In the Shadow of the Razor Wire: Class and Insecurity in Guatemala's Urban Core

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Abstract: Entering the global search for an ever-elusive sense of security, Guatemalan homes are adorned with razor wiring. Modern security paraphernalia today build on the long-standing socially accepted paranoia about outsiders disrupting the sanctity of the home. The country's history of inter-ethnic inequality and political violence now reinforces a particular architectural aesthetic that symbolizes the ways that relationships with outsiders are understood. Yet residential spaces in the city core are not solely a product of underlying cultural and historical influences but also reflect more recent market-oriented neoliberal patterns of consumption and citizenship.

Keywords: neoliberalism, urban, violence, Guatemala, inequality, ethnic identity

Résumé : Attendu la quête globale d'un sentiment de sécurité toujours évanescent, les résidences du centre-ville de Ciudad Guatemala sont entourées de fils barbelés. Tout l'attirail de la sécurité moderne s'appuie aujourd'hui sur une paranoïa socialement acceptée par rapport aux étrangers qui perturberaient la sacralité du chez-soi. L'histoire du pays, en termes d'inégalités ethniques et de violence politique, renforce une esthétique architecturale qui symbolise les façons dont les relations entre les résidants et les étrangers sont perçues. Cependant, les espaces résidentiels ne constituent pas seulement un produit d'influences culturelles et historiques : ils reflètent aussi les plus récentes orientations des schémas néolibéraux de la consommation et de la citoyenneté.

Mots-clés : néolibéralisme, urbain, violence, Ciudad Guatemala, inégalités, identité ethnique

Figure 1: Wires and flowering vines, May 2015. Copyright M. Gabriela Torres.

Introduction

In Guatemala City's oldest residential areas, razor wire has appeared in the wake of the civil war as if to symbolize the new violence of everyday living. At a time when other areas of the city were developing as gated communities or self-policed no-go zones, the residents of Zones 1 and 2 chose to adopt the visible security image of the wall-facade. Entering the global search for an ever-elusive sense of security, Guatemalan homes, businesses and public plazas are adorned with fences, armed guards and different arrangements of razor wiring. Adding to a long-standing socially accepted paranoia about outsiders disrupting the sanctity of the Spanish-American home (Few 2002; Taracena Arriola 1999), the razor wire and other modern security paraphernalia are shaping the landscape of residential areas

in the city core. Fortress homes, razored rooftops and barren sidewalks walled by concrete, metal and a wall of noxious traffic dominate the residential areas remaining in the central core of what *ladino* nation-builders once prized as their *tacita de plata*, or "silver cup," for its faux renaissance architectural design and minimization of urban waste and visible poverty.

How do the security concerns of individuals work to shape Guatemala City's core in an age of post-conflict? This study is one answer to Anna Tsing's (2004) call to understand how neoliberalism expresses itself unevenly in local places. I begin by locating the perspective of the ethnographer as a participant observer in postwar Guatemala City. Then in the next sections I explore how neoliberal ideologies imbued in counter-insurgency and postwar governance strategies, together with structural adjustment policies in Guatemala, as in the Latin American region more generally, encouraged civic conceptions of persons as discernible individuals who would engage in civic life through consumption (Bilbija and Payne 2011; Han 2012; O'Neil and Thomas 2011). Immediately following, the article suggests the breadth of insecurity in the Guatemalan capital city. The bulk of the article focuses on residential facades (their walls and the prolific use of metal enclosures and wiring) as emblematic forms of material culture that have come to embody the complex interaction between cultural and historical spatial practices, global neoliberal conceptions of the self and the insecurity of existing in violent environments. In the sections that explore the practice of consuming security and the making of solid facades in Guatemala I suggest that the very nature of security-seeking spatial arrangements also actively works to entrench neoliberal forms of citizenship. My analysis of security-seeking practices is not exclusively framed as neoliberal in the sections that look at residential facades. It also suggests, as Jeff Maskovsky and Catherine Kingfisher (2008) have earlier, that the reach of neoliberalism is always partial and must always be situated in particular cultural dynamics. Given that security-seeking was oriented during military regimes on pre-existing notions of ethnic and class purity (Nelson 2009), I also argue that consuming security in the postwar period follows the habit of ethnic self-making through exclusion and thus also works to bolster the long-standing and divisive national ethnic and class dynamics.

Being an Ethnographer in Guatemala City

Living for 12 months between 1999 and 2005 on the southern edge of Zone 2, just two blocks from its border with Zone 1, I often wondered why residents continued living in the traffic-, pollution- and crime-plagued centre of the city instead of moving to the newer and quieter apartments of the wealthier zones where much of their social life was located. Coming from the more regulated urban spaces of the north, I was surprised by the cost of living in an area of such apparent chaos. Though not as expensive as homes in the wealthy Zones 14 or 10, stand-alone residences in Zones 1 and 2 were affordable only to middle- and upper-class Guatemalans.

Life in *el Centro* was dominated by talk of ensuring personal safety. Area crime—including carjackings, armed robberies, pickpocketing and the occasional violent attacks—was a preferred topic of conversation among residents. Safety, my informants often reminded me, rested inside the home. There was general agreement that safety on the street could only be attained by adhering to particular rules: Purses were undesirable for walking on the street. Money needed to be carried in several spots on the body: in a sock, tucked in your bra, in underwear, with a few bills in a change purse for a robbery. To avoid becoming prey to criminals, residents advised being behind the closed doors of one's home by 7 p.m.—advice that most visitors to my home followed to the minute unless travelling by car. Immediately following the war, the streets were often deserted by 7 p.m., with the exception of special community event evenings, such as Holy Week celebrations. Talking with *desconocidos* ("strangers") was unequivocally seen as risky.

As a ladino woman (understood as self-identifying as ethnically non-indigenous), I walked the streets of Guatemala City and, to my surprise, was often approached on the street by strangers (ladino and indigenous alike). Discussions of personal safety were particularly frequent whenever I attempted to use a nearby public park with my infant son. While there were always other children playing in the park, I was often stopped by passersby to suggest that bringing a child there, particularly one that was *tan canchito* ("so blond"), put me and the child at risk of armed robbery and kidnapping. When I persisted in using the park, I began to be counselled on the undesirable company I would be keeping by inhabiting public spaces. As one woman told me, "You never know who is going to be there, it is best that you stay in your home." The mothers and indigenous caregivers of my child's playmates commented that it was "strange" or "unusual" (*raro*) to see "people like me" (*gente como Ud.*) on the street. Fear of the street lay in the difficulties in identifying a potential criminal but also in concern about being judged by the company we keep.

I conducted interviews with 30 residents of Zones 1 and 2 and a survey of more than a hundred single-family home facades in Guatemala City's Zones 1 and 2 be-

tween 1999 and 2005, and I compiled a 40-year residence story of a single home in Zone 1. Interviewees chosen for this study were financially secure enough to purchase homes in the city's outskirts or better-off neighbourhoods but preferred to live in el Centro (downtown). Instead of fleeing to the safety found behind the armed gates of the suburbs, families living in the urban core often chose to deal with insecurity by retaining their homes and blatantly closing their entryways to any type of public scrutiny and access.

In analyzing the results, I asked whether the gates, security firm emblems and wires that adorn residences, as well as the ways residents spoke about their homes and security, reflected a way of life with violence and the constitution of the other and the "self at home"? Was it possible to make links between expressions of security/insecurity on residential buildings and self-making?

State-Sponsored Violence and the Making of a Security Commodity

Barthes' (1972) work was seminal in suggesting the ways that commodities can encode consumer ideologies and identities. In Guatemala, not only security paraphernalia but also security itself has become commodified since the war. The security commodities—walls, metal bars, wires and insignia—that adorn the homes of Guatemala's inner core are explored here as an expression of how middle-class ladinos of the city core live with and incorporate both real and imagined violence in their lives. Thinking of security commodities, I wanted to understand how "insecurity physically shapes your home" (Goldstein 2012:5).

Guatemala's 500-year history of severe inter-ethnic inequality and its history of political violence in the latter part of the 20th century are of relevance to an analysis of the architectural character of its residential streets because they shape how the elites who populate the houses in this essay seek to understand and separate themselves from the "public other," often understood as the indigenous and poor. Pointed analyses of Guatemala's long-standing inter-ethnic conflict are found in revisionist histories (Perrera 1993; Taracena Arriola 1999) and in accounts of current social trends like Angelina Snodgrass Godoy's (2006) analysis of the legacy of inter-ethnic conflict and more recent political violence for Guatemala's social fabric. Guatemala's recent past of state-sponsored violence and its long-standing ethnic insularity have made the establishment of a rigid division from outsiders important not just as a marker that punctuates ethnic identity. Security goods adorning homes betray ladino-specific ideologies used to keep "outsiders" and "others" outside the imagined safety and separation of private space (Few 2002; Taracena Arriola 1999). Such value-laden commodities are used to construct urban ladino identities of class, ethnicity and difference in post-conflict Guatemala.

The display of consumption choices builds meaning systems, such as those bolstering notions of class and ethnicity (Barthes 1972; McCracken 1988). Grant McCracken demonstrates how the symbolic power of goods can often work to tame what consumers perceive as cultural disorder. For McCracken, goods can work to present a "relatively consistent expression in the face of the disruptive potential of radical social changes" (1988:137). While metal bars, walls and wires do represent an attempt to attain physical security, I argue that the security paraphernalia that adorns Guatemalan homes is much more than this. It is a physical expression of the ways that ladino Guatemalans actively imagine themselves existing in the changing urban space of a post-conflict nation that is experiencing radical social change. Buying security goods and talking about buying security goods were typical practices of life in *la Capital* at the start of the post-conflict period.

Security choices made by urban residents—in addition to their practical crime-deterrent functions—work to "construct notions of risk, threat, danger and generate standard modes of response" (McCracken 1988:139). In the particular case of Guatemala, security choices and discussions about one's own choices and the choices made by others work to reinforce ideologies of consumption-based citizenship and to promote particularly long-entrenched cultural practices that attempt to make ethnic difference visible.

For me, the consumption and display of security goods is a particularly cogent example of the very local ways in which neoliberal technologies of subjectification are working in Guatemala. Neoliberal subjectification relies on self-governance strategies, such as fear, to "recalculate social criteria of citizenship, to remoralize economic action and to redefine spaces in relation to market-driven choices" (Ong 2006:5). Aiwa Ong's work in Asia further demonstrates that the "fortressization of urban space" (5) is a well-worn and global spatial practice, through which moralities that serve a market-centred model of citizenship are internalized. John McMurty (2002) similarly argues that the entrenchment of the neoliberal mindset is attained by corporate interests through the construction of threats against life as a means to coerce compliance. According to McMurty, neoliberalism commands through the creation of ambient terror or universal insecurity. For him, it is the socialization of individuals into lives of terror that

enables the reorientation of moralities understood as cultural values to suit neoliberal agendas.

In the past 30 years, Guatemalans have been actively socialized into lives of terror as participants and victims of a civil war that brought the genocide of Mayan Guatemalans and thousands of other murders. Diane Nelson (2009:xv) accounts for the myriad of ways that Guatemala's civil war transformed notions of self, understandings of the value and mechanics of social relations and the meanings given to mundane everyday practices. She highlights that in postwar Guatemala, "discourses of *engaño*, *babosadas* and *manipulación* (duping, foolishness, manipulation) circulate as commonsense assumptions of how the world works" (xv). The notion of engaño—"the sense that the world available to our senses hides another face behind it"—is particularly active in the way that city residents care for the facades of their homes. Purchasing security systems, electrified razor wire, doorbell metal bar enclosures and ornate metal doors becomes a way of securing what lies hidden beyond the reach of the street. Purchasing security was seen by all informants as an apolitical and definite way to deal with the insecurities that faced Guatemala as a whole. In my interviews, I often asked informants whether the municipality or the state was responsible for providing the security that they purchased from private companies. The response was a consistent assertion that political involvement was to be avoided. As one informant put it, buying a security system has a clear and foreseeable outcome, but getting involved in politics is inconclusive and, for him, had been proven to "never end well." Engaging with *la calle* ("the street") was saturated with risks not only to life and property but also to the self that were posed by others' manipulations. Such risk was intensified in the interpersonal realm and, most intensely so, in the realm of politics in postwar Guatemala. As Daniel M. Goldstein reminds us, "the proper neoliberal subject in this security society ... is one of perpetual alertness and individual preparedness, being continually on one's guard against the emergence of any and all possible threats" (2012:14).

Hay se cuida ("you take care") was a regular refrain for me upon exiting homes, particularly when I planned to walk home and not travel by car. When I asked Dora, one of my key informants for this project, about what risks I should keep in mind, she responded, "You never know who you are going to meet up with. There are all types of people in la calle." *Una buena puerta*, or "a good door," divided the street from the home, provided safety and minimized the risks to the reputation of those living on the inside, while also reducing the opportunity for interactions where exposure to risks occurs.

Yet the process of "fortressization" in Guatemala cannot be traced solely to neoliberalism or a violence-induced cultural reframing of morality, citizenship and space. Guatemala City's fortressed, solid facades have long roots in ladinos' sense of ethnic insularity and in middle-class traditions of actively segregating their private spaces from the public view of the streets. Notions of danger and insecurity, as well as modes of response to danger, are strongly mediated in Guatemala by an individual's social class aspiration and ethnic ascription and by a history of segregation.

Violence and Insecurity

Residents of Guatemala City, like many of their counterparts in other large cities and suburbs (Caldeira 2000; Goldstein 2012; Low 2005; Nuttall and Mbembe 2008; Rotker 2002), live in fear of armed assaults and other arbitrary crimes that could end in murder. For most residents, the fear of crimes like armed robbery and the life-threatening violence associated with them is based on very real high and rising national homicide rates and the prevalence of robberies and assaults in the city core.

For the residents of the city core I spoke to, rising homicide rates authenticate the ever-escalating sense of insecurity they feel, an insecurity that, for many, was also as an indication of social and cultural disarray. Despite the inability of homicide rates to provide a real sense of the breadth of violence in the region, the rise and magnitude of homicide rates are staggering. Observatorio Centroamericano Sobre la Violencia (OCAVI 2007) estimated that 5,885 homicides were committed in Guatemala as a whole in 2006. This figure represents an increase in the homicide rate of more than two thousand people compared to the annual average in the previous decade (Centro de Investigaciones Económicas Nacionales [CIEN] 1998). A comparison of homicide rates for 2006 reveals that Guatemala's rate per hundred thousand was 7 times that of the United States and 24 times that of Canada (Statistics Canada 2009; U.S. Department of Justice 2007.

In an in-depth survey of Guatemalan families conducted in December 2004, 42 per cent of respondent families indicated that at least one of their members had been a victim of violent crime in 2004 (POLSEC 2004). Just over 80 per cent of the crimes reported by these families were armed robberies that did not result in physical injury, and 60 per cent of these took place on city streets while individuals engaged in shopping and work-related activities. Violence and insecurity are undoubtedly a tangible threat for residents of the city centre, but stopping here does not allow for an under-

standing of the cultural production that results from violent realities. Thinking about insecurity, Goldstein suggests that to be insecure is to "occupy a habitus of fear and uncertainty that is at once social, psychological and material" (2012:4).

I suggest that individual fortification consumption choices by Guatemala's middle classes, although responding to a threat of crime, are also enactments of fear used to divide space and society, bolster and segregate elites and draw our gaze away from the political and civil demobilization in the Guatemalan neoliberal post-conflict nation. Pierre Bourdieu (1998:6) suggests that a person's place in social space emerges through the habitual set of differentiations that consumers can produce. I argue that the practised consumption of security goods, evidenced in Zone 1 and 2 residences, works not just to "provide security" but also to naturalize class and ethnic divisions among people.

Purchasing goods provided residents with a certain sense of control over the disorder they perceived in the urban space. If you bought the right wire, had professionals install the wiring and electrical equipment and contracted a decent security firm, you had "done your part to make yourself safe (*asegurarse*)." Residents agreed that doing your part through consumption was the only way not to be blamed when violence and insecurity reached the inside of your home. When a stray bullet injured a young girl eating dinner with her family inside her home, neighbours remarked that it was not the family's fault because they had put all that was needed on the home to make themselves safe—a steel door, electrified wiring, well-trained staff. As one man I interviewed (March 2005) commented, "I don't know what else they could have done to be safe."

Marketing Security

The constant threat of violence in Guatemalans' imaginations and in their everyday lived experience is clearly also fuelled by corporate interests that feature in McMurty's (2002) account of neoliberal social restructuring. As Avery Dickins de Girón (2011) suggests, the rise of the private security industry is indicative of the state's current inability to provide public security. A growing and powerful private security industry that began during the civil war now relies on crime and violence to expand its business. According to Andrew Cockburn and Leslie Cockburn (1991), today's Israeli-inspired security agencies build on the reputation of the Israeli-trained counter-insurgency intelligence systems during Guatemala's civil war. Israeli-inspired security agencies like Sistemas Israelis de Seguridad (Israeli Security Systems), Grupo Galil or Grupo Golán provide their clients today with metal plaques or plasticized stickers sporting omniscient symbols and metaphors (radar maps, an eye) to add to the image of security presented by the building fronts. Though most security companies operating in Guatemala have expertise beyond the home security system, home security was being provided in Guatemala by more than 143 legally licensed firms in 2008, and these private security firms employed 25,735 people and had a registered arsenal of 24,133 weapons (Anonymous 2009).

Home invasion was a major crime concern for those I interviewed. All interviewees living in single-family homes had contracted one or, in some cases, two different security firms with armed rapid response teams. Residents adamantly understood their consumption of security firms to be a requirement of life in el Centro. As one interviewee summarized, the security firm "es una necesidad" ("it is a need"). The process of selecting security firms for some took into account perceptions of military ability developed during the civil war. One informant would only consider "Israeli" firms (not always Israeli-owned but having an Israeli-sounding name) because he thought the Israelis had been so "important to Guatemala's military during the conflict." Another informant sought a security firm that was not managed by a known corrupt ex-military agent, as "contracting a company of this type makes a robbery more likely." Such individuals, he said, are "motivated by money," and "many times it is the company itself that robs you." The concern with ensuring the quality of a security firm is probably a result of the minimal requirements for employment with a security firm in Guatemala: 18 years of age, a sixth-grade education and working knowledge of Spanish (Dickins de Girón 2011:111). References, advice and chastisement from friends were all absolutely essential in the process of shopping for a "good" agency. The process of framing the consumption of security firms as a need that is mediated through relationships of trust has roots both in the social history of violence and ethnic separation and in the spatial arrangements of Guatemala's municipal space.

Security firms primarily draw their employees from the rural labourers who have migrated to the city in search of well-remunerated employment as rural plantation work has decreased (Dickins de Girón 2011:104). Guards are recruited from departments of the country that are primarily Mayan (113). The ethnic background of the primary respondents was not lost on my informants, who did not trust the "morals" of the men who responded to possible breaches or did "rounds." Their potential duplicity as thieves disguised as security guards was reminiscent of the many conversations inter-

viewees had with me about the "theft-prone" character of their indigenous housemaids. Both types of workers were allowed in the home, but their "character" was always under surveillance by residents—often judged by their ability to submit to instruction, look smart but not too smart and act *como se debe* ("as one should"). For many residents, the *muchachas'* (maids') or guards' knowledge of the privileges that their employers enjoyed every day was corrupting and drove "the help" to jealousies and thievery. As one informant put it, "Where they come from, they do not have this. They can't access it."

Design and Settlement: Zones 1 and 2

Guatemala City mimics the Parisian *arrondissement* urban plan as it radiates in a counter-clockwise spiral over the terrain's many precipices. Guatemala City's urban core is physically arranged into 25 zones, or geographical divisions, organized in loose grid of numbered streets and avenues that radiate concentrically from the original 18th-century settlement area. Zone 1, where La Nueva Guatemala de la Asuncion (Guatemala City) was first founded in 1773, is still the site of the city's oldest residences, churches and commercial districts. Today Zone 1 boasts modern apartment and office buildings built in the latter half of the 20th century, highly concentrated commercial areas and many of the sites of national government. The area still retains residences for Guatemalans representing the breadth of the social class spectrum. Most of these residences are found intermingled with commerce.

Most of the colonial-type buildings in Zone 1 were built or rebuilt after a series of earthquakes destroyed most of Guatemala City between 1917 and 1918 (Almengor and Guillermo 1994). Guatemala City was thus rebuilt to retain not only its colonial building facades but also the mapping of the city's social hierarchy (42). The central parts of Zone 1 housed middle- and upper-class ladinos, while poorer ladino and indigenous families were pushed to the city's outskirts. In demographic terms, according to the Asociación para el Avance de las Ciencias Sociales (AVANCSO 2003), the combined area of Zones 1 and 2 has changed in the last half century from housing one-third of the city's total residents to remaining home to only 8 per cent of city dwellers in 1994. AVANCSO suggests that this demographic change is a factor in an absolute reduction in the total number of Zone 1 and 2 residents (which decreased by approximately 25 thousand during the 1950–94 period) and the extension of the city to outlying and low-income zones of the municipality.

The walled and razored facades of Zones 1 and 2 are but one of many possible ways of managing the threat of urban violence in Guatemala City. Crime statistics show that the bulk of urban violence is not located in Zones 1 and 2 but dispersed throughout the city, with greater intensity in the zones that suffer from the highest rates of poverty. Most of the growth of Guatemala City in the past 30 years has been outside the city's official municipal boundaries; many gated communities have developed in the municipalities adjoining Guatemala City. Between 1981 and 1995, growth rates for these municipalities have averaged 2 to 5 per cent per year at a time when some areas of the city core experienced population contractions (AVANCSO 2003).

A Solid Facade

Figure 2: Zone 1 faux colonial facade with updates, May 2015. Copyright M. Gabriela Torres.

The most common residential building facade in Zones 1 and 2 is the solid concrete facade with a metal dual-purpose garage and entry door. This home facade hides an inward-facing residence of similar interior design to the colonial-type home discussed below. In terms of intruder deterrence, the solid facade achieves security through occlusion of private space and controlled interaction with the street. When asked about the appearance and security of their homes, residents reported that a solid facade allows residents to feel *seguros* ("secure/sure").

I suggest that to project an image of a properly protected home, the details—doorbells, electrical metres, metal bars—must be secured behind metal enclosures. Protecting the details with flimsy locks placed upon sturdy wrought iron grates is a statement about the value residents place on their belongings and their

perception of the character of the outsiders who are imagined to loiter in city streets. An attention to security details is, as one woman put it, *"lo que significa vivir en el Centro"* ("the meaning of living downtown").

As with their colonial-type counterparts, almost all entry doors have a system that allows residents to look out of their entry door without needing to open it, thus allowing a resident to inspect the character of those wishing to enter with a simple glance. Informants repeatedly reiterated that you needed to be sure of the character of anyone you let into your home. Most of these homes show security concerns by enclosing electrical metres behind metal bars, and some display stickers that prove they have an installed alarm system or surveillance by a security firm.

The efforts made to secure private property that must be located on the facade of the residence are remarkable since there is little profit and conversely little loss from the theft of such items as doorbells or drainage pipes. Are poor Guatemalans so desperate that stealing a ten-dollar doorbell is worth the risk? Are there organized gangs of electrical metre thieves? Is entry into a home at all probable through a 15- by 15-centimetre rainwater drain? These are questions I asked residents, and I was assured by all that thefts of electrical meters and doorbells were common. While one story of electrical meter theft was related to me, no one I interviewed could remember a doorbell theft. Tales of expensive doorbell failures and replacements, on the other hand, abounded. I was repeatedly assured that even if these items were not removed for profit, leaving them unenclosed made homes vulnerable to intrusion. As one man said, "Who knows, they could stick things in there."

The display of security measures in Guatemala City often overpowers the admittedly real security concerns. Homes are overprotected with redundant security measures that speak more of the image that residents want to give to the public than of the actual security needs of the home. In this part of the urban core it is rare to see signs suggesting the low-technology security options of the past. Guatemala City residents want to display their ability to protect their residences because the spectre of imminent violence and crime resonates with pre-existing and well-worn fears of outsiders repeatedly used by ladinos to assert their ethnically insular approach to living in a multi-ethnic and highly hierarchical nation. Discourses of *decencia* ("decency"), *el buen vecino* ("the good neighbour") and *gente con medios* ("people with access to power") were often used to suggest the difference between those who resided in the good homes and those who trolled the streets (including the *servidumbre*—the maids, workmen and nannies—who worked inside most of the homes I visited).

The threat of crime associated with violence allows middle-class Guatemalans to imagine themselves as part of a new global nation where the protection of private property becomes a paramount concern in a modern professional's self-conception as a neoliberal individual, but it also serves to reinforce notions of ethnic and class difference. This became evident when informants discussed their delinquent neighbours who ostensibly failed in their duties as citizens and "good people" by leaving their homes underprotected. Depending on the informant, an unsuitable level of protection could consist of an inability or unwillingness to contract a security firm, inadequate wiring and metal bars or the permitted entry of undesirable characters into the private space of the home. Given the vulnerability of rooftops, the key to being viewed as a good neighbour was the maintenance of a visibly safe roof. Unsuitable levels of protection were often taken to mean a level of disinterest in the safety of neighbours and came to define the social character and social class standing of the offender. Consuming security was often described as *un deber* ("a duty"), and an inability to finance its costs was often interpreted as a forfeiture of the privilege of residing in a middle-class area (as with the residents of the derelict home in Zone 1 that I discuss below).

Consuming Security and Violence

A resident I knew well received a small inheritance from a relative. Despite having many needs, he promptly invested it in updating the wiring of his home. Up until that point, he had only old glass and spikes, but now he could afford electrified razor wire. On the day the new wiring was installed, a crew of workers was busy remodelling the top edges of the concrete facade as the wiring had to be cemented in. New electrical connections and access to sufficient voltage had to be secured. The electrical connection, as it turned out, resulted in an extra charge that was not covered by the small inheritance. Why, I asked, did he choose to do this update now? To date, his house had never been burglarized. Was there any reason to fear it might happen now? He responded, "To be able to have these things ... well, it gives me peace. It gives me calm. I feel good. I feel respected. I feel secure. I am doing something."

The injury potential of security wire is a powerful and often repeated image of what I describe as "purchased aggression," which is commonly found in Guatemalan residences and businesses. Responding to the vulnerabilities of the solid facade, razor wire is now prevalent as the primary form of rooftop security for

Figure 3: Zone 2 stacked security wiring between neighbours, May 2015. Copyright M. Gabriela Torres.

new and renovated homes throughout Guatemala City. Replacing the insecurities of the chicken wire, metal spike and crushed-glass combinations of the past that might allow for intrusion, razor wire predominates on the urban skyline. Residents told me razor wire is a "more professional" wire that must be installed expertly. In instances where height puts the building at a disadvantage, razor wire loops are strung up and stacked two or three loops high. Often razor wire is found dividing adjoining rooftops. When asked about this, my friend with the new wiring indicated that a neighbour's poor security could impinge on his ability to have an "impenetrable" or "unbothered" home ("una casa donde nadie se meta"). In such cases, razor wire was erected to create a barrier between neighbours, to show who cared or could afford to care about their safety through wiring. Yes, he had bought that, too, to show his neighbours that he could now afford to safeguard even the roof of his home.

Unlike chicken wire (metal wiring with regular star-shaped spikes) and metal spikes, razor wire threatens injury not only from the sharpness of its stainless blades but also from the unleashing of the precariously contained tension of the touch-sensitive wire loops. In most cases, there is evidence that razor wire was added to existing chicken wire and to the lower and upper ends of razor wire loops. As if this threat were not enough deterrent, electrified wire is sometimes hooked up to razor wire loops to dissuade the intruder brave enough to tackle the tension of the razor wire.

Wiring as a symbol of security is, like the dog, duplicitous. It does double duty as it both stands for the residents' power to threaten/injure outsiders and also represents the protection-worthiness of the residents' home. Following the pattern set by the impenetrability of the solid facade, security wiring adds the threat of violence to uninvited public–private encounters. As its edges glisten in the blue sky, razor wire, often adorned with private security decals, stands as an imposing reminder of the potential violent repercussions of an unauthorized entry. Such consumption choices are influenced by shared ideas of security through ethnic and class insularity, which comes to be practised through a continual surveillance of the moral character of those let inside. The ordering of residential architecture, as with other forms of cultural expression, occurs through the interaction of this historical and cultural heritage, as well as the contemporary social and economic constraints of residents.

Securing a Home

Dora opened the wood square that served as a peephole in response to the loud knocking that had reverberated all the way to the second patio, where she was preparing lunch with the cook. We looked past the metal bars embedded in the century-old wooden door to see that a young man with tools and building materials stood on the sidewalk. "I was sent by Don Juan to fix the bathroom." Dora closed the square and said to me without responding to the youth, "You always have to see who it is. You never just open the door." She undid the lock, and the young man struggled through the opening with the load of materials and tools, taking care not to get caught in the quick rebolting of the entry door. We led him past the tiled room that housed the car in the evenings into the main courtyard and to the bathroom door. "You tell me when you are done," Dora said, as we left the unnamed youth to his tasks. Walking back to the second patio, Dora stopped to remove a dead leaf from a climbing plant on the edge of the patio and whispered to the youngest of her maids, at work mopping the floor, "Ojo" ("keep an eye out"), as she gestured toward the bathroom door with her mouth. Why let the young man in, if she didn't know him, I asked, as we sat to prep the green beans. "I know Don Juan, and that is his *muchacho*," she responded, adding, "You have to always know who you are letting in." Anticipating what she thought might be my next question, she said, "And yes, Gabrielita, this is how it has always been. The safety of the house depends on it. You already know that."

Even the lowest-technology solutions to middle-class security concerns, such as knowing those who gain entry, suggest the role that spectres of violence play in securing the home. The latent violence within the home of the

family I interviewed extensively was displayed in the continuous surveillance of temporary workers and in mundane items such as a sign firmly lodged at the top right edge of the wooden door that opens the home to the street that announces the presence of a *Perro Malo*, or "Bad Dog."[1]

The dog, the streets and public life were defined as perilous by the family because of the degree of *maldad*, or viciousness, they believed lay at the threshold between the public and the private. For them, violence dominated the public space of the street, making such spaces unsuitable for the interaction of *buena gente/ gente decente* ("good/decent people"). The separation from the alterity of the public has deep roots in the life of the residents of Guatemala City, as suggested by the 40-year residence story I compiled of a home in Zone 1.

The residence, a classic example of a colonial-type house with a solid facade, was rebuilt during the architectural renaissance of Guatemala City after heavy damage in the 1917–18 earthquakes. The ladino four-generation extended family chose to organize their space so as to separate themselves from those they viewed and continue to view as "other," for the entirety of the 40 years they had been residing in el Centro. The family home housed a grandparent, parents and their married children and grandchildren. One live-in house worker resided in the home, and a cook and washerwoman contracted to work only on occasion also resided in the home. The family did the bulk of their socializing in their home, at work or in the homes of friends and family.[2]

The residence in question had an unusually unkempt outer facade that did not correspond to any disrepair on the inside. The degree of care given to the outer facade of the home indicated the residents' attitude toward downtown city streets. Inside, two inner courtyards, or *patios*, adorned with tropical plants and flowers, dominate the space. Reinforced doors and windows shut out street life from the inner courtyards and garages and show the family's adherence to a strict division between private and public space. The division between public and private, the women of the home told me, has always been there. Even in olden times, they said, the now long-dead *abuelita*, or grandmother, spent her days sitting inside and watching the street from behind the iron bars. According to them, she did not go out unless she had to but had many people stop by and talk to her through the bars—although Dora noted that she did not speak to "just anyone" (*cualquiera*).

In newer homes, wrought iron grates, razor wire and chicken wire on roof edges, along with multiple padlocks, also reflect an interest in maintaining distance and keeping intruders out of the home, as I was often reminded. According to the residents of this home, the iron window bars are original to the home and were meant to dissuade intruders from the outset. Yet, at the same time, these homes structurally allow those inside to *espiar* ("spy" or "look at") the street without being seen—a function served today by the security camera, which elderly members of the family also relished. Despite the solid facade and the building's security features, the residents I interviewed reported intrusions on many occasions. Robberies took place when individuals gained access from the rooftops. Access to the rooftops was, ironically, gained by climbing the wrought iron window grating in the windows of other homes.

At the time this home was built, the location of the residence and the residents' attention to security details were signs of social status (Gellert and Pinto Soria 1990). Today the home continues to signal the residents' status. Neighbours reflected on the now inadequately secured home, suggesting that the character of the residents was not questionable but that it was a sign that this family's class status was probably in decline. They had not electrified any of their wires, fixed the concrete encasements or hired a reputable security firm. Inadequate security paraphernalia was actively interpreted by neighbours as an indicator of a lack of disposable income and, more importantly, as the inability of the offending residents to continue to be good neighbours and *buenos ciudadanos* ("good citizens").

Other Zone 1 colonial-type homes have been extensively retrofitted with electric locks and metal doors. The remaining wood door and metal bar facades of this home show a long-established interest in the sharp separation of the home from the public space of the streets. This architectural and social arrangement could be traced back to the turn-of-the-century neo-colonial revival, colonial roots, Spanish traditions and even Middle Eastern architectural styles. Yet, beyond the syncretic architectural inspiration, this home in Guatemala City's inner core reflects contemporary individual choices, values and preferences indicative of both the ethnic and class origins of its residents. When I asked why the family had not chosen to electrify their roof wires or hire an expensive security firm, the patriarch responded, "If we continue like this—adding this, adding that—then we'll end up in a jail." Probing, I suggested that others could see it as a lack of funds, to which he responded, "Well, yes, probably also that."

Conclusions

I have suggested that Guatemala's inner "City of Walls" is shaped by three key cultural and historical dynamics

of spatial import: (1) the long-standing traditions of ethnic segregation laced with aggression and distrust that allowed ladinos to distance themselves from the indigenous majority whom they so often consider as "other"; (2) the legacy of a recent history of urban insecurity, militarization and political violence that habituated urban Guatemalans into framing the street as a site of danger; and (3) the local character given to the influence of neoliberal moralities and forms of being that promote the expression of civic participation through consumption. Yet the residents of the capital city are not simply products of their culture or past. They are actively engaged in their own self-making by consuming and talking through their security negotiations. Through security-seeking acts, city residents become practised in the surveillance of streets, constant surveillance of the character of their neighbours and the persons who perform services inside homes (including security guards and security companies), and self-scrutiny of their own class worth.

Resonating with the ideological and architectural constructs in Teresa P.R. Caldeira's (2000) *City of Walls*, Setha Low's (2005) *Behind the Gates* and Ong's (2006) *Neoliberalism as Exception*, the solid facade in Guatemala becomes a tangible material culture legacy of the global trend in private property protection and fortressing as a favoured form of market-driven neoliberal civic engagement. As elsewhere, in Guatemala local expressions of neoliberal security-seeking rhetoric and security consumption are a result of a complex syncretic process that embraces well-worn practices of othering, together with notions of individual responsibility for citizen security. Security-seeking rhetoric and notions of decencia and el buen vecino, in particular, resolutely rely on pre-existing notions of ethnic and class purity as residents regularly inspect and judge the class and ethnic worth of their neighbours and household workers. In Guatemala the individualization and privatization of neoliberal security draw on and bolster the country's long-standing and divisive ethnic and class dynamics. While city residents gain security from their investment in walls, metal grates and razor wires, they also feel emplaced into safety by security-seeking practices that allow them to know, judge and display their class and ethnic worth.

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Notes

1. The sign is meant only to dissuade outsiders from entering the residence, as the small mutt that lives in the home would have difficulty reaching an intruder's knees. Interestingly, the sign characterized the dog as a "bad" animal, instead of speaking of a "guard" animal. The animal's imaginary character is offered as the basis of deterrent.
2. They originally sought to live in a colonial-type home because of the belief that Guatemalans of good social stature had to live with what the patriarch of the family called a "decorum" that required distance from where the "other" people lived. It is the privilege of owners, the patriarch accentuated, to decide which "other" people can be given permission to enter the home. Hired domestics and manual labour "help" (*trabajadores*) needed to be chosen carefully as others who could enter the home.

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