The scholarly debate on the Guatemalan armed conflict of the 1970s-1980s continues to gravitate around the question of how the masses, and especially its indigenous sectors, understood and responded to the conflict between guerrilla and state sectors. The UN-funded Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) established that over 200,000 Guatemalans were killed or forcibly disappeared in a scorched earth counterinsurgency campaign led by state security forces responsible for 93 percent of these killings, including 626 registered massacres (CEH 1999b). This research project argues that an emphasis on passive victimhood and a theoretical fixation on resistance have obscured our understanding of subaltern politics by creating an artificial and binary opposition of subjugated victims and revolutionary agents. A bibliographic exploration will demonstrate how this dichotomy has translated into a romanticized historiography on the Guatemalan armed conflict, theoretically incapable of tackling the paradoxes of agency. This deficit maintains a pact of silence on the ample historic indications for widespread army collaboration as well as a blindness towards the often ambivalent independent actions and attitudes with which subalterns joined in or evaded multisided pressures of mobilization and ideologization. Countering the countless stories of “courage, terror and hope” (Manz 2004), this paper argues, requires the identification of the disparate, often subtle and ambivalent, grass-roots cultural and political practices and attitudes with which Guatemalans responded to experiences of subordination and conflict and coped, maneuvered and survived the pressures for mobilization the armed conflict exerted. This objective will be realized through a dual approach, drawing on, on the one hand, the methodological reflections of scholarship on everyday life in European dictatorships and, on the other hand, the theoretical insights of Subaltern Studies. This paper advances the theoretical hypothesis that Guatemalan subalterns acted as “migrating subjects” (Sanjinés 2005: 115) through the changing nature of their social pact vis-à-vis the army and the guerrilla. Within the taxonomy of divergent understandings and responses to the armed conflict, black and white victim-agent binaries will be exchanged for a recognition of overlapping identities. Consequentially, the subaltern is capable of inhabiting two worlds at the same time, both the hegemonic and the subaltern sphere, enabling the urban working class and peasants to strategically migrate the vast gray areas between compliance and resistance.

The Commission for Historical Clarification labelled the armed conflict in Guatemala as a “fratricidal war”, captioning how the nation turned on itself as the armed conflict split communities and families (CEH 1999a: 15). This approach of the conflict emphasized both the horizontal character of violence between Guatemalans as well as the challenge it poses to national reconciliation. Scholars have predominantly structured historiographic accounts of the armed conflict on a rigid victim-agent dichotomy, a binary opposition between rebellious sectors and a military that unleashed its state terror to maintain a system of ethnic exclusion and economic exploitation. Saldaña-Portilla (2003) revealed how scholars on Latin America continuously analyze the continent through the lens of a binary consciousness of the popular classes that finds its origins in dominant colonial representations of indigenous populations: on the one hand subjugated, compliant and docile, and on the other hand the irrational, rebellious and unruly masses. Within this scheme the masses are thus either agents of resistance or objects of repression. Scholars are consequentially faced with the task of reconciling fundamentally incompatible narratives that either celebrate popular resilience and active heroism or emphasize the attempts of ethnic annihilation indigenous sectors endured as passive objects (Chappell 1995: 313). Lost between these myths of perpetual victimization and incessant agency are those ‘in-between’ accounts challenging the clear-cut binary.

Scholars have instead focused on reconstructing the local formation of political consciousness to explain the disparate popular attitudes and actions towards the insurgency and the military during the Guatemalan armed conflict. These relationships are seen as a reflection of the efforts of ideologization undertaken by guerrilla and army actors as “channels of ideological complexion” (Passerini 1987: 7). Scholars mapped how external actors provoked far reaching changes in political attitudes in rural communities in the 1970s and 1980s, forming subjectivities that either activated class and ethnic consciousness through revolutionary politics or sought to alienate the popular
classes from it through state coercion and military socialization. In doing so research did not theoretically challenge but strengthened and empirically legitimized the theoretical victim-agent dichotomy, directing narratives towards opposing and mutually exclusive identities of subjugated victimhood and heroic rebelliousness that “speak to our moral and political sensibilities” (Schirmer 2003: 63). Additionally, relations between popular sectors and the insurgency and the army have been approached predominantly through ethnographic studies, asserting there is no “typical Guatemalan village” (Manz 2004: 3) and that historiographies have to reconstruct the armed conflict “village by village” (Vela Castañeda 2008b: 16). Embedding subaltern politics firmly within their local power complex while stressing their particularity, however, leaves little space for engaging in theory building approaches.

**Heroism and the theoretical fixation on resistance**

Peasant communities’ support or participation in the armed insurgency has been explained through “dynamics of empowerment” (Esparza 2018: 104) which created a critical class and ethnic consciousness that enabled an escape from the struggle for immediate needs into a political critique. Liberation theology, and in its wake the critical readings of the bible, literacy programs and rural cooperatives headed by local clergy and social promotors, shaped political consciousness by establishing a community spirit and contributed to the creation of powerful peasant leagues spearheaded by a newly emerging indigenous leadership (Murgo Armas 2011). These experiences in the 1970s formed the “intellectual roots” (Manz 2004: 93) of the dense network of rural support the guerrillas constructed in politically charged regions through political education and selective military training. As guerrillas replaced traditional village authorities in ‘liberated territories’, communities were incorporated in vertical military structures which opened channels for widely varying degrees of participation in the ‘popular revolutionary war’. On the community level, local militias of unarmed recruits secured food provisions or acted as courier, guide and transporter, strategically misinformed the military and maintained communication between guerrilla fighters and their relatives. They were topped by a military structure of clandestine village and regional committees, organized into broader guerrilla fronts (Manz 2004; REHMI 1998).

The objective of *reivindicación* or the legitimizing and conferring of “dignity and agency upon historical actors tarred as traitors” has been kept high on the scholarly agenda, reshaping a history of criminalization of political opposition by “retrospectively legitimizing popular resistance” (Weld 2012: 43-47). Subjugated social groups are liberated from their status as passive victims and empowered as actors in their own right. Additionally, the emphasis on active resistance to domination figures strongly in many postcolonial studies on Latin America. Sanjinés, for example, ascribes supposedly isolated indigenous communities a tradition of historic struggle reaching back as far as Spanish conquest, some essentialized “visceral rebelliousness tied to the long memory” (Sanjinés 2001: 302). The politicized culture of remembrance under the problematic transition into democracy in Guatemala additionally pushes narratives of subaltern politics into the celebration of victims, martyrs and heroes.

Such approaches are, for example, evident in the title of an influential volume on the role of Guatemalan peasants and urban working-class as creating an “infinite history of resistances” (Vela Castañeda 2008a). Karen Pyke has offered valuable insights on how this scholarly “love affair with resistance” or “theoretical fixation on resistance” misrepresents experiences of oppression by creating a “model resistor stereotype”, a “romanticized misrepresentation of the experience of oppression” (Pyke 2010: 562). This model represents an inflated belief in the capacity of the subjugated to resist complex structures of oppression and equates oppression to engaging in resistance. In this Guatemalan case-study, this stereotype coerces the urban working class and
(indigenous) peasants in a straightjacket of resistance to military rule, demanding a “constant display of strength” (Pyke 2010: 560-563). In Latin America in general and specifically in Guatemala where Mayan sectors constitute an ethnic majority, these romanticizations tie into the exotization of indigenous communities that glorify traditions based on mutual reciprocity into an unconditional solidarity. Maintaining indigenous communities as cohesive undifferentiated units of analysis despite the military’s politics of division aimed at widening existing division, underestimates the ‘axes of diversity’ (Hale 1997) and complex interrelations of class and ethnicity that fissured many parts of rural Guatemala and strengthens the Otherness of indigenous populations.

Although this seemingly perpetual resilience to oppression provides political capital for politics of liberation, the “search for an authentic insurrectionary Other” (Moore 1998: 346) also contributes to an “authenticity test” that expels those oppressed subjects that do not engage in resistance (Pyke 2010: 562-3). By marginalizing and excluding those subjects that demonstrate vulnerability towards the oppressor’s incentives and pressures for recruitment, the myth maintain itself and the voice of those who, voluntarily or coercively, submitted to authority remains marginalized. Unwittingly, research that echoes this resistance narratives, “obscures the injuries” authorities tactically inflicts within oppositional groups to divide and break up the potency of oppositional politics (Pyke 2010: 563). Considering agents merely as “pivots of resistance” (Ludtke 2016:6) additionally ignores the how agents and structures “tend to implicate each other in very compromising ways”(Chappell 1995: 312-313). Essentialist approaches idealizing historic capacities for rebellion, fail to explain actions and attitudes that do not fit this ahistorical and homogenizing narrative.

**Victimhood and passiveness**

Conversely, a striking feature of Guatemalan historiography is its reluctance to view popular sectors as “agents in determining their own political alternatives” (Manz 2004: 10, my italics). Especially indigenous peasants are portrayed as “passive subjects acted upon by other military actors” (Weld 2012: 43). From the 1980s onwards, political violence emerged as a key topic in Guatemalan historiography. Establishing who perpetrated which crimes on whose orders, truth projects and ethnographic fieldwork engaged in studies of advocacy to raise international awareness on the “acts of genocide against groups of Mayan people” committed by agents of the state between 1981 and 1983 (CEH 2004: 51). As a consequence of the army’s perceptions of Maya communities as the “peasant infrastructure” or natural “population resource” (Grandin 1997: 7; Manz 2004), 83 percent of the recorded 200,000 Guatemalans killed or forcibly disappeared were of Mayan descent (CEH 1999b). Predictably, the dominant narrative in Guatemalan historiography has been one of passive victimhood. Oglesby has described these narratives as “tales of death” (Oglesby 2007: 79), which reduce the richness of social identities into mere dehistoricized repetitions of horror and portray indigenous sectors as “locally centered and apolitical” (Manz 2004: 5).

This emphasis on popular apoliticality and innocence originated in human right narratives that faced the urgent task to meticulously document state human rights abuses. As empowerment of the victims could provoke a retrospective legitimization of state terror, it was necessary to strip the subjugated of any political agency (Weld 2012) and tactically downplay popular militancy in the quest to secure “the moral authority of suffering” (Moore 1978: 48). As Chappell noted, victimhood connotes injustice and its implications of helplessness and vulnerability are a “powerful political tool”(Chappell 1995: 309). Yet the disregard for agency is not confined to human rights narratives. Passiveness figures equally strong in Stoll’s controversial conclusion that peasants were trapped in the crossfire ‘between two armies’ equally coercive and vicious in their recuperation and mobilization tactics of neutral peasants (Stoll 1994). The failure to articulate subaltern identities thus facilitated their apparent assimilation into organized politics. Popular alliances with guerrillas, for
example, are viewed as a natural “confluence of desires” (Hurtado Paz y Paz 2008: 63) with centuries of accumulated injustices and “historic experiences of exclusion” fomenting a common cause with “Marxist and nationalist utopias” (Esquit 2010: 334). Peasant or community agency is thus made dependent on the intervention of a revolutionary vanguard that offers these sectors the tools they supposedly lacked to articulate and put forward a political agenda that brought pre-revolutionary impulses to maturity (Hurtado Paz y Paz 2008; Esquit 2010; Palencia-Frener 2014).

Despite ample indications that significant sectors of society actively or passively, supported or participated in state repression and that there was “no shortage of people who opposed the guerrillas and supported the army” (Manz 2004: 215), scholars engaged little in problematizing how not only the guerrillas, but also the counterinsurgency and its military intelligence relied strongly on local irregular forces of informants, collaborators and accomplices (Ball, Kobrak & Spirer 1999, CEH 1999b). Intrinsically motivated through “personal and economic interest” or forced through extortion, pressuring and intimidation (CEH 1999b: 87), collaborators were charged with passing on information and compiling lists of suspected subversives for the nearest military base, resulting in the kidnapping, assassination, torture and rape of friends and neighbors. This intricate web consisted of confidential agents and spies who infiltrated social and guerrilla movements, communities and public and private agencies (CEH 1999b); military commissioners who became “local representatives of the counterinsurgency” bestowed with unlimited power in policing their communities, reporting on political activities and engaging in assassinations and tortures (Ball et al. 1999: 16); and members of the Civil Defense Patrols, an irregular state-sponsored “plainclothes auxiliary force” (Esparza 2018: 4) invested with military powers that mobilized 1.3 million men, nearly a fifth of Guatemala’s population, in some areas up to 80% of men between 15 and 60 years old (Schirmer 1998).

Although the army successfully decentralized the counterinsurgency into local hands, the voices of the military and its collaborators and informers have long been deemed irrelevant to the understanding of the conflict (Schirmer 2003). The marginalization of perpetrator’s narrative corresponds with the “model resistor stereotype” (Pyke 2010) and left us with a unidimensional view on the armed conflict. This narrative of presumed predispositions towards rebelliousness and notions of innocent victimhood excludes those demonstrating agency in discordance with revolutionary thoughts and practices and discards those who did not cater to the victim-agent dichotomy as adherents to “patrons, bosses, and political leaders” (Hurtado Paz y Paz 2008: 54). Following Schirmer’s plea to cast off unidimensional analyses and “engage a more polyphonic set of voices” to include all sides of the Guatemalan conflict and capture its “fuller complexity” (Schirmer 2003: 64), several studies have begun addressing the significant segments of rural Guatemala that subscribed to the counterinsurgency campaigns.

In sum, a focus on, on the one hand passive victimhood and revolutionary politics as the sole vehicle through which agency can manifest itself and, on the other hand, a theoretical fixation on resistance, both presume subaltern consciousess and subjectivity as naturally antagonistic to systems of oppression. These analytical blinders result in an absence of scholarly attention and a pact of silence on manifold expressions of ambiguity, complicity and accommodation with which subalterns joined in or evaded multisided pressures of mobilization and ideologization. In Guha’s terms, we are “blinded by the glare of a perfect and immaculate consciousness” that “fails to notice its Other, namely betrayal” (Guha 1988: 84). This failure to conceptualize and include the theoretical avenues of agencies to collaborate in acts labelled as “class and ethnic betrayals” have resulted in a historiography on Latin America in which “studies of collaboration with the army during genocides are lacking” (2018: 17). Mapping these manifestations is undoubtedly deemed both a cynical endeavor in an already grim historic reality as well as a taboo considered “politically harmful to the
larger mission of liberation” (Pyke 2010: 552). Simultaneously, these narratives prevent the recognition of autonomous actions unrelated to the powers seeking to organize the popular sectors into politically instrumental units.

ESCAPING THE BINARY? THE CURIOUS CASE OF CIVIL DEFENSE PATROLS

As the most manifest and tangible form of collaboration with the state, Civil Defense Patrols emerged as a key research topic (Bateson 2017; Esparza 2005; Esparza 2018; Remijnse 2002; Rivas Vasconcelos 2013; Sáenz de Tejada Rosa 2004). The patrols were an institutionalized attempt to separate and isolate the armed insurgency from its support base through violence and intimidation exercised by recruited locals themselves. The army involved the population in a “murderous complicity” (Schirmer 2003:67) by mandating participation in search-and-destroy missions where patrollers served as local guides who knew communities’ footpaths and terrains so as to flush out resistance groups and refugees in hiding and destroy food supplies and milpas or corn fields (Manz 2004; Remijnse 2002). As some Guatemalans turned against their own communities in exchange for security or favors such as access to community properties and better farming lands, indications of the “voluntariness” of patrol enthusiasts have been “little problematized” by scholars (Esparza 2018: 8), although patrols operated autonomously, unaccompanied by the army in 15% of the recorded human rights crimes they committed (CEH 1999a). Allotted “a certain amount of freedom” to inflict violence as they saw fit (Remijnse 2002:125), the patrols often went beyond their purely defensive role and became ‘indigenous troops’, participating in one in five mass killings (Esparza 2018; Ball et al. 1999) and converting the conflict in a “prolonged ethnic massacre [...] a bloody fratricide of indigenous peoples killing indigenous peoples” (Torres Rivas 2006: 17).

Research explains support and participation of indigenous peasants within the counterinsurgency primarily within the framework of military policies of annihilation and recuperation. These were designed not only to incorporate indigenous peasants within military ranks to separate the armed insurgency from its base, the counterinsurgency was also a tool to penetrate “the ‘closed’ caste-like isolation of indigenous communities, identified as the reason for the supposed collective susceptibility of Mayans to communism” (Grandin 2004 : 13-14) and forge loyalty to the state, a national identity and national integration. In the wake of scorched earth campaigns and mass killings designed to restructure indigenous life and break communal bonds of mutual reciprocity, the military unfolded and expanded campaigns to consolidate its power (Figueroa Ibarra 2006). As the army lacked military power to gain a military victory, it adopted a novel mindset in which the satisfaction of material needs was thought to dissuade peasants from a need for a more radical and structural change. Rural pacification and cooptation campaigns such as the ‘guns and beans’ program connected loyalty to the state and dismissal of the guerrillas to entitlement to food and basic services and ensured protection for those who resigned to a military monitored and controlled life. Massive displacement, physical control through resettlement in model villages and ideologization through psychological operations and propaganda instilled a “militarized mindset” of loyalty, patriotism and obedience that replaced ethnic ties and social cohesion and internalized “a psychology of militarization and authoritarianism” (Esparza 2005: 378). Through “seemingly harmless development projects”, the army won “the hearts and minds of desperately impoverished peasants” (Esparza 2018: 73; Schirmer 1998), seeds that fell in fertile ground with sectors which had never received state recognition and development (CEH 1999b).

In the most recent and most comprehensive study of the patrol system up to this day, Esparza (2018) frames the army gaining forced and voluntary peasant collaboration as a relation of “internal colonialism”: the permanence of old exploitative colonial relations within the framework of postcolonial nation-states as spaces of exclusion. The end of Spanish colonialism was merely a
substitution or translation of the “coloniality of power” (Quijano 2000) to native elite exploitation (Casanova 1965). Patrolling becomes a mere re-enactment of an colonial collaboration and brutality, reproducing a colonial legacy of forced conscription and extending “a multipronged strategy” to recruit the internally colonized (Esparza 2018: 10). Stacking layers of postcolonial coercion, recolonization, socialization and militarization on heritages of colonial exploitation effectively suffocates any political agency through which subalterns could pose meaningful challenges to their (post)colonial situation. Only in contradictory terms could “additional layers of domination afford more openings” for agency and resistance (Pyke 2010: 562). Conversely, in communities that demonstrated resistance to army recruitments and mobilizations, army ideology supposedly competed with prior politicization efforts by liberation theology. This exposure enabled those communities to unmask propaganda and psychological campaigns (Esparza 2018), making agency contingent upon external impetuses. The rigidity of the framework of internal colonialism risks applying “dependency theory to an analysis of social relations” (Mallon 2005: 167-168) and pits “two ahistoric essences” against each other: the indigenous and the colonial (Rivera Cusicanqui 2012: 35).

This framework makes subaltern participation in the construction and perpetuation of their own systems of oppression dependent on a profound alteration, cooptation and radical remodeling of peasant and indigenous identities. Civil patrols were an instrument to instill an “ideology of war” and part of a step-by-step ideological process of socialization that transformed civilians into willing and unquestioning executers (Esparza 2005: 383). As socialization theory emphasizes conformity it displays an “analytic danger of neglecting agency” (Checkel 2017: 593). Army loyalty can only be construed by psychological and ideological militarization and the “underlying coercive internal colonialism compelling peasants” to join the patrols (Esparza 2018: 48). This hegemonic power, supposedly, was not only successful in replacing subaltern political consciousness and shared memories by a militarized mindset and the military’s institutional memory, it was also a socialization process potent enough to push aside consciousness altogether by creating individuals who do not “question the consequence or significance of their actions” and “do not think for themselves” (Esparza 2005: 383). Paradoxically, by emphasizing how consent and collusion were contingent on a radical cultural and political alteration, research affirms the military’s achievement of its ambition to create what Schirmer called the ‘Sanctioned Maya’(Schirmer 1998: 113): a culturally deracinated prototype indigena, forcefully reconstructed into a homogenous indigenous culture of loyalty to national symbols and the army, deprived of memory and agency. Socialization, here, is a force impossible to resist by targets construed as blank slates. However, the agency of the target of socialization “may be attenuated but is not absent” (Checkel 2017: 594). Neither does the omnipotence of state ideology correspond to the general conclusion that the constitutive element of the armed conflict was exactly the “structural incapacity of the state to have a social base” (Figueroa Ibarra 2006: 161).

**DE-ROMANTICIZING THE SUBALTERN AS AN AGENT OF LIBERATION AND OPPRESSION**

Through its adherence to the army-guerrilla dichotomy and the victim-agent opposition with the respective conditions of powerlessness and empowerment arising from it, these essentialist and reductionist notions prevented the development of a multifaceted understanding of the complex contradictions and ambivalences this research considers crucial elements of subaltern politics. By focusing on the Civil Defense Patrols as the most discernable and striking mode of army collaboration, we have scarcely begun to shatter decades of silence on the divergent “contradictory ways militarized power also incites, induces and seduces Guatemalans, including the Maya” (Nelson 1999: 96). Research must inevitably confront those occasions where agency meant actively aligning oneself with the oppressing structures. In the quest for a deromanticized historiography, it is pivotal
we recognize the subaltern both as an agent of liberation as of repression. Additionally, few grey areas have been created between the extremes of absolute subjugation and outright rebellion for the articulation of subtle strategies of varying degrees and forms of consent or dissent. Creating spaces for unexpected avenues of agency and manifestations of autonomy are indispensable for the identification of the disparate cultural and political practices and attitudes with which subalterns responded to experiences of subordination and conflict.

The theoretical and bibliographical exploration presented in this paper aims to draw on, on the one hand, the methodological reflections of scholarship on popular stances towards European dictatorships and, on the other hand, the theoretical insights provided by Subaltern Studies. This dual approach should enable the objective of recovering cultural and political practices and attitudes with which ordinary Guatemalans resisted, accepted and coped with state dominance and discern how Guatemalans maneuvered, lived, and reflected on the pressures the armed conflict exerted. By applying the approach of the German Alltagsgeschichte the emphasis is on examining “attitudes and patterns of behavior at the grass-roots level” of society (Kershaw 2015: x), regarding it as a pathway into a de-romanticized understanding of the often subtle and ambivalent strategies with which Guatemalans coped and survived the pressures for mobilization the armed conflict exerted.

From the 1970s onwards, the German Bavaria Project explored not only “fundamental, principled, and total resistance” to the National Socialist regime, but defined resistance in its widest forms including “limited and partial rejection, whatever the motives”. It portrayed resistance not in binary categories of angels and demons, but rather colored the “conflict spheres” in the relationship between the Nazi regime and German society in “shades of grey” within everyday life of adjusting to and coping with a dictatorial regime overshadowing daily existence (Kershaw 2015: 224). Having set out to reveal popular dissent of the Nazi regime, the project unexpectedly unearthed how opposition coincided with “areas of wide-ranging consensus behind the [Nazi] policies” (Kershaw 2015: 307). This paper advances the theoretical hypothesis that Guatemalan subalterns acted as “migrating subjects” (Sanjinés 2005: 115) through the changing nature of their social pact vis-à-vis the army and the guerrilla. Within the taxonomy of divergent understandings and responses to the armed conflict, black and white victim-agent binaries will be exchanged for a recognition of overlapping identities. Consequently, the subaltern is capable of inhabiting two worlds at the same time, both the hegemonic and the subaltern sphere, enabling the urban working class and peasants to strategically migrate the vast gray areas between compliance and resistance.

Firstly, only through revealing these disparate responses can “clear-cut distinctions and homogenous notions” be effectively challenged (Ludtke 2016: 4). Secondly, a ‘portrait in grayness’ explores actions that neither fit the category of outright subversion nor explicit assimilation. This fertile ambivalence acknowledges how multiple loyalties and rationalities give birth to various changing forms and strategies of collusion and contestation. This research will consider this “shifting of involvements” or “meandering” (Ludtke 2016:7) as a constitutive element of subaltern politics that allow for a “simultaneity of resistance and complicity” in which actions “resisting one form of domination can comply with and reproduce oppression along another dimension” (Pyke 2010: 564). As such emphasizing greyness opposes both mutually exclusive identities as victim or agent as well as binary choices between state collaboration or revolutionary opposition. Rather, by opening alternative paths between resisting or falling victim to state terror, the subaltern could, in varying degrees and forms, strategically practice agency by playing an active role within the framework of the state, or engage in “independent initiatives on the part of subaltern groups” (Gramsci 1972: 54).
AFFIRMING HETEROGENEITY: SUBALTERN POLITICS, THE STATE AND ORAL TESTIMONY

This paper argues that drawing on theories of subalternity allow a reconstruction of the subaltern bloc as “internally fissured, heterogeneous, multiple” (Beverley 2001: 57), enabling the articulation of overlapping and presumed mutually exclusive identities, including “areas of independence and emancipation” (Modonessi 2014: 11) that are not contingent upon coercive external impetuses by state and guerilla hierarchies. From its inception, Subaltern Studies took Gramsci’s reconstructive objective of the recovery of “the cultural and political specificity of peasant insurrections” to heart (Sanjinés 2005: 114). As an analytical tool subalternity provides top-down (hegemonic discourse and policies) and bottom-up (subaltern experiences and strategies of resistance and/or conformation) perspectives on subaltern social agency, political consciousness and identity. It examines the structural relations in which subalterns “live, suffer and act” (Sajinés 2005: 118) in a culture centered around antagonism and social conflict. It thus serves as the ideal framework to “make the subaltern and the subaltern positions more visible” and analyze subaltern practices and attitudes of consent and dissent during Guatemala’s armed conflict (Rodríguez 2002).

Theories of subalternity have conceptualized the nation as a “dual space (elite/subaltern groups) of counter-positions and collisions, fragmented by tensions between “assimilation (ethnic dilution and homogenization) and confrontation (insurgency, strikes, terrorism)” (Sanjinés 2005: 115). These fragments challenge monolithic representations of the subaltern ‘bloc’, such as the victim-agent dichotomy, that have concealed subaltern polyphony by producing homogenous discourses. The “radical heterogeneity” of the subaltern (Chakrabarty 2000: 46) grant this research the required counter-hegemonic power to shatter and de-romanticize discourses deplete of internal contradictions and antagonisms by enabling the desired articulation of subaltern cultures and communities as plural, decentralised, factionalised and complex groups comprised of heterogeneous subjects.

According to Luisa Passerini’s groundbreaking study on working-class experiences and memories of Italian Fascism, historical accounts have prevented a complex consideration of subaltern consciousness by presupposing their subjectivity as “antagonistic by nature to the whole of the existing order” awaiting activation by external catalysts. The historian’s task is thus one of conceiving the masses “different from the one whose image has been handed down to us in almost all the existing historiography: that is, an image of a class directly and totally opposed to the existing order” and “staunchly faithful to revolutionary traditions” (Passerini 1987: 5-6). This paper has identified the premises of both the victim-agent dichotomy as well as the presupposition of a unified subaltern class and ethnic consciousness in perpetual opposition to hegemonic politics as the prime theoretical obstacles to such an alternative imaginings of the popular classes. Lost in the accounts are, however, a whole panorama of longings and activities.

Chappell determined two necessary analytical changes to destabilize the binary deadlock between active agents and passive victims and articulate multilayered identities. Firstly, the “gift of agency” (Chappell 1995: 305) should not merely apply within a paradigm of resistance. Through the theoretical fixation on resistance, “the agency of the subjugated is reduced to resistance” (Pyke 2010:562). The conflation of agency with resistance a priori excludes the agency of active and passive alignments with oppressing structures as a rational, strategical and active choice. Instead, agency should encompass all practices, attitudes and imaginations with which a subject places and imagines itself outside of its current situation. As Kershaw has noted in relation to research on German resistance under National Socialist reign of terror, defining resistance in its widest sense risks portraying a society in which seemingly all individuals engaged in resistance in one way or another (Kershaw 2015). It is nonetheless evident that subaltern classes do not make history under conditions
of their own choosing (Marx 1852). To avoid such theoretical inclination towards resistance as an inflated belief in seemingly endless opportunities for autonomous agency, it is crucial to embed imagined or real actions and attitudes firmly within the “asymmetries of power and violence” (Ludtke 2016: 3) and “relations of domination, conflict and emancipation” (Modonessi 2014: 1) that conditioned, shaped and restricted avenues for agency.

Secondly, Chappell argues alternative approaches should detach “victim from its hitchhiking adjective, passive” (Chappell 1995: 308-309). Despite its politically instrumental connotation of innocence and injustice, passiveness implies helplessness, while the former can constitute an active choice of strategizing resistance. James Scott’s landmark publications on everyday forms of peasant resistance in Malaysia reveal how peasants seldom contested local authority publically in an open confrontation. Instead, resistance predominantly took passive and uncoordinated forms and was fought with “ordinary weapons” as foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance and feigned ignorance (Scott 1985: xvi). Clearly, passively practicing “the art of not being governed” (Scott 2014) does not require the experience of victimization but can, instead, provide a safe strategy for exercising everyday forms of agency.

It has been the merit of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group to theoretically break down the apparent opposition between subaltern politics and the state which both preserves the victim-agent dualism as well as allows the subaltern “to retain a certain romantic purity, untouched by the corruption of state power and thus possibly remain a source of future utopias” (Mallon 2005: 165). Early theories of subalternity conceptualized subaltern politics as the Negation of the hegemonic state: two fixed oppositional blocs in which the subaltern realm represents the limits of hegemonic discourse and practices, and the state represents a sphere entirely hostile to subaltern groups and solely representing the privileges of the elite (Guha 2002). With increasing attention towards subaltern ambivalence and contradictions, however, came a growing focus on the interaction between the subaltern and the hegemonic realm, stressing the relational and constructed nature of subalternity. Florencia Mallon broke with the central premise of theories of subalternity by controversially arguing Peruvian and Mexican peasants have been historically complicit with state power by sitting down “at the table of the nation state” (Mallon 2005: 172). This enables us to explore how peasants were not only active social and economic agents through their participation in revolutionary and social movements but also exercised political agency by participating in national politics and institutions as a means of political and social struggle and obtaining recognition from the nation-state (Mallon 2005).

Her approach effectively challenged intellectual conceptions of the subaltern as unproblematically pure and untainted by the structures and institutions of centuries colonialism and nation-building, “freezing the subaltern” into a static, fixed and “pure essence that remains always identical to itself”, rendering the group immune to historical change while reinforcing its absolute Otherness and detaching it from the “historical conjunctures” in which its structural relation of subalternity is defined (Verdesio 2005: 16). As calls for “moving beyond melancholy for a lost world” (Rabasa 2005: 91) gained traction among subalternist scholars, underscoring the porosity between the hegemonic and the subaltern sphere successfully addressed romanticizations on a theoretical level. Increasingly, subalternity has been conceptualized as a social positionality not merely relationally defined between subaltern groups and hegemonic powers, but referring incessantly to the subject that represents the “lowest link in the chain” (Ximena Sorruco 2005: 231-232). By demonstrating how relations of subordination cross, permeate and are reproduced between subaltern groups themselves, compels us to explore the “internal fissures and hierarchies as well as its historical complicity with state power” (Mallon 2005: 172). This opens up research to the articulation of “intra-
subaltern antagonisms” (Beverley 2001: 59), directing us towards frictions and discordance within subaltern groups, signaling a polyphone of divergent attitudes and responses which should not be mitigated or resolved but embraced as an essential part of subaltern politics.

The blurring of the artificial dichotomy between on the one hand active agents and passive victims and on the other hand the radical opposition of the subaltern and the hegemonic realm, opens up a wide range of possible subaltern responses to research. A central task of this research thus lays in the identification of these disparate practices, ranging from active complicity in state violence to indifference, apathy, passionate rejection, pragmatic acceptance, flight, displaying feigned loyalties, deception, playing dumb, tactical silence and misinformation, or active insubordination through support or participation in social and revolutionary movements. Yet, in comparison to palpable actions leaving archival traces, how do we enter the subjective realm of attitudes and mentalities? How do we recover the “genuine desires, longings or anxieties” (Ludtke 2016:3) which include and shape reality? This research will argue analysis of testimonies are the ideal tool to mark both the strategies and the “imaginaries of the future” (Ludtke 2016: 3) with which Guatemalans dealt with the individual and communal challenges the armed conflict posed. Testimony opens up research “to ‘meaning-making’ and strategic choices of participants” (Nolin & Shankar 2000: 268) and reveal how Guatemalans moved between support and criticism as they struggled and coped under “political conditions that aimed at directly changing their ways of life and their opinions” (Steuwer 2017: 547, op. cit. Häberlen 2017: 408).

Endowing “epistemological authority” (Beverley 2005: 63-64) on testimonies as the bearers of subaltern experiences and voices, reappraises and privileges marginalized or “subjugated knowledges” often discredited for being local and partial (Verdesio 2005). They grant the subaltern the “power to create their own narrative authority and negotiate the conditions of truth and representativity” (Beverley 2005: 74) and “allows the original multiplicity of standpoints to be recreated” (Thompson 1978: 6). Firstly, testimonies compensate the lack of a sound empirical base to subalternist approaches that often study the subaltern from a distance by using postmodern techniques of textual deconstruction to locate the subaltern within hegemonic narratives (Mallon 1994). The methodology thus shifts the focus from a deconstructive discourse-centered approach to a reconstructive actor-centered approach. Secondly testimonies carry the potential to not only validate the subalternist claim of the radical heterogeneity of the masses, it also determines what that heterogeneity actually entailed and how it was shaped through the armed conflict in which the subaltern resided.

Both the UN-funded Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) and the Archdiocese of Guatemala (ODHAG) conducted extensive fieldwork, respectively collecting over 7000 and 6000 individual testimonies as part of their fact-finding missions to uncover human rights violations. Both the reports and the archive of ODHAG provide a rich empirical base to understand the strategies and “human dimensions of coping and meaning-making” (Nolin & Shankar 2000: 270). Testimony thus will not only identify the concrete strategies of resistance, accommodation and evasion. Often the value of oral history methodologies lay not in their “adherence to facts”, but rather in their divergence from it, where “imagination, symbolism and desire break in” (Portelli 1981: 100). Only then can we make the subaltern visible as an historic actor in its own right instead of the result of external ideologization radically altering political consciousness. This approach thus defies the dominant view of subaltern actions as a result of the “logic of the army-guerrilla polarization” (Hales 1997: 821).

Testimonies collected by anthropological and ethnographical research will figure as the main empirical base to explore the subtle and nuanced tactics with which Guatemalans maneuvered and understood the pressures for mobilization. As one indigenous activist who was forced to lead a Civil
Patrol recalled: “I have two faces. One I showed to the army. One I showed my people” (Nelson 2009: 14). They are signs of a culture were clandestinity defines every relation and decision and is both a deliberate military strategy as well as a desperate attempt of survival. Peasants living under military control and surveillance state they were “angry at the army”, yet “would not express what is at the bottom of their thinking” because the alliance with the military had to be taken care of “for political purposes” (Manz 2004:133).

On the surface, communities under military domination could thus appear wholly subjugated. Yet the testimonies of, for example, civil patrollers indicates much of this subjugation to be feigned and clear demonstrations of dissimulation. Some patrollers made as much noise as possible during search-and-destroy missions so as to alert guerrillas and refugees in hiding of their approach and sabotage the counterinsurgency (Manz 2004). Others displayed apparent enthusiasm to patrol but showed their active dismissal and resistance to army ideology by converting patrol nights into a laughing stock and drinking opportunities (Esparza 2018). Participating in patrols was also used as a means to negotiate the protection of individual communities, although this did not prevent the army from sanctioning patrol-on-patrol violence, while others passed on inside information to the guerrillas in exchange for guerrilla protection from other more aggressive patrol units (Esparza 2018; Rivas Vasconcelos 2013; Saenz de Tejada 2004). On the other hand, some remained vehemently loyal to the military to obtain socioeconomic incentives and rewards or to “gain prestige and status from their perceived proximity to the military” (Esparza 2018: 148). Similarly, manuals of the National Police for the recruitment of informants mention detailed monthly wages in exchange for steady flows of information, or the possibility of indirect help, for example "a more spacious house or a job promotion" and payment in commodities for poorer informants. The importance of the inclusion of blatant war-time opportunism is also evident in the life trajectories of those who joined guerrilla ranks after voluntarily serving in the army and those former members of the revolutionary movement who become enthusiastic patrollers (Manz 2004; Esperza 2018). Conversely, there was substantial grassroots and spontaneous resistance, evident in community member’s retaliation actions on the most exposed members of the military hierarchy: the military commissioners invested with local military power (Ball et al. 1999).

Preliminary explorations of the testimonies given to truth and reconciliation projects and within secondary literature support the viability of the hypothesis this paper aims to advance: the cultural and political practices and attitudes with which Guatemalans resisted, accepted and coped with state dominance, demonstrate they acted as “migrating subjects” (Sanjinés 2005: 115) in their relations vis-à-vis the army and the guerrillas. The subaltern is capable of inhabiting two worlds at the same time, both the hegemonic sphere as the subaltern sphere, while strategically migrating the vast grey areas between them. This research proposes that complicity, whether explicit, forced or through avoidance, form an inalienable component of the wide panorama of attitudes and actions with which subaltersn struggled through insecure pathways to survival. As such, accepting state dominance could originate from personal motives as opportunism, but could also create individual opportunities for liberation and protection that were unachievable through the display of outright resistance. The inherent ambivalences and contradictions of these strategies is characterized by shifting involvements or ‘meandering’. In other words, the possibility of the simultaneity of strategies of resistance and complicity should be considered a constitutive element of subaltern politics. A deromanticized historiographic account of the disparate ways Guatemalans maneuvered, lived, and

reflected or joined in or evaded the multisided pressures the armed conflict exerted thus necessarily recognize the subaltern both as an agent of liberation as of repression.

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