

Mayan K'iché' garments as cultural but also as military political artifacts in Museums

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INTRODUCTION

“What is at stake in thinking through the gender of an ethnographic object?” This was one of the initial questions raised by Wereldmuseum online on the topic “gendering the museum” seminar on 1 October 2020. Considering the context of a particular Mayan regalia or garment displayed at the Museum, I argue that an understanding of the garment’s meanings require us to address their connection to their particular military ethnographic context because failure to do so obscures the ways in which Indigenous materiality is objectified.² In so doing, we can get a glimpse of the modern colonial relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the military, and the long-term negative (and genocidal) impact of colonialism (and postcolonialism) resulting “in systemic racism, cyclical poverty, economic inequity, violence, loss of language and culture” (UNHCR, 2022).³

1 Acknowledgements, Carmen Monterroso Rivas for her thorough comments and further bibliography and to Justine Lyons for her dedicated editing of this piece. Carmen gracefully suggested that I use the term K'iche' as per the Maya Academy of Languages (Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala). I am humbled for Alessandra Benedicty-Kokken's relentless support to my research over the years. This interrogation of material objects relationship with colonial and military museums is part of a larger research project examining overseas and internal types of colonialism affecting the militarization of Indigenous populations.

2 For the objectification of Indigenous people and their art, see Tzvetan Todorov's *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, pp.130-132.

3 According to Tzvetan Todorov, historians have estimated that out of the 80 million original people inhabiting the Americas in the sixteen hundred, only 10 million remain today. This suggests, in his words that “None of the great massacres of the Twentieth Century can be compared to this hecatomb” p.133.

At the outset, it is important to note that many of the colonial legacies of Latin America of the 1990s examined by sociologist Anibal Quijano's coloniality of power remain true to this date. Some of them are elite assumptions about the racial superiority of the dominant class, restricted opportunities for upward mobility, tax evasion, and lack of access to land for Indigenous Peoples. Yet, often ignored is the prevalence of the nation's army in the lives of Indigenous communities. The museum collection may be understood as showing unique and hidden material evidence of how the military exerts overbearing pressure in the lives of poverty-ridden Mayan-Indigenous communities, exploiting extreme conditions of poverty to gain Indigenous collaborators during war and genocide situations, armed and abetted with the Cold War weapons provided by the United States and other Imperial powers to Central American states.

While most studies focus on the traditional textile practices of Mayan women, the importance of artisanal weaving in the economic reintegration, and cultural reinforcement, few, if any, elucidate the importance of examining linkages between traditional garments worn by men, the larger processes of militarization and their material objects.⁴ As Henrietta Lidchi and Stuart Allan (2020) suggest, locating some of the military's "most precious possessions," can offer "a sense of the way in which objects have a role in military life" (p.7) such as war medals, uniforms, and weapons.⁵ Critical military scholarship has argued that the display of military objects can also "condone or contest militarized violence and resistance to this violence" (Reeves and Heath-Kelly, 2020, p.245). This essay will suggest that ethnographic museum professionals need to consider Indigenous garments embodying

4 Objects such as polychrome vases decorated with palace scenes with richly attired nobles serve as testimony to the artistic talent and expertise of artisans. Militarization is an ongoing process, see Enloe (2014) and militarism is defined by its cultural impact upon groups.

5 For a discussion of war and museums, see Muchitsch, Wolfgang (2013) Ed. *Does War Belong in Museums?: The Representation of Violence in Exhibitions*. Transcript Verlag, 2013. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1wxr1z>. Accessed 1 Sept. 2023.

bloody histories of war and militarized masculinities that sustain systemic colonial violence.⁶ By ignoring the relationship between textile garments to Indigenous Peoples' military history, we risk oversimplifying the material culture kept by museums and leave the racial undertones of the military colonial gaze unaddressed.⁷

I will also suggest that these specific Mayan K'iché' traditional regalia are not only cultural but also political artifacts demanding that we—scholars, researchers, and activists—create meaning of their military history (van Beek, 1990). Drawing from extensive fieldwork and archival research in Guatemala, photographs, military journals, and online monographs written by military personnel, I examine the army's connection between traditional textiles with military regalia appropriated by the army from a decolonial framework that can help us reckon with the perpetuation of violent colonial institutions, practices, and mindsets.⁸ As criminologist Chris Cunneen (2011) further suggests, "postcolonialism is a perspective that demands we recognize the ongoing and enduring effects of colonialism on both the colonized and the colonizers" (p.249).

Against this context, we can see how gendered power dynamics in the colonial regime function by incorporating men into the newly imposed power structure in a higher position than Indigenous women. By doing so, this chapter shows that the nexus between this museum's garment and its military history harkens back to the Cold War years in Guatemala, and all the way back to Spanish

6 Some are seen as hypermasculine (combat arms), while taking into consideration the multiplicity of masculinities within the military, depending on the job, a cook is different from a member of a combat unit (Firestone, 2004; Rosen et al., 2003).

7 According to Anna Jones (1993) in "Exploding Canons: The Anthropology of Museums," these shortcomings include "the neglect of contemporary Indian artists, the failure to consult local native communities, the display of objects collected under suspicious circumstances, the distorted historical treatment, the use of the 'culture area' concept, and in particular, the curator's ignorance of contemporary political issues" (p. 209, cited in Perkins (2018)).

8 This mindset, for example, is reflected in the words of Rigoberto (pseudonym), the President of the Friends of the Army's Association, when I asked him about his relationship with the army four years after the Guatemalan Peace Accords back in 2000: "See in my spirit , I feel I am in uniform, the uniform is not worth [anything] to me, what counts in the spirit because if I have a bad spirit, what good would be uniform be? (Esparza, 2018, p. 166).

colonialism. This sociological and interdisciplinary insight can help curators and cultural researchers broaden their interpretation to include the military history of objects in their exhibits and collections. To overlook how the military absorbs sectors of Indigenous Peoples during wartime, and in doing so appropriates their traditional garments, is particularly troublesome when considering the ways in which objects are central to an understanding of culture and, particularly, social relations (Woodward, 2013). This oversight includes the paternalistic relationship the army promotes with Guatemalan Indigenous groups in the countryside. Henrietta Lidchi and Stuart Allan (2020) argue “material vestiges are often ignored by cultural analysts, leaving unexplored the lingering “objects collecting aspects of the culture of war” (p.7). This insight linking textiles and objects of war is important because as Emily Jean Oertling (2021) asserts garments of a population also reflects previous expectations, heritage, and hopes for a culture's future,” (p.1) which are created by local geographies, social interactions, economic, as well as desires to display collective heritage and individuality.

Figure 1 and 2 show the traditional jacket and pants exhibited at the permanent exhibition Museum Volkenkunde 2011 Central & South America.



Figure 1 & 2

From description in online catalogue: RV-6093-249: "1967 Chichicastenango. A Guatemalan Village. University of Washington Press" as well as RV-6093-245, which represent embroidered pants that are also from the Chichicastenango region. Municipalidad de Chichicastenango: 2009.



With embroidered suns, the garments belong to the Indigenous township of Santo Tomás Chichicastenango (located in the Westerns highlands of Guatemala). Traditionally they are worn by males from Cofradias or religious Brotherhoods from the Mayan-K'iché'. The description shows that "This fringed jacket belongs to the ceremonial costume that important men in Chichicastenango wear during festivities and ceremonies." It is embellished with red

colored suns, which can be traced back to pre-colonial times when warriors wore them, as inscribed in the Dresden Code (or Book of Codes) (1200).⁹ The black jacket is also embroidered with floral and geometric (spiral) motifs on the front and back, with blue patterns woven in. The jacket is embroidered in red silk, with fringes on the back, made with silk wool, which symbolizes rain.¹⁰

Examining the relationship between the garment displayed at the museum and its use by the military reserves revives the discourse about the complicated relationship between Indigenous men the army co-opts as reservists for a non-Indigenous state that renders them, and their communities, in Frantz Fanon's words, the title to his second book, "The Wretched of the Earth" (*Les damnés de la terre*, 1961). This is particularly the case because they are conscripted into wars, often against their own class and ethnic interests. According to the World Bank (2020), 86% of all Indigenous Guatemalans live below the poverty line, and life expectancy for Indigenous People is 13 years lower than for the non-Indigenous population.¹¹ The traditional garment preserved at the Wereldmuseum and exhibited at the Leiden-based museum complicates ideas of gendered bodies by calling for a reevaluation of the military as an opportunity for social mobility for Indigenous men and their communities. I argue here that current scholarly approaches to gender and sexuality overlook the ways in which the military shapes Indigenous identities, and thus such analyses are ill-equipped to give context to museum collections and their relationship to war and genocide. This understanding can illuminate more critical approaches when addressing collection-based research into top-down, militarized gender norms, loyalty, and hypermasculine values that Western modernity promotes.¹²

9 The Dresden Code to this day in the City of Dresden in Germany.

10 <https://esperanzapanjoj.wordpress.com/2014/10/29/traje-tipico-de-chichicast-enango/>

11 According to the World Bank (2020), there are approximately 476 million Indigenous Peoples worldwide although they make up just six percent of the global population, they account for about 19 percent of the extreme poor.

12 Militaries are male-dominated institutions: they are profoundly gendered and masculinized. See McGarry and Walklate (2016).

In Figure 3 the Chichicastenango Reserve Battalion hold USA-manufactured rifles in their hands and wear traditional, pre-Hispanic era Mayan textiles while marching down the streets of Guatemala City in 1996 with their hands lifted forward and their fists closed (Lawson, 1977). Their stern and proud faces are noticeable. As the genocide unfolded in the early 1980, members of these reserve troops were ordered to enlist into Self-Defense Patrols (PACs, in English) in the early 1980s, this time in plainclothes. In contradictory terms, the army despises Indigenous peoples, yet during times of war the Indigenous men in this right-wing military auxiliary force carrying out state orders to eliminate “the communists pillaging and burning their homes, and yet during wartime were manipulated to be at once enemies and allies. This contradiction conforms to postcolonial paradoxes and military projects giving continuity to modern colonial projects such as the political alliances and participation of Indigenous groups in joint military campaigns during the Cold War Years in Central America.¹³ During non-war times, the military reabsorbs Indigenous groups including their traditional ceremonial attire—vest -and-pants—which become part of the uniforms that the state military sanctions Indigenous men to wear in the absence of armed conflicts.

13 See Marcia Esparza. 2018. *Silenced Communities: Legacies of Militarization and Militarism in a Rural Guatemalan Town*.



Figure 3 © Vince Heptig. "Santo Tomas Chichicastenango's Military Reserve Battalion, with permission to reprint and refeature image by Vince Heptig, which also appeared in in Marcia Esparza's *Silenced Communities: Legacies of Militarization and Militarism in a Rural Guatemalan Town* (2018). NYC: Berghahn Books. Permission to use image provided by Heptig in May 2023.¹⁴

Left out in this narrative is the military ethnographic context visible in the picture in which Chichicastenango military reservists wear the same garment in addition to the "caites" (sandals) and the "sut," "su't," or "tzu" headdresses showing the material link between the colonial past and military legacies of the Cold War years in the Central American region. These continuities show that rather than gender-fluid identities and subjectivities, present-day Indigenous societies are left with European colonial and militaristic gendered paradigms. Without accounting for Indigenous People's military masculinities, we are ill-equipped to grasp the history behind those garments in their wartime context.

14 "The photo was taken by Vince Heptig Photo during Army day in the capital Guatemala city in 1993. During army day soldiers parade through the streets. During the war the Civil Patrols were also required to show up and march." According to Heptig, "This was the first time I had ever seen a Civil Patrol march in their native Traje carrying automatic weapons. They usually wear street clothes and carry old, out dated rifles. They are from Chichicastenango, Quiche."

By including the military ethnographic context, we can unpack gendered and militaristic cultures shaping the historical backdrop through which objects originate their use in military conflict, and thus re-interpret museological collections. I trace the local military reserves from Chichicastenango traditional black long-sleeved waistcoat and short pants to interrogate Indigenous Peoples' long-standing military history through material objects serving both external and internal colonial powers. The exclusion of a military lens when understanding the origins, location, and the time of objects leads to museological silences on the launching of counterinsurgency campaigns when the Guatemalan state called up reserves and organized the plainclothes auxiliary group PACs and ordered Mayan peasants to maintain security against alleged communist groups "seeking to rob their wives," as the army propaganda told them. The state military mobilized PACs to commit war crimes against Indigenous groups alongside them. 18 percent of the crimes against humanity from this period, including widespread scorched earth warfare across Indigenous territories, mass rape, and mass killings amounting to genocide against four Mayan groups, are attributable to these plainclothes, Indigenous PACs, according to numerous human rights reports, and the United Nations Historical Clarification Commission or Truth Commission (1997-1999).

Between wrenching war and genocide testimonies, and in the context of my fieldwork in the highlands of Guatemala, I witnessed what UNESCO defines as immaterial cultural heritage, such as "traditional handmade techniques" (Rosen et al. 2003). The case of the embroidered outfit worn by the Chichicastenango Reserve Battalion offers a glimpse into these militarized gendered continuities between colonial past and the Cold War years. These ceremonial clothes in this context represent a genocidal, incendiary past linked to Mayan peasants mobilized into standing reserves dating back to the early 19th Century. Indigenous reserves are wearing ceremonial garments while carrying a rifle in one hand, and with the other, gesturing a patriotic salute. Cofradias are religious brotherhoods, whose members wear the fringed jacket

as they carry silver insignias. Their military garment includes the sut, which are rectangular pieces made on a Mayan loom, which serve as a ceremonial utility clothes keeping ancestral wisdom, providing an insight into traditional community identity. These are made with patterned textiles with simple techniques. Today the men wear the cofradia in ceremonial acts, social, political, or spiritual. Early versions of the sut measured 41 to 42 inches, such as the one used by Nahualá o Nebaj, Chichicastenango, the latter with fringed corners. The custom of wearing the sut for ceremonial or religious purposes is retained by men in various Mayan linguistic communities, such as in Chichicastenango (Mayan K'iché') and San Juan Sacatepéquez (Kaqchikel Mayan).¹⁵

In Chichicastenango, usually the poorest communities (Esparza, 2018) are known for welcoming right-wing parties and army authorities to their town in exchange for repairs to infrastructure and food packages to ameliorate the lack of nutrition in rural areas framed by the conditions of internal colonialism. According to Latin-American theorists Anibal Quijano and Rodolfo Stavenhagen, "internal colonialism" is based on race, class and patriarchy built by the vestiges of slavery and Spanish imperial colonialism, which began in the mid-15th Century when Pedro de Alvarado conquered Central America with thousands of Indigenous auxiliaries or allies from Mexico. This system of internal colonialism leads Indigenous men under the coercion of internal colonialism (Guatemala) to sometimes side with their own oppressors.¹⁶ That

15 From prehispanic times women have woven the sut with colors and motifs—details of their own personal life of their family and of their culture. The sut has always been a distinctive part of Maya attire revealing the origin language and culture of its wearers carry children to cover the head as a sign of authority, showing motifs and colors characteristic of the owner's community.

16 According to Tzvetan Todorov, Hernán Cortes relied on an "army of Indian allies" he used as foot soldiers when subduing the Aztec empire in 1521, (p.114). For the use of Indigenous allies, so called "indios amigos" recruited through recruitment by "force and intimidation" see also Ida Altman, in Laura E. Matthew and Michael R. Oudijk (Eds). 2012 *Indian Conquistadors. Indigenous Allies in the Conquest of Mesoamerica*. Oklahoma University Press, p.147. Also in the Colombian Andes during 1535-1700, Luis F Calero explains how "Inca colonists (mitimataes) who ruled over local groups and implemented administrative, economic, and military policies of the empire." Luis F. Calero. 1997. *Chiefdoms under Siege: Spain's Rule and Native Adaptation in the Southern Colonial Andes (1535-1700)*. University of New Mexico Press, p.21

is, this internal colonialism is sustained by the army's exploitation of the coercive poverty the majority Indigenous peoples experience on a daily basis (Chilcote and Vasconcelos, 2022) often resulting in the destruction of community relationships and networks. Those communities' acceptance of military aid and bribery bolsters rightwing political forces throughout Latin America (Esparza, 2018), where internal colonialism shapes the modern colonial structures that compel and coerce Indigenous peasants to serve in the army at some point of their lives.

A complex identity is captured in Fig. 3, the short and black jacket with traditional embroidery is one example of the soldiers' liminality, at once security agents of the state and victims of internal colonialism. This system of internal oppression of Indigenous Peoples has since been kept by the "criollos" or their heirs who perpetuate the material and symbolic conditions subjugating Indigenous Peoples in Central America and elsewhere. Moreover, internal colonialism articulates their identities. During wars, Indigenous auxiliary forces are simultaneously accused of perpetrating gruesome crimes against humanity to root out alleged communists from the nation, while being themselves victims of centuries old colonization and its reincarnation as the conditions of internal colonialism. This complex and liminal status derives from the limited set of choices available when conscripted into anti-communist state militaries or leftwing guerilla organizations.

Pre-Colonial Genesis and Modern Colonial Traditions: Use of Looms

As early as 1759, Mayan traje signified the wearer's home municipality (Brumfiel, 2006; Oterling). Emerly Oterling (2021) observes that "dress practices and their meanings have transformed in response to colonization, industrialization, war, and structural violence" (p.2). Oertling (2021) further analyzes four historical periods influencing dress practices.¹⁷ During the Pre-

17 1) Pre-Hispanic, Classic and postclassic, 2) The Spanish Colonial Period: 1521 –

Hispanic period, objects show that elite women were permitted to participate in the art of spinning and weaving (Oterling, 2021, p. 24; Otzoy, 1996). Written documents and archeological objects highlight the importance of weaving in Maya kingdoms (Eicher & Evenson, 2014).¹⁸ Later with the demise of Mayan kingdom, in the post-classic era, textiles became a commodity produced by lower status artisans. Through spinning and weaving women were encouraged to produce commodities (Brumfiel, 2006, p. 866). This era is the precursor for current dress practices (Brumfiel, 2006). “Men's traje did not conform to Spanish standards of masculinity; Maya men seeking membership in Spanish society were required to follow dress codes reflective of Western standards” (p. 29). A law promulgated October 25th, 1563, stipulates “That no person, men, or women, be allowed to wear any textile that was brocaded [...] nor one that had gold or silver in its weaving [...] even if these threads were false imitation [...] as also it was prohibited that silver or gold should be used for cloths that were used on horses and mules” (Otzoy, 1996, p. 142). Another source, as cited by Mireille Holsbeke (2008), contends that, “We know from early sources that the rich clothing, especially that of the Mayan elite, aroused much envy among the Spanish colonizers whose attitude was clearly ambiguous”(p.183). Since they considered the clothing to be “pagan they prohibited the men from wearing their clothes with patterned fabric and were forced to dress in a ‘sober’ manner the same time, this same source recounts, the Spaniards exploited the already advanced textile and recruited men for the commercial production of textiles” (Holsbeke, 2008, p.183).¹⁹ At the same time, natural fibers such as wool were imported from Europe to make men’s garments on a treadle loom, for making jackets as ceremonial clothes decorated with imported lace, and precious stones. The processing of wool has not changed since xxx are cleaned and washed and dyed natural oils. then carded and spun into thread. New weaving techniques included foot looms,

18; 3) The Industrial Era: 1880 – 1950 and 4) the Civil War (Oertling, 2021).

18 Almost no written records exist of Mayan dress prior to the conquest. One source is the “Lienzo de Tlaxcala,” a document which contains drawings of some scenes from the conquest of Guatemala and the Dresden Codes.

19 This is one of the various texts brought to my attention by Carmen Monterroso.

spinning wheels, cards, reels, scissors, and needles.

Shortly after the conquest, the treadle (or foot) loom was introduced by the Spanish to Mayan, and the Spanish tradition, initially, only men were trained to use the more expensive and less mobile treadle looms.²⁰ The training of men by settlers to engage labor might also be characterized as the assimilation of Indigenous men into colonial power hierarchy, dichotomizing the agentic man with the passive Indigenous women, reifying further the colonial gender norms.²¹

These and other circumstances spurred Maya men to adopt Western clothing faster than Maya women, facilitating their involvement in new social and economic policies of the country. In the following 1836 decree, a preference for Western dress was to be enforced: "No Indian may hold the office of regidor [council member], alcalde [magistrate], sindaco [trustee], nor any other parish position without wearing shoes or boots, a shirt with a collar, long trousers, a jacket or coat, and a hat that is not made from straw or palm leaf (Carrillo Ramirez as cited in Nelson, 1999, p. 138 in Oertling).

Reporting on the endurance of the waist loom practice, Marta Salvador (2020) asserts that "The Guatemalan waist loom represents a place of memory and construction of a collective identity.... ancestral fabrics are used to store cultural information but, at the same time, Mayan dresses, named huipils, are also the bearers of a history of exclusion and resistance."²² In doing so, the state utilizes the image of Maya women with their bright patterns of ancestral knowledge embroidered in their blouses or huipil,

20 There is a parallel to the gendered division of work in US-American garment factories when men used the cloth cutting equipment and earned higher wages than the women who worked the sewing machines, which was considered less skilled labor (Enloe, 2014). I thank Justine Lyons for this insightful observation.

21 Distinguishing the backstrap loom and the pedal or treadle loom "is the warp that is lifted mechanically by a series of foot pedals" (Sam Noble Museum, n.d.). This phenomenon of a Western division of labor is also corroborated by authors in the forthcoming issue of *Journal of Material Culture* (December, 2023).

22 The loom is an artifact made "of wood with two ends. One of them is tied to a tree or any object where the loom is firmly held, while the other end is wrapped around the knitter's waist, who sits on her knees" (Salvador, 2020).

their skirts or “cortes” and their scarves carrying out tasks of their daily life “without questioning the poor opportunities that exist for women, naturalizing these actions and lifestyle” (Almela and Calvet, 2020; AFEDES, 2020). What were the consequences of the change in material practices for men and women? Some sources argue that during colonial times, much of the man's clothing disappeared, mainly in the cities and extended to many towns. The abandonment of its traditional dress was not for self-determination, but for racism and discrimination of the political and economic system that has been implemented since the Spanish invasion and that the elite who most sustain it, often and still referred to as ‘mestizos’ (an identity category and word that is still used, but which is coming more and more under questioning, in its usage).²³ Additionally, the incorporation of men into the military might signify the sufficient assimilation of them into the colonial hierarchy, in turn reenacting the dynamics for the reincorporation of traditional clothing to indigenize the colonial military apparatus and create a loyal group of Indigenous men, families and communities.

In Figure 3, the Chichicastenango Battalion parades clad in traditional clothing, following orders from the same army that launched US-backed, scorched-earth, counterinsurgency campaigns in the early 1980s in the US-backed countryside against communities allegedly harboring leftwing rebels.

23 See for example the Pew Research Center discussion about the word mestizo: < <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2015/07/10/mestizo-and-mulatto-mixed-race-identities-unique-to-hispanics/> > (accessed 17 July 2023), or Luis Ángel Soto Tenorio's Quora entry: “Are mulatto and mestizo considered offensive terms?” < <https://www.quora.com/Are-mulatto-and-mestizo-considered-offensive-terms> > (accessed 17 July 2023)

MILITARY ETHNOGRAPHIC CONTEXT: SANTO TOMAS CHICHICASTENANGO

Located in the Southern tip of the Province of El Quiché, the Western highlands of Guatemala, Santo Tomas Chichicastenango has a rich tradition of producing and selling colorful textiles and wooden crafts. The township is a tourist attraction for its open-air market with crowded stalls and its 16th century Catholic Church. Embroidered women's shirts (known as huipiles or guipiles) and skirts (known as cortes) are made using traditional backstrap looms and textiles demonstrating how old-fashioned tools are literally woven into a community's cultural patrimony and present-day modernities. Their work hangs on the makeshift stalls, inspiring admiration from foreigners bargaining for folk-art. Tourists are awed by the multicolor textiles woven by Maya women, who centuries after the initial colonization themselves continue to wear the huipiles and cortes.

During the genocide, El Quiché was one of the most severely affected provinces due to its status as a stronghold for left-wing rebel forces among the conscientious Maya peasant population. It was the site of nearly half of the 600 state-perpetrated massacres of the anticommunist counterinsurgency campaign from 1960 to 1996. In total, over 200,000 people were murdered, 50,000 disappeared, and thousands tortured and raped in the country, over 83% of whom were Maya and the rest Ladinos (non-Indigenous). El Quiché is also one of the largest of Guatemala's 23 ethnic Indigenous groups. A United Nations sponsored Historical Clarification Commission (known also as Truth Commission) set up during 1997-1999 interrogated survivors and bystanders and examined military counterinsurgency plans.²⁴ This Commission also concluded that from 1981 to 1983, the Guatemalan army identified organized peasants as the internal enemy of the country and committed genocide against four Maya groups: Maya-Q'anjob'al and Maya-Chuj, in Barillas, Nentón and San Mateo Ixtatán in North Huehuetenango; Maya-Ixil, in Nebaj,

24 From 1997 and 1998, I was part of the El Quiche team of investigators taking face-to-face survivors and eyewitness testimonies from the war.

Cotzal and Chajul, Quiché; Maya- K'iche' in Joyabaj, Zacualpa and Chiché, Quiché; and Maya-Achi in Rabinal, Baja Verapaz when USA-backed counterinsurgency campaigns deployed scorched-earth tactics.

This is the historical ethnographic context against which the use of traditional garments by the Chichicastenango Reserve Battalion, and which the extant museology literature does not sufficiently explore. This state military violence remains inscribed on textile objects housed in museums.²⁵ A review of military journals shows that this deeply embedded militarization is presented to poverty-stricken Mayan communities as “humanitarian” action that seeks nothing but the “betterment of Indigenous peasant communities.” But the engagement with the materials at the museum surfaces this contradictory link between material practices, state violence, the army, and international interventionism, namely by the United States and others. By allowing Chichicastenango Reserve Battalion to wear the traditional garment, the army ensured its control over Indigenous groups from communities trained in the use of foreign weapons supplied by the state army. Often visited by Christian Evangelicals, Mormons, and other Missionary groups, communities collaborating with the army during the war adopted this type of religious doctrine, one which goes hand-in-hand with the extreme rightwing ideology of Guatemalan military.

The military's mobilization of men in traditional garments calls into question the underlying factors accounting for this cooptation of Indigenous men to pledge their loyalty to the non-Indigenous military army. Forged by colonizers with Indigenous groups since colonial times, this highly unequal and coercive collaboration often ensures mutual benefits (Esparza 2018), largely enabling the formation of the irregular plainclothes Indigenous forces PACs who were pitted against the Indigenous popular movement of the 1970s and human rights social movements led by survivors of the early 1980s genocide. Research shows that communities from which Indigenous men enlisted received more resources (infrastructure

25 Most European ethnographic museums were created in 19th century, at the time European colonialism reached its peak. That museums such as Copenhagen, St. Petersburg and Leiden European nationalism and imperialism also had their heyday in the 19th century is not coincidence. In Leiden the Indonesian Collection is the largest.

and food aid) from the Cold War army. Military service also offered a better standard of living and possibly a steadier income to the men who participated and pledged their oath to the military.

What does it mean that an Indigenous soldier of an army ordered to kill their neighbors and massacre entire communities puts on the clothing of a traditional and spiritual Mayan leader? Linked to genocidal and militaristic practices, it is important to highlight the contradiction or a neo-colonial military paradox (Esparza, 2018) of the contradictory or liminal roles imposed upon Indigenous peoples in contexts of war and the military that prepares for scenarios of conflict. This liminality materializes in the simultaneous military belittlement of Indigenous groups (as shown in military journals), and the reliance on conscription of Indigenous soldiers. The colonial military apparatus at once characterizes Indigenous Peoples as an obstacle to progress, which the army supposedly brings to them through measures such as alleged road repairs (Esparza, 2018), and dragoons them into war when they need more bodies to fight thus showing the connection between the current use of Indigenous garments in the military to genocide as an unfolding historical processes.

An analysis of the Museum's garment illuminates the ambivalent, liminal space between the nationalist army and its Indigenous collaborators, troubling the binary and bringing to the fore the "liminal identities" that Indigenous collaborators are forced to embody—one of the many ugly and unpalatable truths (Lemarchand, 2017) of the Guatemalan Cold War genocide. Understanding these historical forces, we can then examine what these 'benefits' look like from the point-of-view of the recruited men. In *Silenced Communities*, I analyze how the military has co-opted the will and recolonized territories through folklorisation of Maya textiles in connivance with the government and the Guatemalan Tourism Institute (INGUAT), constantly relying on the public display of Maya groups and crafts to promote the tourism activity of the country. "There are few studies on the attire of rural Mayan communities, and fewer still on men's clothing specifically. However, the limited data suggest that the majority of European fashion by

the beginning of the 20th Century, sporting garments with sleeves, cuffs, buttons, fitted pants, and European-style jackets” (Barrios and et. al, 2016).

The military garments worn by Indigenous reservists represent the complex link between the material culture of pre-industrial, anti-capitalist textiles produced by women, and objects of war that are the creations of a non-Indigenous global military industry. Undoubtedly, the state seeks to consolidate an idea of one Guatemalan nation, one fashioned out of the numerous distinctive groups comprising the population. Uninterrogated, this unification project will continue to gloss over the ties between the Indigenous reservists, locally recruited mobile groups used to scout for alleged communists or “internal enemies,” and the long history of gendered settler colonial genocide, exploitation, and slavery in the region.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS MORE CONTEXTUALIZATION

Because genocide is an unfolding process, an examination of the traditional garment displayed at the museum shows that Indigenous identity is co-opted through its militarized garment thus, blurring the role that PACs members played in the violence the state launched against communities considered collaborators of leftwing guerrillas. Through these garments, we can ascertain how colonization established a hierarchical assimilation into colonial structures, whereby, in the context of wars, the traditional Mayan garment gets reabsorbed, echoing symbolic colonization in a postcolonial setting. My hope is that thinking critically through these issues will contribute to the field of museum studies, critical military sociology and interdisciplinary studies which currently leaves unexamined the relationship between cultural museological objects and the military weaponry built-up, organization and military civil relations. Having offered more context to this lacuna makes possible a certain reckoning, one that affords us the possibility to assert the crucial role that armies comprised of Indigenous Peoples have in collaborating with nationalist states, and how this conscripted role plays into the erosion and destruction of Indigenous communities throughout the Americas and Caribbean territories.

All contributors called into the Un/Engendering research project were asked to think outside their respective specializations. Without their courage, openness, humility, and without the peer reviewers' generous attention, such an interdisciplinary project could have never taken place.

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Images

Figure 1: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen Coll.nr. RV-6093-249, Ceremoniële jas, Chichicastenango, voor 1993.

Figure 2: Collection Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen Coll.nr. RV-6093-245, Ceremoniële broek, Chichicastenango, voor 1993.

Figure 3: © Vince Heptig. "Santo Tomas Chichicastenango's Military Reserve Battalion, with permission to reprint and refeature image by Vince Heptig, which also appeared in in Marcia Esparza's *Silenced Communities: Legacies of Militarization and Militarism in a Rural Guatemalan Town* (2018). NYC: Berghahn Books. Permission to use image provided by Heptig in May 2023.

We publish these articles as the museums consolidate into one nominal entity, het Wereldmuseum: since the articles were written between 2020 and 2023, they do not yet reflect the March 2023 name change.