolonged history of conflict. As with so many conflicts, the Guatemalan violence took on a symbolic quality, where brutality was etched onto the bodies of the victims. Zur notes that around 50% of corpses recovered in the conflict showed signs of torture, including "fire and acid burns, flayed skin, mutilated genitals, amputations and stake insertions" (Zur 2001: 79). While these wounds were sometimes inflicted to prevent the identification of corpses, they also signified a symbolic war, one that included the appropriation of Maya cultural and religious symbolism by the military (Wilson 1991), the re-writing of victims as 'traitors', and the desecration of bodies even in death.

The first significant factors in establishing peace began in 1986 with the four guerrilla armies, including the EGP, unifying to form the URNG (*Unidad Revolucionario Nacional Guatemalteca*), who would be the negotiators alongside the military in the eventual peace accords. That same year saw the first civilian government since the beginning of the conflict take office. The new constitution, the emergence of a human rights movement and a general decline in the armed insurgency (Ball, Kobrak & Spirer 1999: 28-29) saw violence decline throughout the latter half of the decade, paving the way for the eventual peace process. In 1996 the peace accords were signed in Oslo by the representatives of the Guatemalan military and the URNG finally establishing a definitive ceasefire and bringing to an end 36

years of civil war. Civil society organisations in all their different forms played key roles in this peace process and continue to contribute throughout the ongoing transitional period (Wilson 1997b) which has seen rising crime and continued human rights abuses.

What this recap of the war illustrates is how fundamentally the war impacted upon the lives of Guatemalans. With more than 200,000 dead or disappeared by the end of the conflict (CEH 1999) a great many people were affected by the violence. Nonetheless when the truth commission reports were first published the scale and brutality of the violence came as a profound shock to many for whom the war had been distant and largely invisible. This disparity between those who experienced extreme violence and those who knew little about it, has made it possible for Montt to reinvent himself in peace-time elections as a paternal figure whose legacy was one of reducing crime.

In order to understand the war and its continuing impact on contemporary lives, it is necessary to acknowledge that the experience of the Guatemalan conflict was itself uneven. This in turn must make us careful in how we go on to account for the impact of thirty-six years of violence on the present day lives of Guatemalans. While historical narratives may collectivize the individuals and groups who constitute a nation, the lived experiences of these events and their continued effects will be varied. Establishing end points and transitional parameters in these circumstances consequently requires reflection on the political nature of 'truth telling' and writing history. More specifically, it requires examining how the tropes and histories used to contextualize accounts leave out or obscure particular realities. The war is not the sole source of all suffering in contemporary Guatemala, neither is it something which should be left out of analysis of the contemporary. Instead what we are proposing here is that at some stage the balance needs to shift towards the portrayal of Guatemala's many social problems being grounded in contemporary political and economic realities in order to avoid historical reductionism.

POSTWAR AND 'THE SHIP OF THESEUS'

The abundance of references to 'postwar', 'postconflict' and their Spanish equivalents '*posguerra'* and '*posconflicto'* in Guatemalanist literature over the past two decades is understandable, inevitable and often valuable as a framework for understanding transition. Both authors of this article have used, and where appropriate will continue to use, such terms in varying contexts. But after a decade and a half it is perhaps now time to reflect upon the use of this historical/conceptual category. Throughout the 2000's it has continued to dominate the titles and contents of books and articles on Guatemala.

It seems near impossible to consider Guatemalan violence without placing it within a postwar context. Gendered violence (Menjívar 2008; McIlwaine & Moser 2001), gang related violence (Burrell 2010), vigilante lynchings (Burrell & Weston 2008; Rothenberg 1999; Gutíerrez & 2002; Mendoza 2003) and clandestine armed groups (Peacock & Beltran 2003) have all been covered in relation to the continuing impact of the war. Explanations and vocabulary relating to postwar also emerge in such non-violent (or at least not inherently violent) spheres such as migration (Menjívar 2006; Burrell 2005) and Q'eqchi' Maya 'cosmological' conceptions of justice (Viaene 2010). Little and Smith's (2009) edited volume *Mayas in Postwar Guatemala: Harvest of Violence Revisited* contains various anthropological contributions spanning diverse topics under a postwar heading including violence, ethnicity, education and development. It should be noted that some of this literature deals with the notion of postwar as an increasingly problematized category, and even where it does not problematize the use we are not saying the authors have necessarily erred in any way. Nonetheless a problem remains in the use of 'postwar' that grows incrementally greater as time passes.

There is a rising critical awareness of the way in which the term postwar and its synonyms are being used. Victoria Sanford (2008) and Michelle Bellino (2010) at times place the word 'postconflict' and 'postwar' in parentheses to problematize the terms. Menjívar on the other hand exposes a subtlety of use in another way. So while she notes: "The most immediate threat in postwar Guatemala in the eyes of Guatemalan women and men is common crime" (Menjívar 2008: 110), thus attaching the threat of crime in contemporary Guatemala to this category 'postwar', she does this having already raised the issue of the problematic nature of coalescing contemporary violence with historical violence:

> "Some of the violence is directly related to the militarization of life during the political conflict, whereas other forms are tied to long-standing structural inequalities that assault the lives of the majority of Guatemalans [...] I therefore follow Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois's approach (2004, 4) to highlight the blurring of the distinctions between wartime and peacetime, "to 'trouble' distinctions between the visible and invisible, legitimate and illegitimate forms of violence in times that can best be described as neither war nor peacetime."" (Menjívar 2008: 110).

More historically oriented political analysis such as that by Peacock and Beltran (2003) also swerves around these issues of violent continuity, avoiding many of the problems of the term 'postwar', by focusing explicitly on the continued influence of specific military personnel in the relationship between prior military violence and contemporary politically oriented violence. While these more nuanced understandings of the continuities and discontinuities

implied by 'postwar' are preferable, they do not eradicate the central problem at the heart of the use of the term postwar. Namely that its inconsistent use seems to foreground an everlasting impact of the war at the expense of being able to elucidate that which may indeed be 'new' or regionally (rather than historically) located in the contemporary period. To explore this problem we turn to a metaphor.

The 'Ship of Theseus' is one of the oldest known thought experiments. First mentioned by Plutarch (c. 75 A.D.), it muses on the "identity of things that are changed by growth". The story goes that when Theseus returned to Athens from Crete on his famous voyage during which he slew the Minotaur, the Athenians sought to preserve his ship as a relic. With the ravages of time the ship began to decay and piece by piece new planks replaced the old. The question then is a simple one: if the original components are being replaced, at what stage does the object cease to be Theseus' ship? The thought experiment, also known as Theseus' paradox, exists in other iterations such as 'my grandfathers shovel', 'George Washington's axe' and 'Trigger's broom' and has been pondered upon by authors as diverse as John Locke and Douglas Adams. All are in essence asking the same thing: if an object is transformed piece-by-piece, at what stage does it cease to be the same object?

There are two simple resolutions to Theseus' paradox (although we will return to a more satisfactory solution later): that it will never cease to be Theseus' ship no matter how many planks are replaced; or alternatively, at some stage it logically must cease to be Theseus' ship and become something new. With the second of these answers, the devil is, as always, in the detail. How many planks must change? Are some planks more fundamental to the nature of the ship than others? This metaphor fittingly describes the processes of reconstruction that emerge following periods of prolonged violence. In Guatemala the end of the civil war brought about peace and since then Guatemala has been in a state of perpetual reconstruction.

The changes mandated under the peace accords have seen civil patrols being disbanded (Sieder (ed) 1998), the Civil National Police largely taking over policing from the military, and as the politicians from the conflict leave office, as personnel who make up the courts, police, military and civil servants move on; as older generations pass-away and new generations are born – the country finds itself fifteen years on from the peace accords and nearly three decades on from the peak of *la violencia*. Plank by plank and social institution by social institution Guatemala began to change and as many theorists acknowledged, the postwar era began.

If we understand Theseus' ship to be the Guatemalan war, how do we understand the use of the term 'post' to describe the nature of Guatemala amid the changes that followed the signing of the peace accords? The answer to this question, just as in Theseus'

paradox, revolves around two opposite positions. If the prefix 'post' is being used as in *post-modern*, then it implies a discontinuity with the past - a rejection of that which went before, and the naming of something new. Here 'post' provides the potential of an end and a new beginning. In this form 'postwar' is commonly used to describe a historical period of time, which started when the conflict officially ended. As such, 'postwar' has increasingly become synonymous with Guatemala itself. 'Postwar' and 'Guatemala' are conflated and used as the preferred name for what may otherwise be described as "contemporary Guatemala".

Such uses of the term 'postwar' are prominent in works which use the term yet have little directly to do with analysis of the continued impact of the conflict itself. O'Neill (2010) contextualises Christian eroticism against a background of post-genocidal social change, with the term 'postwar' appearing in his title and being reiterated thirty-one more times. In this instance the term equates with a period of democratic transition. It is not looking at the impact of the war as such, but at social changes which take the end of the conflict as their starting point. O'Neill is not inherently wrong to do so, and many authors use 'postwar' as a shorthand for 'contemporary' or 'post 1996' in works that do not go on to explicitly address the impact of the war in the present. In this type of usage the Thesean ship encapsulating the Guatemalan conflict ceases to exist at the moment the peace accords were signed and/or implemented – new planks, new ship.

The alternative use of the prefix 'post' however moves in the opposite direction. In these accounts 'post' is used similar to the use of 'post' in postcolonial, and implies a *continued* relationship after the event. This version represents a particularly liminal understanding of conflict, with its effects bleeding through into this 'non-combatant' era of Guatemalan history. Here the use of 'post' implies the past continues to influence the present so that the continued impact of the war must be incorporated into analysis of the contemporary. Such an approach can be seen in Berry's (2010) *Mayan Maternal Mortality and Subjectivity in Post-War Guatemala* in the chapter where she discusses the everyday nature of violence in Guatemala (2010: 130-160). Here she looks explicitly at the continuity of violent marginalization of Maya women since the war. The continuum of violence (Bourgois 2004) stretches from the war into the present, and emerges in differing but related forms. This type of use is appealing in that it is concerned with the effects of violence on people, institutions and processes in a way which accommodates the fact that while official policies may change, people and patterns of behaviour rarely change overnight. While the planks of the ship are replaced, it remains Theseus's ship.

If the first use of 'post' describes an analytic category of 'time' divorced from the lives of people, then the second continuity version of 'post' describes a reality sensitive to accounting for the lived experiences of human lives. Without doubt, it is this latter use that is

most appealing to anthropologists. However, this version of 'post', more so than the other, brings to the fore the paradox at the heart of Theseus's ship. 'Post' here implies continuity, and as such offers a potentially infinite scope for historical reduction; a *reductio ad militarum* perspective whereby all social ills can be tracked back to one particular trigger - the war. At what point then can we account for the emergence of new social patterns that originate less in the violence of the past and more in recent changes? If Theseus' ship is always Theseus' ship, will Guatemala forever be a 'Postwar Guatemala' reeling from its decades of violence? To explore the implications of this, we turn to analysis of contemporary Guatemalan violence as it is framed through varying post-war/continuity lenses.

An example: Guatemalan contemporary violence as postwar.

While highlighting problems concerned with the complex genesis of violence, the anthropologist Jennifer Burrell (2010) looks at *maras* (gangs) in Todos Santos in relation to the nexus of migration, rights, security and economic change under the title 'Security, Migration and Human Rights Talk: Postwar Dilemmas in Todos Santos Cuchumatán, Guatemala'*.* This pattern of stating the complexity, and irreducible nature of violence on the one hand, then looking at it under the heading of 'postwar' is common in research on Guatemala's gangs. So while Zinecker, in his report for the Peace Research Institute in Frankfurt, states: "This report analyses three forms of postwar violence which are especially typical of Guatemala: political violence, the maras, and lynch law" (Zinecker 2006 :3), he inevitably goes on to state that drawing parallels between gangs and war can be problematic:

> "Specialists have dated the origins of the Guatemalan maras to the mid-1980s. It is estimated that at that time there were more than 60 maras in Guatemala City alone. The Guatemalan maras are therefore not solely a postwar phenomenon, even though their growth came after the war and can be traced back to the catalyzing effect of, above all, the Californian maras" (Zinecker 2006: 15).

As Zinecker observes, gangs are not especially a war-related or even necessarily a transitional phenomenon.

Despite the presence of gangs largely beginning in the 1980's, the recent massive increase in their numbers and the intensity of the violence they have been using perhaps lends them to being better understood as: "a "new" violence in Guatemala, one that is wrought with a failing economy, a rise in narco-trafficking, gang violence, inept and corrupt juridical institutions, political violence, and the failures of a morally bankrupt government" (Smith & Offit 2010: 3;). But while Smith and Offit raise the possibility of gang violence being something "new" they do so under the 'postconflict' banner, their article being titled

'Confronting Violence in Postwar Guatemala: An Introduction.' Similarly Benson et al discuss 'new' violence under the heading of 'postwar' (Benson, Fischer & Kedron 2008). While 'new' violence' may arise in unexpected areas (such as among market vendors - Little 2009: 58) and may have unexpected links back to the violence of the past, there seems to be an irresistible urge to discuss 'new' violence as a 'postwar' phenomenon.

All of these authors discussing gangs highlight the fact that gangs are not isolated to Guatemala, but are instead part of a broader regional pattern of gang violence (Strock 2006: 136). They can be found in other countries that have experienced similar cold war-related conflicts such as El Salvador (Hume 2007) and Nicaragua (Rodgers 2006), but they can equally be found in countries which did not have recent conflicts such as Honduras (Arana 2005), Belize (Wegand & Bennet 2003) and Costa Rica. "Although Costa Rica has a significantly smaller juvenile delinquency problem than its Central American neighbours, youth gangs are increasingly influential actors in the growing national economy of violence" (Rodgers 1999: 8). As a distinctly regional phenomenon, is it then wise to so consistently label them as a 'postwar' phenomenon in the case of Guatemala?

But if this is problem regarding *maras* in Guatemala, it is far more prominent in literature on Guatemalan lynchings. The term 'postwar' and post-conflict are used frequently in explaining the current wave of lynchings in Guatemala. The term *linchamientos* (lynchings) came to be used to refer to a wave of vigilante mob violence which swept across Guatemala in the 1990's and carries on into the present. These attacks saw Guatemalans take often fatal justice into their own hands in the absence of a functioning criminal justice system.

A small sample of the way 'postwar' appears in titles on *linchamientos* can be seen in titles such as Godoy's (2002) 'Lynchings and the Democratization of State Terror in Postwar Guatemala: Implications for Human Rights'; Mendoza's (2003) 'Collective Violence in Post-Conflict Guatemala: Understanding Lynch Mobs', or in Gutiérrez and Kobrak's (2001) *Los Linchamientos Pos Conflicto y Violencia Colectiva en Huehuetenang*o. By way of showing that we are not beyond such usage ourselves, Weston's (n.d. 2008) *Lynchings in Todos Santos Cuchumatán: A Genealogy of Post Conflict Violence* and co-authored 'Lynchings and Post-War Complexities in Guatemala' (Burrell & Weston 2008). Again, it is worth reiterating we are not critiquing specific uses of 'postwar' and its synonyms in themselves – but the preponderance of use, the diversity of application, and how it becomes incrementally more problematic the further we move on from the conflict.

The ubiquity of the use of this term reaches its zenith in research on lynchings. It should be noted that there are some very clear reasons why parallels are drawn between lynchings and the war, just a few of which will be considered here (for an overview of

linchamientos see Godoy 2006; for an overview with built in critique see Burrell & Weston 2008). Most prominent is the fact that lynchings began so suddenly in 1996, the year in which the peace process was finally completed with the signing of the Oslo Peace Accords. Daniel Rothenburg sees the elation that followed the peace process as masking an unsatiated "…hunger for justice […] enunciated within an environment of enormous systemic mistrust" (Rothenberg 1998: 6). He views this hunger as propelling the public into acts of vigilante violence. Within the democratic transition which followed the peace accords, the high expectations for justice produced a tension which according to Rothenburg needed a vent. "People want order desperately, and it is this desperation, not poverty, a corrupt judicial system, an incompetent police force, or the claims of indigenous law which motivate mob action" (Rothenberg 1998: 6).

Rothenberg's explanation sees lynchings emerging from the processes and various failings of the transition to democracy itself. Others have extrapolated further to look at specific deficiencies with the justice system. Marta Gutiérrez (2003) looks at the specific barriers which make the justice system inaccessible to many Guatemalans (Gutiérrez 2003). Carlos Vilas (2003) sees access to justice lying at the core of lynchings. Political scientist Carlos Mendoza (2003) demonstrates that the greater the ratio of courts per 100,000 inhabitants, the less likely lynchings are to occur. Yet the obvious critique to these latter explanations that imply lynchings should be grouped under a postwar banner (as all these authors do) lies in the fact that inadequate justice is the *sine qua non* of vigilantism (Abrahams 1998) and as one might expect, one sees lynchings in all those Latin American countries which have equally dubious criminal justice systems including Ecuador (Guerrero 2000), Bolivia (Goldstein 2004) and the Andes more generally (Vilas 2008), Honduras (El Heraldo 2009) and Mexico (Vilas 2001) among others.

Of course, some factors contributing to the prevalence of lynchings in Guatemala are more nationally and locally specific (Burrell & Weston 2008). Godoy (2002) demonstrates the prevalent role played by former civil patrollers in many lynchings. The UN Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA) noted the use of PAC torchlight codes to orchestrate specific lynchings (MINUGUA 2001), illustrating direct PAC involvement. However, stating that PACs were involved in lynchings in rural areas should not be that surprising, as throughout the 1980's in large parts of the country all men between 12 and 70 were drafted into the ranks of patrols. This means that any male now aged between 30 and 90 in certain rural areas is more likely than not to be an ex-PAC. As lynchings have also occurred in urban areas, most notably in Guatemala City where PAC patrols were never instigated, it is possible to read too much into patrollers presence as a blanket explanation for all lynchings. Again it is clearly the case that the fomentation of these attacks is dependent upon a multi-layered causation,

some of which draws upon regional factors, while other parts clearly have local historical components. But the problem the 'postwar' label produces is that these layers are collapsed into each other and with one word they become reducible to the category of 'postwar violence'. Complexity is reduced to an implied continuity. It is not that the war plays no part in the shaping of contemporary violence, but that using it to describe a historical era (be it war or post war) also makes it the descriptor of the origins of whatever events are placed within it. Postwar is not a neutral term.

If just one type of violence were being described as a postwar phenomenon it might not be quite so concerning. But with all types of violence spanning gangs, robberies, lynchings, vigilantism more widely, and even domestic violence and femicide (Bellino 2010; Sanford 2008) being described as postwar, the problem is a wide one. While sometimes this is done explicitly to show the violent continuities, at other times it is simply implied or inferred through the categorization of such violence under a postwar heading. Our first concern with this is that if this violence is going on elsewhere in the region, in countries which have not experienced conflicts then other factors may be being overlooked or downplayed.

Another concern is that in aggregating all contemporary violence as postwar violence, and in doing so tying this ' emergent' violence to 'old' violence, there is an echo of old ideas of a 'culture of violence'. This is problematic given that anthropologists such as Margold (1999) provided such compelling arguments as to why we ought not equate the top down, state-based violence perpetrated by militaries as cultural (proffering the term 'normalisation of violence' as an alternative). Since Green (1999) account demonstrating the crippling, debilitating effects that such normalisation incurs in the lives of Maya war widows, Guatemalanist anthropology has a history of rejecting reductive culture of violence arguments. Yet viewed *en masse*, it becomes very hard to avoid the historical reductionism involved in (collectively) representing all post 1996 Guatemalan violence as somehow being a continuation of the violence of the war. If violence is so prevalent, and if all this violence is borne of a shared history of violence, is this not approaching a reductive culture of violence argument? We are not accusing anybody of actually arguing this, but suggesting that the prevalent use of postwar, which intentionally or unintentionally classifies violence as a postwar phenomenon, makes this type of reductionism a very real possibility. Slippage into a 'once violent, always violent' argument carries with it an implication that not only will the postwar era carry on indefinitely, but that Guatemala will always be violent. Framing violence as a postwar phenomenon, prioritizes the conflict over the more immediate socio-economic factors which drive violence, both in Guatemala and beyond.

The problem of the 'postwar' coming to represent an indefinite continuity is equally visible in attempts to account for the continuing impact of war time traumas on subsequent

generations. The rise in anthropological literature on trauma which gained pace in the 1990's was applied to Guatemala to rich effect. Work on the embodied trauma of Maya war widows (Green 1999), the culture of impunity (Zur 1994), culture of silence (Löfving 2005) and other issues described the psychological impacts of living with the extreme stress of prolonged violence. These experiences can lead to a psychological normalization of violence that continues to affect everyday behavior long after the event. The effects of these types of traumatic experiences can be passed on from generation to generation (see Dickson Gómez's (2002) work on El Salvador and Lev-Wiesel's (2007) regarding Holocaust survivors' transmission of trauma across three generations). The term 'postwar' as a marker of continuity is appealing then for those who want to acknowledge the impact of violent traumatic events across generations into the present. If the population has experienced trauma inducing violence, one ought to expect to see continuity in subsequent generations who have no direct experience of war time violence themselves. But bearing this in mind, how then does one speak of a time when the impact of trauma ceases to impact on lives? When can we be confident that such effects have dissipated enough to allow analysis to prioritize other factors? And do we then stop using the 'postwar' label?

Finally, the 'postwar' framing of recent Guatemalan violence threatens to conflate individual and collective experiences. While the end of war, and social and institutional reforms (such as the re-instatement of the Civil National Police) may form components in what is being described as a 'postwar era', how people experience such change is greatly affected by an individual's social position, prior experiences and expectations. As we have already stated, direct experiences of the Guatemalan war were uneven. So while some embrace 'Nunca Mas!' (Never Again! - the title of the Catholic Archdiocese of Guatemala's Recovery of Historical Memory Project (REMHI 1999) as a message of reconciliatory transition, others such as HIJOS (an organization of the children of the disappeared), subvert and reject this message embracing instead the motto "*no oviladamos, no perdonamas, no nos reconcilamos* (we will not forget, we will not forgive, we will not be reconciled" (Djohari 2007: 5). HIJOS's personal war time experiences, the way they chose to maintain the memory of their parents and create a political identity for themselves, leads them to experience institutional change in ways that are distinct from those for whom the war was a distant event. Where others may focus on what has changed since the signing of the peace accords, HIJOS tend to focus on what remains the same, finding continuity between the perpetrators of past and present violence, and the ongoing impunity of the oligarchy. There is a plurality then in Guatemalan perceptions and experiences of structural change that unreflective use of the term 'postwar' is ill equipped to elucidate and threatens to obscure.

Theseus' Paradox Reappraised

While we have explored the two simpler answers to the paradox of Theseus' ship, it is obvious that neither of these solutions is entirely apt, either in regard to the paradox itself or in relation to the use of 'postwar'. The reason the conundrum has fascinated philosophers for millennia is precisely because it is paradoxical. The less simple answer to the paradox in all its incarnations is that it is simultaneously both things at once. The ship is both the same and different: 'postwar' is both a matter of rupture and continuity. To borrow from three of Aristotle's (384B.C. [2011]) four causes for understanding change, the material cause (the matter from which a thing is made) has changed, as has the formal cause (the arrangement of that matter), yet the final cause (the objects aim or purpose) has to some extent remained the same. For the Athenians, the ship retains its meaning, remaining as a celebration of Theseus' deeds through its continued physical rebuilding. This quantum state of existence is also the same for understanding the Guatemalan war. While the signing of peace accords represents a distinct, historically verifiable end date to the Guatemalan Civil War, the impact of such a prolonged conflict – the ill sentiment, the violence, the psychological repercussions, the way people have come to interpret and attribute meaning to social institutions and experiences – linger on.

Among Guatemalans today, the war is both invoked and rejected as an all-encompassing explanation of contemporary events depending on what one asks and to whom. It is not only academics for whom the ship is both different and the same; these debates are ongoing across all areas of society. The slippage between the two types of use of 'postwar' by anthropologists and other academics is thus a reflection of real-world ambiguity. It is these ambiguities, emerging as they do in flux, that make such social contexts so appealing to social scientists.

The persistent ambiguity of post-war transitions are not confined to Guatemala. They are ubiquitous specters which arise from the ashes of war. While we have already explored the intergenerational transmission of trauma (Dickson Gómez's 2002; Lev-Wiesel 2007), many other types of continuity exist and play significant parts in the continued impacts of wars after peace has been established. Isserman and Kassim (2000) note that the centennial celebrations of the American Civil War were dogged by century-old tensions which lingered into the 1960's highlighting "what divided rather than united the nation" (2000: 2). Today, another fifty years later, the Confederate Flag remains a lasting symbol of these divisions and latent hostilities are frequently directed toward 'Yankees' – although such tensions are often couched in humour. But such post-conflict 'joking relationships' are often the lasting ripples which make otherwise unspoken tensions visible.

Such continuities are not necessarily so indirect. The Rwandan government's continued suppression of civil society, the media and free speech even after 2003's democratic elections, illustrates how political terrains following conflicts are often dominated by the same militarized mindsets as before (Straus and Waldorf 2011). To some extent the architecture of post-conflict transitions attempts to tackle these types of continuities, incorporating purges, war crimes tribunals and truth commissions (Roht-Arriaza & Mariezcurrena eds. 2006) alongside memorials, reparations and reforms. But as many authors have shown, such remedial measures can only ever be partially successful (Colvin 2003; Ross 2001; Hayner 2001). Consequently, while the deliberate manipulation of national historical memory may be used to draw a stark contrast between war-time and peace-time, it can not eradicate the paradoxical continuities of war-time experiences beyond their official end dates. The formal and material causes of what it means to be at war may be brought to a close through peace processes that reshape public institutions or replace past actors, but the deeper tensions and inequalities which led to the violence and the political divisions and repercussion of that violence do not simply disappear.

The ambiguous use of 'postwar' consequently reflects the ambiguities which result from the end of all wars. The challenge for social researchers is to adequately look at both those things that have changed, particularly the shape and form of institutions and histories, as well as how and in what ways continuity is maintained. In such dynamic social environments, it is our task to provide clarity where possible, and as such we ought not to add further silt to these already murky waters through ambiguous use of the term 'postwar'.

CONCLUSION

Anthropology, being a study of how people live their lives, inevitably has to contend with the challenge of applying analytical taxonomy to subjects of study that are in states of continual change. The difficulty of this approach is demonstrated in the use of the term 'postwar' to situate contemporary life in Guatemala. In using the term 'postwar' analysts are inevitably attempting to account for the "identity of things that are changed by growth" (Plutarch 1850 [c. 75 A.D.]: 26). But in its increasing use as a prefix to Guatemala itself, 'postwar' has come to suggests both continuity and change without clarifying which is implied at any given stage. With little consistency in use, there can be little agreement over its potential end point, making the 'postwar' era one that could last indefinitely. As a consequence, the persistent application of 'postwar' to analysis of Guatemalan society threatens to make the dominance of the war inevitable in accounting for current social problems.

When using 'postwar' we are often trying to imply a relationship of continuity between 'the past' and 'the present', while also signifying an end point. Yet it is precisely this paradox that allows for slippages into ambiguity. In signifying "historical rupture", there is a danger that the term 'post-' will obscure those elements that continue (McClintock 1992) while signifying "continuity" will hide those "new" emergences that do not originate in the past. Fundamentally the problem here is one of conflation; conflating continuity and change; historical and analytical categories; individual and collective experience; and nationally distinct and regionally ubiquitous factors. As such the word simultaneously functions as an *analytical category* describing a historical era distinct from people's lives and as a *historical experience* embedded in human life. Without greater engagement with the subtle distinctions and implications these approaches invoke, the term leads to a decline in clarity, while its ubiquity risks the term becoming a catch-all for all social ills in Guatemala which benefits neither academics nor policymakers. In resurrecting the thought experiment of Theseus' Ship, we exposed this inherent paradox in the use of the term 'postwar' and how fifteen years from the official end, the conflict threatens to overshadow the new planks that have long replaced the old ship and the new passengers that now sail in her. As a new generation of Guatemalans who have had no experience of the war comes to maturity, it seems like a prescient moment to reflect upon and change the way in which the conflict dominates thinking regarding Guatemala's contemporary problems, particularly in relation to understanding violence.

The problems discussed here are not necessarily part of a spiral of terminal decline; they can be ameliorated by reducing and refining descriptions of violence as 'postwar violence' from now on. Where we do look at such violence in terms of continuity it is becoming increasingly necessary to go out of our way to stress non-war factors (Burrell & Weston 2008) in addition to any which relate to the conflict. The reason for this is that blaming contemporary violence on the war is not only reductive but also anchors new violence to an unresolvable factor. In 'blaming the war' we risk providing easy excuses as to why current social problems have emerged and remain untackled. What is more, we also risk conflating the human rights abuses of the past with the crimes of the present, turning human rights into a language of stuckness rather than progression. Already, as a language of suffering, human rights discourse provides access to resources in a way which encourages informants to perpetuate certain frameworks for observing suffering (Wilson 1997a; Djohari n.d. 2007). The links between past and present violence then become a self-fulfilling prophecy – we expect to see them, our informants expect us to want to hear them and the parallels risk going unquestioned.

We are not advocating a Stoll (1993) like position that perhaps the best thing for everyone is to stop talking about the war. It is not wrong to look at the war, but it might at some stage be necessary to move away slowly from the *reductio ad militarum* perspective which makes itself apparent through the labeling of practices as 'postwar'. As a new generation of ethnographers encounter new generations of Guatemalan's whose experiences of the war are second or third hand, parts of this transition may occur without any deliberation. But in other cases there may be a need to take a step back, to focus more solidly on recent experiences before reintroducing the war. The war was not a singular experience but 'postwar' explanations risk conflating experiences of young and old, urban and rural, Maya and Ladino. A more mindful approach would be to consider what is gained from the use of 'postwar' and its synonyms and what richness may be lost.

We suggest here that in studies of Guatemalan violence the use of the term 'postwar' is increasingly unnecessary and unhelpful. But where it is used, there is a need for greater clarity in whether it is applied to studies of how the past conflict affects the present or whether it is used as a loose descriptor of a historical moment in time. To make matters simpler we advocate using the term for the former rather than the latter. The term 'postwar' makes a greater contribution as an analytical category describing continuities than it does as an ill defined and possibly unending historical moment. The discussion around post-colonialism and the problematisation of this is a good precedent. When anthropologists use the term 'post-colonial' they often engage in a debate over the applicability of the term. If we are to continue using 'postwar' meaningfully we similarly need more clarity regarding its specific iterations and ideally greater consensus to avoid the ambiguities described here.

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