

Enacting Youth: political agency and youth subjectivities in Tactic, Guatemala

By

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Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Anthropology

August, 9<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Nashville, Tennessee

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## **DEDICATION**

To the loving memory of my grandmother, Marta Guzmán de Lemus, who I miss daily. Tactic will always be our home because she made sure we were always loved and fed under her roof. I am very proud to be introduced as her granddaughter whenever I meet new people in town.

To Edelberto Torres-Rivas. He wanted to hear about young people's engagement in our political life, but I was never able to show him the final text. We would have discussed so much over this. I will forever miss our banter and those long meals along our friends.

To the many young Guatemalans who strive to make our country a better place for all.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Through the long journey of the doctoral studies, I have had the great fortune of being surrounded by wonderful people who provided the needed support and help to see this project to fruition. Dissertations are never an individual accomplishment, and while the mistakes are entirely my own, there is much credit to give the many people who interacted with me through the years and made this possible

First, I would like to express my gratitude to my advisor, Professor Edward F. Fischer. Ted always had a word of encouragement through this bumpy ride, and I am deeply grateful for all his pep-talks and update emails. To the members of my Committee, Professors Arthur Demarest, Lesley Gill, and Debra H. Rodman, thanks for taking time from their hectic agendas to meet with me and give your feedback. I have taken with me their advice and inquisitive comments and will carry them to my future academic endeavors.

Appreciation is due to the Faculty and Staff of the Anthropology Department and the Center for Latin American Studies at Vanderbilt University. I am indebted to Helena Simonett and Avery Dickins de Girón for all their work to support graduate students' research through the summer research grants from the Tinker Foundation. The financial support from Vanderbilt University through the doctoral scholarship, the Harold Stirling Vanderbilt scholarship and the summer grant from the College of Arts and Science, made this project possible.

My work in Tactic would not have been possible without the help of many people and institutions that graciously open their doors for me. I would like to thank the young men and women of La Mesa and the Oficina Municipal de la Juventud, present and past, who not only shared their lives with me but constantly challenged my political positions, knowledge, and understanding of our history. Several topics in the dissertation would not exist had they not made such tough questions. Special thanks go to Adela, Álvaro, Aracely, Carlos, Dalia, David, Edna, Edvin, Griselda, Harold, Henry, Hugo, Leyzer, Magaly, Magner, Mayron, Nataly, Nelson, Noé, Noelia, Otto, Raúl and Sulmi for the fun and challenging moments. Additionally, I would like to commemorate the lives of Concha Ponce and Tita Arrué, who were always happy to share their knowledge of Tactic and their experience as educators. Fieldwork would have not been possible without the support of the whole Lemus Guzmán clan, but especially Tía Chita and Tía Negry who fed and cared for me; their presence was, and still is, a foundational stone of my well-being.

Throughout the fieldwork and research, I was fortunate to have scholars and friends who shared their work with me, and their contribution is now part of this text. Sarah Foss gave me access to her research about the archival records of Tactic's development projects in the 1960s. Gustavo Arriola Quan answered many questions regarding the statistical data used in this dissertation. José María Lemus Orantes shared his archival and paleographic work with me. Luis Ernesto Velásquez was my software consultant and made two beautiful maps for me.

During my years as a student at Vanderbilt University, I was able to meet incredible people who have become part of my extended family. My love goes to the best cohort ever. Carla Hernández Garavito, Brian McCray, Sarah Levithol, and Scotti Norman, we have had quite a ride, and I am glad to have shared this boat with them (I'm on a boat!). To the Guatemalan posse, Ixchel Espantzay, Iyaxel Cojti, and Felipe Girón, gracias muchá. The final writing was made easier by my delinquent crew (you know who you are). A special *seink yús* goes to Scotti for being the best writing partner a girl could ask for, and to Carla for guiding me through the mysteries of graduate bureaucracy. To my dear Vandy friends Amanda Garrison, Caissa Revilla, Dan O'Malley, Emma Banks, Gabriela Oré, Gloria Pérez, Keitlyn Alcántara, Marlon Escamilla, Rosemary Lieske, Sarah Foss, Tristan Call, and Werner Hertzog, I am forever grateful for your company and friendship through these years. My life in Nashville was made brighter by Shelley Darling, who always had an open door for us. Massive thanks to Alma Paz-San Miguel for allowing me into her family and giving me a home in Nashville. Carlos Girón, I will owe him beers for the rest of our lives.

In Guatemala, the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at Universidad del Valle de Guatemala has been always been a second home to me. I want to recognize the mentorship of professors Didier Boremanse, Linda Asturias and Marion Popenoe de Hatch through my undergraduate studies; their work was and is an inspiration. After returning to work at UVG, I have been lucky to have the support of Andrés Álvarez Castañeda, Lorena Argueta de Castañeda, Alejandra Colom, Ángel del Valle, Aracely Martínez, Ana Vides, Ramón Zamora, and Cristina Zilbermann de Luján. In particular, I want to acknowledge Andrés for making it possible for me to do the job while conducting fieldwork and writing; thanks for always having my back! To the students of Anthropology and Sociology, thanks for their patience and cheers through the process. I am indebted to those who engaged in research with me during the past six years, especially: Aiken Chew, Alejandra Barrios, Ana Lucía Morales, Gaby Sofi Dávila, Jennifer González, Juan José López, Marielos Ceballos, Pablo Yon, Paulina Garzaro, Ramón Zamora, and Silvia Sánchez. A shout out

goes to Analu for jumping on board with my last-minute proposals and keeping track of the fieldwork playlist.

Graduate school and life, in general, would have been more difficult without the constant friendship of David García, Gustavo Arriola, Hugo Rabbia, Karen Lorenti, Karen Pereira, María Castro, and Pamela Escobar. I thank them for remaining close despite my tendency to fall out of communication.

Finally, no words can encompass the enormous gratitude and love I carry for my nuclear and extended family; the Paz, Lemus, and Velásquez have been there for me in more ways than I can count. Guillermo Paz and Marta Lemus who are my foundational rock. Sometimes we are like water and oil, thankfully we always emulsify. Mito and Martis who love me despite the weirdness. Joaquín, the bright light of my afternoons. Luis, who ventured into Nashville with me and stayed by my side through this whole journey; thanks for being there for me in the good and bad days (you carry my heart in your heart).

To all of you, as Cerati would say, *gracias totales*.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

On May 3rd of 2015, different cities in Guatemala witnessed social mobilizations against the administration of President Otto Pérez Molina and Vice-President Roxana Baldetti. It was a Saturday and I had been busy doing interviews and surveys in Tactic, Alta Verapaz, a small town in the Northeastern region of Guatemala. Instead of attending the large mobilizations in Guatemala City, as I had on April 25th, my plan was to join the closest demonstration which would take place in the nearby city of Cobán. I learned about the *marcha* through a Facebook post that invited Guatemalans, regardless of their location, to join the movement against corrupt politicians and the upcoming elections. The point of departure was the regional campus of the national University, known by its Spanish acronym as CUNOR; I met a friend there and we stood in the crowd with our banners while the organizers reminded us that these were peaceful demonstrations and offered a few words of encouragement. "There is a bit of rain, but we are not made of sugar," was the final rallying cry as we moved into the not so enticing weather. We walked along the highway, which soon entered Cobán's main road, la Calle Minerva. As the group moved toward the town square, we sang the motto "*Pueblo que escucha, únete a la lucha*" while applauding the incorporation of each newcomer. "So much noise and they are so few," said someone on the sidewalk; however, when we got to the main plaza, we found more music and more people. This second demonstration, in what was soon called the "Guatemalan Spring of 2015", ended early for my young companion and myself. We had a meeting in Tactic and had to run to catch one of the few buses that traveled the route during weekend evenings. As we walked to the bus station, my friend and I wondered about the young people we met on the street, working, running errands, socializing. "Why do you think they are not at the protest?" was the question between us. To temper the sense of discouragement, I said maybe there would be more youth at the following marches.

The next morning, as I exited my family's home in Tactic, the popular protest song "*Las Casas de Cartón*"<sup>1</sup> sounded loudly in the streets; the music was coming from a set of large speakers set in the bed of a pickup truck that had the colors and emblems of a political party. Behind the music came a caravan of cars and motorcycles blowing their horns in a repetitive *ti-tí-ti-ti*; the

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<sup>1</sup> The song was popularized by Venezuelan group Los Guaraguo, an iconic band of the liberation theology movement in Latin America.

young people in the convoy laughed while waving the flags of a political party recently charged with embezzlement. I had heard the song the day before, as part of the peaceful demonstration, chosen for its emblematic role in Latin American social mobilizations; however, on May 4rd 2015, the second day of the period allowed for campaigning, the song was used by partisan politics to encourage present and future supporters. Two days in a row I found young Guatemalans moving and engaging the political life of the country through very different mechanisms and discourses. This contrast would mark the last year of my field research as I surveyed the political agency of Tactic's youth.

Agency has been described as a relational condition (Emirbayer and Mische 1998; Ortner 2006; Gutmann 2011), however, the discussion has focused on an abstract (ahistorical) adult subject without addressing how agency may fluctuate through the different stages and experiences that people live in certain social and political contexts (Durham 2008). Considering the above, the thesis of this dissertation is that the agency is a fluctuating and malleable multidimensional disposition in the life of people that can be expanded and restricted quickly according to the experiences lived. In this sense, it should not be assumed that it responds to a single set of abilities or an intrinsic capacity to achieve individual or collective projects, much less that it can be acquired with a fixed set of skills that once transmitted remains over time. Addressing agency as action or engagement that is socially and temporally embedded, my research demonstrates the intrinsic ties with the specific subjectivities that agency challenges or reproduces.

This is of particular interest as we delve into the possible and probable repertoires of human action in the political field, which will be enacted by young people whose identities cannot be compartmentalized nor separated into single political positions. An intersectional approach into the ethnographic exploration of youth political agency requires attention to particular narratives (Abu-Lughod 1991) that break free from an abstract human subject. This will also require addressing the political agency of young people not as an independent dimension but one that is embedded in multiple and complex social relations. In this dissertation I proposed that in order to transcend discussions of apathy or citizen disinterest present in many adult-centered narratives of youth political agency, we need to explore how young people's repertoire of action is informed by the intersectional experiences of inequality and violence that transcend the realm of partisan politics but frame what is conceived as possible within the political sphere.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Tactic, Guatemala, this dissertation explores the articulation between youth subjectivities and political agency in a context of social and political

inequality. The dissertation hopes to intertwine the questions raised by the field of Youth Studies (Bucholtz 2002; Harris 2004; Maira and Soep 2005; Best 2007; Durham 2008; Gordon 2010; Taft 2010; Lesko and Talburt 2011; Kennelly 2011; Greenberg 2014) about youth political agency into the ethnography of Guatemala. This examination of youth political agency in a rural Poqomchi' town focuses on individual and collective lived experience and how it is performed and informed by different life trajectories.

### **Exploring agency in anthropology**

Social scientific conceptions of agency have been embedded in the long-lasting contention between the utilitarian legacy of rational choice theory (particularly of British liberal philosophers such as Locke, Mills, Smith) and the Kantian normative conceptions of freedom. Within this foundational debate, there are several issues that frame current understandings of agency. From the utilitarian notion of rational choice, we are presented with a conceptualization of humankind as self-interested individuals who either need the structure of institutional frameworks (mainly through the state) or who should not need such regulations because, through the invisible hand, rational distributions would prevail. In contrast, the notion of non-rational normative action has framed debates regarding what motivates or should motivate human acts<sup>2</sup> while also assigning a positive moral value to that which is unconditioned by need (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:964-966). Both rational choice and normative imperative theories speak of an imagined and ideal human nature that does not exist in actual practices; this has led to bounded, frozen, ahistorical modeling of behavior where the individual, her presumed motives, and the assumed omnipresent mandates hold together societies.

The notion of a rational, self-interested maximizer model of human behavior became a widespread tenant in social sciences. Anthropology, building from the ground up, may offer a different account based on actual behavior and expressed thought on humans as agents. In anthropology, agency as a topic became relevant within the debates of an actor/structure dichotomy. However, it was the notion of social structure that captured the interests of the earliest schools of anthropologists. Functionalist approaches were concerned with overarching structures in the discussion of human organization. While the functionalism of Bronislaw Malinowski(1950)

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<sup>2</sup> Though anthropological and sociological work has focused mostly in creating abstract explanations of action, in development theories we can see how normative frameworks imagine the drivers of action among the subjects of their interventions. See discussions of agency as freedom in Amartya Sen (Sen 1999:19; Alkire and Santos 2009:37-38; Alkire 2009:459).

considered human need as the basis for social arrangements, the structural functionalism of A. R. Radcliffe-Brown (2014) incorporated Durkheimian notions about structure as a social epiphenomenon that governed human interactions. As functionalism was left behind, schools of thought such as French structuralism continued the emphasis on individuals as enacting hidden social structures. Lévi-Strauss' (1983) conceptualization reduced human action to a superficial expression of an unconscious ahistorical system of binary oppositions that determine the social order. The response to this school of thought was varied across different disciplines, but I am interested in two academic venues that became important references for Youth Studies: the configuration of the structure through history and the focus on social practice as a way to capture individual and collective human action. While this dissertation was inspired on the tenants of practice theory as a way to capture the repertoires of agency, Youth Studies have relied upon Foucaultian theory, particularly in discourse of youth subjectivities through history, and a Gramscian approach to the reproduction of class order through the enactment of subaltern cultures. I will briefly outline the ideas that have been useful from these approaches for the construction of this dissertation.

In practice theory, the oppositional relationship between agency and structure is understood as dialectical, highlighting how individuals and collectives relate to structures and how they reproduce, challenge, and strategize with available resources (Bourdieu 1977; Sahlins 1981; Giddens 1984; Sewell 1992). Pierre Bourdieu(1977) reintroduced the Aristotelian notion of the *habitus* as a mediator between structure and agents. As “regulated improvisation”, the habitus becomes inscribed (regularized) through practice and creates a conscious homogeneity and unconscious sets of shared meaning that ultimately result in structures. As such, structures become the “statistical regularities” that social science observes (Bourdieu 1977:78, 80, 86). The conceptualization of Bourdieu brings out the role of time in human practice, tying the habitus and the agents to history. Human action in the habitus, according to the author, is only in appearance determined by the future; it is actually informed by the past, specifically the outcomes of past practices (which could be identical or interchangeable). The habitus is the source of a series of movements that are organized objectively as strategies without being the product of a genuinely strategic intention. Agents act upon the habitus estimating their future according to the experience of the past as it relates to their interests (first) and to rules or costumes (second); however, the scope of action within the realm of practices only allows a conditional freedom for agents. Through the notion of the field, Bourdieu places the agent in a relational network of objective positions

which allows for a current and potential in situ; the position condenses the relations between agents, institutions and structure, which are also the result of a particular value of exchange for the interactions (capital) and objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, etc.) (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:97). Although Bourdieu provided dynamism to the relationship between agents and structure, it is difficult to abstract the habitus from the structure, thus resulting in a dual epistemic framework.

Most useful is the conceptualization of the “field” as a circumscribed sphere of values, relationships, and positions that articulate agents and structure. Since it is in a particular field that values are turned into capital, it is still questionable how can changes be introduced into the cumulative norms (*doxa*) that regulates the repertoire of human action; Bourdieu provides a venue through generational dissonances that may lead to variations in what could be possible and probable within practice. On this point, Marshall Sahlins (1981; 1985) emphasized how dissonant actions of actors can transform values (meanings) within a structuring order. Focused on the relation between structures and events, Sahlins’ analysis of change through what he called “structures of the conjecture” showed how cultural categories come into practice by historical agents in an specific timeframe and within certain social interactions (1985:xiv). The combination between happening and structure allows a view of agents that test the categories (empirical risks) and could introduce new meanings into the symbolic system that reproduces the structure (Sahlins 1985:ix–xiii, 138). Sahlins finds that change is not entirely disruptive, as any transformation in the cultural categories is encompassed in conjectural relations therefore resulting in the structure’s reproduction; this transformation is not an individual achievement as it also reflect dissonant practices between actors in a specific hierarchical order, those who concentrate power (the Hawaiians chiefs) and those who are subjected to it (the commoners) and the violent encounters in the happening (Ibid., 140-143).

In this framework human agency can only be grasped in that which has already taken place thus, carrying unintentional outcomes. However, Anthony Giddens (1984) placed larger interest in the possibility of achieving what is desired as part of an agentic power (1984:14–15). Giddens’ approach is much more schematic than Bourdieu’s and Sahlins’, modeling the linkages between agents and structure through the resources and rules that operate in the process of structuration (1984:19–25). His overarching process of structuration conveys a certain degree of harmonious integration without an acknowledgment of dissonance. In this sense, I will follow those who are

not solely interested in placing power as an individual agentic trait but who emphasize the relational (social) in agency.

While the assumed meta-position of the structure was surpassed with this emphasis on practice, discussions of how power framed actor's subjectivities became the main focus under post-structuralist theories. In particular, Michel Foucault delved into the "objectification that transformed human beings into subjects" which occurs in discourses of science, "dividing practices" and self-subjectification (2000:326). These modes of objectification sustain rationalities intricately interwoven with power relations that subjugate human beings. Foucault poses two key understandings in the notion of *subject*, first is to be subjected to "someone else by control and dependence", and second to be "tied to his own identity by conscience or self-knowledge" (Ibid., 331). In contrast to the previously discussed authors, Foucault does not consider the existence of agents, and I would even venture neither actors, as human beings can only exist as subjects to power. The analysis of modern rationalities that turn humans into subjects through disciplinary power in schools, prisons, and medical facilities shows an all-encompassing tailoring of the self (Foucault 1995). This focus on subjectivity help us understand how practices become disciplined to the interests of the ruling governmentality (Foucault 1991). The art of government orders not only the territory but objectifies and regulates everything in it. In the modern rationality, individuals become the object of government, relegating the family as basic unit, and common good becomes reiteration of the established order (Ibid., 96). Governmentality, as the "ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, the calculations and tactics that allow the exercise of [...] power", has the population in aim, political economy as knowledge and different schemes of security as technical means (Ibid., 102). Technical knowledge and surveillance become the mechanisms to achieve the subjugation of human beings into these governmental forms, which in turn become internalized and self-fulfilled by the subjects. Foucault leaves little room for subjects to challenge or speak against these oppressive arrangements (Spivak 1988).

The analysis of how discourses of Modernity structure power should be complemented with the legacy of political economy in anthropology (Roseberry 1988) which brought back a concern over the expansion of capitalism, the consolidation of dominance in ruling groups or classes, and the understanding of disenfranchised subjects as subalterns. Building upon Gramsci, the notion of hegemony came to light as "a problematic, contested, political process of domination and struggle"(1994:358) that creates "not a shared ideology but a common material and meaningful framework for living through , talking about, and acting upon social orders characterized by

domination”(1994:361). Though in anthropology hegemony has been understood mostly as ideological consensus, Gramsci does point out that the “spontaneous consent” is obtained both through the prestige of the dominant group and the “state coercive power which “legally” enforces discipline on those groups who do not “consent” either actively or passively” (Gramsci 1971:12; Roseberry 1994:358; Crehan 2002:104). In this sense, hegemony is not a totalizing force; the subalterns have a world-view of their own which is built upon their own history (Gramsci 1971:272–273; Crehan 2002:99–105). Historicizing power in anthropological thought, allowed for better understandings of contemporary articulations of being; for example, Wolf’s analysis of colonial power and the conformation of the Mexican State, allowed a depiction of Mesoamerican communities as entities of meaning in tandem with larger schemes of power(1962; 1957). Additionally, some interpretations of Gramsci point out how subalterns are not “captured or immobilized” by the dominant as their relationship is “characterized by contention, struggle and argument”, however their activities are never completely autonomous (Roseberry 1994:360). This has led to different studies that how actors in subaltern positions challenge or reproduce class positions (Willis 1977; Sider 1986). Inspired in the notion of “spontaneous consent”, Matthew Guttman (2002; 2008) has questioned how agency in the studies of the subaltern have usually focused on resistance (Scott 1990) instead of also reading it in actions of compliance or failure to defy. The possibility of understanding agency when both failure and compliance occur, placed focus on how certain power arrangements become engrained in the everyday practice of disenfranchised subjects.

Both from post-structuralism and critical political economy, we find humans acting within particular power frameworks. These are not generic modes of domination but are embedded in historical context, specifically in discourses of modernity and the expansion of capitalism. Thus, human action would reflect in one way or another, the meanings and values inscribed in them. It is in this scenario, conceptualizations of human agency as rational choice or normative imperatives idealized human beings within particular structures of power (be them understood as modernity, liberalism, or capitalism). In a way, because of rationalities like these which emphasize the individualization of human beings, distrust clouds the notion of agency and place it solely as an expression of the liberal or neoliberal conceptualization of the subject (Gershon 2011). In particular, the suspicion of agency as an equivalent to rational choice has made several authors wary of its use; specially when it might translate into self-governance (Kennelly 2011) or the individualization of responsibility and risk (Madhok and Rai 2012). Anthropology has warned against assigning



assumed universal values to agency, specially when associated as autonomous subjects who would constantly challenge tradition and social order, or who would value individuality over the social reciprocity intertwined in kinship and community obligations (Durham 2008; Agarwal 2017). The possibility of reading agency, as human action beyond liberal or neoliberal values can provide light into the articulation of power structures and subjectivities into enacting upon the world.

Sherry Ortner (2006) has addressed this disjuncture by including within her approach to practice theory; the questions raised by, what she calls, the power shift and the historical turn in anthropology. Her approach is to place practice in the reproduction or transformation of relations of power and inequality (Ortner 2006:4-11). In Ortner's view, actors would be both subjects and agents who are produced "through practice in the world" which in turn they reproduce with "routine practices and intentionalized action" (Ibid., 16, 129). It is the practice in the world where one finds socially embedded actors that will always be entangled in "relations of (would be) solidarity" but also "within relations of power, inequality and competition" (Ibid., 130-131). As subjectivity provides the content that sustains agency, the latter is not a natural disposition but "takes shape as specific desires and intentions within a matrix of subjectivity -of (culturally constituted) feelings, thoughts, and meanings" (Ibid., 110). I coincide with Ortner that subjectivity provides certain degree of consciousness to self-knowing individuals who can engage in a reflexive consideration of themselves and the way in which the world acts upon them; but also allows for conscious collectives that act upon the public sphere without it necessarily meaning a contentious position against power. I find quite useful to place both agency and subjectivity as socially and historically embedded practices.

In this sense, agency and subjectivity inform one another in specific settings of practice. The heuristic use of agency in this dissertation, will reference a relational and socially embedded action that enacts particular subjectivities in a particular historical contexts. Agency as such may synthesize in the present both the past and the future by contextualizing "past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment" (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:963). While agreeing that agency addresses intentionality as a general ability of agents to project into the future (Ortner 2006:135), I do not consider necessary the attainment of achievements to speak of agentic actions (Gutmann 2011). This understanding of agency should not be considered as an all-encompassing coherent process. As Sider argues, "people act in terms of what they cannot understand, or understand in radically different ways, and in terms of relationships they cannot form, or sustain,

or leave, as well as in terms of what “works,” what they think they clearly understand and can probably do” (Sider 1986:10).

By addressing agency as action or engagement that is socially and temporally embedded, we can see the intrinsic ties with the specific subjectivities it challenges or reproduces. Subjectivity would then be the construction of self-hood based on specific ideological frameworks that respond to particular power arrangements. As such, we should not expect absolute compliance from human actors to the subjectivities that frame their being; contentious relations and contradictions will arise in practice, giving room for dissent or disbelief in totalizing meanings and values. Without assigning it a particular “cultural” content, agency serves as a heuristic device that allows us to understand how human action is a relational process, binding time and society together, where the present is settled in key references of the past that can be iterated, modified or innovated into the future (Emirbayer and Mische 1998).

Understanding agency as a relational process, requires overcoming conceptualizations that frame it as an individual capacity or asset; by addressing it as a relational condition we are required to see it in constant change, not only across history but also across an individual’s life. So far in this discussion of agency and subjectivity, no variations has been made regarding human life stages or has centered upon generic and ahistorical humans adult. However, in this dissertation I will focus upon individual and collective agentic actions that produce and reproduce repertoires of youth political action in the public sphere; as subjects intersected not only by gender and race but also discourses of age, so their political agency is constantly shifting as individual and collective experiences that frame their understanding of what is possible within a broad power structure. It is in this sense that I will briefly outline how Youth plays an important role in the approach of agency and subjectivity.

### **Youth studies and their approach to agentic actions**

Youth, as a polyvalent notion, indexes different phenomena: a life stage in a generically conceived human development, a trope for temperament and character, or an assigned subjectivity that frames social bodies. While discussions of youth delve into age ranges and cognitive development, I will focus the discussion here on key ideas driven from the realm of youth studies that can help us understand its use in a political framework. Youth studies have also incorporated an interest in youth agency, many times related to experiences of citizenship or activism.

Anthropologists' first focus on youth was oriented toward adolescence. While youth seems to be grounded more in social and cultural identity (Bucholtz 2002:532), "adolescence" hints at biological or sociobiological growth of bodies and minds (Lesko 1996:142). Adolescence as a concept emerged in the psychological work of G. Stanley Hall, which he portrayed as a second birth and a time in which complete human traits were developed (Hall 1916:xiii). The impact of his characterization has had a long run in Western knowledge about this stage of life: an emphasis on abrupt gendered biological changes and psychological incompleteness placed young bodies as ones unable to command their own selves. The notion of adolescence was thus fixed as a universal condition (Feixa 2011:1634) despite efforts to challenge some of its assumed contents (Mead 1928). Still, further efforts kept segmenting the "development" of humans into more universalizing categories: adolescence, teens, tweens, post-adolescence, and adult-essence or emerging adults (Feixa 2011:1635). For example, psychologist Jeffrey Arnett explains "emerging adults" as those individuals between 18 and 25 years of age, who are too young to be called adults since their "subjective experience" is based on earlier menarche and the circumscription of school years (Arnett 2000:476-477). A naturalization of social practices based on Western modern whiteness slowly became a universal human development stage.

Against the biologically-charged notion of adolescence, a corpus of studies focused on youth cultures as the life experience of young people and the practices that shaped their world (Bucholtz 2002:532). Among the first to address the study of youth was the Chicago School of Sociology with a focus on urban ecologies and social behaviors, particularly in deviant behaviors (Pillow 2011:82; Williams 2007:573). The work of Fredrich Milton Thrasher in "The Gang" (1927) and Albert Cohen's "Delinquent Boys" (1955) took an ethnographic approach for depicting youth as a cultural subset in opposition to dominant values. The exploration of shared meanings of deviancy from the norm would result in a tradition of studying youth in contexts of social fragmentation and criminology (Bucholtz 2002:536; Salasuo and Hoikkala 2011:77; Williams 2007:575).

In the 1960s, the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) of Birmingham University, focused on youth cultures under the leading work of Stuart Hall and Jefferson (1976) and Paul Willis (1977). Following a Gramscian and Marxist approach, the CCCS was interested in working-class youth and how different cultural expressions were practiced in opposition and resistance to hegemonic culture and the British establishment. Willis' foundational text "Learning to Labor" follows a group of working-class British young men (*lads*) who challenge school norms and the imposition of middle class aspirations, bringing light to the way in which culture can

reinforce subjection, embedding behaviors in “a narrative of capitalist reproduction” (Ortner 2006:14).

The CCCS established an approach to youth studies that highlighted it as a subculture *per se*, challenging hegemony in two different ways: some studies focused on the semiotics of youth cultures as places of symbolic meanings and opposition, while others followed Willis, showing how practices -reinforced by the social settings- reproduce working-class position. The first approach leads to catalogs of youth’ subcultures in different parts of the globe: Michael Brake (1985) elaborated a typology of youth cultures by comparing the United States, England, and Canada; Carles Feixa compared what he considered different *youth tribes* in his anthropological approach to urban youth from Barcelona and Mexico City (Feixa 1998); and, most recently, Ross Haenfler (2012) explored skinheads, punks, rockers, gamers, riot grrrls and other groups, providing data about their founding history, core values, associated music, style, and political position. One problem with the symbolic approach to youth identities and the extended focus on “semiotic markers” is that it portrays culturally bounded, discrete and even static groups. Another is that the representation of youth subcultures tends to privilege identities that seem to be modern, global and (as Haenfler’s subtitle maintains) deviant from the hegemonic culture, lacking historicity in its approach, thus invisibilizing previous alternative identities within minorities. For example, Pachuco culture, Cholo identity, and the Chicano movements captured a large portion of Mexican-American youth but are rarely considered part of the subculture scenario (Marín Caicedo 2011). Chicano studies, on the other hand, have rarely seen these expressions as US subcultures but as a culture in its own right, where elements like Mexico-Texan music are in tune with historic changes and life experiences of young Chicanos (Limón 1994; Peña 1999). Helena Simonett (2001) has shown how Mexican-Americans, during her fieldwork in Los Angeles embraced the Quebradita style, not just as sound taste, but as ethnic-like renewal and social opposition.

A second legacy of the CCCS approach has been the focus on the school system and the notions reproduced through it. Carol Stack (2001) focused on fictitious skill improvement and flexibility presented by the fast food industry to poor and minority youth in Oakland, California. Julie Bettie in “Women without Class” (2003) took an intersectional approach to the lives of Mexican-Americans and white working-class girls in a California high school that naturalizes their future as cheap labor and how, despite their shared experiences, they do not speak of themselves in class terms but keep reproducing the race/ethnic divide. Ann Arnett Ferguson in “Bad Boys”(2000) described race/class differentiation in an unnamed school where a group of African-

American students labeled as troublemakers were considered lost cases (that would end up in jail or dead) by their White teachers. Power, race, and culture came together in these studies that focus on practices that reinforce the marginalization of these youth.

A new approach to youth studies has been influenced by Foucault's proposition of looking at the rationalities of objectification in the history of how humans are made into subjects (Foucault 2000:326). By placing the interest in youth as disciplinary power, the risks of naturalizing Western lifestyles becomes evident and that it can provide a power setting for governing individuals (Lesko and Talburt 2011). Nancy Lesko (1996; 2001) argues there are three great naturalizations that occur regarding adolescence in this technology of power: a *coming of age*, as a universal transitory stage to adulthood; *biological instability*, focusing on hormonal changes that lead to lack of control over the body, emotions, and psyche resulting in the need for adult supervision; and a *peer-oriented disposition*, prone to cliques and gangs<sup>3</sup>. Lesko argues that the study of youth cultures has naturalized these dispositions instead of explaining them, creating an *other* that can be an object of study. The youth subcultures approach of the CCCS may have "perpetuated a construction of youth as potentially disruptive, locating youth subculture somewhere between delinquency and normalcy" (Lesko 2001:14). According to Sherry Ortner, studies of youth cultures have emphasized change by focusing on the actions through which young people challenge and adjust to "larger" encompassing cultural repertoires. However, what is missing from the analysis is what she refers to as the explanation of the "duration" patterns persisting over long periods of time (Ortner 2006:11). Ethnographic work in everyday practices brings out depictions of youth that are not always contestant and in permanent vigilance but engage in alliances and subtle negotiations.

Other studies focusing on youth subjectivities have articulated Foucaultian critique with resistance and agency. This analysis breaks from subcultures or deviance sociological approaches, by looking at young people's actions as both challenging and reproducing power. Sunaina Maira and Elizabeth Soep (2005) coined the term *Youthscapes*, partly in tune with the notion of scapes as disjuncture and flow (Appadurai 1996), but shaping it into an approach that considers both the defiance and resistance of youth cultures and social movements with the uses of youth as a mechanism to maintain repression. Maira and Soep consider "the category of youth as a social achievement rather than a given psychological stage that children pass through *en route* to adulthood" (2005:xviii). By achievement, they are not speaking of a positive outcome but "a

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<sup>3</sup> According to Lesko, the school experience where youth spend 6 or more hours a day with peers could enhance the disposition towards group formation.

condition that is produced, over and over again, by various parties and institutions participating - whether they know it or not- in the concerted activity of producing youth” (Ibid.). This social and cultural construction of youth carries “specific vulnerabilities, rights, desires, and dangers” while also emphasizing that not all the bodies will be designed as youth and, therefore, the category renders some as “privileged, condemned, or overlooked” (Ibid., xviii-xix). By understanding youth as a social achievement the focus shifts from biological age to a “social position structured by the simultaneous powers of consumption, creativity, schooling, citizenship, surveillance and social membership” (Lipsitz 2005:xvi). The idea of *youthscapes* appears quite often in analyses that place youth’ lives in contexts of globalized politics and power (Wise 2008), focusing on governmentality regimes and the creative answers of non-white youth (immigrant youth) in the United States<sup>4</sup>.

Similarly, current studies show how in unequal settings, like Guatemala, not all individuals within the “appropriate” age frame have been cataloged as youth; peasants, indigenous people, and gang members have rarely been included within the notions of the youth condition (Levenson 2005; Levenson 2013a; Levenson 2013b). However, as the social experience becomes homogenized in terms of education, sex and reproduction, labor and consumption, the construction of a “youth” social subject can take place. As such, the youth condition is comprised of the activities, functioning, and places assigned within society to those categorized as young (AVANCSO and IEH-URL 2013:xvi-xxi). Since the contents of “youth” will vary across social settings and time, we must look into those who are named or position themselves as such and explore how their social being came to exist. Moving beyond the normalizing age-framing of human behavior requires an intersectional approach towards youth that shows how age can be “another axis of social power” that shapes youth through “racialized, classed and gendered struggles for political power” (Gordon 2010:15).

Therefore, in this dissertation, I will understand youth not as an age frame, but as malleable subjectivity and a contested social position that articulates local practices, national policies, and economic interests. Through a focus on social practice, I hope to bring light into how “youth” come into being within particular political spheres.

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<sup>4</sup> The cases included in the compiled volume of Maira and Soep (2005) include refugee and immigrant Somali students embracing Africa-American narratives of inequality and voicing of their opinions (Forman 2005); colorblind politics in US schools challenged by race-talk among high school students who experience the state’ approved simplification of race/ethnic lines (Pollock 2005); or the criminalization of graffiti painting as a way to exercise control over unwanted youth behavior that in turn makes the criminalized *others’* style repertoires a way to mobilize resistance (Cintron 2005).

## **Enacting youth: citizenship and agency**

The notion of youth as a counter-hegemonic position, as described in the CCCS approach, and its widespread use as a trope of change and future has resulted in a common association between the labeled subjects and active political participation. However, through these discourses of youth as citizens-in-the-making, young people are encouraged to think of themselves as “passive social actors” (Gordon 2010:56). This is not necessarily a contradiction *per se*, since youth is also the arena for outlining the “social expectations for productive, rational, independent adults” (Lesko 1996:142).

Youth, as an overarching technique for governing the human body, speaks both of the idealized adult society wants and those unwanted behaviors that must be disciplined until the expected result is achieved. This is reflected in the often-contradictory discourses that are cast on the condition of youth: the desired youth (agent of change, hope for the future, range of possibilities) and the unwanted (apathetic entity, deviated from the norms, wasteful of life's opportunities). Underlying these arguments is an idealization of the subject that is expected to be built in the still unformed bodies of these human beings in transition. This subject, today, corresponds in large part to the image of the modern citizen of Western states. It should not be a wonder then, that several analyses of the political agency of young people across the globe are demarcated in “democratic” regimes.

The condition of youth as “privileged transformative powers” is discussed by Deborah Durham as an expression of a “universal and uniform agency” that is aligned with a liberal subjectivity (individualist rationality, self-determined, self-aware, self-reflective) embedded in “narratives of family and ontogeny of the person of Western society” (Durham 2008:152–153). In this sense, I will not follow a notion of legal citizenship circumscribed to rights and obligations or political membership; ageism poses a risk in these approaches by placing youth as a moratorium of adult life or reinforces depoliticization through the model of legal age (being under 18 years of age). Citizenship should be considered a plane of interaction between the efforts to produce and reproduce a political subject consistent with the interests of a determinate political-economic order with the consequent or dissenting actions of those same political subjects. Discussions of flexible and cultural citizenship shed light on the relevance of the articulation between subject and citizen formation and the configuration of capitalism(s) across the globe (Ong 2012; Agarwal 2017).

To challenge common narratives, Durham suggests we ask about other kinds of youth and forms of agency, as well as recount how an individual's agency relates to that of others in their

society (Ibid.,153). We could also look into historical ways in which the participation of young people in the public sphere, framed in concrete struggles and changes, was not considered exemplary or desired citizenship. For example, young activists have led social movements without necessarily deeming them “youth movements”. In Guatemala, young people have been active in the political movements that granted regime changes, from the Generation of the 1920s against the dictatorship of Rafael Cabrera to the Revolution of 1944 against Jorge Ubico; their participation has been highlighted in the form of student organizing (Álvarez 2012a; Álvarez 2012b). However it has also taken place in the peasant movement (Falla 1978; Carmack 1991; Manz 2004) and later on in the leftist movements that eventually led to the guerrilla organizations in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Levenson 2013a). Youth activism in the United States also shows the political engagement that minority youth have led: the Civil Rights mobilizations and college student movements against the war in the United States between the 1960s and 1970s (Dyke 1998; Dyke 2003). While today’s review of these mobilizations may cast a light of desirability upon them, without a doubt all of them represent a challenge towards the *status quo* and hegemonic power; and it is this spirit of resistance and defiance that clashes with the aspired transformative power that is associated with citizenship.

This focus on youth’s agency and citizenship should investigate open fields of activism and social struggle as well as everyday practices where young people maneuver the possibilities of being. By studying both types of action and movement, we can trace the diverse ways in which youth enact agency and citizenship in particular settings. Sunaina Maira’s study of Muslim American youth who try to embrace their condition as US citizens, shows how racial and religious profiling denies the partial citizenship they are allowed. Therefore, a model of dissenting citizenship is bounded to the actions of the State (or global political order) that forces these youth to become politically engaged, even if they are not interested in portraying themselves as political subjects. The author here sees youth as a category of citizens whose rights and public representations are defined *a priori* by their gatekeepers, be that State or family (Maira 2005:77).

The articulation between youth organizing, institutional arrangements, and State actions should bring out hidden places, emotional load, and unforeseen consequences of enacting agency and citizenship. Hava Rachel Gordon (2010) found that youth political activism in Oakland and Portland, CA, was often invisibilized because their activities took place inside schools (as actions against school policies) or they were concealed as part of larger adult social movements. Jessica Taft’s (2010) comparison of “rebel girls” experiences across Canada, United States, México, Argentina, and Venezuela shows that adult narratives of youth apathy also invisibilize the actions



and strategies led by youth activists, then increase their imperceptibility when exposed as feats of extraordinary youth (2010:40–45). Both studies emphasize the need to address the gendered-experience of youth political activism as it will be structured by gender inequalities reproduced by adults and peers themselves (Gordon 2010:176–181). Youth studies have typically been characterized as male centered, and the analysis of female activism helps counteract the depiction of reserved and unengaged girls.

There is, however, a risk in a light reading of resistance and agency without having a critical eye, particularly in the study of youth citizenship. As aesthetics and media representations convey an image of an ever-resistant youth, we should become wary of the implicit association between resistance and youth identities or subcultures (Bucholtz 2002:541). Warnings against a light reading of resistance in anthropological literature (Rebel 1989; Abu-Lughod 1990) should also be applied to this field, particularly the rejection of the capitalist system that can easily be transformed into proper actions of consumption (Klein 2009; Heath and Potter 2004). For example, Taft points out the experience of activist girls in “youth participation programs”, who felt little empowerment as these interventions “can act as a form of regulation, encouraging particular forms of civic engagement and particular kinds of political expression, all under the watchful eye of the state” (Taft 2010:38–39). Placing these youth movements in the realm of civil society may result in a practice of modernity that “compels people to become self-inventing and responsible citizens who can manage their own development and adapt to change without relying on the state” (Harris 2011:146). We should also consider whether this enhanced youth political participation can also reinforce the surveillance apparatus, if “participating means displaying oneself and speaking out in particular ways in particular places, places that are on view to the authorities who grant this empowerment” (Harris 2004:138).

The projection of active engagement in the discourse of youth should be considered within the framework of a liberal ideal of citizenship. It expects an active and orderly participation of its subjects; however, we should not regard apathy as its direct opposite for it can refer either to an underestimation of the researcher or a rightful political position by the subjects.

### **A brief overview of Youth in Guatemala**

A look into Guatemala’s demographic pyramid shows the country is young in terms of age-group composition; about 20% of its population is between 15 and 24 years of age (PNUD, 2012:

225). However prevalent this tendency is in the makeup of the population, the idea of Youth has not always encompassed the bodies included in that age bracket.

Following the discursive use of youth, Deborah Levenson (2013a) shows how its contents and use have varied across the history of Guatemala, along with other categories that helped disciplining the subjects. Though the term was not necessarily used in the earliest years of the Republican era, key aspects currently associated with it now were already in play: the Liberal ideals of an enlightened citizen were grounded in the conceptualization of children as a *tabula rasa* that could be modeled into the new era through the noble task of education. According to the author, the first Constitution of the Nation of 1823<sup>5</sup> called for an obligatory, free and secular education for those under 14 years of age (Levenson 2013a:8). Formal schools were concentrated in the city of Guatemala and, after the abolition of the Federation, the back and forth between the Conservative and Liberal regimes' views on education would result in inconsistent attempts at molding the minds and bodies of the infants. By 1893, under a new wave of Liberalism, the Central American Congress of Pedagogy debated again over the role of education in improving the minds and bodies of children. The concern over Maya children established they should be educated in order to free them from the vices of the "race" but also adapt to the agricultural work expected from them (Ibid.,10). A differentiated expectation of the indigenous subject crystalized in the creation of indigenous institutes, normalizing their life experience and differentiating it from the idealized version of a Youth as a student. Another caveat was made for women's education, that was solely conceived to help her become a wife and mother (Ibid., 12); and, of course, this educated woman would not include indigenous females. However, during the government of dictator Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920), the celebrations of the "Studious Youth" would cement the association between both notions, while also invisibilizing the thousands of young people who were denied the right to education. By the time of the following dictatorship of Jorge Ubico (1938-1944), this education had also become militarized through the incorporation of ranks, wardrobe, and physical exercises extracted directly from the army (Ibid., 13-18).

Parallel to the convergence of education and youth, another term came to light to categorize young people: minors. Levenson places the first use of the category in the Liberal governments of

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<sup>5</sup> Levenson is probably referring to the Asamblea Nacional Constituyente (1823-1824) that declared the Federal Republic of Central American (1824-1838). Levenson does not delve into whom were the subjects included in this aspiration. Further revision of this aspect would be required as, for example, it was not until 1824 that slavery was formally abolished in Central America (Asociación de Amigos del País 2004:29).

the 1870s, who considered minors the children under ten years of age and exempted them from “delinquent” responsibilities (Ibid., 18). This would change with the establishment of the Penal Code, and by 1936, under Ubico, youth between 10 and 15 years of age could face trial under a Minors Court. This resulted in different types of young delinquents who were maids, homeless or petty thieves by the age of 14 (Ibid., 18-20). Another example given by Levenson about the circumscribed notion of youth is the laws that regulated sex-work throughout Guatemalan history: initially it was legalized for girls of 15 in 1881, then lowered to 12 in 1896. Ubico’s government increased the minimum legal age to 18, and this is still the current law, though the practice never reflected this change and many “underage” sex-workers have been reported through the years (Ibid., 21-23). The different use of age to designate the desired youth or the undesired condition of minors should not be disregarded. As we will see in the following chapter, the notion of citizenship also followed age and status criteria which would play a key role in the configuration of the idea of youth.

Levenson argues that it was during the Revolution period (1944-1954) and subsequent anti-communist, development-focused and militarized governments, that the current use of Youth was established. The revolutionary period brought the Labor Code that prohibited the work of children under 14 years of age in hazardous environments, as well as the number of hours they could engage in labor. Unfortunately, the vagueness of the regulations left many loopholes which served both struggling families and large-scale landowners. At the same time, the government of Juan José Arévalo (1944-1951) extolled Youth as the driving, energetic, and virile force of change. Arévalo’s platform focused on education as a critical aspect for the experience of youth, which also resulted in the expansion of the school system and the creation of Normal Schools that standardized secondary education. Throughout this period, the working youth would also see niches opening through unions and the Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo -PGT- or the expansive reformist program of *Acción Católica* and its programs focused on working youth (Ibid., 24-32). The counterrevolution responded via different measures to contain and discipline the energetic call for an ever-challenging youth. While the labor code did not change in terms of the legal age, tougher measures against labor unions resulted in the imprisonment, disappearance or assassination of many youth. Education was also under control through new textbooks tailored after US standards or the creation of the Instituto Adolfo V. Hall, a military school providing free education (after elementary school) for young cadets, established in 1955<sup>6</sup>. However, the subsequent years saw the

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<sup>6</sup> Originally only one military school was established in Guatemala City but soon other campuses were established: Occidente (San Marcos) in 1964; Oriente (Zacapa) in 1969; Sur (Retalhuleu) in 1971; Norte (Alta Verapaz) in 1973;

emergence of Youth as a revolutionary force, mainly through the organization of student movements that sympathized with the guerrilla organizations and would lead several protests during the 1960s and 1970s. Levenson points out two important aspects about this period: first, that not all students rose against military power and even non-student youth were found among those organizations; second, that the actions of young people in the leftist movement were not focused towards youth as a category but the unjust world of adults. The response from military governments was increasing control over young bodies through criminalization practices (Ibid., 33-41). I would also include here the subjection through forced conscription of indigenous or poor mestizo males. “Good” and “bad” youth were defined by their association with the political subject of interest during a given political period.

Among the actions taken by the Guatemalan State during this period was the establishment of the “Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 1975-1979”, which promoted youth clubs in the rural area; it did not have much impact, but discursively put up a fight against the “spread of communism and revolutionary forces” (Levenson 2005). This would be the first of many Youth driven Public Policies, a trend that remains to this day. Youth as a topic also gained relevance with the United Nations proclamation of 1985 as the “International Youth Year: Participation, Development, Peace.”<sup>7</sup> That very same year marked the transition from military power as the National Constituent Assembly drafted our current Constitution and called for the first elections in what has been called the “Democratic era.” The creation of the Instituto Nacional de la Juventud (INAJU), under the Ministry of Education, as an entity primarily devoted to the promotion of sports and cultural activities, took place the same year. The INAJU established several of the current youth gymnasiums located at Departmental capitals; not much more was accomplished. By 1996, following another political change with the signing of the Peace Accords, the INAJU was substituted by the Consejo Nacional de la Juventud (CONJUVE), an entity directly linked to the Executive power and focused on making the participation of youth in development efforts viable (PNUD 2012:16-18). Despite its mandate, the CONJUVE usually works under the ruling party’s interest and remains an inter-institutional coordinator without actual program execution.

The installation of these governmental entities and the establishment of youth as a topic in the international development agenda, allowed for it to become a specialized field in the political

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Quiché (Santa Cruz del Quiché) in 1983; Jalapa (Jalapa) in 1983; and Chiquimula (Chiquimula) in 1999 (Ministerio de la Defensa Nacional n.d.).

<sup>7</sup> General Assembly, Resolution 34/151.

arena. Several youth-oriented law initiatives and public policies have emerged after the Peace Accords, and different State entities have specific regulations or units regarding youth matters: from the sectoral policies for rural youth in the Ministry of Agriculture to youth courts in the Judicial System or youth commissions in Congress. Just in 2003, under the government of Alfonso Portillo (2000-2003), a law, a commission, a coordinator and a national agenda were established<sup>8</sup>. The “Coordinadora Juventud por Guatemala” (CJG), which has since disappeared, produced an “Agenda Nacional de la Juventud” that was presented and subscribed by the two leading political candidates for the following electoral period. The agenda demanded a national dialogue on youth and the promotion of a youth-oriented law (Ibid, 19-20). Various political initiatives sprouted from this first national agenda: in 2005 a statement concerning youth at risk was issued under the “Política Nacional de Prevención de Violencia Juvenil”, while the “Política Nacional de la Juventud 2005-2015” was read at Congress without achieving the support needed to pass. A “Ley de Desarrollo Integral de la Juventud” was read at Congress in 2007, and a “Ley Nacional de la Juventud” was presented in 2008 and again in 2012; all of these instruments were without success (PNUD 2012:16–24). Meanwhile, CONJUVE pushed for the national political policy for youth without success in 2010 but a new version named “Política Nacional de Juventud 2012-2020” was finally approved as a Government Agreement in 2012 (Presidencia de la República de Guatemala 2012).

Other niches for youth in the Guatemalan state apparatus were the Urban and Rural Development Councils<sup>9</sup> and the Municipalities. In 2010, modifications to the Municipal Code of 2002 allowed for the specific dedication of 0.5% of the budget allocated by the State to the municipality towards youth and seniors (PNUD 2012:18). The approval of the national policy and this assignation became incentives for the establishment of Municipal Youth Offices as well as Youth Committees within the Municipal Development Councils. As we will see in the following chapters, the structuration of citizen participation through this mechanism will play a vital role in the consolidation of a youth presence in local politics.

The notion of youth in Guatemala is intrinsically linked with the State’s interest in its emergent citizens and responds to the political concerns of different historical moments, many times in obvious contradiction. Practices and policies, however, do not come only from the State but also from international agencies and private-entrepreneurial sectors. In a framework of

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<sup>8</sup> The “Ley de protección integral de la Niñez y la Adolescencia 27-2003” laid the groundwork for the creation of the “Comisión Nacional de la Niñez y la Adolescencia”.

<sup>9</sup> The structure of the Councils will be explained in the following chapter.

multiple but unsuccessful attempts to establish policies focused on youth, still seen as a potential future or a problematic present, several youth-oriented projects have been implemented by agencies for international cooperation for development. For example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) included the promotion of youth leadership as a core issue for their cooperation agenda and developed a specific project for violence prevention focused on “youth at risk” in the country; this is framed under the security initiative for the Central American region (AMUPREV 2011; AMUPREV 2019; Berk-Seligson et al. 2014). Among other instances found implementing youth-related projects in the country were: The Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID, Spanish acronym), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD). SIDA, through their Maya Program, has also funded several initiatives for youth political formation through national institutions like PROPAZ and Universidad Landívar. It is precisely in the confluence of national policies, development interventions, and social movements that the notion of youth dissected in this dissertation came to life.

Youth, then, is a relevant instance in national politics; this relevance is based on the contradictory positions of youth as the keepers or custodians of the nation’s hope for a better future or youth as a violent threat to national security. Both discourses of youth, as a hope and a threat, have been present in Guatemala’s politics since the early 20th century, reinforced during the war era. Both are present in national and local politics, creating an environment where youth’ interests should be supported and feared.

### **Building the dissertation**

This dissertation builds on several years of ethnographic work in Tactic, Alta Verapaz. I chose this site for study both because it has an active landscape of youth organizations and because of my personal relationship with the town. Exploratory fieldwork research in 2011 allowed me to become familiar with the educational setting. I found that Tactic, one of the five territories of the Maya Poqomchi’ region in the Verapaz, had been targeted by different organizations working with USAID-funded violence-prevention programs. Located at a point of entry to the department of Alta Verapaz, Tactic is highly accessible through National Route 14, the only completely paved road connecting Alta Verapaz with the Guatemalan highlands and the Atlantic coast. As an area with a lower presence of drug-networks and land conflicts, Tactic was presented as a strategic place for development projects focused on crime prevention and economic empowerment among young

people. It was during this initial fieldwork that I became familiar with its local youth groups, particularly with the alliance “Mesa de la Juventud de Tactic”, which had begun working as an active organization in 2011. It was not until the summer of 2012, that I would meet most of the organized youth that became key participants in my research and current life. *La Mesa* -as it will be referenced through most of this dissertation- had just formalized an agreement with the local government to have a permanent youth office within the Municipality -Oficina Municipal de la Juventud, OMJ-. This setting seemed ideal to explore the dynamics between organized and unorganized youth and municipal/state actions.

In addition, my other ties to the town are significant. Tactic has been the home of my maternal ancestors for at least a century. Though I grew up in Guatemala City as part of the first generation of families that migrated from small towns to the City in the 1970s, my parents kept strong ties with both of their hometowns. I spent part of the year, particularly during school breaks, in Tactic with my grandparents, uncles, and cousins, while also engaging with community life and, at times, religious youth groups. However, being a young *mestiza*, descendant of Ladino landowners who were the local elite in the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century, made me the recipient of economic and social privileges that are not widespread in the town; my social rearing and family ties positioned me, in spite of myself, on the dominant side of ethnic relations in the Verapaz region. Still, my relationship to the region was personal and not anthropological until this research. While different fieldwork opportunities had taken me to other regions of the country, I always wanted to explore the history of Tactic, all the more so given the lack of anthropological research in the Poqomchi’ region. A stroke of serendipity allowed me to meet the organized youth of *La Mesa*, and it is thanks to this, and my aunt’s support, that this fieldwork was made possible.

The fieldwork spanned a period from 2011 to 2015, but the substantial research presented in this text took place between June of 2013 and December of 2015. Throughout the fieldwork, I conducted a survey with unorganized youth and semi-structured interviews with different youth (organized and unorganized) as well as local authorities, development practitioners, and community leaders. Through this period, my professional and personal life took root in Tactic well beyond my initial research expectations. As a *halfie* anthropologist (Abu-Lughod 1991), partially linked to the town and recognized both as local and foreign by different members of the community, I was also confronted by the other positions, experiential and structural, that took place between me and the participants. I hope to bring light into some of these shared and distant positions throughout the dissertation.

In the fall of 2013, I was offered a position at the Universidad del Valle de Guatemala as head of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology. Given the few opportunities that exist in Guatemalan academic life, I took the job hoping to manage both work and research. Though not fitting to the practice of “research” in US academic trajectories, I believe the experience was highly appropriate to understand the life of many youth that participated in my research. Sharing the overload of working and studying allowed me to equate my own experience with some of the youth who were struggling to keep up with their studies; a few of them now brag about how they have finished their degrees while I have yet to defend this dissertation. While our experience of inequality is vastly different and cannot be overlooked by a temporally shared position of work/study, it did prove a relatable experience that provided understanding and compassion.

On another note, this particular experience provided an opportunity to question my practice as a Guatemalan anthropologist. While I was fortunate to have the support of two summer grants by the Tinker Foundation in 2011 and 2012, the largest portion of my research was funded through a summer grant from Vanderbilt’s College of Arts and Sciences for 2013 and my monthly income from UVG for the subsequent years. My fieldwork schedule was usually set up from Thursday to Sunday, travelling back and forth from Tactic to Guatemala City (about a four-hour drive). While this is not consistent with the classical expectation of deep immersion conveyed in the tradition of “participant observation” set up by North American anthropology, it became an in-depth participation in the unfunded academic life in Guatemala; this is not an exclusive experience, but the common ground of our discipline that I believe, decisively, shapes the future of anthropological inquiry in our country. In an effort to understand what this entails, I created a database with days present and travels that were required. My record shows that for 2015, I traveled about 48 times between Guatemala City and Tactic and was able to stay for about 95 whole days in Tactic. During this period, I attended approximately 22 events with different youth organizations and, while working in the city, I took part in 7 other meetings through skype or telephone.

During the summers of 2011, 2012, and 2014, I also had a fieldwork training with students of Universidad del Valle de Guatemala who, in turn, implemented parallel research projects in Tactic. In 2011, with Aiken Chew, Silvia Sánchez, and Ramón Zamora we designed and implemented the first survey and the final database is now part of UVG’s educational resources; in 2012, Alejandra Ariano, Jenifer González, and Ana Lucía Morales explored formal and informal educational settings; in 2014, Sophia Dávila, Paulina Garzaro, Juan José López, Fernando Peña, and Pablo Yon implemented a collaborative evaluation of youth committees with *La Mesa* and the OMJ. The



interaction between anthropology students, Tactic youth, and myself, provided a constant questioning of my position as a local-foreign researcher and professor; members of *La Mesa* questioned anthropological assumptions about the “other” while also engaging the students as peers because of their shared condition as youth. Since then, several of us have had the opportunity to exchange views in conferences, demonstrations, art shows and informal get togethers. A large part of my reflections on the construction of *our citizen self* is informed by this experience.

### ***The methodology***

The core data presented in this dissertation comes from a survey and semi-structured interviews done between 2013-2015; these make up a final database of 185 participants. Additionally, through a series of field notes, I kept a register of all the events that I attended during this period as well as a personal account of my experiences. The research was approved under the IRB# 130857 "Aspirations of well-being and agency among Guatemalan youths: explorations in Tactic, Alta Verapaz".

The non-probabilistic survey was applied to 102 youth between 15 and 30 years of age, most of whom were studying at the time of the interview<sup>10</sup>. The survey sample was designed through a quota sample, in order to capture equal numbers of participants regarding sex (female/male), ethnicity (indigenous/non-indigenous), and geographical location (urban/rural). The participants were identified through a snowball mechanism, which allowed me to first contact the parents of possible participants who were minors (between 15-17). The surveys were anonymized from the beginning as no personal identifiers were collected; the responses were handwritten or tape recorded with permission of the participant. The data was later digitalized via a password protected Google form that allowed the creation of a database that was reviewed for consistency. The survey database was analyzed both in a quantitative (SPSS) and a qualitative software (MAXQDA) because the instrument was composed both of open and closed questions.

As previously mentioned, the database of a survey done with UVG students in 2011 was also reviewed for this dissertation. This anonymized data set includes 343 individuals who were middle or high school students at the time. Of these, 57% were males and 43% females, and their average age was 17 years old. Despite the fact that the people that participated were all in the “secondary

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<sup>10</sup> The original design was intended for participants between 15-24 years of age. However, because the mechanism of recruitment was through snowball sampling, my contacts made appointments with two participants who exceeded the age limit. As age became a contested notion in the idea of youth, as will be discussed later, and to acknowledge their kindness towards my inquiry, I have included their data in the sample.

education” years, the eldest age reported was 38 for males and 30 for females. Though this survey was mostly focused on characterizing these students and did not delve into agency as a topic, it was quite useful to compare youth living conditions and interests (chapter 3).

Semi-structured interviews were applied to two different groups: youth (organized and unorganized) between 18 and 30 years of age, and a selection of development practitioners and local authorities. The semi-structured interviews with youth captured 50 young people (ages 18 and up), procuring equal participation of organized and non-organized youth as well as equal representation of gender. The participants were identified through a snowball mechanism and also through my regular participation in town events. These interviews provided information about aspirations and agency, perceptions of citizenship after becoming legal adults, and their relationship with the adults- gatekeepers in their lives; the interviews with organized youth expanded on their expectations of community well-being, as well as the challenges they face as they enter local “adult” politics. I conducted all the interviews as one-on-one sessions, in places that were thought comfortable for the participants; most of them took place in private houses (the participant’s or mine) but other settings were also used: a secluded coffee-shop, an unvisited library, an office after working hours. All interviews were tape-recorded with permission of the interviewee, while I also took hand-written notes during the sessions; all interviews were conducted in Spanish and transcribed in Spanish. The quotes included in this text were only translated into English during the process of composition.

The semi-structured interviews with development practitioners and authorities were conducted in a similar fashion to that previously described. Exceptions include the fact that some adults were not willing to have the interview recorded, thus with them I took copious notes in my field notebook and wrote a general impression of the interview immediately after it took place. Additional data included local and national newspapers or newscasts, public posts circulated through social media (primarily Facebook), public records or documents from any institution or organization related to this research, as well as municipal and national archives. During fieldwork, I also collected leaflets, posters, invitations, programs and agendas related to the events that took place in the town and which I attended; some of these have been used as illustrations in this dissertation. The interviews were all anonymized and the real names of all the participants have been substituted throughout the texts. The names of public figures, projects, and youth groups have been introduced as such.

The transcriptions of the interviews, relevant field notes and data compiled from archives were uploaded to qualitative software (MaxQDA). The general principles of in vivo coding were initially followed (Saldaña 2013:91–96), creating an extensive code set that was interesting but too vast for such a large database. Afterward, I switched to a structural coding system (*Ibid.*, 84-87), which allowed a faster approach to the analysis by identifying content related to the codes already present in the questions and further analysis within the selected sections. The qualitative software also allowed for doing a “linguistic search”, some tropes discussed in the following sections were possible thanks to this analytic tool; for example, while searching for mentions of two youth base groups, *Equilibrio* and *Expresión*, I became aware of their relation with ideas of well-being and citizenship. A matrix for social network analysis was developed after the transcription and general coding of interviews.

#### A GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The young people that participated in this research were between the age of 15 and 30, with an average age of 17<sup>11</sup>. Most of them were single (95%) and did not have children (98%). Accordingly, they lived with their immediate family and at least with one of their parents (93%). Few people lived with other relatives, which included grandparents, uncles or partners. This trend coincides with other data reported for the region: in Alta Verapaz, 93.2% of people under 18 lived with at least one of their parents (70.8% with both); on a national scale the number is 92.5% (65.2% with both). When only one parent was present, the mother is the one with whom youth live (ENSMI 2014-2015: 30).

Their houses were owned by their parents (77%) or by other family members (12%). Though few of them reported living in rented houses (4%), these declarations of ownership must not be confused with legal ownership. Many people would speak of owning their house but not having legal paperwork for land tenure; this represented a high vulnerability for them, as several youth talked about how their nuclear families had been thrown out of family lots by those members who held the legal titles<sup>12</sup>. Therefore, we can picture these youth living in houses owned by their parents but without legal certainty of property.

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<sup>11</sup> The 2011 survey, which will be referenced occasionally in this section, captured people between the ages of 13 and 38 years, with a mean age of 17.

<sup>12</sup> It is a common practice to build houses on family plots without a formal division of the property. I was also aware of land being sold without legal property titles because of contested intestate successions; still many venture to acquire land this way.

The households were comprised of several family members, with an average of 7 individuals living in the same house (minimum of 1 and maximum of 15), and had, on average, 6 rooms with 4 of them being used for sleeping. Most homes had a separate room that was specifically used for cooking and not sleeping (91%). To prepare food, 43% primarily used a firewood stove, 32% a gas stove, and 14% still used an open fire (poyo). These homes had concrete floors (64.4%) or ceramic tiles (24%), electricity (96%) and direct access to running water (88.1%). While most mentioned having ceramic toilets as sanitary facilities (71%), latrines were still present in the hamlets (24%)<sup>13</sup>. The majority of the participants lived in neighborhoods that had both running water<sup>14</sup>, electricity<sup>15</sup>, and public street lighting.

Most of the participants did not have access to a land line or a family vehicle. While bicycles were the prevalent means of transportation for youth, both surveys showed it was males who were more likely to have them. Very few had computers at home and even less had access to internet at home. Televisions were fairly common in youth's houses (77% in 2011, 84% in 2015) but only the main town and nearby hamlets had access to cable tv (which is the only way to get a wide variety of channels). Those who didn't depended on antennae transmission that usually provides access to two national channels. Email and Facebook were used by several of the youth (more than 60% in 2015) but the latter, as I will discuss later, was more useful for wider communications; by the end of my fieldwork most people used Whatsapp to communicate, something I did not originally consider for the surveys because it was only included later in the "social media packages" that cell phone companies were selling.

As mentioned before, Tactic is part of the Poqomchi' territory; while most of the participants self-identified as indigenous (63.5%), they did so through a variety of labels: Indígena (30.7%), Maya (24.8%), Poqomchi' (5.9%), Maya Poqomchi' (2.0%), and Maya Mestizo (2.0%). Meanwhile, non-indigenous labels included: Ladino (17.8%), Mestizo (9.9%), and No Indígena (1.0\*). A few declared they did not know their ethnicity (3.0%) or stated they had none (3.0%).

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<sup>13</sup> In 2002, Tactic barely had 36% sewage coverage, concentrated in urban areas (COMUDE Tactic and Segeplan 2010:26).

<sup>14</sup> The water services in the main town are owned by the Municipality, while 78% of rural areas have running water from nearby springs that are not connected to the towns' piping system (COMUDE Tactic and Segeplan 2010:26). Municipal water costs about Q40 per year, whereas just the bill for public lightning is Q.75 a month.

<sup>15</sup> Electricity is provided by a private company, known as ENERGUATE or DEORSA. DEORSA is the Distribuidora de Energía Eléctrica de Oriente, S.A.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THIS RESEARCH

As previously mentioned, the research spanned the four years between 2011 and 2015, though it was not originally designed as a longitudinal study. The advantage of a multi-year ethnographic study is that you can grasp the fragility of temporality; no description will last long, particularly when you are referencing the experience of youth with a population who is “growing out” of the category. Therefore, the descriptions contained in this dissertation need to be read through a lens of fluidity and not be seen as fixed conditions, probably just like all human experience. As I delved into the topic of youth, particularly that of organized youth, the expectations of capturing rooted practices were soon confronted by their temporality; this contrasted with what seemed like the more solid and structuring forces of inequality and difference, briefly challenged with the 2015 movements, but ultimately unmoved. Though I have tried to portray both fluidity and reiteration in what I heard and saw, there is still a risk in conveying stagnation by producing an explanation in a written form.

The long exposure during fieldwork also provided a vast amount of information that requires a longer analytical process than what I was able to do. Similarly, to my situation during fieldwork, I have had a full-time job while analyzing and writing this dissertation; thanks to Vanderbilt’s scholarship and UVG’s license, I was able to take a semester off in 2016 and another in 2018 for analyzing data and writing, respectively. Therefore, the text does not explore all the narratives I was fortunate to collect, and I hope, in future years, to elaborate on several of the analytical routes that remain unfollowed.

Additionally, this research briefly explores the dynamic between local endeavors and state/international interventions that produce niches of action in the lives of individuals and collectives. The purpose is to provide an overview of the many projects and interventions without it representing an evaluation nor an endorsement for a theory of change that could be replicated. None of the development projects and interventions in Tactic can be individually accounted for through the stories conveyed here; this is a narrative of the confluence of individuals’ backgrounds, preferences, and decisions, under collective efforts that took over fleeting windows of opportunity to challenge their surroundings. It is still history in the making.

I would also point out that it is possible that nuances were lost in translation; while the fieldwork and database analysis was completely done in Spanish, the process of reading and writing has been done mostly in English. Given my mother tongue is Spanish, I feel I have not done justice

to all the richness and wordplay expressed in the interviews. Hopefully, the key ideas and narratives still convey the richness of what was spoken and seen in Tactic.

#### A BRIEF NOTE ON THE POLIVOCALITY OF LABELS.

I was surprised by the subtle difference between talking about *juventud* (youth) and *jóvenes* (young people) made by Tactiqueños across the different interviews. While the first term evoked descriptions of feelings, attitudes and positions towards life, the second one became more specific when describing subjects cataloged with such a label.

The feminine noun *Juventud* recalls the reified and romantic idea of Youth, associated with what Deborah Durham (2008) considers a supposed transforming power and what Deborah Levenson (2013a) understands as a power technology in the construction of the modern subject. Meanwhile, the term *jóvenes*, which despite being gender neutral in Spanish is mostly used with a masculine article, elicited narratives of young men's lives; only females and queer youth made differences in terms of gender in the condition of youth.

I also found that people never used the word *patojo* or *patoja*, a colloquial Guatemalan Spanish term that refers to young people, to describe the idealized notions of youth. Most of the uses of *patojo* were centered on descriptions of risky behavior or an adult's nostalgic remembrances of the past. *Juventud* was never substituted by the Guatemalan noun *patojada*, which always referred to a collective of individuals and never to an idealized concept. Other terms like *chavo/chava* were rarely used, its use was circumscribed to point out a particular individual in a conversation.

Because the research has moved constantly between English and Spanish, the original design focused on youth or young people without an explicit quest for La Juventud until I was in Tactic and immersed in Spanish again. Though more research could be done on the linguistic implications of these terms, I consider the ethnographic account conveys enough evidence of the juxtaposition between ideas and subjects inscribed by these labels, as well as the production and reproduction of the field of youth.

#### ***The structure of the dissertation and Elizabeth's story***

The thesis is composed of seven chapters that starts from a brief description of the town of Tactic, through a description of the social spaces of youth, towards a construction of the political scene in which organized youth mobilized between 2013 and 2015. Through this I hope to provide

enough evidence of how individuals, groups, local governments, specific projects and other actors interact in the construction of the public sphere.

To convey the rich experience of the life stories recollected through the fieldwork, I will present the story of a young Tactiqueña as a preamble to each of the chapters. Elizabeth is a passionate and serious young indigenous woman; she chose her own name for this ethnography after asking me how I was planning on analyzing the data and writing the dissertation. Her professional training had provided a few experiences in research thus, of all the participants, she was the most interested in the details of my thesis proposal. We had the longest interview with different sessions at her home, interrupted on different occasions by her parents, brothers and sisters. She was one of the few young women who felt safe conducting the interview at home since she had already spoken about her life and her choices in different mediums. Elizabeth's story has been represented in several snippets and videos of NGOs that have worked with youth in Alta Verapaz. Her candid and unapologetic way of telling her life story inspired me to convey her narrative, with a few alterations to protect her identity. Through her story we see the contradictions and consequences of decision-making, as well as the limitations faced while trying to exercise individual agency. Unmet expectations become apparent when her illusions of community are faced with the challenges of collective work and her search for personal satisfaction (studies, family, friends, etc.). Elizabeth's story is in many ways unique, but still relatable to the experience of the youth' lives recounted in the following chapters. The sections with Elizabeth's narrative are introduced with Mayan numbers as a way to break the sequence of the main chapters

The arguments of this dissertation are presented in five interludes and seven chapters. Chapter 2, "Tactic and its history" provides a general description of contemporary Tactic and delves into local dynamics during relevant moments of Guatemalan history. Chapter 3, "Tactic's Youthscapes" explores the social map of youth, as it is produced and reproduced in specific arenas of social life, particularly the fields of education and work. Chapter 4, "Creating the political field of youth in Tactic" relates the story of youth grassroots groups between 2005 and 2015, as they structure the mechanisms of their own participation in the local government. Chapter 5, "Enacting youth" explains local notions of youth and agency, as well as the challenges faced by the participants when acting upon the world that surrounds them. Chapter 6, "An Event in the political field of youth" describes how youth action clashed with partisan politics in the context of the Guatemalan Spring of 2015. Finally, the conclusions will outline questions about the possibilities of action in the political field of youth in Guatemala. Hopefully, through this dissertation the reader will see

the struggles and contradictions that emerge in production and reproduction of historical webs of domination, while also appreciating the irreducibility of these youth to a single subjectivity.



- **ELIZABETH, THE LIFE OF A YOUNG POQOMCHI' WOMAN**

Elizabeth is the eldest daughter of six siblings in a Poqomchi' family living in one of the hamlets near the village of Tactic. She is 23 years old and studies social work at the Centro Universitario del Norte (CUNOR), a remote campus of the Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala (USAC). At the time of our interviews, she worked with her family in the mornings and studied in the evenings (from 4 to 9 pm) during the week; on the weekends she traveled to a neighboring market to sell the family's produce, took language classes on Sunday mornings, and attended youth meetings on Sunday afternoons.

Her community is in one of the outer hamlets of Tactic. Her three-bedroom house is home to all six people of her nuclear family. A large kitchen occupies a separate building, joined by a roofed corridor where they store vegetables and other produce before selling it in Baja Verapaz. Elizabeth's family has worked in agriculture for as long as they can remember; they switched to non-traditional products when they realized that exotic vegetables, like cauliflower and green beans, could provide better income. As the eldest child, Elizabeth was expected to work with her family in all their economic ventures and provide domestic support to her mother in the rearing of her siblings.

With hair down to the waist, Elizabeth always wears the regional Mayan outfit, alternating between open or thick *huipiles* according to the weather. Only on rare occasions will she wear western pants or dresses, unlike other girls in the youth movement who usually change their clothing styles more frequently. She speaks fluent Spanish and Poqomchi' and is determined to master the Q'eqchi' language, for which she takes classes during the weekends.

### **Elizabeth's family**

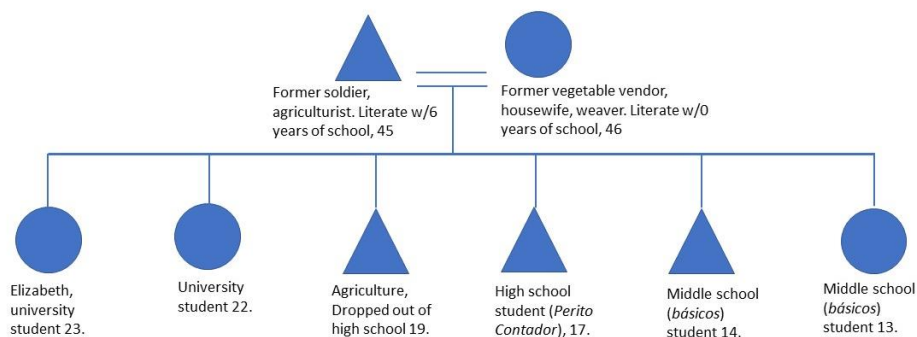
Elizabeth's father is a 45-year-old man who works mainly in agriculture. He was able to study elementary school, which he finished; he was drafted by the army when he was still a minor and remained there for several years; until his mother got sick and he returned home. Elizabeth's paternal family is from Tactic but always lived in the hamlets, not in the town.

Elizabeth's mother is 46 years old and works mainly in the family's grocery store and *nixtamal* mill<sup>6</sup>. She was born on a finca in Patal, Purulha' (a neighboring municipality belonging to

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<sup>6</sup> The mill for *nixtamal*, where the soaked and cooked maize is grounded into *masa*, is a common service in Guatemalan towns. Neighboring families pay to have their grain milled.

Baja Verapaz). Though Elizabeth rarely mentions it, her mother’s family lived as *mozos* (under the colonato system) until the landowners gave them proper titles for the land. As Elizabeth explains it, they now live in a hamlet that was once part of the many *fincas* of the Verapaz region. When her mother was young, she was unable to study because the *mozos*’ dwelling had few inhabitants (eight or ten households) and no school was close. She would have had to walk either to Purulha (the municipality’s capital) or to Pasmolón (the closest town from Tactic), both requiring a 3-hour walk with no alternative transportation. To support the family, Elizabeth’s mom worked as a merchant in the local market of Tactic. She would travel from the hamlet to the town every Thursday and Sunday, set up her post in front of the Catholic church, selling seasonal produce and flowers. That was where she met her husband. As an adult, she finally learned how to write and read through CONALFA, the national program for literacy, mainly due to the insistence of her daughter.



**Figure 1: Elizabeth’s family chart**

In addition to her parents, Elizabeth’s immediate family is composed of two sisters and three brothers. Both of her sisters are students. The older studies business administration at the university with Elizabeth and the youngest is still attending middle school. Her oldest brother dropped out of high school after the first year of Perito Contador because “*he liked to work and have his own money more than studying*” and currently works with their father both in the fields and the market. All the siblings have to “*help*” in the family’s economic endeavors even if they are still studying; this is the main reason they attend schools in the neighboring hamlet instead of traveling all the way to the main town.

When asked about the origins of her family, Elizabeth says that her ancestors were the founding fathers of her hamlet. While conducting a community survey for a university project, she learned that story from her grandfather when interviewing him. According to this narrative, the

southwestern area of Tactic was called Chiacal until conflict divided it into three hamlets: Chiacal, Chimaxpop, and Pansinik. These corresponded to the three *principales* that inhabited the region. In her narrative, there was a man called Esteban Buk who was in the army and organized a group that would defend the region from the guerrillas; as they won the different confrontations, they were awarded the land titles to their territory<sup>17</sup>. However, this is not the story of the land where Elizabeth's family currently lives; her father and two paternal uncles bought the property and later equally divided it between them. Later, her father bought other land properties in this and neighboring hamlets.

When Elizabeth was born, the family did not have a place of their own to live, so they remained in her mother's household. One year later, her father bought their first "cuerda" (a 25x25 m plot of land) where they built a small house. She remembers the walls were made with planks of wood and *nylon* (tarp) with a thatched roof. Thanks to a spike in the demand for non-traditional produce, a year later they were able to improve it with wood walls and a tin roof. In the last several years, they rebuilt the house, section by section, using concrete blocks.

Elizabeth's family is almost an archetype of the local image of Mayan entrepreneurship: they plant vegetables (non-traditional products) which they sell in the neighboring departmental market of Salamá. They have found their sales niche in a municipal market outside of Tactic, where their products are sold twice a week. To facilitate this process, they invested in a truck capable of loading all the produce. Aside from the cultivation of vegetables, the family has other businesses: a micro-bus that travels between the town and the village, a *nixtamal* mill, and a small grocery store. Elizabeth is responsible for managing all these businesses, particularly all things related to the finances.

At first, Elizabeth's father would cultivate the land where the family's house currently stands, but once they began construction he rented other fields, both in the same hamlet and outside the municipality, traveling all the way to Chamelco to grow chili peppers and tomato. When she was an infant there was no public transportation between their hamlet and the main road, her father and other men would carry all the produce in nets or baskets with a *mecapal* (head strap that allows carrying items on the back). Later, when transportation was accessible, they would pay for their produce to be taken to the town's market. Her father began producing non-traditional

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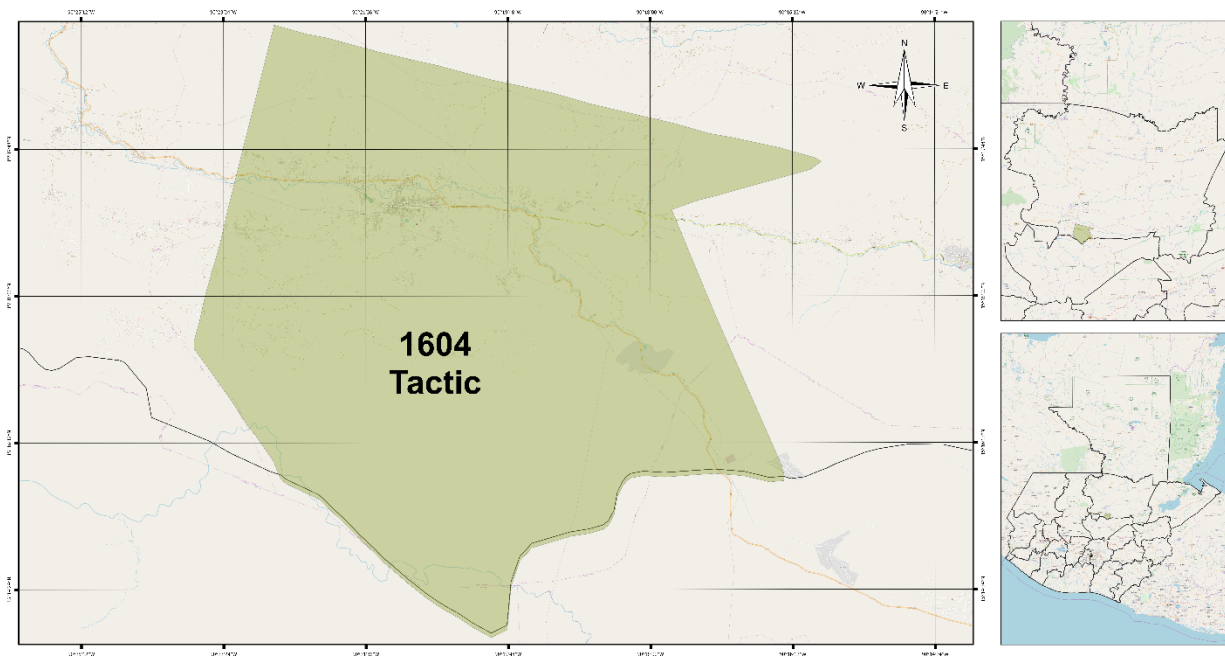
<sup>17</sup> Young Poqomchi' people in Tactic have little recollection of the town's history and the education system does not provide it in the curriculum. Other youth had short recollections of their family history, many times not going beyond a couple of generations. Few recordings of oral history can be found in the work of Terga and Velásquez (1976).

vegetables (moving beyond the traditional corn, beans, squash, and different salad greens), among them strawberries that would be bought by a large bakery located in Tactic. As time went by and access to seeds and fertilizers became easy, her father began planting cauliflower, French beans, peas, and all sorts of produce. With time, Elizabeth's family was able to buy a pick-up truck and later a *camión* (transportation truck). Being able to move the produce by themselves implied that all the family members could become active workers in the family's business. The family interdependence was not uncommon and Elizabeth would constantly be challenged to find a balance between pursuing her individual aspirations and complying with her role within the household.

## CHAPTER II

### TACTIC AND ITS HISTORY

Located in northeastern Guatemala, Tactic lays in the highlands of *La Verapaz* as part of a corridor of humid forests that spans the departments of Baja Verapaz, Alta Verapaz, and Quiché. As one of the largest settlements of the Poqomchi' people, Tactic is shaped by the history of ethnic conflicts, colonial domination, republican territorial reorganization and the aftermath of a long war. In this chapter I will provide a brief look into current Tactic territory and its inhabitants, surveying the prehispanic history of the area and the main events that took place during the Colonial and Republican era. After giving a brief overview of Tactic's current conditions as a context for young people's lives, like Elizabeth's, I will address key elements of Poqomchi' history, the conformation of the *municipio* and the current structure of local government.

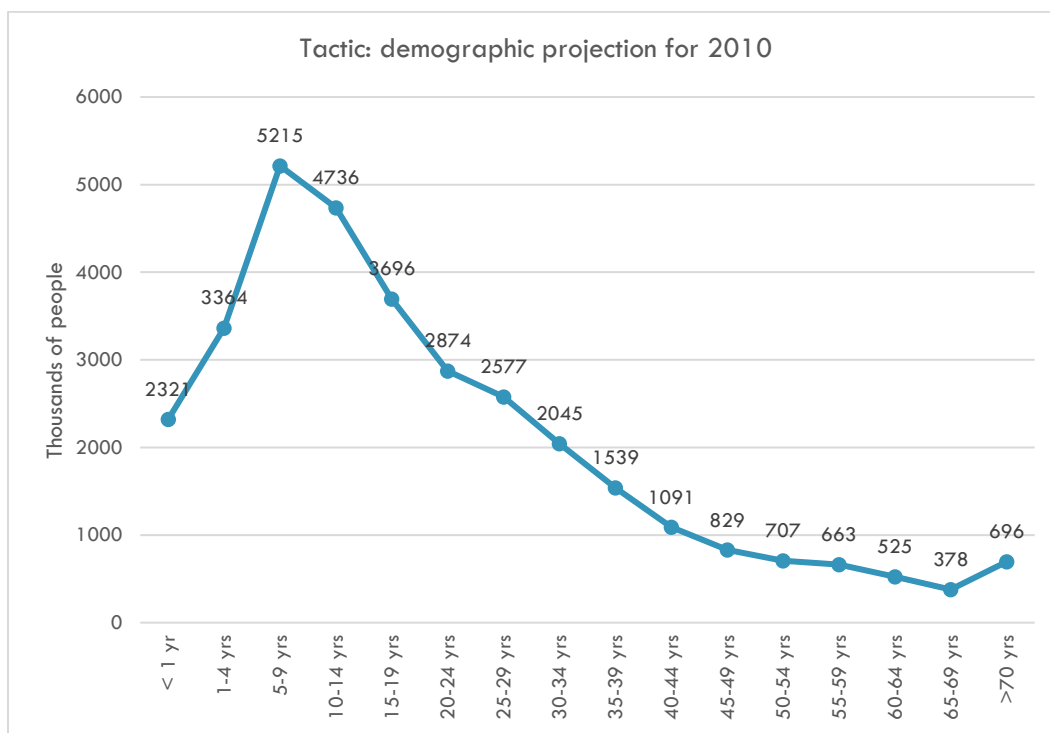


**Figure 2: Map of Tactic**  
Courtesy of Luis Ernesto Velásquez Álvaro.

### Tactic today

Stretched between two mountain chains, Tactic is composed of 85 square km and 63 settlements between *barrios* or boroughs, *aldeas* and *caseríos* (which I will refer to here as hamlets), and *fincas*. The *municipio* is located in the highlands of the Verapaz region, about 1,465 MASL, and is administratively located in the Department of Alta Verapaz (COMUDE Tactic and Segeplan 2010).

Tactic and Guatemala, as a country, are quite young in terms of population. In 2010, one-third of the 33,256 people living in this town were between 10 and 25 years old; 20% of the projected population was between the ages of 15 and 24 years.<sup>25</sup> Guatemala, as a country, also has 20.2% of its population in this age range (PNUD, 2012: 225). While no recent data was found for the town's composition, not much variation is expected since fertility rates had shown minimal change. The demographic distribution is highly relevant for the dissertation, which focuses on how *youth matters* relate to a large population within the territory.



**Figure 3: Demographic projection of Tactic for 2010.**

Elaborated by the author with data from INE (2013).

<sup>25</sup> The five-year population projections were officially estimated by INE based on the 2002 census (INE 2013).

As an indigenous region, Tactic is part of the Poqomchi' corridor of Guatemala. The last national census indicated that in 2002, about 87% of Tactic's population self-identified as Maya, mainly ascribed as Poqomchi' (72%), with smaller but important settlements of Q'eqchi' (11%) and Achi' (3%); non-indigenous or Ladino populations were the second largest group, mainly concentrated in urban areas. While Poqomchi' people dwell both in the main town and hamlets, Q'eqchi' settlements are located towards the north close the mountains neighboring Cobán (the capital city of Alta Verapaz), and Achi hamlets are located towards the south, closer to Baja Verapaz.

Tactic's location as the gateway to both the northern lowlands and the Polochic region (eastern lands following the Polochic river that have seen different monoculture expansions) has made this town a meeting point for the Verapaz highlands, providing services lacking in the surrounding municipalities. Crowded single row streets mark the town, which does not have a traditional gridded colonial pattern; the two main streets that cross it are no longer continuous as the market spread into one of them. The two largest barrios, "Asunción" and "San Jacinto", divide the town at its widest point, meeting at the center of town between the park, the Municipality, and the Catholic parish devoted to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (the town's patron saint). During the fieldwork for this dissertation, I lived in my family's home, which has been located in Barrio San Jacinto since my great grandfather built it in the 1930s. The Calle Real hosts different business, with most of the houses combining a family home and a shop; the old adobe houses have been replaced with brick and a few more have been demolished and substituted with multi-story buildings. Most of the town, and a few nearby hamlets, have paved roads; still, the most distant communities have dirt roads that can be almost impassable during winter season unless driving a 4x4 truck. This limited accessibility leaves people with the option to either walk or hire transportation in the iron-clad truck beds of pick-up vehicles during market days. The lack of good roads and safe transportation is of high significance since, in 2002, 68% of the population lived in rural settings.

While Tactic is not among the poorest municipalities of Alta Verapaz, poverty analysis shows that the region is the most deprived in Guatemala<sup>18</sup>. The latest estimates for municipal poverty showed that, in Tactic, by 2002 64.3% of the inhabitants lived in general poverty and 18.2% in extreme poverty (PNUD 2005:332). Unfortunately, new data may not show improvement, as the country saw a rise in poverty in 2014. At a regional level, Alta Verapaz showed an increase of general

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<sup>18</sup> Given the country's lack of a national census since 2002, current data on of the municipality is based on census projections or institutional statistics since few national surveys are designed with municipal-level samples. Most of the poverty measurements are regional, which means they cannot be itemized for municipalities.

poverty, rising from 78.8% in 2006 to 83.1% in 2014; meanwhile extreme poverty in Alta Verapaz more than doubled national level, with 53.6% of its population living under this threshold, it remained as the department with the most severe poverty rates (INE 2015:5–10).

Unlike poverty, education seems to be improving in Tactic, although under precarious conditions. The last census showed that 82% of the population had not finished elementary school and 44.8% of the people over 15 were illiterate (INE 2002); in 2010, literacy rates in Spanish improved as 70% of the population over 15 years old knew how to read and write. However, women still showed the lowest rates (PNUD 2011:8). While literacy rates and elementary school achievement had improved, substantial challenges remain in education. In 2015, school coverage rates showed a dramatic gap between elementary and secondary education. About 80% of school-aged children were attending at the elementary level; the rate dropped to 36% for middle school ages (between 13 and 15) and to 23% for high school (between 16 and 18) (MINEDUC 2016). Attendance for female students was always lower than their male peers. Young people experience many difficulties in their pursuit of higher levels of education, as we will see in the next chapter, and those who continued studying were older than the expected age for the educational level<sup>19</sup>. Though Tactic's youth do not live under the most precarious conditions in the country, exclusion is still evident.

Similar to other areas of the Verapaz region, a large proportion of land in Tactic is unequally distributed between small plots and large *fincas*. Lack of transparency regarding access to data makes it difficult to portray a current situation of land ownership in Guatemala; the most reliable information dates from the National Agricultural Census of 2003. This survey revealed that Tactic had about 1,427 agricultural units with an average of 0.29 hectares, representing 10% of all agricultural hectares in the municipality.

The same survey revealed that most of these hectares (80%) were private holdings, meaning that agricultural endeavors belonged to the owners of the land. The extension of land ownership, however, does not exclude the existence of diverse forms of agricultural arrangements. The survey revealed that, up until 2003, the *colonato* system was still present in the area, under which people would have lived just like the experience recounted in Elizabeth's mother's history. Land distribution, just like the rest of the country, was unfavorable and unequal: Gini coefficients showed that farmland tenure is highly concentrated among few people with 0.797 for holdings over one

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<sup>19</sup> Gross coverage rates doubled the observed data for net rates. Gross rates show all those registered in the educational system without regard for their age. This is consistent with the ethnographic register of older ages among secondary students.



*manzana*<sup>20</sup> and 0.831 for all farmlands (PNUD 2005:332). While concentration is high, the use of that land has not been devoted to extensive agriculture like the rest of Alta Verapaz but mostly for other crops and cattle. The lack of coffee plantations during the early Republican era, freed Tactic from the current –and highly violent- monoculture agricultural transformations that are taking place in the region, like the expansion of African palm oil or biodiesel-oriented crops<sup>21</sup>.

**Table 1: Agricultural farmlands in Tactic, 2003**

<b>Categorization by the size of farmland</b>	<b>Mean surface in Ha</b>	<b>Number of holdings</b>	<b>Total area per category</b>
Menos de 1mz	0.29	1,427.00	411.00
1mz -- 2mz	0.84	341.00	286.33
2mz -- 5mz	1.83	184.00	336.90
5mz -- 10mz	4.33	33.00	142.94
10mz -- 32mz	10.33	29.00	299.61
32mz -- 64mz	30.30	10.00	302.98
1cab -- 10cab	72.72	22.00	1,599.81
10cab -- 20cab	589.92	1.00	589.92
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.94</b>	<b>2,047.00</b>	<b>3,969.48</b>

Source: IV Censo Nacional Agropecuario (INE 2003)

While agriculture has been the most common source of work for Tactiqueños, the spectrum of production varies between subsistence agriculture (small plots with primary grain production, like corn and beans) to fairly recent new crops like vegetables, as in the case of Elizabeth’s family; these require small plots of land, access to water, and labor for specific tasks. The types of vegetables vary constantly, but during my fieldwork there was a high production of French beans, cauliflower, broccoli, potatoes, and tomatoes. Unlike the international market-oriented vegetable production in the central highlands (Fischer and Benson 2006), Tactic’s produce is sold within the region and very little is exported<sup>22</sup>. Cattle farms are not as widespread, with both Ladino and Poqomchi’ families holding some of the largest production; these are oriented towards dairy production and meat processing. A few families hold cattle ranches outside Tactic, particularly in the northern

<sup>20</sup> A manzana equals 0.7050 Hectares or 1.74 acres.

<sup>21</sup> Few efforts have been made to write the history of land tenure in Tactic; for example, Laura Hurtado’s (2008) review of the agrarian dynamics of Alta Verapaz does not mention the municipality. Further investigation of land tenure shifts and the political structure in the early 20th century would help clarify power struggles in the Poqomchi’ region.

<sup>22</sup> ADEATAC, an agricultural association, was a product of the European Union projects that took place in the late 90s that developed a processing facility in the town around the mid-2000s (Valenzuela Juárez 2007). During my fieldwork, the main produce worked with in the facility was French beans, though at the beginning they focused on pickled *pacaya* (*Chamaedorea tepejilote*).

lowlands. While dairy was an essential economic activity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has dwindled in recent years.

As was described earlier, coffee has not been a key product in Tactic, though small ventures have emerged in the past ten years. A Poqomchi' family produces "Café Santa Apolonia" which targets the local market, a cooperative handle "Café Santa Sofía" that just recently began exportation, and several families have small plots for their own consumption. Neither of these initiatives is large enough to demand coffee-oriented services in the region, so toasting and grinding is either done artisanally at homes or in large facilities in Cobán or Guatemala City.

Tactic's lands have a forestry vocation and a few holdings have been dedicated to it through the incentive programs sponsored by the National Forest Institute (INAB, in Spanish). In 2018 about 132 plantations were involved, representing 9% of the units registered for Alta Verapaz (SIFGUA 2018). The oldest plantations were registered in 1995 and most of them are privately owned<sup>23</sup>. Most of these reforested areas are not dedicated to the commerce of wood, therefore have little impact in terms of labor; they merely benefit the owners with forestry incentives, if they are paid<sup>24</sup>.

Currently, Tactic also holds a few large companies that have become a source of work for many young people. A commercial bakery called "Santa Lucía"<sup>25</sup> and a couple of mid-range meat processors are among the options for many locals. The density of stores, internet shops, pharmacies, and canteens (*comedores*) also generates other options in the main town; hamlets see less service economy and more agricultural work, either on their land or as day laborers for neighboring farms.

Meanwhile, in their homes, women have kept up the long tradition of Mayan weaving of *huipiles* (blouses) following the Northern clothing styles (see chapter 3). The art has become an economic activity for several women who sell their craft in the local market or through a few cooperatives. While labor intensive, most of this work will rarely provide enough income for subsistence, as will be seen later.

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<sup>23</sup> The two largest plantations are owned by the Instituto de Previsión Militar (IPM) with 110 and 24.44 hectares. Only one was a municipal holding. Other plantations are owned by private individuals and vary in terms of extension and the "requirement" to remain as forests (Hernández Camposeco 2006).

<sup>24</sup> One of my relatives who has land in the forestry program states they have not received the incentive in over 5 years. They have kept the land as forest since they are not stretched economically and think it plays a larger role for environmental health.

<sup>25</sup> The bakery is owned by the former Mayor and has extended across the Verapaz region. The main factory is located in Tactic.

The religious composition of Tactic is diverse. In the town alone there are two branches of the Catholic Church (dioceses and charismatic renewal) and at least ten different protestant denominations, several being evangelical or neo-pentecostal churches<sup>26</sup>. In addition to these, Tactic also has three other minor Christian denominations, locally known as Adventists, Mormons and Jehova's Witnesses<sup>27</sup>. Hamlets have a variety of Evangelical chapels, with a significant presence of Iglesia Nazareno (based on Wesleyan theology) branches, and almost all had a Catholic chapel. Religion is one of the attractions of Tactic, receiving quite an influx of Catholic visitors to the *Señor de Chi Ixim* shrine. The church is located on one of the southern hills that overlooks almost the whole town. It hosts a dark-skinned Christ who is considered a miraculous saint; this follows the Guatemalan tradition of *Cristos Negros*, worshiped across Mesoamerica (Navarrete Cáceres 2015). While the Catholic Diocese holds the care of this shrine, indigenous religious organizations still exist in the town comprised of both *cofradías* and *hermandades*. A few religious leaders differentiate between them by arguing that *hermandades* can have Ladino participants within their structure while the *cofradías* are solely for indigenous people (Palma 1996:72). In conversations with two *Cofrades*, I was told that only one Hermandad had a Ladino principal, while the rest were still within indigenous families<sup>28</sup>. The two largest *cofradías* correspond to the patron saints, The Assumption of Mary, known as Asunción, and Saint Hyacinth (*San Jacinto*), along with Saint Mark (*San Marcos*) and Saint Anthony (*San Antonio*), make up the four *chinames* (the heads of the *cofradía* system of Tactic). The others<sup>29</sup> are divided between the men's *cofradías* (Virgin of the Rosary, Saint Anthony, Christ Child, and Saint Michael)<sup>30</sup> who rank higher than the women's *cofradías* (Saint Francis, Saint Barbara, Saint Isidore and Virgin of the Immaculate Conception)<sup>31</sup> who work harder<sup>32</sup>. Two religious brotherhoods were mentioned, Saint Dominic (Santo Domingo), the patron saint of the market, and Virgen Inmaculada de la Concepción.

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<sup>26</sup> The Evangelical churches identified were: Iglesia Cristiana Asamblea de Dios "Josué", Primera Iglesia del Nazareno, Segunda Iglesia del Nazareno, Iglesia de Dios Evangelio Completo, Iglesia de Cristo Elim, Ministerios Mi-el, Iglesia Cristiana Monte de los Olivos, Iglesia Cristiana Beerseba, Iglesia Cristiana Amigos, and Iglesia Pentecostal, Iglesia Apostólica.

<sup>27</sup> The full names of these churches in Spanish are: Iglesia Adventista del Séptimo Día, Iglesia Jesucristo de los Santos de los Últimos Días, and Congregación del Reino de los Testigos de Jehová.

<sup>28</sup> There are two large *cofradías* corresponding to the Patron Saints: The Assumption of Mary and Saint Hyacinth

<sup>29</sup> My data on the *cofradías* varies from that collected by Palma (1996) who mentions other *cofradías* like: Santo de los Cuarenta Días, Virgen de la Encarnación, San Andrés and Chi Ixim.

<sup>30</sup> Virgen del Rosario, San Antonio, Niño Dios, and San Miguel.

<sup>31</sup> San Francisco, Santa Bárbara, San Isidro, and Virgen de Concepción.

<sup>32</sup> According to one *Cofrade*, the women work harder because they need to change the flowers of all the Saints every 15 days during the whole year.

*Cofradías* are the most visible organizations, based on Maya cosmogony and intricately intertwined with Catholic beliefs (Rojas Lima 1988). Although concentrated in the town, these religious organizations still resonate in the hamlets, but rarely do the *Mayordomos Principales* come from there; the main hosts of the saints usually live in town or the nearby outskirts and are involved in economic activities such as livestock production, professional services and medium to large scale agriculture. The presence of Evangelical churches has diminished the importance of the *cofradía* as a political trampoline for indigenous males, but the *Mayordomos* still are accorded a certain status because of their post and economic prowess.

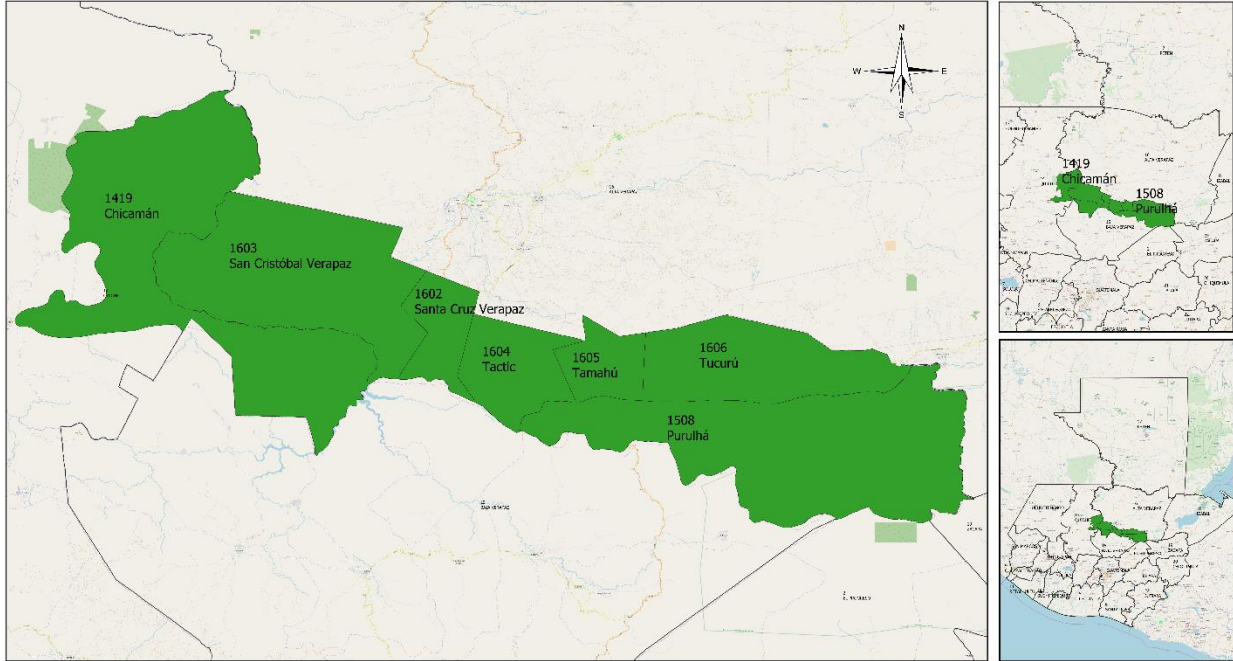
How does Tactic's present resemble its past? The following section will address a few of these issues, trying to highlight how this Poqomchi' settlement was spared from the *encomienda* system through the Colonial period but had to face political violence and dispossession during the Republican era. I will also describe how the Peace Accord institutions mark the contemporary scenario where youth engage the local government.

### **The Poqomchi' people: a brief overview**

The research on the prehispanic history of the Poqomchi' people is not as abundant as that done for other Maya populations in Guatemala, particularly as it does not seem to relate to large settlements or monumental constructions. Any attempt to draw the relationship between current Poqomchi' populations and their historical ancestors requires addressing the separation of the Poqom languages (Poqomam and Poqomchi') and the arrival of Achi' people to the region in the early postclassic. The Poqomchi' language is currently spoken in the Verapaz region, through the municipalities of San Cristóbal Verapaz (Kajkoj), Santa Cruz Verapaz, Tactic (Chi Batz), Tamahu, and in parts of Tukurú (Tukurub'), La Tinta, Purulhá; in the Quiché department, some hamlets speak the language in Chicamán and Uspantán (Richards 2003:72-73).

The linguistic differences within the Poqom languages, Poqomam and Poqomchi', were minimum during the 16th century (Arnauld 1998) and, so far, no unified theory explains their separation: some authors understand that the division might have resulted from the expansion of a branch of the K'iche' confederacy, known as Rab'inaleb' (now Achi') into the Poqom territory; other theories favor the colonial order imposed by the Dominicans friars on the Verapaz region as the cause of separation (Miles 1983:24). Evidence points out that Poqomam and Poqomchi' were intelligible in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (1946:233-272) and that during the Colonial period, the Poqomam and Poqomchi' peoples were separated by enclaves of K'iche', Chol, Pipil (Central American

Nahuatl) and Xinka speakers (Campbell 1998). Whether or not the shared language implied political affiliation is one of the many questions we can pose upon the Poqom territory.



**Figure 4: The contemporary Poqomchi' region.**

Courtesy of Luis Ernesto Velásquez Alvarado.

Regarding the prehispanic history of what is now known as the Poqomchi' region, very few data is available. A highly K'iche'-center vision of the conquest and the prehispanic period obscures our understanding of the Poqom territory even before the K'iche' expansion. Different authors have worked on identifying the possible archaeological sites associated with this group before and after the conflict with the K'iche'-Achi': Suzanne Miles(1957; 1983), Robert Carmack(1980), Marie Charlotte Arnauld(1978; 1986; 1998a; 1998b), Alain Ichon(1996), Robert Hill II (1998) and Ruud Van Akkeren (2000; 2002; 2006). Much of their work combines both archaeological and ethnohistorical evidence. Arnaud (1998b) proposes that the sociopolitical organization of the Poqom did not go beyond the *amak* (*amaq*), as conglomerate of *molam* or *molab* (*parcialidades*) that would not have been larger than a town. The ethnohistorical evidence of the Poqomchi' settlements during the Colonial period shows several independent settlements that lived in open confrontation. Few colonial texts written by the Poqom provide us with a glance into their history, with references derived from documents by other K'iche' such as the *Popol Vuh* (1993) or *Anales de los Kaqchikeles* (Recinos and Chonay 1950). Only two ethnohistorical documents have been studied for the

Poqomchi' region: "*Testamento y Título de los Antecesores de los Señores de Cagcoh*" dated in Spanish for 1785<sup>33</sup> (Universidad del Valle de Guatemala 1999) – from here *Título Kajkoj*-, and "*Título del Barrio de Santa Ana*" dated August 14th, 1565 (Sapper and Narciso 1906). Both texts speak of the Kajkoj people – now San Cristóbal Verapaz- and shed some light into their relationships with other Poqom peoples in the region. The *Título Kajkoj* mentions that wars were fought between the nations of Kajkoj, Tukurub, and Taltique (Santa María Tactic) before finding peace through the conversion to Christianity (Universidad del Valle de Guatemala 1999:4–5). This is one of the few specific mentions of Tactic or Chi B'atz in ethnohistorical records and to open confrontation that existed between the Kajkok and the Tukurub' people. Arnaud proposes that Taltique could be centered in the prehispanic ceremonial site of Chikan, and they were allies of the Tukurub' people (Arnaud 1998b:697). This might also be related to their sharing of the eastern Poqomchi' variant (Campbell 1998). In oral tradition<sup>34</sup>, Tactic served as a meeting center for the different Poqomchi' lords, particularly between the Kajkoj and the Tukurub', as they negotiated alliances and truce; this political role provided the names of *K'ux Akal* (heart of the world) or *Ratzum Akal* (center of the world) to Tactic (Terga and Vásquez 1977:87–88). According to the recollection of Tactic's elders, their ancestors immigrated from the Rabinal valley into the northern highlands, around the area of Jauté and Chikan. The settlements were brought together by the *Ajawal* (chief or *cacique*) Chak'nal, and soon the community expanded through the constructions of houses across the area. Chak'nal would have also lead the Poqomchi' in their confrontation with the Q'eqchi' who threatened the northern borders of their new territory (Terga and Vásquez 1977:85–87). No ethnohistorical document is found for Tactic nor is there a written record of this *Ajawal*. However, the memory of the founding father is still present in oral history and is now inscribed in the title of the indigenous queen "*Daughter of the Cacique Chak'nal*".

The evidence is strong regarding a political division between the Poqomchi' groups. The Western Poqomchi' territory or Kajkoj had an open confrontation with the Eastern Poqomchi' populations, which included the Tukurub' and the Taltique peoples. Their political distance was severe, and ethnohistorical and linguistic evidence suggests a closer relationship existed between Western Poqomchi' and Poqomam groups (Arnaud 1998b). Campbell finds linguistic evidence in the shared features between Western Poqomchi' (Kajkoj and Beleju) dialects and Poqomam

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<sup>33</sup> According to Campbell, the original version in Poqom was written in 1564 (1998:185).

<sup>34</sup> In the 1970's, the historian and catholic priest Ricardo Terga compiled many recollections of the origins of the Poqomchi' as told by the elders both in Poqomchi' and Spanish.

language which do not exist the Easter dialect (Taltique y Tucurub) (Campbell 1998:185). The Poqom territory was disturbed during the post-classic, not just because of the K'iche' invasion but because of the tensions that existed between Poqom affiliations. No single political unit seems to be present at the time of Spanish invasion, and several strategic alliances took place as the region was controlled by the Dominicans during the Colonial period.

### **Tactic during colonial and early republican times**

As mentioned before, the Poqomchi' people are located in the highlands of the Verapaz region, which were known as Tezulutlan or Tecolotlan<sup>35</sup> in the records of colonial encounter. Tezulutlan included the Q'eqchi' territory (between the Polochic river and the Cahabón river), the Poqomchi' area (between the southern watershed of the Chixoy river and the lower Polochic river – by Panzós), and the northern lowlands populated with the unconquered Lacandón, Chol and Akalae people (Luján 2011:86). This “land of war” was not successfully dominated despite several military campaigns to reduce its people between 1529 and 1530, and the creation of three encomiendas by 1537 (Saint-Lu 1998:630). It is only after the Spanish crown granted permission to the Dominicans to pacify the region that the area begins the process of reduction<sup>36</sup>. While the period known as the *Pax Dominica* did not guarantee stability in the region, the lack of military and *encomienda* intervention seems to have facilitated the creation of *Pueblos de Indios* (Hurtado 2008:56–57). Las Casas visited the region in 1545 and reported at least five reductions in the region: Cobán, Patal, Jactic (Tactic), Chamelco and Tucurú (Saint-Lu 1998:632). Fueled by the myth of it being pacified through the doctrine, the region received the official name of *Vera Paz* (true peace) in 1547. A closer look into the ethnohistorical record shows it was through alliances between the Ajawalab' (caciques) of antagonist settlements that the region was subdued.

Between 1543-1545, most of the *Pueblos de Indios* in the Verapaz were settled. Tactic (or Taltique) had 100 tributaries according to the "*Real Cédula del 7 de septiembre de 1543 al Presidente, Lic. Alonso de Maldonado*", and the village was founded according to Colonial laws on July 2<sup>nd</sup> of 1545 (Gall 1976:17). By 1552, the Spanish King was notified of the vassalage (vasallaje) of the local

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<sup>35</sup> Tezulutlan or Tecolotlan is the hispanized form of the nahuatl name for a “land of owls”. Though there is no certainty of the region having a single unifying name, this one seems to reference the Tukur people. Analysis of the importance and prehispanic presence of the Tukur, as a Poqomchi' señorío in the ethnohistorical record, has been made by Van Akkeren.

<sup>36</sup> Initially a secret pact was subscribed between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Alonso de Maldonado in 1537, and officially ratified in 1539.

Indians, though the integration did not imply the disappearance of the *Ajawal* according to the historian André Sain-Lu (1998:633). There is little information in the written record regarding the caciques who led the people of Taltique or Chikan during Colonial times. Oral history recounts the role of Miguel Cahuec Xoy [or Xoy Cahuec], a *principal* who led the building of the Church after either receiving silver from the Virgin Mary or sowing silver to fund the construction (Terga and Vásquez 1977:109–110). Further archival research is needed to explore the way in which the Colonial life of Tactic and the rest of the Poqomchi' region.

In 1562, the first Spanish administration system was imposed upon the region and the Verapaz became an *Alcaldía Mayor*. As indigenous people had to pay tributes, they complained about the excesses and abuses of both Dominicans and the royal administrators (Saint-Lu 1998:634). The Dominican control over the region, which lasted well into the 17<sup>th</sup> century, faced several contentious issues. The northern regions (now Petén) were the setting of violent encounters with the “infidels”, particularly with the Lacandón, Chol, and Sakapulas people. Tensions also emerged from three Spanish interests over the territory: the Dominicans wanted to keep control of the taxes and forced labor to sustain their independence, the Crown aimed at having a larger stake over the income generated under the ecclesiastic mission, and the *Encomenderos* sought to abolish the bans that impeded their entry into the territory. On the southern borders of the Verapaz, particularly in Zacualpa, Rabinal, and Cubulco, the Crown gave away “estancias” for Spaniards in what were previously indigenous communal lands and soon were used for cattle production. Still, up until the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Dominicans had control over land and people in the Verapaz, which allowed for little change in the land tenure<sup>37</sup> in the region. By 1650, the first private acquisitions were made by the *Caciques*, who claimed control over *ejidos* and communal lands (Hurtado 2008:56–62). The aperture of the frontier lands mobilized Spaniards towards the borders of the Verapaz; by the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the system of *composición* allowed Spaniards and Ladinos to buy lands from the Crown. The historian Michel Bertrand found that two towns on the border with the central highlands had the most substantial presence of Ladinos: Salamá (40%) and Rabinal (10%); the inner areas of the Verapaz region continued with little to no Ladino presence up until the independence. Indigenous communities protected themselves by asking for tenure over the land and, according to Bertrand, about 40% of the land sold by the Crown was acquired by the

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<sup>37</sup> In her revision of land tenure in the colonial record, Hurtado looks into the work of Jean Piel, Michel Bertrand and others. She concludes there were four models of land tenure in the Verapaz: *ejidos*, indigenous reductions, private properties, and religious haciendas (Hurtado 2008:60).



communities of the region (1998:370–371). As the Dominicans lost control over the administration of the region, the transfer of tenure to non-indigenous hands became inevitable.

While there was an ongoing secularization of Colonial administration by 1760s (Hurtado 2008), the Dominican parishes, including Tactic, were never secularized during the colonial period (Luján 2011:125). The visit of the Archbishop Pedro Cortés y Larraz, which took place between 1768 and 1770, to the “*Presidencia de Taltic*”<sup>38</sup> describes the town as composed by 315 families and 990 people with no mention of Ladinos. According to Cortés y Larraz, the town was fairly poor with little to recommend them: they lacked significant productions, there was no sugar mill or cattle, and people produced only corn and beans. A single Dominican friar, Joseph Ramires, was in charge for the three towns and had a school for teaching doctrine. The site of Patal, a prehispanic reference, was not much more than an unpopulated ranch (Cortés y Larraz 1958:5–7).

By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the colonial administration implemented the *Regimen de Intendencia* which allowed for control over intraregional matters and diminished the autonomy of local municipal powers (Zilbermann de Luján 1998:34–36). The laws established the abolition of the *alcaldes* and the *corregidores*, but the Verapaz remained as an *Alcaldía Mayor* until independence. The Spanish administration was concentrated in the city of Cobán, while Tactic had indigenous *escribanos* and the local political organization remained in the hands of Poqomchi’ people. For example, in 1785, a claim for the construction of the Church (which had been destroyed by natural causes, perhaps an earthquake in 1777) was signed by the indigenous *Alcaldes* Domingo Quejh, Felipe Bin, and the *Regidores* Francisco Quej, Francisco Queh, Agustin Yxiom, and Miguel Xoc.<sup>39</sup> These Poqomchi’ last names are still prominent in the region.

An important aspect of the secularization of all Catholic parishes is that it allowed the *Intendencia* to alienate the lands of the *Cofradías* and made them public goods under the Royal administration (Hurtado 2008:62). While Jorge Luján states that secularization never occurred in Tactic and neighboring towns in the region, Laura Hurtado agrees with Jean Piel that this was the initial process of privatization of communal lands in the Verapaz. Still, Tactic remained as a *Pueblo de Indios* during the colonial period which meant an insignificant presence of non-indigenous

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<sup>38</sup> Tactic under its jurisdiction the neighboring communities of San Pablo Tamahún and San Miguel Tucurub. I suspect the practice of subduing a strong community like Tukurub’ to a minor one like Chikan followed the same principal shown by Dominicans in other parts of the Verapaz. The same was done in the Q’eqchi’ region by making San Juan Chamelo led by Aj Pop B’atz a dependency of the Spanish settlement of Cobán.

<sup>39</sup> AGCA, A1, L 181 E 3715. Paleography by José María Lemus Orantes.

people<sup>40</sup>; by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, about 70% of the land in the Verapaz was still in the hands of indigenous communities (Hurtado 2008:62).

The Independence and the establishment of the republican administration generated many changes, specially after the Constitution of 1823, and the “*Ley General de Tierras*” of 1825. The new rules for the regularization of land tenure provided the legal frame for privatization of all unclaimed lands. The indigenous communities were able to retain *ejidos* and pastures but had to present all the relations of their possession. According to David McCreery, while there is evidence of abuse and expropriation, it was mainly the political chaos of the early republican era that prevented the registration of the lands and fueled the lack of trust in the administration; meanwhile the Ladinos were finally able to access the land market (McCreery 1998a:485–487). The following decade would see the expropriation and sale of the Dominican haciendas (Hurtado 2008:63).

The constitution of republican municipalities was sustained in the 1836 liberal regulations, allowing any rural area (with over 200 inhabitants) that was able to finance all expenses (institutions and bureaucracy) to acquire official recognition; this resulted in only a few registrations, mostly of larger communities. Decisions about the constitution of municipalities and their borderlands were arbitrary, and land conflicts across the country arose between neighboring communities as they were registered under the new system (McCreery 1998a:492–493). Among the new functions of the municipal government was the authority to separate the *ejidos* into partial plots, and distribute any barren lands, *realenga* or private property that was underused (Hurtado 2008:63). For the Verapaz region, McCreery states this time also implied the separation of the *ejidos* held by the communities in the high and low lands (McCreery 1998a:489, 494); though no particular information is known for Tactic, evidence shows the Kajok people had *comunes* in the northern lowlands, as mentioned in the *Título de Santa Ana*. The new administrative configuration of the Municipio allowed for the arrival of mestizos and Ladinos into the Verapaz, who then acquired land in the region.

There are few records about the earliest incursion of Mestizos or Ladinos in Tactic. Oral history marks Longinos Guzmán<sup>41</sup> as one of the first Ladino males in the town, having played the role of *síndico* in the municipal administration of the Poqomchi’ Mayor José Bin (Terga 1986:9). My

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<sup>40</sup> Further research would be required to portray everyday life during this period, as not many documents report on it.

<sup>41</sup> The archival record also shows that in 1830 Guzmán had been assigned the post of “Director de Caminos del Departamento de Alta Verapaz”, from which he resigned later that same year. AGCA B86.2 L1167 E27.231. AGCA B86.2 L1167 E27.240.

maternal grandmother was a direct descendant of Longinos Guzmán, who had established his family in the town by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. The first Ladinos were not great landowners, most of them focused on trade, commerce or education. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, other Ladino families were settled in the area: Trujillo (of Mexican origins); Santos (who came from Salamá); Milián, Morales, Godoy, and Molina (from Amatitlán). According to Terga, the *ejido* system still prevailed at the time, so the land was still under the control of the Municipio (Terga and Vásquez 1977:113-117).

The continuous reconfiguration of the geopolitical scene through new bureaucracies and the liberal projects for national progress impacted the history of the Verapaz. With the arrival of the Liberal Reform of Justo Rufino Barrios in the 1870s, more changes disrupted the indigenous land tenure in Guatemala. In 1873, Barrios gave land titles in the Verapaz to the militias (Ladinos and Mestizos) that served in support of the Liberal Revolution; during the same year he ordered the consolidation of all the ecclesiastic lands, finalizing the expropriation from the Church and the *Cofradías* (Hurtado 2008:65, 72). Decree 170, proclaimed in 1877, would allow for all the land given under *enfiteusis* by the Crown to become private property. Under the hand of Barrios, the Verapaz suffered a second wave of colonization with the arrival of coffee production by German immigrants. The impacts of the liberal reforms, the arrival of German families and the expansion of coffee production in the Verapaz, particularly as it relates to Q'eqchi' communities, has been reviewed by several authors (King 1974; Cambranes 1985; McCreery 1987; Wagner 1991; McCreery 1998b; Hurtado 2008). The northern region of the Verapaz, which had avoided the *encomienda* system during the Colonial period, experienced the most significant land dispossession through the new forms of colonization under the Liberal Reforms. The claim over lands allowed for the establishment of the *colonato* system: indigenous communities became *mozos* or peasant servants who were not only forced to stay and work for the new plantations (coffee or others), but received no compensation for their work. *Mozos* only had a *right of usufruct* which denied tenure over the individual land plots assigned for subsistence agriculture.

Tactic, unlike most of Alta Verapaz, did not have any land sold to the Germans, so no coffee plantation was ever established in the territory during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Oral history recounts the Government offered lands in the hamlet of Chiacal, but the Germans did not find the land adequate for their endeavors (Terga and Vásquez 1977:117). Still, the Liberal Reforms of the 1870s and the laws for land parceling out (*lotificación*) subscribed by Carrera in 1906 (1977: 117-118) did change the land tenure and ethnic composition as several Ladino families took over mid-sized estates and

applied the *colonato* system. None of these became extensive plantations and remained productive with traditional crops and cattle production.

Written records of oral history report that President Rafael Carrera gave property titles to the Poqomchi' people in 1906 as a reward for their participation in his militias (Terga and Vásquez, 1977: 117). However, the information retrieved so far does not speak of indigenous people becoming large landowners after the early privatization under the Liberal Reforms. Ladino families benefitted from Carrera's land distribution, several of them arriving from Baja Verapaz (like the Peláez and Sandoval families of Cubulco). The legal recognition of private property allowed greater mobility of non-indigenous people in the area and soon the Ladino militia men who had received land in Tactic, but lived elsewhere, sold their land; this is how my great grandfather Eduardo Lemus Dimas, who arrived from Tukurú with his family in 1923, was able to purchase farming land (Terga, 1977:117-118). However, other people migrated to provide services, like Heriberto Gálvez Barrios who arrived in 1906 as a teacher<sup>42</sup>, or the Chinese family, Lam, who set up a general store and later a bakery. The main town of Tactic contained the houses of both Ladino and Poqomchi' families that had either land or commercial businesses.

By the late 1870s, the municipal administration was shared between prominent indigenous males and the few Ladino families that were present in the town; however, this was not necessarily a reflection of equality between both groups. The Liberal government adopted the idea of universal citizenship to the inherited *República de Indios* by restricting the right to vote to males that complied with the characteristic of literacy, land tenure and political assignments (Taracena Arriola 2002:174-176). In 1873, Tactic had 18 male citizens who were qualified to vote, of which only three were indigenous males, who were not literate but held political positions within the local government (López Cantoral 1999:83). The evidence highlights how differentiated citizenship was practiced well into the Republican era, and how political niches like *cofradías* were important strongholds for indigenous organization.

Some of the Poqomchi' families, the Tujab', Xoy, Koy, and Medina who had successful businesses in silver-smithing or cattle production, held positions of leadership on several occasions in the Municipality and *Cofradías* creating ties between religious and political power. The *Cofradías*

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<sup>42</sup> He would become part of the community and his family remained in the town. The first urban elementary school carries his name.

played a crucial role in the cargo system, just as in the Mesoamerican region<sup>43</sup>, and for a while the *Alcalde* was selected among the *principales* of the *Cofradías*. For example, José Cruz Bin was the Mayor of Tactic in 1906; as a young Poqomchi' man he attended the local elementary school and, after receiving military training, he became First Sergeant and Justice of the Peace (Lemus Dimas 1959:7). Bin served in different posts within the municipality -*Síndico Primero*, *Regidor Primero* and *Alcalde Primero* (he was Mayor five times)- oscillating between these roles and others linked to several religious organizations (Ibid.).

While Poqomchi' men initially held the position of *Alcalde* (see Table 7 in Appendix), after 1906 a mixed *Alcaldía* was practiced, with the first Mayor being a Ladino and the second a Poqomchi' male (López Cantoral 1999:91-94). This remained the norm until 1933, when José Cruz Bin was the *Alcalde Segundo* for the last time. The Liberal reforms of 1879 ensured the differentiated participation of Ladino and Indigenous people in the municipal governments<sup>44</sup>; the role of second Mayor was designed for the indigenous representant in the mixed *Alcaldías*, while the first role was to be exclusively for a Ladino representative, even in those communities with an indigenous majority (Taracena Arriola 2002:1978). Reforms made in 1927 stipulated that all municipalities with a predominantly indigenous population had to have a Ladino that could read and write in the positions of first *Alcalde* and first *Síndico* (Ibid.). After José Cruz Bin's last term as the first Mayor, the record shows the post remained mostly among Ladinos. Only three indigenous men held the position between 1912 and the Peace Accords in 1996 (López Cantoral, *Op. cit.*).

During the dictatorship of Jorge Ubico<sup>45</sup> (1931-1944), a change was made to the municipal delegation suppressing the elections for the Municipal Mayor and substituting both the first and second majors with a Municipal *Intendente* appointed directly by the political chief (Taracena Arriola 2002:197). Ubico's regime disrupted the *Cofradía* system as a political structure through the direct appointment of municipal officials. The differentiated citizenship was also cemented in the implementation of both the *Ley contra la Vangacia* and the *Ley de Vialidad* that revived the forced labor established in previous decrees of the Liberal reforms. In Tactic, many young indigenous men

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<sup>43</sup> The cargo system has been discussed in the ethnographic work of the Mesoamerican region (Wolf 1957; Vogt 1970; Rojas Lima 1988; Gossen 1986; Carmack, Gasco, and Gossen 2007).

<sup>44</sup> Taracena describes in detail the elements of the "Ley para las Municipalidades de los pueblos de la República (Decreto no. 242)" (2002:178)

<sup>45</sup> Jorge Ubico was appointed a military post in Tactic, Alta Verapaz as Second Lieutenant of Infantry in 1897; he was 19 years old. No information was found as to whether he in fact took the post or for how long.

were sent to work in road construction, particularly to Salamá, a new path to access the Verapaz region, and some of them died under the dire conditions (Terga and Vásquez 1977:122–123)<sup>46</sup>.

Terga reported, from oral history, that ethnic relations in Tactic had been amicable until the Revolution of 1944, which he describes as a time marked by conflict (Terga and Vásquez 1977:123). While almost no information is found in written records about this period, oral history speaks about the uprising of indigenous leaders against Ladino landowners. The ethnographer Francisco Rodríguez Ruanet wrote in his field notes of 1957 that he heard the story of a man by the last name of Sierra<sup>47</sup> who had done "terrible things" during the Revolution (without specific mention of the actions) and who was later ostracized by the rest of the community<sup>48</sup>. Whether or not this story is accurate, it resonates with some of the ethnic antagonism that arose at the time. Greg Grandin's study of the Polochic region during and after the Revolution mentions several unions were founded in the Verapaz, including Tactic, but provides no specific information about them (Grandin 2011:55–56). The local registry of Municipal power states that it was not until 1946 that the local government was once led by a Mayor instead of an Intendente (see Table 7), however I found no further information about it. It is clear, however, that the dynamic of local power remained among Ladino men throughout these years. Further archival research for the period would be required to shed light on the actual events that took place during the years of the revolution.

### **Tactic and the will to improve during the development era**

After the Revolution era (1944-1954), national and local politics shifted towards development and counter-insurgency efforts. The Cold War politics pushed the agenda of State driven efforts that would replace the progressive agenda of Arévalo and Árbenz. When the ethnographer Francisco Rodríguez Ruanet arrived in Tactic, back in 1957, he was told that the only political party present was the Liberationist party, Movimiento Democrático Nacional (MDN), which was supported by several Ladino families. President Castillo Armas had visited the town between 1956-1957 and met with different families of the community, but he did not do much

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<sup>46</sup> Terga also mentions that young unmarried women were sent to work at German coffee plantations during this time. Though the action is not unlikely, the time period is questionable since it corresponds to some of the practices seen for the Liberal Reforms of Barrios (1870s).

<sup>47</sup> Terga (1986) explains the Sierra family had their roots in the Ladino community but through several marriage alliances became a renowned Poqomchi' family.

<sup>48</sup> Rodríguez Ruanet worked in Tactic from April to June of 1957. Thanks to the extensively detailed work of Sarah Foss in the reconstruction of his work, I was able to study his field notes from the aforementioned months in Tactic.

beyond advising them on requesting State funding. While the Guatemalan State hardly led to the improvement of the community, a combination of non-government and government projects was implemented during this period.

The arrival of Fernando Leyns in 1959, a Belgian priest and ophthalmologist, marked two crucial changes in the town in terms of education and agricultural development. Leyns facilitated the arrival of the Religious of the Assumption, a group of foreign nuns that founded the private Catholic school "*Colegio La Asunción*" in 1961. The school promoted education for both indigenous and Ladino children in the main town and also housed literacy programs during the weekends and a small medical facility. Later, in 1967, Leyns promoted the creation of a savings and loan cooperative "*Cooperativa de Ahorro y Crédito Santa María de la Asunción*" -COOPSAMA- that benefited indigenous people with loans for house improvements and agricultural endeavors (Terga and Vásquez, 1977: 162-163). Later on, the cooperative became affiliated with the national federation of cooperatives (Fenacoac) and evolved into one of the primary sources of credit in Tactic.

Between the late 1950s and 1970s, the town received several new initiatives aimed at improving conditions of the town and the hamlets. While some of these were State driven projects, others came through the Catholic Church –as previously mentioned- or were led by neighbors. For example, the *Plan de Mejoramiento Integral de una Comunidad Indígena* was an initiative led by the Instituto Indigenista Nacional -IIN- in Tactic in 1958. The Improvement Plan responded to the need to integrate indigenous people into the national culture, governmentally cemented by the Liberationist government (Dary 2013; Taracena Arriola 2004:55). The project rejected the idea of the indigenous person as a negative element in the social structure of the country and stated the institution's duty was to integrate the subject into national life (IIN 1960). The reasons for choosing Tactic as the site of implementation were based on previous research<sup>49</sup> of ideal conditions for the components of the intervention (see Table 8 in Appendix). The IIN worked with two North American linguists, Margarita Wendell and Rubi Scott from the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), in creating literacy booklets in Poqomchi' (Wendell 1962). It is through them that we know the national government withdrew its financial support, making the implementation of the project

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<sup>49</sup> The IIN had delegated the Guatemalan ethnographer Francisco Rodríguez Ruanet to work in Tactic from April to June of 1957. Though not specified, it can be inferred that before coming to Tactic, Rodríguez Ruanet had been doing the same research in Totonicapán. It is not clear if there were delays or interruptions in the implementation of the research and project with the assassination of the then President Carlos Castillo Armas on July 26<sup>th</sup> of 1957. The publication in the bulletin does state that the institution lacked funds to travel and present the results of this project in the *IV Congreso Indigenista Interamericano* (IIN 1960).

impossible (Wendell 1962:132). Not much was accomplished in terms of infrastructure, but several committees were formed in the hamlets to promote the aspired change. Although the people participated in these processes, the project did not attempt to change the power relations in the area as can be seen in their request that the municipal government encourages landowners to provide materials and *mozos* to partake in the construction of school buildings (IIN 1960:78).

By the 1970's, the Presidential program "*Desarrollo de la Comunidad*" came to Tactic, one of the twenty-five recipients of this intervention. The initiative followed the development and anti-insurgent agenda of the Guatemalan government, inspired by CEPAL's prescription for economic improvement<sup>50</sup>. Mariano Emilio Vásquez Robles, a school teacher from the Western Highlands, led the project in Tactic<sup>51</sup>. The project included several areas of intervention, such as economic production, infrastructure, health education, and community organization for development (Terga y Vasquez 125,127). The project introduced electricity in the main town, built three rural school buildings, facilitated educational interventions in health care and family planning, and organized development committees in several communities (Vásquez, personal communication).

The Development project also provided financial support for the acquisition of Jersey cows to improve the genetic stock among cattle breeders who were members of the dairy cooperative (Godoy Peláez 2004:11). In 1976, the *Cooperativa Agropecuaria de la Verapaz -VERALAC-* was established with the participation of several townspeople who had large-scale production of cattle; the founders were all Ladino men<sup>52</sup>. The associates received training in cooperativism and dairy management through the development project and the Instituto Técnico de Capacitación y Productividad -INTECAP- (Ibid., 19). The ties of Ladino families with military officials facilitated the approval of the *de-facto* president Lucas García for a loan from the *Banco de Desarrollo Agrícola*<sup>53</sup> (BANDESA). The money was used to buy machinery for dairy production. The cooperative provided another platform of economic power to the Ladino families that co-opted its administration, operations, and finances; it also allowed them to control the commercialization of

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<sup>50</sup> Taracena explains that the Plan Nacional de Desarrollo Rural lasted between 1971-1975, by request of Méndez Montenegro's government (1966-1970) but implemented by Colonel Arana Osorio (1970-1974). The project had the support of several international agencies like IDB and USAID; the program included the creation of several projects for economic improvement like colonizing the subpopulated "Franja Transversal del Norte", creating services for agricultural commerce like BANDESA, INDECA and DIGESA (2004: 107).

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Emilio Vásquez. During his time in Tactic, Vásquez worked closely with Ricardo Terga and produced the ethnography here referenced as "Terga and Vásquez, 1977".

<sup>52</sup> Miguel A. Peláez, Rolando Flores, Darío Paz, Ottoniel Gamboa, Carlos Cáceres, Alejandro Chinchilla, Damián Ochoa, Rodolfo Sierra and Miguel Ramírez (Godoy Peláez 2004:18).

<sup>53</sup> Bandesa was a state-owned financial entity, inaugurated in 1971 with the development boom. It would later turn into Banco Rural -BANRURAL- a public-private entity that has become one of the largest banks in Guatemala.



dairy and cattle over the region (Palma 1996:153-154). Unlike VERALAC, the finance cooperative COOPSAMA was never controlled by the Ladino elite of the town (Palma 1996:163).

While the cattle owners saw an improvement in their production and were able to support the production and position their products in the national dairy market, for the indigenous peasants of the hamlets the situation had not improved. In his assessment of living conditions in the town, Vásquez reported that many men and families migrated to the southern coast in order to work at different plantations (coffee, sugar, cotton and other products). Despite the income being meager, it allowed for a salary that was not obtainable in Tactic. This seasonal migration posed a problem for the literacy component of the Development project as people would leave before finishing the program (Terga and Vásquez 1977:156-159). The rural schools were the main contribution of the project to the livelihood of rural Tactic; the rest of the interventions, including electric infrastructure, favored the urban area. Though the Development project was indeed implemented and remained for a longer period than its predecessor, the aims of the intervention were never achieved. Eventually, the political turmoil of the 1980s resulted in a lack of funding for the project.

The *institutionalization of progress* was emphasized by the local government while the State strengthened both the development and national security agendas as insurgent movements expanded in the region. As we have seen, the State was able to modify the configuration of local government with ease thanks to the establishment of municipal laws during the Liberal Reform. Citizenship had expanded during the Revolution, granting the vote to all men and women over 18 who knew how to read and write, as well as illiterate men of adult age; neither women or illiterate men were required to vote, although later had to register their vote publicly by raising their hands (Taracena Arriola 2004:168). The Liberationist constitution of 1956 would remain exclusive for all men and literate women over 18, but it allowed the vote of illiterate men to be secret; it would not be until the Constitution of 1965 that all females, independent of their literacy, would be able to vote secretly (Taracena Arriola 2004:174-179). Despite the extension of citizenship to illiterate populations, the municipal administration of Tactic continued to be held mainly by Ladinos without indigenous participation in leading positions beyond the hamlet<sup>54</sup>. Terga and Vásquez reported the existence of different forms of political organization that linked hamlets and the town with the national administration of the country. While the Municipality was presided over by a

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<sup>54</sup> Taracena explains that the first indigenous congressmen, Pedro Varona Cúmes and Fernando Tezahuic Tohón, were elected for the period 1974-1978

Council that was “democratically elected” to rule for two years, the local leadership in the hamlets, *Alcaldes Auxiliares*, were appointed by the Mayor for a year and received no income for their service. Parallel to this, the military control over the region relied on Commissioners who were elected in each community and validated by the Military Zone of Alta Verapaz. These commissioners were in charge of procuring “improvement and order” in their communities, recruiting youth for the army and delivering official summons (Terga and Vásquez 1977:179–182).

**Table 2 Administrative structure in 1970s**

Administrative level	Political posts	Military
Department	Governor	Chief of Military Zone
Municipality	Alcalde (1) Síndico (1) Regidores (6) Tesorero (1) Secretario (1) Oficiales (1) Chief of Municipal Police (1) Fiel del Mercado (1)	Chief of Commissioners
Hamlets	Alcaldes Auxiliares (1 or 2 per hamlet) Semaneros (2 per hamlet)	Military commissioners

Source: Terga and Vásquez, 1977: 179-182

The organization of local authorities across the different settlements of a Municipio remained the same until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The logistics of this political administration not only regulated the type of government posts and degree of autonomy allowed for these authorities but also marked the Municipal access to State resources. Taxes collected at a local level did not go beyond the “*Boleto de Ornato*,” an annual fee that varies according to the individual’s declared income; thus, the municipal administration depended heavily on national central funding.

In 1976, a group of citizens from Tactic presented a plea to change the status of Tactic from “Pueblo” to “Villa” based on the Presidential Agreement (*Acuerdo Gubernativo*) of 1938<sup>55</sup> that regulated types of settlement and their official differentiated status. The law considered a hierarchy

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<sup>55</sup> According to this particular law, the Guatemalan State can declare a “villa” when it achieves the following characteristics: an urban population of min. 5,000 inh; a 20% literacy rate; houses built on a grid, with roads well arranged and paved in any way”; an underground sewer system; potable water distributed through pipes, public baths and washing areas (*lavaderos*); a public market; street lightning; parks or plazas; a post office of adequate category and a telegraph office; a second rate pharmacy or a first rate medicinal shop; an authorized cemetery; stores that sell in bulk; a hotel or boarding house; a library; elementary schools in adequate numbers; proper buildings for civil and military authorities; main roads to the main commercial areas, with regular transportation services (PNUD 1999:131–132).

of typology based on their level of progress [*adelanto*]: *Ciudad, Villa, Pueblo, Aldea, caserío, and Lugar Poblado*. The adjustments made to the administration of the country's political territory reproduced the Liberals' interest in land control, restructuring of regional powers, and enforcement of national sovereignty (Taracena Arriola, Pira, and Marcos 2002; Mendoza 2015); the permeation of this rationale in the configuration of local places would provide order when accessing State resources.

The subscribers to the plea argued that they were only concerned with the “*material and cultural progress of Tactic*” (see Table 29 in Appendix) and hoped that Tactic would one day acquire the status of City. The achievements that allowed the recognition of Tactic as a *Villa* were the result of development projects, private interests, community effort, and forced labor, despite the lack of interest by the national government. It would not be until 1984, under military rule, that Tactic is recognized as a *Villa*. This was validation of the town's self-improvement and its compliance with the ideals of liberal progress, unfortunately it did not speak of the well-being of its citizens, nor the unequal conditions experienced between urban and rural settlements.

### **Tactic, the armed conflict, and the counter-insurgent institutions**

Guatemala's long-lasting armed struggle (1966-1996) had a peak in violence during the late 1970s and early 1980s as the control and presence of the Army intensified. In public accounts about the history of Tactic, silence prevails surrounding the period of the war and its impact on the communities; for example, the monographic work of López Cantoral (1999) does not address the period, not even to state that Tactic was untouched by the long-standing conflict. The data presented here has been retrieved from the “*Comisión del Esclarecimiento Histórico*” (CEH) and the report of the “*Proyecto Interdiocesano de Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica*” (REMHI), Truth Commissions promoted by the United Nations and the Catholic Church, respectively.

The REHMI Project reported 422 community massacres in Guatemala between the late 1970s to the mid-1980s. Of the 63 massacres reported for Alta Verapaz, none took place in Tactic. The municipalities where the massacres were concentrated in this list were: Cahabón (14), San Cristóbal Verapaz (14), Cobán (13), Chisec (9), San Pedro Carchá (6), Panzós (2), Santa Cruz Verapaz (2), Senahú (2), Chahal (1) (ODAHG 1998a:37–39). Although no massacres were reported for Tactic, violence was still present: deaths and disappearances were reported in the Municipality (see Tables 9 and 10 in Appendix).

The location of Tactic as a midpoint between the lowlands, highlands and the Polochic region in Alta Verapaz was optimal for the Army to set up checkpoints; the fork in the San Julián road was the place of disappearance in several cases (CEH Guatemala 1999a). The role these posts had in the abduction of people was quite important, as can be seen in the case of Edmundo Salvador Morán Ical, a man from San Cristobal Verapaz who was captured at this site under the accusation of not carrying an identification document; his body was never found (CEH Guatemala 1999b:31-35).

The academic corpus on the war has focused on Q'eqchi' populations of Alta Verapaz, like Panzós where the first massacres took place (Grandin 2011) and the Achi people to the south of the region. Within the Poqomchi' region, it was in San Cristóbal Verapaz where military forces struck hardest and several testimonies speak of the experience during the war (CECEP 2012). Meanwhile, Tactic seems to have been fallen under military control quite early, perhaps because of its geographical location as point of entry to different roads within the Verapaz region.

The institutionalization of order through *Alcaldes Auxiliares* and *Comisionados Militares*, as mentioned before, was instrumental in achieving that control. Forced recruitment was implemented in Tactic by either by the army or the PAC (*patrullas de autodefensa civil*). The recruitment was not limited to the hamlets but also took place in the main town, with the participation of Ladino men in the PACs. Among the many young men drafted by the Army in the early 1980s were the fathers of several youth that I interviewed. The participation in the army was so widespread that it is not uncommon to find the pictures of those once young Poqomchi' men in military attire on the walls of both urban and rural homes.

As the REMHI report states, the *Comisionados Militares*, even after the peak of the massacres, played an important role in in the “military control of the communities, making their power evident through the patrols, personal coercion, or even threats to social or political groups” (ODAHG 1998a:123). The REHMI reproduced a note that accompanied a testimony collected in the hamlet of Tampó, in Tactic A.V. The note warned the political parties, preparing for the first democratic elections after the Constitution of 1985, not to intervene with the patrolling work of the PAC. An important aspect of the note is the association made between “questioning” the obligatory character of participating in the PACs and insurgent behavior. By consigning the doubt as “leftist” or “subversive,” the threat is clear: the military commissioners were able to “cut down and disappear bad apples.” The signatory of the note is the Chief of the Military Commissioners, Baltazar Milián

Morales, who would become Mayor between 1993-1995, just before the signing of the Peace Accords (ODAHC 1998a:123-124).

The structure of local power was similar to the one reported in the 1970s: *Alcalde*, *Alcaldes Auxiliares*, and *Comisionados Militares*. However, a new form of military control was introduced through the presence of *Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil*, following the counter-insurgency tactics employed by the State during the early 1980s. The power assigned to these local commissioners allowed them to question directly the members of political parties, as the note explains. The control the military delegates had over the political system should not be underestimated; it would remain as such even during the democratic transition and, I venture, through the postwar era.

The transition to the democratic era in 1985 did not represent much change in terms of political organization at a local level. The anthropologist Danilo A. Palma and a team of local researchers studied the complex structure of traditional, local, and national spaces of power in Tactic during the early 1990s, when the war was waning and the cease fire was negotiated. Palma's analysis of the power structure (see Table 11 in Appendix) distinguished between military structure, local delegated government, and community forms of organization. Three links existed still between military structure, communities, and the municipality: the PACs were no longer a mandatory activity, but the largest hamlets and the town still had them patrolling and controlling their neighbors; the military commissioners were also still present both in the town and the hamlets, and all the hamlets had *Alcaldes Auxiliares* directly appointed by the Mayor. In addition to these, both urban and rural dwellings had development committees named "Comités Pro-Mejoramiento" and paved, in a way, self-improvement entities that, at the time, negotiated better access to water and electricity with the State (through its civilian and military expressions).

In the early 1990s, the efforts of democratic participation were limited to the act of voting; the brokers between communities and the government were not democratically elected but negotiated according to the interest of municipal or national authorities. The *Alcaldes Auxiliares* were men appointed by the Mayor (no evidence speaks of women holding the post); the military commissioners in the hamlets were directly appointed by either retiring commissioners or other influential members of the community, and then submitted for approval by army officials in Cobán. Meanwhile, by 1993 the PACs were appointed by the community in an assembly that took place in the hamlet's school, signaling how it was changing into a voluntary entity, a clear contrast to the forced character it had between 1980 and 1992 (Palma 1996:77-80). The same principles for electing representatives were followed to form the *Pro-mejoramiento* committees; however, the

Municipality as the superior authority had to confirm the appointments agreed upon in the community's general assembly. This led to conflicts, as was reported in the hamlet of Chiacal, which had two *Pro-mejoramiento* committees because some members had become estranged from the original one; both were trying to gain the favor of the Municipality and gain proper recognition and legitimacy (Ibid.). Sometimes a single person would be selected to represent the community in all the posts. Palma recorded the story of a single man who was the president of the Evangelical church committee "El Nazareno", the president of the new *pro-mejoramiento* committee, and the general secretary of the PAN political party (Palma 1996:92). This multiplicity of roles concentrated power in a single figure.

The combination of political patronage and individual prominence would result in the irrelevance of the political parties' ideological foundations. Palma asserts that the political parties rarely represented a formal type of organization because of the high "volatility" of the representation. This would remain the case during my fieldwork season. As Palma noted in his research, patronage not only took place between the Mayors and the national political parties but extended towards the representation of the hamlets. As the official party of the Municipality changed in 1993 from UCN to PAN, the president of a local committee also changed hands towards a local supporter of the recently elected Mayor (Palma 1996:93).

Though the complex practice of patronage was not solely forged during the war, it became intricately linked to the notion of peaceful negotiation in the wake of our most violent era. This essential element of *old politics* would permeate the post-Peace-Accords era.

### **Tactic and the Peace Accords' institutions**

The democratic transition in Tactic resulted in a few changes regarding municipal power. The era allowed for broader participation of political parties as well as increased participation of Poqomchi' candidates for the role of Mayor. The period also came with modifications to the governmental period for Mayors. Until 1993, Municipalities had elections every year or every two and half years; after the Peace Accords in 1996, Mayors were elected every four years in a single voting event along with the President and Congresspeople. The first four Municipal governments after the Peace Accords were led by a Poqomchi' Mayor: two men (one reelected) and one woman.

Leonora Cú Isem, the first Poqomchi' female Mayor after over 140 years of Municipal organization, was elected for the period 2004-2008 (see Table 7 in Appendix). Cú Isem had been a Congresswoman with FRG, a political party led by former *de-facto* president and war criminal Efraín

Ríos Montt, between 2000-2004; then she ran for the Municipality under the same party. In 2007, she ran again for Congress but under the UNE's departmental list (representing Alta Verapaz). Cú Isem got reelected for Congress four times but did so with different political parties (FRG, UNE, UCN, LIDER, MR). Unfortunately, her role both in the Municipality and Congress was not seen as particularly productive for the region and has received several accusations of corruption<sup>56</sup>.

The role of the political party in a local candidacy has become relevant as campaigns with more substantial funding will have more access to publicity and the possibility of key figures, like members of Congress and presidential candidates, showing up to political rallies. Still, candidates rely heavily on family connections and new forms of *cacicazgos* in their campaigns; local economic powers -particularly cattle owners- play a role in the Municipal Council configuration.

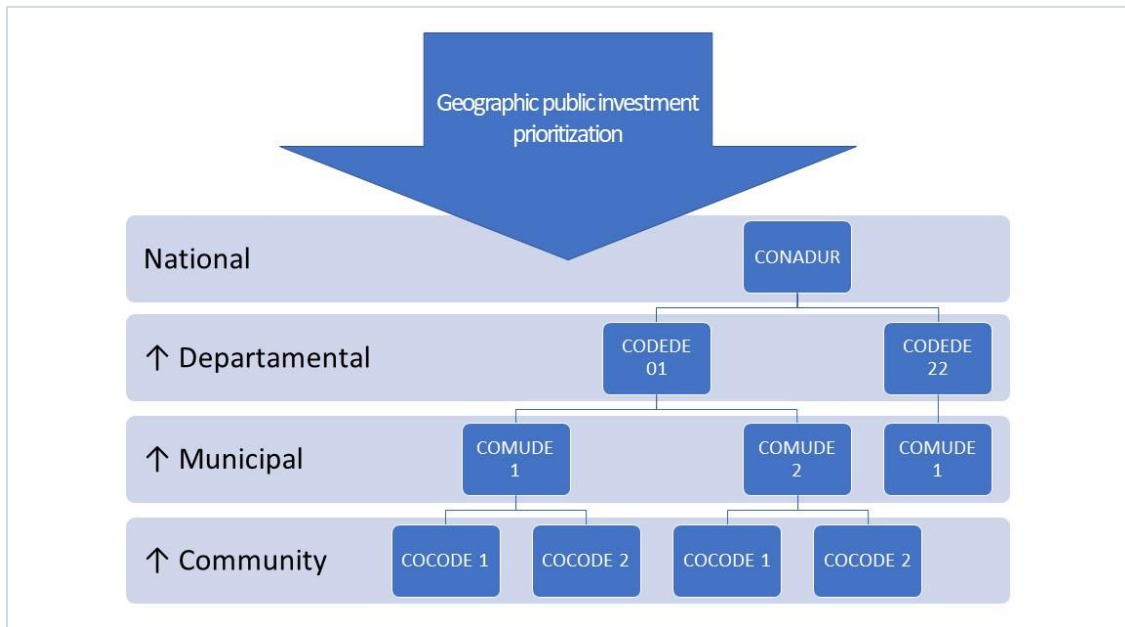
With the arrival of the Peace Accords in 1996, the administrative entities of control changed. Not only were the formal military organizations demobilized, but also the Municipality and its development structure were modified. In 1985 the new Constitution of Guatemala cemented the State's obligation to promote a decentralized structure for local participation in national development planning; this would, in turn, become the *Sistema de Consejos de Desarrollo* or Development Councils System (Ramos and Sosa 2010:9). Though the *Pro-mejoramiento* committees were the preliminary forms of this system, it was not until after the Peace Accords that deliberate efforts were taken by the State to operationalize a decentralized administrative structure. At least two of the specific accords required citizen participation in prioritizing social investment: the one concerned with indigenous peoples "*Acuerdo Sobre Identidad y Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas*" (AIDPI) and the one focused on rural development "*Acuerdo Sobre Aspectos Socioeconómicos y Situación Agraria*" (ASESA). In 2002, the Guatemalan State passed the three most important legislative reforms of the Peace era: *Ley de Código Municipal*, *Ley General de Descentralización*, and the *Ley de Consejos de Desarrollo Urbano y Rural*. These laws would change the public administration structure by reinforcing municipal autonomy over the use of national funds, providing an obligatory 8% of the national budget to the Municipality, and requiring the creation of community (COCODE), municipal (COMUDE) and department (CODEDE) development councils for the approval of the State's social investment (Ramos and Sosa 2010:10-11).

Furthermore, in 2005 the *Plan Nacional de Descentralización* promoted the participation of indigenous people, women, and youth in the Councils-system. By 2009, all settlements of Alta

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<sup>56</sup> The citizen alliance "Congreso Visible", a project that implements parliamentary monitoring, has published a profile on the Congresswoman (Congreso Visible 2018).

Verapaz had COCODES (Ibid., 15). The following figure shows the different levels of the councils where development is supposed to be planned and the flow of representation from a local to a national level.



**Figure 5: Graphic representation levels of the Development Council System**

Though no specific date is given for the initial creation of the Development Councils in Tactic, by 2010 all of the communities registered within its territory had a COCODE. Ideally the COCODE is made up of members elected through community assemblies; these take place in public spaces like community halls or schools, where the community nominates neighbors, and a public vote is taken by either raising hands or giving voting chips to the chosen candidate. After the elected members receive specific positions, a Municipal officer registers the Committee in the Municipality’s record book (*Libro de Actas*). The President of the COCODE is the figure that substitutes the *Alcalde Auxiliar*, just as the Mayor holds the presidency of the COMUDE. All the presidents of the COCODE take part in the COMUDE along with the Municipal Council, local representatives of the public sector, and selected members of “civil society.” In Tactic, the latter is made up of representatives of the private sector (who are also part of the Municipal Council) and representatives of Indigenous People, Women, and Youth. The decisions taken in the COMUDE regarding public investment can receive funding from the State’s financial assignation to the Municipality or the CONADUR; if the latter, the local projects would have to receive approval



through the system (see figure 5). The model delegates local representation and decision making through apparent “democratic participation.”

In their analysis of the Development Councils System, Belinda Ramos and Mario Sosa argue that authoritarian culture and patriarchy taint the makeup of the COCODEs. Patronage and fear permeate the processes of electing representatives, and many times the representation responds to an imposed decision dictated by the Municipal Mayor and not to a democratic process in the community (2010:15–16). While the direct assignation of the COCODEs by the Municipality is not easy to prove, interviewees did highlight that those communities that had supported the political campaign of the Mayor benefited through the prioritization of their needs in the plans for public investment. I also found that some COCODEs had been *Alcaldes Auxiliares*, Military Commissioners and PAC members during the war period; this is not too difficult to imagine given the previous examples of how a single individual could concentrate local power during the war. Patriarchy, in contrast, was easier to observe: though all the communities had a COCODE, not one of the councils was led by a woman. Females participated in the COMUDE through the *Oficina Municipal de la Mujer*, a municipal office dedicated to women’s needs and projects. Channeling their participation through a specific niche for women erased the need for challenging gender bias; soon the idea would be replicated locally and 50% of the communities had a Women’s Committee taking one seat in the COCODE (COMUDE Tactic and Segeplan 2010:50–53).

The Development Councils System also provides a clear path for channeling claims, proposals, and requests. The protocol for presenting projects also ensured that many requests were forgotten due to rejection or lack of funding. Most of the projects presented by the Municipalities before the Departamental and National councils were focused on infrastructure with little investment in educational or productive projects nor did they offer direct benefits to rural areas (Ramos and Sosa 2010:27–31). Currently the system has also reorganized the 63 settlements of Tactic (which includes *barrios, aldeas, colonias, caseríos, canton, and Fincas*) in a new administrative figure: the micro-region. The micro-regions bring together the 63 COCODEs into eight territorial blocks<sup>57</sup>, once more centralizing and delegating the process of decision making and investment planning (COMUDE Tactic and Segeplan 2010:20).

Since the Peace Accords in 1996, Tactic has participated in several exercises for development planning that follow the same principles of delegation of power seen in the Development Council

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<sup>57</sup> Microrregiones: Bempec, Chi Ixim, Pasmolón, Guaxpac, Chiacal, Tampe, Peri Urbano, and Casco Urbano.

System. In 2003, a Municipal Strategy for Poverty Reduction was promoted through a series of participative workshops led by the National Government through the Secretaría de Planificación y Programación de la Presidencia –SEGEPLAN– and the European Union. Later in 2005, the Municipio was integrated into the *Mancomunidad Poqomchi'* –an official figure that aimed at promoting regional level interventions based on ethnic affiliation– with the neighboring municipalities that shared a prehispanic legacy: Tactic, Tamahú, San Cristóbal, Santa Cruz Verapaz (Alta Verapaz) and Purulhá (Baja Verapaz); this entity also received the support of the European Union. Poverty prevailed despite the strategy, and while the *Mancomunidad* did implement a few projects, during my fieldwork there was no activity beyond an abandoned building outside of Tactic.

In 2008, a new strategic plan for 2008-2019 was developed but never fully implemented. In 2010, another development plan was created by SEGEPLAN with a 15-year intervention plan, following the millennium development goals. So far, no official reports speak of implementing the most recent or any of the previously designed strategic plans (COMUDE Tactic and Segeplan 2010:50–53).

## **Conclusion**

Tactic has been part of the many efforts implemented by the State (be it Colonial or Republican) to control and manage its population. The *tactiqueños* and *tactiqueñas* have coped and strategized with the changes in public participation and representation in the public sphere. Its prehispanic settlements defined the current whereabouts of the *Poqomchi'* people, whereas the colonial era cemented the region of the Verapaz as a single administrative and political territory. We have seen how differentiated citizenship forged during the early Republican times underlined the composition of mixed municipalities. The impact of Liberal governments and the acquisition of power by Ladino families led to a secondary role for indigenous leadership. The development efforts associated with the military governments would also create disciplined forms of community organization and participation in the local government. Local politics have had less to do with party politics and more with the *cacicazgos* that emerged through a history of service in institutions of control and enforcement. The current state of the municipal structure was built upon the legacy of this long history. The Development Council System settled control mechanisms conformed by *Alcaldías Auxiliares*, Military Commissioners and PACs; meanwhile, the prehispanic legacy of Tactic allowed for the creation of administrative figures like the *Mancomunidad Poqomchi'*.

Three main topics have marked the efforts of development since the 1950s: community contention, niche political participation, and a “desire to improve” has adapted local government structures to each political era’s needs. The State promoted the creation of multiple “committees” that, in theory, channel civic participation and provide local pertinence to the prioritization of development interventions. However, as it will be later demonstrated, they also compartmentalize the participation by creating separate niches for segments of population based on conditions of vulnerability (women or youth committees, or microregions) and lack a long-term plan to integrate them into a single structure of participation. This way of structuring representation and participation will also be reflected into the political field of Youth built by youth organization, municipal government and NGO projects.

## •• ELIZABETH'S EDUCATION AND WORK

Elizabeth thought her “Life Project,” a required school project for all high school graduates that focused on a person’s aspirations for their life, community, and country, outlined a map of her life. We were sitting in her family’s kitchen while she prepared the lunch for her parents and four siblings, talking about her education, when she brought it out as a reference for our conversation. Elizabeth’s life project was printed on colorful thick pages, with several pictures illustrating her life accomplishments, in a thick spiral bind; the document described what had happened in her life before and up until she turned 21, and it also sketched out her dreams for the future.

Going through the pages, Elizabeth remembered that being the eldest daughter implied that, at a fairly young age, she was responsible for household chores. This was a shared experience with the females I interviewed. At first she looked after her siblings wherever they were placed (in a *petate* in her grandmother’s patio or a small clearing in the maize fields while her parents worked). Little by little, her parents assigned her more demanding tasks. When she was seven years old, her mother expected her to wake up at 5:30 in the morning and carry the *nixtamal* to the mill and walk back home with the masa. That same year she was enrolled in elementary school but just to *parvulitos*, a pre-elementary year dedicated for child adaptation to school.

By the time she was eight years old, she was enrolled in her first year of elementary school and her parents, who had bought a corn mill, left her to “observe” the running of the shop. According to Elizabeth, there was one time when all the adults were busy in the store and women with *nixtamal* were waiting to mill their grains. Seeing nobody was able to come over, she took a small stool, got on top of it, turned on the mill, and began receiving the *palanganas* or buckets with milled corn. After this, she began working in the mill regularly. That this occurred so early in her life is not a thing she considers strange. Elizabeth remembers two boys who worked with her father, ages 10 and 12, who were full-time agricultural workers. They had been her friends before she began school, though they rarely had any free time to play as she and her siblings did.

By the time she was nine years old, her mother had shown her how to sell fruit by putting it in a *canasta* (with oranges, peaches, *annona* fruits, and other local fruits she picked from the family’s fields) and going from house to house. She was also taught to wash clothes, taking not just her own, but all her siblings’ clothes to the *pila* or sink. Also, that same year no adult was assigned to babysit when her parents left to sell in the main town; she was left in charge of her sister and brother during market days. A year later she had to “observe and help” her parents during weekends

when they traveled to sell vegetables in the nearby markets. When they began traveling outside of Tactic in order to access better markets, she went along and took care of tallying the sales.

At school, Elizabeth's grades were among the best, and her teachers nominated her for a scholarship program sponsored by the European Union that supported indigenous girls to finish their first six years of education. She was selected and received economic support to remain in school for the following three years. When she finished elementary school, a teacher got her a scholarship to study *básicos*, or middle school, in a private school in town; her father turned down this offer without even telling her about it. Elizabeth remembers being ashamed when years later, the teacher confronted her in a public event and complained about how she lost that opportunity. What had happened was that an older cousin of Elizabeth attending *básicos* had become pregnant by her school boyfriend. This news shook the family. Elizabeth's father compared the risks of a young woman traveling daily to town, interacting with young males, and the expenses of the school against the supposed benefits of education. For him there was little to gain, since once she got married and had children there would be no use for that education.

Elizabeth was also in charge of the family's convenience store and corn mill and, being so good at handling the accounts, she was already in charge of balancing the accounts after each week's sales. According to her father, there was no practical need to continue with her education. The vegetable business of the family had expanded and Elizabeth became involved in both the agricultural portion of it (overseeing the sowing and harvesting, as well as the payment of day laborers) and the subsequent commercialization. For example, on Friday nights Elizabeth had to register all the produce before her brother loaded it into the truck. The family left home around 2 am; her brother made the two-hour drive to the market while Elizabeth slept. Once in the market, the family focused on selling while Elizabeth recorded all sales. In the afternoon, they traveled back to Tactic and turned in for an early night. Besides the vegetables, Elizabeth was also in charge of the other business's accounts: the mill, the grocery store, and the flowers her mother grew, which were sold to the *mayordomos* of the different *cofradías*.

Elizabeth was busy, and her father saw no place for further education in her life. She disagreed but decided to obey his banning of school for one year and put off her studies.

*"Then, with my own means, I decided to sell atol<sup>58</sup>, have a little income and fundraise to continue my studies. I wanted to forget that year and continue onto the next one, but then I*

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<sup>58</sup> Atol is a grain-based drink, that can have different flavors.

*had another cousin who ran away with her boyfriend while she was studying; for two days she was nowhere to be found! So, it became two years that I could not study.”*

During those two years, she did other things so as to not to “waste time.” She enrolled in a computing course, first as a technical operator and then as a programmer. She realized that it would be difficult to obtain her father’s approval to continue her education. So, taking advantage of her father’s absence from the household (he was working at a rented field in another Municipality from Monday mornings to Sunday afternoons), she enrolled in the *Instituto Guatemalteco de Educación Radiofónica* (IGER) which allowed her to study the equivalent of 7th to 9th grade through the radio. The program required just one meeting per week with a study group in the former Catholic convent in the town. Her mom gave her support after learning Elizabeth was already enrolled in school; her father would not know about it until she was about to finish classes. Elizabeth had been elected as “Señorita IGER” and would lead the school’s representation in the town’s festival parade; she needed money to buy a new dress. Her father’s reactions were violent: she remembers being pulled by the hair while he hit her and shouted in anger at her defiance. Elizabeth’s recollection of this moment is one of simple acceptance, *“but it was done, I was already finishing. What could he do?”*

After finishing *básicos* she heard about a scholarship to study a one-year program to become a local development promoter. Announcements were made on the radio and through the COCODE. Elizabeth considered the opportunity and applied without telling her parents. She was accepted for one of the 20 scholarships for the region, but to enroll she needed parental consent because she was still a minor. So she told them about the opportunity, there would be no significant costs as classes would take place at a boarding school in another town, San Pedro Carchá, and the scholarship covered expenses. The program required her to remain two weeks in classes and return home two weeks to engage in community activities. Her father disapproved and offered her a house in exchange for abandoning her plans to continue her studies. It was her mother who provided the final consent, though they kept it a secret. When the time came for classes to begin, Elizabeth decided to run away. On a day her parents had to sell, she excused herself from the trip claiming she felt sick. Her parents let her stay, though her father was not happy with the prospect. When they left with the produce, she left her home.

*“My dad and my mom left, and I ran away from home. I made a plan with my sister because I had to supervise the day laborers, the sales [of the store], and the mill. Moreover, my sister*

*did not like to sell. She embraced the challenge and sacrificed a year of her studies so that I could make the most of the scholarship.”*

The days after Elizabeth fled the house, her mother and siblings paid the consequences of her father's ire. She does not speak much of what happened to them but states that the only thing she regrets was not helping them at that moment. In the hamlet, gossips said she had eloped with a boyfriend and her father told family members that he had banished her from home. He also threatened taking away his last name from her. Elizabeth was decided not to return, but the tragic death of a cousin compelled her back. Her father refused to see her, but her grandmother and godmother offered their homes. It was a tense moment. An uncle mediated the conflict and, finally, she was able to attend classes while also returning home for the weekends and holidays. Still, the success was bittersweet as her family suffered from her decision and the hamlet did not believe she was in an educational program.

Elizabeth worked hard to build up her good name again and, by the end of that first year in the program, she presided the hamlet's youth committee. The project offered her a partial scholarship to study *Bachillerato por madurez*, a condensed high school diploma that only took place on weekends. Because she was able to remain home during the weekdays, she kept on working at the mill and used part of the profits to cover her expenses. Elizabeth was the only one of the three females in the Tactic delegation to remain in the program: one girl got married, the other finished high school at a local private school paid by her parents. Meanwhile, Elizabeth got elected President of *Seminario* by her peers, the class where she wrote the Life Project; usually, the best student is the one selected for the leadership post.

Before graduating, Elizabeth was unsure about continuing her studies at a University level. Her friends had already taken the general exams for admission to the regional campus of the national university (CUNOR-USAC). Not all applicants pass the exams, so Elizabeth was anxious and doubtful about her chance of making it. She only knew one other person from her class that received admission.

*“Then I had that fear, but that pushed me. I said, well, to see what happens, what is my capacity. I did the exam. My parents did not know that I was [planning] to continue studying; they were already tired of me and that I did not respect their decisions or their opinions.”*

Once admitted, she told her family, who by then were neither supportive nor opposed to it. Unlike most youth I interviewed, Elizabeth applied for the daily program at the University, which is considered more demanding than the weekend program. She wanted a chance to be an everyday student, something she had not experienced since elementary school. The costs of becoming this type of student worried her because classes took place in the evening, so the transportation between Tactic and Cobán became more onerous than if it had been during the mornings. Classes ended at 9 p.m. when no public transportation covered the route between campus and Tactic; once in town, Elizabeth had to either walk, pay a taxi or hitchhike to her hamlet. At first, she was paying Q. 50 daily (about \$7) for transportation, about 73% of the daily wage of 2012.<sup>59</sup> Having no financial support from her parents and limited resources of her own, sometimes she would stay at a friend's house at night and then travel at the earliest hour to her house, just to do the same again at the end of the day. Still, transportation was expensive since even with regular service, Elizabeth would pay Q17 to travel between her hamlet and the University.

To finance her studies, Elizabeth kept on working with the family. Even with more corn mills in the area, the business begins every day at 5 a.m. with the racketing of the motor breaking through the stillness of the hamlet. Elizabeth and her sisters oversee the business, and all the profits from it belong to them. They have used it to support their everyday expenses and their studies. Because her father denied them financial support for studying and they do not get paid for all their work in the family business, Elizabeth and her siblings have used the same family ventures to make their own money:

*“For example, ... last year with my brother we invested in some of the crops, then what we sold was ours for investing, spending, or selling. Then it is a family investment. They [her parents or siblings] are not going to tell me: “Look, here is your money.” It is like, what we sell is ours, we already know how much it generates, loss or profit. This is how we work. For example, tending to the store and the mill. We take care of the mill between my sisters. Well, I am rarely here, but my sisters use it to pay their tuition and everything [...] I am the one that administers everything. My brother is in charge of commercialization. Everyone has their own role.”*

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<sup>59</sup> The daily wage for agriculture and non-agriculture activities was Q68 (US\$9 approximately). Governmental Agreement 520-2011 published December 30th, 2011.



On top of this everyday challenge, Elizabeth faced new experiences at the University. She was the only one wearing Mayan clothes in her classroom. While other students were from indigenous descent, most had abandoned the dress before entering University. Elizabeth analyzed this situation and explained the main reason for this was that very few rural women could afford or get admittance to the daily program. She felt blatant discrimination from teachers and fellow students, who even recommended that she transfer to the weekend program, claiming it might suit her better.

Unfortunately, the pressure of work, transportation, and classes took its toll on her. She failed a few classes during her first year and was left with doubts about her abilities for college-level education.

*“I felt bad because I did not have that ability to finish well that year. I had always been able to. I do not know if it was pride, to always [want] be the first, to have good grades. That was when I went totally down because I did not have the moral or economic support of my parents. I felt that I would not be able to close well that semester because the class I lost was a prerequisite [for other classes]... Yes, it was a challenge, but at the same time, a lesson learned. Moreover, it made me appreciate what others have not had the opportunity [to do].”*

Elizabeth sought advice from indigenous women from the town whom she had met through workshops directed towards youth; they were her elders and had studied in the same college program. They encouraged her to continue despite the difficulties, and Elizabeth made up her mind to catch up and improve her studying. By the time we talked in her family’s kitchen, she was doing her practical training as a final requirement to acquire the technical degree (first three years at a University level).

## CHAPTER III

### TACTIC'S YOUTHSCAPES

The *youthscape* of Tactic, the disjuncture and flow that produces and reproduces youth, is comprised of a multitude of practices that can easily change with time. In this chapter, I will describe the most relevant dynamics and niches for the young participants, that frame the field of public action registered during the field work. Through this depiction, the enactment of Youth - though not entirely articulated- will render certain bodies subject to carry the label while others remain outside of this scope. The information gather here comes from different sources compiled during fieldwork, including surveys of young people, interviews with organized and unorganized youth, interviews with authorities and practitioners of development, as well as a variety of records poured into field notes and referential documents.

#### **Descriptions of Youth in Tactic**

To understand youth as a social category produced by the practice of subjects over the world, I will begin with an exploration of the discourses and elicited descriptions of youth, given by local authorities, adults who act as gatekeepers, and organized and unorganized young people. The analysis of different questions regarding youth provided idealized notions supported on biological conceptualizations or generic descriptions of a young person.

Youth was usually described as a transitional stage. For organized and unorganized youth childhood was associated with immaturity, lack of knowledge, freedom, and innocence. In this idealized description, children were thought to be play-focused, who were bothersome (*molestan*), and had freedom to do what they wanted but under the watchful control of their parents. Parents supported their kids economically thus children did not have to provide for themselves. And because children had little control over what they did or think, they needed gatekeepers.

Youth, in contrast, were described as more independent and able to think things through than children; they were thought to be focused on the future and their decisions reflected that. As youth became independent, the idea that parents were not responsible for them was highlighted, leading them to make decisions by themselves even if they lacked enough experience or knowledge; it was argued that this could make them more susceptible to regret because of their hastiness. The assumed autonomy of youth drew an image of accountable beings who should have self-

governance, unlike children, and must face the consequences of their decisions; they were expected to become individualized disciplined subjects. Enjoyment of free time and rebellious attitudes were only used to describe young people; adults seem to lose both characteristics. Bodily changes were not specifically discussed<sup>60</sup> with exception of the presence of “mustaches” in males (adults sport a mustache while youth do not) and a young female who described youth as becoming a *señoritas*, a word which is commonly used to name a girl who has experienced menarche.

Adulthood was associated with being subdued (*apagado*), having a family, having responsibilities or commitments (*compromisos*), and settling into life (*acomodarse*). Among the differences between youth and adults, participants highlighted maturity, a wider experience in life, deeper thoughts, and a capacity to reflect before deciding. This provided adults with more knowledge and security in their actions. Accompanying the responsibility of a family was the condition of *worry* among adults, be it a concern for their families and procuring income to support the household or a general worry about life. Adults must deal with family problems, an aspect that was not present in the descriptions of young people. This condition of worry also highlighted how adults were **without time** to enjoy life and to participate freely in activities. These adult characteristics were built upon elements already present in youth and did not imply a clean break between the two stages. However, having a family of their own was the tipping point between youth and adults. Consistent with other narratives, youth were never thought of as parents or having family responsibilities.

These idealized notions of the life-stages contrasted with other descriptions of the actual experience of being a young person in Tactic. Several contradictions emerged in the discussions with young and adult participants and these shed light onto aspirational notions of youth and weariness about real youth. I will briefly explain how discourses built an aspirational youth that conveys energy, freedom, opportunities and inquisitiveness; meanwhile the undesired youth was apathic, makes poor decisions, settles down without aspirations and is easily drawn to deviant behaviors.

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<sup>60</sup> By asking to explicitly differentiate between these stages of life participants were thinking about humans on a time continuum without referencing age brackets. This contrasts with the international discourses and legal apparatus that equate life stages with age limits. I venture that because these descriptions are not referenced by chronological age, bodily characteristics were minimal in the given explanations.

Energía o Apagado: Energy as a positive connotation was mentioned both by males and females when discussing youth. Rarely mentioned in a specific context, this energy was associated with aspirational notions like dreams, potential for future actions, or moving forward. Because this energy seemed to be always contained and focused, it was never associated with restlessness or risky behaviors. For a young Poqomchi' man youth was a “*dream of energy*”, and two young females described it as “*Having energy, abilities, facilities and potential*” and a “*Life-stage where one is with energy to do many things*”.

In contrast, *apagado* (subdued) was associated with being an adult or behaving like one. One female contrasted youth as period of energetic decision making and expectations of what life could be, while describing adulthood as “being subdued”<sup>61</sup>. The claim that young people could act as *apagados*, without energy just like adults, was recurrent among organized youth; they expected their peers to be moved by the assumed energy of their life-stage.

Libertad o Compromiso: Youth as freedom to make decisions and have choices was mentioned mostly by females, calling it “*a life-stage where one is in full freedom*”. A young Poqomchi' woman accompanied these mentions of freedom with a moral caution: “*Youth is freedom, not debauchery; it is also responsibility.*” The idea of debauchery was a common concern in adult narratives about undesired behaviors among young people. So, freedom was circumscribed to particular performances associated with an aspired youth.

Speaking of the potential freedom associated with youth, young females highlighted it as a time to decide about keeping one's freedom to be oneself and having the chance of “*doing many things*”. I found that young women claiming youth as freedom was both a statement of aspiration, an acknowledgment of the few options they currently have and how these might further shrink when they become married women or mothers. This was expressed through the notion of “*tener compromisos*” or having commitments, a reference to adulthood and associated with having a partner, a family and the related reproductive work. Young men also mentioned commitments as a condition associated with adulthood, referencing the expected role of providing for the family and having to work. A married 22-year-old male who had been part of several youth groups explained youth as life-stage without commitments:

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<sup>61</sup> In Spanish, “*estar apagada*”.

*"It is a life-stage when you are without commitment, you can go out and contribute ideas but when you're married, the doors close on you, because you have to see the welfare of the family"*

The interesting issue here was that both young males and females did not regard their current responsibilities as *compromisos*; even when many of them already carried the task of providing income for the family or child rearing and household chores. It was the association with marriage or children that determined the lack of freedom, opportunities closing, and a life focused on the family and not the public sphere.

*Aprovechar o arrepentirse*: The idea of making good decisions and taking advantage of opportunities was also mentioned as an important element of youth. A young man stated, *"Youth must get involved in many activities and take advantage of the few things we have"*. Some of these affirmations emphasized chance, thus acknowledging that opportunities were more of a rarity than commonplace. With the notion of *aprovechar*, or to take advantage of, several people referenced training opportunities (like the ones provided by NGO's) but also the youth niche within the public sphere. For another young Poqomchi' male, youth was the *"time to do things that are worthwhile"*. Engaging in worthy activities was also seen as helping the young person to *"become someone"*, projecting this anonymous being as an aspiration for those *no-one* bodies.

Not to take advantage of opportunities or making poor decisions resulted in *"arrepentirse"* or regret. Several expressed it as a concern about the future, based on their knowledge about the adult world. A young male Poqomchi' musician said

*"I have talked with people who say "Oh, if I were young right now, I would have done this", then youth is the time, so when I'm old I won't say "I would have" but "I did this". That is the time of youth, to do things that are worthwhile and not say "I wasted [my years from]15 to 26 or 27 or whatever."*

Regret was associated with the lack of certainty of future opportunities. For organized youth the concern was sustained in the lack of long-term initiatives. Several projects that came to Tactic had very short spans of intervention, some would provide specific trainings that lasted a couple of months while the longest was carried out through a year and a half; the awareness that projects were fleeting sustained a concern over not taking full advantage of every chance that was presented.

Questionar o acomodarse: Youth as a time for questioning was among the answers given by some of the young males. This capacity to question was also expressed as a condition that could be present regardless of age, thus extending the youth umbrella to anyone challenging the social setting. A very outspoken young Mestizo said:

*“You arrive to an age where you question certain things, that becomes part of your rebellion as an adolescent, a young person. Those existential doubts, like who am I, what am I doing, what am I here for, those for some reason this youth-way of thinking allows you to explore. But there are people who become adults and never question these things because [for them] they are unquestionable”.*

This process of questioning was associated with participation as well. Youth were expected to be active members in the community, showing their youthful energy by challenging the prevalent order of things. In contrast, adulthood was equivalent to becoming adjusted or *acomodarse*. Routine, responsibilities, and social pressure were given as elements that had an impact on settling. *“It [youth] is lost when it is repressed, it is the routine where one loses it”* said a young man while explaining the rebellious energy of youth. During fieldwork, I heard about the hazards of *acomodarse* many times, particularly when people had steady jobs or a comfortable life and refrained from participating in the youth groups. This is particularly interesting for the political connotations of a youth transitioning towards an unquestioning, well-adjusted adulthood; it resonates with Lesko’s approximation of adolescence as a means to producing adapted and productive adults (1996:142).

Ser sano o perderse: The phrase *una juventud sana* or “healthy youth” was a recurrent notion that precisely conveys the expectation of producing adequate subjects for society. Descriptions of healthy youth, healthy environments, and a healthy society were given both by adults and young people in many situations, which usually referenced idealized behaviors: sports without fights, public participation without disobedience, good educational performance without questioning. For example, one young woman, when describing Tactic as a healthy environment for youth, mentioned being able to *“meet your friends in the street to talk, get together in the park or go out for an atol”*; the park is a strategic location for youth interaction, particularly for students after school, and *“going for an atol”* is a socially approved activity for meeting with friends. However, the park is a healthy space only during daylight hours, at night it turns into an undesirable space for women.

Producing nice and healthy youth was also part of the public discourse of municipal authorities. For example, a former Mayor described Tactic youth as healthy because there were no gangs or *maras* in the area and they did not engage in “nocturnal” venues except for sports matches, which were healthy. During the closing ceremony for a series of workshops called “*Escuela de Formación Empresarial*”, that was part of the project “Violence prevention – A challenge for the Youth” funded by USAID, the speech of Mayor Edin Guerrero expressed this precise idea:

*"[...] We want to tell you that, as a municipal administration, we are sincerely committed to the youth, to the children who are the present for us [...] That for us it is very important that these young people who go to the different business schools, go out with an activity, and leave them ready to be useful people in society, which is what we are looking for [...]. We need spaces free of vices, spaces free from danger for youth, where healthy young people can practice sports, which is very important, where they can do different social and cultural activities. "* (March 2014)

A healthy youth could turn into a useful member of society, understood here as a self-sufficient entrepreneur who practiced sports, engaged in cultural activities, and was vice and risk-free. The youth that were not healthy and took advantage of these fleeting opportunities for self-improvement could easily *perderse*, or get lost. The idea of lost youth was prevalent among males and females, youth and adults. In general terms it referred to what were considered deviant behaviors like alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution, gangs or drug trafficking. These undesired youth were recognized as present in Tactic but were never pertinent as a definition of Youth; this resonates with Levenson’s historical construction of Youth (Levenson 2013a). Among the life-experiences of organized and unorganized youth, being lost included being too young to have romantic or sexual partners, rejecting religious participation, disobeying parental advice, hanging out at night with friends, consuming alcohol, partaking in unnamed gangs<sup>62</sup>, or engaging in drug consumption and trafficking. Some of the youth would refer to “wilder” times they had given up, providing testimonials of reformation and the healthy lives they now lived. Still, this construction of a healthy Youth relies on the denial of anyone who is lost, deeming certain bodies undesirable and unrecognizable, and holding up high moral standards without acknowledging “vices” as part

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<sup>62</sup> No evidence was found of *maras*, the organized gangs of larger urban dwellings which usually have names or affiliations to larger organizations. In Tactic what was found were smaller groups of youth, with activities ranging from blocking streets for biking or skateboarding to painting graffiti, drug consumption or petty thievery.

of the common practice of young people. Additionally, by using the word “*perderse*” as a reflexive action, conveying that the act of losing oneself was an individual responsibility; however, in a violent country exceptions could be found, as was explained by an unorganized 22-year-old male:

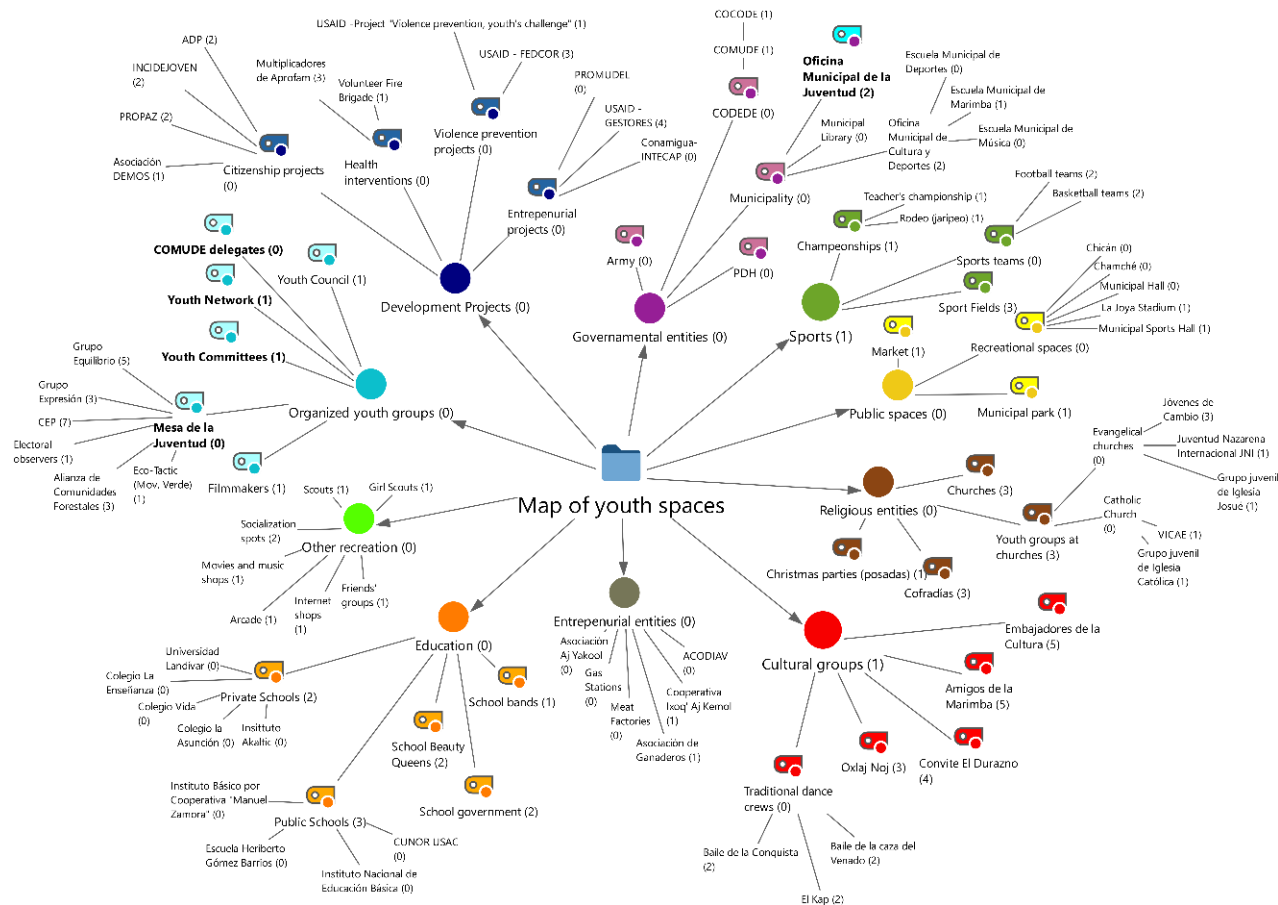
*“I’ve never had a friend telling me to do things, it’s not that the friends make you lost [lo pierdan a uno], one loses oneself alone. Maybe someone comes to you with a wrong idea, but if you say no it is a no; unless you are forced with a gun or you are intimidated into doing it, and then you have to do it, but otherwise...”*

As we have seen in this section, the local descriptions of Youth convey what is expected for adults-in-the-making without necessarily reflecting upon the actual lives of young people in Tactic. This idealized young person is a generic, self-sufficient, rational, assertive, moral, accountable, goal-oriented, active, and productive being. In the following sections, I will describe the social map of youth in Tactic, and talk about the many contradictions that emerged between these idealized notions and the actual experience lived by young Tactiqueños and Tactiqueñas.

### **Mapping the social space of Youth**

As previously mentioned, my initial approach to the space of youth in Tactic focused on educational spaces; however, it became apparent that a broader scope was needed to capture its complexity. Therefore, I asked some of the organized youth I had come to know to list the spaces where young people congregated. The immediate response was usually an enunciation of actual locations, though it built into a description of youth groups that had been or were still their own spaces of reference. Combining their classification and my coding system, I aggregated them as education, cultural groups, organized youth, development projects, government entities, entrepreneurial entities, sports, public spaces, religious entities, and a diverse selection of recreation activities. The map of youth spaces, structured by my code classification, can be seen in the following diagram (figure 6).





**Figure 6: Map of youth spaces in Tactic**  
Elaborated by the author based on ethnographic data

Among the listed niches, a list of educational and cultural groups was mentioned, which coincided with my ethnographic register. Entrepreneurial entities were also listed, but most people signaled that the job spectrum was quite varied and many times inaccessible.

This social mapping of youth space is comparable with the participation reported by the participants of the youth survey. Most youth took part in church groups, sports teams, student organizations, youth groups, or arts-focused groups. These four were also the highest-ranking areas of collective youth participation in the National Survey of Youth in Guatemala (2011). Participation in community or local committees was higher in the national survey than among my interviewees, both presented lower participation in political organizations, and unions or other work-related associations (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Youth participation**

Youth participation in...	Tactic 2015	National 2011
	%	%
Church group	52.5	47.5
Sports team	50.5	35.7
Student organization	22.8	44.8
Youth groups <sup>63</sup>	20.8	26.0
Arts-focused groups (theater, dance, singing)	19.8	16.2
Youth workshop	17.8	-
Political organization	10.9	8.3
Indigenous organization	5.0	-
Women's association <sup>64</sup>	3.5	-
Community or local committees	3.0	16.2
Association of traders or producers	2.0	3.8
Peasant movement	0.0	-

Source: National data from Encuesta Nacional de Juventud (INE 2011:131-147). Tactic 2015 survey.

I will discuss education and work in further detail in the following sections, delving into the data compiled through ethnographic work during the research. After a general description here of the other identified spaces, the chapter will focus on these two areas, which were referential for understanding local dynamics.

Organized youth groups in this mapping exercise, or “*Organizaciones Juveniles*” as they are called in Spanish. Unlike religious youth groups, most of these organizations had been created and led by local youth; their development mirrored the arrival of development projects that hosted youth interventions in Tactic, setting up a complex narrative about the field of youth in the political arena. While recognizing that young people organize themselves in many different groups, I will use the label of organized youth to name the groups who self-identified as such and who eventually opted for *La Mesa*. While some of the initiatives described in this map were no longer active by the time I was doing fieldwork, they were still referential for the youth that participated; I was slowly able to distinguish between those which were alive solely in discourse and those which were still active. This story will be described in chapter 4.

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<sup>63</sup> The National survey included three different categories that are not clearly defined in the variable dictionary: volunteer groups (26%), groups for idealized causes (10.8%), and associations in support of specific problems (10.8%). Tactic's youth groups are all composed of volunteers to help the community, so I have made this the comparison. Further analysis of the data may provide a different perspective to sustain a specific comparison of this issue.

<sup>64</sup> Of female participants.

*Religious groups* were among the mentioned spaces for young people, particularly some youth-oriented efforts based in some of the largest churches. As previously mentioned, Tactic hosts a large variety of religious denominations, but Catholicism and Protestantism (see Table 14 in Appendix) were the most commonly practiced religions among youth. In the surveys, the third option for religious practice, though barely surpassing 6%, was “none”, and it was mainly males who chose it. I found that churches and their youth groups were quite relevant for young people (see Table 3), particularly for young women who were the most active in them (58.8%). Several of these churches organized youth groups, with meetings taking place both on weekdays and weekends. Many of the young people in the surveys and interviews took part in these groups. The dedication of time to religious activities was higher than I had initially considered. For many youth, Sundays were dedicated mostly to church services, Catholics would attend mass either in the morning or afternoon and then Confirmation catechism. In the different Protestant denominations, the general service went from 9 am to noon and a second service after lunch (usually from 3 to 4 pm); additionally, most had youth services in the afternoon which ended around 6 pm.

The largest churches had youth groups with more structure, but they could still fade away; for example, the Catholic Church had a group named VICAE that ceased to exist just before my fieldwork and was slowly succeeded by “Adolescencia e Infancia Misionera” (AIM) by the time I finished. Within the evangelical churches, the “Juventud Nazarena Internacional” is mentioned the most in my research because it integrated the different youth cells from local parishes into a larger network. Both AIM and JNI hosted camps, field trips, and events where they interacted with young people from across the country. As we will see later, church groups were a platform that launched young people towards non-denominational or secular participation, and several of the youth were active in both types of organizations.

In the late 1990s, Eduardo Gularte (2000) found eleven youth groups within the Catholic church in Tactic; these were mostly made up of Poqomchi’ people between the ages of 12 and 23. He recognized that, while the main purpose of these groups was to discuss religious precepts, they still engaged in small projects aimed towards their community. Gularte’s analysis of the Peace Culture among youth focused on the answers of the animators of these groups; it is unclear if they were young people as well. Still, he highlights that young people in these groups valued peaceful non-confrontational relations over any other form of participation, and most disapproved of political engagement. During my research, I found that religious youth groups did engage in community projects but avoided political participation. Despite this, I witnessed several “Parades

for Peace,” where religious organizations were the main organizers and youth the most active participants. These mobilizations usually emphasized religious precepts as the core for proper citizenship, just as has been demonstrated by Kevin O’Neill (2009) in his study of Pentecostal churches in Guatemala City.

An important aspect of religious youth groups was their conceptualization as a temporal type of engagement in the life trajectory of their parishioners. The understanding of youth that sustained these groups focused on the condition of age and role within the family (unmarried person), so once those conditions changed, notably the marital status, the person had to transcend the youth affiliation. Across the interviews, I found that the individuals who could no longer be labeled under this version of Youth soon found a space in the Social Concerns Ministry (*Pastoral Social*), the Marriage Ministry, or Bible Study groups. Unlike other youth groups, in religious organizations there was always a way to continue the affiliation and participation.

*Sports* were also as a sphere where different youth came together. There were few facilities to practice sports in Tactic. The town had three soccer fields, one of them being the Municipal Stadium “La Joya”, and another the “Gimnasio Municipal”, a roofed multipurpose basketball court. These public spaces were free to the public when not reserved for scheduled municipal activities or school activities. The main town also had several privately-owned courts, and the hamlets had open fields working as soccer fields, though many of them were private plots with restricted access. In the public facilities, the Municipal Office for Culture and Sports organized different championships, mostly basketball and soccer, distinguishing between women’s and men’s tournaments. While these tournaments were often concentrated in the main town, the hamlets organized championships for which they had to find sponsors, often the Municipality or private companies, to cover expenses (including field rental, referees, uniforms, medals, and trophies). During my research, I was able to see the many links between sports, youth, and politics; not only was sports an expected dimension for healthy youth, but many of the “violence prevention” narratives focused on promoting sports as a solution.

Additionally, several hamlets prioritized the construction of soccer fields as development projects, which matched the municipal interest in infrastructure (an activity related to opaque

business arrangements)<sup>65</sup>. In 2014 one of the most remote hamlets inaugurated a soil soccer field, for which the Municipality had bought the land and financed machine-work to level a small mountain, as can be seen in figure 7; that very same year, the community lacked drainage services, and several households had no electricity or potable water. The President of the COCODE thought the investment was sound, as it allowed the community the opportunity for recreation without the expense of traveling abroad. Meanwhile, the young women from this hamlet's Youth Committee were not comfortable using the soccer field. During a food sale to raise money for making posters about the risks of alcohol consumption, the girls were nervous about selling near the soccer field because many men were playing there and not everyone was from the community. One of them mentioned it was not a place where they felt comfortable nor would they visit it alone.



**Figure 7: Soccer field in a hamlet.**

Photograph by the author, 2014.

In terms of development agendas, it would be easy to disregard investment in recreation as superficial in communities that could benefit from having other types of basic services. However, in another hamlet, I learned from young women who prioritized building a secondary sports field that by proposing this initiative they could have a place to play, one not always occupied by men who rarely granted them access. They thought this could result in parents being willing to allow their daughters to leave the house to play.

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<sup>65</sup> Several interviewees referenced how members of the Municipal Council had economic interests in the companies hired to implement several of these infrastructure projects. It was not possible for me to gather evidence to validate this claim but further research upon municipal contracts could provide more information on the subject.

Recreational facilities and public spaces were common locations to find groups of young people hanging out after school or work. Public spaces, owned by the Municipality, were among the recreational facilities mentioned frequently: the town square, the municipal hall, the soccer fields, the *Gimnasio*, and the Chamché water-park. The town square, actually a triangle, was locally known as “*El Parque*”. Located in the center of town, *el Parque* was the most common public place to hang out and served as the central bus stop for all transportation coming in or out of Tactic. It had a cement-based structure and it lay in front of the Municipality, usually embellished in the same colors as that building; the design included a few raised flowerboxes with built-in benches, a couple of towering palm trees and a statue to a devoted teacher sitting at his desk. The monument was a reminder of Tactic’s role in providing educational options for the region, with students traveling daily from rural areas to the main town. Around noon and late afternoon, students could be seen hovering in *el Parque* either waiting for friends, getting on or off buses, or trying to connect to the unstable free Wi-Fi provided by the Municipality. At the same time, one area of it served as the working station for shoe shiners, who were also young people but did not share the same position as the students engaged in recreational activities. On the weekend the town square was engulfed by the market that grew with the arrival of vendors from different points of the Verapaz region; here, young people were engaged in selling and buying. Street food was found here day and night, varying according to the time of day, so it was common to make plans to join friends for snacks or meals in the vicinity of the town square. None of the hamlets had a devoted public space like this that combined socialization, consumption, and work in one; sometimes soccer fields served as meeting spots and could be used for socialization, but *el Parque* was frequented both by men and women during daylight hours.

The Municipal Hall, located inside the Municipality, was a large multipurpose hall used for many activities including school events, dancing lessons, conferences, weddings, *quince años*, beauty pageants, and public dances. The hall could be used for free if the activities were associated with the local government, or rented for any private affair. It usually remained closed off from the public so, although associated with recreation, it was not as accessible as *el Parque*. Another public spot mentioned was Chamche’, a municipal water park or *Balneario*, that had a few pools and benches for family picnics<sup>66</sup>. While Chamche’ was a place that locals visited, the fee of Q5, made it more of a weekend option for young people who might organize a group outing. Chamche’ also

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<sup>66</sup> The place includes a zoo (with no more than 15 cages) that held a lion and a tiger, thought to have been previously owned either by a passing circus or a fleeing drug lord.

had a few meeting rooms which could be rented or used free of charge if the event or group were associated with the Municipality. As can be seen, having a direct connection with governmental entities could help void the expenses of accessing public spaces, a relevant aspect for youth groups who were not associated with any other host.

Cultural groups included initiatives focused on music and dance within the town, but also associations that brought ethnic affiliation to the public sphere. Regarding the first, I would point out that the musical taste of young people in Tactic was varied; from reggaeton to ranchera, from marimba classical pieces to Christian salsa music, young people and I were always surrounded by music. Interestingly, the prescribed musical environments of development/state interventions did not include this diversity of musical references. State projects like “*Escuelas Abiertas*”, the Municipal School of Music, or the Municipal School of Marimba, functioned as music workshops after school hours. While the Municipality mainly focused on traditional musical instruments (marimba, piano, flutes, and guitars), the other ones taught instruments played by school bands (trumpets, lyre, snare, and bass drums) and modern musical styles like hip-hop, *banda* or *norteña*. The *Escuelas Abiertas* project was held in a public elementary school and the teachers were young people hired under “Civic Service” stipends who brought their own interests to the sessions; they had dance crews doing hip-hop, break-dance or *banda*, and even had their own “school band” with the regular participants. Public opinion of this type of school was divided, some celebrated the incorporation of modern soundscapes while others thought it chaotic and promoting deviant behaviors, like gang cultures (mostly because of the break-dance). After its disappearance, two music schools remained: the Marimba School supported by a cultural association called Amigos de la Marimba; and the Music School supported by USAID’s crime prevention projects. At the time of my research, the Music School was operating in a dark room within the Municipal Hall, with all the instruments crowded into the small room. Both schools performed at different events, but neither was attracting much of the young population of the town, much less people from the hamlets.

The other entities mentioned were cultural associations and dance groups that represented different ethnic positions in Tactic. The *Oxlaj No’j* association, as explained by its 20-year-old male secretary, focused on “recapitulating our history as Poqomchi’ people.” They held different “cultural activities” but mainly the election of the Indigenous Queens, *Rixq’uun Ajawal Chak’nal* (The Daughter of the *Cacique* Chak’nal), *Riih Ajawal Chak’nal* (the Granddaughter of the *Cacique* Chak’nal) and *K’ulul Ula* (a title for the companion of both Queens). The first title was usually

carried by young women between 15 and 20 years old, while the second focused on girls who were usually not more than ten years old. The association was not only in charge of the election as a ceremony but also took care of the preparation of the candidates and their families. The activities of *Oxlaj Noj* and the Indigenous Queens were intricately related to the *cofradía* organization and the religious festivities that merged Catholic practice and Maya spirituality. In this sense, the ethnic affirmation became a religious one, since most of the candidates and people associated with these efforts identified with the Catholic Church. While the association instructed communities about the history of the Poqomchi' people, they did so around the figure of the female indigenous representatives.



**Figure 8: Poqomchi' queens during a municipal parade.**

Courtesy of Luis Ernesto Velásquez Álvaro, 2012.

Other groups mentioned were “traditional” indigenous dance crews, like the *Kap* (or Serpent), the Hunting of the Deer, and the Conquest; additionally, two initiatives focused on the “revitalization of classical marimba.” None of these groups were directed or led by youngsters. I was able to interact with two of the dance crews.



The Hunting of the Deer is a traditional dance that tells the story of a group of deer fleeing from the men who try to hunt them. The dance is believed to be a pre-Hispanic and colonial legacy, representing the opposition between the Maya and the Spanish worlds; the first is represented by jungle characters that include deer, jaguars, and monkeys while the second includes a group of Spanish hunters, an Old hunter, and his dogs<sup>67</sup>. The dance group was led by a local artist and *naturista* (a Maya healer)<sup>68</sup> who kept the dance alive, not only to maintain the tradition, but because of the rewards he received (sent by God). The dance was only performed during August, around the Patron Saint's festivities, so it was a seasonal effort. Because the dance is extenuating and long (the sets are done in about four hours) it required two crews for the performance: the first crew was composed of elder and experienced dancers, while the second had a mix of experienced and rookie dancers. Each one had around 20 dancers. Young males invited into the second group had to commit to partaking in all the ceremonies as well as paying the fee for the costumes. No females were part of the indigenous dances in Tactic, except for little girls (under ten years of age) who could perform minor roles like the dogs, and a young woman who played the marimba for this dance. Being mainly a male event, the dancers became part of a dancing brotherhood; they looked after each other during the initiation ceremonies and the performances in sacred and secular places. Hierarchy prevailed, and the director of the dance was the main leader. When asked about young people wanting to participate, he claimed that almost everyone whom he invited had accepted. "*If I call them, they come,*" he said. In his view, the threat to young people's involvement was not the "modern" or fashionable dance styles but the abandonment of Catholicism, since this dance was so intimately related to a religious festivity.

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<sup>67</sup> Guatemalan anthropologist, Carlos René García (1996) considers this dance a part of Mesoamerican legacy because of the characters and content. García found 36 groups for the Deer dance across different parts of the country. His account of the dance is taken from a performance based in Cobán, Alta Verapaz (1996: 31-39). Unlike what was described by García in Cobán, in Tactic the dance is performed to a wordless *son* played on a rustic marimba.

<sup>68</sup> This was the preferred title of the specialist, as in the interview he rejected other names like *curandero* or Aj Q'ij.



**Figure 9: "La Caza del Venado" dance crew.**  
Photograph by the autor, 2011.

The other dance group was the folklorist ensemble "*Embajadores de la Cultura*", an initiative focused on promoting marimba dancing among young people in Tactic. Led by two Ladino families, the group practiced in closed environments twice a week. Practice on a school night was reserved for the main dancing crew, while the other took place on Sunday afternoons and was open to anyone who wanted to join. While the main dance crew had 16 dancers, more than 180 were registered (Cú 2011); not more than 50 came to practice regularly. This dance crew performed to different marimba compositions, from *sones* to waltzes, foxtrots, or *pasodobles*. While the *sones* were reserved for folkloric representations during general rehearsal, they preferred ballroom dancing. Everyone was required to have a dancing partner, with distinctive female and male roles emphasized through the dancing styles. Grace and poise were demanded of each dancer. Unlike the Deer Dance, no live music accompanied this dancing group and they could perform all year round. When asked about the reasons for the initiative, one of the group directors described the lack of "healthy" activities for the kids and how they benefited from the opportunity to learn about "our" culture, good music, and dancing.

The contrast between both dance crews highlights ethnic differentiation in Tactic. The Deer Dance was intricately linked with religious festivities, introducing young men to the *cofradías*, Mayan spirituality and indigenous leadership. Meanwhile, *Embajadores de la Cultura*, despite having many indigenous dancers, focused on theatrical performance with indigenous *sones* as folklore and Ladino soundscapes as high culture. Though neither the Deer Dance nor the *Embajadores* had official municipal funding, the latter used the Municipal Hall without charge and was the main attraction in several Municipal events. In this, I find a public and political affirmation of what is desired, signaled by dances rooted in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ladino culture; an essentialization unquestioned for its authenticity or relevance for the participants but set up as the highest and most desired representation of high culture, nationality, and class (Bourdieu 1984; Wilk 2008).

Other recreational facilities and activities included internet shops, music and movie shops, and “*maquinitas*” or arcades. Most youth did not have computers (53%)<sup>69</sup> nor internet at home (78%)<sup>70</sup>. This did not limit their presence on the web or social media; using devices like cellphones, young Tacitqueños accessed mass media and international communication. At the beginning of my fieldwork, few companies had affordable internet packages<sup>71</sup>, so I met several youth who had cellphones but did not use them to make phone calls, they used them just for texting or as digital cameras. It was not uncommon to find young people gathered around these little devices and playing music, using them as tiny jukeboxes. When I was finishing this research, the free Wi-Fi access granted by the Municipality had made the main square a hot spot for youth checking social media and downloading resources. A row of young men in school uniforms, perched on the concrete garden walls of *El Parque*, each with a cellphone in his hands, browsing without talking, became a familiar image.

Still, internet shops were highly popular among young students. In the 2011 survey, 45% of the participants visited these shops at least twice a week; in 2015, 37% visited with the same frequency (see Table 15 in Appendix). In 2011, Ramón Zamora mapped at least 16 internet shops in

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<sup>69</sup> See Table 16 in Appendix.

<sup>70</sup> Only one company provided internet services in Tactic at the time of this research. The international company Claro provided internet with land line contracts in the main town (Claro bought the infrastructure of the national telephone company during the privatization wave of the 1990s); other international companies, like Tigo, provided internet through mobile modems. Some of the internet shops sold internet access through Wi-Fi access to nearby households. However, most people either bought internet packages for their cell phones or relied on free access Wi-Fi spots.

<sup>71</sup> In 2011, I was paying Q375 for 1GB via a mobile modem and prepaying Q100 into my cellphone, which charged Q1 a minute or for each text message; by 2015 you could buy “unlimited messages” for 1 day with Q5 or “unlimited internet” for a week for Q20.

the main town of Tactic, noticing that women were focused on doing homework or used the time to check Facebook and watch videos on YouTube (particularly soap operas), while men most frequently used their time in the shops to play video games and check their social media (Zamora 2011). Because I sometimes traveled without a computer and did not have a printer, my visits to the internet shops coincided with young clients who were usually students. While I usually rented a single computer for half an hour for Q5, it was common to see students gathered around a rented computer and sharing rental costs. Just as in Zamora's description, I found them being used for a variety of activities: researching for class, accessing Facebook, playing online games, or YouTube videos. These shops also provided "research" services, where students could buy a paper from the store clerk that addressed whatever topic their professors had assigned them. According to a young man who could not finish high school because of economic hardship, but worked in an internet shop, the most common *Investigaciones* were about historical events like Independence Day and people choose to buy them because it was cheaper than renting a computer without knowing where to look. Some of the professors I interviewed mentioned the internet as a risk because of high accessibility to unsupervised content, but no one was concerned with the common practice of buying research. In 2014, the Municipality inaugurated a "Virtual Library" which looked and functioned just like an internet shop but was free of charge and had stricter norms regarding content accessibility; it still failed in enhancing research or learning skills, favoring copying the materials that all the students were looking for at the moment.

As mentioned, *maquinitas* and DVD shops were also youth places. While there was not a venue dedicated solely as an arcade, different game machines could be found in the corners of general stores, internet or DVD shops, making their use not entirely concealed from the public eye. Young men were the main clients of these machines, and it was not common to find girls in these machines. Adults spoke of young people ditching school and even failing a grade because of the time spent in these machines. However, this meant no threat according to the narratives of young men since not everyone had enough money to spend a whole day in the machines and most of the times people were hovering over the friend who was playing. The combination with DVD shops was particularly interesting, some decorated in a graffiti style and frequented by young men; some ventured this type of spots as places where drugs also circulated though I never witness this.

Music and movies were sold in the so-called DVD shops and were usually owned or tended by young men who could also be found fixing cellphones, computers and other electronic devices; but music and movies were still the main interest. While several youth had access to television

(84%) and DVD players (56%) at home, it was through cellphones (85%) that young people accessed music, movies, and internet. From what I was able to observe, no one bought music through official digital markets, but instead through these DVD shops that not only sold it in disc format but also on flash drives or by directly loading it onto a cellphone. Because Tactic did not have a movie theater, though there used to be a local business that projected movies from DVDs, it was not uncommon for young people to buy a movie and watch it together in their houses, on computers or even on their phones. Sometimes movies would be projected in the park, but it was usually a promotional event sponsored by a large company; I attended at least two such features during my field season and more so throughout my life in Tactic.

The articulation between communication, technology, and recreation is a topic that changes rapidly and requires further inquiry. It presents exciting connections with new mediums of consumption, challenges to the notions of property, and a global exchange that grants youth access to a vast array of content. Though I was not able to delve into these matters, I will later show a few examples of how technology and social media became a source relevant for political action in Tactic.

### **Secondary education in Tactic**

The education system in Tactic was similar to other municipalities in the country. It had several rural and urban elementary schools, but the secondary level was concentrated in urban areas; at the time of the fieldwork it had a combination of both private and public institutions covering both middle and high school levels. However, the educational offer was quite limited before the 2000s. For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Tactic only offered Elementary school education. The first official middle-school was the “*Instituto de Educación Básica por Cooperativa Manuel Zamora López*” or “*El Básico*” as it is known by locals. The school follows a cooperative tripartite model of financing with contributions from the State, the Municipality of Tactic, and the students’ families. “*El Básico*” was founded in 1972, focusing solely on middle-school (grades 7th to 9th)<sup>72</sup>. By 1982, the “*Instituto Guatemalteco de Educación Radiofónica*”, or IGER, was also providing education across the country via their radio-based education. High school was absent from the town until 1993, when the private school “*Instituto Akaltic*” inaugurated high school level education with a

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<sup>72</sup> The first private school in Tactic was “*Colegio de la Asunción*” founded by the Congregation of Assumption in 1961. It focused only on elementary school until the late 1990s.

degree in rural teaching.<sup>73</sup> Soon other private institutions would begin to emerge in the area, teaching both middle and high-school.

Finally, in 2009, four public middle-schools were opened under the educational expansion programs of Álvaro Colom; in 2015, the first public high school was established in Tactic. These five public institutions provided free education in the town as the State reinforced the principles of “*gratuidad*” established in the Constitution.

### **Public education**

Between 2011 and 2015, public middle-school education in Tactic included four facilities: an urban middle-school, *Instituto Nacional de Educación Básica (INEB)*, and three rural middle-schools, known as *Telesecundarias*. The INEB worked under standard conditions with one teacher per course or subject, while the *Telesecundarias* followed a distance education method that was supposed to have one teacher facilitating all subjects (about ten classes per grade) with the support of educational videos and workbooks. Before 2014, all public middle schools in Tactic shared the same problems: none of them had a building of their own, and they were sharing buildings with elementary schools. As a result, clashes between elementary and middle school were frequent, not just between students but also between teachers and directors.

The expansion of the educational system in 2008, not only included the creation of these schools but also the mandate that all national establishments should provide cost-free education. Since 2008, the “*Programa de Gratuidad Educativa*” has required the Ministry of Education to make a direct transfer of funds to schools for both elementary and secondary levels<sup>74</sup>. At the time of my research, the public urban middle school had 116 students, which meant the contribution from *gratuidad* was approximately \$1,568 per year; teachers were paid directly by the Ministry of Education, so that did not have to be covered directly by the schools.

The “non-fee” funds were administered by the Parents’ Associations as a way to decentralize the government of schools, avoid embezzlement, and “empower” parents through the control of school expenses and purchases. In secondary schools parents did not receive the money directly, as was the case in elementary schools, but they still needed to approve all purchases. Schools could not request money for anything students might use during the year (materials, books, or cleaning

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<sup>73</sup> Magisterio Rural.

<sup>74</sup> The funds varied, elementary schools receive about \$5 per student per year, while middle schools get \$14 per student per year. Elementary schools had complementary programs like school meals, teaching materials and, textbooks. Middle schools have no complementary programs, which is why they receive a larger annual amount per student.

supplies) as they had previously done, nor for school trips or other activities unless the parent's annual assembly approved the expense. The non-fee cash transfer covered expenses like minor infrastructure improvements, cleaning services, and general utilities. However, this was not always enough.

*“One of the basic requirements is that education be free, sometimes that limits us in doing other types of activities, but we have to be in sync with elementary schools. Saying that it is free applies to the registration, tuition, textbooks, and things like that, but they do have to buy uniforms. Benefits like teaching supplies or school meals are not available for the middle schools. [...] The facilities are State-owned [so they are rent free] and agreements are made with other educational units. For example, electricity is paid by the Departmental Direction; the problem is that the system thinks that DEORSA<sup>75</sup> is going to wait three or four months for the payment, and by then they already cut off our energy. So, we decided to pay the electricity bill, and we come up with different arrangements: the teachers give a quota, some money is collected among students, a fund-raising activity is carried out... a minimum of shared expenses. Now support program for student learning, the middle school has nothing of this nature. In the years that we have been operating we gathered, at most, some CNB<sup>76</sup> guides for teachers; but we do not have textbooks for students.”* (Public urban middle school principal).

That teachers and students had to join forces to pay an electricity bill was not the worst thing that had happened. In 2012 the INEB had to change facilities a week before the beginning of classes because the elementary school that used to host them said they would not do it anymore; one-third of their student population transferred or dropped out during the following weeks. The Ministry of Education threatened to close them down because enrollment had diminished; however, Ministry officials failed to understand that these problems were created the same day they opened a school without infrastructure. Finally, in a new elementary school, the director and his teaching staff were able to use some of the classrooms but did not have access to the entire building. As a result, the Principal improvised an office in an empty room and carried all documentation in the trunk of his car (student files, financial and administrative records, and books). Making light of

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<sup>75</sup> The electric company with coverage in the northern regions.

<sup>76</sup> Currículo Nacional Base.

the situation, he claimed that, unlike many traveling workers, his office was a real mobile office. Finally, in 2014, INEB had received a new building with three classrooms, a Principal's office, a small patio, and bathrooms, but the number of students increased, and classrooms were on the way to becoming overpopulated. By 2015, total enrolled students reached 166 youth, while the staff remained at 11 teachers (MINEDUC 2016).

Meanwhile, *telesecundarias* still operated with the same lack of space, but this was neither the only nor the greatest of their problems. In 2015, the largest one had 103 students and four teachers, the smallest one had 18 students and one teacher. The main resources for the *telesecundaria* model are videos and workbooks since the teachers are supposed to remain simply as facilitators; however, since they began classes in 2009, the Ministry of Education had only provided materials for the first quarter of 7th grade. The “non-fee” funding was used to buy photocopies of old *telesecundaria* textbooks<sup>77</sup> which teachers found through personal connections. The available copies were not enough, with 5 to 8 students sharing one book. The *Telesecundaria* did not own enough televisions or audiovisual equipment; with one desktop computer for all grades, students took turns to play the few educational videos they had.

In the smallest of the *Telesecundarias*, one teacher oversaw all subjects for all three grades. The indigenous young men and women attending school were all residents of this remote hamlet and mainly spoke Poqomchi'; their classes took place in a single classroom of the hamlet's elementary school, with students' desks grouped by grade in each corner. According to the “teaching plan”, every week the teacher had to cover 30 subjects at the same time, which of course he did not. The young kids constantly moved across the room to hear the lesson given to the other grade, or just went to the halls and played ball while waiting for the teacher's instructions. Girls were huddled together, since there were only five of them, talking between them with their faces covered so no one would hear; but when the teacher spoke in Poqomchi', everyone joined in the activity. The lack of cultural pertinence affected the achievements of students; the *telesecundarias* catered to indigenous students from rural hamlets who spoke Poqomchi', but the textbooks were all in Spanish and lacked the reformed multicultural curriculum of 2011. Despite this, all these rural schools had informally incorporated Poqomchi', teaching students to write and read in their language, a subject highly praised over chemistry or physics.

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<sup>77</sup> One professor had photocopies of Mexican textbooks.



### **Cooperative and private education**

The private sector of education was not necessarily in better conditions than public schools. “El Básico”, a semi-private school, is the largest institution at the middle school level: in 2012 it had 672 students, three years later it had increased to 742 without any improvement in infrastructure. The staff was composed of 14 teachers and three other members. Students paid \$2.70 per month for general tuition or \$4.72 if they enrolled in the computer class (*computación*). Manuel Zamora has been the Principal since its establishment in 1972 but only recently was the institute named after him. According to the Director, while the cooperative funding scheme included a contribution from the State and the Municipality, this was not enough to cover expenses nor to improve the decaying buildings. Tuition fees were used to pay teachers’ salaries and utilities. Overpopulation was one of the main problems for the school, as they had at least 60 students per section during my fieldwork.<sup>78</sup> The lack of school materials was just the same as in the public schools, but they were able to ask students to buy educational materials.

With concrete walls, tin roofs, broken windows, and scratchy desks, the ambiance within the school was chaotic and deafening most of the time. I was in a third grade classroom one day with 65 students and the teacher had to shout instructions because another grade had a break and was hanging out in the covered hall/patio that linked five classrooms and the Principal’s office. While the teacher spoke a few young men at the back of the room began throwing things at each other, amicably at first, but rapidly escalating. The young females were all seated on the left side of the classroom, occupying the rows closer to the teacher. “*Those are the problematic kids,*” one of them explained. The teacher tried to calm the game down but gave up eventually. In another classroom, as I was talking to the teacher, someone whistled while another catcalled me in plain sight; the teacher reprimanded the male students who, in turn, laughed. Young girls would later tell me that it was “normal” behavior in class.

Most of the male youth and a few of the girls from the organized groups had studied in “El Básico”. According to them, it was the place where they had to toughen up and learn how things happened in real life. Stories about fights, relationships, and alcohol were among the memories of this moment of their lives. Unlike elementary school, where teachers would look out for the kids, in *El Básico* the most astute ruled, “*ahí gana el más vivo.*” The “vivo” or astute one obtained the best

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<sup>78</sup> At the moment there were 3 sections for third grade; 4 for second grade; 5 for first grade.

results, not necessarily through hard work but by conniving and outwitting others, this lesson would resonate with youth' political experiences in town.

After finishing middle-school, those who continued studying did so in the private schools of Tactic, since there was no public option until 2015. Private schools varied according to the educational model they followed: daily or weekend plans. Guatemala's poor educational coverage provided an opportunity for private schools to introduce degrees in many towns. As has been explained, Tactic had its first high school degree taught locally by a private school in the 1990s. Private schools were the only ones with a morning schedule for middle-schools and had relatively fewer students. The largest population in private schools were high school students, and they had to share classrooms within the building: a classroom hosted an elementary grade in the morning and a high school grade in the evening. Enrollment in private high schools varied according to the technical degrees offered: high school degree (*Bachillerato*), teaching degree (*Magisterio*), secretarial degree (*Secretariado*), or accounting degree (*Perito Contador*). The most sought out degree was the Elementary Teacher Degree (*Magisterio de Educación Primaria*) that, until 2012, was available as a high school diploma and only taught by private schools in Tactic.<sup>79</sup> Private schools also provided degrees "*por Madurez*", a compressed educational model aimed at adults (using the legal definition of 18 years old) seeking to attain middle or high school diplomas. These degrees were taught on weekends, mainly on Saturdays (though some had a Sunday plan) from 7:00 to 4:00 pm. Though initially they were aimed at working adults, it had become a way for young people from distant hamlets to continue their education, traveling once a week to the town.

Another alternative with less face-to-face interaction was IGER, the radio school that provided both middle and high school diplomas across the country. In addition to the radio shows and textbooks, IGER has implemented studying groups that, in Tactic, took place on Sundays. This was the program that allowed Elizabeth and other young women to continue their education. While IGER had a social justice approach, it remained a private endeavor; it was associated with the Catholic Church and had monthly costs like all other private schools.

### ***Knowledge vs. degrees: a compliant education***

As explained before, Elizabeth was able to continue her education through these alternative options. She finished middle school in IGER and got a high school diploma through a *Bachillerato*

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<sup>79</sup> The only public school with this degree was in Cobán and the admission process, plus expenses of traveling back and forth, made it inaccessible for many.

*por Madurez*. Despite the less than ideal situation, Elizabeth was participating in different training processes and was keen on learning, so her commitment and performance at the admission tests granted her entrance to the National University. Unfortunately, this was not the situation for most youth.

The Ministry of Education had carried out evaluations for middle school and high school graduates for several years, focusing on two learning fields: reading and mathematics. Performance was low in both across the country. The evaluation of 2013 for middle school graduates in *Tactic* showed that only 14% of students achieved the required standard in language and 19% did so for mathematics. National performance was almost the same as *Tactic*'s, while regional data for Alta Verapaz showed even lower results. Performance varied between daily and weekend programs, with the first ones ranking significantly better (see Table 17 in Appendix). High school student performance was not so different in 2015. In *Tactic*, only 16% of students achieved the expected language criteria for a high school graduate; for Alta Verapaz, only 19% achieved the mark while 26% did so at a national level. In mathematics, only 2.53% reached the expected level in *Tactic*, 4.74% in Alta Verapaz and 8.51% for Guatemala. The disparity in achievements between daily and weekend students was considerably higher in reading than in mathematics; still, both showcase poor performance (see Table 18 in Appendix).

The shortcomings in schools previously mentioned, undoubtedly resulted in poor academic achievements for youth. It did not only limit their possibility of entering the National University (which has the most demanding admission tests for the Alta Verapaz region) but also scholarship programs at private universities. Still, the model of education seemed to privilege degrees over knowledge; once the degree is obtained, no one paid attention to the precarious settings in which education was offered.

State mechanisms looked for fast and quick fixes to poor educational outcomes. The working notion seemed to be that having any school and any form of education was better than none: it was the way to achieve development goals. The Ministry's interest in the rates of enrollment and coverage, or transparency in purchases clashed with the conditions under which secondary education was implemented. It was a half-hearted development effort with no books, materials, or infrastructure. Sanctions, like closing schools or firing teachers, were applied when numbers fell, but no sanctions were applied when the State did not provide the necessary conditions for students to learn. Numbers were privileged over the student's experience and growth. Teachers applied the same strategy: it did not matter if students learned; what mattered was how many could pass the

year. In the public system this trend was worsened by the contract clauses that demanded a 90% student promotion at the end of the year; tenured teachers were not required to comply with this requirement, but most of the teachers in secondary levels were under annual contracts.

The sovereignty of bureaucracy became crystallized through the “transparency principles and mechanisms” of State funding, which often resulted in teachers and parents looking for “alternative” routes. A teacher of an elementary school, who also worked afternoons in a private middle-school, explained that trying to acquire dictionaries had become a problem. The textbook programs did not provide them, students could not be required to buy them, and schools could not purchase dictionaries because they counted as “books”, which should be provided by the textbook program. Given this setting, faculty and parents incurred in “corruption” by agreeing with local libraries to alter invoices to obtain the desired dictionaries. In the end, bureaucratic logistics increased the practices they were supposed to fight.

The experience of education was not about overcoming development obstacles but about accepting the obstacles to a better life. Secondary education as a mechanism to overcome poverty was not a positive example in Tactic. By not having their building, students couldn’t hang decorations or exhibit school projects; they had to clear everything out each afternoon. In the *telesecundarias*, teachers and students stored their few belongings (computer, books and even toilet paper) in cupboards secured with locks or took them away daily. The last minutes of each day were dedicated to sweeping and mopping the floors so the morning occupants –the elementary school- would find it undisturbed. “*We have no house of our own,*” said one of the teachers. “*Every time something is lost, we are the first to get blamed for it,*” said another. Middle school students were accused of using a space that did not belong to them, even when these were public facilities; this served as a constant reminder of dispossession. In a highly unequal country like Guatemala, this was perhaps not an “unintended” consequence: unequal opportunities would likely be a rule in their future lives. However, teachers, students, and parents were not passive under these circumstances. They faced and coped with the situation with great creativity: they went around established procedures and norms or adjusted education goals and curricula.

What I found during this research was that the educational system ended up reproducing the same inequality structure that, according to development discourses, it was supposed to challenge and change. “*Education is the key to success,*” said a banner carried in a school parade in Tactic, but there were substantive contradictions between the State’s logic and its actual practices:

an educational system that normalized an impoverished educational experience while reinforcing aspirations of a degree that would grant them social mobility.

### ***Youth representation and citizenship through education***

Ethnographic work on youth has delved into the role of schools, the condition of being a student, and political participation. While education can help reproduce class position (Willis 1977; Ferguson 2000; Bettie 2003), it can also harbor political activism and organization (Gordon 2010; Greenberg 2014). As mentioned before, student organization has also been a key component of youth participation in the political life in Guatemala (Levenson 2013a; Álvarez 2012a; Álvarez 2012b). In Tactic, interviewees mentioned school governments as youth spaces, but participation in student organizations was not as high as seen in national data (Table #3). The adults in charge usually designated class or school governments. Though schools implemented “democratic” procedures like nominations and voting, these were neither organized nor audited by the students. Teachers remained in the classrooms, since nominations favored students with the best academic achievements for the positions of class representatives. The vote took similar forms of public voting like raising hands or walking to tap the candidate’s shoulder as I later observed in COCODES or Youth Assemblies. However, the scope of work of the student government, even within the classroom, was fairly limited. In interviews, organized youth rarely mentioned their involvement in student organizations; if they did so, the scope of action usually focused on school projects like *Seminario*<sup>80</sup> or competing with other schools for the position of “*Mayor for a Day*”. As we will see in the following chapter, attempts to integrate school delegates as Youth representatives within the Municipal organization was not transcendental. This resonates with the findings of Hava Gordon in Portland about the school government model that “adheres to the citizen-in-the-making”, as a test-run for adult citizenship serves to align youth with a hierarchical system of order without strengthening their voice in “real world community issues” (2010:72). For example, in 2012, the Ministry of Education decreed that the Teaching High School Diploma would no longer be available and those wanting to become Elementary Teachers would need a College Technical Degree (Rojas 2012). A student movement rose up to oppose the shutdown of the teaching degree, led mainly by public high schools, “*Normales*”, from Guatemala City and the capitals of each Department. The movement was not successful in mobilizing private schools across the country, which was the only

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<sup>80</sup> *Seminario* is a graduate project

option for acquiring a high school education in Tactic. Interviews with students enrolled in this secondary level degree revealed they did not identify with the movement, they perceived protests as an exclusive right of those who had the luxury of studying at the *Normal* in Cobán. They followed the news but did not engage in the mobilizations. Their class governments were focused on fulfilling the requirements for graduation, like student teaching or *Seminario*, and did not discuss the possible implications of these changes to their educational career. A year after the Ministry closed enrollment, several private schools saw their student body diminish, and several teachers lost their jobs. In this sense, student governments did not address substantive issues, thus reproducing “mechanisms of disengagement and political powerlessness” (Gordon 2010:66).

Another way the education curriculum reproduced the model of youth as citizens-in-the-making was the *Seminario*. As part of the normalized educational practices, the Ministry of Education required all Guatemalan students to take a “seminar” course, which had evolved in the last few years. When I was in high school, the purpose of this class was to learn research methods and scientific writing by executing a collaborative research project that each class defended at the end of the school year. In 2007 the Ministry of Education introduced changes in the methodology of the high school seminar, changing it from a generalized research project to one focused on introducing citizen-prospective thinking<sup>81</sup>. Eventually, the manuals standardized the *Seminario* to produce three types of outputs: 1) Life project, 2) Nation project, 3) Action-research project. As previously mentioned, Elizabeth used her “Life Project” when explaining her life trajectory during an interview; I found other youth referenced this document when discussing future aspirations.

The model of this “life project” was based on the idea that a conscious citizen must define his/her aspirations in order to move towards civic participation and social action. The manual guides for 2013, entitled “*Seminar of citizen youth with criteria*”, had as their motto “*planting dreams, sowing citizenship*”(MINEDUC 2013). The mandate in the document was for young citizens to learn to dream and project both for his/her life and the nation through a model of action-research. However, in practice, the Ministry of Education established a “theme” that would guide the national project of each year. Topics included “Environment and Education for Peace” (2011), “Sustainable Development and Education for Peace” (2012), “Popular consultation, territorial dispute Guatemala and Belize” (2013), and “Food and nutrition security” (2014 and 2015). This is another example of the many ways in which the educational system forwarded the creation of the citizen-subject in

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<sup>81</sup> Ministry Agreement 2496-2007 of November 8th, 2007.

Guatemala. Arturo Taracena (2002; 2004) found three routes after the Guatemalan independence through which liberal ideals had molded the State and its desired citizen-subject: education, army, and work. Through the *Seminario*, Guatemalan youth outlined their future expectations for education and work, while at the same time outlining a contribution to the Nation under the guidelines of the Ministry.

Through the experience of school governments and the exercise of future life projections in the *Seminario*, the depoliticization of the citizen becomes visible with the creation of a consenting productive subject for a predetermined nation. In both cases, education has a role in the formation of an ambiguous citizen practice with superficial mechanisms of political and civic participation. Although authors like Gordon (Gordon 2010:94) describe this as a problem within the educational model, my appreciation is that schools practice the same model of participation available for citizen adults before the local and national government in Guatemala.

### **Work, time and aspirations**

While most of the youth I interacted with were studying, this did not mean that their primary focus was school. Young people engaged in activities like weaving, household work, and the family business, not always recognized as “jobs”. On average, these youth were working 37 hours per week, without a significant difference between males and females; several reported working in the family businesses. By asking directly about it, the number of working hours hidden under the notion of *helping* became evident. Those actively supporting family businesses worked an average of 28 hours a week, and most of them did not receive any remuneration. While all men who were working received a wage, a few young women depended on sales for their income or did not receive payment at all.

Capturing the work of young women was not easy. In the surveys, I took advantage of the lessons learned from the home visits and differentiated my questions between general work, work in family businesses, and work in weaving for sale. Women made up the majority of those unemployed at the time of the interview. This category, however, obscured the weight that household work represented in their daily activity as we will see in their descriptions.

I was also able to meet youth who only worked and some that did neither. In my 2015 survey, about half of the youth were working, several of them were studying and working at the same time. A few more had worked previously but were not doing so at the time of the survey. Among the organized youth, being a NINI (*ni estudia ni trabaja*, as they are known in Spanish) was a fairly

common but temporal condition; many times people would consider themselves as unemployed though they were engaged in many short term or informal jobs.

In the following section, I will build on the data collected both through the surveys and interviews in order to describe the type of jobs available in the area and how they shaped their daily activities. By comparing indigenous and non-indigenous as well as female and male experiences, I hope to highlight how gender and ethnicity frame their working conditions and aspirations for the future.

### ***Their parent's work***

To capture the job market available for young people, first I explored how their parents made a living. Crosscutting the data by the ethnicity and gender of the respondent, I found that parents of indigenous youth shared similar experiences. The fathers of these young men and women, when present<sup>82</sup>, worked mainly in agriculture, construction, and commerce; other employment options were wage-jobs like security man, public official (municipality), mine worker, hydroelectric worker, and sawmill worker. Their mothers generated income primarily through weaving using the traditional Mayan techniques, followed by commerce (market stalls or small stores) and cleaning services (as full-time maids in town or part-time labor washing and ironing clothes).

In contrast, the fathers of non-indigenous males were mostly occupied in different types of wage-labor. Occupations included commerce, teaching, management, public offices, and transportation; fewer worked in construction or agriculture, with at least one person owning cattle. Most of their mothers were reported as dedicated to the household with a few of them also dedicated to small commerce; other occupations ranged from domestic work to medical doctor. Interestingly a few reported that their mothers wove, highlighting their “mixed ethnicity”, as will be explained later; traditional Maya weaving is usually an activity exclusive of Poqomchi’ women.

In all cases, the fathers were the ones reported having jobs outside of the Municipal territory, an important aspect when young men imagined their future work goals. In several of the work narratives, young men ventured moving not only out of Tactic but also beyond the Verapaz region. Young women rarely expressed a desire to work beyond the region, with Cobán as the farthest city mentioned.

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<sup>82</sup> I found several did not have a father present in their families. Several lived solely with their mothers.



### ***First and current employment***

In terms of first employment, variations were found by ethnicity and gender, with both indigenous men and women as the ones more likely to have begun work at an early age. All youth experienced their first work with their parents or relatives in whatever occupation they had.

The first work experience of indigenous young males was highly influenced by their own father's occupations, partly because of an apprenticeship style of introduction to a specialized work like agriculture but also because of family connections to work crews in construction. These young men began working in agriculture, in similar activities as their fathers, some mentioning how their fathers took them to their first job. While most of them called themselves "*agricultores*" (cultivators), some did reference being "*jornaleros*" (agricultural day-laborers). The difference between the two is that the latter would be hired by someone else, thus being wage laborers in *fincas*. The youngest age for first employment was eight years of age when the youth began harvesting potatoes along with his father. Among other produce harvested by these boys were cardamom, black beans, cilantro, and tomato.

The first employment for most young indigenous women was weaving, initially helping to set up threads for their mothers and slowly advancing into producing small pieces by themselves. These young weavers began their training at six years of age at the earliest, by the age of 10 or 11 they were producing pieces for sale. All the young women who were weavers had mothers who also wove items for sale. This is an important point, as there are women who were taught the art of weaving but did not engage in it for commerce but only for clothing themselves and their family. Other recurrent activities for first employment were domestic work and child-rearing outside their own families. One of the young women begun working as a nanny at 11, every afternoon after attending elementary school. At the moment of the interview, she was dedicated both to weaving and ironing *cortes* (the Mayan skirt) in the latest fashion<sup>83</sup>. In addition to this work, just like in Elizabeth's story, most young women were also in charge of household work that went unpaid.

Unlike their indigenous peers, about half of the non-indigenous males had not worked by the time of our interview. Among those who had worked or were working, this experience had begun early. The youngest was six years old when he began work as construction assistant to his

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<sup>83</sup> That year the fashion was a pleated skirt with two-centimeter folds. Pleating a skirt can take about two hours since each skirt is between 6 and 8 yards wide.

father, among those who followed their fathers into agriculture, nine was the earliest age for their first job.

The same trend was present for non-indigenous women. Half of them did not have paid work by the time of our interview but, similar to the young indigenous females, were in charge of household work. For those who did wage labor, commerce was usually their first experience: they were shop clerks at stores selling general articles, clothing or food supplies; for some of them the job took place in the family business. The earliest working age reported for this population was 12 years old as a sales worker.

The only case of a young woman migrating for their first job was a young non-indigenous woman; at 17 she was sent to work as a “nanny” for a family in Guatemala City. She had just finished middle school when her family was faced with financial problems, so she was urged to find employment. During this period, she worked all week except for Sundays. Though she denied it being domestic work, her responsibilities included feeding and watching over the children plus making food, cleaning rooms and doing the laundry for the rest of the family. After a year of this work, she returned home and began working with her father in a new plot of land dedicated to non-traditional produce. Because she and her sisters were not married, and there were no sons or sons-in-law, both were working alongside their father in the field. Neither received a monthly salary, but the income was what sustained the family in general; if income improved, she hoped to continue her high school studies.

Overall, the average age for the first job was 13 years, with the earliest age being six years and the highest 22 years of age. Both the average and the earliest age for first employment were well under the legal minimum. The Guatemalan Labor Code states that minors can be employed when they are over 14 years of age. After ratifying Convention 138 of the Minimum Age of Admission to Employment of the ILO, the minimum age for work increased to 15 (Conapeti 2016:15). According to the national survey, ENJU 2011, Guatemalan youth entered the labor market at an average age of 16. This varied when analyzed through markers like ethnicity, gender, place of residence, or education. For example, for young people without education the earliest age was 13 (PNUD 2012:126). Though this matches the ages reported in my data, most of the participants in this set had finished or were being educated.

In terms of employment at the time of the interview, most of the young men who were working did so in part-time or temporary jobs. Agriculture and construction were the most common occupations for indigenous men; the rest were engaged with commerce, particularly small

stores, market stalls, or temporary jobs like selling miscellaneous goods -“*vender cositas*” as one youth called it. A few non-indigenous males were working as *jornaleros* at local farms, clearing the grounds or tending crops in hothouses, others were working in family businesses like internet shops or small restaurants (*comedores*). For most of the young men, there was not much variation between the first employment and the current occupation.

For several young indigenous women the main occupation with any remuneration was weaving, but it was not the only one. Other options were in storefront positions or food stalls, which sometimes belonged to their families. This type of work was not stable or lucrative but allowed some flexibility for those still in school. A young high school graduate, with a teaching degree, commented she was considering a position in a store in town but was taken aback by the offered payment: US 108 (Q800) per month for working Monday through Saturday from 8 am to 5 pm. Though it was less than half of the official minimum wage, it was an average wage in town and, for her, it was a good option since at least it would provide a monthly payment.

The non-indigenous women who worked did so usually in the same area as their first employment. Several continued with their employment in sales work. Only one among the self-identified non-indigenous females mentioned weaving as her employment; she worked along with her mother, from whom she had learned the art. When asked why she wove, she explained that her parents forbade her from seeking employment outside the family home.

### ***Reasons for working***

Among the reasons for working, many highlighted the family’s need for income, as well as their own for financing their studies. Just as in Elizabeth’s story, several of these young men and women had to support their middle school or high school studies. A few of them mentioned they had stopped studying in daily school programs, opting for weekend programs, like *Bachillerato por madurez*, and working during the week. In Tactic, studying during the weekends was a regular experience for young people, particularly if they wished to attend university.

For many indigenous men, it was their fathers who introduced them to their jobs. This was not an uncommon practice; several studies in Mayan communities have delved into the role of children’s work in traditional occupations as part of their education and socialization (Rogoff et al. 2003; Paradise and Rogoff 2009). However, what I found concerning was how this might naturalize exploitation and risk when applied to wage labor instead of family crops or household work. A young Poqomchi’ man, whose father was a construction worker, had his first job at 13 as a

construction worker assistant (*ayudante de albañil*), which is the initial position for a non-specialist in the construction job hierarchy. Given the lack of local opportunities, he moved to the city to work, when I asked why he began working he stated, “*we are poor, and I needed something to make ends meet.*” After a time working in the city, he was sent back home to continue his studies. At the time of our conversation, he was working part-time in the mornings as a *jornalero* and engaged in his high school studies during the afternoons.

Meanwhile, young indigenous weavers were introduced to the art by their mothers or grandmothers. An enthusiastic girl explained how, when she was in second grade, her mother assigned her weekly chores at the backstrap loom, working mainly on small pieces with easy figures. As we will see later, many youth remained working with their mothers at home and dedicated their employment exclusively to weaving.

For many non-indigenous men and women who worked the reasons were similar, their parents wanted to introduce them to the family business. Among non-indigenous women who worked in the family business, this was a good way to learn even if they did not receive payment. A young woman working in her mother’s artisanal dairy was in charge of making cheese and selling it. This was a family tradition, just like in many Ladino families, and a product for which Tactic is known; for her it was an opportunity to learn the business. Meanwhile, a self-identified young Ladino explained how his father worked setting up jukebox machines in bars, so he worked with him on the weekend. These “bars” were establishments that also employ sex workers; he flushed as he explained, “*You know the type, like Guatemala Linda,*” a bar-brothel in Tactic. He was still underage, but since his father wanted him to learn the business no one objected to his presence in these establishments. That his father expose him into precarious and probably violent workspace was not questioned by the young man, after all, it was the primary source for family income.

Though most engaged in work to support their family or their studies, a few did so for personal expenses. A young man related how, after asking for a gaming console, his mother sent him to work and he used the income for that purchase. Temporary employment was also a common sight in Tactic, youth would work during holidays and vacations, and young men would even migrate to neighboring towns to work with relatives. In my overall experience, young Tactiqueños and Tactiqueñas were always engaged in earning a living, and very few did so for personal entertainment.

### ***Aspirations of work***

In an attempt to capture life projections as an aspect of agency, I asked youth about what they envisioned as future lines of work. Reactions included both idealized notions, like becoming a soccer superstar, and realistic assessments, like to keep working in the same type of work they had been so far. Among indigenous young men, the aspirations for future labor were unrelated to the experience they had so far. Several mentioned service-focused jobs, with basic professionalization, as their main goal: teachers, policeman, accountant, nurse, secretary. Most of these occupations were accessible through a high school diploma. Still, a few of them mentioned wanting to become doctors, engineers, football players, sportscasters, managers, or business owners. Agriculture, if desired as future employment, was usually mentioned in the context of a specialized version of agricultural work, like Forestry Engineer, which was also referenced by non-indigenous young males.

Non-indigenous men wanted to have a university degree and a job related to their degree. Among the favorite ideas was a degree in Criminology, a career recently inaugurated as an undergraduate option in a University at Cobán. As mentioned, no one was interested in agriculture-related jobs unless it was through an Engineering degree. Several explained they would like to set up a successful business, and two mentioned they would like to become football players for the *Cobán Imperial* (local team) but found it complicated because there was no training school nearby. Again, as with indigenous males, their aspirations were not particularly related to the current options in Tactic or the employment of their parents though, in comparison, their families had higher education levels in general, which could make that initial goal more feasible.

Faced with limited options, the aspirations for future employment of Indigenous young women were quite realistic. All the female weavers, except one, said they were not aspiring to change their occupations; one of them explained, *“My mother is a weaver, so logically we are going to weave as well. I have only been taught to weave, so I will keep on weaving.”* The one that hoped to move in another direction wanted to become a nurse; this was one of the two most desired occupations along with becoming a teacher. Few mentioned they would like to continue to work in commerce by having their own stalls or moving to Cobán and becoming a salesclerk in a large mall. The occupations they aspired to required at least a high school diploma (although one can study to be an infirmity assistant after middle school), which was a leap from the education level of their mothers, who had hardly finished elementary school. However, as seen in the previous section, accessing high school education was not necessarily feasible.

In contrast, non-indigenous women aspired to become infirmiry assistants, teachers, or secretaries (high school degrees), or social workers, lawyers, and medical doctors (university degrees). None of these young women had mothers with university degrees, but a few of them had a high school diploma, which might result in moral support to continue studying. Still, several of them were already having difficulties in financing their studies.

While aspirations of future work clashed with the opportunities of the present, many young people in Tactic endeavored in precarious work hoping for a *better life*; for most, the immediate goal was to achieve better educational outcomes, about 97% of the young people surveyed said that they wanted to continue studying (regardless of whether they had already studied or not). So I asked young people about what they would like to study or work at in this imagined future and how feasible it was to reach it. The answers showed that for many of them these achievements could be obtained “but with difficulties” (67% for education, 62% for labor). When further discussed in open-ended questions, many stated they hoped for the best even if it was not possible: “*hope is the last thing that dies*” was the answer of a young man.

**Table 4: Perceptions about achieving aspirations**

	Do you think that you will be able to study (...)?			Do you think you will be able to work as (...)?		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<b>Yes, very easily</b>	4.40%	1.10%	5.50%	8.50%	3.70%	12.20%
<b>Yes, easily</b>	5.50%	4.40%	9.90%	6.10%	6.10%	12.20%
<b>Yes, but with difficulty</b>	33.00%	34.10%	67.00%	29.30%	32.90%	62.20%
<b>Yes, but with great difficulty</b>	5.50%	8.80%	14.30%	8.50%	2.40%	11.00%
<b>Not at all</b>	0.00%	2.20%	2.20%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
<b>Total</b>	48.40%	50.50%	100.00%	52.40%	46.30%	100.00%

Source: Survey, 2015

In one interview, a young man who was finishing his high school teaching degree conveyed how difficult it was to obtain a teaching post. His parents had wanted him to study this career, hoping for better employment, but he thought there was no unilineal progress with his new educational outcome.

*"One time, the director at the school where I am taking my internship asked me, "Are you going to work here next year?" I kept thinking, and I told him, the truth, "I do not know.*

*Maybe I'll grab my machete and my hoe, which is what my dad does, that is what we work at the most, and maybe I'll take that, and work the land." " (Male, Education student).*

For many youth, this was more about acknowledging the scarce possibilities that surrounded them, and not necessarily an assessment of their own ability to achieve imagined goals. For those who were already working in the field that would be their future, the answer was always a shrug, a smile and just a “*you know..., easily.*”

### **Young Weavers**

In Tactic, there was a long tradition of female weavers, who usually did their work at home and sold individual pieces in different venues. Tactic's *huipiles* were known for their three-panel composition (see picture below) with intricate embroidery, be it in close-knit stitching for cold weather or a loose, breathable pattern for the hot and humid season. While different types of weaving were popular in Tactic, like crochet or knitting, the reference of the weaver as “*tejedora*” referred exclusively to the art of Mayan weaving as it was practiced by Mayan women. Girls learned it through their mothers and other female relatives, tying them together into working arrangements that provided income. The art of weaving and its intricate social standing has held a long-lasting interest in the anthropology of Guatemala; several authors have meticulously described the technical, symbolic and economic aspects of weaving, highlighting its role in binding gender roles, ethnic affirmation and political history (Asturias de Barrios and Fernández García 1992; Hendrickson 1995; Green 1999).

As mentioned in the previous section, several young indigenous women wove to sell; most were no longer studying and wove in their homes. I had to reschedule visits on different occasions, adjusting to whenever they had time away from weaving or housework. These young women began weaving at 13 years of age, on average, however, the earliest age reported was six years old. Green has mentioned that in the western highlands the process of learning will begin between the ages of 7 and 10, sitting next to their mothers or another female within the household (1999:136). A young woman remembered being ten years old when she sold her first pieces; at that age, she had already had three years of experience.



**Figure 10: My grandmother's huipil.**

Photograph by the author, 2013.

While most Poqomchi' women were taught to weave, not all remained as weavers nor did they become master weavers. Most of the indigenous youth, male and female, had weavers among their families, but the younger generation did not necessarily think of it as a desirable career because of the arduous labor and its low remuneration. The working schedule of weavers encompassed the whole day, Monday to Sunday, particularly when associated with *encargos* or commissioned pieces; this did not exempt them from household work. A young woman described her weekdays as follows:

*"You know it is nice to begin the day heating tortillas in the comal or going to the mill and get the masa for the day. Around 7:00 or 8:00 am, I begin weaving until 11:30 when I need to make lunch for my brother before he leaves for school. This week I did not have to do so because he was on vacation. After he leaves, I return to my loom and weave until late afternoon. Around 5:00 pm, I leave to visit my grandmother and check if she needs anything. By 8:00 pm, we have dinner with the whole family, and afterward, I help my mother with cleaning before going to sleep. Our day ends around 10:00 pm."*



For these young weavers, the day began between 5:30 or 6:00 am so they could light a fire in the woodstove or *poyo* (open fire with three grounding stones and a clay plank), make breakfast for their siblings, sweep and mop the floors (when applicable), and then wash the dishes.

After these morning chores, the young weavers would sit in the open corridors or front patio of the house, hanging the backstrap loom on a pillar or a hook in the house's walls, sitting on small stools or directly on the floor. Since none of the weavers was studying, they would remain most of the day at home. They usually took a break around noon to prepare lunch and wash dishes; some were only in charge of making tortillas while others had to prepare the meals for the entire family. Afterward, they resumed the task until 5 or 6 pm, depending on the light and exhaustion. Some took the opportunity to go to the mill as a chance to visit friends or briefly meet their boyfriends. After getting back home to make and eat dinner, some took a break by watching television, if they had it, and finished the day by going to sleep between 9 and 10 pm.

This demanding schedule, unfortunately, did not represent much in terms of earning. Among the main difficulties of weaving as a means of income is that the payment does not correspond to the number of hours dedicated to it. In addition to this, weaving does not allow a fixed remuneration. None of the young weavers had a steady wage, depending entirely on the success of their sales. It is worth noting that no man reported their income depending solely on sales; only women appeared in the category of income by sales with either weaving or catalog sales.

The number of hours dedicated to weaving averaged 50 hours a week, while the minimum number of hours reported was 32 hours, and the maximum was 63 hours. A 22-year-old teacher, married without children, who worked in a private school and was involved with one of the weavers' cooperatives explained the precarity of work and its poor recognition in monetary value:

*“Weaving is beautiful, but it is worked mostly in rural areas. There are cooperatives, but right now the price of yarn is going up a lot. Now the basic cost of living is going up [increasing costs], so if they have enough for weaving, they do it. However, it is not the same as before; it is not sold the same as before. Right now, a very nice huipil costs Q. 250 [US\$35]. Moreover, a weaver spends about Q.150 or Q.200 [US\$20-27] on the thread; it is not enough anymore.*

*A woven piece, it depends if she makes scarves, tablecloths, or table centerpieces, can take almost a month or two months. There are tablecloths for six people, [that would take] almost two to three months. If the person works from six a.m. to six p.m., she can do it in one month.*

*However, women have other things to do, go to work, go to wash the dishes, go to feed the children, so to do it would take about two months. It depends on the lady's skill."*

Another young woman who had learned to weave with her mother explained that being able to choose whom to work for was important. Her mother no longer wove regular *huipiles* but only in *encargos*, which could sell for up to US\$270. Still, materials cost about half of the sale, and it took her mother more than a month to produce fine work; the *encargos* were also a risk since she had to rely on people's word for the final payment. An experienced weaver might find better market opportunities, but others had to rely on selling directly in the town market on Sundays or through cooperatives. The 22-year-old teacher said her mom had taught her the art of weaving but she did not engage in it too often because she had chosen to study. When she did it, her work was sold through the cooperative:

*"Right now, I rarely get involved in weaving because I work here in the school and then [in the afternoons] I do my university assignments, so no. For example, November and December<sup>84</sup>, that is when I start weaving. The shawls go to Antigua Guatemala. They also go to "Novica."<sup>85</sup> The huipiles of the cooperative go to those places."*

The young women who were working as weavers no longer studied, several of them having just achieved elementary or middle school degrees; only one had a high school diploma and was weaving while waiting for a better work opportunity that would help her pay for a university degree. The association between weaving and studying is an intricate one. A university student and young organizer who had learned how to weave stopped doing it once she enrolled in high school at a private school at Cobán:

*"When I began to study in the Verapaz School, I left all that [weaving]. I did not have time. During the weekends because I had too much homework, I did not do it... and because I do not like it! [laughs]. It is too exhausting."*

Neither she nor her sisters, who were also full-time students, wove even though they did wear *huipiles*, so now they bought them from other women. The option of weaving as an alternate career to study was, unfortunately, highly associated with parents who feared education as a

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<sup>84</sup> This is the period of school vacations, which in her case applied both for her work and studies.

<sup>85</sup> Novica is a prestigious store in Guatemala City, known to export Mayan textiles to the international market.

transgression of gender roles. Another young organizer, who had studied for her degree through IGER like Elizabeth, spoke of the clashes between her parents as she wanted to enroll in high school:

*“The problem was with my mom. She did not want me to study. I already helped her to weave; that is why she did not want me to study. Instead, my dad did want me to study. When I started studying middle-school, that is when the problem began because my mom did not agree. She said no, that only the men went to school, that the women did not have to be out of the house. However, little by little, she accepted it.”*

“To be out of the house” for studying meant to travel outside the hamlet, even if it was only during the weekends for those in the *compressed* school models. Patriarchal notions of female well-being confine them to the house and weaving, tarnishing the art with lack of opportunity. Most of the young women surveyed who were full-time weavers lived in the hamlets, not the town. The association between weavers and rural areas was one that also reproduced wholesomeness and backwardness in the discourses of authority figures. A school director said that Tactic had seen a drive towards education in the past years, but the situation was challenging in the hamlets where women were *only* left to weave, dismissing the complex knowledge behind the skill. A middle-aged teacher, who had been raised in a hamlet, explained she still wove but did so in closed quarters now that she lived in the town; she did not want to be judged by others. A young woman entering middle-school was threatened by her parents to be locked in the house and “*just weave*” if she got a boyfriend.

In these dire circumstances, efforts to procure better conditions for the recognition of female work in weaving were not enough. Cooperatives sought to improve the market value of the textiles by having small stores with shop windows, securing contracts for larger orders (usually of decorative pieces), and teaching necessary accounting skills. Unfortunately, very few of the young women interviewed were members of these cooperatives; sometimes only their mothers were part of these efforts and were, therefore, the main person to channel relationships with buyers or cooperatives. The assumption that young generations were all focused on education and should not *desire* to weave as a career, made the general conception of a weaver that of a female adult who is married and takes on the craft to support the household. “Weaver ladies” (*señoras tejedoras*) was the phrase used in public events and discourses from the Women’s Municipal Office or the Mayor during “Women’s day” thus invisibilizing many young women occupied in this craft. Disappearing into the unimagined youth, these young women were rarely part of youth initiatives, citizenship

workshops, or sectorial representation in Development Councils. In general, no public policies for improving the livelihood of weavers, independent of age, had been promoted in the region, nor were these young women highlighted in the youth public agendas we will see later.

Discourses of female weavers as epicenters of cultural resistance or ethnic affirmation, unfortunately, forgot to discuss a proper social and economic recognition for the craft and the livelihood of its artists. The intricate thread that ties precarity and patriarchy into the lives of young weavers must be untangled, so the craft be may be acknowledged like any other degree or professional career.

### **Work, study and youth without time**

*"I have no time"* was a standard answer in the interviews with young people who were not involved in youth organizations and with those who had been active members but stepped down at one point of their lives. This was not exclusive for youth activities; about 34% of the reasons why participants stopped attending any group (including religious, political and even recreational groups) was the lack of time (see Table 19 in Appendix). This, however, went beyond a figure of speech as I will explain.

Time has been explored in anthropology, both in its construction through social interaction and its role in shaping otherness (Hession 2006), placing interest in cosmological time and human history. Here, by exploring how time is related to everyday tasks (Munn 1992:103), I want to highlight time as it relates to the bodies that act upon it and are subjected through it (Ibid., 105-111). In this sense, I propose to frame time as the conjunction of bodily presence and ownership of self in a given place and moment; therefore, time can be dispossessed through the social relations that govern the body.

Jorge, a young Poqomchi' man of 19, was studying his last year of middle school when we talked about the difficulties of studying and working in Tactic. He began working in a local meat processing company in town when he was a boy, about ten years old. Almost a decade later Jorge was still working there, moving slowly into the position of butcher. In his words, he was *forced* by necessity and his family to find employment and support the household, but once he had some savings, he decided to invest some of it in studying. He went to classes in the afternoon and worked the night shift during the week. Being almost five years older than his classmates made him a reference of maturity in the classroom, praised by his professors for his tenacity about finishing his

degree. However, the challenges were many as he described his weekly routine as an endless list of tasks:

*“Most times, I do not sleep, except on Wednesdays when I sleep more than three hours because I do not have to get to work until 5:00 am. Usually, from Monday to Sunday, I barely sleep. I get up around 1 am, drink coffee to awake and leave home at 1:40 am, arrive at work at 2:00 am. Between 2:00 and 2:30, we move the meat that has come from the slaughterhouse to the processing building. Butchering takes until 6 am when the company gives us breakfast. Afterward, around 8 am, I go home, take a bath, listen to music on the computer, and do my homework. However, I do not sleep. I have lunch and leave for El Básico [from 1:00 to 6:00 pm]. When classes end, I join my friends in the park, and we have an atol with tayuyo<sup>86</sup>. Then I go home and have dinner if I am still hungry. Sometimes when I get home early, I watch TV with my sisters. Early, around 9:00 pm, I fall asleep because that is how my body got used to it.*

*I see my girlfriend at the company because she works right there. On Tuesdays I go to her house after leaving school and we hang out for about three hours because my day starts later on Wednesdays. I get one day off a month, and also the last Saturday of each month. Those days, if both my girlfriend and I are on leave, we go out all day; if it is just me, I borrow the horses from the company and ride them in the farm where they keep the cows.”*

For Jorge, Sundays were the most trying days because it was market day in Tactic and ten animals (cows and pigs) were killed and processed for selling. After working the night shift, he attended church and a football championship during the afternoon. When I asked when he thought he had “free time”, Jorge sighed and said that it was only Sundays *“because I am going to football or to church, to have fun.”*

While Jorge’s situation was not usual, in terms of working night shifts, I found that many youth carried work and household responsibilities that took up a large part of their days. Several indigenous young men, who were studying and working at the time our exchange, woke up between

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<sup>86</sup> As mentioned before, *atol* is a grain-based drink, that can have different flavors. In Tactic the most popular during the weekdays are *shuco* (a fermented purple corn drink topped with salted black beans), *tres cocimientos* (yellow corn drink sweetened with white or raw sugar), *arroz con leche* (cooked rice in milk with white sugar), and *arroz con chocolate* (cooked rice in traditional chocolate). *Tayuyos* are stuffed tortillas, traditionally with salted whole black beans; during the evenings in Tactic you can find potato and pork rind *tayuyos* and ricotta cheese (*requesón*) *tayuyos*, topped with tomato sauce and pickled cabbage. Each one cost about Q3.00 (US\$ 0.40), so for less than a dollar you can have a reasonable dinner in Tactic’s town square.

5:30 or 6:00 am, had a small breakfast (coffee and reheated tortillas or bread), walked to work and stayed there from 7 am until noon when they returned home to have lunch, changed into their uniforms, and quickly left for school. Around 6:00 pm, when classes were over, they stayed for a while in the park while waiting to take a bus or just hanging out with friends. It was at night, after they got home, that they did their homework.

Though not as numerous as the working youth, both indigenous and non-indigenous young men who were not working mentioned more recreational activities in general, like playing soccer or hanging out with friends outside their homes. Most of them had no household chores, with several describing getting home to wait for their mothers or sisters to set up their meals. Among the responsibilities within their homes, indigenous men mentioned having to pick up firewood in nearby forests, non-indigenous men were not responsible for this task. One of the latter described how he was responsible for dropping off and picking up his siblings from school.

Unlike the days of young men, the weight of household work marked the daily activities of all young females. I have already described the heavy schedule of young weavers, but this was not too different from other girls. The young indigenous women who were studying and did not weave still had to take care of many chores. Making breakfast for their siblings, sweeping, mopping, setting up fires, going to the mill, making tortillas, washing dishes and doing the laundry were among the most common tasks of "*hacer oficio*", as household chores are commonly known. If they had sisters, then chores could be divided or alternated throughout the week; if they did not or were the eldest, most of the chores would weigh on their shoulders. They were able to allot time according to their school schedules, but most described mornings as the time dedicated to household work and homework.

Several still had to balance homework, household work, and their paid work. A young woman who worked in a cafeteria woke up at 6 am to take a bath and make coffee for her and her family, although when possible she would set up an earlier alarm to get in a run before school. After eating a light breakfast consisting of a toasted tortilla and sweetened coffee, she would go to school from 8 am to 1 pm (her high school program took place during the mornings). After getting home, she had to "*hacer su oficio*" which consisted of making lunch, sweeping and mopping, then go to work from 3 to 6 pm; immediately after her shift she had one hour to do her homework. Dinner, which took place around 8 pm, was not one of her tasks but she still had to do the dishes. She finally went to bed around 10 or 11 pm.

In general, the workload (be it paid or household work) was far more demanding for women and left very few windows of opportunity to engage in new activities. This heavy load of tasks also provided a framework to control the whereabouts of young women with precision. The fact that they were not allowed much free time bound them to their family home unless they were able to go to school. Trajectories between school and home, just like between home and the mill, were prolonged as much as possible to meet friends and wander outside. This applied to both indigenous and non-indigenous women. Just like the weaver women, non-indigenous women who were only working had a more restricted schedule, particularly if the work took place within the family. For example, several of them would state that entertainment in their free time was staying home to watch television with their parents or grandmother. This dynamic, as we will see later, would result in limited participation of females in the political sphere.

Weekends were not free for many youth. As mentioned before, several of those working during weekdays were studying on Saturday, others oversaw the family business during the weekends. Sundays, for many, were also quite busy with religious services that, as was previously explained, could take between an hour to all day depending on the church. For young women, Sundays were not that different from weekdays, as they woke up at the same time to prepare breakfast for the family before attending church services or leaving for market day. While some were only in charge of getting groceries, others had to work at their family's market stall from 6 am to noon. Almost all of them had *oficios*, particularly laundry on sunny weekends. In general, Sunday afternoons were the only time slot young people had free, they used it for sports, visiting family, hanging out with their boyfriend or girlfriend, or eating out. For several of the organized youth, Sunday afternoons were the best time for meetings and workshops, because of this my Sunday afternoons during fieldwork were among the most intense times.

As mentioned before, many of the youth who were students worked long hours during the week, even if that work was unpaid. The act of balancing their studies and workload was one that weighed heavily in their daily activities and translated into narratives of time deprivation. When asked about their "free time", they defined this simply as time when they were not obliged to carry out work or study. Young indigenous males mentioned having about 3 hours during the week and about 5 hours during Sundays<sup>87</sup>, whereas non-indigenous males had almost two additional hours, consistent with them participating less in job or unpaid work. In contrast, "free time" for young

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<sup>87</sup> I asked about Sundays because these were the days preferred by youth organizations to schedule meetings and workshops.

females was less abundant: indigenous girls had 2.5 hours during the week and less than 4 hours on Sunday, non-indigenous women had an hour and a half extra during the week and just one for the weekend. The understanding of free time presented interesting subtleties since several of the young women mentioned “helping in the house” as the main activity they enjoyed during their “free time”.

The combination of schoolwork, paid work, and household work held indigenous youth to a schedule with less leisure time than their non-indigenous peers. Gender also shaped the days of these youth, as women were charged with more responsibilities that tied them to the household. Unfortunately, the local narratives of youth rarely recognized how this work-study load weighs on them. While at the beginning of my research I was interested in understanding what sustained the image of that which was considered the apathy or disinterest of youth according to authorities and other adults, a closer approximation to the daily lives of youth, organized or not, showed the weight of responsibilities that occupied their day.

As seen here, independent of the amount of *time* that any of these young people had, it was not necessarily theirs to allot as they wished. Parents and gatekeepers restricted many young women from partaking in activities beyond the home, school, or church; even school, as we have seen, was a contentious arena. Patriarchal arraignments deprived young women from control over their bodies and their time. Overall, a set of aspirations based on acquiring educational degrees to obtain a better life placed these youth in a constant race for self-improvement without time for community involvement.

### **Conclusion**

The *youthscapes* in Tactic were abundant in contradictory notions. Descriptions of youth had at least three different connotations: youth as an aspiration, that is, a specific subjectivity that corresponds to an idealized experience of life (many times related to a western liberal subject); youth as a hazardous condition, usually grounded on real life experiences which did not match what was expected of an idealized youth; and youth as a momentous condition, usually placing youth not just in a specific age bracket but as a combination between time, action and attitude that could be enacted at any age. Within the idealized notion of Youth, being free of commitments was a key feature. This understanding was particularly problematic as it dismissed the burden youth carried in financially supporting themselves or their immediate family (parents or siblings) and it also denied youth to those who had become parents. This notion of “lack of responsibility” could interact with the “risk” associated with certain forms of leisure, according to adult arguments.



The map of youth spaces showed that young people moved in many spheres at the same time, challenging static and restrictive portrayals. Tactic's *youthscape* was composed of a diversity of practices and spaces that challenged the idealized images of youth. An exploration based on what was identified by the Tactiqueños themselves gave a quick overview of the multiplicity of fields for the production and reproduction of young people. Religious groups, sports teams, dance groups, and self-defined groups as juveniles harbored different forms of collective being.

Meanwhile, traditional fields for evaluating young people, such as education, were presented as spaces designed according to a subjectivity that emphasized individual productivity. The young Tactiqueño workspace was vast and required more exploration. However, through the text, I have shown the complex relationship between study and work, often sustained by the aspiration to achieve a better future. From an early age, young people looked for ways to make a living and generate resources to support their family or their studies. This moves away from the vision of youth as a moratorium on adult life, since all of them had tasks and responsibilities that went beyond the role of apprenticeship or entertainment.

In particular, this chapter highlights how the dynamics of studying and working with the restrictions imposed by patriarchy have produced youth without time for community participation. The field of education, a fundamental niche in contemporary youth studies, showed how school, instead of becoming a liberating experience, reproduced the webs of inequality in the classroom. Other youth scenes, such as recreational projects with music or sports, were also intersected by racism, patriarchy, and inequality, despite presenting themselves as options for positive and proactive formation in the face of the generic threat of youth deviation. In Tactic's *youthscape*, we saw conflicting notions about the young citizen, who assumes as her responsibility to procure her own opportunities for self-improvement, even though the options to do so are practically non-existent. In the following sections I will explain how youth groups, which move within the political sphere, built the youth space within the local government.

### ••• ELIZABETH AS A YOUTH ORGANIZER

Between 2013 and 2015, I accompanied Elizabeth to different activities, some of which were related to organizing youth in different communities. In return, she accompanied me on different visits while trying to set up interviews or survey dates. Usually on our walks or bus rides we would discuss different things: national and local politics, research methodologies, fashion and clothing choices, love and relationships, and the difficulties she had with English and the ones I had with Poqomchi'. Among our discussions was a constant dissection of the challenges faced when trying to incentivize youth political participation.

When Elizabeth began her practice as a development promoter, she chose activities to encourage youth participation in her community. After talking with girls and boys she had known all her life, a consensus was reached that a football (soccer) championship was the best thing to do. Several women wanted to play but, as Elizabeth explained, until then “*nobody had told them, come on, let's do it.*” So she wrote a short proposal for the championship and *gestionó* (managed) support from an NGO through the Municipality; they would give her the uniforms, food, and money for renting the fields and the referees' fees and she had to present a report on the outcomes of the activity. With this offer in hand, she launched the championship and 25 teams enrolled but just as the dates drew closer neither the NGO nor the Municipality came through with the offered support. She debated between canceling the events or coming clean with all the youth involved:

*“I kept thinking, “They will be discouraged and will not believe in me anymore; and if they do not believe in me, what do I do?””*

Elizabeth decided to tell the teams there was no support but that she would find ways to carry out the championship. Using her family network, she got a parcel of shirts from a relative who had a garment shop; it was only one lot, so she had to wash them after every game. From her savings she paid the rental of the football fields and the salaries of the referees. She was exhausted and finally decided to ask for help from a friend who was on the Municipal Council; the officer for the Municipal Office of Culture and Sports showed up for the finals with trophies and a representative from an NGO, he took the stage and gave a long speech about the importance of sportsmanship while thanking the NGO for their support. Elizabeth remembered feeling outraged and crying a lot after that final match.

*“And I felt like, damn [púchicas]!<sup>88</sup> it is not possible! My motivation was that I wanted that championship for young people. I cried too much. Everything I did! I tried not to take the experience as a negative one because it introduced me to different arenas, and I met new young men and ladies. But some looked at me as a liar [cuentera]. And I was very surprised with it all because you never know who you are working for. I handed in my report, but I was very upset because they greet with someone else’s hat<sup>89</sup>. And for a while I gave up, I did not want to organize anymore because of the experience, because I was spending as if I were rich, as if I had economic possibilities. But then the kids would tell me, “hey, when are we going to organize another match?””*

So, in 2013, when I began my extended fieldwork Elizabeth again actively engaged in her role as youth organizer. This time she was responsible for mobilizing youth in her hamlet in order to have a local assembly and set up a youth committee. One Saturday she invited me to *refaccionar* (an afternoon snack) at her house. So I took an overcrowded *microbus*, found a seat on an improvised bench behind the copilot and traveled the distance between the main town and her hamlet. When I arrived at her house, she was helping customers at the mill. After settling an order, we headed into the dinner/living room which had a couch, a tv set and a table for six people. On the table Elizabeth had several printed sheets which she was cutting in four, these were invitations to be given around the hamlet for the local assembly. She had designed the invitations on her computer and printed them out in an Internet shop the day before.

After finishing with our coffees and *pan dulce*, she asked me to go with her and deliver the invitations around the hamlet, targeting those houses with young people who could participate in the assembly. Elizabeth greeted parents and grandparents and explained in Poqomchi’ and Spanish that the purpose of the meeting was to organize the young people so they would have proper representation in the COCODE. Some families were friendlier than others, and in one house we were chased down by very angry dogs. On several occasions Elizabeth was readily recognized and we were invited to sit down on a bench out in the corridor while the speech was delivered; I was usually introduced as the anthropologist who was working with youth in Tactic for her university

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<sup>88</sup> Elizabeth said *púchicas*, a Guatemalan expression considered more proper than other, more explicit expletives. It can be translated as damn!.

<sup>89</sup> “*Saludar con sombrero ajeno*” is a common expression that depicts a person taking credit for someone else’s hard work.

degree. After a couple of hours visiting the neighborhood, Elizabeth said she had to go back and begin preparations for dinner, so we headed back to her house and I said goodbye for the day.

A few days later, the hamlet's youth assembly had taken place but it had not been as successful as Elizabeth had hoped. About fifteen young people arrived, many showed up quite late, and several of the attendants were related to Elizabeth. Among the participants were a group of siblings who had a relative on the Municipal Council, so Elizabeth considered their interest was driven by their family's partisan affiliation. At the meeting, the official of the *Oficina Municipal de la Juventud* and members of *La Mesa*, including Elizabeth, explained the importance of youth participation on the community's committee. According to her, the audience was either silent or giggly when asked to participate. Elizabeth hoped they would be inquisitive and challenging but, as happened frequently, people did not openly engage in discussion. In the end, representatives were elected among those present and the hamlet's youth committee was registered in the municipal minute book (*libro de actas*). One of the older girls in the group, a 21-year-old Ladino woman who worked in agriculture with her father, was nominated as President; reluctantly, the girl accepted after requesting that Elizabeth become an adviser since she knew little about what had to be done and was not familiar with the hamlet's elders.

Despite the good intentions, the committee did not work as expected; Elizabeth believed the lack of political preparation among the members and unwillingness to fully take on the task of organizing were the main detriments. Although Elizabeth tried to encourage them into organizing events in the hamlet, the Committee did not take on the responsibility. Elizabeth would recall all the work it took her to get the first meeting going: getting permission to use the small Catholic chapel for a nonreligious gathering, printing invitations and personally delivering them across the hamlet, coordinating with the youth organizers from the town and getting them to show up on time (punctuality being a contentious issue between them), and getting snacks and refreshments from her parents' store to properly attend to all those invited.

*"Not everyone is willing to do all that work,"* she would argue, *"they have other things to do"*.

While this statement was frequent among organized youth when describing their peers, the organized youth were handling different responsibilities while also actively working in the youth movement. The efforts of Elizabeth were not entirely in vain; a few of the attendants of the youth assembly attended a few meetings in town and became volunteers in several events organized by the OMJ. The committee remained dormant for a year and a half, then in 2015 it made a come-back but all the representatives were youth affiliated with the Mayor's political party.

## CHAPTER IV

### CREATING THE POLITICAL FIELD OF YOUTH IN TACTIC

The social mapping of Tactic showcased the different youth groups and projects aimed at young people; this framework became an entry point for understanding how youth as a political category was used in Tactic. However, it would be inaccurate to portray a history of youth groups that depicted them merely as a result of development projects or government interventions. To understand the current figures used to represent Youth in the political arena of Tactic, I had to trace the history of grassroots organizations that emerged with hopes of providing new spaces of participation and recreation for other youth like themselves. The history of how organized groups transformed the *youthcapes* of Tactic relates both to the structure of the Guatemalan State and the interests of Development interventions in the neoliberal era of international cooperation and NGO's in the country. In this chapter, I will describe that process of creating a political field of youth in Tactic, focusing mainly on the different forms of youth organization between 2005 and 2015. The multiple links between groups, projects and communities, identified by the participants as key niches of youth participation, will be described in detailed so as to understand their different expressions.

#### **Recent history of youth organizations in Tactic (2005-2015)**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, although young people could be found in different types of collectivity across the *youthcapes* of Tactic, there were specific entities identified as youth organizations when I arrived to the area. The fragile constitution of these organizations does not allow for a clear-cut history; these groups were fluid, flexible and shapeless. One of the challenges throughout the research was to understand how people were part of different collectives, moved from one group to another, deferred participation and chose not to participate anymore. State or NGO interventions considered these youth formations permanent entities with institutionalized structures, however a closer look will show the fluidity of belonging, as volunteers and activists take part within “collective forms of being” in the political arena.

### ***Between expression and equilibrium***

The shared memory of the current mobilized youth placed the “youth genesis” in two organizations *Expresión* and *Equilibrio*, the largest articulations of urban youth in Tactic during the 2000’s. However, there were other forms of youth organizations beyond these two, which would eventually cross paths as the field of Youth created new forms of representation. In the following execution I present a closer look into the histories of members who took part in some of these grassroots groups and discuss their importance in terms of their legacy.

#### “EXPRESIÓN ES PRESIÓN”

The youth group **Expresión** began in 2005 when a few boys and girls, both Poqomchi’ and mestizo, living in the main town and between 15 and 18 years old, decided to get together to promote new recreational activities in town. José (Ladino, 24-year-old) and Andrés (Poqomchi’, 24-year-old) were among the original members of this group. José remembers that the group had already been meeting for about three months when he was recruited; a friend of his was among the “founders” and had proposed they send him a formal letter of invitation because of Jose’s “social approach”. Many got involved through friends who recommended them because of their interest in cultural activities like theater, music or movies. In the beginning the group did not have a specific political perspective. The main interest was in providing something else to do in town, something other than sports (soccer particularly), which was they thought was the only entertainment for young people. Andrés remembers the dynamic of the group:

*“We would say, “hey next Sunday,” because we got together on Sundays, “you bring a theme and explain whatever you want to all of us.” Other times we would make lists of topics like leadership, youth, or whatever you would like to talk about, music. And we began talking, watching movies, and that is how we all began to get along [desenvolvernos].”*

Their usual spot for Sunday meetings was the office of the local cable enterprise; eventually they would have picnics, cook outs or “lock-ins” in a member’s house where they could enjoy movies and music. While most of the members were young men, a few women were part of the group, though the presence of the latter was restricted during the over-night events.

Andrés fondly remembers these meetings, *“that was where I started to learn things, about leading and doing stuff with young people, trying to learn new things, and we used to get together to jot down ideas.”* The constant questioning within the group would trigger ideas that were written

down in a notebook, all proposals were recorded there; some of those ideas were implemented while others were forgotten. Sometimes they would ask for external help to get those ideas going; they presented a few projects to the Municipality, who would provide supplies (like piñatas for a celebration of “*Día del Niño*”), but most of the time that offered help never materialized. They usually did things on their own, without any financial help.

The group was also concerned about doing something for the community and one of the events most participants considered successful was the “Toys Marathon”. This consisted of gathering 5 kilometers of toys (they stipulated that each 100 toys equaled 1 kilometer) that would be later donated to kids in the hamlets. They talked to their families and other people within their neighborhoods that were likely to help, and were also able to broadcast the event on local cable announcing, “*now a few young people will be passing by [your houses] and come by if you have any toys*”. Among the other public activities they organized was “Expo Joven”, where youth groups from neighboring towns would come and share whatever it was they did (skateboarding, painting, music, etc.) and they placed stands in the town’s square where people could read about the different cultural expressions. They organized this event two years in a row. They also organized a parade for the International Youth Day and the celebration of “Revolution Day” on October 20<sup>th</sup>.

Though at the beginning they had no name, after the first successful toy marathon in December of 2005 they decided to baptize the group. *Expresión* had a board and norms, with a system of “shifts” to rotate the leadership between the members. They looked into getting legal registration and paperwork as an association or an NGO, seeking the legal advice of an attorney who was related to a very active member. Those plans never materialized

In all, *Expresión* was active about three years. Participation diminished as many of the original members began working full-time jobs, got married or left town for their college studies. Though some of them kept on partaking in workshops and Municipal meetings, eventually becoming active with other groups in the community, most of the original members withdrew from active participation.

A few members of *Expresión* took an alternative route and made another group concerned with environmental issues in Tactic. Andrés, who thought of himself as part of both groups, remembered meeting in the “convent” (an annex wing of the Catholic church) with those urging with need to do something. The first activities of this alternative branch were an awareness campaign about pollution and the organization of a task group for picking up garbage in the streets, cleaning public areas and so forth. Unfortunately, the momentum was brief with no more than a

couple of months of work. *Nemecio*, the young man who led the group, passed away suddenly. While *Movimiento Verde* had a short life, several youth kept the memory alive by referring to it constantly as part of their history.

The motto of *Expresión*, expression is pressure, conveyed their will to push for an agenda exclusively for youth within the Municipal government. The ideas written in the notebook were transcribed into different projects for youth organization that eventually came to life. As the last members retired because of their work commitments, the group came to an end. Andrés's view on their legacy as a group was marked by the fact that they never implemented their proposals, "*all we had left was just in ideas.*"

#### EQUILIBRIO

While *Expresión* was declining in 2007, another group came to life on the eve of the national elections. A group of young people had been summoned to act as "*observadores electorales*"<sup>90</sup>, a strategy of social audit designed by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE<sup>91</sup> in Spanish) and the Human Rights Ombudsman's Office (PDH<sup>92</sup> in Spanish) across the country. The history of how they were called has two versions: one highlights the role of adults while the other minimizes their involvement. For some, the first step was made by two prominent indigenous women who were active in the Electoral Board of Tactic and encouraged their young relatives (children and nephews) to become part of the observers. The PDH invited others directly because of their community participation (usually Church or School) and they in turn decided to include their peers. As I watched the process of summoning young people for different initiatives in Tactic, I find that both probably took place at the same time; however, the second narrative was highly frowned upon by many organized youth who distrusted any boasting or intent to become a protagonist – an issue of animosity that will be discussed later.

Ana (Q'eqchi'-Poqomchi', 28 years old) and Siin (Poqomchi', 25 years old) recalled they had their first workshops at an elegant hotel in Cobán. The leadership of the PDH only lasted three months, and José –who was a member of *Expresión* but attended the workshops- saw this as an abandonment of the newly mobilized youth. After this, Ana's brother encouraged the observers to

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<sup>90</sup> The practice of having youth as electoral observers began after the Peace Accords in 1996. I was an undergraduate student when the TSE implemented the initiative for our first postwar elections in 1999. After my training I had to survey and report all the voting locations in the municipality where I used to vote.

<sup>91</sup> Tribunal Supremo Electoral.

<sup>92</sup> Procuraduría de los Derechos Humanos.



create a new group and *Equilibrio* was born. According to Ana, their first event was a debate with the candidates for Mayor. At the beginning they did not have a specific agenda. Ajpu (Poqomchi', 24 years old), who was not an observer, but got involved later on through her sister, explained their objective was to do something or just anything that could mobilize young people's interest in their surroundings.

*“Well, it did not have a mission, or a vision, or anything like that. It was simply that youth got involved in political participation, not partisan, as we saw the situation in the government that was happening; it was necessary for us to be wake up in interest. But focused, not only on youth, but on social activities, on everything. Same thing with religion, we participated supporting the Catholic and the Evangelical church.”*

The divide between the Evangelical and Catholic church in Tactic was usually presented as a contentious aspect for community organizing; although many youth participated in church groups they rarely took on any other connotation beyond doctrine education and inner-faith community building. Since *Equilibrio* had people openly involved with their churches, they consciously decided to have a non-denominational approach and engage in each other's activities. For Ana, a practicing Catholic, it was important to show support to all members and avoid being separated by religious ascriptions. They purposely discussed how their activities should surpass personal preferences and affiliations (particularly ethnicity and religion) and benefit larger populations. This trait would remain in later definitions of youth organizations.

*Equilibrio* engaged in social activities like celebrating Mother's Day (May 1<sup>st</sup>) and Children's Day (October 1<sup>st</sup>) or supporting activities promoted by local organizations, like a race sponsored by a community radio. They also promoted charitable events, gathering food, clothes, toys and basic supplies for families they had previously identified as needing support. For Ajpu their celebration of Mother's Day was different from the type of celebration now led by the Municipality, which he called “closed and not free”, privileging those affiliated with the political party. *Equilibrio* held its celebration in the park, open to everyone, while in official celebrations the COCODES brought mothers to the gymnasium for a scripted and political event<sup>93</sup>.

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<sup>93</sup> In years previous to this research, I witnessed how the Municipality gifted yarns of the same color as the political party of the Mayor. The gift was made in May and the communities marched with the *huipiles* made from those yarns in the August parade.

All these initial activities did not require much funding. The biggest project for *Equilibrio*, in 2008, was an initiative to turn the organic waste from the market into organic fertilizers to later use it for harvesting non-traditional agriculture (vegetables). They drafted and pitched the idea to the Municipality and several NGO's without receiving a concrete answer. Ajpu considered this their first lesson in how local development politics works: they would receive vocal support, but it would not transform into material support.

"... we did what is a pilot plan [...], the municipality did not help us although we went to ask for support. We said, "why depend on the Muni or another institution if we can do it by our means ." We started to manage [gestionar], we made our project of organic fertilizer, mini project, we managed tables from a sawmill to make drawers. "

The idea of *gestionar* [managing] would become an important topic for these youth. Learning to strategize about who to ask for support and to access connections when official funding was denied became one of the work mechanisms of the group. They received training in compost techniques and growing vegetables, as well as the initial seeds for the harvest, from the Agricultural Ministry, a donation of red worms (*eisenia fetida*) from private farm owners, and technical support from the national university, CUNOR. During this process they also reached out to other young people from the town; José, who was in *Expresión* and was studying for his technical degree in agriculture, recalls having conversations with some of *Equilibrio's* members about the compost process. Once they had the organic fertilizer, they chose to grow the seeds given by the MAGA which included cabbage, broccoli, lettuce, beet, carrot, and jalapeño pepper. Ajpu remembers harvesting on a rainy day and struggling to find buyers because the power was out in town. They sold their produce to the vendors at the market.

They later received technical support from PROMUDEL with a Colombian expert who trained them in the administration of their harvest. Through PROMUDEL, they were contacted by the television show "*Entrémosle a Guate*" directed by Ana Carlos, Guatemalan filmmaker, and Harris Whitbeck Jr., Guatemalan CNN correspondent. The program focused on *Equilibrio* and their fertilizing project as an example of ecological youth initiatives in rural Guatemala. However, other than the broadcast not much more was done with the project. The initiative lasted two rounds of producing fertilizer and one round of harvesting vegetables, it was very time-consuming and they were involved in too many other activities to dedicate the needed time for agriculture. The experience showed them how difficult it was to sustain projects.

As initiatives became less systematic, group activity lessened and some of the members stopped participating. For Ana and Ajpu, *Equilibrio* was never formally over. Some had married and were working full time jobs, without time to engage in the group. Younger members like Memo (Poqomchi', 18 year old), whose cousin was one of the founding members, participated in some of the activities but never felt entirely welcomed; he was the youngest (about 10 years old) and his elders rarely assigned him any tasks, so he stopped attending the meetings. Other members were active in several groups at the same time; for Siin being part of *Equilibrio* was not everything, he attended workshops in other projects and decided to leave when the support base had diminished.

#### OVERCOMING DIFFERENCES AND JOINING EFFORTS

*Expresión* and *Equilibrio* peaked, in terms of activities, in different years but still managed to overlap around 2008. Andrés commented on how the groups merged and began implementing activities.

*“Few of us [Expresión] were left, but we didn’t falter and kept on going. Then Equilibrio appeared and so did other groups [...]. They saw there were a few of us and said, “Let’s do something together, we have more people” and so we organized another toy marathon with them. The integration was not easy, some people clashed, and more participants retired after poor experiences in coordinating efforts.*

Though most of the former members of *Expresión* and *Equilibrio* spoke fondly of all the initiatives they were able to pull off, a few recognized there were tensions between the two groups. Ana considered *Equilibrio* had been viewed suspiciously and competitively by some of *Expresión*'s members; indeed, some interviewees mentioned disliking that *Equilibrio* would mention how large their support base was or how many people they were able to mobilize. Though frictions were always present, they never turned into explicit conflict.

In spite of the early confrontations, José believed they were not rivals but rarely engaged with each other because they had different approaches and concerns. Interactions between individual members of both groups increased through the joint projects or initiatives, and even romantic relationships emerged. One of few founding girls of *Expresión* started dating one of the

founders of *Equilibrio* and later got married; some of the *antiguos*<sup>94</sup> saw this as an example of how differences between both groups were not significant.

The joint efforts were mainly focused on making youth visible in town, but still included some charity events. In 2008 they celebrated the International Youth Day with “*ExpoJoven*”, including a parade that highlighted the purpose of each group. Other youth, who were not necessarily “organized” like skateboarders, Teletón youth, and marimba dancers, also took part in the event. Andrés participated with a musical band and felt quite excited when people sang along with the cover songs they included. The new alliance also kept on collecting toys for Christmas donations, an activity inherited from *Expresión*’s agenda.

In addition to these public activities, both groups had many ideas on how to improve the youth experience in Tactic. One interviewee called this **the moment of the youth revolution in Tactic**: they presented several ideas to different entities, seeking the institutional support denied from the local government. For Ajpu it was all about making a stronger alliance that could catapult new programs and a strategic plan within the Municipality work plan.

*“they were Expresión and Equilibrio, doing the same things but we said, why make a double effort if we can be an alliance? [...] They summoned the members of Equilibrio and of Expression, just three, four, five compañeros arrived. The meeting took place at the preschool, in order to outline projects and give proposals. We worked on five projects or ideas: Eco-Tactic (which consisted of environmental matters for the municipality, for example, talking about the garbage dump); there was a social communication program, having a place where young people could express themselves, in alliance with the local cable; we then had the idea of the virtual library, so that the young people could come to investigate without paying a penny [...]; we had the macro-project of a Casa de la Cultura, that included all areas of art, dance, theater, music, and even sports; and the last one was citizen participation.”*

Among the members of both groups were people trained in writing project proposals and work plans, so these ideas were not ethereal discussions. The plan for the *Casa de la Cultura* was not focused on ethnic revitalization but centered on the possibility of having alternative sports

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<sup>94</sup> *Antiguos* or elders was the way youth referenced those who had been part of the “firsts” groups: *Expresión*, *Equilibrio* or *Eco-Tactic*. This name was given independently of age or current participation. For example, some of the *antiguos*, who began in the youth movements at 15 were considered *antiguos* 7 years later, when they were only 22 years old.

(skating, cycling) and artistic training (music, dancing, and painting) in a single space. One of the members of *Equilibrio* who was studying architecture drew the blueprints for the project design. Among the justifications for the project was a concern about drug trafficking and consumption and the limited options for recreation. Some referenced it as a recreational park that would allow for youth expressions beyond soccer and basketball, which had always been promoted by the Municipal Office of Culture and Sports. With time, this idea would become the Polideportivo project and remain as core project for the movement. They presented the project to the Alcalde of the time and, as Ajpu recalls, it did not go further than congratulations and a polite discourse on how relevant these ideas were:

*“As always, they congratulated us, exactly what we did not want! [We wanted] to be told "It's okay, we're going make it happen ". They filed our project without follow up. They were probably annoyed [by us]. From here the friction between the groups and the Muni began. [...] We were disappointed, to receive an answer they told us "Come the other week" and we arrived; "Come the next week", and then the Mayor was not here; so, we were worn out and frustrated”*

Not everyone coped well with the frustration and disappointment, and more people left the youth initiatives. It was around that time that new development projects came to Tactic and efforts headed another way.

#### TENSIONS WITH TRADITIONAL POLITICS

About the relationship with the authorities, Ana thought some of the politicians viewed them with distrust. Not everyone welcomed a group of youth that had an independent political view.

*“I do not know how some politicians took it, some of them looked at us with respect maybe, others a little bit like enemies. So that motivated us, to demand a little more, to show that things could be achieved. That project, that project of organic fertilizer, and we presented it to the Mayor. And the truth is, we are not going to deny, we were not welcomed but even so, he did not stop summoning us. He had [...] some advisors from the Mancomunidad Poqomchi' with a garbage project, so he was always getting us involved because that was supposedly our strength.”*

The relationship between these initial youth groups and the local government was not always an easy one. In *Equilibrio*, one of the founding members had her contract terminated in the Municipality after her involvement in the political debates promoted by the group. New conflicts arose as they presented new projects to the Municipality that were rarely received for consideration. Tensions were strong when these youth confronted adultocracy, and more so when they challenged the economic power. Another member of *Expresión* faced a direct life threat after publicly contradicting a man from the *Asociación de Ganaderos* when challenging the interests of livestock owners by questioning the relevance of investing public funds in a new market area for large scale commerce instead of improving recreational infrastructure for youth. The young man was shown a gun and was told to “learn his place” in meetings. While the young man was aware of the importance of economic infrastructure, as he said, the investment would be limited to those who already have plenty of resources; the recreational facilities, while not improving poverty, would at least be “democratic” with access to all the members of the community. In the end the Municipality favored the interests of the cattle owners.

The relationship between the Municipality and the youth groups was distant. As the new elections of 2011 grew closer, they organized a forum entitled “*Avances de mi pueblo*” to inform the citizenship about the achievements of the municipal government; they expected the attendance of the Mayor and a full report of the administration. In hindsight, they recalled this as being rebellious because it was an open challenge to the authorities. To promote the forum, they had called a television show and local media to transmit the event. In the end, the Mayor did not show up. A Municipal Council member, who had quarreled with the Mayor and thought about running for the post, attended the presentation and used the venue to openly critique the work done by the administration. This increased the distance between the youth groups and the Municipality.

For Ajpu there was something important about “pissing off” the authorities; according to him, the groups had nothing to lose from the confrontation. Fair play should never be expected from active citizens when they are committed to inform a larger community about the real politics. He saw a risk in youth standing on the sidelines, commenting without openly confronting the authorities.

*“We did not care because we did not have the support of him [the Mayor], we did not win nor did we lose with him. It was a good experience and it would be good to do it again. Yes, so that people are aware, react. We live now [...] only criticizing [...] but we do not do anything to activate ”.*

Instead, for Ana it was important to demonstrate that youth groups were capable of doing things but also to recognize that all youth activities were part of an intricate relationship with the local government and the funding agencies:

*“... youth activities and everything, it's all part of the political issue, they're always going to be tied up. NGOs, institutions, will come to the Muni, and the Muni with young people. So, we cannot fight, that's what I was telling you, we learned not to go openly to blows, to confront, but to be more strategic.”*

### ***On the outskirts of Equilibrio and Expression***

The narratives of youth groups –and the texts produced later– usually highlight the experience of *Equilibrio* and *Expresión* as the two collectives motivating youth participation in the political arena. But the individual pathways of currently active youth show that other spaces existed and provided equal opportunities; it is interesting to highlight that these had much more direction provided either by an adult or an NGO.

In 2007, Adán (Poqomchi', 24-year-old) and Kayum (Poqomchi', 22-year-old) were studying in *El Básico* when a teacher invited them to participate in a youth network for sexual health education. This became their first experience of youth organization, as none of them had participated before in the other groups. In Tactic, the project “*Multiplicadoras y Multiplicadores Juveniles*” of APROFAM has been implemented for several years mainly through connections between the organization, the public health center, and teachers from *El Básico*.

The *Asociación Pro-Bienestar de la Familia*, better known as APROFAM, is a nationwide private organization, established in 1964 with the aim to provide health services, particularly sexual health and family planning. The organization is funded through private (national and international) donations and patient contributions. Since its beginnings it was criticized severely through accusations of pushing family planning and sexual education, a claim made by indigenous and Catholic organizations, though no historical records have proven forced sterilizations (Hartmann 2018:132). The lack of sexual and reproductive education was among the main concerns behind their initiatives towards young people, following a model of “self-management” and peer education for the information transfer. The idea of peer education in health issues has been quite preeminent in development strategies across the globe (Turner and Shepherd 1999). This specific youth project aimed at youth between 10 and 24 years old, who were interested in topics of sexual and

reproductive health and could lead their peers into addressing these subjects. The institution projected that young people could become multiplying agents of change, highlighting the idea of self-management, co-management, and transformation that youth could achieve in their communities. While the project only took care of the basic education for the main promoters, it was expected that all the information would trickle down from the *agents* to their peers and communities.

For Adán and Kayum this was an opportunity to socialize within their towns, but also to receive multiple workshops on reproductive health. These workshops allowed them to travel outside the department and get to know “*multiplicadores*” from all over the country. However, for neither of them was this the only youth group with which they got involved.

A few years later, the group “*Conocimiento es Poder*” (CEP) emerged, with Kayum among its main active members. The initiative was a product of the interactions between Katherine, a Peace Worker who had arrived in Tactic by 2009, and Alejandro, a young indigenous man and self-trained film maker. In 2010 both of them were interested in filming educational short videos that could be transmitted over local cable. The show addressed general social issues for which people might need information: how to open a bank account, how to obtain a personal identification document (DPI), etc. Concerned with making this effort a sustainable project, they decided to cast a group of young people interested in doing the show. Alejandro knew three teenagers, among whom was Kayum, who had produced two tv shows for the same local cable and were calling themselves JEDEJOVEN. Kayum and his friends, all males and studying together in middle school, had access to an old video camera and filmed short shows on leadership and sexual and reproductive health, based on the information Kayum was receiving in the workshops at APROFAM. So when they heard about this new initiative, they decided to join and no longer used the other name to reference themselves. The new setup of CEP included ten young males and females who received training in filming and the use of audiovisual equipment, and a time slot on local cable. Between 2010 and 2012, CEP was active and produced several programs. The members of the group shifted, and only three of the original youth remained active; new people joined from other youth groups, many of whom were active members of *Equilibrio*.

Between 2009 and 2010 Adán, who was by that time studying high school, found partial employment with *Alianza de Comunidades Forestales* (ACF). This was a network established by Julio Asig, a local politician who had worked in agroforestry and founded the political party *Comité Cívico PUNNET*. Adán got involved with Asig, moved by his leadership in advising hamlets with



communal land and protecting them as as forestry reserves. Many of the communities that worked closely with ACF were not in control of the springs that provided fresh water to their dwellings and had to negotiate using rights with big landowners (who were usually Ladinos and residents of the main town). Adán worked here, alongside other young men from Tactic, and befriended Manú (Ladino, 26-year-old) while visiting different communities to asses land tenure and help in the dissemination of information to the communities. Both Manú and Adán became highly motivated by the struggle faced by the communities and found a passion for development projects that included any form of fieldwork. When ACF could not provide them with resources to do the community visits, they organized themselves and kept on going despite the financial setback.

It was in 2010 that different Youth Projects arrived in town, and invited the different organizations known to gather youth. José, Andrés, Ana, Siin, Ajpu, Kayum, Adán and Manú were delegated by the different organizations to participate in workshops and meetings that would soon result in the transformation of the youth field in Tactic.

### ***Youth Projects as a Sieve***

Between 2010 and 2014, different development projects came to Tactic boosting the synergy between the different youth groups while also serving as a sieve for restructuring the plurality of collectives into more “institutionalized” varieties. The arrival of these projects would dramatically change the Youth landscape with governmental figures that provided a standardized channel for youth voices. In the following section I will briefly describe the general purpose of these projects and their initiatives.

#### **ADP**

The *Asociación de Amigos del Desarrollo y la Paz* – ADP- was founded as an NGO in 1994 in the city of Cobán, Alta Verapaz by a group of friends who had participated in radio education programs like “Rajlal Kutan” on the Catholic radio station “Estéreo Gerardi” and the television show “Aprendiendo con la Verdad” (Chomo Ac 2013). The association implemented several projects through the support of international cooperation, as can be reviewed on their webpage.

Between 2010 and 2012, this NGO implemented a project titled “Proyecto Participación Democrática en Alta Verapaz”(Veclix Medios Digitales 2012) with interventions for strengthening the participation of “invisibilized” populations, like youth and women. The main strategy was an educational component aimed at youth. They launched a technical degree entitled “Local managers

of democracy and development” that lasted 10 months and was composed of three cohorts. The project also focused on creating youth assemblies that could become the social base for the election of youth representatives in the COMUDE. For about a year a promoter of ADP traveled into Tactic once a month to follow the work of the youth delegates and promote meetings with leaders and general assemblies.

ADP also implemented a program to train indigenous youth from rural areas to become “agents of change” (*agentes de cambio*) through a one-year scholarship for development promoters who could replicate citizenship workshops and youth committees in their own communities. The only requirement for the youth was to have completed middle school so, after the first cohort obtained a degree as development promoters, they were given the opportunity to obtain a high school degree through a “*Bachillerato por madurez*”. Nikte’, Ab’ixoom and César participated in this educational project, at different moments of its implementation. They were the main champions of youth committees in Tactic’s hamlets and had a relevant role in the creation of the *Red Juvenil*.

#### PROPAZ/PLJ

In 2010 the combined initiative of *Fundación Propaz* (a Guatemalan organization focused on postwar peace efforts) and the *Programa Liderazgo Juvenil* of Universidad Rafael Landívar (a private university), promoted a certification program on Citizenship and Political Participation on the local level. The call to participate in the process was open to all youth groups and individuals, though some youth organizations like that previously mentioned were specifically invited. Among the “*antiguos*” who took part in this training were José, Andrés and Moy from *Expresión*; Ajpu, Ana, and Siin from *Equilibrio*; Nikte’, César, and Ab’ixom from ADP. The initial program took place between January 30th and July 17th of 2011, with sessions taking place every other Sunday in a local hotel (*Agenda Municipal de Jóvenes 2011:2*). To my knowledge, the program continued until the end of 2011 and was followed by a second version in 2012. The training process allowed for an exchange of experiences with other youth who were receiving the same training in other parts of the country. A second year of the program allowed for new youth to get involved and through this constant interaction new relations were developed. Besides providing knowledge on political issues, PROPAZ also aimed at creating a political agenda that prioritized youth views on local needs, which would be presented to the candidates for Mayor in the general election of 2011.

#### USAID “VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAM (2010-2014)”

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), through different NGO's and implementing partners, has focused on “promoting youth leadership” as one of their main interests in the country. The specific “Proyecto USAID Prevención de la Violencia” promoted several localized, youth-related interventions across the country (RTI International and USAID 2015). The USAID umbrella project was implemented by RTI International, who invested a total of \$13 million to fund activities through different grants; Alta Verapaz was assigned over \$2 million over the duration of 4.5 years (Ibid., 45). The work in Tactic was developed through different implementing partners including NGOs and the Municipality of Tactic. Among the first of these were the *Asociación en Función para la Educación y el Desarrollo Social y Rural* (FEDCOR), who launched the project “*Jóvenes creando alternativas*”, focused on promoting recreational activities and implementing workshops about gender equity and violence prevention; and the *Red Nacional de Grupos Gestores* (Gestores) with a project called “*Jóvenes por el desarrollo local contra la violencia*” which aimed at the creation of economic opportunities as a means to prevent violence and promote development. Both projects were popular among the interviewees, FEDCOR was regarded fondly by the organized youth for its lively workshops, while *Gestores* was thought of as a disappointment for bringing hopes for economic ventures without proper financial support. The projects were present in Tactic for several years, though not always active; Manú and Adán, who became quite close with the facilitators of the project, would even be given the keys to the project's house. This was a two bedroom house with a nice garden, known to many as USAID, and was the meeting point for youth organizations for almost two years. When the initial projects were finalized, a second project was implemented by the Municipality and it focused on creating violence-prevention committees at prioritized town areas and hamlets as well as promoting an entrepreneurial school. This time the development brokers were young people previously involved in the ADP and PROPAZ interventions and who were hired directly by the Municipality using USAID funding.

#### MULTIPLICADORES DEL DESARROLLO HUMANO – PNUD

The United Nations Development Program, through the Project for the Human Development National Reports (HDNR), articulated a network of local leaders who could work in their environment to promote the human development scope and the use of reports to inform development practices at a municipal level. The network was first established in 2002 with the

preparation of a “mediated” version of the national report. Between 2006-2008 I was the coordinator of the *multiplicadores* network and, with the support of international cooperation, the HDNR project modified their strategy to incorporate youth within the network. However, it was a few years after I left the project that new efforts within the communication strategy aimed at reaching young people in different regions of the country more accurately. Between 2011 and 2012, the report was focused on the challenges due to inequality that youth faced in Guatemala, and the *Multiplicadores* strategy promoted different workshops with youth leadership, not only to compile information, but to socialize the results. Several of the young people, including Siin, Ajpu, Ana, and Elizabeth took part in the different activities.

As can be seen in this brief description, several organized youth got involved in different ways with the Youth projects that arrived in Tactic. The participation of a single individual in many organizations was not new; as was mentioned in the history chapter, local leaders at hamlet levels were known to partake in several associations at the same time. The accumulation of knowledge, however, worked in fueling these young men and women’s interest in having a stronger presence within the Municipality structure. In the following section we will see how the different platforms merged and the way in which these young people managed to create a new field for their political representation in local politics

### **The structuring of youth representation**

In 2012, when I first met Elizabeth and the rest of the organized youth, there were several links between youth groups and the local government. At that moment, they were gathered as a network and held permanent representation in the Municipality, with the Municipal Youth Office –OMJ- and representation (with two delegates) at the Municipal Development Council – COMUDE. This structure had just recently been created and it was in constant transformation; young people strategized about how to best achieve the goals set up across the different expressions of youth organization.

#### ***The first attempt: Consejo de la Juventud***

In 2008 the efforts to create a representation of youth at a Municipal level took the form of the *Consejo de la Juventud*, a structure promoted and created by the Municipality during the government of Mayor Hugo Caal. The initiative was focused on high school students but emulated

a similar process named *Alcalde por un día*, an honorary title given each year to a distinguished student from the elementary schools of Tactic. The *Consejo de la Juventud* would replicate the Municipal Council, assigning the different posts to students from the local high schools which, at the time, were only private schools. Since this form of representation was channeled through the school's directors, it was adults who nominated the high school students with the best scores for each of the posts. Despite being a representation of youth, the model invisibilized all the non-student youth of Tactic.

Felipe (Ladino, 22 years old), a member of *Expresión*, was part of the *Consejo* and even became the *Alcalde*; despite feeling proud of the accomplishment, he recalled it as nothing more than a political token:

*"We were the best students out of all the establishments. The one with the highest score would be the Mayor and I did not know that, so it turned out I would be the Mayor. We had five councilors, two trustees and the whole roll of a municipal council. We were just a token sadly ... it was one of the greatest experiences I've had in my life, I swear I was beyond myself. I was the Mayor for a year... it was great. But we were just a token, a symbol that young people were involved in the municipality, but just that. We didn't even get into any fights; we didn't have the experience [for it]."*

This council was soon abandoned, and the organized youth ignored it when they spoke of the history of youth representation. Many of them judged this type of youth representation harshly, constantly questioning the purpose and achievements of these posts directly assigned by the local government. In any case, the Council also became irrelevant as youth groups and projects were summoned to the first youth assembly in Tactic and the "legitimate" structure of youth representation was consolidated.

### ***Building up legitimate youth representation***

As has been mentioned before, ADP began its work in the Municipality in 2010, focusing on the organization of youth representation before the *Consejos de Desarrollo*. At first their local promoters, like Elizabeth, went to the different hamlets and met with the Presidents of each COCODE in order to ensure local participation. They were also met with youth groups which included, in addition to *Expresión*, *Equilibrio*, *Movimiento Verde*, *CEP*, and *Alianza de Comunidades Forestales*, religious groups from Catholic and Evangelical churches; most of these

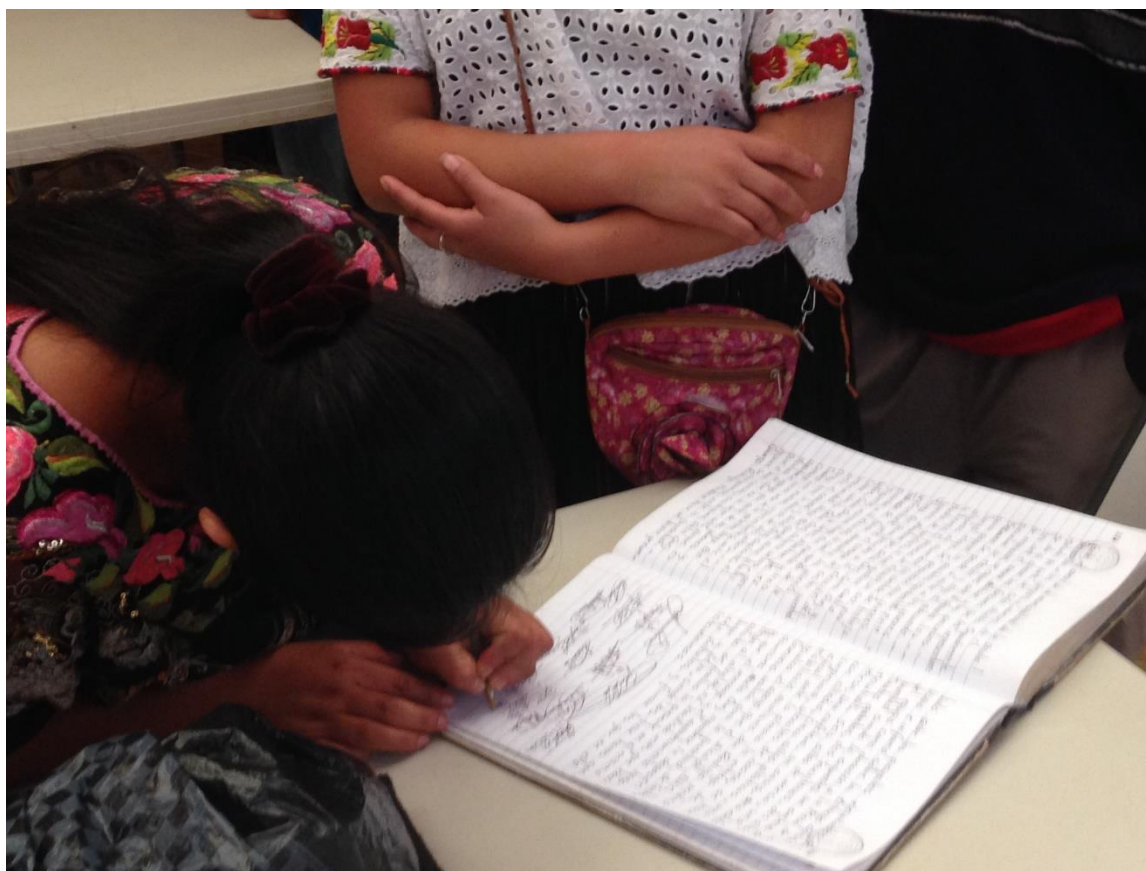
groups were composed of urban youth, who had already been active for a while on the local stage. A series of meetings eventually took place with the purpose of organizing these different youth organizations and molding their participation into an appropriate democratic structure: an assembly with representatives. The question of who was the first to summon all these youth was a contentious one. The young interviewees recalled that the assembly was facilitated by NGOs but strongly declare that it was led by Tactic youth. While it cannot be denied that this was a targeted intervention, the youth's claim is also true: the local promoters of ADP were young people from the town and soon they would identify mainly as organized youth rather than NGO promoters.

*“Then two, three individuals [pelones] decide to start with a municipal assembly of young people, where the 54 communities were represented. The youth represented the 54 communities of the municipality, and at urban level Expresión, Equilibrio, Eco-Tactic, religious groups and all the organizations that were beginning to form in Tactic.” José, Expresión.*

The *Youth Network*, or *Red Juvenil*, was the result of these assemblies, the first niche that summoned youth from all corners of the municipality. Elizabeth, one of the local promoters, thought the first encounters were the most exciting get-togethers. The participation of the *antiguos*, mainly members of *Expresión* and *Equilibrio*, was significant in terms of providing content for these meetings; they came to these new interactions with the ideas, projects and plans previously presented to the Municipality. Meanwhile, the representatives from the hamlets were young people selected by the presidents of the COCODES to attend the meetings, and during the first assemblies they were encouraged to establish Youth Commissions within their hamlets. Since the latter had less experience in these matters, the *antiguos* became a reference for the newcomers and also provided the Youth Network with a history independent of the intervention of NGOs: they could trace their roots back to the first activities of *Expresión* and *Equilibrio*, strategically reducing the relevance of external presence in their history.

Among the first activities of these assemblies, and parallel to the organization of the Network, was the election of Youth representatives before the COMUDE. Two people were elected through the general assembly that would represent sectorial interests before the Municipality Development Commission. These posts had a duration of two years and the election followed the same mechanisms as the general elections of COCODES in the Municipality. That is, the attendants of a general assembly would nominate members to the posts and later all attendants would vote to

elect a candidate from the selected pool. The vote was not secret and could take different forms: a raising hands, standing up, or the presentation of a “ballot” (a square piece of paper, usually numbered) to the hands of the candidate. I was able to attend an election of youth representatives in 2014 that followed this last voting mechanism: nomination, vote through a numbered ballot, counting of ballots, selection of the first and second nominees with highest numbers of votes, an official record of the voting in the minute book signed by an official member of the Municipality and all attendees. These would become the legitimate youth representatives in administrative functions related to the *Consejos de Desarrollo* and the main proponents of projects before this official entity.



**Figure 11: Signing the official minute book**

Source: Tatiana Paz Lemus, 2014

According to remembered history, three sets of pairs had been selected for youth representation before the COMUDE. Usually the person with in the first position became the main representative and the second was an alternate delegate. Both could attend any official meeting of

the COMUDE, though only one vote was given to “youth” as sectorial component of the Council. These meetings were usually held on weekdays in the morning, so it was imperative (though not always considered) that the representatives be free or have some flexibility to attend. The first two representatives were females, with Elizabeth as the alternate; the second time Elizabeth was again the alternate. For the third election, Elizabeth declined the nomination because her studies would prevent her from attending the meetings.

The first and, so far, greatest accomplishment of the youth representatives was the approval of the *Oficina Municipal de la Juventud (OMJ)*. The OMJ is currently the institutional niche for youth within the local government; it has an office space within the municipal building and a basic operational budget. The project for the OMJ was presented by the Youth Network and Youth Representatives before the COMUDE, with the support of the NGOs that were working in town. A few adult-allies, who were family relations to the Youth Representatives (and who were involved at the time with the COMUDE), were also key figures in the negotiations. In 2011, when the OMJ was approved, the Mayor wanted to elect an officer for the post among the most “proactive” youth; several of them declined and eventually the issue was raised in one of the assemblies of the Youth Network. The first person to occupy this office was elected in the assembly, mainly because of his merits as an active youth and his willingness to engage in the task and not particularly because of any professional capacities. He was a 22-year-old Poqomchi’ man who had been part of different youth groups but was not an *antiguo* of *Expresión* or *Equilibrio*; he had participated in workshops promoted by ADP, PROPAZ and USAID. His previous work had familiarized him with the hamlet youth, but he was not as popular with the *antiguos*. Starting with this first nomination for the post, it was considered that the only ones with power to select the officer in charge of the OMJ were the young people connected through the Youth Network, although this has been left to some interpretation, as we will see later.

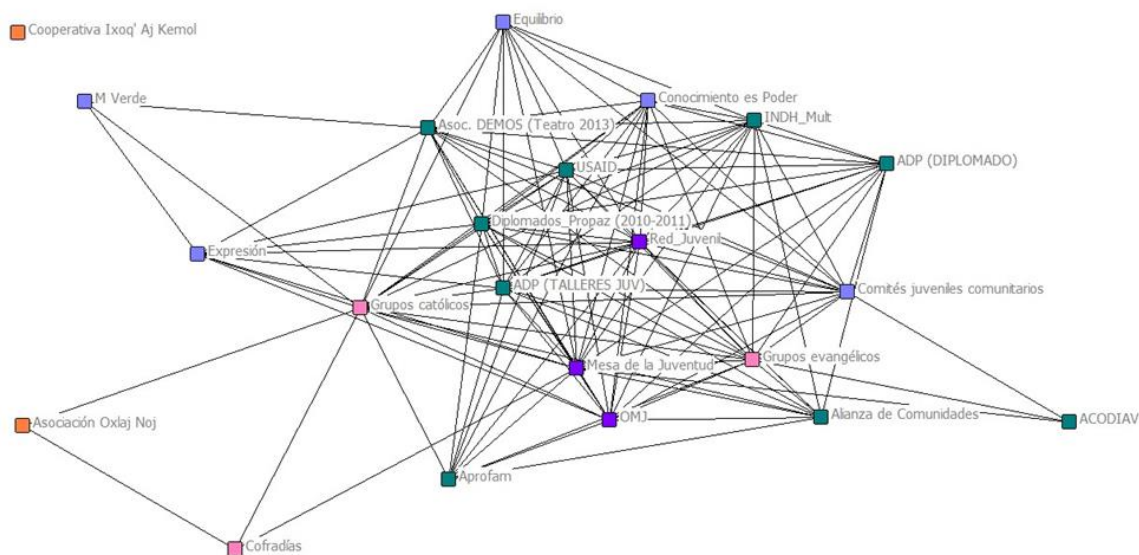
The OMJ did not have, and still does not have, a large budget. The resources given by the Municipality cover the officer’s salary, the office space, utilities, and basic expenditures like printer cartridges or paper. In the beginning the OMJ consisted of a single desk, two chairs, a desktop, a printer, and a file cabinet, all of which had been donated by a project to the Municipality. It has never had a place of its own, sharing “office” space: first with the Municipal Office for Women (*Oficina Municipal de la Mujer*) and later with the Municipal Office for Childhood and Adolescence (*Oficina Municipal de la Niñez y Adolescencia*). This lack of resources resulted in a high dependency



of the OMJ on volunteers and external funding. The volunteers were youth who were initially members of the Network and later decided to create a new platform.

*La Mesa de la Juventud* (La Mesa) was the result of the synergies between the Network, the OMJ and several youth workshops focused on citizenship. The way the story is told is that La Mesa emerged from the exercise of writing the youth agenda of 2011 and the discussions held between the youth participants in the citizenship educational programs directed by PLJ-Propaz in 2012. Because the discussions were focused on political participation and local government, the youth were concerned about how the NGOs and the Municipality could potentially take over the Network and the OMJ. They decided to create a platform that would become an advisory entity to both, but remain external.

It is indispensable to understand that all the original members of La Mesa took part in the Network, and several were *antiguos* from the youth groups. In figure 12, through an analysis of the groups to which my interviewees belong, we can see the links between the different organizations. The OMJ<sup>95</sup>, La Mesa and Red Juvenil are in purple, concentrating most of the links with youth-based organizations (in light blue), development projects (in green), and religious groups (in pink). As such, the members of La Mesa, who varied constantly, had been part or were still part of other forms of affiliation within and outside of Tactic.



**Figure 12: Network of Youth Groups in Tactic**  
Source: Elaborated with compiled ethnographic data.

<sup>95</sup> For this exercise, I mapped OMJ as anyone who was participating actively as a volunteer in the office.

Their name came from a phrase “*There is a chair for you and a table for everyone*”<sup>96</sup> that claimed to capture the idea that every youth organization had their own voice and agenda but they would join efforts to make their concerns heard. At least two different stories were told about who coined the catchphrase, but most agree that it was inspired by the way they would all sit at a long table at the citizenship workshops and work through the exercises together, without reference to their base-groups.

At the highest peak of youth activity, between 2013-2014, they did not know how many people were active; some estimated 30 to 40 people, most of them between 15 and 27 years of age. Many of them were students (high-school or university) but several of them were *NINI*. Most of them were educated, working, urban, indigenous, single males; female participation was active but less numerous, few of them were able to have a permanent presence like Elizabeth and Nicté. Most members were single and childless and, though it was not an explicit rule, almost all those who married, particularly the females, left the organization because “*they have other priorities*”. Having no *compromisos*, be it spouse or children, was one of the main shared characteristics of the group; others were having a part-time job or none at all and being enrolled in weekend studies or no longer studying. Any change in these circumstances affected attendance and involvement in the activities as we will discuss further on.

After inquiring, it became clear that there were few explicit rules of La Mesa as an accompanying platform, but two tenets were remembered constantly: they were political but not partisan and it was a secular space, but all members could express their faith. These two elements were important rules to have because of the diversity of youth that were already part of the group. Having these few rules allowed them to be adaptable while protecting them from two compromising entities: political parties and churches.

For a while La Mesa did not have an internal structure; leadership would move between a selective group of members, which allowed flexibility when the usual members were not able to attend a meeting or a workshop, playing to each individual’s strengths. However, this also created issues regarding who could be recognized as a spokesperson in negotiations or governmental activities. It was only in 2014 that a General Secretary was created in order to provide some structure and representation. The idea was presented in a meeting and the post was assigned to an

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<sup>96</sup> In Spanish, “*Hay una silla para vos y una mesa para todos y todas*”.

active member with hopes of alternating the post after a year. In 2015 the structure was again reviewed, and two other posts were created as Adjunct Secretaries. In practice, the General Secretary was supported by any member who had time to devote to the organization and mobilization of youth according to each event. For the period of this fieldwork, only one member held the post of Secretary while the elected adjuncts were not particularly active as such. La Mesa never transitioned to an NGO structure, though some of the members were interested in doing so at different times. Funding and projects could be easily accessed if they became a legal entity (*personería jurídica*) and, as such, could create job opportunities for youth. Discussions regarding this matter were heated among the membership, but usually discarded after remembering the financial problems that had broken other youth organizations with NGO status in Alta Verapaz; distrust regarding having a single legal representation was also a constant issue. As such, La Mesa remained a legitimate and recognized youth platform without transitioning into a formal (structured or legally registered) organization.

The main interventions of La Mesa were oriented towards strengthening the OMJ and the Youth Network as support of their many activities for Tactic youth: organizing youth committees, 10k runs, and youth rallies. Additionally, it promoted some events of its own like a “*Escuela de Vacaciones*” during the end of year school break and a Citizenship Workshop. However it was difficult to differentiate between these three entities in terms of the activities and events they promoted as they were usually working hand in hand. Although from an institutional perspective this could be seen as a weak arrangement, in practice it allowed them to use each figure strategically, shielding them from external interests.

The recognition of a history behind the Youth structure is one that still played a substantive role in the way many of the current and former youth organizers narrated their achievements. By highlighting the role of the initial youth organizations, like *Expresión* and *Equilibrio*, the youth detached their accomplishments from the NGOs that approached the town and positioned themselves as leading actors in the creation of their own field of political participation. Despite being inactive, former youth organizers saw themselves in the now established forms of youth organizing, even if they never were actors within the new initiatives. For a former member of *Expresión*, the current state of affairs was bittersweet.

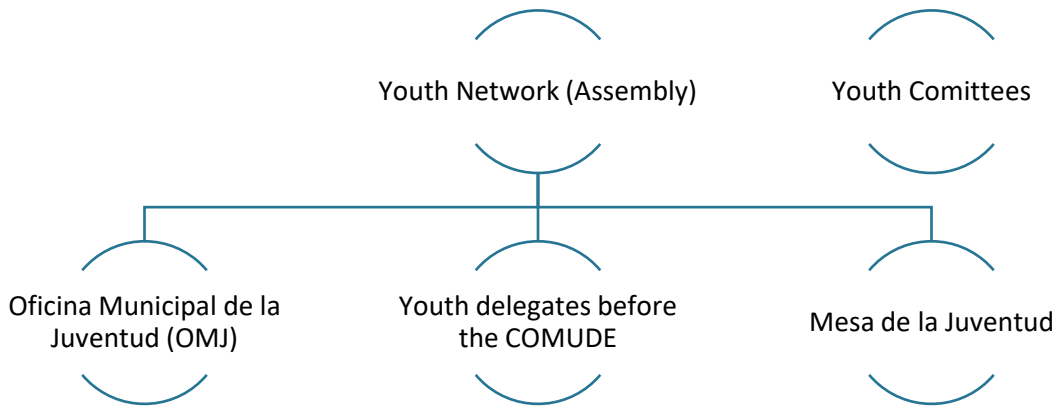
*“We always wanted that, what is happening now, which is always good. We talk among ourselves and say: those ideas we had about having a group or someone who represented us in the Muni, in any way possible, is now there. We didn’t accomplish it ourselves but at least*

*we took the first steps and others made it happened; and now there it is and that is good. That's what we talk with the other [former members]”.*

Meanwhile, those who transitioned from the mythical origins to *La Mesa* recognize all the hard work and the many transformations of those ideas. The creation of this “legitimate” youth structure, however, was not a set-in-stone matter; it required the constant work of reproducing the pattern of recruiting youth to the new entities of representation.

**Reproducing the field of Youth and structuring the revolution**

As a result of all the workshops, assemblies, camps, and instructional efforts during that synergic period between 2010 and 2012, at least four niches for youth representation were recognized as part of the local government. The OMJ, the Network and *La Mesa* were working together following what had been outlined as a Youth agenda but were worried about the mechanisms for evaluating their actions. Another concern was the organization of rural youth because the legitimacy of the structure resided in having a wide social base. In order to provide content to the structure, and to sustain it, the creation of Youth Agendas and Youth Committees became a central issue. I will briefly discuss these two topics as a deliberate action from organized youth to reproduce the field of Youth in Tactic.



**Figure 13: Components of the field of Youth**

### **Youth political agendas**

The transition from the original youth groups to the establishment of the youth structure was driven largely by the configuration of a sectorial agenda. According to the accounts of the *antiguos*, the first organization to produce a list of prioritized needs for Tactic youth was *Expresión* in 2004. Then, in November 2008, a coalition between *Expresión*, *Equilibrio* and *Movimiento Verde* presented a formal “Management Plan” [*Plan de Gestión*] to the municipal authorities.

The same demands were presented to at least two municipal administrations, which included an office within the municipality dedicated to youth issues, a “Casa de la Cultura” focused on youth’s needs and better and safer recreational environments, and a master ecological plan including reforestation and better procedures for waste treatment. According to some of the accounts of these exchanges, the municipal officers were not keen on addressing these demands. In a brief history of youth movements, they recorded the resulting frustration:

“An almost common and biased phenomenon occurs at the social level in most of the municipalities in the area. The municipal administrations 2004-2008 and 2008-2012 subtly rejected these proposals (Municipal Youth Secretariat, Management Plan, ECOTREN), justified in the lack of municipal resources to support these youth initiatives that benefited not only this sector but society as a whole, since they dealt with issues such as health, education, among others. For this reason and for several that are still unknown, the disillusioned groups backed away from their participation with the local government.”  
(Agenda Municipal de Jóvenes 2011:2)

I was not able to access any of these initial plans nor were the youth conforming La Mesa in possession of them at the time of my research, however the *antiguos* knew about them and constantly talked about them during the further attempts to make a strategic workplan for Youth.

In 2011, under the “*Programa Liderazgo Juvenil*” of Propaz-URL, a new youth agenda entitled “*Agenda Municipal de Jóvenes*” was created by the youth that attended the certification program in Citizenship and Political Participation. The authorship of this document was assigned to a “Multisectorial Youth Group for the Democratic Consolidation of Tactic”, a name that was never used by the youth when referencing themselves.

Though the document states that it was during the workshops and *diplomado* that the document was produced, the roots of this agenda are placed in the certification program; the youth that took part in its elaboration become blurred and unnamed:

“The elaboration process included the participation of young people from different sectors participated, representatives of Communities, Districts and Colonies that make up the municipality; for six months at an average of 104 hours, after intense modular sessions, a consolidation of the analyzes was achieved, of viable and feasible proposals...” (Agenda Municipal de Jóvenes, 2011: 2).

In the “Background” section credit is given to the grassroots groups, including a brief history and acknowledgement of their previous efforts to present “demands and needs” as well as a “prioritization of possible solutions to these problems” (Ibid., 5). When asked about the authorship of the Agenda, several of the participants just laughed and said it was something invented by the NGO but that it was almost the same thing as the Youth Network.

The document contains a brief discussion of ailments the Municipality faces without data; the main argument is that Tactic does not have the worst development indicators in the region and that might be the reason why many needs are overlooked. The discussion of problems, they say, were analyzed in terms of their roots and the “basic needs of Human Development aligned with the Millennium Development Goals” (Ibid., 10). This provided four problems, four alternative solutions and four action plans for each solution using a logical framework approach. The main concerns of the agenda are linked with the general spectrum of youth spaces mentioned in the previous chapter: education, recreation, culture and citizenship. An additional topic was health, mostly focused on girls’ reproductive and sexual health. In the following table I have outlined the problems and solutions contained in the agenda:

**Table 5: Problems and solutions in the Youth Agenda**

Problems	Solutions
1. Insufficient encouragement of citizen participation and youth advocacy	1. Promotion and construction of citizen participation and youth advocacy.
2. Deficiency in monitoring, evaluating, and auditing of education.	2. Implementation of a monitoring, evaluation, monitoring and auditing system in education.
3. Lack of adequate infrastructure for the recreational, artistic and professional development of young people	3. Investment in infrastructure adapted to the recreational, artistic and professional development of the young
4. Insufficient cooperation for the coverage of the public health service	4. Cooperation and assistance in the coverage of the public health service

Source: Agenda Municipal de Jóvenes, 2011: 10-11

The lack of concern regarding work opportunities, labor conditions or youth income stunned me the first time I read the Agenda; not only was it a constant concern among the youth and adults I had the chance to interview, it also was -at least through the lens of income and poverty- one of the key components of the Human Development approach and MDGs which were popular among public policy discourse. When I asked why the issue was not addressed in the Agenda, one of the *antiguos* and active member of La Mesa explained it was a very complex problem and the only solution within their reach as youth was “education”. The assumption was that by strengthening the educational outcomes, better employment opportunities would arise. This, as we saw in a previous chapter, was a powerful belief as many youth. Now this should not be read as a lack of ability to critically analyze the disparity of power, particularly of those that concentrate access to land, water and livestock, who are just a few Ladino and indigenous families from the main town. However, the youth were reluctant to publicly address other possible arrangements regarding access to resources, furthering redistribution or repossession. As mentioned before, one of the *antiguos* recalled being openly threatened by a member of the *Asociación de Ganaderos*; the aggressor was an elder of a prominent Ladino family with several ties to the military forces. Although the *antiguos* saw this confrontation with the cattle-owner as a source of pride, because as a result of the challenge the adults had shown their true cards, it was also a reminder of how violent Tactic’s society really was. For many of the seasoned youth organizers it was futile to challenge current resource distribution since violence was the common answer to these questions. Therefore, channeling efforts towards improving individual skills and opportunities seemed like a more efficient way to procure social mobility and well-being.

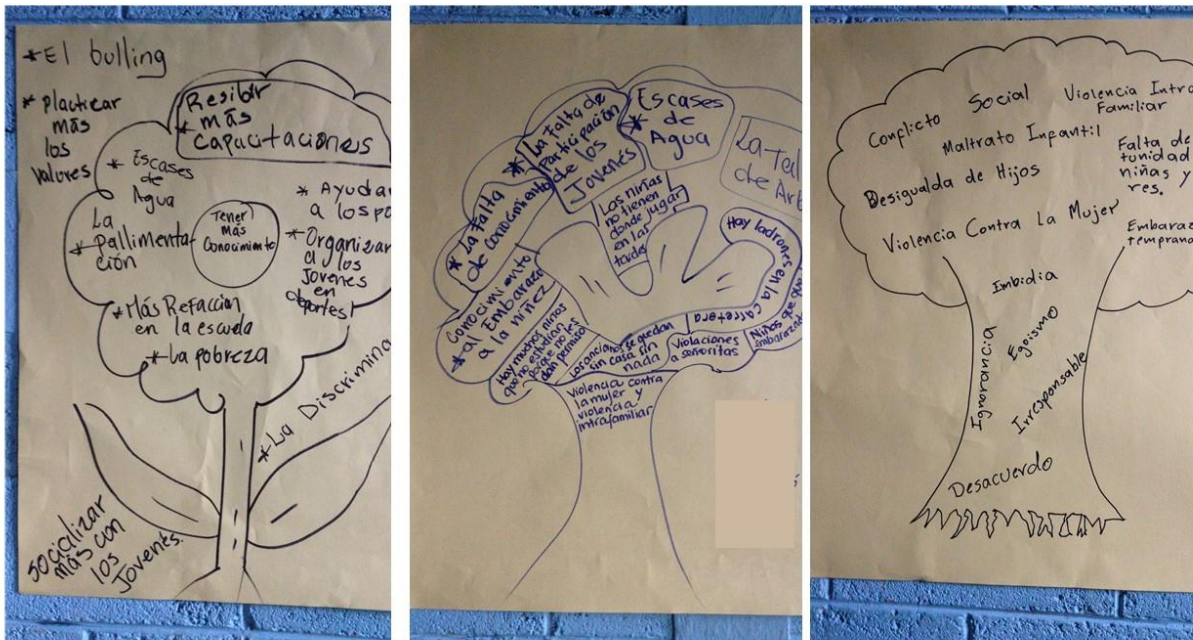
A question that arose after the first agenda was the level of influence that NGOs had on its content. Though informed by collective efforts, the procedures and final document were supervised by NGO “specialists”. Some of the members of *La Mesa* questioned whether the issues raised in the Political Agenda were in the interests of Tactic’s youth. Many of them thought it necessary to get new information regarding their peers’ needs, especially since some argued there was a misrepresentation of rural youth in their ranks. Because they were aware of how the Municipality had silenced their critiques and that the NGOs would not necessarily contradict the authorities, they wanted to be cautious about not doing the same with other voices. Additionally, they wanted to refine the technique of their approach, so a during a meeting I was asked to provide them with training on how to establish a baseline in order to evaluate the Agenda; they wanted my input as an “anthropologist” that studied youth in Tactic. When I asked why they needed a baseline, their

answer referenced the importance of accountability in any project. Development practitioners had emphasized that good projects evaluated impact and outcomes sustained by a baseline and they wanted to go beyond activism, which in the workshops had been explained as acting without assessing outcomes or achievements. Despite my difference in opinion regarding this last issue, the *antiguos* stressed their interest in having a baseline. We debated for a while about who was responsible for implementing the Agenda, which I thought a first step towards creating any form of evaluation. While no baseline was implemented, they agreed that the OMJ was responsible for proposing workplans that answered to the Agenda and *La Mesa* was in charge of guiding and supporting the OMJ.

In 2015, four years after the first agenda, a new Citizenship Workshop was implemented by *La Mesa*. The main idea was to reach out to new rural youth and, without the participation of any NGO, the training would be led by some of the *antiguos* and implemented before the election process. I was requested to participate in the process, first designing the “history of Guatemala” module and then acting as an instructor along two other young men in one of farthest communities. Besides transferring some of the knowledge regarding democracy and citizen participation in light of the upcoming elections, the process would generate new youth agendas from the communities. As mentioned before, several members of *La Mesa* thought an update of youth needs was imperative.

During the elaboration of these youth community agendas, an analysis of priorities was carried out in each of the four hamlets selected by *La Mesa*. The process first had youth create a “problem tree”, though some preferred to do flowers, as can be seen in figure 14. The problems identified by these rural youth were concerns that went beyond the “scope of youth” but clearly affected their everyday lives. In a community the prioritization resulted in infrastructure issues (such as paving, lack of space for girls recreation), or poor living conditions (lack of employment, high rates of poverty, water scarcity with the nearest water springs on private lands), deforestation (which leads to drought in the wells), poor education and health services (proper classrooms for the *Telesecundaria*, lack of supplies and services in the health outpost, early pregnancy that limited girls’ education), and lack of citizen participation (poor knowledge regarding youth citizenship, lack of parental consent for youth to attend workshops, lack of a youth committee). When justifying the prioritization, several youth highlighted how these problems resulted in “disagreement” and “envy” which exacerbated community discord.





**Figure 14: Problem trees and flowers**  
 Source: Tatian Paz Lemus, 2015

These agendas, both the 2011 municipal and the 2015 community, were presented before the candidates for Mayor in the corresponding electoral processes. In the candidates' debates the organized youth demanded the commitment of any future leader towards the needs of youth. This practice of creating democratic dialogues and delivering political agendas that compile the interests of different social sectors and looking for the politicians' commitment to them during electoral processes has been a common activity in the public arena of Guatemala since the late 1990s (several processes followed the same path, such as *Visión Guatemala 1998-2000*, the *Pacto Fiscal*, the *Mesas Intersectoriales de Diálogo 2002-2004*, or the 2002 National Human Development Report, "*Una agenda para el Desarrollo Humano*"), but its effectiveness in terms of impact and change is still questionable. While the practice seems empowering by bringing the aspirations of those unheard voices into recognition (Appadurai 2004) and promoting social accountability, I found that the case of Tactic highlighted at least two risks. On one hand, it created expectancy without the certainty of fulfilment, which in turn could feed the ever-growing politics of disappointment, as will be discussed in the following chapter. On the other hand, even after entrusting the agendas to the State (Mayors), *La Mesa* as a collective had interiorized (as self-governance) the responsibility of ensuring compliance with the youth's demands. The neoliberal subjectivity operates

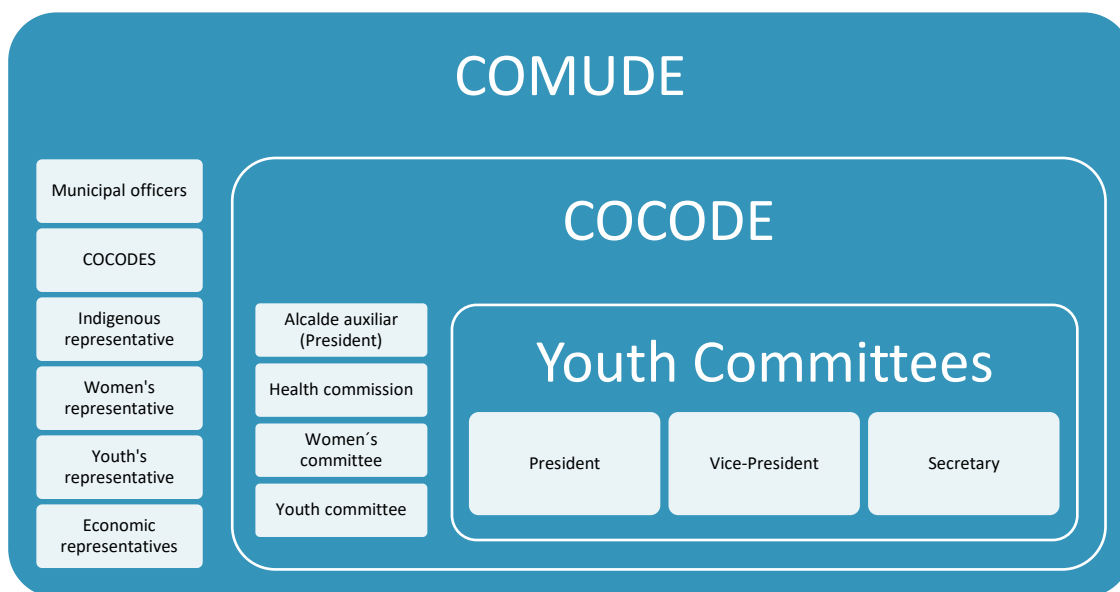
individualizing responsibility and, in this case, collective agency demanded active self-development even when these youth groups lacked the necessary resources (Harris 2004). In turn, this would feed into feelings of inadequacy, disappointment, and other political anxieties (Kennelly 2011; Greenberg 2014).

### ***Replicating the development structure.***

As mentioned before, both the OMJ and *La Mesa* were highly concerned with ensuring a larger youth base to support their efforts. Part of this was thought to be possible through the local *Youth Committee*. Before the existence of the OMJ, few communities had youth representatives within the COCODE; sometimes these youth took part solely as members of the community and did not hold posts as sectorial representatives. This changed with installation of the OMJ, as the Committees were implemented through the direct intervention of the officer in charge as a separate instance for youth representation at a community level.

In 2013 the OMJ officer's goal was to organize a youth committee in each of Tactic's hamlets (52 communities) so they could participate in the COCODES. The purpose of these committees was to consolidate all youth in the hamlet and participate in the assemblies to elect the *Youth Delegates before the COMUDE*, as well as to design projects to be presented either before the COCODES or directly to the municipality. It was expected that the President of the Youth Committee would take part in the COCODE, just like the President of the Women's Committee or the Health commission; this would allow them to gain experience in the community organization and advocate for the interests of young people in the hamlet.

There were similarities between the first efforts to create the Youth Network and the way that all these Committees were established. The OMJ officer, who was studying his first year of Law at the University, based his intervention plan on the model of ADP to promote official youth representation at a hamlet level. This included requesting the COCODE to summon youth for an informative meeting, usually a weekday during work hours, where he could explain the purpose of having a Committee and the need to have one in the hamlet. This was usually followed by a second meeting that would work as an assembly and where the Committee would be elected among the participants. Between 2012 and 2014, the OMJ officer had approached about 15 hamlets and constituted 14 committees, with the proper registration in the minutes of the OMJ (*libro de actas*). All these committees were recognized by the municipality, giving them the faculty to present projects on behalf of the community.



**Figure 15: Expected articulation between COMUDE, COCODE and Youth committees**

I visited several of these committees along with a group of anthropology students from Universidad Del Valle as part of a collaboration between UVG and La Mesa; the purpose was to approach each of the installed committees and learn about what they had done so far. One of the main results was that almost none of them had appropriated their role or elaborated any projects, most of them were inactive or their members did not even remember they were part of it.

**Table 6: Communities and Youth Committees in Tactic**

Community	Youth Committee	Has a member in La Mesa
Cuyquel	Active	Yes
Tzalam	Inactive	
Chamahoj	Inactive	
Pansinic	Inactive	
Pasmolón	Active	Yes
Chiacal	Active	
San José Chi-Ixim	Active	
Colonia San Juan	Inactive	
Guaxpac	Inactive	
Platero 1 y 2	Active	
Chiji	Inactive	
Chiallí	Inactive	
Nuevo San Julián	Active	
Saamelb 1 y 2	Inactive	

Source: visits, interviews and *libro de actas*

The OMJ officer had only visited them twice: first, to gather them and then to facilitate an assembly and establish the committee. Little to no instruction was given about the laws that help constitute youth committees nor the strategies of organizing their own peers in their communities. According to the OMJ officer, these youth had acquired the responsibilities and knew how to invite and mobilize their own community; if they did not know how to do this, it was their responsibility to acquire the skills by themselves. *Gestionar* was the task of these committees and it should be achieved without much instruction. While the OMJ officer mentioned that the model followed the NGO strategies that had been successful in creating the Youth Network, he failed to see some of the problems it presented: a local facilitator (rarely an expert) appears briefly in the community, organizes and establishes a work structure with just two sessions with young people who are not entirely aware of the responsibilities this represents, then transfers all the accountability of the success to the people, assuming they will appropriate and work from the given platform.

The members of these committees would usually explain that they had no clear ideas about what they were supposed to be doing. Among the main arguments for the lack of activities at hamlet level was that the elected representatives did not know how to mobilize youth, that they were not believed in their community to be representatives - “*no nos creen*” one said- and thus were unable to get others involved, and they were dependent upon adults summoning youth for the meetings, particularly the President of the COCODE, who in all cases was a male adult. The scenario became more complicated if the elected members had substantial changes in their *compromisos*; the attempts to find them for an interview showed several were working outside Tactic, and others had recently become parents and were no longer able to participate.

The few committees that were doing activities (like rallies or celebrations – Mothers’ Day, Children’s Day, etc.) had a member of the Mesa as an advisor or a member, some had good relationships with the COCODES, mainly through kinship relations. Having a more direct relationship with these actors allowed access to both knowledge as resources (i.e., permits to use local space, formats to present projects or activity design, etc.) which was a key component of success. Eventually, this would result in an unexpected lesson: nothing could be achieved without *conectes*, a key premise of Guatemalan transactional politics (*política clientelar*).

## Conclusion

The Youth arena in the political sphere of Tactic was built through the deliberate actions of youth groups and development projects inscribed in a governmental logic for local participation that ensured national security. Despite being designed within the political sphere, the Youth agenda was anchored in three niches controlled by the organized youth in Tactic: the designation of the OMJ officer, the legitimacy for summoning the Youth Assembly, and the control over the election for the youth representative before the COMUDE. None of these three key aspects of their local power was sustained in any official documentation, but for the past four years the local government had acknowledged *La Mesa* as the authority that summoned youth representation in Tactic.

In general, the Youth Committees faced a lack of recognition, not only from the adults that constituted the COCODES, but also from their peers, particularly if the assemblies where elections had taken place had been poorly attended. This crisis of legitimacy was enhanced by the lack of knowledge regarding their rights and obligations as official committees, which was rarely discussed by the OMJ officer or the members of *La Mesa*. By the end of my field season, the general assessment of the Youth Committees was that of a failed project: frustration and disappointment was expressed both by OMJ, *La Mesa* and the Committees themselves.

It would be easy to paint a picture where youth get co-opted by the interests of political entities foreign to Tactic; this, however, would obscure and deprive these youth of any agency regarding what they support and what they don't. As they gained more experience in the political arena these youth also understood how to challenge local adults' opinions and decisions and how adults responded back by slowly denying access to political spaces. Deciding whether they should engage in an open confrontation with the municipality and the development projects in order to get their voice heard is a slippery slope; it would put an end to jobs, resources and an apparent power. So far what seems to be happening is that confrontation is tamed down and channeled through approved bureaucratic lanes: formal statements, letters, proposals, executive meetings, and annual work-plans. In general, *gestionar* through connections with external entities was a necessity. The young people in the Youth Network or the Youth Committees did not consider themselves in a position to procure all the changes by themselves, thus their political agendas were centered on issues where they felt able to contribute (thus the idea of managing, summoning, and talking with others).

At the beginning of my fieldwork I was concerned about the dependency on financial resources, as the original meeting space belonged to USAID and several projects funded the food for the meetings. With time, I learned this was part of *gestionar*: a deliberate strategy for acquiring resources from external instances working with youth issues. Several of the former and active members of *La Mesa* shared my concern but remained positive, thinking that they could always get things done with little money, just like they had done at the beginning. In fact, that was what they did for the Citizen Workshops of 2015, which were implemented entirely on volunteer hours and a box of supplies (paper, cardboards, markers, masking tape, and printer cartridges) from an NGO.

### ••• ELIZABETH AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF YOUTH

Elizabeth's journey as a youth representative and organizer was quite varied. In her memory, the first time she was in a role of representative was in Elementary School when she got elected as the president of the class and the Student Council. In school she had been selected to represent their peers in different venues: as a candidate for "Niña Independencia" (an amalgamate between a beauty title, an educational award, and an indigenous reign), as a candidate for "Mayor for a Day", and as a contestant in the Municipal Mathematical Olympics. A few years later, as a middle schooler, she was chosen to be "Señorita IGER", a recognition that again tasked her with representing the school in Tactic's parade. As mentioned before, this implied not telling her father about her studies, which resulted in a violent episode. Still, Elizabeth recalls this as an important event because she was not chosen as the "Indigenous Queen" of the school but as a representative of all of them. As "Niña Independencia" she had worn the Tactic ceremonial Maya outfit, while as "Señorita IGER" she attended the parade in a red spaghetti strap dress with a flowing skirt and silver high heels. That same year, Oxlaj Noj approached her to participate as a candidate for the title of "*Rixq'un Ajawal Chak'nal*". Both she and her cousin enrolled and began the training for the title. She had to perfect her ceremonial speech in Poqomchi', learn the proper behavior for each moment of the ceremony, and find the best ceremonial outfit -an ancestral attire preferably inherited within the family. She did not win, and the title went to a girl of a prominent family from the main town. Elizabeth decided not to run for more beauty events in the town, though she occasionally joined informal "contests" using all her knowledge of Poqomchi' etiquette. As a student, she had been part of the elementary school student council and, later, of the middle school council. While studying for her technical degree her classmates elected her as regional coordinator and later, in high school, as President for *Seminario*. This last position implied overseeing the work of students coming from all over Alta Verapaz and reading 44 reports before giving them to her class teacher. As a University student, she was the secretary of a committee that coordinated all students doing professional practice in neighboring municipalities.

Additionally, she became a representative of youth in the political sphere. First, as president of the Youth Committee in her hamlet, which did not last for long. After the youth assemblies were successful and a "Youth Network" was established, Elizabeth was given different charges within the organization, first as Secretary and later as Sub-Coordinator. Elizabeth was 18 years old when she attended the first general youth assembly at a municipal level. The meeting took place at the largest

public school in the main town and Elizabeth remembered feeling overwhelmed as she was not familiar with the other participants. The NGO delegates divided the young attendants into groups according to the eight micro-regions of the Municipio, the way public administration agglutinates hamlets within each municipality. After just a few exercises led by the adults, each group had to prioritize needs for the micro-region and designate a representative; Elizabeth was elected not only as a representative of her micro-region but, a few hours later, she also became part of the governing board (*junta directiva*) of the recently conformed Youth Network:

*“In total, we were twelve. In general, they elected us through a delegation process in a democratic way. I liked the modality, but the problem was that I did not really know what the governing board was for; I was left with that uncertainty. First, we had to give a little speech of what our perspective was, and I was left like this [with doubt]. I gave a little speech, and I was uncertain, and then the oath was taken, and I couldn’t believe it, I was taking an oath and giving my speech, not knowing if I did the right thing or not. The audience is looking at how you speak, and in the end, I could say “they coerced me”, and I was a little scared; there were other kids who were more competent than me...”*

Elizabeth’s shock at being chosen as representative in the assembly was a common experience in these “democratic” settings. After attending several community and youth assemblies, I found that rarely were those nominated or elected given enough information about what they were expected to do. Many times politeness and social pressure played a key component in accepting a position without further discussion or preparation. Elizabeth’s idea of coercing representation was not entirely an oxymoron. Still, she was excited to be acknowledged by her peers.

A few months later she was elected as a substitute youth delegate before the COMUDE. Although two other youth had been assigned the post of representatives, Elizabeth was left with many of the corresponding tasks. The first delegate had accepted a job as municipal employee, thus was unable to participate as a representative; the second delegate, a young female who was studying at a private high school in Cobán, was usually unavailable during weekdays. Elizabeth was also attending high school that year, but since her school plan was “*por madurez*” and only took place on weekends, she had more time to participate. Without having the official title, Elizabeth was the main representative for all youth. This implied attending the meetings for the COMUDE, *gestionar* support for their proposals, informing the youth-base about any progress, polishing her political



jargon in order to read the COMUDE minutes, and negotiating with the other members of the committee.

Elizabeth's recollection of youth representation focused mainly on the positions she had held within the youth organizations or the local government. Still, when asking her about the implications of being a leader in her hamlet and Tactic, her reaction was to assert that the only thing she had done so far was to remain unnoticed. I was surprised because several of the organized youth had mentioned her as their role model so I asked what she meant about being unnoticed.

*"I just don't like to lead [protagonizar]. I don't like to say, "I've done this, I've done that". They [other youth] say, "You're coordinating!" and I just answer, if you say so then it's okay (she shrugs in acceptance). [...] I love what I do, and I appropriate it, I want what we do to be well perceived. Give what I can, even the few cents that I have. The same in other spaces. I look at what surrounds me, the people who have the most difficulties and I focus on them. And because I identify with these people, it's like a personal challenge. I think if one wants more motivation [from others], one's perseverance has to stand out. And I started with the collective but there is also a personal benefit. It is to work with others, to know more, to have the experience!"*

To further understand her disinterest in being considered a leader, I asked her about her motivation for engaging all of those forms of organizations and representations, from school delegate to pageants and community organizer. Laughing, she explained that would require a complex diagram to comprise all the different reasons. Finally, she summarized:

*"I like it. Let's say it's my nature. So yes, always, I should be there because I have to be there; but it has to be in something that I like. For example, politicians call me and I say no, I would not compromise my ideals. I cannot say what motivates me, maybe is my nawal, my ideology as a person, because my ancestry has been that, my grandfather was a leader, my dad too."*

Elizabeth's grandfather and father participated in different committees at a hamlet level, focused on improving infrastructure or services for the community; her mother, in contrast, never participated in community organizing because "she had no time and had always been busy". Despite her family's history, she considered that inheriting the inclination was not enough to explain her own path:

*“Inheritance is just a part of it. You build it with time in the spaces you are able to have. It’s a very personal motivation, and I must do it because it’s a commitment. This is my training, as a social humanitarian, for social justice, for the human rights. That’s my vision.”*

Since it was a personal conviction, Elizabeth could cope with the lack of interest her family has had about her involvement in multiple groups and positions. Her father, despite having worked for the community on previous occasions, did not care for her role as a youth delegate or representative.

*“No. He does not even care about what I do, what I don’t do or what I undo. I just observed what he was doing, reflected on it, and moved on.”*

Elizabeth mentioned her *nawal* as a source of motivation for participating, coordinating and organizing. She learned about it in the training for “Rixq’un Ajawal Chaknal”, when she awoke to what it meant to be indigenous (she rarely uses the word Maya as self-identification). Because her *nawal* is strong in leadership skills, Elizabeth was certain that her life should be focused on fulfilling that task. Besides this sense of purpose, she felt responsible for the privileges and opportunities to study she had received, particularly the scholarships and training workshops she had pursued.

*“I did it with a purpose because they trained me for something; maybe not to give back what they gave me, though that was what they said. The truth is that I had the privilege of studying and having a scholarship [...] So, I have a purpose; and maybe I have not yet figured it out, but I will discover it on the road.”*

However, her studies and training had not come easily. As a critical thinker, Elizabeth severely evaluated what her decisions had implied for herself and her family. So she was reluctant to be considered an example or role model for others. The way she had lived her life had included many risks.

*“It bothers me that they take me as a role model because I know I have not done things right. And to be who I am, I have endured many circumstances. I did not respect my parents, the hamlet looked at me, well, as a very rebellious person. They saw me like a “street girl”, because I always share with young men and not so much with young ladies. And yes, it bothers me. Last week I went for a walk with a friend and she says: “I told my dad to give us the freedom and confidence you have with your parents” ... I mean, that bothers me because*

*she should not be like that, she needs to be authentic and not only wanting to follow my footsteps.”*

Though Elizabeth does not dwell on it, her path as a youth representative has been marked by suffering. When people only focus on the accomplishments she has achieved, they forget the costs she paid to get there. In a framework that privileges the notion of Youth as an energetic, healthy and productive concept, the young people of Tactic had to mediate their own life experience with these expectations of being, even more so when things didn't work out. Enacting this idealized Youth came with risks, particularly for young women who faced the violent repercussions of making decisions. Enacting youth without being authentic, as Elizabeth put it, might be harder to endure.

## CHAPTER V

### ENACTING YOUTH IN TACTIC

In the political field of Youth, organized young Tactiqueños and Tactiqueñas aimed to exercise their agency within the framework of actions allowed within the local government but also through the expected notions of youth citizenship. As seen in the previous chapters, despite facing many restrictions, young people were key actors in the production of the political instances that would grant them access to municipal resources and connections. In this chapter we will see the challenges faced when enacting Youth, that is the contradictions that arose as organized youth actions expected from acting upon the idealized notions of youth, citizen and political participation. I will highlight how the gendered experience of being young in Tactic clashed with the assumed discourses of a generic youth subject, and how this turned into limitations for an all-encompassing representation of Youth. Additionally, I will delve into different experiences of organizing and acting upon the political field within the local government, and the lessons learned that will in turn inform and frame the agency of organized youth.

#### **Gendered youth**

The experience of youth was indeed transactional: class, ethnicity and gender made a profound difference in how it was experienced. In contrast to the descriptions of youth as a period of effervescence and energy, female and queer youth faced many difficulties and challenges that were not part of the mainstream narrative of being young. This did not mean that young men were not also subjected to the inequality and violence that made young lives less than ideal. As an organized young woman explained, both boys and girls were faced with constricting options:

*“Many of my former [male] classmates, may they rest in peace, almost the majority have passed away. Many joined gangs, since elementary school or middle school. I had very good classmates, with so many initiatives, able to give a little more ... but they did not find that space [to belong] and they took another road. Now they are resting. Most of my female classmates are married, some suffer domestic violence; others were able to graduate but they got married. Then I visualize a scenario, if I had married, I would be full of children; I would be subdued and that was not what I wanted [for me].” (Nikte', 28 years old)*

Nikte's statement was a reflection on the future that would be available for her had she not been involved in the youth organizations. Nikte' had been active in several workshops that taught sexual and reproductive rights to indigenous girls and the subsequent involvement in the Youth Network had fueled her motivations to prioritize her education over family pressures to settle down and become a wife. Her depiction of the gendered life options for young Tactiqueños and Tactiqueñas, based on the trajectories of her school mates, resonate with several narratives of young people who were not in the youth organizations. Young men facing an early death or girls living in violent households was not unheard of, even if Tactic did not have formal gangs or pandillas.

In 2012 two men -apparently high or intoxicated- barged into a small hamlet elementary school with knives, killing an 8 year old girl and a 13 year old boy who were not able to flee the classroom. When the neighbors learned of what was happening they surrounded the school, captured one of the men, beat him, and burned him alive (Tax 2012). In 2013 several women were raped in Tactic and Cobán by a group of men who were accused of kidnapping and sexual assault (Ministerio Público 2013). Though Tactic has been classified as having a low homicidal rate, oscillating between 25.6 and 5.4 homicides per 100,000 between 2010 and 2014 (RTI International and USAID 2015:6), the reports of gender violence saw a rise from 10 to 60 murders between 2012 and 2013 (Ibid., 64). Conversations with young people revealed how physical violence and sexual assault happened in homes, schools, and public spaces without it being reported. This affected not only girls and women but also queer people, who have had been assassinated throughout the history of the town without it making the news.

Unfortunately, the gendered experience of youth was rarely addressed in the political agendas, as previously seen. Most of the discussions of gender were circumscribed to a concern over sexual and reproductive education, focused primarily on girls; a few mentions about the rate drops in female participation at high school were included. Meanwhile LGBTQ youth was not included in any of the youth agendas. In the following sections, I will describe a few narratives collected through fieldwork about how gendered youth as they coped with inequality and a violent patriarchal social order.

### ***Girls enacting Youth***

As we have seen in Elizabeth's story and the depictions in the previous chapter, starting at an early age young women in Tactic carry have carried the weight of a multitude of responsibilities within and outside the home. Patriarchy, as a domination system, takes away the control over the

female body and life and places their possibilities of “being” under a restrictive scope. A combination of violence, moral impositions, and rigorous standards of accountability constrains the life options of many females. Just like Elizabeth, several of these young women faced difficulties in continuing their education beyond Elementary School, and many were encouraged to remain home and dedicate their life to weaving. Margarita, a 20-year-old girl, came from a hamlet located about 3 km (a 20 minute ride) from the main town; she was the only girl in her class during Elementary school and, although her father wanted her to study, her mother thought it was a waste of time because she had to be married soon. As a compromise she enrolled in IGER, just like Elizabeth, for her *básicos* and that allowed her to remain in the hamlet and be under the protection of her mother. Her father wanted her to continue to high school at private school, but in order to do so she had to wait for her sister who was just beginning *básicos*. When it was time for both of them to enter high school, their parents presented the conditions for the “opportunity” to study:

*“When they [her parents] put us in high school, they asked us this with my sister: if we wanted to get married, we had to tell my dad and interrupt our studies. Maybe if God wants, we’ll get married in the future; that’s what we thought, because caring for a child is difficult.”*

In order to continue with her education, she was required to not engage in romantic relationships or get pregnant. Many adults spoke against female education, equating it with disregard to the traditional norms of sexual abstinence before marriage, which applied solely for women.

*“They [society] do not trust women anymore because of what I said. Everyone thinks the same. Say, if I had been in básicos and I had gotten with child, that’s what they’ve said, that if women go to study is just to come out with a big belly. That’s why they do not give women much importance.”*

Margarita and Elizabeth’s stories conveyed the high expectations pressed upon women who attended school: no fault should be detectable in their behavior at school, otherwise they would not only tarnish their own reputation but could also result in losing the opportunity for other women. Ideal performance was not based on grades or knowledge, but on obedience and moral behavior. I found that this pattern was also followed by many youth in the youth groups: many rarely got involved in relationships and if they did so it was usually “secretly” (*a escondidas*), without it being known about by their parents or sometimes even their friends. These restrictions were also applied to schedules and mobility in general. In answer to the question of why young people did

not get involved in youth groups, women were the only ones to explain they were not allowed to do so. Religious groups were the spaces parents were least reluctant to let their daughters attend, and even so they were encouraged to attend with other members of their family. This control over women's bodies by the men in their lives was not circumscribed to their fathers; boyfriends and brothers could demand to know about their whereabouts and order them back home. The fact that I was a woman, and a married woman, coming and going "freely" was always a topic of discussion; usually when I confirmed my married status, both old and young woman would say "*but it's good that you husband lets you go out alone*".

In contrast with this restrictive understanding of women in education and other forms of public participation, female involvement as beauty representatives of schools were common practices. During a night in May of 2014, I attended a school beauty pageant held in the Municipal Hall alone, barely five blocks from my family's home. In this event, 12 young women competed for the title of "*Señorita*" as these beauty queens are usually called; each girl represented their grade. There were a lot of people in the municipal hall, since it was an open event, and anyone could enter after "giving" a donation. The décor was in school colors and they had placed a walkway with rows of chairs on each side. I sat in the back, near some young men who jumped up every time the girls came out in different suits. The candidates had several appearances, including in a fantasy costume made with "recycled materials" and in sports attire. As it was the year of the World Cup, the fantasy costume alluded to the Brazilian Carnival. In the sports section the girls performed as an aerobics gymnast, rodeo rider, cheerleader, rhythmic gymnast, footballer, badminton player, basketball player, tennis player, motocross rider, cyclist, surfer, jockey and skateboarder. While the girls moved sensually on the stage, the audience cheered, clapped, and whistled. The previous queens of the institute presented themselves in elegant evening gowns, bands, and tiaras, while the presenter announced their educational achievements, which rarely went beyond their high school teaching diploma. The girls' interventions alternated with musical performances: a group from the school presented a dance routine and a couple of regional artists sang romantic songs to the candidates. Just as in many other beauty pageants, the ceremony exalted the contradictions of the gendered body of women: beauty and sexiness had to be displayed without transgressing the expected delicacy and purity. They displayed a sensuality that was frowned upon in everyday activities, and referenced sports that were not available for them in town or the country. This was not an environment that highlighted the reality of being a young woman in Tactic.

After the event was finished, I met a couple of young men who were concerned when they knew I had arrived alone and remained alone for the whole event; they were convinced I shouldn't go back home by myself, but they were engaged elsewhere. Among the organized young women I got to know, it was common to go around in groups; most disliked going around unaccompanied and if activities took place during the afternoon, they were the first ones to leave. If activities finished late, it was not unusual for young men to say, "*We will take you home*" and organize home-walking parties for the different females in attendance. While the actions were usually also part of an affable dynamic, where people were making jokes and talking about any topic, I always found interesting the way in which both males and females performed this ritual with ease, all assuming the gendered roles of safety. Even I, older than all the young men in these youth groups, was usually deemed in need of companionship to walk back home. That same night of the beauty pageant, though I usually felt quite secure coming and going alone in town, I became aware of how my behavior changed when unaccompanied at night:

*"As I walked back from the event, I realized there were no other women out. It was just 9:40 pm and most of the groups on the street were men talking or drinking around their cars or front doors. I noticed that my pace was aggressive, projecting a sure step, until I encountered a family and we greeted each other kindly. The nights are masculine, there are no women alone in the street, only those accompanied by more people; it seems the nights are designed to intimidate us and make us feel in danger. My aunts have locked their door and although I'm late, they do not rest until I arrive. I remember that last week, when my mother learned I might spend the night alone in the house [without my aunts], she asked me to sleep in my grandma's room because it can be locked. I insist, the nights are male, and we are out of place. "*

My reflections were also inspired by recent interviews where young women had related the many forms in which they had experienced violence in Tactic, including domestic violence, school harassment, ethnic discrimination, sexual assault and rape. Just as in Elizabeth's story, many of them had their first experience of violence within their homes.

Among the most heartbreaking experiences was Sonia, a young 22-year-old Poqomchi' with university studies, who, from a young age, witnessed the violence that her father exercised at home: screaming and beatings were common, and her mother was the main recipient. During some workshops for young people Sonia learned about women's rights and realized that what they lived



through at home was not only horrible but could be punished by law. Seeing her mother hurting after a beating, she decided to put an end to the situation. After convincing her mother and sister of the same, she went to the Court to file a complaint against her father. Contrary to other stories of legal procedures in Guatemala, they followed up on the case and her father received a restraining order. However, her intoxicated father entered the house one night and attacked Sonia for being the principal plaintiff. Without going into details, she remembered how she struggled to protect herself while her father beat her; her mother came to the rescue with a log she got from the kitchen. Although her father was taken to the municipal jail, he was never prosecuted for breaking the restraining order. The family's reactions were severe against them, the women, they were expelled from the family land and had to move from their hamlet to the town. Once there, they had to rebuild their lives without the support of the extended family, setting up their house in a rented plot of land and building their house with wood planks and metal sheets. They lost everything they had. Although for Sonia and her family this had been a foundational decision, she expressed how difficult it was to bear the responsibility of having forever altered the life of her mother and sister.

Gender, without a doubt, shaped the experience of young women within their homes and in the public sphere. As mentioned before, the first youth committee in which Elizabeth participated was soon abandoned. All the participants were female, which was praised as a great accomplishment. However, after that first meeting, one of the representatives got married and her husband forbade her to continue, another graduated as a Secretary and after getting full-time job had no time for meetings, the other three members were not "active" because their parents did not allow them to attend. This was not uncommon. Even among the most active young women problems arose because of meeting hours or parental permission. Elizabeth and Nikte' constantly advocated for meeting arrangements that were considerate to people living outside the main town and to women's "permitted schedules".

*"Some compañeras could not [participate] because, truthfully, how difficult it is with this society. They have this pattern that ladies should not go out; they are weavers and they [the parents] do not give them permission to go to the meetings."*

This was not exclusive to girls in youth groups. As mentioned before, none of the COCODES was presided by a woman. Margarita, who as the high school female graduate and who at the time had been elected as a youth representative before the COMUDE, had never participated in her

hamlet's committee. Thus, she considered the post a challenge because of her limited experience in local politics. When I asked why she was not involved in the hamlet's organization, she said:

*"I'll be honest with you. There, they don't want women to hold positions in the COCODE, they don't want women to rule. That's what they say."*

According to Margarita, women did not complain or say anything on this matter as was reinforced by the fact that none of them had a voice in it. Female participation was restricted to the female committees promoted by the Municipal Office for Women (OMM). From the workshops Margarita knew women were able to participate and she was determined to provide a good example so people in her community would change their mind.

*"[What motivates me is] To educate myself more in what I do not yet know and to convince the women of my community, that women are not only useful to take care of the house, but that they have the same right as men, that they should stand up for themselves, because we have the same rights. That's what I want, what motivates me to educate me more and tell them what I learn."*

The way in which gender frames the scope of female political agency is not unique to Tactic. Hava Gordon has shown how gender expectations and parental power impacts the lives of female young activists who have less social and civic mobility than their male counterparts (Gordon 2010:181-196). According to her, a parent's response is influenced by experiences of poverty and State violence that might render political activism a risk. In this case we can see that risk resides not in the public political sphere; women, no matter the age, are embedded in violent social arrangements. The juxtaposition of gender and violence was also present in the experience of queer youth.

### ***Queer Tactiqueñxs***

LGBTQ youth was an invisibilized population in Tactic, rarely did interviewees include them in the descriptions of youth nor in the project interventions aiming at vulnerable young people. As seen in previous chapters, the social map of youth in Tactic was centered in the heteronormative male experience of being young. It was during the celebration for the International Youth Day, after the first 10K race had taken place, that I first became aware of how the Youth field was not inclusive to their life experience. Jesús, an expressive and smiley youth,

appeared dressed as Lady Gaga ready to take the stage and perform the dance he had practiced for more than two weeks with a group of six dancers, all female classmates from *El Básico*. While some people knew Jesús and the group would dance to a song by Lady Gaga, none of the youth organizing the sports event were prepared to see his full transformation into the pop star. For the performance as Lady Gaga, he chose a long platinum blonde wig, white pants and blouse, white platform pumps, and full makeup. Meanwhile, the backup dancers wore modest outfits of black jeans and black shirts. Jesús was transformed into his idol Lady Gaga, but for the audience it was a transgression to see a boy dressed as a girl at an official youth event. The people in the park began whistling and cat-calling, the air thick with violence and detestation and shouts of “*hueco*”<sup>97</sup>. No music came through the speakers and soon Lady Gaga was surrounded by friends in the middle of the stage, blocking the audience from view. A former youth organizer-turned development official next to me gasped, “*My God, we need to look after him!*”

The public reaction was not welcoming and the actions that followed were not enough to protect him as was necessary since he was just rushed down from the stage; this assessment was shared by several of the youth organizers. However, a few of them also expressed concern, not for Jesús but because it was the first 10K and “*that*” was not the image they wanted to project to the community. I felt the impotence of not being able to protect or accompany Jesús; everything happened so quickly, and just as Gaga had appeared with her glittery suit and silver wig, she was gone and didn’t come back to the celebration or any other event. I asked about Jesús several days later, since he had not been around, and I was supposed to interview him. A cousin said he had been kicked out of his parent’s house and it was going to be difficult to find him. Several months later I met Jesús on the street and we shared basic pleasantries; when I asked him if maybe we could meet another day, he said he was leaving town in order to become the apprentice of a beautician and eventually attend beauty school. I have not seen him since then.

Jesús story was not uncommon. Many queer youth were violently treated in Tactic and Guatemala; not only were their bodies physically violated, but their very existence was systematically denied when projects and youth initiatives made them invisible or silent. Proper acknowledgement and safe spaces were (are) almost nonexistent for LGBTQ youth in Tactic, so many opt to disappear into the accepted roles of society. The disinclination to discuss the matter publicly

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<sup>97</sup> A pejorative term equivalent to “fag”.

was explained to me by a young man who had a TV show on local cable. Once he was asked by a gay viewer if his show could address the issue of “homosexuality”.

*“Then I told him, look I’m interested but to be honest, I do not have the courage because they’re going to believe that I’m motivating it. Because in any case I don’t want to have problems, and people don’t have the maturity to talk about it. And so, it was. I don’t know how many months later the boy killed himself. He was already suffering; this was very shocking. Apparently, he killed himself, others say that his partner killed him. It was shocking.”*

Death among LGBTQ youth was not something openly discussed in any forum or workshop I attended during my fieldwork; the theme of sexuality was usually circumscribed to health risks, particularly HIV. However, in Tactic several queer people and gay men had been killed and most people were aware of this. When discussing this matter with José, an openly gay organized youth I had chance to meet, he explained:

*There’s a Miss Independence Gay, and there are Miss Gay in the region. Fuck man, here in the town all homosexuals, not all, but the majority are trans. So, to understand what the LGBTQ collective means, is truly complicated. Even among themselves [...] they killed each other. In the last decade, three or four homosexuals, openly trans, were killed. So that made the mara [people] self-conscious, really. Once a year they have that celebration [LGBTQ parade], as to say here we are! but you won’t make me make me partake in that shit.*

José a young gay Ladino would later tell me that it was harder to be gay if you were *loca*, by which he meant transgender, transvestite or too feminine. As a young gay man, he had also been the object of violence and school harassment, but he felt that he had blended in better than others. Not willing to lose opportunities because of his sexuality and without necessarily being “in the closet”, he concealed it as much as possible in order to be safe. He was about 15 years old when he became aware of his sexuality, he had difficulties dealing with it and for a while even considered taking his own life. As he said, he loved himself too much for suicide and decided to speak with his family about it. Their first answer was to take him to a psychologist but he ended up being treated by a medical doctor who just told him he was too young to know his own preferences. After a while he ditched the clinic and, after reading online, learned there were many ways in which to be gay.

*“In the town, I knew people to come out of the closet but not necessarily as homosexuals but as transvestites. The traditional archetype of the homosexual in the town is the person who*

*has a beauty salon, who puts on heels, who dresses queer, who is queer, and who speaks queer. Then the archetype is marked among the queers. So, I said, fuck, I'm not queer but neither am I [heterosexual]... then, what the hell I am, right? So, while that went on, I kept myself silent."*

Referencing international icons as role models, José admired the way in which Ellen DeGeneres had been able to blend her sexual preference with a public image that did not inspire rejection. He came out to his family and just a few friends, while with the rest of the people his policy was to speak only if directly asked about it. While he was still exploring the possibilities of his sexuality and identity, the time came to choose a high school career; he pondered the options: his interests were mostly in agricultural activities but queer people in Tactic, his closest references, were beauticians. Since he was not interested in that line of work, he chose to get a high school degree in agricultural management at a recently opened semi-private school; he could have applied for the public options, like the *Escuela de Formación Agrícola* or the *Escuela Nacional Central de Agricultura*, but those operated as boarding schools and were known for hazing new students.

*"Fuck but knowing there would be a bunch of machos and me like an ass, being hueco, I said no fucking way. [...] they baptize you [hazing] and it's just like the macho thing is firmly rooted there. I said no, in ENCA they are going to fuck me up, so no. I prefer to stay here with my queerness [mariconadas] than go there. Because by then I had been bullied all through elementary and middle school since I've never been, well..., good in soccer; I've always spent time with girls and that..."*

Throughout his life José had been mediating upon his identity in order to engage in the activities he enjoys while still embracing his sexuality. For him this meant being cautious of publicly presenting himself as gay but he was not willing to act as a heterosexual man in order to continue his participation in youth organizations. As mentioned, there was an LGBTQ youth in Tactic but rarely did any participated openly in the youth groups. When I asked whether any LGBTQ groups existed, I only received the joke *"You have to go the beauty salons."* At least two of the trans people who had been assassinated in Tactic worked as beauticians and consultants in beauty pageants. Despite this, the youth groups who were not explicitly opposed to the LGBTQ community neither openly rejected nor included queer youth in interventions. When José came out to his friends in the youth groups, the response was lukewarm.

*They knew, they had known since I was 16 or 17 years old. First, they said "Oh, cool", it was neither here nor there. Nobody talks about that shit, but nobody bullied me, so I said, oh well."*

This apparent inclusiveness was what encouraged Jesús to publicly perform as Lady Gaga; he tested the inherent contradictions in the Youth arena only to have his undesirability ratified. I believe this practice, to test what is possible within the contradictions implicit in the social order, is a youth trait that can either lead either to new venues or violent rejections. When Jesús was rejected and thus retreated from the youth movement, the issue did not arise again nor was the Youth agenda modified into incorporating the LGBTQ population as a target. José thought people preferred not to disturb the waters too much and things would change but not just now.

*"I think the group [La Mesa] is not open yet toward sexual preference, neither are other youth groups [...] So I do not speak much of my preference, although I know I could talk to them but no, because you also learn to respect the sensitivity of others. [...]"*

As we have seen through the experience of young women and queer youth, gender can shape political participation. Youth groups are not always cognizant of how the gendered body might render differences in the political trajectories of their members; it is present "even if these groups do not explicitly wrestle with the language of gender" (Gordon 2010:192). I would argue it can also shape the collective experience of political participation by invisibilizing or silencing particular forms of *enacting* in the field of Youth.

### **Youth and citizenship**

As we have seen, local conceptualizations of Youth speak of an aspirational and idealized subject that embodies a desirable *healthy* subject. Affirmations of "good" and "bad" youth have been related by studies across the globe and throughout different time periods (Willis 1977; Ferguson 2000; Bettie 2003; Kennelly 2011). While rebelliousness was expected from youth, as mentioned earlier, it was also expected for it to be a fleeting condition. José saw youth as both the capacity to piss off the system while also becoming passive actors.

*“Youth must be that mixture of a way of thinking and [age]. Then, when those two things are mixed, you have youth. So, you can understand youth as those people who piss off<sup>98</sup>, I mean, people who [say] the fuck with it.... Today they’re fine, tomorrow you have a revolution. Tomorrow you have a revolution and the day after tomorrow you have a State. I mean, [then they become] totally passive! [laughs]. So, that radicality of decisions in a conglomerate, I do not know, that’s youth for me. Those who have the ability to piss off, and really piss off.”*

José’s view related to the experience of a few young men from Tactic, but it was not possible to extrapolate it to everyone. Several of the boys in organized youth groups told stories about rebelling against teachers or parents, even fleeing home to pursue different goals (education, traveling, employment), however they were never faced with the violence that women like Elizabeth or Sonia lived when confronting their fathers. Still, experiences of violence were present for young men who adventured into the realm of *unhealthy* youth.

Ezequiel, a Mestizo 22-year-old-man, had participated in a couple of meetings of La Mesa but then never returned. He had just dropped out of high school because of financial problems and was working full-time as a clerk in an internet shop when I interviewed him. We discussed important life-choices, which for him had been severing relations with relatives who were involved in drug trafficking. When he was 14 years old, he attended a wild party with his cousins; while there, these cousins stole a wallet from an unconscious young man that was lying on the floor. A few days later, while walking in town, a pick-up truck cornered them. An older man, wearing cowboy boots and hat, jumped out of the car, pushed Ezequiel against a wall and put a gun to his head while demanding his son’s wallet back. The cousins, who Ezequiel described as driven by an urge to fight, told the man that he should tell his son to learn to drink instead of threatening them. The man finally left but told them to bring the wallet back. Ezequiel was adamant that he did not know what his cousins had done, nor that the host of the party was a drug dealer, but in the following weeks Ezequiel saw the pick-up following him. He was scared of going out and had told no one in his family, until his brother confronted him.

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<sup>98</sup> When José said “mara que chinga y chinga grueso”, he is using a positive connotation of chingar. Usually that refers to joke and play around, leaving no stone unturned but it could also be interpreted as confrontational.

*"I told my brother, [and he told me] "Why didn't you tell me?" I did not tell him because I knew that, first, it was putting him in trouble; if something happened to him, my mom was going to take it against me. And second, for what? They could not do anything."*

Eventually his brother and mother convinced him to present a report in the police. He thought of it as a useless effort because it put them at greater risk. They did not take his fear seriously, arguing that it was what he got for hanging out in dodgy places. The police wanted the names of all the people involved and, since he was underage, his mother had to sign all the forms.

*"What are the laws for? Just because I was a minor, but I was a human being! They would have taken me into account if I was dead. What are the protocols for a minor? The laws are for everyone. Then I begged and the only thing the Police did was to issue a restraining order. I made it clear, if something happened to my family, it would fall onto them. "*

So, for Ezequiel, the act of *pissing off* the adult-world had resulted in a death threat and a useless response from the authorities who dismissed him for hanging out with the wrong crowd. Similarly, any youth who was blatantly involved in drug trafficking or consumption, petty robbery, or even displayed undesired characteristics (like being queer) could be easily disposed-off.

José's romantic notion of a courageous youth was, in practice, harshly punished. While studies have shown how discourses of youth as citizens-in-the-making convey images of innocent, or even infantilized subjects (Gordon 2010:177), they have also stressed how citizen youth are deeply "classed, raced and gendered" (Kennelly 2011:45).

Youth as a social achievement (Maira and Soep 2005) should contain the foundations of a productive adult (Lesko 1996). As *good citizens*, youth should then exercise political agency within certain boundaries. Gordon found that media coverage of youth activists in Canada "demonized and pathologized youth political critique when it became explicit, unpatriotic and confrontational" (Gordon 2010:174). These narratives of Youth concur with that of a desired citizenship, which in turn becomes the normalized discourse of what young people can and should be. I agree with Kennelly's argument that the stories and "moral claims" of organized youth, in her case youth activists, cannot be separated from the notion of the "good citizen" (Kennelly 2011:29). These youth's sense of self is intrinsically embedded in the ways in which they conceive their own performance of citizenship. This was expressed by Sonia, who conveyed the weight that resided on Youth as the potential of a country.



*“I feel it means responsibility, a will. The meaning of the word “youth” becomes the future of a country, because I feel that youth means development, the sustainability of something; we are the force for other things. That the great or the powerful do not take us into account, that does not mean that we are not part of [everything]”*

I found interesting that both indigenous and non-indigenous participants placed such importance on what could be considered a neoliberal subjectivity: a sense of individual accountability and self-governance, with a hyper-individualization of action, choice, and risk (Gordon 2010; Kennelly 2011; Gershon 2011; Madhok and Rai 2012). This sense of individual responsibility was also accompanied by anxieties and a fear of performing poorly. Referencing the “structures of feelings” (Williams 1983) through which youth activists interact with the world, Kennelly found that youth activists were burned out by the need to control (awareness) their choices and political interests while also fearful of making “the wrong choice”; as such, “guilt and a sense of failure to live up to the ideals” became an intrinsic part of neoliberal youth subjectivities (Kennelly 2011:29).

Healthy, energetic and responsible bodies were the desired enactments of Youth; corrupt, apathetic, and reckless youth could easily be pathologized as unfit bodies for the performance of Youth. As such, given the violence of poverty, patriarchy, and ethnic disparity, very few *tactiqueños* or *tactiqueñas* could be encompassed by the first notion. Still, the people and groups that produced and reproduced the field of Youth did so with all its contradictions. As *La Mesa* and the OMJ implemented actions towards the promotion of a healthy youth, the framework would provide contradictory lessons of how to be a “good citizen” and a “productive subject”.

### ***Learning politics through organized sports***

As mentioned earlier, sports were a common ground of youth interaction. Municipal efforts toward the promotion of soccer and basketball were concentrated in the main town, though a few championships took place in nearby hamlets. The idea of *healthy* youth and sports was not just supported by the notion of bodily soundness but also sustained by popular phrases like “*un deportista más, un delincuente menos*”. The motto was popularized in Guatemala by Miguel Ángel Ordóñez, a sportscaster in the first sports news program, “*El Deportito*”<sup>99</sup>, but it was also constantly referenced on the educational TV show “*Mentes Sanas*” conducted by the teacher Rubén Alfonso

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<sup>99</sup> The show began airing in the 1970’s on national television. Ordóñez died in 2000.

Ramírez<sup>100</sup>. As a common tenet in the academic and popular discourse about youth, the phrase was repeated to me during fieldwork in several interviews when explaining the reasons for promoting sports and healthy recreation for young people. However, after attending several sporting events, I found them to be a contested space for political participation and that hosting a “sport or recreational event” could be part of the political agency displayed by youth.

In 2013, when I started my longer research, *La Mesa* discussed how to celebrate the International Youth Day in Tactic as one of the main events of the year. Back when *Expresión* and *Equilibrio* were active, they had included this day within their activities, and across Alta Verapaz different activities would take place in celebration. International Youth Day is celebrated on August 12<sup>th</sup>, as established in 1999 by the United Nations General Assembly, and each year the commemoration promotes reflection on distressing issues for global youth. The topics for the past years show a variety of concerns that require youth participation in development and well-being: (2015) Youth Civic Engagement, (2014) Youth and Mental Health, (2013) Youth Migration: Moving Development Forward, (2012) Building a Better World: Partnering with Youth, (2011) Change Our World, (2010) Dialogue and Mutual Understanding (United Nations n.d.).

The celebration in Tactic, however, posed two difficulties. First, on the exact date, larger events would take place in Cobán and many members of the youth groups wanted to participate in those. Second, Tactic’s *fiesta patronal* was held between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> of August and too many activities were already built into the town’s celebratory agenda. After several exchanges between *La Mesa*, the OMJ, and the projects who were active in town at the time (USAID and Propaz), they reached an agreement to organize a 10K race as the celebratory activity for Youth Day; this would take place two weeks after the actual date to accommodate the local dynamics. One of the organized youth told me he thought the race was a good way to show their ability to organize and coordinate but it would also provide alternative recreation for young people.

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<sup>100</sup> The name of the show also references another popular saying “*mentes sanas en cuerpos sanos*” as it was directed toward studying youth. The show began airing in 1983.



Figure 16: Posters of the “10K por la Juventud”.

Credits OMJ and La Mesa, 2013 and 2015

The success of the 10K resided in the participation of volunteers from across Tactic. I offered to help and was assigned the distribution of supplies at different points within the 10k circuit; since I had a car they also placed me at the farthest point with the young people in charge of the “return point”. Nikte’ had already negotiated with the closest house for them to shared electricity with us in order to set up music and the girls from the community arranged a balloon arch to mark the point of return to all runners. This was not the only *gestion* that took place. Just as in Elizabeth’s championship story, different supplies were needed: runner numbers, volunteer t-shirts, trophies, prizes, judges’ fees, water, route-signs, ribbons for departure and finish lines, among many others. While initially the idea was for people to pay a fee for receiving their number, possible runners began to ask for a kit, which I noted down as a constant question: *what does the fee include?* Since the idea was to celebrate Youth Day, the delegates of the two development projects helped establish contacts with CONJUVE, *Ministerio de Gobernación* and *Ministerio de Cultura* to procure a stage, sound system, and even a host for the event. Meanwhile, *La Mesa* was in charge of preparing everything else, holding several meetings with all the volunteers to set up the race. During an activity to nail down the organization of the event, an *antiguo* encouraged all the volunteers to identify with *La Mesa* and keep partaking in the youth activities, but also warned that nobody

should seek individual benefit from this as it was a collective effort. In the days before the race, rumors circulated about how a member of the group had bragged about being the leader of the organization and single-handedly obtaining all the resources for the race.

Expectations were higher by the second edition of the 10k, and economic support from the Municipality was needed as external support diminished. The race became part of the official fair program. Pressure was high for the event, as it was scheduled for the last Sunday of the town's week-long celebration and already a few animosities were in the air; the race would take place two hours before the equestrian parade (*desfile hípico*), a long-standing tradition within the *feria*. The parade was, and still is, organized by the *Asociación de Ganaderos*: an epitome of accumulation, violence and whiteness, the parade brings together ranchers from different towns who show off their best horses while striding along the two main roads of the town. The riders, male and female, present themselves in cowboy-like attire, while carrying beer bottles and not-so-concealed guns in their belts. The representative of *La Mesa* and the OMJ had already received complaints during meetings about the way young people were putting the equestrian parade at risk and the Association had tried to remove the activity from the municipal agenda. The youth stood their ground but worried about possible aggressive retaliations from well-known violent ranchers. The stakes were high for the event to go as smoothly as possible because this would mark a political standoff against the regional economic powers.

The afternoon before the race all the volunteers had preparations to make and it was nighttime before we were done. Several volunteers, including me, were assigned to distribute water and supplies to different pots along the circuit but this time we were going to use a small truck from the Municipal Police. We hopped into the truck bed as we discussed the possibilities of negotiating an official recognition of the race as part of the fair events. A concern among the members of *La Mesa* and myself was the possible partisan use of the race and that Municipal authorities expected a servile youth organization after granting the request. Just the week before the meeting all volunteers were reminded that it was fine to be involved in political parties, but they should abstain from any form of proselytism during the 10K. As we discussed how the negotiations with the Municipality should not be construed as a debt, a young man immediately proclaimed, "*I am a political subject, not a political object.*" This led to a discussion about how asking for support was not equal to subordination.

The discussion had already been taking place within the group, later I would find out that part of the group had strategized how to get the Mayor to endorse the event as a part of the town's

*feria* and warrant municipal funding for further editions of the race. Nikte' and Elizabeth wrote an agreement letter (*acta*) that should commit the authorities into institutionalizing the race, but the group had not yet decided whether to ask beforehand or to just present the document in public. They opted for a mix between the two. They spoke with allies within the Municipal board but waited until the last minute to inform the Mayor. They feared that asking in a private setting would turn into a long negotiation but by doing it publicly onstage in front of all the volunteers and runners he could not say no. As expected, the Mayor signed the agreement and thus the 10K became an official activity within the youth political sphere of Tactic.

The race was not a simple recreational event, but a performance of political strengths. *La Mesa* mobilized youth from different communities, through friends, churches, and school. The ability to recruit volunteers created the illusion of having large social base, even if these young people were mostly in it for the fun of the event and the commemorative t-shirt. Meals and meetings between *antiguos* and newcomers did help in expanding a sense of identification with *La Mesa* and the OMJ, and eventually enrolling new members in the organization. This expanded version of mobilized youth, over 100 people per race, also intimidated the authorities who were certain of the relevance of the youth movement in Tactic.

Recreational activities were not only promoted or planned by *La Mesa* or the OMJ. As the local youth committees were formed, some of them defined activities to implement and motivate youth. Many of these activities were sport or recreational events. In 2014 a Youth Committee in one of the largest hamlets of Tactic, with the advice of an *antiguo*, prioritized a "rally" as an activity for their projection into the community. This was the first of several rallies that have taken place in two hamlets since then. The event usually had a main theme that was reflected in the many activity posts that composed the trail; most of them were obstacle challenges but some included questions, inviting the participants to reflect on the theme. The leitmotifs for the rallies between 2014 and 2015 were "uniting youth for the future", "the challenge", "the resistance" and "overcoming your fears" (see figure 17).



Figure 17: Posters for the youth rallies.

Credit: OMJ and La Mesa

As the first rally was designed, many things had to be negotiated with local authorities (Municipality and COCODES) as well as between the Youth Committees, *La Mesa* and the OMJ. Just as with the race, these experiences offered important lessons, from organizing and negotiating to coping with political expectations. Negotiations with the Municipality for supplies and funding were always contentious, with youth writing proposals and asking week after week whether their requests would be met. Expectations about who should actively seek the municipal support became an issue. For the OMJ delegate, the committees had to *gestionar*, just as we saw in the previous chapter; meanwhile the youth thought it was part of his job to negotiate on their behalf. The relationship with COCODES was mostly focused on obtaining permits to use the few community grounds or private land where the rally was to take place. The fluidity between members of committees and *La Mesa* facilitated communication but also granted access to the *antiguos'* experience in organizing this type of events.

Although the youth who had attended workshops had participated in rallies, no one had experience organizing a large one. Since rallies were not standardized as other sporting events, they had to come up with their own rules. During meetings several issues were raised, from how to judge to the type of prizes and how to make it a fair experience. This last matter was a concern, particularly regarding how teams would be put together. The solution offered by the Youth Committee was to enforce a gender quota: each team should have at least two women in them. This would motivate female participation in the event and allow for fair competition without making specific gender races. This effort was mainly driven by previous discussions about the lack of public spaces for female recreation, since many times the soccer field or the basketball court would be

hogged by male players. Females rarely had the opportunity to engage in sport events outside school, even though the Oficina Municipal de Cultura y Deportes organized a soccer and basketball female competition each year. Again, these seemingly irrelevant spaces became politically informative as youth learned about promoting equal gender participation, negotiating with COCODES, coping with critiques and *gestionar* funding from the municipality.



**Figure 18: A challenge during a youth rally**

Photograph by the author, 2014

Tensions arose again as individuals and groups were accused of looking to gain prominence or profiting politically from a collective effort. This issue was of concern with the presence of the *Alcalde* at the award ceremony because the focus on his speech usually overshadowed the work done by the youth committees –he rarely knew the names or people who had been involved. I should note that this concern was present in almost all the events that were organized in cooperation with NGOs and the Municipality, because the institutions providing the funding for the events did not necessarily publicly recognize all the work done by the volunteers and committee members.

Not everyone was supportive of the race as the main event of the year. Kayum thought the mobilization of resources should be allocated into solving real issues; one of the girls in the group was suffering severe health problems and was facing great expenses in traveling back and forth between Tactic, Cobán and Guatemala City for lab tests and medical appointments. The way he saw things, there were many problems among the group that were aggravated due to the poor conditions of local services. The response of *La Mesa* to the illness of any member was to organize a visit and raise money through *cooperacha* (slang for cooperation) between members; sometimes they would also ask for help among the contacts gained through the workshops and development projects. The mental and physical health of young people remained a highly individualized matter and did not turn into a larger political concern. Kayum thought it was ironic that the discourse over healthy youth was addressed with a single event, like a race, instead of actually discussing what would be necessary for “real health”. The relevance of recreational activities was also questioned by former members of youth groups; a young Ladino man, former member of *Expresión*, who was working outside of Tactic told me that he thought the youth movement was not achieving anything real:

*“Well I have not heard that the organization is going somewhere. I would tell you what a priest said, “they are doing activities to entertain them not to change them.” The only thing I’ve seen lately is the rally. And the guys come together, the kids, just to entertain themselves, to do things that they like and not to change things. Today there are other spaces to entertain yourself, but I think these young people could change things. I do think you should have recreational activities because Expresión did it as well. But if that group [La Mesa] is only organized to entertain themselves and not to change, I think it is not going anywhere at all, at least on matters of achieving change.”*

### **Who am I to represent other youth?**

As we saw in Elizabeth’s experience enacting Youth in the public sphere, she questioned her relevance for the role of delegate after being elected in the youth assembly; it also posed questions regarding the democratic process of selecting representatives. Elizabeth’s recollection expressed her surprise about being singled out by her peers and the quick succession of actions that left her with the responsibility of representing others. This was not necessarily a problem singled out for youth. On one occasion, as I attended a meeting convened by the COCODE of my family’s barrio,



the neighbors nominated me for a post. The meeting took place on a Saturday at 5:00 pm in the parking lot adjacent to the Catholic Church, it was a rainy afternoon and we were sitting inside a tent in plastic chairs. Several neighbors were present, most of them older members of the community. The President, who was stepping down from the post, encouraged people to nominate themselves for the committee. The attendees and I were sitting in a semi-circle of plastic chairs on the earth floor when a woman who I had seen but never talked to said, “*You, the young Lemus with the glasses.*” A childhood friend who was the Secretary of the COCODE said, “*Taty you are around here more often, you should do it.*” Though I was indeed spending more time in Tactic at the time since my interviews and surveys were not done, my presence in the town was merely sporadic. I stood up, greeted everyone and proceeded with the ritual of polite declination: I thanked everyone for considering me a possible representative of our neighborhood, stated personal difficulties that would keep me from attending the meetings with the COMUDE, which took place on weekdays when I was teaching in the City, and assured them that although I could not take a post on the committee, I would gladly support any activities they saw fit. My friend growled in acknowledgment as my declination was accepted, and I responded with what you could call a “*ni modo*” gesture (tilted head, tight lips in a loop smile and shrugged shoulders). After the meeting was over, my friend walked up to me and I added a second “*Thanks but I cannot take the responsibility and I am not really a resident,*” to which he quipped, “*That is not important, what we need is people who do it.*”

In different, but similar fashion, both accounts made me considered the arbitrary process in these apparently democratic mechanisms of political representation. In Elizabeth’s first selection as a Youth representative, the assembly was a means to agglutinate and organize a variety of subjectivities under the categories of youth and locality, then produce a representative of this now uniformized population. In the second case, the COCODE was part of a mechanism to ensure decentralization of the State, strategically romanticized as the way to give voice to the people within a community. Two processes took place in this story: representation and delegation. While we usually speak more of representation in anthropology, delegation is the figure that is a key component to the mechanisms of democracy.

Delegation assumes both a relationship between the individual and the collective they seem to represent (those individuals who share the characteristics that make them a single category) and the responsibility of communication between both instances. Delegation in political theory is a key component as types of government reach from monarchism to the establishment of democracy; instead of divine transfer of power from God to a Monarch, the people delegate power to the elected

representative that chosen to lead the State. This powerful metaphor was translated into the operation of many venues, with a conglomerate of individuals that were gathered to elect a representative and delegate their decision making onto an unknown person. In both examples there seems to be more of a concern in following the steps to minimize voices than in engaging the articulation of a collective subjectivity that would support the exercise of representation. I also found troubling how for youth these notions of representation were built into the assumed sociability and peer-to-peer disposition of youth (Wyn 2011). As Elizabeth mentioned, she did not know most of the youth from the micro-region she had to represent, much less all of those who were encompassed under the Youth Assembly, yet development practitioners would repeat that they expected youth to replicate their knowledge and properly inform their peers.

The issue of representation was also a concern for a collective like *La Mesa*. The leaders of the *Mesa* at the time of my fieldwork were the representatives of the original organizations, before the network was created. As time passed and the previous groups disbanded, the organized youth were concerned with their legitimacy in participating; what sustained their position within the Youth Network or *La Mesa* was having initially been selected as “representatives” of an organization that now consisted of two or three members or perhaps only themselves. Not only had the groups merged in terms of organizations, but also in their agendas; different positions disappeared as they were integrated into a sectorial block to face the Municipality. It is important to mention that this “merging” was not necessarily driven by the interest of the youth but those of the NGOs. As these youth got to know each other and work together, the original interests of the organizations became blurred. Although this could be understood as a different problem, when they presented themselves in local politics being part of the *Mesa* was not enough. As each one of them “had to” represent something, several of them hoped nobody would require them to summon their “base”. The need to represent, I believe, emerged from their citizenship and democracy training workshops. The value of democratic participation was bestowed on the figure of representation, so questions arose regarding who was a good representative and how many youth should they represent?

The process of delegation and representation can trick us into believing it is arbitrary; it certainly feels like that when you are called upon to participate in it. The issue of representation here goes beyond the discussion raised in anthropology about otherness and the production of knowledge (Clifford 1988), but is partially tied into it. There was an artificial selection and a process of tokenism through which a single figure was made into the symbol of everything. I would also argue that in this process of otherness, certain subjectivities were emphasized. However, once we

observe it closely, we can see the process of objectification: Elizabeth was selected because of being an active and energetic rural indigenous woman, of which there were few in the assembly, I was signaled out because of my family's history and the town's ethnic configuration. Neither of us felt we were good candidates because we evaluated ourselves against an idealized notion of the adequate representative. But both of us were selected as representatives of particular positions within the field of political power.

Despite being aware of the game in the three scenarios discussed, that the fundamentals of representation were not being met, people kept on playing it. This, however, was taken on with caution. Beyond discussing the process as artificial and romantic, questions remained about how it was interpreted by those enacting Youth in this scenario: the representative feels fearful, doubtful, coerced and responsible, meanwhile, those represented might turn to distrust or indifference.

### ***Youth' political anxieties***

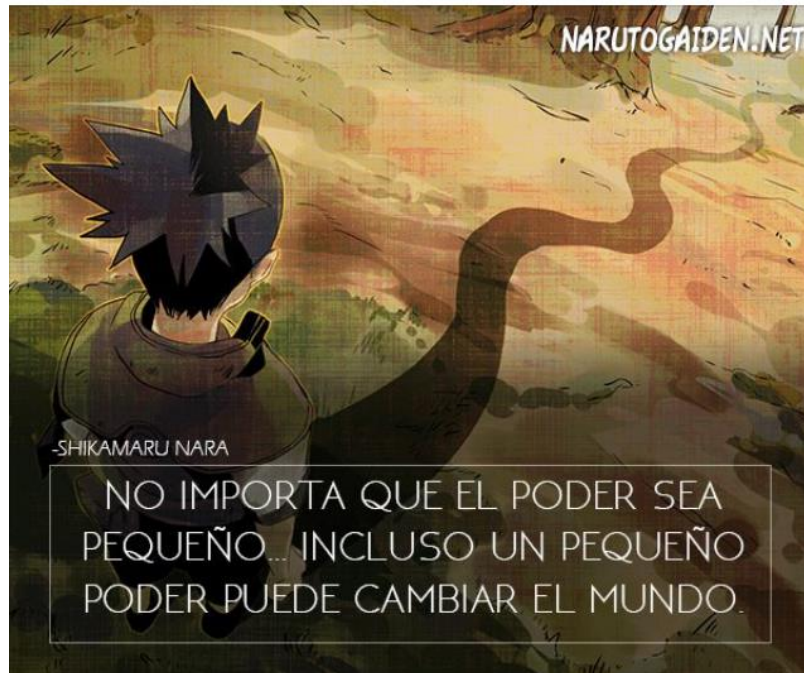
As previously mentioned, youth as citizenship is loaded with an emotional baggage. While most descriptions of neoliberal subjectivity emphasize the role of self-governance, several authors focused on youth citizenship have brought up the role of emotions in the individualization accountability and governance (Gordon 2010; Kennelly 2011; Greenberg 2014). In these descriptions, youth as agents in this neoliberal framework face tiredness, fear, guilt, distrust and disappointment. Tactic's youth were no exception; however, I believe the emotional burdens are embedded in dynamics that transcend the field of Youth.

#### REPRESENTATION AND INSECURITY

Feeling unprepared for the position and lacking support would usually be among the reasons given to withdraw from a representative post or to simply "give up". Unfortunately, in many of these discussions, particularly those where new delegations were elected, organizers would assign full responsibility of the failure to the delegate (characterizing him or her as irresponsible, uncommitted, flaky, etc.) without much concern for the mechanisms of nomination and the possibility of coercion, as Elizabeth pointed out.

Elizabeth's recollection of her first time at the youth assemblies is tinged with memories of insecurities and doubt. Once she met the people from all the youth organizations, she realized many had a better grasp of the politics behind their movement and they were better public speakers making her feel inadequate for the task, like a "*pollita recién comprada*" (a newly bought chicken).

This figure of speech relies on the image of a shy newcomer to a hen house and is frequently used in Guatemala. The feeling of not belonging was a common aspect in youth's narratives of their first participation. Some of them overcame the feeling by appropriating the organization, creating a sense of belonging, others waited on the sidelines for invitations and public activities. For others, external words of encouragement against self-doubt and fear were more useful.



**Figure 19: Shikamaru ponders in a mountain.**

Source: Unknown, received through WhatsApp on June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

A young man shared an inspirational image with me that had been circulating on Facebook from one of the many Naruto fan pages (see figure 19). The central character is Shikamaru Nara, who was a classmate of Naruto. Not the typical hero, Shikamaru considers himself a coward. However, he moves when his companions need him, almost sacrificing his life, although he constantly admits that he lacks courage. The image references the possibility of change even if your power is small. I wrote in my fieldnotes being impressed by Shikamaru standing alone with his shadow extending over a valley, “him with his shadow, becoming larger than the subject itself”; at that moment, I was unaware that the shadow was actually his fighting power. The image’s intention was to recognize oneself capable of transformation, regardless of one’s size or one’s insecurities.

Not everyone was successful in overcoming these fears, and many youth withdrew from participation. Others remained but kept feeling incapable when they compared themselves to the more experienced organizers.

#### LEADERSHIP AND ENVY

Becoming a representative could also turn into recognition as a leader. As we read in Elizabeth's story, she was uncomfortable with being labeled as a leader or a role model; she considered this seeking prominence, an undesirable characteristic for a youth representative. Throughout my interviews, I found many youth complaining about how their achievements were considered acts of self-importance by others, but this, they considered, was an act of pure envy. A young man who retired from youth organizations but remained active in cultural groups, considered envy a town characteristic.

*“Look, in our town, because in the city it is different, there is a lot of envy that is not seen but is felt. We are envious people, of a lot of jealousy, that we cannot see someone improving themselves. It is a very difficult town. I have cried because of what I have seen, because of what I have felt, because sometimes there are no spaces. [...] But yes, I promise you, there are a lot of people who do not like to see you better yourself, people who are at your same level. But it is hypocrisy, because on the one hand they greet you and on the other hand they are talking bad behind your back, trying to get you down, trying to take you away from where you are, trying to take away your merits. Here at Tactic it is difficult to be recognized for many things. For example, here there have been many young people who have criticized me for everything I do, always looking for what is wrong. And I've told you, because it's true. Unfortunately, that's the way it is, in every way. In adult people too.”*

According to him, the experience of being elected as a representative for a Departmental meeting and appearing on several television shows had made several of his peers envious and unsupportive. The notion of being judged by others, understood as envy, was mentioned by several people but mainly by former members of the youth groups.

*“I do feel I got burned out... the problem with our people is that they are very envious. They cannot see you in a position or a post, because they want to throw you out or they want to be all over you. Then I said, I do not want anything to do with municipalities, nothing at all. And I retired from this for, like, two years while I finished studying.”*

For Rosita, the repercussions of envy are serious. She explained that “*violence comes from envy. If I envy you, I think other [bad] things.*” While individual experiences of envy were mainly related to the effort of receiving public acknowledgement, Rosita thought the killing in the school of San Juan was in part due to a financial debt that drove one of the aggressors crazy with envy. Just as the envy had taken the man’s mind, he took the children’s lives.

These varied understandings of envy deserve deeper treatment, but what I found central to the issue of youth citizenship was the association between individualism and envy. Selflessness was the positive attribute discussed once in a meeting as everyone was bantering: a young member was accused of being “*individualist and envious*” for not wanting to collaborate with a group meal while another person who offered to bring a cake was praised as being “*part of the collective*”. While this was a friendly exchange, the concealed accusation was a serious one. Concern was higher regarding youth acting individually (without asking for advice or sharing news with others before acting) while representing other youth; they were usually labeled as “seeking prominence” and thus repeating the same patterns of political clientelism detected in old politicians.

#### PARTICIPATION AND MISTRUST

Several of the youth talked about the emotional links that sustained the groups, particularly trust, loyalty and empathy. However, this type of affective support was not a preexisting condition in youth associations. In large assemblies, like the Youth Network or *La Mesa*, the notion of friendship was not particularly mentioned as an instrument of mobilization; although camaraderie existed, the almost ingrained distrust in others was a tough act to beat.

The first time I was told “*you should never trust your friends*” was not during this fieldwork. It is a common saying in Guatemala that was usually said to me when I was not following the family’s prescription of living; several youth made similar affirmations during interviews when discussing conflicts or offenses. A young woman claimed there was no-one she could trust when making important life decisions, a couple of young students answered that they had no friends to trust, and, perhaps the most difficult for me to hear, was when one organized youth included the saying in an interview after having had an intense quarrel with the members of the group.

Mistrust was also expressed in relation to all sorts of institutions. During 2014, two young men decided to design and implement a workshop on audiovisual production. Both had experience in this field and hoped to engage a large group of youth in filmmaking. They organized everything in order to provide the classes for free, asking friends from the film industry to teach one or two

weekly-sessions for the 8-month program. They were not associated with any educational institution or NGO. Costs were covered by small donations obtained through old connections; for example, the local fireman delegation lent their offices for classes and they got the Municipality to pay for the hotel for a guest speaker they were not familiar with. When I asked why they had embarked on an educational project without support, one of the organizers answered that institutions could not be trusted, thus it was better to do something by themselves even if they failed in the process.

Mistrust increased during the political campaign of 2015. On many occasions there were public expressions of doubt, not only of the intentions of the candidates and their parties, but also of the fellow youth organizers who were either interested or invested in the political campaign.

This was not entirely unique to Tactic youth. Back in 2011, the National Youth Survey showed that only 14.3% of Guatemalan youth had complete trust their municipal governments and only 10.3% trusted the national government (ENJU, 2011). Meanwhile in 2014, LAPOP showed that Guatemala's "trust in local government" was at 44% (Lapop 2014: 101). They also incorporated new questions for citizen engagement in local politics; Guatemala's data showed that only 9.3% had attended a town meeting in the past year and only 11.2% had sought help from or presented requests to the local government (LAPOP, 2014: 74-81). My data for Tactic youth showed that only 2% held the government responsible for improving people's quality of life, while most participants placed the responsibility on their family (56%) and their own self (27%). None of the youth thought the government could contribute to changes in their lives and, when asked if people like them could change things in their communities if they wished to, 71.4% of the participants answered within the spectrum of "yes but with difficulties".

## **Conclusion**

As discussed in previous chapters, discourses and narratives of Youth in Tactic relied heavily on the allegory of energy and future, or a concern for deviant behaviors. Many initiatives aimed at youth were sustained by an interest in keeping youth "healthy" and out of the streets or under the influence of gangs and drug-related networks. This postulated safe spaces with "healthy" activities as the desired counterpart. However, these efforts were not sensible to the life experiences of gendered youth, girls and LGBT population, who either remained invisible to the interventions or were included only through limited scopes of interest (i.e., sexual and reproductive health programs). The process of enacting Youth in the public sphere reproduced the many contradictions

and inequalities that young people face on an everyday basis, usually dismissing the challenges that framed the political agency of gendered youths. As the expected performance of citizenship was circumscribed to a student heteronormative male youth, the public figure of the young representative required a disposition of copious amounts of time and freedom to decide about their movements that was not accessible for many “other” youth. However, young men who performed outside the desired enactments of Youth were subjected to violence or political indifference, reinforcing the idea that not all young people mattered.

While young people organized in *La Mesa* and OMJ implemented actions that corresponded to the idealizations of a youth citizenship, they faced substantial political contradictions. The democratic exercises of choosing and representing became ritual acts to reinforce their right to hold a position within the local government. However, at the same time, they learned important lessons about “real politics”: patronage, mistrust and fear. These political anxieties had an effect not only in the external relations between the youth and the Municipality but also within the organized groups. Despite the contradictions, the activities and dynamics proposed by young people sought coherence within the political field of Youth. Through the implementation of processes and events they fostered an idealized notion of the “good citizen” and a “productive subject” among their peers. Unfortunately, this understanding for political agency rarely considered how the intersection of poverty, patriarchy and ethnic disparity framed young people’s expectations and experiences in the process of enacting Youth.



## I ELIZABETH, “POLITICIANS ARE ALL HARINA DEL MISMO COSTAL”

The first time Elizabeth dealt directly with the pressures of the electoral process was when she was a representative within the Youth Network. A girl who was also a youth representative was recruited by one of the leading candidates for the 2011 elections; however, the girl was still underage so she could not officially be affiliated. The candidate approached Elizabeth as did several of her relatives who were supporters of the candidate because they wanted someone that was “*managing a large mass of youth*.” While she initially felt flattered about being considered<sup>101</sup>, later she wondered about what her contribution could be. Unsure about what to do, she asked her father about participating when she didn’t have much knowledge. Her father, who had supported a few candidates in his time, told her that partisan affiliation required no knowledge. Elizabeth wondered if her father had dismissed her questioning or had given a veiled warning about political life. Around the same time, a member of the Municipality offered her a post in the Municipal Office for Culture and Sports because the previous person in charge had left the office to become a political candidate. So, she reflected upon her options.

*“I did not have the concrete definition of politics, I did not know there was a political difference, and I wondered if politics would be my thing. I thought about the implications of the parties, right or left, what were their advantages and disadvantages. I also thought if I wanted to spend four years after a political party and how they would treat me; or how it would be to become a public servant when there were only four months left [for the administration] and if they would leave me sweeping the Municipality after using me as a “good girl”. [With the youth organizers] We saw all the political parties pulling us like we all were chinchines<sup>102</sup>, and we said: “damn, they go too far.” And what did I do? I spent most of my time in the electoral observatory, and from there, we were seen as neutral, neither here nor there.”*

Elizabeth’s appreciation for being neutral must not be confused with being apolitical. The youth had learned, from direct experience and Guatemalan history, that there were risks involved in political positioning. Some of Elizabeth’s friends considered making their own political project,

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<sup>101</sup> Here she also referenced the phrase “*me toman en cuenta*”, a statement of acknowledgement that was also used by other youth.

<sup>102</sup> A *chinchin* is a traditional rattle, made from the fruit of the calabash tree. In Guatemala to be a chinchin can mean to make useless noise or also to be a toy for others, which is the connotation Elizabeth gives it.

a civic committee that could run for the Municipality but gave up after receiving aggressive messages from other candidates and signs of distrust from other youth. The organized youth usually referenced this experience when speaking about what could they could expect from political parties. Still, the problem remained for several of them who wondered whether not having a political affiliation meant not having a political ideology. Here Elizabeth was adamant: she had no political ideology because she did not identify with any of the options in the political spectrum of Tactic or Guatemala. A few years previously she had felt inclined toward political leaders that emphasized education as a driver for improvement, like former candidate Eduardo Suger<sup>103</sup>, but she was no longer convinced:

*“After reading more, I do not know if my focus is left, center-left, central or central-right. It is all flour from the same sack [harina del mismo costal]. It is all so confusing, even more so now with all the political propaganda and the elections. And the leaders leave a lot to be desired. I had hope in Suger, but with time I realized they are all the same. So, in the end, if none of that [political ideology] makes a difference, but at least I want to try my best [to make a difference] until I break down. Yes, without an ideology as such. The same with religion. I can attend religious events, but to appropriate it and say, “hey, this is me”? No!”*

Elizabeth worried about how the political parties could manipulate youth, but also how young leaders could become political influencers when favoring a particular candidate instead of transparently informing other youth about their options. The electoral process lent itself to reinforcing transactional practices between authorities and general citizens, and youth were not the exception. In one of the hamlets, the leading members of a Youth Committee were affiliated with the Mayor’s party and had soon displaced all youth that were not openly supporting the political party. Elizabeth and the other members of *La Mesa* continued to work with them since, after much debate, they all had agreed that youth had a constitutional right to elect and be elected. Despite this, they were still concerned because democracy demanded partisan-neutral institutions, and this seemed impossible when all the individuals participating in it belonged to a single party. Should all Youth representatives be without partisan affiliation? Elizabeth understood that many youth were thinking “strategically”, that this was a way to obtain resources for the community or

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<sup>103</sup> Presidential candidate for the Guatemalan election in 2011. Mathematician and educator, his political campaign focused mostly on the role of education and values as key elements for the improvement of the country. He ran on several occasions but his last attempt was in 2011, with the party “Compromiso, renovación y orden (CREO)”, a center-right political option. His ticket included Laura Reyes, a Mayan lawyer, as his vice-president.

even jobs for the young people, but she was not willing to compromise her ideals and, therefore, herself. This recurring notion of thinking strategically and managing was a practical approach based on previous experiences with politicians, the Municipality, and NGOs. According to Elizabeth, a development practitioner had once told the Youth Network to be smart about their relationship with politicians.

*“Someone told us, “what happens is that you go directly to confront, but you will learn, you have to be strategic like the politicians.” And the truth is that, in that sense, I was learning that we did not always have to tell the truth, because there are better ways to get things done without any conflict, either with the political administration or within us as young people.”*

So, without a clear electoral option, Elizabeth faced the upcoming elections of 2015 without much concern. She saw herself as a more realistic person because after studying the political context of Guatemala and Tactic, she now knew what to expect.

*“Now we understand that there are many people who are in public posts because of their political affiliations. I understand the personal side for them, but I cannot see myself identified with political parties, not even with a civic committee, because they always go after the power. [...] I have seen how the situation is, so I am a bit more realistic; I cannot continue to deceive myself that any political party can come to change things. As we said, a large part depends on the citizens, but in the end, we are all stuck in the same situation, we in ours and they in theirs (laughs).*

## CHAPTER VI

### AN EVENT IN THE POLITICAL FIELD OF YOUTH

As we have seen, the political field of youth in Tactic made up an intricate web of actions and ideas that emanated from youth organizations, project interventions, and Municipal interests. The actions led by the complex structure of youth representation produced and reproduced practices that were not circumscribed to the field of youth but belonged to the broader scope of political power: political patronage and citizen compliance were expected from the youth as they acted upon the community. This situation would be openly questioned in 2015, when the Guatemalan Spring shook the realm of “old politics”. Unfortunately, the uplifting and citizenship-affirmative feeling associated with this moment was not experienced equally across Guatemala, and Tactic youth would soon face the consequences of openly confronting the status quo. In this section I will address the Guatemalan Spring as an *event* that would bring youth political practices into new contexts that would eventually become integrated to the system (Sahlins 1981:6). Youth, as citizens, would face a series of contradictory values and meanings within the field of political practice, heightening distrust and disappointment as basic components of democratic life (Greenberg 2014).

#### **#notetoca: a violent event during the Guatemalan Spring of 2015**

On Saturday, July 25<sup>th</sup> of 2015, a group of six enthusiastic young men went to a political rally for the LIDER political party. The rally was a public event, with no entry requirements, set in an open field that usually served as a soccer arena in one of Tactic’s largest hamlets. A massive stage with an equally impressive sound system stood at the end of the field, decorated in red and white, reproducing the political emblem of the party. On this stage, the leading presidential candidate Manuel Baldizón<sup>104</sup> would address his supporters and invite voters to choose him as President and reelect Mayor Guerrero for the local government.

As the youth approached the location, they psyched themselves up to display the hand-made signs saying “#notetoca” (not your turn) to Baldizón. Standing by the edge of the field, with their signs under their arms, they laughed and stalled for a while before advancing further into the

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<sup>104</sup> Manuel Baldizón became the Secretary of LIDER in 2009, after leaving UNE. He had been elected as congressman by UNE for the period 2008-2011 but disagreements with its General Secretariat resulted in his abandonment of the party. Baldizón’s legal work in favor of senior citizens, retirees and pensioners of the State became the support base of LIDER (ASIES 2012:69–76).

open field. Not too long after this their presence was noted by a group of supporters of the Mayor and municipality employees; they had been waiting for the young protesters. The LIDER followers, wearing red shirts with official embroidery, surrounded the youth and yelled at them to leave the rally. In a matter of seconds the confrontation escalated and soon the men swooped in to hit and kick the young protesters. A couple of the young men were able to get away as the aggressors took the signs from their hands. Another was chased down on the sidelines until he fell, the supporters gathered around to kick him while he was still on the floor, then suddenly someone threatened him while pointing to a gun still encased in a belt. In the background, a recording of the campaign's theme song performed by children proclaimed the lyrics: "*Te toca Guatemala, te toca. Con LIDER, al pueblo le toca*" ("It's your turn Guatemala, it's your turn. With LIDER, it's the people's turn").

Eventually, the six young men gathered on the outskirts of the field while the aggressors shouted some more and ripped up the banners. Scared and mildly hurt, the young people took refuge in whatever space they could find. Bystanders eventually tried to protect the young men by talking to the aggressors, begging them to stop; suddenly an older man came out of his house with an iron stick and waved it in front of the LIDER brethren who then backed down. Amid this confusion, a couple of the protesters saw a bus coming by and moved fast to get on it, the others ran down the road and, after things calmed down, left in a taxi.

Without any further interruptions, the political rally continued as planned and Baldizón approached the audience as if nothing had happened.

### **The general elections, the Guatemalan Spring of 2015 and "old politics."**

To properly situate the #notetoca event and the Guatemalan Spring of 2015, we need to understand how local and national politics were intertwined in a contentious electoral campaign. The three major political parties in the 2015 elections were the same parties that had led the results in the previous elections of 2011: *Partido Patriota*<sup>105</sup> (PP), a right-wing conservative party, self-labeled as liberal democrats, who were in office with former General Otto Pérez Molina (2012-2015); *Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza*<sup>106</sup> (UNE), a populist center-left party that self-identified as social

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<sup>105</sup> PP was among the parties that emerged after the Peace Accords, coming to life around the early 2000's. They ran with a "*mano dura*" approach to security which they would eventually soften to include also employment and democracy as their slogan. They had been the main opposition to UNE's government (2008-2011) and won the general elections of 2011 with the binomial candidacy of founding members, former general and congressman Otto Pérez Molina and former congresswoman Roxana Baldetti (ASIES 2012:89-101).

<sup>106</sup> UNE came to life within the left-wing political coalition Alianza Nueva Nación (ANN) that had integrated different leftist political groups, including the former guerrilla coalition URNG who had turned into a political party after the

democrats and that, after leading the country with Álvaro Colom (2008-2011), became the main opposition in Congress; and *Libertad Democrática Renovada*<sup>107</sup> (LIDER), a populist right-wing party that held the third largest political bloc in Congress.

As was usual in Guatemala, political parties began proselytism in mid-2014, even though electoral laws banned any political campaign before the official declaration on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2015. Before this date political parties were only allowed to promote affiliation, but most had incurred in an anticipated campaign. This contradictory practice between proselytism and the political campaign was one of the many unclear regulations of the electoral process in Guatemala. In 2014, the regulations for the *Ley Electoral y de Partidos Políticos* (LEPP) established, in article 62bis, that proselytism was the right of political parties to make themselves known (through their name and emblem) and enroll affiliates, whereas a political campaign was any activity driven towards promoting a candidate or a governmental program before the general elections<sup>108</sup>. Experts had claimed that the law was clear regarding the regulations but political parties claimed ambiguity when faced by electoral sanctions (Ramos 2014), and by March of 2015 the Tribunal Supremo Electoral (TSE) had verbally sanctioned eleven political parties for early campaigning (TSE 2015).

As I was engaged in fieldwork, my notes registered how the road between Guatemala City and Tactic became overflowed with political propaganda. Across Tactic the walls, rocks, electricity posts, doors, and mountains waved political publicity for any of the 14 candidates to the Presidency and the 11 candidates running for Mayor. The absurdity of the numbers resulted in jokes about how the electoral ballot resembled a lottery board. Presidential and municipal candidates overlapped

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Peace Accords of 1996. Álvaro Colom, who ran as presidential candidate under ANN in 1999, was among the main proponents of the party which rallied around a “social cohesion” political program; in 2000, several congresspeople elected by ANN left the coalition and created UNE’s political bloc within the Congress. Colom would again run for president in 2003 and 2007 when he was finally elected president. UNE became a strong political party, holding the largest political blocs in congress since 2003. Sandra Torres, who was the First Lady in Colom’s regime, led the social cohesion programs without having an official governmental post; this was highly criticized as an anticipated political campaign. In fact, Torres would eventually divorce Colom, become the General Secretariat of UNE and launch her candidacy for the period 2012-2015; however the Constitutional Court found her candidacy unconstitutional and was withdrawn from the political race (ASIES 2012:110–121). Colom would later resign from the party and the main political image of UNE would center on Torres.

<sup>107</sup> The political party *Libertad Democrática Renovanda* (LIDER) emerged after several congresspeople broke off from the leading political party *Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza* (UNE) in 2008. In the 2011 elections the party focused on a social agenda, similar to UNE and after finishing as the third force in congress it soon became engrossed with elected officials fleeing from other political parties (ASIES 2012:69–76). The statements of the political party do not make a clear affirmation of their political ideology, constantly referencing a humanistic approach.

<sup>108</sup> These articles would be modified and expanded in the revisions implemented in 2016 (TSE 2016a).

in rallies, speeches, and political paraphernalia. The eleven municipal candidates of Tactic were all men while the presidential election had two female candidates for a brief time<sup>109</sup>.

In January of 2015, the main candidates for Municipal Mayor in Tactic were Edin Guerrero, Julio Asig, and Hugo Caal, although at that time the first two were still shopping for a ticket with the most popular political parties. Edin Guerrero, who was the Mayor (2012-2015), had been elected as a member of the Municipal Council with FRG for the period 2004-2007, ran with UNE in 2007, and with PP in 2011 when he was finally elected. However, early in 2015 he had yet to announce his partisan affiliation for the new elections. The publicity from the Municipality highlighted Guerrero's profile with the colors of the municipal flag (blue, white and yellow) instead of the orange that was associated with PP. Meanwhile former mayor and entrepreneur Mayor Hugo Caal, who had reached local power through the *Partido de Alianza Nacional* (PAN), was now running with UNE, which locally had been strengthened by the endorsement from Alta Verapaz's congressman Haroldo Quej.<sup>110</sup> Guerrero and Caal were known to be running, but word was not out yet about Julio Asig -a former teacher and activist- who had founded and previously campaigned with the civic committee "PUNEET".<sup>111</sup>

A photograph of Asig with the presidential candidate of LIDER, Manuel Baldizón, and a Guatemalan flag had circulated through social media by the end of 2014 and people speculated about a political liaison for the elections. Regionally, LIDER had become a central figure as the strongest party in Alta Verapaz<sup>112</sup> after securing the main ticket for Cobán's municipality and congresswoman Nora Cu, former Mayor of Tactic, that had run with PP in the previous elections. However, by February of 2015 Guerrero announced his candidacy with LIDER after a rift with members of the PP party who were on the Municipal Council, Asig confirmed running with PUNEET while Caal remained with UNE. The rumor in town was that Asig had not been able to "buy" the municipal ticket with LIDER, but he systematically denied this accusation in his rallies

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<sup>109</sup> Sandra Torres ran for UNE while Zury Ríos was running with VIVA. Ríos is daughter of coup d'état president Efraín Ríos-Montt, which deemed her candidacy unconstitutional in 2015.

<sup>110</sup> Haroldo Quej has been a congressman for over 30 years. His first period was with FRG in 1996- 2000. He remained in the post until 2007, when he quit to run with Luis Rabbé as vice-president for the same party. In 2012, he ran and won a seat in congress with PP, then in 2015 he became affiliated with UNE.

<sup>111</sup> A civic committee was the alternative political figure to a political party, which usually only presented candidates for Municipalities. The name of the civic committee was "Comité Cívico Población Unida con una Nueva Identidad Tactiqueña" and its acronym PUNEET meant "hat" in Poqomchi'.

<sup>112</sup> LIDER was secured in Alta Verapaz by the Córdova family. Tomás "Maxiko" Córdova ran and was elected as congressional representative of Alta Verapaz; his brother Jorge "Koky" Córdova ran and was elected as for the Municipality of Cobán. Other family members had benefited from State contracts (Investigación 2018)

while continuing proselytism with his Civic Committee.<sup>113</sup> This common practice within the organizational scheme of Guatemalan political parties can be understood as “franchise-parties” (ASIES 2013). The franchising of the political brand allowed for highly centralized parties and local leadership to converge in a utilitarian alliance: the former gains the law’s required departmental representation and the latter acquires the backup of a national brand (Ibid.). In this context political profitability was the driving force behind the electoral campaign, while ideological identity and even partisan affiliation become secondary elements.

The inconsistency of partisan affiliation shown by the Tactic candidates was not unheard of in Guatemalan politics; in Figure 20 we can see the political parties and candidates that had run for the municipal government between 1999 and 2015 and their associated political party (see Table 20 in Appendix). The four elected Mayors for the period (in bold) ran with different affiliations, sometimes even shifting to the opposition’s party. For example, Guerrero’s participation with PP, UNE, and LIDER condenses the three major congressional forces for the period, without necessarily resulting in an impediment to obtaining an electoral ticket and eventually winning.

This high mobility between political parties was locally labeled as *transfugismo*<sup>114</sup>, erasing the role of the political party as a source of ideological identity. The lack of clarity in partisan political ideologies was not a problem of interpretation but a deliberate characteristic that favored proselytism; while there are a few efforts to capture the ideological spectrum of political parties in Guatemala (ASIES 2012), previous studies have shown how political parties deliberately position themselves as *catch-all parties* by allowing incongruity between the ideological statements of their leading members, affiliates and written postulates (Ortiz Loaiza 2006:18–20; Erazo and López Arrivillaga 2006:17). This apparently unclear position, which helped to capture votes and avoid political commitment, would result in Elizabeth’s appreciation of all politicians as being “*harina del mismo costal*”. This liberal market-based relationship between candidates and political parties was defined by temporary convenience, rarely transcending the electoral period, thus reinforcing *caciquismo* as the sustenance of partisan action. The unrestrictive movement of candidates and political parties was normalized under the refrain that “*it has always been like that.*” The thing that

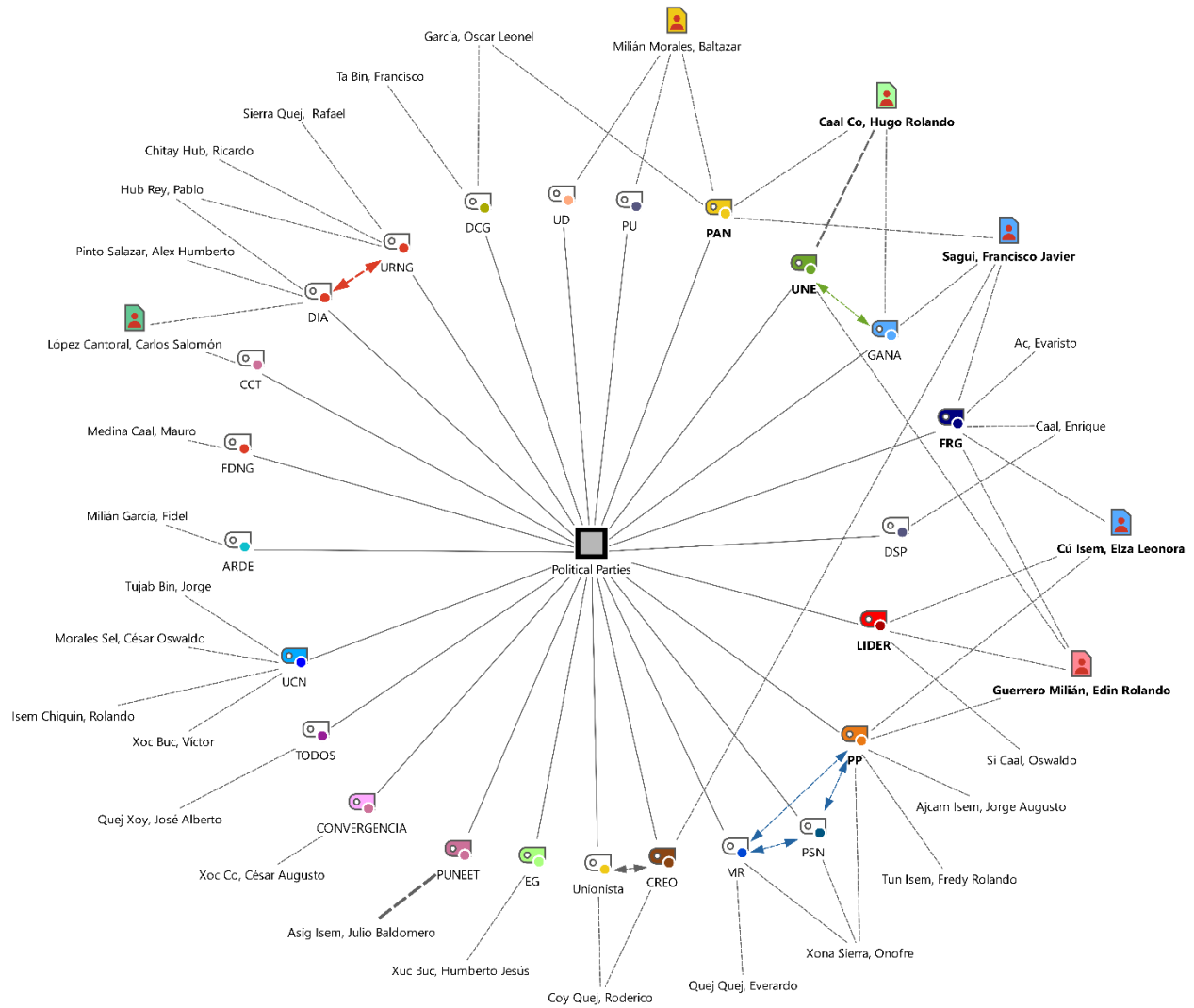
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<sup>113</sup> Municipal candidacies were rumored to cost around Q 100,000.00 (approximately US\$ 13,500) though I don’t have strong evidence for this. The cost covered the right to use the party logo, but no additional resources were given. In this sense, candidates were expected to “personally” fund their entire campaign.

<sup>114</sup> “*Transfugismo*” as a political term was highly referenced through the 2015 elections to describe the changes in partisan affiliations among congresspeople. However, several youth also used it to describe the volatile partisan affiliation among the local candidates for Major.



mattered locally was not necessarily the party but having a direct relationship with the candidate, which could, in turn, be exchanged for favors and connections. This practice was continuously reinforced throughout the youth's experience of the political sphere.



**Figure 20: Tactic's municipal candidates and their partisan affiliations 1999-2015**

Source: Elaborated by the author with electoral data for 1999-2015  
(TSE 1999:638-639; TSE 2003; TSE 2007:654-655; TSE 2011:550; TSE 2015:424)

As the waters settled in terms of candidates and political parties, the pressure was on voter affiliation and subsequently capturing local leadership that could ensure more supporters. Political tensions were increasing as political parties recruited young voters through friends and social connections. It was barely January of 2015 when the first confrontation about the elections erupted

within *La Mesa*. The first session of the year began with a discussion about the upcoming political campaign and the non-partisan character of the organization when several members accused an *antiguo* of “offering” the support of *La Mesa* to a political party. This led to a long and heated discussion where everyone present had to state whether they had attended partisan meetings and in what role (as individuals or as the organization). It was revealed that several people were affiliated with different political parties, and while the most prominent youth remained unaffiliated, they had received explicit invitations as “representatives” of the organization. After considering how to balance the right of young citizens to be active in the electoral campaign and the need to protect the organization from a partisan takeover, a new rule emerged: individuals could attend political rallies but were never allowed to do so as representatives of *La Mesa*. Still, an air of distrust remained between the members and it seemed to increase as Guatemala moved forward in the electoral process.

#### ***“Old politics” and political pragmatism in Tactic***

In April of 2015, amid the celebration of Holy Week of 2015, I met with a young man who was a Municipal employee but also the chief strategist of Guerrero’s political campaign. He was trying to get about 20 young people, who wore bright red clothes, into two pick-up trucks. After greeting him, I asked whether everyone was wearing red because they were campaigning for LIDER. Just a few months before, I had seen him wearing orange clothing since the Mayor was still associated with PP. He confirmed that it was part of the new image but quickly pointed out it was not the same early campaigning seen in other places. I snickered and replied that people doing it elsewhere did not make it legal. To that, he said:

*“Look, the thing is that the others [political parties] had already started and now we are in politics. I was one of those who learned how it is supposed to be and the rules of democracy, but in the real world, we must do what it takes.”<sup>15</sup>*

This pragmatic approach was also embraced by disenfranchised youth who thought of political participation as a means to obtain social standing. Rosita, a young Poqomchi’ woman with a teaching high school degree and an active member of *La Mesa* and LIDER, talked about her participation with a political party as fun and enlightening.

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<sup>15</sup> In Spanish, “*tenemos que hacer lo que toca*”.

*“It’s a good opportunity to make myself known. Maybe if they see that I take a part in it and get involved, then they will take me into account when other projects come along. [She laughs] I know this is not why we should participate, but that is just the way things work, right?”*

She had participated in several workshops on democracy and citizenship, while also partaking in entrepreneurship collectives, but she had not been able to find the permanent job she needed to continue her college education. With no opportunities in sight she was struggling about her future. *“Dar me a conocer”* and *“Que me tomen en cuenta”* were elements that appeared in many of the youth’s stories when explaining their involvement in youth groups; in a general sense, both youth groups and political parties were spaces for meeting others and being known. However, Rosita expressed the common belief that partisan affiliation was a way to access jobs and political favors. After our interview, I walked with her to a political meeting, but she stopped before the door and told me, *“Maybe it’s better if you don’t come in, they will think you want to join, and you don’t want that. That way, you are left alone and can come and go without problems.”*

The model of “old politics” naturalized several practices but mostly *caciquismo*, patronage, and electoral harassment. At first, Rosita’s warning did not resonate with me, but this soon changed. Although I did not live in Tactic permanently, a few political parties invited me to “advise the young people” about making intelligent alliances for the upcoming elections. A childhood friend, who decided to run for Mayor, duplicitously invited me to talk about my family’s literary magazine<sup>116</sup> then suddenly proclaimed I should be part of his electoral ticket. Comfortably seated in his office, he explained that he needed one member of the old Ladino families to run with him; since my family was non-partisan and no longer had a business in town, we were the best option to validate his campaign. Then he went on to say that I could bring all “my youth” with me. While trying to decline the invitation politely, I explained that the people in the youth organizations had already made statements about their neutrality during the electoral process, plus they were not mine to boss around. This was not the first time I was told *“tus jóvenes”*, which was said not just to imply relationship but almost ownership; this was usually followed by me getting angry and curtly answering *“I do not own people.”* After saying no to his first invitation, he continued to text and call me to reconsider or help him get another member of my family to join the party. Eventually, I opted for blocking all the calls and text messages, as well as avoiding him in streets and at public events.

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<sup>116</sup> *Revista Asunción* is published for the patron saint festivities.

I related everything that had transpired in these interactions with *La Mesa* since it could easily lead to misunderstandings. The previous conflicts in January were now apparent to me; even if you rejected affiliation, a candidate could claim to be negotiating an alliance with the organization through me. When I informed the organization, Nikte' explained this was just part of the "electoral harassment" and that it should soon pass. This notion of candidates as male predators over possible voters struck a chord with me; a non-partisan position was deemed impossible, and there was no need for consent. This experience was more common than I had anticipated, as many of the organized youth had been approached by different political parties. Not all of them had chosen to share the information with the group, and this created many tensions and disrupted people's trust in one another.

### ***Creating a safe space from electoral harassment***

Electoral harassment increased as the elections drew nearer, which proved difficult for individuals. Youth soon faced the expectations of transactional politics, which offered jobs during and after the elections, funds for group or community initiatives, and goods in exchange for support during the campaign. In this context, the members of *La Mesa* doubted each other's intentions whenever political parties were involved. This led to evident tensions but also reinforced the need for clear rules within the group against external threats. Usually the process of luring young people into political parties was subtle, the pressured increased as the youth tried to execute their regular public activities.

In 2015, *La Mesa* and the OMJ were planning the third 10K race, which needed funding from the Municipality. As several requests had been made for institutional support, a member of the Municipal Council summoned the members for a meeting at a private home. The appointment was scheduled for a weeknight and few youth could attend, so they asked me to come in support of the group. Everyone was tense prior to the meeting; the Municipal Council was divided between two political campaigns and the discord amongst the administration was high. Although within the youth there were sympathizers for different political parties, at that moment it was considered essential for the survival of *La Mesa* to have a neutral stance before the electoral process. So, attending a meeting with any of the parties was a risk.


The power struggle was immediate. The Municipal Councilor let us know that the youth could not expect the Municipality would support the race all the time, so the best solution was to make alliances with private companies to finance it. While searching private sponsorship was not

unheard of for this type of sports event, the Councilor sought to place his own company as the primary logo in all the advertising (banners, posters, and t-shirts) while offering an insubstantial amount of funds. He also offered to negotiate with other companies who had benefited from State contracts and were sympathizers of the party in office. A member of *La Mesa* showed interest in this proposition while the others received the information with suspicion. Once outside, a young Poqomchi' man shook as if he had a chill, and said, "*I'm afraid!*" The statement was followed by people nodding; while no direct threat was made, it was clear that local politicians expected to be in control of the youth group. As I walked with the youth, at almost at 10:30 pm under the twinkling lights of the street, they decided to summon an emergency meeting the next day. The rules within the group had been clear since January but had not been made public.

A few days later, a statement that detailed the purpose of *La Mesa* and the basic rules of political engagement was released through the Facebook page of the group (see figure 21). The text emphasized the rule of collectiveness, consensus, and horizontal decision-making as the key features before the electoral process; the measure of publishing the principles attempted to protect the organization from partisan interests. However, it also recognized that individual members could act independently from the "collective" but never as representatives of all the youth; that is, individual and collective positions could exist at the same time, giving room for an I, We, and They. Distancing the organization from individual action aimed to protect what was thought to be their trump card: control over the designation of the OMJ officer and the legitimate right to elect representatives before the COMUDE.

Partisan neutrality was conceived as safe space, which granted impartiality and legitimacy to an entity that seemed to exist beyond the individuals that composed it; as mentioned before, several youth supported specific candidates, but not all were willing to engage with the political campaigns. Whenever the electoral harassment escalated, members were able to protect themselves under the umbrella of collectiveness and the agreement of partisan neutrality. As mentioned before, even I referenced it to protect myself from those wanting to use me as a channel of influence. The technical arguments of social and political auditing allowed the narrative of partisan neutrality as a desirable position before the electoral process. When facing "old politics", rules and proceduralism instead of depoliticizing or placing youth outside of the political sphere granted them a place in the idealized realm of Democracy while legitimizing their position as an entity untouched by the self-interest of political parties. At the same time, it reinforced the notion

of individual responsibility when engaging in local politics. As Greenberg has found, the use of procedure “embedded the individual more firmly into politics” (Greenberg 2014:178).



**Mesa de la Juventud**  
**Tactic, Alta Verapaz**

La Mesa de la Juventud –MJ– es un espacio de análisis, asesoría e incidencia de carácter abierto con espíritu dialógico en donde se profundiza sobre las necesidades y la forma en que las juventudes participan en su acontecer social. La MJ está integrada por jóvenes de diferentes barrios, aldeas y caseríos del municipio de Tactic.

**TIPO DE ORGANIZACIÓN**  
La organización es de carácter horizontal, respetando el principio de transitividad. Cada tres meses cambian dos figuras importantes: “Secretarías Adjuntas”; y cada dos años a la figura máxima: “Secretaría General”. En este sentido, la MJ no cuenta con presidentes ni directores; se espera que todas y todos los jóvenes que la conforman demuestren liderazgo para dirigir las diferentes actividades y áreas de trabajo. El nivel de participación de sus integrantes, activos y pasivos, varía según las actividades y/o procesos que ésta lleva a cabo. La ubicación de dichas actividades varía según la coyuntura y según lo acordado por “el colectivo”, como suele llamarse al mecanismo de toma de decisión, compuesto por la mayoría de miembros activos.

**PRINCIPIOS DE LA MESA DE LA JUVENTUD**  
*Respeto y Tolerancia:* al disenso de ideas y a la libertad del pensamiento ideológico, religioso y político.  
*Dialogo e Interdependencia:* como valores ciudadanos y mecanismos imprescindibles del progreso social y desarrollo humano.

**POSTURA DE LA MESA DE LA JUVENTUD ANTE EL PROCESO ELECTORAL DE 2015**  
La Mesa de la Juventud se define como un espacio político no partidario, es decir que promueve la participación en el espacio político pero no asume ni asumirá el apoyo a un partido político en específico. Los integrantes de la Mesa de la Juventud pueden a título personal participar en la arena política pero deberán respetar los acuerdos que se han discutido en diferentes reuniones desde 2011:

- Ningún miembro de la Mesa de la Juventud promoverá el apoyo de toda la organización a partido político o comité cívico alguno.
- Las y los miembros que decidan participar en el proceso electoral como candidatos u organizadores de partidos políticos o comités cívicos, podrán hacerlo únicamente a título personal.
- Las y los miembros que decidan participar en el proceso electoral como candidatos u organizadores de partidos políticos o comités cívicos no ostentarán los cargos de Secretaría General o Adjunta; de ser así deberán renunciar al cargo.
- Las y los miembros que decidan participar en el proceso electoral deberán dar a conocer sus intenciones al “colectivo” en las reuniones programadas para así evitar malos entendidos.

**MESA DE LA JUVENTUD**  
“Hay una silla para vos y una mesa para todas y todos”

**Figure 21: Statement before the electoral process of 2015**

Source: Mesa de la Juventud, Tactic, Alta Verapaz (2015)

## The Guatemalan Spring of 2015 and #notetoca

In April 2015, while *La Mesa* was involved in the Citizenship Workshops, and I balanced teaching and fieldwork, the Ministerio Público and CICIG<sup>17</sup> gave the first declarations on how a corruption ring had been found that was clearly linked to our presidential cabinet; these accusations triggered the “Guatemalan Spring of 2015” –which referenced both the Egyptian Spring and our previous “spring” of 1944. A customs fraud scandal called “*La Línea*” brought to light a corruption scheme orchestrated by President Otto Pérez Molina and Vice President Roxana Baldetti; soon Baldizón was also linked to new focal points of corruption within the government. After the revelation of several corruption schemes within State institutions, including both Executive and Legislative powers, outraged Guatemalans took the streets to demand the application

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<sup>17</sup> The *Comisión Internacional contra la Impunidad en Guatemala* (CICIG) is an independent international entity established between the United Nations and the Guatemalan State in 2007. Its aim is to strengthen and support national institutions in charge of the criminal investigation and prosecution of illegal and clandestine organizations. Most of CICIG’s work was done with the Ministerio Público (Public Prosecutor).

of justice, changes in the National Political Parties Law and the extrication of “old politics” from election campaigns. The congressmen of LIDER had effectively blocked legal procedures to withdraw immunity from President Pérez Molina, a step required by the Public Prosecutor (Fiscal General) to continue investigations; meanwhile, Baldizón was leading the polls with his vague slogan “*Te toca*” (Your turn) just as several fraudulent cases emerged against him.



**Figure 22: Facebook invitation to #25A**

Source: Image of the Facebook event (Radio Ambulante, Reply All, and Trelles 2015)

The first massive call to action took place on April 25th through a Facebook public event that went viral. Gabriel Wer, one of the eight organizers of that first #RenunciaYa, explains that everything began as indignation about the evident fraud led by the Presidency, they did not expect it to become a national movement (Solis Miranda 2016). Parallel events were created in other cities, like Cobán where CUNOR-USAC students had an important role in summoning attendees. In Guatemala City, students mobilized in USAC and in private universities with several “unofficial” organizations coming to life. A coalition was organized under the *Coordinadora de Estudiantes Universitarios de Guatemala* (CEUG). These student organizations in Guatemala City and the largest secondary cities, like Quetzaltenango and Cobán, would have a central role in the social mobilizations or *marchas* during the year. Facebook events summoning people to these different *marchas* strategically used hashtags with publications featuring titles like “#RenunciaYa” as the

movement was called or referencing the date of the mobilization, like “#25A” (April 25<sup>th</sup>) which linked all posts, pictures, and memes of the last several days.



**Figure 23: “Marcha del #25A”**  
Photograph by the author, April 25th, 2015.

Parallel to the #renunciaya demonstrations that took place in plazas, usually organized by student movements or social organizations, another form of protest had also taken place in the electoral process: the #notetoca. Manuel Baldizón, the presidential candidate for LIDER, campaigned with the catchphrase “Te Toca”. This was wordplay on the popular idea that the frontrunner of a previous election had to be given the presidency for the following term (*le toca*). Memes and banners challenged Baldizón’s campaign stating #notetoca on social media until it became a specific form of protest. Fausto Rosales, a seminarian who had become known for making a single-person protest during an illegal political rally<sup>118</sup> of the Partido Patriota in 2014, crashed one of the largest meetings of LIDER on May 3rd, 2015. Rosales stood in the middle of La Plaza in Guatemala City, with two banners that stated “PP = LIDER. No soy estúpido” and “Este circo no

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<sup>118</sup> During an assembly the party presented Alejandro Sinibaldi as a pre-candidate. It was considered early campaigning.



*representa al pueblo.*” Baldizón’s sympathizers threw water and garbage at him, but he stood stoically without responding to the threats (Pitán 2015). His picture became viral in newspapers and social media, with many people praising his bravery. However, Rosales was not the first or only one at that political rally; a “communist youth group” had experienced the same treatment even before entering the rally with a similar banner (Barreto 2015). By the following weekend, protesters crashed political rallies in Antigua, Guatemala, and Quetzaltenango and Baldizón decided not to show up at the first one; these protests became the #notetoca movement. Soon, LIDER called a press conference and announced they had evidence that the protesters were being paid by UNE, their primary opponent at the time. Through this simple act, they cast aside and discredited all critiques coming their way and increased distrust among the *indignados*.

For the first mobilization, #25A, I was in Guatemala City and as an *indignada*<sup>119</sup> decided to answer the call. In the *Plaza*, as the central park had been renamed, I met friends, colleagues, and students. In the midst of political turmoil, the protests (most of which took place between #25A and the “national stand-down #27A” on August 27th) became part of my weekly research/teaching routine as I moved between Guatemala City and Tactic. I was never an organizer, just an active and exhausted citizen. During these different marches and the national strike, my bag carried (besides IDs, water, food, and cash) a hand-made banner, a small bottle of vinegar and a light scarf; the last two items were among the many preventive measures recommended to improvise a mask in case we were met with teargas. After the first protest, I downloaded Twitter and Firechat on my phone; the latter is a proprietary mobile app that works by cellular proximity rather than cellular network systems, it became popular since the signal usually collapsed (or was blocked) around the Plaza. Once the marches were over I wrote a short personal reflection or published some emblematic photography on social media. In most of these marches I participated on a personal level, although I did walk with the student movement “*Acción UVG*” which agglutinated members of the UVG community, without being recognized by the University authorities.<sup>120</sup>

In my experience, the marches were followed by an intense session of questions and debates about our political system, our role as citizens in the Guatemalan Spring, and future scenarios for the upcoming elections. While my first participation was in Guatemala City, the second took place in Cobán. I wrote a reflective note about my experience in that march and posted it on Facebook,

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<sup>119</sup> The Spanish movement “Los Indignados” of 2011 was among the references for the Guatemalan Spring.

<sup>120</sup> For more details on the student mobilizations and the creation of the CEUG see Regina Solis’ thesis (2017).

as many others had done on social media during the past weeks; I thought it would be a good way to share with my friends who were mobilizing in the city and get the word out about how non-violent protests were occurring across the country. The Facebook posts concerned many people in my environment, including my family and the youth of Tactic. A day before the second mobilization in Cobán, I wrote in my field notes how the members of *La Mesa* had questioned my participation in the #25A in Guatemala City:

*“We were sitting in La Mesa’s office when Ab’ixoom questioned me about going to the protest. He thought it was risky and not safe, adding “Thank God nothing happened!”. I tried to explain that these were non-violent protests, and people began discussing if protesting could be considered a good way to convey the malestar (which quite nicely always reminds me of indigestion). Another person said he thought it was going to be like when peasant organizations take the road<sup>121</sup> in San Julián and burn tires. They were impressed that all we had done was wave our banners and sing along. I asked them why they didn’t go to the protest in Cobán, and one answered, “we are not from Cunor.” Only Ajpu had gone and said that it had been a nice and cool event, and I could see his pictures in “el feis” [Facebook].”*

The note highlighted two things: first, the idea that mobilizations were restricted to university students, particularly those enrolled in the national university; second, the bewilderment about peaceful demonstrations. During the mobilizations in Cobán, who experienced similar events to Guatemala, protests took several routes but Universities were always meeting points, and student blocs were highly visible; still, peasant, indigenous, and worker organizations were among the key actors of the civil unrest. The protests I attended in Cobán all departed from CUNOR-USAC, and there was no need to be a student or have friends in order to participate; though I did attend with one of the members of *La Mesa* who was a student there, and we were soon joined by people unaffiliated with the organization. Still, it was commonplace to have prominent signs stating the leading role of University students; for example, during the march of #16M in Cobán, the first line of the protest (after the pickup cars holding amplifiers and photographers) was with the Guatemalan flag next to the “CUNOR PRESENTE” sign (figure #24).

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<sup>121</sup> The intersection between the road to the Polochic and CA4 in San Julian, a hamlet of Tactic, is a common place for road blockades by peasant organizations.



**Figure 24: #16M in Cobán**  
Photograph by the author, 2015.

The association between protests and student organization was not only expected but desired; students could invoke a sense of greater good and innocence while demanding the observance of democratic principles (Gordon 2010; Greenberg 2014). However, in Cobán, the dynamic of university life was different from the city with several private universities holding classes on Saturdays, the same days as the protest, that were not interrupted. This meant that several of the youth from *La Mesa* were attending school during these demonstrations while others never engaged because they were not university students, finding themselves lacking with the legitimate standing to perform in the protests.

Additionally, I found the relief of “nothing happening” expressed by Ab’ixoom as a reference to the violence and repression that had been the standard answer from the State to social movements. While faced with this fear every time I went to *La Plaza*, I knew of the legal actions filed by different social organizations before the Constitutional Court to enforce the constitutional right to demonstrate (Soy502 2015). When these discussions took place among the organized youth of *Tactic*, many conveyed that while the *Plazas* of big cities could keep protesters in anonymity, doing it in a small community carried much more risk in the long term. “Everyone will know you

*defied the alcalde or the president; they will later challenge or ignore you when they implement social programs or when you ask for municipal support,”* was said to me by a youth organizer. This was the reason why many of these highly critical youth never led a local demonstration, opting to attend protests in the main cities where they could participate anonymously; we met several times during these demonstrations in Cobán and Guatemala City. Gordon (2010:181–183) found that fear of political violence from the State shaped parental opposition toward youth activism in public protests. I would add that in Tactic, youth themselves have interiorized this fear and were not always willing to take the risk and felt the need to warn their peers against it.

So when the events of July 25th unfolded in Tactic, I wondered why, instead of organizing a #renunciaya protest, the boys had chosen to crash Baldizón’s rally. Most of them were highly critical of President Pérez Molina’s corruption ring and of Manuel Baldizón’s candidacy; Mayor Guerrero was linked to both since he ran with PP in 2011 (#renunciaya) and was running with LIDER in 2015 (#notetoca). However, with time, I would come to understand that the lack of partisan consistency shown by Guerrero made his political affiliation irrelevant, weak and utilitarian; local politicians were evaluated by themselves, not by the parties they were supposed to represent. However, national politicians were unknown individuals who embodied the “old politics” and that Saturday in July presented an opportunity to face an undesirable candidate directly. This was most likely going to be the only time that Baldizón would set foot in Tactic; only during the electoral campaign did high-rank politicians show up in small municipalities like this one.

### **#notetoca in Tactic and its aftermath**

Inspired by the different expressions of national indignation, the young Tactiqueños who participated in the #notetoca event were all male legal adults between 19 and 26. All but one were Poqomchi’ and had been active in *La Mesa* for over a year. The idea of crashing the rally had been briefly discussed, amidst jokes and political memes, over Facebook a few days before the event. While they were all members, they never thought of mobilizing as *La Mesa* but coordinated themselves independently; the many discussions of keeping the organization free from partisan politics seemed to apply even for anti-partisan demonstrations. So they were engaging in the Guatemalan Spring as many other citizens who had a wide range of affiliations.

That Saturday morning they got together in front of the Catholic Church to quickly make their signs. They had a set of thick markers and colorful poster board. One of the young men remembered the events with amusement and anger:

*“A compañero was the one who called a meeting to organize against a political party that was coming to the municipality. I saw that many were signing up for it, my acquaintances from La Mesa. So I thought, I am going to participate, because as a young person I had to get involved in politics. I had to know what actions these candidates were going to take for our country. Filters [news and ads on social media] always came out of what that candidate was like, that he was not fit for President. One already knows how things are going to be... That motivated me to express my disapproval of that man. So, the day came when that candidate was coming; we gathered in the town square with our posters. We made them in front of the Catholic Church and took the bus to the hamlet.*

*We were going to wait for other compañeros to join the group because only men had signed up. Women had signed up too, but at the last minute they did not arrive. Supposedly one of them would join us at the rally... [I ask if they had organized through Facebook] Yes on Facebook! Afterward, just one compañero who lives in the hamlet [where the rally took place] joined us there, and the supporters of the party saw that we carried signs and that we were not wearing the color of the political party. We approached the field. We planned to go in front of him [Baldizón] and show our posters but they [the party people] did not let us. Suddenly they were attacking us and hitting us and we just run away. We did not even get to show our signs! Several of the compañeros were beaten hard.” (male, 22-years-old).*

Meanwhile, inside the political rally, two young women, who also participated in *La Mesa* and supported the Mayor and Baldizón, watched with great consternation at what was happening to their friends. These two girls became the target of questioning from the young adherents that surrounded them. While rejecting accusations that *La Mesa* was trying to boycott the Mayor or the political rally, the girls placed themselves as proof of the partisan neutrality of the organization. If the boycott were an official position of *La Mesa*, why would they even be at the political rally? This seemed to pacify their peers and both remained, albeit nervously, at the activity.

Later that day, public and private Facebook pages were loaded with discussions of the event as videos, pictures, and personal recounts were published. Several commentators blamed the young protesters for “*inciting violence*” and said they deserved what they got for “*stepping into the anthill*.” Few people commented on how there was no wrongdoing as the young men were not even able to take out their signs. A few hours after the violent reaction in the field, the first video of the attack posted on Facebook had gone viral and many other visual accounts of the event were

uploaded. All the *La Mesa* channels of communication (social media and text messages) were active with the news, with people were concerned about the medical conditions of the protesters. As soon as their safety was established, several members posted outraged texts and shared the videos, while others were tracking what locals were saying about what had transpired.

The following day, a meeting took place within the youth organization. The emergency meeting was called in order to discuss the events, its repercussions, and follow up measures. The members who did not take place in the protests were divided regarding the situation. A few of them reprimanded the young men for exposing themselves and the organization to this violent event, which would undoubtedly jeopardize their standing alliance with the municipality. Others expressed their support of their peers after what they considered a flagrant violation of their right to free speech. There was a discussion about the legal actions that could be taken; Guatemala's long history of violent vendettas was the main concern for the well-being of the youth. Finally, the decision was that *La Mesa* would not take a public stance on the matter but would support the young men in any individual legal action.

The event was highlighted in two national papers and on one digital media source. While the young demonstrators were laying low, with some of them still in shock and others enraged, the public discussion continued over social media. Local influencers in digital media posted tamed public concerns about the event, lamenting how *"this has happened in our municipio"* or *"this is not the way we treat our fellow Tactiqueños"* and asking the Mayor to hold his followers in check since they gave a poor image of his candidacy and the town. Others made the names of the municipal officials that were seen in the video public and questioned the use of public resources in the campaign. Meanwhile, sympathizers of Guerrero stated that everything had been orchestrated by the opposing parties, arguing the demonstrators were armed with an iron stick and had received what they were looking for. In a series of media threads, people argued with each other about what had transpired. A municipal officer commented on a national newspaper's public Facebook posting of a screenshot of the video where a man is seen with an iron stick:

*"This is a screenshot of the first video published by [name of woman], and you can see what [another municipal officer] is saying, but I don't want to express any opinion. This happened, has its cause, and that cause had its effect ... I'm not going to put names either, because everyone knows who it was and who was not."*

This generic text normalizing violence as a simple consequence to action was not uncommon. Many of those who argued that the youth had deserved what they received followed their comments with “*God bless us*” or “*Let’s pray for Tactic,*” taking away the consequences of the event from human control. Another neutral stance was condemning both parties, equating the position of the young demonstrators and LIDER aggressors, the first for “provoking” and the following for “reacting”. By placing both sides as anonymous, mistaken, and violent, the aggressors were exempted from any responsibility and the importance of the event was diminished.

The strategy of casting doubt on the political interests behind public protests was not exclusive to Tactic’s #notetoca movement or Facebook commentators. Left-wing intellectuals like Mario Roberto Morales spent most of 2015 questioning the political interests of the United States Embassy in the region and placing it as the organizing force behind the social mobilizations, reducing the indignation to middle-class entertainment (Morales 2015). Politicians had also used distrust as a mechanism to diffuse responsibility; LIDER had used the media to argue that the protests were orchestrated by their political opposition (Hernández, Pitán, and Orozco 2015). The sympathizers of Guerrero took the same path casting doubt on the real interests of the young men who had crashed the rally; this infuriated several members of *La Mesa*, who rarely took part in the social media discussions. Indignation was high because among those accusing the youth of foul motives were former members of *La Mesa*, who personally knew the young protesters and had witnessed the efforts made to keep the organization non-partisan free. Again, on a national newspaper Facebook post, a discussion emerged between Tactic youth:

(user A)<sup>122</sup>: “*But hey, I think that, in my opinion, that maybe they were paid to provoke ... true or not?!*”

(user B)<sup>123</sup>: “*Young man, I do not think so because they were very few. Remember that where there is money, there are more people.*”

(user C)<sup>124</sup>: “*They say that when it’s little, much better ... is CHEAPER.*”

(user B): “[Those are] *Just sayings.*”

(user D)<sup>125</sup>: “*Copied and pasted!*” [referring to the officer’s accusation]

(user B): “*As the sayings go: “by the mouth dies the fish” and “the lion judges by its own condition.”*<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> User A was a LIDER sympathizer

<sup>123</sup> User B was a female member of *La Mesa*.

<sup>124</sup> User C was a male municipal official, LIDER sympathizer and former member of *La Mesa*

<sup>125</sup> User D was a male member of *La Mesa*

<sup>126</sup> She uses two proverbs in Spanish: first, “*el pez por la boca muere*” references giving yourself away in a lie or revealing something that was not your intention; second, “*el león juzga por su condición*”, similar to “a thief believes everybody steals”, warns that the accusation reveals that User C uses those tactics.

The week after the #notetoca event, I traveled to Tactic in order to prepare for a meeting with all the candidates for Mayor of Tactic. An electoral debate had been organized by *La Mesa* and the *Aj Yakool* market vendors association, and I had been asked to moderate by both organizations. The original idea was to meet on Friday with the candidates and the two organizations for setting up the rules of the forum that would take place on a Sunday at the municipal gymnasium. However, the atmosphere was tense between the municipal authorities and *La Mesa*, and a conciliatory meeting with the Mayor was arranged. None of the young demonstrators was present because the Municipality had made known that the Mayor did not want to see them "*not even in painting*". Given my role as the debate's moderator, I was asked to participate in the meeting to share how the forum methodology was designed to be fair to all candidates and non-partisan. An *antiguo* stated that our function would be to "*calm the waters*" because it was possible that they would take away the OMJ and all the support for youth activities. Since in internal conversations I had expressed a more confrontational position, the young people asked me to play the role of a university professor who provided technical and academic consultation; and, as I had done on other occasions, I tried to fulfill the assigned role.

The meeting was brief, with the Municipal authorities reminding us of all the "*support*" they had given the local youth; this constituted a constant underhanded threat, expressed on multiple occasions by authorities and adults to reinforce their power position. On many occasions, municipal officers expressed how they expected the population's loyalty after granting "support" in their public positions (creating public goods, attending to community demands and events) as a political favor. Afterward, the Mayor reminded us how they had "*supported the youth with the OMJ*" and recognized the legitimate role of *La Mesa* within that municipal office. The youth delegation answered with a curt but diplomatic "thank you" and proceeded to demonstrate how there had been several political rallies and urged the Mayor to acknowledge that in none of those previous occasions had any youth protested his candidacy. As the discussion progressed, we asked the Mayor to recognize that perhaps the problem was not him but his choice of a political party: Baldizón. The youth delegation also stated that there was no reason for the Mayor's sympathizer's violent reactions; his supporters could have just let them be since they were only six young men in a field full of people affiliated to his party. After a few diplomatic exchanges about each parties' responsibilities we said goodbye, stating that *La Mesa* would continue its work in partnership with the Municipality, as an institution, but they should be clear that the group would support its members if they decided to exercise their constitutional rights and press charges against their



aggressors. Clearly recognizing that either party was entitled to press charges, the Mayor ratified his attendance to the candidate's debate.

A few days later, in early August, the young protesters filed a lawsuit against their aggressors, several of whom were municipal officers, with their main argument being "fear for their safety". Shortly after the event one of the demonstrators and his family had received violent threats from a neighbor who not only lived in the same hamlet but was also a municipal employee. The lawsuit was reported in two newspapers under titles that highlighted the role of government officers as LIDER sympathizers in the violence; one of the young men stated for the papers:

*"We concluded that expressing our ideas is a crime in Guatemala, and one feels oppressed by the system. I call out everyone so that we are not afraid to express ourselves, because, in the end, if we do not, who else will do it?"*

After the lawsuit, the relationship between Municipality, OMJ and *La Mesa* became even more strained; however, emphasizing the expected separation of roles between the Municipality and the Mayor's political party, the different players performed according to the working alliance between them. On August 16<sup>th</sup> *La Mesa* and OMJ coordinated the 10K race despite political tensions that resulted in the coordinator's constant discussions over the political affiliations of any young volunteer that took part in the sports event. As soon as the race was over, an internal decision was made that everyone should take some time off from youth mobilizations, at least until the first election round was over. A couple of weeks later, in Guatemala City, I joined *Acción UVG* for the "*Paro Nacional #27A*" (August 27<sup>th</sup>) which became the most massive mobilization of the Guatemalan Spring; five days later, and just four days before the elections, Otto Pérez Molina stepped down from the Presidency.

Despite the political turmoil, the elections took place on September 6<sup>th</sup> as if nothing had happened. In Tactic, Guerrero was reelected as Mayor, though it was a tight race with Asig (TSE 2015:424). The difference in votes was low and the winner was not clear until the closing of all polls, which fueled the animosity between both candidates. The morning after the elections, rumors circulated that PUNEET's sympathizers wanted to take over the Municipality. However, a few hours later Asig himself made statements to a local digital news channel that posted on Facebook, assuring all that he and his party acknowledged the results. Meanwhile, Baldizón lost the possibility of entering the second election round and after stating the elections were fraudulent quit his political party (La Redacción 2015).

A couple of months after the elections, the young protesters had not heard from the Ministerio Público regarding the complaint against their aggressors. However, they were not willing to continue with it as they thought the “waters had calmed” in the community. In an interview, one of the young men explained he was not too upset about the event but had a new understanding: it was hard to endure the life of civil right activists in Guatemala, and he would never again take part in political events. Still, a couple of his friends and himself remained as volunteers with *La Mesa* and the OMJ. By enacting a transgressive version of citizenship, these youth confronted the given social arrangements of political performance; they exposed their personal safety in order to act as the idealized empowered agent without taking into account the possible risks (Madhok and Rai 2012). Through this event, the youth tested the categories of citizen participation and learned the boundaries of desired citizen display; despite the empirical risk not much had changed in the structure (Sahlins 1981), the youth’s actions were rapidly framed in the long traditions of distrust and suspicion that surrounded the political sphere and their critiques were soon forgotten.

### **Reproducing democratic disappointment and distrust**

The succession of events in 2015 was not only demanding for any informed citizen but also straining for those engaged in any way or form across the movements. Just as expectations were high regarding the possible outcomes, a sense of distrust was also present. While there was an air of hope with the resignation of Baldetti and Pérez Molina, the possibilities of purging the State of “old politics” were almost inexistent since the TSE refused to cancel the general elections. Focusing on the “social life of expectations”, it was clear that, despite the celebratory tone of citizen awakening, contradiction and disappointment were intrinsic to democracy, not an exception (Greenberg 2014:3).

In Guatemala City, many had mobilized to call for a stop to the 2015 elections and carried out different analyses regarding the possible impact of abstentionism and null votes, with the slogan “*In these conditions, we do not want elections*<sup>127</sup>.” In these discussions abstentionism was understood not as apathy but as a political critique of the blatant corruption ingrained in “old politics” (Gutmann 2002:207). However, in Tactic several of the youth considered this a problem, not only because it was antithetical to democratic ideals of citizenship, but because of the possible

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<sup>127</sup> In Spanish the motto rhymes, “*En estas condiciones no queremos elecciones*” making it a catchy cheer.

constitutional implications in Guatemala's long history of political uncertainty. "*What if no one votes, Tatiana? What happens then? Do you know?*" I was asked once in the middle of a sports event. Though unsure, I explained that most of the people opposing the elections were hoping to delay them until the laws regulating the political party model were reformed. The new modifications to the LEPP, which would ban *transfugismo*, impose higher sanctions on the anticipated campaign and illicit funding, and recognize null votes as valid ones, were not yet applicable. A majority of null votes would result in repeating the elections, and the assumption was that in doing so a partisan purge would occur; however, the TSE did not call-off the elections and the law had not changed yet, so any candidate that amassed the largest number of votes would win. Nikte' who was close by and listening, loudly said, "*Heavenly Father! We are screwed!*" and everyone laughed.

Laughs, in a way, inscribed this inherent cynicism and disappointment within the scope of general elections. As both Gutmann (2002; Gutmann 2011) and Greenberg (2014) have argued, low expectations help cope with the impending disappointment associated with the world of politics. This was also in tune with young people's perceptions of democracy, which revealed their lack of hope and even disbelief in the model. Assertions, even among organized youth, about democracy usually began by stating that the main problem was trying to define what it meant. This resonates with anthropological notions of democracy as a multivalent concept that can come to different meanings in different settings (Paley 2002). More than focusing on textbook descriptions, the young people built their conceptualizations based on the actual exercise of that what was called democracy in their surroundings. Those who had not been involved in citizenship workshops quickly commented on their distrust of democracy when it only appeared to be a single vote every four years, others referenced the ways through which people could participate in the State's decision-making process, particularly the Development Council System. A few described democracy as an attitude that should begin at home or everyday interactions as an opportunity to listen to different opinions without violence. A few of the *antiguos* emphasized how democracy was a Western notion that emerged in opposition to Monarchic power, Guatemala's long-standing war, and how the Constitution of 1985 marked the beginning of the democratic era. Still, most of them argued that democracy existed "*only in theory*" while claiming that "*absolute democracy was impossible*" or that "*there was no democratic country in the world.*" This was a common concern, particularly for those who recognized the limitations of representative democracy:

*"There is no full democracy because it is always a representative democracy. In the last five years, this has changed. I do not know if it's me or know what's happening but before you*

*could not sit down with the authorities, with the bosses, with the congresspeople. But now, one has spaces for sitting down and negotiating, where they must give you an answer. A "No thanks" or "I do not care," this also satisfies. It has improved a little; there is a bit of decentralization. But full democracy is not possible. "*

Youth were highly critical of the "old politics" model but, despite recognizing the role of power elites, particularly at a national level, in "allowing" democratic forms of participation, most centered the problems for achieving democracy on citizenship performance. They mainly blamed the lack of knowledge about civil rights as the reason for political apathy and people's manipulation by political parties and the Municipal government.

*"Democracy, for me, depends on citizenship. If there is no citizenship, there is no democracy. It is a proportional relationship. If you are a producer and you are not aware that you influence the decisions of your people, how democratic can your municipality be? "*

One of the most common examples of how democracy was impossible at a local level was the lack of transparency in the election of representatives for the COCODES. As we have seen earlier, there were no clear criteria for the process of representation, and many believed the Mayor in duty gave the posts to his supporters. Whether or not this was true, distrust was intrinsic to the exercise of democratic practice; as we have seen in the previous examples, any form of political activity was analyzed with suspicion, which was exacerbated by the transactional character of electoral and partisan life. As politics were associated with corruption and morally dubious actions, any actor attempting to play within the field, in this case as a political candidate, a demonstrator or even a public servant, would be held in the same suspicion (Greenberg 2014:5). This resonates with reports that have shown Guatemalan distrust in local government, the national police, and the judicial system (Azpuru and Zechmeister 2014:101-102); a disbelief in the legitimacy of the system and low political tolerance toward dissident actors places Guatemala low in international rankings of favorable attitudes toward steady democracies (Azpuru and Zechmeister 2014:126).

As mentioned before, distrust worked in different ways: between politicians, between members of *La Mesa*, between *La Mesa* and any youth expressing partisan support, between the general population and any form of organization (political parties, *La Mesa* or the Municipality). For the young people that had worked as volunteers trying to protect the OMJ from becoming a partisan object in the practice of transactional politics, the accusations of distrust were hard to understand. Despite having little personal benefits and working towards the possibility of pushing

forward the youth agenda, several of them heard strong accusations against *La Mesa*'s work alliance with the Municipality.

A few weeks after the #notetoca event, the dynamics between organized youth was tense. Few of them remained free of partisan affiliations and the violent event increased the animosity between them. For a while it was easier to discuss the Presidential campaign than the local candidates. Asig's supporters referenced Mayor Guerrero's lack of action against the aggressors in his party as evidence of undemocratic behavior; meanwhile, several of the *antiguos* were upset with Asig, whom they knew personally, after apparently accusing *La Mesa* of selling out to the Mayor. Nikte' was furious when she said to me:

*"He says we sold out because we act strategically for the sake of the OMJ, but he promised construction materials to the COCODES who joined his Committee; they [the politicians] are all the same."*

The political life, particularly the flimsy life of political parties for the sake of electoral periods, resulted in effervescent riffs between the members of *La Mesa* and the rest of the community. Though people dismissed them over time, not everyone was willing to commit with their former enthusiasm to activities and workshops. Distrust and disappointment contained the expectations of democracy, but unfortunately, it also resulted in lowering the expectations in individuals and collectives.

A few days before the general elections I received a meme through WhatsApp and Facebook encouraging "friendship over political parties." While at first I dismissed it as a generic message, I registered it in my fieldnotes after receiving it from different friends in Tactic and Guatemala City. As a depoliticizing object, the meme suggested that the only ones who benefited from people's concern over politics were politicians. During an interview, a young Tactiqueño showed the image to me while saying, "*Nah! Maybe it is better if one loses them, right?*" While I appreciated his cynicism, the experience of politics said there was some truth to it, social relationships were strained through the electoral period while politicians' opportunistic relation to political parties disappeared just after getting the results. His appreciation of disposable friendships reminded me of the way many people in town spoke about being always suspicious of friends while at the same time rejecting any form of open confrontation.



**Figure 25: Friends over political parties**

Source: A viral image shared through social media associated with the Twitter profile @politicaHeroica

Veiled and explicit accusations of self-interest or manipulation in the context of the partisan campaigns labeled many youth, and other members of the community, as “victims” without any agency; however, it also provided an excuse for sustaining a neutral position outside of partisan life, just like *La Mesa* had done. The contradiction between the recognition of youth’s political agency and the accusation of partisan manipulation did not escape the young organizers. As a friend of Elizabeth pointed out to me, “*people will try to play with all politicians and see what comes out of it.*” Thus, distrust fueled a pragmatic approach to politics that extended beyond the electoral years. In all of my research, however, it was during this period that the suspicious glances became the most common interaction.

## **Conclusion**

As we have seen, the experience of the Guatemalan Spring varied considerably according to the type of event one attended. While the #renunciaya marches were an iconic experience, in tactic they were not an uplifting experience. The hesitation of many youth to partake in a public stance

against politicians was confirmed by the violent reaction to the local #notetoca protesters. The relationship between the young men, the youth organization and the municipality were tense and fragile for quite a long time, though several negotiations between the leaders of both entities were held. Within *La Mesa*, much like all other social spaces, jokes were made with the hashtag #notetoca. Even after the failure of Baldizón's candidacy, the catchphrase was used to express discomfort against political opportunists.

While the feeling of dissatisfaction with "old politics" was shared by many, public performance was not widespread. There was an inherent lack of trust in politicians, but many were still willing to play the game of partisan affiliation. This idea was present through the constant messages that political parties sent to young leaders highlighting that patronage-based politics was the way to access benefits from the State.

As discussed in previous chapters, young people interacted with the arrangements of local politics without necessarily being directly involved in the electoral campaign. Youth and politics were embedded into a cycle of "political times"; young people were not indispensable for political parties except during electoral years. This fluid condition resulted in the perception that youth had low participation in "politics" and were manipulated by political parties during the campaign; however partisan life was inexistent during the first or second year of government and only increased as local politicians bought their political tickets. Most of the youth were aware of the game. The lack of sustainable connection between political candidates and political parties reinforced the perception that all of them were "*harina del mismo costal*".

The idea that politicians were all indistinguishable and self-serving, plus the need to purge Guatemala from the "old politics", became the political platform for James Morales, the racist comedian/actor who, under the slogan "*neither corrupt nor a thief*", ran his campaign posing as a political outsider despite being supported by former army officials. Morales won over Sandra Torres in Tactic and Guatemala. A few days later after the second electoral round, a public Facebook page dedicated to giving anonymous political commentary of Tactic's political life congratulated voters for taking a stance against traditional politics while sharing a meme mocking the elected president.



**Figure 26: Meme about President Morales**

Source: Anonymous post on a public Facebook page (October 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015).

The “old politics” were neither purged, nor replaced. A “new politics” did not emerge. While the post celebrated the loss of Baldizón and Torres, it warned against being optimistic about Morales’ role as president. Change was not to be expected despite having ousted the three main political parties (UNE, LIDER, and PP) and deposed both the President and Vice-President under corruption charges. The post invited mistrust and encouraged people to be observant of the puppet and his puppeteers. Similar expressions of wariness were shared and discussed during the final months of 2015; despite the many efforts to mobilize citizen action, no bright future was in sight. In this way, the Guatemalan Spring re-inscribed distrust and disappointment into the practice of political agency and democratic life.



## • I ELIZABETH FEELING LIKE A “LLAMARADA DE TUSAS”

Almost five years after being elected as representative for the Youth Network, Elizabeth had held more than six different posts within youth organizations in Tactic. The constant back and forth of projects between the Municipal government, NGOs, and International funding frustrated the young minds that were hopeful of generating change in the community. When asked about what had been achieved locally by the youth movement, Elizabeth recalled the items that were at the core of youth concern back in those first assemblies. She believed they had two main projects: establishing the OMJ and creating a Polideportivo (multifunction space for youth programs). The first project was accomplished in 2012 by working together with at least three different NGOs that had youth organization as their primary development goal; these same NGOs would later take all the credit for the establishment of the office, belittling the negotiating efforts led by the youth organizers.

The creation and establishment of the Youth Office gave her two valuable lessons: how organizations took the credit for others' work and how local politics functioned. As previously mentioned, she thought authorities and development brokers “*saludaban con sombrero ajeno*” by appropriating the outcomes of activities executed without much of their input. At the same time, the creation of the OMJ had emphasized the importance of having connections, of being on top of all type of documentation, of learning about the legal procedures for State recognition.

Meanwhile, the Polideportivo was a project led solely by the organized youth, that took a lot of time, effort, and courage to write and present before the local authorities and the Municipal Development Council. After being locally approved, several months passed and no one heard back about the funding; word spread that negotiations between local authorities at the Departmental level had taken the project (with the same name and planning) and assigned it to another municipality. The youth felt not only robbed but frustrated.

So when I asked Elizabeth about the achievements of Tactic youth organizing, she evaluated them against that original purpose and the many comings and goings they were put through by the Municipality and the NGO projects. She talked about how the most significant achievement was founding the Municipal Youth Office, and their failure was not getting the Polideportivo. She

thought of the youth movement and herself as a “llamarada de tusas,” an expression based on the short flash of a husk as it catches fire<sup>128</sup>, which captures how loud the ephemeral can get.

*“After that, just normal activities. Just like a “llamarada de tusas,” where there was a thing, there we went. If there was another, there we went. That was what happened. So much wear and tear that we suffered from each project that showed up in town. Then there was so much to do for each of those projects. It felt it like manipulation, like they used us.”*

Elizabeth’s disappointment arose from different experiences. She thought youth organizers were used to summoning youth only to comply with the purpose of external projects, thus forgetting to support their own projects. She felt they were no longer able to set the activity agenda nor challenge the ways the projects’ design once they took foot into Tactic. For her, many projects considered their achievements only through the number of participants in a workshop or the people signing their names on the attendance sheet for a free meal. She valued the information these projects provided, particularly those focused on public administration or political training, but still, she considered them shortsighted and not sustainable. Therefore, she thought of herself and the youth organization just as shortsighted.

So, a few days before our interview in 2015, Elizabeth had decided to take a break from youth participation. She was grateful for the learning experience and the opportunities to participate in the political scenario of Tactic, but at the same time she was riddled with doubts. She was disappointed in the Municipality, the NGOs and the youth organizations; her last experience trying to support a youth committee had been unsuccessful. Her willingness to activate and participate in Youth initiatives faltered after several failed attempts to change the dynamics for incorporating rural youth into the training workshops of the “Business School” and mediating conflicts within the youth groups. She found many contradictions between the principles claimed by these entities, the expectations held by young people, and the final execution of youth activities.

*“There is a confusion [contradiction]. If I speak about inequality, but I practice it; if I speak about machismo but I practice it; if I speak of free will or free speech but I obscure it. Maybe I have practiced unconsciously in one way or another, but now I see and do not care to share it. So yes, that is why I had to distance a little.”*

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<sup>128</sup> Similar to a “flash in the pan”.

These contradictions, she found, impacted how the community perceived the youth organizers and felt worried about the negative comments coming her way. While she thought most people had a good impression of *La Mesa* and the OMJ, for her this was a moment for self-reflection and weighing her involvement. A teacher had recently asked about her satisfaction with all the volunteering she did and, disturbingly, she found herself doubting whether she should be involved. So she had decided to evaluate all her achievements so far and as a result chose to step back from the youth organizations.

*“I would return [to La Mesa] but now I cannot. In the beginning, I had not thought about what my priority is. Because, if I could go through all the time [passed], yes, [I would see] I gave much time to participatory activities. I left a lot to be desired in my studies, in some classes.”*

At this moment, I shared with her my own doubts about finding myself more involved in the many volunteer activities required from *La Mesa* than in doing the dissertation. To this, Elizabeth laughed and said she also wondered when I would finish the research and then added reflexively *“It is hard to realize that.”* We had already discussed how several of the youth organizers felt burned out and Elizabeth had warned that they all needed a break from the ever-growing activities and projects. So, for her, it was hard to realize that she had neglected part of her life goals without being convinced about her other achievements. There was a long pause in the interview until I asked if she would consider coming back to the youth political field, to which she answered cautiously,

*“Yes... if I had the time, yes.”*

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

The story of Elizabeth is, in many ways, the story of many young Guatemalans who aspire to transform their environment but find many limitations to do so. During the fieldwork when youth like Elizabeth, who seemed to have unlimited strength and drive, said they were withdrawing from political participation or social engagement, I could not help but feel a deep sadness. Eventually, I understood these moments of doubt or pause did not signify the final stance of their public and political life. So, before addressing the conclusions of this study, I would like to highlight that none of the stories told here represents a final narrative.

In the years since I finished collecting data, Guatemala has gone from broad mobilizations and indignation over corruption to a quiet observance of the blatant takeover of the State by a long-standing alliance of corruption. In this context, both the youth of *La Mesa* and I have embarked on different routes, some of us radicalizing our political participation while others are channeling our efforts towards work and study. Despite the many challenges, youth like Elizabeth continue to participate in the public sphere, but perhaps with fewer expectations and just focused on those activities towards which they feel a deep commitment.

In this sense, it is worth remembering that the political agency of young people should not be understood as a static and individual achievement. It is fluid and malleable, constantly adjusting to multiple fields of action. The exploration of the youth field in *Tactic* shows how young people experience, negotiate, produce, and reproduce their possibilities of being. The ethnographic approach shows how they construct a domain in local politics, strategically positioning themselves within the category through which the State recognizes them: youth. In this sense, agency and subjectivity juxtapose in a complex network that responds to local, national, and global conjunctures.

This relational view of agency must be a substantial element in the analysis of human action. Otherwise, we risk reproducing notions that circumscribe agency to rational choice or normative predeterminations. An approach that only explores the experiences of individuals, without considering a subject that is embedded in multiple collective dynamics, will not be able to capture the subtle ways in which the individual is collective. The story of Elizabeth cannot be understood without exploring how the Guatemalan state, the people of *Tactic* and youth dynamics frame her

life; however, this does not mean that Elizabeth merely reproduces the structure that surrounds her. Just like many other young people, she experiences, negotiates, restricts, plans, and aspires to her *being* within a context of multiple inequalities and violence.

### **Youth subjectivity and agency**

Answering a call to bring ethnographic imagination into the comprehension of agency (Gershon 2011), this dissertation drew on young people's actions upon the world to demonstrate how they enact youth subjectivities. This approximation shows the contradictions surrounding Youth: discourses of young people as citizens-in-the-making clash with the weight of responsibilities they carry since an early age, which makes them self-sufficient adults without the proper recognition. The idealized opposition between youth and adulthood defined the latter as a subject overwhelmed by responsibilities and who lacked time to enjoy life; however, many youth in Tactic already claimed "not having time".

While time use analysis was essential for the description of everyday activities, I have argued that objective time is not necessarily the issue at stake when exploring the justifications that keep youth from taking part in social movements. Engagement beyond certain sanctioned circles of interaction (religion or sports) was not the desired for youth lives; work and education were the privileged fields of time investment, in many ways reinforcing achievement or productivity over communal life. Education was important as a potential mechanism of social mobility (despite its poor conditions and lack of quality), while work was both necessary for current subsistence and to ensure a future (as in learning the family business or paying for education).

For working youth, their extensive work hours were added to household work and, in some cases, weekend studies. They were making ends meet under conditions of underemployment that deprived them of time. Further explorations of people's control of time should highlight body appropriation, placing materiality in a space/time continuum. The belief of "not having time", beyond the capacity to allocate time for specific activities, produced subjects who could not get involved beyond their everyday burdens and who would privilege individual accomplishments and individual well-being over collective efforts.

Women's time was disposed of by patriarchal understandings of being that deem them unavailable outside of prescriptive time/activity frameworks. While some of these young women were able to challenge the preconceived roles held for them, the risks of such ventures were high. Elizabeth and other girls faced violent responses when pursuing the life they valued.

Understanding how young people place themselves at risk while striving for a better life should provide a pause to claims that place youth's apparent lack of action as apathy or dutiful consent.

Economic inequality, patriarchy, and racism merge with modern idealizations to create a power structure that reinforces a neoliberal understanding of the self. Youth must self-govern, self-regulate, and overall perform individually, but they are also expected to be responsible for pursuing their own development for the "future of the country"; in this process, they are riddled with guilt and anxiety over the success or failure of their actions. Still, some challenge the views of individualized ways of being in the public arena and create different collectives to enact the discourses of youth as agents of change. Expectations and idealized constructions of "citizen youth" clashed with the local arrangements of social order; the contraposition of these multiple visions and expectations of youth performance derived into disappointment and distrust.

Observing young people enacting their youth within the contradictions of neoliberal subjectivity while attempting to forge a sense of collectivity, we see the spaces of contention when translating the structure of power into the local setting. A critical view of the ethnographic data presented here requires us to consider what is at stake when academic or development approaches evaluate failure in the performance of agency or citizenship as an individual responsibility. In this sense, I propose an approximation to agency that can read the many contradictions of collective human action, giving room both to accomplishment and failure, building and tearing down, as intrinsic components of life.

### **The political field of Youth**

In postwar Guatemala, discourses that exalt democracy and citizen participation abound in the public sphere; however, favor-based politics and the corporatization of political parties has marked the practice of politics. The State, conceived in the Constitution of 1985 and built upon during the Peace Accords of 1996, sought local participation through the Development Council system, but the model built on previous transactional practices between individuals, organized communities and the local and national government. As governmental structures, like the COMUDE, opened the door for "vulnerable populations", different projects arose aimed at organizing (without a partisan bias) the representation of women, youth, and indigenous peoples within the local government.

This is the context in which Tactic youth groups emerged between 2005 and 2009, motivated by interests such as the arts, environmental concerns, or local electoral politics. As these

youth groups worked together in the public space, implementing activities with community projection, they faced many challenges. Their interaction with the Tactic power structure, particularly the municipal authorities and the representatives of local economic interests, taught important lessons about the way to play politics and the risk of challenging the given order. As the organized youth furthered their political formation and imagined a space of their own within the Municipality, they learned about the difficulties in obtaining public investment in favor of the youth sector. In this framework of youth grassroots groups, national development projects based their interventions for strengthening youth citizenship and promoting the adequate representation of young people in local government.

Soon the dynamics of formation and organization would lead to the structuring of the political field of Youth in Tactic through five key positions: The Municipal Youth Office (OMJ), the Youth Assembly, the youth representatives before the COMUDE, the local Youth Committees and *La Mesa de la Juventud*. In this scenario, multiple youth came together -some had begun their participation in youth groups while others joined once the new structure began to organize activities and interventions. The first groups soon became a mythical origin story, particularly as few of their members remained active; as time passed, these original organizers withdrew to pursue their studies, jobs or the formation of their own families.

Although the political field of youth was configured within the municipal structure, the organized youth did not assume a secondary or passive role. On the contrary, taking strategic advantage of the many development projects that came to work in Tactic, the youth of *La Mesa* negotiated control over the OMJ and the right to summon the Youth Assembly; in doing this they were able to protect the election of representatives before the COMUDE from partisan interests. One of their main reasons for not ceding control of these spaces to the local government was the practice of transactional politics. There was a sustained fear among organized young people that these spaces would be politicized (in the sense of being used by politicians for personal benefit) and stop advocating for young people independently of partisan affiliation. In this way, the municipal youth agenda was designed and executed with the participation of young people who constantly negotiated with the interests of the sitting government.

To a large extent organized young people sought to act in accordance with an idealized citizen subject, one that participated in the public sphere while procuring the common good. However, through the planning of events and projects that were apparently outside the scope of politics, young people encountered different practices that placed them at the epicenter of

transactional politics. In turn, some of these organized youth decided to openly engage in partisan politics understanding that this was the mechanism to access more "opportunities". As the electoral process came to life in the public sphere, the organized youth of *La Mesa* mediated between the individual right of partisan participation and the required neutral position that protected the collective from transactional politics. The contradictions of being a citizen are reflected here in the creation of their own space in local politics and the apprehension that caused the involvement of their peers in political parties. In this sense, the political field of Youth is the need of participation and the fear of manipulation.

Organized youth sought to protect their collectivity, which had an eminently political character, placing it beyond the reach of party politics. The multiple contradictions fed perceptions of disappointment and distrust among the young people of Tactic. The experiences of violence they encountered while experimenting with their political position and the balance of power also brought up questions about the possibilities of transforming their environment.

### **Youth groups without transitions for the future**

During an open panel to discuss the possible articulations of the youth agenda for the future, a young man who sporadically participated with *La Mesa* challenged me by asking, "*Tatiana, you have been studying us for a while, right? So, tell us, what are we doing wrong!*" After a lengthy explanation of how my intention was not to evaluate them, I told them my main question for the future was what would happen once they were no longer considered "youth." Over the following years, my main critique of the group was the lack of mechanisms that would grant a generational change with the same skills some of them had acquired through the many workshops and citizenship trainings they had attended. Over time I was able to see how new youth were incorporated, some staying active longer than others, each with different perspectives and interests. *La Mesa* and the OMJ implemented citizen training that helped to capture young people's interest and the Youth Committees, when active, were also a way to incorporate new youth into the movement. However, this rarely translated into leadership that could take over from the generation of *antiguos* that remained active. While a few of them retired from volunteering as economic and family pressures weighed on them, others remained active despite no longer being considered "youth" according to their age; it was this element of the future that was not discussed at the time.

Youth as a State-recognized category, allowed many of these dynamic and critical individuals to engage actively in the political life of Tactic from a space of their own. Despite having



to negotiate and ally with adults, their political gains within the Municipal structure gave them an important platform to participate as serious actors on the local scene. Unfortunately, there were not many other spaces they could participate in once outside of the category of Youth. Unlike religious youth groups that eventually evolved into other forms of organization and practice in their communities, the political field of Youth led to a generic world of citizen-adult participation. Though these organized youth could take part in other forms of civilian representation within the local government, particularly through sectoral representations (women, indigenous, economic sector) or the COCODES, it is not clear to me if any of them was interested in transitioning to these alternatives.

As Guatemalans face the shameless seizure of power orchestrated by the #pactodecorruptos, a complex network of corrupt politicians, former militaries and big capital representatives, we can only hope to find better ways to assert youth participation without toning down or disciplining the very voices we need to hear. In this scenario, we should reconsider Elizabeth's concern over the political field of youth as a "*llamarada de tusas*". Unlike the well-lit fire that can provide nourishment and warmth, settle in a home and bring light into all nooks and crannies, the "*llamarada de tusas*" works well as a metaphor for Guatemalan politics. It is a short-lived and flashy fire that can light up the road for a few minutes, but that, unfortunately, will not take us beyond a few steps. Still, there is something beyond the evanescent fire: the image of what was seen and a trail of ashes remain after the husks burn down. Young people like Elizabeth and the youth from *La Mesa* have learned through these flashes of light how local politics work. Democracy is not as depicted in textbooks or workshops, and citizen participation is not always well received by old politics; in Guatemala, after several months of social mobilizations and the overthrow of one corrupt President, the electoral process brought a worse option. Guatemalan youth face some devastating options: to play by the rules of old politics in order to achieve their goals, to accept that the *llamarada de tusas* will not add up to much and give up, or take on the fight to light the road with something more substantial, despite already feeling disappointed and exhausted.

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## APPENDIX

**Table 7: Mayors of Tactic through history**

Period	Name	Title	Indigenous	Reelected	Political party
<b>1863</b>	Juan Cahuec	Alcalde primero	x		
<b>1879</b>	José María Guzmán	Alcalde primero			
<b>1880</b>	Lorenzo Tujab	Alcalde primero	x		
<b>1881</b>	Juan Cahuec	Alcalde primero	x	x	
<b>1882</b>	Basilio Xoy	Alcalde primero	x		
<b>1883</b>	Enrique Caal	Alcalde primero	x		
<b>1884-1887</b>	Lorenzo Tujab	Alcalde primero	x	x	
	Venancio Tujab	Alcalde segundo	x		
<b>1892</b>	Gaspar Sierra	Alcalde primero	x		
	José Ac	Alcalde segundo	x		
<b>1893</b>	Mariano Guzmán	Alcalde primero			
	Gregorio Guillermo	Alcalde segundo	¿?		
<b>1895</b>	Enrique Caal L	Alcalde primero	x	x	
<b>1896</b>	Baudilio Morales	Alcalde primero			
<b>1897</b>	José Cruz Bin	Alcalde primero			
<b>1898</b>	Enrique Caal L	Alcalde primero	x	x	
	José Cruz Bin*	Alcalde segundo	x	x	
<b>1899</b>	Andrés Sierra	Alcalde primero	x		
<b>1900</b>	Miguel Peláez	Alcalde primero			
	Nicolás Xoc	Alcalde segundo	x		
<b>1901</b>	José Cruz Bin	Alcalde primero	x		
<b>1902</b>	Lorenzo Xoc	Alcalde primero	x		
	Santiago Cahuec	Alcalde segundo	x		
<b>1903</b>	Abel Santamaría	Alcalde primero			
<b>1903-1905</b>	José Cruz Bin	Alcalde primero	x	x	
<b>1906</b>	Ceferino Bin	Alcalde primero	x		
	Manuel Cahuec	Alcalde segundo	x		
<b>1907</b>	Adolfo Leal Solís	Alcalde primero			
	José Cruz Bin	Alcalde segundo	x	x	
<b>1908</b>	Celestino Peláez	Alcalde primero			
<b>1909</b>	Adolfo Leal Solís	Alcalde primero			
<b>1910-1911</b>	José Cruz Bin	Alcalde primero	x		
<b>1912</b>	Celestino Peláez	Alcalde primero		x	
<b>1913</b>	Matías Acevedo	Alcalde primero			
<b>1914</b>	Cándido Fernández	Alcalde primero			
<b>1915-1916</b>	Adolfo Leal Solís	Alcalde primero			
<b>1917-1918</b>	Cláfiro Trujillo	Alcalde primero			

	Juan Cantoral	Alcalde segundo		
<b>1919</b>	Víctor Morales	Alcalde primero		
<b>1920</b>	Matías Acevedo	Alcalde primero		x
	José Cruz Bin	Alcalde segundo		x
<b>1922</b>	Cándido Fernández	Alcalde primero		x
<b>1923</b>	Francisco Guillermo	Alcalde primero		
	José Claro Max	Alcalde segundo		x
<b>1924</b>	Nicolás Morales	Alcalde primero		
<b>1925</b>	Miguel Peláez	Alcalde primero		
	José Cruz Bin	Alcalde segundo		x
<b>1926</b>	Amadeo Cruz Leal	Alcalde primero		
<b>1927</b>	Cándido Fernández Chavarría	Alcalde primero		x
<b>1927</b>	Nicolás Morales Ochoa	Alcalde primero		
<b>1928-1929</b>	Santiago Mendoza Javier	Alcalde primero		
<b>1930</b>	Mariano Cantoral	Alcalde primero		
<b>1932</b>	Baudilio Morales	Alcalde primero		
<b>1932</b>	Nicolás Morales Ochoa	Alcalde primero		x
	José Cruz Bin	Alcalde segundo		x
<b>1933-1934</b>	Román Milián	Alcalde primero		
<b>1934-1935</b>	Eduardo Lemus Dimas	Alcalde primero		
<b>1935-1937</b>	Cnel. Juan Samayoa Quezada	Intendente municipal		
<b>1937</b>	Herculano Fernández	Intendente municipal		
<b>1940</b>	Nicolás Morales Ochoa	Intendente municipal		?
<b>1940</b>	Jaime Barahona	Intendente municipal		
<b>1940</b>	Ignacio Cano López	Intendente municipal		
<b>1941-1943</b>	Julio Álvarez Ponce	Intendente municipal		
<b>1943</b>	J. Ernesto Ayala	Intendente municipal		
<b>1944</b>	Samuel Castillo Guevara	Intendente municipal		
<b>1945</b>	Ricardo Lima Torres	Intendente municipal		
<b>1945</b>	Juan Buenafé García	Intendente municipal		
<b>1945</b>	Nemecio Peláez	Intendente municipal		
<b>1945-1946</b>	Alfonso Mendoza Ramírez	Intendente municipal		
<b>1945-1946 (?)</b>	Bernardo Fernández Gúzman	Intendente municipal		
<b>1946</b>	Heriberto Torres B.	Alcalde		
<b>1946</b>	Bernardo Fernández Gúzman	Alcalde		x
<b>1946-1947</b>	Eduardo Lemus Dimas	Alcalde		x
<b>1947</b>	Nemecio Peláez	Alcalde		x
<b>1948</b>	José E. Buenafé Sánchez	Alcalde		
<b>1948-1950</b>	Gustavo revolorio Lima	Alcalde		
<b>1950-1952</b>	Nemecio Peláez Medina	Alcalde		
<b>1952-1953</b>	Alvaro Morales Rivera	Alcalde		
<b>1954</b>	Jesús López Monacheda	Alcalde		

<b>1954</b>	Luciano Bin	Alcalde			
<b>1954-1955</b>	Nemecio Peláez Medina	Alcalde		x	
<b>1955</b>	Constantino Peláez Sandoval	Alcalde			
<b>1956-1959</b>	Luis Alberto Cantoral Peláez	Alcalde			
<b>1960-1962</b>	José María Lemus León	Alcalde			
<b>1962-1966</b>	Esteban Leal Peláez	Alcalde			
<b>1966-1968</b>	Waldemar Godoy Prado	Alcalde			
<b>1968-1970</b>	Rubén Guzmán Morales	Alcalde			
<b>1970-1972</b>	Santiago Mendoza Javier	Alcalde		x (?)	
<b>1972-1974</b>	Miguel Alejandro Peláez Morales	Alcalde			
<b>1974-1976</b>	Oliverio Guerrero Leal	Alcalde			
<b>1976-1980</b>	Hugo René González	Alcalde			
<b>1980-1982</b>	Pedro Gilberto García M.	Alcalde			
<b>1982-1984</b>	Bernardo Fernández Gúzman	Alcalde		x(?)	
<b>1984-1985</b>	Valerio Tujab C.	Alcalde			
<b>1985</b>	Francisco C. Vásquez	Alcalde			
<b>1985-1986</b>	Benjamín Fernández Guzmán	Alcalde			
<b>1986-1988</b>	Enrique Caal	Alcalde	x		DCG
<b>1988-1991</b>	Carlos S. López Cantoral	Alcalde			DCG
<b>1991-1993</b>	Oliverio Guerrero Leal	Alcalde			UCN
<b>1993-1995</b>	Baltazar Milián Morales	Alcalde			PAN
<b>1995-1999</b>	Fco. Javier Sagüi	Alcalde	x		DCG
<b>1999-2004</b>	Fco. Javier Sagüi	Alcalde	x	x	FRG
<b>2004-2008</b>	Elza Leonora Cu Isem	Alcaldesa	x		FRG
<b>2008-2012</b>	Hugo Caal	Alcalde	x		PAN
<b>2012-2016</b>	Edin Guerrero	Alcalde			PP
<b>2016-2020</b>	Edin Guerrero	Alcalde		x	LIDER

\*López Cantoral places both Enrique Caal and José Cruz Bin as majors for 1898 but lists first Caal. He lists alcaldes segundos after the first, so I assume Bin was second for that year.

Source: Data from 1863 to 1999 obtained of López Sandoval (1999:91–94). Data from 1993 to 2020 corroborated or obtained from Tribunal Supremo Electoral (TSE 2016b).

**Table 8: Outline for the “Plan de Mejoramiento Integral de una Comunidad Indígena”**

Adaptations proposed for the improvement of the indigenous people	Expected interventions Work areas for the project (p.67)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Salubridad</li> <li>2. Alfabetización</li> <li>3. Vivienda y vestido</li> <li>4. Vías de comunicación</li> <li>5. Agricultura</li> <li>6. Artes e Industrias</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Defensa y conservación de la salud</li> <li>2. Mejoramiento del hogar</li> <li>3. Fomento agrícola y pecuario</li> <li>4. Aprovechamiento del tiempo libre como medio de aculturación</li> <li>5. Aprovechamiento de los valores propios de nuestras comunidades para su superación</li> <li>6. Transmisión de conocimientos teóricos y su aplicación para mejorar sus técnicas agrícolas e industriales</li> <li>7. Fomento del cooperativismo como base para conservar su integridad</li> <li>8. Desarrollo del trabajo comunal para construcción y conservación de caminos, introducción de agua potable y demás servicios que benefician a la comunidad</li> <li>9. Fomento de nuevas industrias y cultivos.</li> </ol>

Source: IIN, 1960: 66-67

Figure 27: Letter presented to the Municipal Council in 1976

Señores Miembros del Consejo Edilicio,  
P R E S E N T E.-

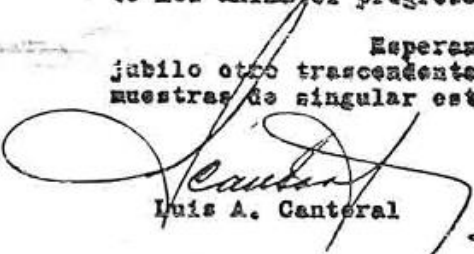
Los abajo firmantes, TACTIQUENOS en pleno goce de nuestros derechos ciudadanos, ante ustedes que actualmente llevan la gran responsabilidad de dirigir los destinos de nuestro Municipio venimos a manifestarles la siguiente inquietud.


Como hijos querendones de esta tierra, deseamos verla cada día mas grande, mas próspera, mas pujante, mas culta, mas noble, en ustedes hemos fijado nuestra esperanza y anhelamos que se recupere todo el tiempo que lastimosamente se perdió, por cuya razón venimos a plantear un deseo que bulle en nuestras mentes y es ver a TACTIC convertido en VILLA y muy pronto en Ciudad, por cuya razón a ustedes P E D I M O S:

Que en una próxima sesión, conozcan nuestra solicitud, que haciendo un análisis sereno, se dicte una resolución del Consejo pidiendo al Ejecutivo por intermedio de la Gobernación Departamental, que nuestra población si ya llena los requisitos establecidos en el Acuerdo Gubernativo de fecha 7 de abril de 1,938 por lo cual se pide sea elevada a la categoría de VILLA; para una mejor ilustración de ustedes acompañamos una fotocopia del referido Acuerdo.

Estamos prontos para colaborar con ustedes en la ardua tarea que van a emprender, y lo hacemos porque unicamente nos anima el progreso material y cultural de TACTIC.

Esperamos que muy pronto podremos celebrar con júbilo otro trascendental acontecimiento en nuestra tierra y con muestras de singular estima, somos atento servidores.-

  
Luis A. Canteral

  
Waldemar Godoy P.

  
Javier Tujat M.

TACTIC A.V. AGOSTO 31 DE 1,976.-

Source: Revista Asunción, 2011.

**Table 9: Reported cases by the REHMI**

Type of Violence	Name	Date	Testimony	Place
Massacre victims (3 or more people)	Calel Gue, Felipe	25/04/1983	T 10,549	Chiacal
	Calel Gue, Rosaria			
	Calel Gue, Vicente			
Deaths	Morán Calel, Virgilio	10/4/1983	T 10,681 (tortured and executed)	Chiacal
	Xoy Caj, Francisco	15/05/1982	T 10,686 (executed)	Chiacal
	Xuj Laj, Anita	10/10/1983	T 10,699 (death by hunger during persecution)	Chiacal
Disappearances	Guerrero López, Francisco	26/01/1983	T 2,155	Tampoc
	López Ac, Jacobo	26/01/1983	T 2,155	Tampoc
	López Quej, Rodolfo	26/01/1983	T 2,155	Town Tactic
	Morán lcal, Edmundo Salvador	17/01/1983	T 6,628	Mun. Tactic

Source: (ODAHG 1998b:18, 249, 320, 321, 360, 369, 370, 378)

**Table 10: Reported cases by the CEH**

Year	Case	Type of violence	Description	Place	Responsible
1982	11039	Massacre	In the caserío of Pambach of Santa Cruz Verapaz, executed 4 men, 2 guerrilla members were captured, and about 60 young men were abducted. Later the young men, who allegedly had been taken as forced recruits, appeared killed near Tactic. The exact place is not reported.	The victims were originally from Santa Cruz Verapaz but the bodies were found in the borderlines with Tactic.	Army
1982	9011	Forced disappearance	In the hamlet of Río Frío, the army beats and captures 5 men, of which 2 disappeared. Among the men was the PAC leader of Chiacal, a civilian patrolman, a military commissioner, and two bodyguards. The listed victims were Esteban Bin, Mauricio Isem Choc, Mario Cahuec Choua, Alfonso Choy, Augusto Chuc.	The victims were original from Tactic (apparently from Chiacal and then disappeared in Río Frío, two different hamlets).	Army
1983	9383	Forced disappearance	In the hamlet of San Julián, the Army captures two men –Carlos Catalán Choc and Edmundo Salvador Morán lcal- in a register post. No bodies were found.	Register post in San Julian, a hamlet of Tactic.	Army
1984	9143	Forced disappearance	On the road towards the municipal capital of Tactic, Miguel Sis Gualim is intercepted by a car with armed men who abduct him.	Main town of Tactic	Armed men
1984	9237	Forced disappearance	On the road from caserío Pancox, San Cristóbal to Tactic, the woman Adolfa Suc Lem is captured by the army. No body was found.	Roads to Tactic	Army

Source: CEH, 1999. All the cases can be found in the Volume VIII, annex 2. Case 9011 in page 79; case 9383 in page 83; case 9237 in page 85; case 9143 in page 131; case 11038 in pages 59-60.

**Table 11: Structure of power as described by Danilo Palma in 1993**

Type			Tactic					
			Municipal capital	Chiacal			Guaxpac	
				Main hamlet	Chimaxpop (caserío)	Chijulja (caserío)	Main hamlet	Chiji (caserío)
Central power	Military governance	Army patrols Army register posts National police Hacienda police	Comisionados militares and Patrulla de autodefensa civil (the town decided to keep both)	Comisionados militares and Patrulla de autodefensa civil (until early 1993)	Comisionados militares and Patrulla de autodefensa civil (until early 1993)	Two comisionados militares	Two comisionados militares	
	National services	National schools Schools Supervision (MINEDUC) Private school of La Asunción CONALFA USAC Health center and health posts Municipal agencies of National projects (DIGESA, DIGESEPE, DIGEBOS, INDECA, MINDES) Peace Corps CARE GUATEL Dirección de Caminos TSE Juzgado de Paz	DIGESA representative (agropecuario) Health post Elementary school	DIGESA representative (agropecuario)		Elementary school CAFEDESCO CARE	CARE	
Local government (delegated power)			Municipality (corporación municipal) Municipal police Alcaldes Auxiliares	Alcalde auxiliar	Three alcaldes auxiliares (elected by the community and ratified by the municipalidad)	Two alcaldes auxiliares (elected by the community and ratified by the municipalidad)	Three alcaldes auxiliares (elected by the community and ratified by the municipalidad)	No alcalde auxiliar (no one wanted to receive the post)
Local organizations and leaderships	Communal organizations	Sports organizations	Junta Deportiva Municipal Junta directiva del "Deportivo Tactic"					
		Associations	Casa de la Cultura (inactiva) Unión de Artistas Tactiqueños Revista cultura Asunción Unions of DIGEBOS and Caminos					

	Committees	Comité de Ganaderos Comité de la Feria Comité Folklorico	Two “pro-mejoramiento” committees Women’s committee CAFEDESCO (food remittances program) Parents committee in support of the elementary school	One “pro-mejoramiento” committee	One “pro-mejoramiento” committee that had been inactive for the past 8 years (mostly concerned with water distribution)	One “pro-mejoramiento” committee (presided by one of the comisionados) Water committee (presided by the other comisionado) CARE women’s committee Parents committee in support of the elementary school	One “pro-mejoramiento” committee Water committee (both committees were presided by a terrateniente) CARE women’s committee
	Cooperatives	COOPSAMA, VERALAC, Weavers cooperative					
	NGOs	None local office					
Religious groups and movements	Catholics	Casa Parroquial Calvario Cementerio Legión de María Cursillistas Grupo de Jóvenes Colegio La Asunción COOPSAMA Cofradías (13)	Cofradía de Esquipulas Pastoral social committee for the catholic chapel de la ermita (not approved yet by the departamental authorities)	Brotherhood of the Santa Cruz chapel. Pastoral social committee	Brotherhood of the chapel. Charismatic catholic group	Chapel	Chapel
	Evangelicals	Nazareno Elim Iglesia de Dios Evangelio Completo Adventistas	Committees for the Nazareno and Elim churches.	Elim church	Nazareno church	One evangelical church (no denomination)	One evangelical group (no denomination)
	Others	Mormons Ye Jehovahs Witnesses	Costumbr				
Political parties		Five political parties: PAN MAS PSD UCN	UCN PAN DC				
Influential people		General manager of COOPSAMA Catholic priest Leaders of political parties (UCN and PAN) Leaders of Acción Católica About 40 families Governor of Alta Verapaz (Tactiqueño)	Two curanderos Indigenous elders One ladino male who resides in the town but people rely on him.	Owner of the plantation (under colonato system) Two plantation foreman (one is also the evangelical deacon)	Curanderos	Former cofrade	Three landowners (at least one of a plantation under colonato system)



**Table 12: Work-study in surveys**

	2011			2015		
	Male %	Female %	Total %	Male %	Female %	Total %
Currently, do you work and study?						
Study only	66.7	83.8	74.1	46.0	41.2	43.6
Work and study	33.3	16.2	25.9	46.0	27.5	36.6
Work only	0	0	0	4.0	21.6	12.9
Neither	0	0	0	4.0	9.8	6.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Survey 2011; Survey 2015

**Table 13: Age of first employment and hours worked**

Sex		Age of first employment	Hours worked per week
Male	Mean	12.11	38.76
	N	37	34
	Std. Deviation	2.885	16.458
Female	Mean	14.41	34.32
	N	32	25
	Std. Deviation	3.618	17.639
Total	Mean	13.17	36.88
	N	69	59
	Std. Deviation	3.421	16.964

Source: Survey, 2015

**Table 14: Religion of participants**

	2011			2015		
	Male %	Female %	Total %	Male %	Female %	Total %
Catholic	40.5	49.3	44.3	52	52.9	52.5
Evangelical	40	45.3	42.3	36	45.1	40.6
None	10.8	2.7	7.3	12	0	5.9
Adventist	2.1	2	2	0	2	1
Mormon	3.6	0	2	0	0	0
Other	2.1	0	1.2	0	0	0
Maya spirituality	1	0	0.6	0	0	0
Jehovah Witnesses	0	0.7	0.3	0	0	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Survey 2011; Survey 2015

**Table 15: Visits to internet shops**

Do you visit the internet shops?	2011			2015		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
6 to 7 times a week	7.7	12.8	9.9	4.0	5.9	5.0
4 to 5 times a week	8.7	7.4	8.2	4.0	2.0	3.0
2 to 3 times a week	29.2	23	26.5	32.0	25.5	28.7
One day or less a week	40	35.8	38.2	38.0	37.3	37.6
I do not visit them	14.4	20.9	17.2	22.0	29.4	25.7
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Survey 2011; Survey 2015

**Table 16: Access to communication resources**

	2011			2015		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Computer at home						
Yes	55.9	50.7	53.6	48.0	47.1	47.5
No	44.1	49.3	46.4	52.0	52.9	52.5
Total	100	100	100	100.0	100.0	100.0
Home internet						
Yes	26.7	25.7	26.2	22.0	21.6	21.8
No	73.3	74.3	73.8	78.0	78.4	78.2
Total	100	100	100	0.0	0.0	0.0
Email						
Yes	69.7	61.5	66.2	72.0	64.7	68.3
No	30.3	38.5	33.8	28.0	35.3	31.7
Total	100	100	100	100.0	100.0	100.0
FaceBook account						
Yes	53.8	45.9	50.4	76.0	58.8	67.3
No	46.2	54.1	49.6	24.0	41.2	32.7
Total	100	100	100	100.0	100.0	100.0
Television						
Yes	74.9	79.1	76.7	80.0	88.2	84.2
No	25.1	20.9	23.3	20.0	11.8	15.8
Total	100	100	100	100.0	100.0	100.0
DVD player						
Yes	61	40.5	52.2	58.0	54.9	56.4
No	39	59.5	47.8	42.0	45.1	43.6
Total	100	100	100	100.0	100.0	100.0
Bicycle						
Yes	57.4	18.9	40.8	40.0	20.0	30.0
No	42.6	81.1	59.2	60.0	80.0	70.0
Total	100	100	100	100.0	100.0	100.0
Vehicle						
Yes	32.3	37.8	34.7	32.7	32.0	32.3
No	67.7	62.2	65.3	67.3	68.0	67.7
Total	100	100	100	100.0	100.0	100.0
Landline						
Si	29.7	32.4	30.9	28.6	20.0	24.2
No	70.3	67.6	69.1	71.4	80.0	75.8
Total	100	100	100	100.0	100.0	100.0
Cell phone						
Yes	85.1	83.8	84.5	80.0	90.2	85.1
No	14.9	16.2	15.5	20.0	9.8	14.9
Total	100	100	100	0.0	0.0	0.0
MP3 player						
Yes	37.4	18.2	29.2	38.0	39.2	38.6
Yes, phone				24.0	27.5	25.7
No	62.6	81.8	70.8	38.0	33.3	35.6
Total	100	100	100	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey 2011; Survey 2015

**Table 17: Middle school graduate achievements**

	Location	Daily	Weekends	# graduating students 2013	Reading achievement 2013 %	Mathematics achievement 2013 %
National	Guatemala				14.58	18.35
Departamental	Alta Verapaz				7.88	12.29
Municipal	Tactic				14.47	19.36
Public						
Instituto Nacional de Educación Básica INEB	Chjacorral (main town)	Evening		22	4.55	0.00
INEB de Telesecundaria	Tampo (hamlet)	Evening		11	18.18	9.09
INEB de Telesecundaria	Cuyquel (hamlet)	Evening		6	16.67	33.33
INEB de Telesecundaria	Chiacal (hamlet)	Evening		22	4.55	13.64
Cooperative						
Instituto Mixto de Educación Básica por Cooperativa Manuel Zamora Lobos	La Joya (main town)	Evening		192	17.19	26.04
Private						
Colegio Nuestra Señora de la Asunción	Barrio San Jacinto (main town)	Evening		19	52.63	47.37
Instituto Akaltic	Barrio San Jacinto (main town)	Morning		39	25.64	23.08
			All day	41	0.00	4.88
Colegio Cristiano Particular Mixto "Vida"	Chjacorral (main town)	Morning		27	7.41	18.52
Colegio Privado Mixto La Enseñanza	Barrio Asunción (main town)	Evening		26	19.23	19.23
Colegio Particular Mixto Blaise Pascal	Barrio Asunción (main town)	Morning		6	0.00	33.00
			All day	10	0.00	20.00
			Evening	49	6.12	2.04
Instituto Guatemalteco de Educación Radiofónica (IGER)	Barrio Asunción (main town)	Radio	Radio	w/o data	w/o data	w/o data

Source: DIGEDUCA (2013) "Bases de Datos / Evaluaciones DIGEDUCA 2013 / Evaluaciones Tercero básico (por establecimiento)". *Ministerio de Educación* website. Accessed [10/15/2018] <http://www.mineduc.gob.gt/digeduca/>

Morning: usually from 7 am to 12:30 pm

Evening: usually from

1:30 to 6:30 pm

All day: usually from 7:00 am to 4:00 pm on Saturdays

**Table 18: High school graduate achievements**

School	Location	Daily	Weekends	# graduating students 2015	Reading achievement 2015 %	Mathematics achievement 2015 %	Average age students
National*	Guatemala				25.97	8.51	
Departamental	Alta Verapaz				19	4.74	
Municipal	Tactic				16.42	2.53	
Public							
Instituto Nacional de Educación Diversificada	Chjacorral (main town)	Morning		No graduates yet.			
Private							
Colegio Nuestra Señora de la Asunción	Barrio San Jacinto (main town)	Evening		No graduates yet.			
Instituto Akaltic	Barrio San Jacinto (main town)	Morning		5	20	0	19
		Evening		103	23.3	0.97	19
			All day	72	5.56	1.39	23
			All day	7	0	0	22
Colegio Cristiano Particular Mixto "Vida"	Chjacorral (main town)	Evening		9	33	0	17
Colegio Privado Mixto La Enseñanza	Barrio Asunción (main town)	Evening		56	28.57	3.57	19
			Morning / evening	46	30.43	4.35	19
Colegio Particular Mixto Blaise Pascal	Barrio Asunción (main town)	Morning		31	16.13	9.68	19
			All day	85	7.06	2.35	23
			All day	61	8.2	1.64	20

Source: DIGEDUCA (2015) "Bases de Datos / Evaluaciones DIGEDUCA 2015 / Evaluaciones de graduandos (por establecimiento)". *Ministerio de Educación* website. Accessed [10/15/2018] <http://www.mineduc.gob.gt/digeduca/>  
 \*Source: DIGEDUCA (2016) "Informe Departamental y Municipal de Graduandos 2015". Guatemala: Ministerio de Educación. Pages: 20, 69.

Morning: usually from 7 am to 12:30

pm

Evening: usually from 1:30 to 6:30

pm

All day: usually from 7:00 am to

4:00 pm on Saturdays

**Table 19: Reasons for not participating in youth groups**

	%
Lack of time	34%
Does not like them	16%
No reason (they just wanted to)	14%
Not allowed to go	11%
Group does not exist anymore	9%
Meeting schedule (too late)	5%
Youth moved	5%
Conflicts with other youth	5%
Left the Church	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Survey 2015

**Table 20: Municipal candidates and their political affiliations (1999-2015)**

Candidates	Political Parties or Civic Committees				
	1999	2003	2007	2011	2015
Ac Bin, José Moisés		UNE			
Ac, Evaristo			FRG		
Ajcam Isem, Jorge Augusto			PP		
Asig Isem, Julio Baldomero			PUNEET	PUNEET	PUNEET
Caal Co, Hugo Rolando		PAN	PAN†	UNE-GANA	UNE
Caal, Enrique		DSP		FRG	
Chitay Hub, Ricardo		URNG			
Coy Quej, Roderico					CREO-Unionista
Cú Isem, Elza Leonora		FRG†			
García, Oscar Leonel		DCG		PAN	
Guerrero Milián, Edin Rolando			UNE*	PP*†	LIDER†
Hub Rey, Pablo	DIA-URNG				
Isem Chiquin, Rolando				UCN	
López Cantoral, Carlos Salomón	CCT	DIA			
Medina Caal, Mauro	FDNG				
Milián García, Fidel	ARDE				
Milián Morales, Baltazar	PAN	PU	UD		
Morales Sel, César Oswaldo					UCN
Pinto Salazar, Alex Humberto			DIA		
Quej Quej, Everardo					MR
Quej Xoy, José Alberto					TODOS
Sagui, Francisco Javier	FRG*†		GANA	CREO	PAN
Si Caal, Oswaldo				LIDER	
Sierra Quej, Rafael					URNG MAIZ
Ta Bin, Francisco	DCG				
Tujab Bin, Jorge	UCN				
Tun Isem, Fredy Rolando					PP
Xoc Buc, Víctor			UCN		
Xoc Co, César Augusto					CONVERGENCIA
Xona Sierra, Onofre		Gran Alianza Nacional (PP-MR-PSN)*			
Xuc Buc, Humberto Jesús			EG		

\* Political party that won the National Elections for the corresponding period.

† Candidate and political party that won the Municipal Elections for the corresponding period

Source: Electoral data for 1999-2015 (TSE 1999:638–639; TSE 2003; TSE 2007:654–655; TSE 2011:550; TSE 2015:424)