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¿Por qué Quédate?

Frontiering through development in Guatemala

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Abstract: Across the global south, regimes of labour and mobility control are reforming that attempt to manage the northern movement of people. By combining financing development projects with explicit forms of border enforcement (including border personnel training and new securitization technologies), western governments and southern elites attempt to encourage publics (invariably poorer people of colour) to stay in local regions, rather than seek better livelihoods elsewhere. By reference to the USAID funded Centros Quédate or Stay Here Centres in Guatemala, this paper explores the merging of development and migration governance regimes through the concept of "frontiering through development." The paper argues that initiatives such as these fail to consider the root causes of colonialism and imperialism that have long led people to migrate in the first place. Moreover, migration is cast as something problematic under discourses of populist economic nationalist sentiment, rather than beneficial to migrants, country-of-origin and destination regions. However, rather than passive recipients of patronising development, I show how participants rework the Quédate programme to fit their own onward goals. Paternalist development paradigms should take into account how crucial and embedded mobile livelihoods are in present-day realities.

Keywords: Migration; Development; Borders; Frontiers; Colonialism.

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Introduction[1]

> I want to be clear to folks in this region who are thinking about making that dangerous trek to the United States-Mexico border, do not come. Do not come. The United States will continue to enforce our laws and secure our border. There are legal methods by which migration can and should occur, but we, as one of our priorities, will discourage illegal migration. And I believe if you come to our border, you will be turned back. So let's discourage our friends, our neighbors, our family members from embarking on what is otherwise an extremely dangerous journey, where in large part, the only people who benefit are coyotes. United States Vice President Kamala Harris, 7 June 2021.

During her first international trip abroad as Vice President, Kamala Harris pronounced these memorable words in the ornate surroundings of the *Palacio Nacional de la Cultura* in Guatemala City. Flanked by Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei, Harris pledged a tough on borders approach that centres on addressing 'the root causes of migration.' As part of their so-called Root Causes Strategy, Harris is heading the Biden Administration's efforts to advance local livelihoods in the Northern Triangle region of Central America: El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras[2]. This article examines the U.S. government's strategy as symptomatic of what I term a "frontiering through development" approach. I use the concept frontiering through development in two main ways. First, to denote first the territorialisation aspect of development regimes that impedes people's mobility. Second, to detail the vast amount of capital in development regimes as "resource frontiers" (Cons, Eilenberg 2019). This strategy of financing development aid as a softer means of migration governance is not unique. In recent years, regimes of labour and mobility control are reforming that attempt to manage the northern movement of people from the global south. Under this strategy, wealthier countries (invariably in the global north) and networks of southern elites cast their eyes on so-called "migration transit" and "source" country regions or strategically

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2. See the U.S. Strategy for Addressing the Root Causes of Migration in Central America (2021). Available at: https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Root-Causes-Strategy.pdf, accessed on 01/01/2022.

capitalise on their geographical position (Morris 2020). By combining financing development projects with explicit forms of border enforcement (including border personnel training and new securitisation technologies), western governments attempt to encourage publics (invariably poorer people of colour) to stay in global south regions.

The frontiering through development strategy I put forward here connects directly to this special issue's focus on "economic nationalism" in that much migration policy gains traction from discourses of populist economic sentiment. Preventing immigration from Central America is represented as preserving jobs for those in the US. Yet, as researchers have well shown (Chomsky 2018; Holmes 2013; Muller 1994), the distinction between domestic and international labour is a false one. In reality, foreign workers – undocumented and documented alike – buoy the American and global economy. The broader global economy thrives on mobile workforces (Xiang 2006), as much as the persistent poverty of majority Black and Brown life (McKittrick 2013)[3]. Discourses of American economic nationalist supremacy negates histories of imperialism and the violence of transatlantic slavery through to present-day exploitation and neocolonial extractivism. As this article will show in the case of Guatemala, frontiering through development strategies map onto these protracted colonial logics and are neither effective or deeply supportive of people's livelihoods.

The article draws primarily on fieldwork in Guatemala's western Sololá region, and specifically the town of Santa María Visitación, high in the Sierra Madre mountains. Migration is everywhere palpable in Santa María. On most blocks, stores advertise how to receive remittances from the US. Locals say that the pilons jutting out from the roofs of the towering marble white houses in town indicate the anticipation of more remittances from travel and work in the US. Multiple-story homes with neoclassical facades and grand window dressings are known locally as *arquitectura de remesas* or "remittances architecture." Nearly everyone I speak with has a migration story to tell: of precarious journeys hiding in border-crossing trucks under the crushing

3. Throughout this article I use uppercase "Black" to convey aspects of collective history and social identity of people and cultures of African origin globally. "Brown", referring to race, ethnicity, and culture, is used to describe a wide range of people of Indigenous, Latin, Middle Eastern, and South Asian descent. Usually, "Brown" is not capitalized because of the diversity of individuals' countries, cultures, and ethnicities. However, I have chosen to also capitalize Brown to show how Brown is also a social identity connected to histories of racialization in which people of colour are discriminated as a group.

weight of fruits, vegetables, and other produce; of the going rate to make it up through Mexico and across the US border. It is a town where migration is an indelible part of daily life – most everyone has attempted the journey or at least considered it. It is towns like Santa María that have garnered the interest of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and affiliated development agencies in their Root Causes approach. Such programmes include the development of the unabashedly named the Centro Quédate or Stay Here Centre. Centro Quédate operates as a network of training schools across regions in Guatemala where there are high numbers of young people who migrate. This article zooms in on Santa María's Centro Quédate as a clear example of the frontiering through development approach.



FIG. 1: *Arquitectura de Remesas* (Remittances Architecture). Photo by J. Morris.

Basing myself between Santa María Visitación, Guatemala City, and Flores for a total of five months across 2021 and 2022, I have been examining different U.S.-funded migration development programmes. The US government funds a number of initiatives to provide long-term skills-building and livelihood opportunities for locals (particularly those who might migrate), internal migrants, and migrants from surrounding regions. These initiatives, while nominally supporting local livelihoods, are devised to govern lower-middle income migrants' – and quite often Indigenous Guatemalans – mobility[4]. Since the Biden Administration entered office in 2021, there has been an increase in the numbers of people attempting to cross the U.S.-Mexico border. Last year, 17% of undocumented border crossers (279,033 people) were recorded from Guatemala: after Mexico and Honduras, the third most significant country of origin in the region (Pew Research Center 2021). Guatemala is not only categorised as a sending country but also a transit country, passed through by the majority of Central Americans, and increasingly Venezuelan, Haitian, and African migrants, in their passage to reach the U.S. As a result, Guatemala has become a key site in the U.S. government's efforts to limit southern border migration. These strategies look to appease a polarised American electorate, riled by years of xenophobic – and often explicitly racist – discourses surrounding non-western immigration.

My interest emerges from previous research into the development of migration governance strategies on small Pacific islands (Morris 2019, 2020, 2022a) and in the Middle East (Morris 2020, 2021). I have examined the controversial roles of NGOs in facilitating some of these arrangements (Morris 2022b). Many initiatives are part of the allegedly "softer" side of immigration enforcement, which merge development strategies with blatant frontiering goals. As with my previous research sites, in Guatemala, regional migrants – and those from further afield – are similarly encouraged to stay in the country rather than migrating elsewhere, in particular the US. So too, like my past fieldwork locations, the locations where externalised border regimes take place are no accident, but are structured by deep legacies of colonialism (Morris 2021). Years of violent colonial upheavals, resource depletion, border drawings and their consequential impacts cannot be removed from migrations and their governance (Samaddar 2020). The drive towards frontiering through development extends from these

4. Typically, it is not the poorest people who migrate. Migration is an expensive endeavour and often requires loans, leasing of land, and extensive familial support. Many people incur considerable financial debt to make these journeys including the seizure of their lands for defaulted loan payments. See Heidbrink 2019.

histories. Part of what this article seeks to detail is the underlying structural reasons that account for both the migration of Guatemalans to the US and the willingness of the Guatemalan government to agree to such frontiering through development arrangements. I bring in a focus on the *longue durée* to understand the extreme contradictions inherent in root causes strategies. I argue that the root causes approach fails to consider – and indeed exasperates – the very root causes of colonialism and imperialism that, in Guatemala, have disproportionately affected lower income migrant and Indigenous Maya communities: subject to conquest by imperial Spain, conquest by local and international capitalism, through to present day frontiering development regimes. The kind of international development interventions furthered by the Biden administration call for technical solutions and ignore the structural inequality and racism fostered by colonialism in the first place. They also overlook the importance that migration has to local and global economies except when it comes to the mobility of the wealthy, international elite. Yet, in 2021, remittances to Guatemala totaled a record $15.3 billion, which was an increase of 35% from the previous year, and makes up 17.8% of the country's entire economy (World Bank 2022). Simultaneously, Guatemalan labour and skills are also indispensable to the US and global economy. Alternatively, to take a more insidious angle, developments agencies and affiliated government divisions recognise the profitability of undocumented low wage labour. Instead, such programmes are merely a gauze for perpetually facilitating a low wage disposable labour force: what de Genova (2013) describes as the purchase of "illegality."

Understanding these asymmetrical relations has important implications for debates over open migration as a form of colonial reparation (Nevins 2019). It is no coincidence that frontiering development projects retrace the fault lines of colonial extractive regimes. Guatemala is certainly distinct in terms of its colonial histories and political and geographical structures, as this article goes on to describe. However, there are significant overlaps in the logics of financed border regimes, showing how colonial linkages still have a lasting impact on our contemporary world. The funding of border enforcement, international development, and military presence zig-zags from global north to south, including ever-more western government and organisational investment in containment regimes and militarised border technologies (Besteman 2020). Yet, as this article, goes on to show, those targeted by development interventions are by no means passive and subaltern actors. Instead, they rework these development strategies to fulfill their long-term migration goals.

This article proceeds as follows. I start by extending work on migration and development to explore the dimensions of migration governance regimes. I then move into the coloniality of frontiering through development, tracing the colonial histories that extend into the present. The heavy involvement of US imperial interests spurred on decades of displacement and economic devastation that contemporary development programmes now seek to address. I draw on the example of Centro Quédate as one such USAID-promoted project. But rather than passive recipients of such policies, I show how participants rework the programme to fit their mobile livelihood patterns.

Frontiering Through Development

International migration is governed through a multilayered architecture of binding transnational regulations, but also a variety of "soft law" procedures split across different governance levels (Kunz, Levenex and Pannizon 2011). Within this, development has long been a buzz word in migration governance circles (Bakewell 2012; de Haas 2010). As a governance strategy, stimulating economic development and funding local livelihoods opportunities is proffered by governments as a way of reducing migration from global south to north. This mode of governance follows market-based solutions and, as a form of neoliberal governmentality, is designed to immobilise potentially mobile transnational subjects within the globalised economy (Likić-Brborić 2018). Buoyed by "the new migration and development optimism" (Betts 2011: xxiv), the migration development approach promotes temporary labour migration schemes and development initiatives to allegedly produce "triple wins" for receiving and sending states, in addition to migrants themselves.

A growing body of scholarship, largely from anthropologists and geographers, is more circumspect about the long-term efficacy and morality of the frontiering through development approach (Heidbrink 2020; Paoletti 2010). As post-development critics have long pointed out (Escobar 1995; Esteva *et al.* 2013), triumphalist accounts of international development projects depoliticise how they can serve "a duality of care and control coupled with exclusion" (Samaddar 2018). Rather than a form of economic development to be celebrated, international projects that link migration and economic development policy ultimately attempt to restrict people's movements (Bakewell 2008). While mobility is celebrated for wealthy international elite, it is represented as symptomatic of failure among poor people of colour in the global south. Instead, camps and entire global regions become holding territories

of an enormous amount of labour, characterised by a cordoned division of low-wage, labour-intensive production. People are kept in place or strategically held within wealthy urban and global north contexts through precarious visa stipulations and other mechanisms of social control and "ghettoization" (Wacquant 2009). Simultaneously, within the racialised economy, they become part of the global supply chain of commodities, such as in agricultural plantations (Murray Li 2015), special economic and outsourced manufacturing zones (Morris 2020), garment and construction industries (Kathiravelu 2016), domestic labour (Rosenbaum 2017), and for providing an immobilised captive labour force for mobile tourist economies (Sheller 2003). Bodily (im) mobilities are a crucial part of these systems of transnational exchange, immobilised in order to produce the mobility of commodities and other bodies. While proffered as a form of meaningful local development, such frontiering through development projects can become a way for networks of elites to profit, disallowing the movement of those who need to – and in Guatemala, majority Indigenous Mayans – in the process.

Equally, academics and policymakers question whether development aid does actually prevent migration, pointing out that economic growth and improved education typically increase people's capacities and aspirations to migrate (de Haas 2010). There is increasing evidence that distributing development aid to migrant-origin countries does not deter migration (de Haas 2007). Rather, it generally produces an increase in emigration as people's access to education and international connections rise (Dao *et al.* 2016). More disposable income also means not only an ability to pay the costs of migration, but also the ability to invest in such aspects as Internet access, overseas business connections, language skills, and tourism: all of which inspire and support migration. Yet, when it comes to global south people of colour-majority regions, migration is cast as something problematic, rather than beneficial to migrants, country-of-origin and destination regions (Bakewell 2008). Politicians frequently rely on populist discourses of economic nationalist sentiment, obfuscating the indispensability of global workforces to domestic economies. In reality, as the COVID-19 pandemic showed, the contemporary global economy is so globally interconnected that the concept of jobs having a national identity or reducing those jobs of people in the US is an erroneous one (Chomsky 2018). But these framings cyclically nurture xenophobic ideologies and racist worldviews as countries in the global north look to protect themselves against the mobility of people from the global south and guard hegemonic whiteness

(Hage 2000). Such racialised dynamics map onto the policing that occurs within global south regions, where the Black and Brown poor can become racially profiled as "illegal" by local police forces (Gazzotti, Hagan 2020). Government efforts would be better deployed in shaping not deterring migration.

Harris' statement that "the only people who benefit are coyotes" belies the political economic capital that is generated through these development regimes, and beyond Guatemala's borders. Indeed, the private sector constitutes a substantial part of this strategy. Organisations have mushroomed across "migration hot spot" regions (Cabot 2019) to provide a range of outsourced governance strategies. This includes local livelihoods projects through to explicit forms of border control: such as walls, drones, biometric tracking, immigration detention centres, holding facilities, and other forms of policing and incarceration. NGOs, corporations, academic research institutes, and other interested parties come together as part of this "immigration industrial complex" (Golash-Boza 2009) centered on the capture and control of human movement. Meanwhile, western governments in particular have extracted exponential symbolic value from counterbalancing the representation of hard-lined border enforcement with one of developmental care.

Important to consider also is the coloniality of migration governance regimes. Today's population movements and migration governance regimes are structured by colonial histories (Samaddar 2020). Root causes programmes dehistoricise histories of Spanish colonialism then US imperialism in Guatemala, which set the stage for present-day frontiering through development projects. Many development projects target Indigenous Maya in a country where 21.8 percent of the Indigenous population lives in poverty as opposed to 7.4 percent of the wider population. In fact, Guatemala is unique among other Central American and Caribbean regions in that the Indigenous Maya population still to this day constitute a majority: over 60% of Guatemala's population. Yet, Indigenous Maya campesinos in particular have experienced land dispossession, threats to livelihoods, and ultimately forced migration – followed by development interventions designed to keep them in place. However, migrants – and in Guatemala, Indigenous Mayan populations – by no means passively accept these sorts of interventions. Rather, Guatemalan Mayans are some of the most powerful actors in Guatemalan civil society, who have forged transethnic alliances and led organisational and grassroots strategies to constrain attempted domination (Grandin 1997; Tzul Tzul 2016). So too, regional migrants also craft their own self-value, drawing attention to their

efforts by mobilising through transnational solidarity networks including migrant caravans (Correa-Cabrera, Koizumi 2021) and asylum systems (Coutin 2011). Although individuals operate within a deeply unbalanced system, many navigate through their own modes of survival and activist strategies.

The next section turns to the coloniality of frontiering through development – to adapt Anibal Quijano's (2000) "coloniality of power." Using this expression, Quijano describes the structure of power, knowledge, and hegemony that stretches from colonialism. Racialised and class-based hierarchies persist in the present in the uneven distribution of wealth, resources, health, life expectancy, rights and freedoms. By historicising the present-day frontiering through development projects, this section illuminates the contradictions inherent in root causes strategies.

The Coloniality of Frontiering through Development

> There is every likelihood that the payment of good wages, coupled with sanitary surroundings and civilizing influences, will breed in Guatemala and in all of Central America strong, self-reliant, and progressive races of people (Frederick Upham Adams, *Conquest of the Tropics* (1914).
>
> I will also continue to work with CEOs around the world to encourage investment in Guatemala. And Mr. President, I look forward to working with you on that. As I shared with you, in Washington, D.C., I recently convened some of our biggest CEOs who have a profound interest for many reasons on supporting the work that happens here and the work that can happen here in Guatemala to, again, uplift folks who may have been overlooked or neglected, but also uplift the natural capacity and resources of this beautiful country (United States Vice President Kamala Harris, 7 June 2021).

Guatemala, located just south of Mexico, bordered by Belize to the east and El Salvador and Honduras to the south, represents what Anna Tsing (2003), Michael Watts (2014), and others have termed a resource frontier. Guatemala has a long history around resource extraction, where natural resources and people's labour power have been enclosed, extracted, and incorporated into circuits of production and consumption (Castro, Lavinas Picq 2017). Histories of Spanish colonialism then US imperialism in Guatemala set the stage for the economic and social dispossession experienced in present-day frontiering through development projects. Indigenous Maya campesinos in particular have been the target of immense upheavals. Mayan Indigenous peoples, of which there are twenty-four ethnolinguistic groups, have experienced almost five centuries of conquest, begun in 1524 by Spanish colonialists. The era of Spanish colonialism resulted in highly unequal patterns of land distributions

for local farmers experienced through to ongoing processes of accumulation by dispossession in U.S.-funded development.

Under the policy of *congregacion*, Maya communities were forced out of their homelands and corralled into settlements (Schwartz 1990). Through this imposed nucleation, the Spanish colonial administration looked to manage and control Indigenous populations by creating centralised pools of labour that could be utilised for imperial objectives. Diverse Indigenous groups were umbrellaed together as *congregaciones*, despite being far from homogeneous. Organised akin to a feudal system, Indigenous communities were forced to pay tributes to Spanish colonists in the form of goods and services (Farriss 1984). Colonial resource extraction concentrated on the cacao-rich Pacific Coast and the temperate hills east and south of the capital city, Santiago, where indigo was grown, cattle reared, and multiple corn crops harvested on an annual basis. Maya from these regions were recruited to provide labour on plantations, while those of the northwest highlands were ignored to the extent that they were seen to inhabit "among imperial Spain's least-prized possessions" (Lovell 1988: 32). Many Maya fled to outlying rural areas to escape the brutal exploitation of forced resettlement in the *congregacion* enclosure. This system of forced agriculture was legitimised by promoting a national *ladino* identity (originally those of mixed Spanish and Guatemalan Indigenous heritage, but later taken to be "non-Indian") that marginalised the Mayan majority (Colby 2006)[5]. By the time Guatemala gained independence and banana companies stepped at the turn of the twentieth century, deep social divisions marked Guatemalan society.

After independence, Guatemala was governed until 1870 by a series of conservative regimes, who focused on forging a paternalist state centered on maturing Hispanic institutions and attracting foreign colonists. The country's Spanish-descended Guatemalan elites called on the government to force highland Maya to labour in agricultural plantations. The Guatemalan government focused on sparking the local economy through a series of land acts in 1825 and 1829 that privatised communally held land (Handy 1985). During the Mariano Gálvez regime (1831-1838), Indigenous Maya were forced off land that they could not provide title to, regardless of any claims they might have, unless they paid an exorbitant fee. Those who refused were arrested and some

5. Unlike the term *mestizo*, used in contexts such as Mexico to celebrate a mixed heritage through nation-building projects, nation-building in Guatemala focused on a process of whitening, whereby the status of *ladino* was elevated to white Europeans (Hale 2002).

sold as indentured servants for local landowners. These legislative acts were designed to benefit *ladino* landowners and foreign investors. The Barrios dictatorship (1873-1883) initiated taxation and labour laws that forced Mayans back into agricultural labour and vicious cycles of debt peonage. Vast tracts of land were labelled as unclaimed by the Barrios government, moving into the hands of *ladinos* and creoles. This land acquisition was spurred on by domestic and foreign investments in the cultivation of coffee, especially in the relatively untouched Verapaz highlands and Pacific piedmont. Indigenous Maya were forcibly recruited to provide a disposable seasonal work force for the coffee harvest under the *mandamiento* draft instituted by Barrios in 1876 (Carmack 1988). This was replaced by legalised debt peonage in 1894 and eventually a vagrancy law in 1934, which required those farming less than 6.9 acres of land to work part of the year as wage labourers for others. Any uprisings were brutally stifled by government militia through capture, imprisonment, and execution. These labour demands and forms of violent suppression contribute to the preconditions for the present-day system that Maya encounter today – and people's efforts to move for better livelihoods (Greene 2009).

The banana trade continued the ever-rolling expropriation of land and drafting of labour experienced by Maya from Spanish colonisation. In the wake of Guatemala's independence from Spain (1821), the Monroe Doctrine sedimented U.S. imperial interest in the Latin American region. This opened the floodgates for organisational interest, with Guatemala imagined as a storehouse of natural riches, a source of future wealth (Striffler, Moberg 2005). Widely known as Banana Republics in the nineteenth century, Central American countries, many in financially unstable situations, gave American and other Western companies market access to advance the banana trade, which yielded vast profits for Western producers and local elites. Multinational heavyweights, such as Standard Fruit (now Dole), Cuyamel Fruit Co. (later acquired by United Fruit), and the United Fruit Company (UFC, now Chiquita), exerted their powerful influence to gain control over local farmlands, manipulate government officials and the media (Colby 2011). During the regimes of Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920) and Jorge Ubico (1931-1944), Maya were further ostracised and repressed through extensive networks of draconian police forces, spies, and the *mandamiento* forced labour draft. By 1930, UFC was the single largest landowner in Guatemala – leaving minimal habitable land or self-governing economic opportunities for Indigenous rural farmers, who experienced incredibly low standards of living and monocrop dependency

(Reyna 2016). Governments that blocked UFC from entering the country, such as Honduras, found themselves overthrown, marking a succession of political upheavals in the interests of the banana trade for western markets.

The agrarian reform of Jacobo Arbenz, designed to promote peasants' autonomy and lessen the grip of banana corporates on Guatemala (Colby 2011), resulted in a now infamous CIA-funded coup. Between 1945 and 1950, Arbenz's predecessor, Juan Jose Arevalo, helped organise the first cooperatives in the Guatemalan countryside in combination with moves to improve the education system and promote Mayan languages. Arevalo abolished the vagrancy law and passed legislation allowing workers the right to organise. After election in 1951, Arbenz, a left-leaning former military officer, pushed forward these reforms, which threatened the political monopoly of U.S. banana conglomerates. Arbenz was not only supportive of worker's rights but also focused on undoing the imperial hold of UFC on Guatemala. Arbenz denounced UFC's rail, telephone, and telegraph system monopoly. Importantly, he also signed a sweeping land redistribution law in 1952 to give undeveloped lands held by large property owners to rural landless farmers, who constituted 90% of the population. Then Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and CIA Director Allen Dulles both had economic interests in the Boston-based UFC. UFC utilised their close ties to the U.S. government to persuade President Dwight Eisenhower to approve a CIA-sponsored coup that overthrew Arbenz in 1954 and reversed the land reform. This operation pushed Guatemala into a brutal 36-year civil war that lasted from 1960 to 1996. The increasing turn of Maya communities away from plantation labour, requests for titles to historically Indigenous-inhabited tracts of land, and the encroachment of transnational corporations onto their land (often with the support of the government) led to direct confrontations with the state (Grandin 2000). Over these four decades, a deadly system of widespread slaughter by successive military regimes claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Mayans across Guatemala, culminating in the massacres of the 1980s. During this period, the U.S. provided counter-insurgency training and military supplies to Guatemalan military and police, which heightened the escalation of violence.

Large-scale Mayan migration began in the late 1970s. Many Maya ended up in camps in southern Mexico run by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (ibid). In the 1980s, the Guatemalan army identified the Mayan population as subversive and supportive of leftist insurgency movements from the Mayan highlands. A massive counterinsurgency war and genocidal policies

against Maya led to an estimated one million Maya leaving their homelands between 1981 and 1985. Some 440 highlands villages were destroyed during the 1981-1983 period, with over 150,000 Maya were killed or "disappeared" during this period alone (Greene 1999). Around one million Mayan villagers were internally displaced, and 200,000 sought refuge in southern Mexico, where many remain. Many also sought refuge in the forests and mountains, while other social reformists became part of resistance movements, and still more moved to squatter settlements in Guatemala City, eschewing their language and visible cultural identity through "ladinoization" in an effort to survive (Manz 1988). Eighty-three percent of those subject to violence were Maya, while others were largely professional, middle-class Guatemalan political exiles (CEH 1999). The violence across the country massively disrupted patterns of commercial trade, resulting in the loss of livelihoods for many Maya, including huge unemployment that lingers to this day. In this context, migration has become a survival strategy for Maya to find above-subsistence jobs with many attempting to make their way up to the United States and Canada.

The U.S. has long benefited from the wealth made on Guatemalan plantations and the importation of Guatemalan-produced commodities. Indigenous Maya in particular have exponentially contributed to the U.S. consumer economy, including providing arduous plantation labour for coffee, indigo, banana, and palm oil production. Yet, the U.S. government militated against the movement of Maya, deriving further profit from the spectacle – and material effects – of "illegality" (de Genova 2013) as part of an expanded politics of consumption. Because the U.S. was still supporting the Guatemalan political regimes, the Reagan administration refused to acknowledge Guatemalan migrants as refugees (Coutin 2011). Instead, Indigenous Maya and other low-income Guatemalan migrants looking for protection were classified as "economic migrants"[6]. As a result, many Guatemalans became undocumented in the U.S. A vast number found work in agriculture, construction, and service industries, and quite often in low-wage precarious working contexts, once again profitable to American industry (Fink 2003). Many migrants stayed in the U.S., supporting the American economy in some of the most dangerous and low-

6. The Reagan administration's denial of the asylum cases of Guatemalans and Salvadorans led to a class-action lawsuit in 1985 brought by migrants and their supporters against the INS and the Justice Department, later known as American Baptist Church (ABC) v. Thornburgh. The lawsuit ended in a settlement that required the INS re-adjudicate the cases of all Guatemalans and Salvadorans in the U.S. who had arrived by 1990 and been denied their asylum claims.

est-paid jobs in the country, as their precarious status made – and continues to make – them subject to heightened exploitation (Stuesse 2016). Others were deported under the harsh '96 immigration laws of the Clinton administration, which mandated the deportation of immigrants convicted of minor infractions such as traffic violations or marijuana possession (Golash-Boza 2015). The escalation of deportation has been profitable to a range of state and private sector actors, including "not just police and immigration officials, but airline executives, pilots, stewards, and other passengers" (Walters 2002: 266). So too, the detention industry, comprised of mammoth corporations but also NGOs and other government agencies that provide contractual services to facilities, has exploded in recent years (Morris 2017). This includes both within the U.S. but also in Mexico and Guatemala, where securitised facilities and NGO-run shelters have mushroomed along migrant trails in the region as part of the outsourced governance of mobility (Olayo-Méndez 2017). Meanwhile, Guatemala continues to be a place of informal US imperialism where companies extract capital from the country centered on the governance of human mobility.

Development projects have long been connected to colonial concerns with the control of Indigenous mobility. USAID development began in earnest in Guatemala in the 1950s as part of the post-war explosion of international development in formerly colonised regions (Sundberg 1998). Following the 1996 Peace Accords, which signaled an end to Guatemala's devastating 36-year civil conflict, USAID focused their development efforts on regions in Guatemala with high levels of out-migration. As much as development is presented as a tool for social mobility, its use as a means of *im*mobilisation is explicit in that "irregular migration" now constitutes a central pillar of USAID's work. Regions that have historically been ravaged by the violence of U.S.-funded genocidal regimes, such as the Western Highlands, have become hotbeds for development interventions. U.S. funding has focused on financing private sector industry in sectors such as agricultural plantations, healthcare, education, environmental conservation, and ecological tourism. These initiatives are ostensibly designed to support people's livelihoods, while simultaneously functioning as forms of governance and resource extractive projects that benefit big business by fixing allegedly recalcitrant Indigenous subjects in place. The final section turns to look at the system of frontiering through development as it operates under the public campaign in the long-ravaged Western Highlands, *¡Quédate Aqui!* (Stay Here!).

(Im)mobility frontiers

I sit inside the air-conditioned offices of Centro Quédate in Santa María with Ernesto. Ernesto is just 17 years old, but he has already made the treacherous journey northwards to the US. With few economic opportunities locally, and a minimum wage far at odds with what he could earn in the US, migration, Ernesto describes, is his main option to support his family in a small village on the outskirts of Santa María. At the time, Ernesto tells me, the going rate was $15,000 overlanding to the US border through coyote networks: far beyond the prices of a plane ticket and my own journey to Guatemala. Even when taking into account these exorbitant costs, the personal safety risks, and the back-breaking cash-in-hand labour on the other side of the border, the journey was still worth it in Ernesto's and many others I spoke withs eyes. Although the minimum wage in Guatemala is roughly $12 a day, in Santa María it is far less: sometimes as little as $5 daily. Ernesto describes how sleeping ten to a room, as his father did in the hot crop fields of North Carolina, would be bearable, given the financial support it could lend, far above that available locally. But Ernesto was stopped short of making this journey a second time, which is how he came to be speaking with me here at Santa María's Centro Quédate, after I had come by in the hopes of finding out more about the programme. After deportation back from the border following a failed crossing attempt, Ernesto was recommended by local authorities and his family to enroll at Centro Quédate. This would, they told him, give him a kickstart in Santa María through local enterprise. It would create a long-term future for the town, rather than one sustained by overseas remittances. Alternatively, it would put off the inevitable journey until a safer opportunity arose when Ernesto had the qualifications to migrate with documentation.

Santa María's Centro Quédate is just one of a series of training day schools that have opened in the last five years in 25 municipalities in the five departments of the Mayan Western Highlands (Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango, Totonicapán, Quiché, and San Marcos): the ethnically diverse region where the majority of civil war massacres took place. Funded by USAID, Centro Quédate offers a range of skills-training programmes to young people largely between the ages of 12 to 19 who might be thinking of or have already attempted to migrate undocumented to the US. The majority of public schools in Guatemala are free, but often come with prohibitive costs for educational supplies, far beyond the means of many poor larger families. In contrast, Centro Quédate is free and amply resourced. For some, it might be the only school that they can

afford to attend. Ernesto describes the options on offer including hairdressing experience, computer and mechanical repairs, and English language training for work in Guatemala's growing multinational industry of call centres or as tour guides in the nearby popular Lago *Atitlán* site. The latter call centre and tour guiding options hint at some of the tensions of the programmes. Centres such as that of Quédate are funded to impede the physical mobility of people in the global south. Simultaneously, through their labour, participants support the mobility and economies of local elites and those in the Global North.



Fig. 2: Santa María's Centro Quédate, Photo by J. Morris.

The opening of Centro Quédate came in the wake of a huge publicity drive across Guatemala that began in 2014[7]. At this time, the numbers of unaccompanied children migrating to the US began increasing. Parents made the difficult decisions to send their children to be with extended family or friends in the hopes that their youngsters would have better long-term opportunities. The then First Lady, Rosa Leal de Pérez, a psychologist, and married to former President Otto Pérez Molina (2012-15), became heavily involved in promoting the ¡Quédate! campaign in her role as Secretariat of the Secretaría de Bienestar Social de la Presidencia (SBS): a position traditionally held by the First Lady. The campaign built on US Customs and Border Protection agency-funded initiatives such as the 2014 "Dangers Awareness" campaign and the 2015 "Know the Facts" campaign. Across Guatemala, glossy brochures and posters, radio broadcasts, songs, mobile phone jingles, and school activities now all encouraged youth simply to "Stay!" Pérez toured regions in Guatemala's Western Highlands with substantial out-migration, as well as majority Guatemalan schools, medical centres, and youth shelters in the US. When launching the campaign at the National Palace of Culture, she declared that, "It hurts my soul to see the problems that our children face, but together we will get out of this crisis" ("*Me duele en el alma ver los problemas a los que se enfrentan nuestros niños, pero juntos saldremos adelante de esta crisis"*). In 2015, President Pérez Molina was forced to resign from office over charges of corruption and human rights abuses during the civil war. However, the ¡Quédate! campaign continued with the change of presidency, capturing the interest of USAID. Between 2018 to 2023, USAID pledged an investment of $65 million into the project. They visually backed it with a slickly produced short film series with Golden-Globe-nominated director Jayro Bustamante and actress María Mercedes Coroy. These ¡Quédate! films celebrate the beauty and natural resources of Guatemala, highlighting the different initiatives kickstarted among young people through the Centro Quédate programmes.

Ernesto, like many of his fellow students, is Indigenous K'iche'. According to the Guatemalan Secretariat of Social Welfare, 95 percent of unaccompanied minors returned to Guatemala are Indigenous – primarily K'iche' and Mam children from rural communities in the departments of Quetzaltenango, San Marcos, Quiché, Huehuetenango, and Totonicapán (Heidbrink 2020). Many of Ernesto's, and other young people's, livelihood challenges connect directly to

7. See Heidbrink (2020) for a powerful historical account of Quédate and similar programmes in Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States.

the ruptures of past colonial regimes. The 1996 Peace Accords stipulated that landless campesinos could receive land tenure from the state. However, the vast majority of Maya returning from Mexico (including Ernesto's family) were unable to obtain any land, and endure landlessness to this day, renting their house, as part of the systemic racism of Guatemala's "pigmentocracy" (Hale 2002). Guatemala still has one of the most unequal systems of land tenure in the world. 78 percent of arable land is concentrated in the ownership of 8 percent of landholders (Tramel 2019). The recruitment of Indigenous youth as border enforcement patrols, park rangers, archaeological site guides, and for a variety of extractive projects (including logging and tourism) reveals how Indigenous bodies and their vulnerable mobilities become sources of profit through their labour power. ¡Quédate! characterises how development agencies do not address these root causes. Rather, migration is separated from the actual structural factors that provoke it.

The strategy of frontiering through development is noticeably stark across the centre. Regularly, Ernesto and his fellow students receive lectures on the dangers that they face in migrating. A poster on the wall depicts stick figures falling off the tops of trains, being held at gunpoint, and drowning in rivers. These sorts of narratives create a spectacle of danger and deterrence. Such discursive and policy responses presume that it is a lack of education or misinformation that is to blame for migration, rather than the social inequality and structural violence that so many of my interlocutors spoke of. Meanwhile, these strategies disregard the border controls that produce these precarious pathways in the first place. Ernesto and others I talk to all intend to reattempt the journey northward. Many merely bide their time in acquiring skills that might be useful for living in the US. Increased border controls only put them and others at more risk as they strive to navigate ever more restrictions on their migration routes.

Underneath the glossy ¡Quédate! spectacle, Ernesto and his friend Jorge express more reservations. Jorge, also enrolled at Santa María's Centro Quédate, and like Ernesto, K'iche' Maya, asks, "What about the education system here? What about healthcare? It's good to learn a trade, but they think this will help?" As Jorge makes clear, the programme has not addressed much of the structural violence and inequality that both he and Ernesto endure on a daily basis. Rather, it presupposes that misinformation around migration dangers and a lack of education and skills are to blame for their migration attempts. In reality, neither Jorge or Ernesto are naïve about the dangers of

migrating northward. Nor are either of them lacking in skills or drive. We sit by the row of computers in the Centro, which most of the students could not afford, talking about it further. Jorge says, "Sure, I'd like to stay here, but if I want to learn to be a mechanic, or fix computers, I'm going to need the materials for it. I don't have the kinds of resources I'd need to buy them". Ernesto chimes in, pointing out that "migrating to the US isn't something we want to do, but the options are limited". He continues, "I know it'll be tough. I'll have to do things I don't want to, like working in a restaurant kitchen in a big city. I also know people in construction. I'll do any of that, to earn money to help my family here".

Both Jorge and Ernesto highlight the major failings of the ¡Quédate! initiative. No substantial resources or personal supplies were made available to participants beyond those at the Centro. Nor have there been school scholarships or training programmes for high-skilled youth employment to earn livable wages, which might change the economic conditions that prompt migration. Jorge and Ernesto could still make far more through cash-in-hand labour in the US. This all speaks to the symbolic nature of ¡Quédate!. Little thought has been given to addressing the structural inequalities that impact on the lives of Indigenous youth, such as Jorge, making migration a logical option. As we discuss Jorge's and Ernesto's motivations and desires to migrate, I cannot help but notice the contradictions of the gleaming purple and gold ¡Quédate! poster on the wall of the Centro. Jorge and Ernesto want to contribute to the survival of their households: as financial providers through migration. The sorts of skills on offer will largely not, they both point out, offer economic stability for their families. Instead, the ¡Quédate! initiative will merely reproduce the economic marginalisation their families face. Yet, as the stark juxtaposition between the demanding rhetoric of ¡Quédate! and their mobility desires make clear, and research on 'development' has so often found (Escobar 1995), many of the paternalising initiatives on offer ignore these experiences and perspectives.

Both Jorge and Ernesto come from families who have long been highly-skilled farmers. Yet, family-based agricultural practices are not valued in the Centro Quédate programs. Past development initiatives radically altered land use patterns. Now, ¡Quédate! programs compel majority Indigenous populations to become part of unequal global markets, such as through call centre work and tourism, that will likely not provide the promised benefits, and may be socially damaging in the process. They gloss over the deep structural in-

equalities that spurs on migration in the first place, whereby development and state-led programmes have long displaced and regulated Indigenous mobility and access to the region. The ¡Quédate! program also fails to recognise the importance of the transnational social connections voiced by Jorge. Familial, friendship, and diasporic ties reveal how long histories of migration – including the impact of colonial wealth accumulation and extractive economies on Indigenous communities in particular – play an important part in decision-making. For many Maya of Guatemala, migration is a survival strategy connected to histories of land ownership, debt, and violence.

Certainly, Jorge and Ernesto are not immune to these debates. They both express deep feelings of rootedness or *arraigo* in their communities, as well as a longing to support their families by whatever means. Jorge voiced this clearly to me, saying:

> I was born here, I grew up here, this is my home, but I want to make money myself to help my family. I can't earn enough to do anything but scrape by here. My dad did that before he came back to be with us, some of my cousins have also gone to America. They've built a house for their parents here in town. I want to be able to give my parents more of that, but I can't do that with what they're offering here.

Ernesto nodded as Jorge spoke, adding, "I am going to return to Guatemala. This is why I want to go to work, to give it everything I've got and then get my family set up here. Start more local businesses that actually help people and give a livable wage." With these professional and personal goals in mind, Ernesto and Jorge place mobility front and center of local development. Both rework the skills on offer for their own long-term goals for livable futures for them and their communities. They excitedly practice their English with me, demonstrating how easily it will be for them to move to the US – or wherever needed. By receiving computer skills accreditation, and taking advantage of technological equipment ostensibly designed to territorialise them in place, Jorge and Ernesto direct development towards their own onward frontiers.

Conclusions

Classic critiques of development argue that local knowledge is eschewed in favor of imposed technical solutions (Escobar 1995; Esteva *et al.* 2013). Instead, development often does more harm than good, encouraging diverse regions of the world to adapt to western capitalist ways of life. Development is also predicated on exploitation, where certain regions and peoples serve as cheap labour and are subject to immense resource extraction, ecological destruction,

and violence. ¡Quédate! is unique in that the programmes explicitly focus on the governance of people's movement. These attempts are combined with the channeling of people's labour power through training programmes that benefit foreign industry and mobile tourist elites. Seen in a historical perspective, it is stark how closely the twenty-first century of US-led resource frontier development resembles the colonial era of the sixteenth, for the continuities between extractive regimes of conquest, dispossession, and control are striking. International development programmes in Guatemala are designed to serve a similar function to colonial *congregaciones* – as an institutional means by which political elites' level authoritarian mechanisms of control on marginalised populations, under the guise of socioeconomic "development."

By taking a *longue durée* approach, this paper has argued that the contemporary extractive era of regional migration development projects exasperates long-standing patterns of racialised inequality and labour segmentation generated by colonial extractive capitalism. Projects such as ¡Quédate! are proffered as forms of development designed to address the root causes of mass migration to the United States. However, they fail to address the structural inequality and differential access to resources advanced by colonial regimes – and on the contrary, exasperates them. From histories of dispossession and displacement from their lands, Indigenous Maya are now subject to yet more interventions that places them in enforced relationships with the land and global economy: as tour guides and in outsourced call centres deemed profitable for global markets. These industries attempt to function as boundary-*making* practices over people's socioeconomic and physical mobility. At the same time, political economic value is also extracted from Black and Brown bodies in the spectacle of enforcement. The US government counterbalances the presentation of humanitarian benevolence towards "third world" populations with one of authoritarian securitisation as Guatemala has become an explicit part of the US enforcement frontier. By considering frontiering through development strategies through the lens of economic nationalism, this article exposes the fallacies of the domestic/international labour distinction advanced in populist political rhetoric. Such a framing renders invisible the indispensability of migrant workers to global and local economies, as much as people's frequent exploitation. It also obfuscates how crucial migration is to people in the global north *and* south as a livelihood strategy. In the meantime, the "Make America Great" line nurtures xenophobic and racist sentiments that are ultimately harmful to social relations.

Although represented as objects of policy, Indigenous youth are by no means passive recipients of frontiering policies. Instead, they navigate attempted forms of marginality by reworking development for their own onward goals. With the global political penchant for the frontiering through development approach, highlighting people's efforts to challenge impoverishment and marginalisation is crucial. It would be better if programs such as ¡Quédate! embraced migration and young people's aspirations as a development frontier.

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