

MOBILITY IN CRISIS: SECURITY, RIGHTS, AND RESPONSIBILITY ON  
GUATEMALA CITY BUSES

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## ABSTRACT

Rachel Dotson: Mobility in Crisis: Security, Rights, and Responsibility on Guatemala  
City Buses  
(Under the Direction of [Rudolf Colloredo-Mansfeld])

This thesis examines Guatemala City’s contemporary “transportation crisis,” including the assassination of over 800 bus drivers over the last several years, and state and civil society responses to this crisis. It focuses on the Transmetro, a Bus Rapid Transit system implemented by the municipal government that aims to provide secure transportation, as well as efforts by civil society groups to address violence on buses through campaigns focused on citizenship and human rights. In doing so, it addresses broader questions related to state efforts to resolve insecurity through infrastructure projects and the visions of security underlying such interventions. Since such efforts go beyond the construction of bus lines or the organization of routes to target the attitudes and behaviors of city residents, this paper pays particular attention to how projects to address violence on buses conceptualize rights and responsibilities of both city residents and the municipal state in relation to security.

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## **Introduction**

This paper examines Guatemala City’s contemporary “transportation crisis” and government and civil society responses to this crisis, with a focus on two related initiatives: the Transmetro, a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system administered by the municipal government, and the Transurbano, a system coordinated through a partnership between the national government and private bus companies that serves as a feeder system, connecting Transmetro routes. In doing so, it addresses broader questions related to state efforts to resolve insecurity through infrastructure projects and the accompanying expert practices of planning and design, including the visions of security underlying such interventions. Since such efforts go beyond the construction of new bus lines or the organization of routes to target the attitudes and behaviors of city residents, this paper pays particular attention to how projects to address violence on buses conceptualize rights and responsibilities of both city residents and the municipal state in relation to security.

In order to address these questions, I situate my analysis of Guatemala City’s contemporary transportation crisis at the intersection of three literatures: critical anthropology of security; studies within anthropology and geography of violence, inequality and space in the Latin American city; and anthropologies of infrastructure. Emerging studies in the critical anthropology of security examine how the set of logics, discourses and practices associated with security, often imagined as universal, are taken up in specific contexts (O’Neill et al 2011, O’Neill 2010, Goldstein 2010, Arias 2006).

A central focus of this work is how security intersects, co-exists, and conflicts with other frameworks for ordering social and political life, such as human and civil rights. Security regimes, in many of these analyses, undermine the rights of some individuals (for example, gang members) by positioning them as anti-citizens and therefore outside of the realm of civil rights (Levenson 2012, O’Neill et al 2011); they perpetuate the dismissal of human rights as protection for “the rights of criminals” (Burrell 2010; 2014); and they justify state repression, *mano dura* policies, and extra-judicial violence as necessary and legitimate responses to the country’s “security crisis” (Burrell 2010, 2014). At the same time, Goldstein (2012) suggests that security can serve as a basis for new human rights claims, with demands for the “right to security” extending beyond concerns of crime and violence to incorporate social and economic rights, as well. Here, the conception of security is expanded to encompass broader conceptions of justice, rights, and wellbeing.

In Guatemala City, security has become the dominant idiom through which the municipal government legitimizes its projects and policies, most ostensibly through its *mano dura* (iron fist) approach to crime and violence, but also through investment in urban infrastructure and the revitalization of public space. Civil society organizations claiming to represent the city’s residents articulate their agendas in the language of security as well, though these groups are far from homogenous in their understandings of security and strategies for achieving it. Additionally, the distinction between state and non-state security projects is often less than clear, as the municipal government partners with international funders<sup>1</sup> and negotiates with private business and organized crime in order to modernize the city’s transportation systems, and civil society organizations act

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<sup>1</sup> The Transmetro, like BRT systems throughout the region, received planning and technical support from international funder, principally the Inter-American Development Bank.

from a range of positions in relation to the municipal and national state, from antagonism to collaboration to competition for power. This paper contributes to discussions within the critical anthropology of security by examining multiple projects aimed at addressing violence on Guatemala City buses-- from the introduction of the municipal-run BRT system to the Defensoría's efforts to define secure transportation as a human right-- with attention to the conceptions of rights and responsibilities, of both city residents and the municipal state, deployed within these projects.

My discussion here also engages with the work of anthropologists and geographers who have examined the social and spatial reconfiguration of Latin American cities over the past two decades in the context of heightened urban violence and ongoing inequality (Caldiera 2000, Moodie 2010, O'Neill et al. 2011, Arias and Goldstein 2010, Rodgers 2009, Dinzey-Flores 2010). These scholars have pointed to the privatization of supposedly public goods, including security, and the increasing segregation and fragmentation of both infrastructure and public space, what Graham and Marvin call "splintering urbanism" (2001). Security-driven infrastructure and urban development projects, both publically and privately funded, have been critical to this process. Rodgers (2004), for one example, describes how the Nicaraguan state's investment in the construction of high-speed road systems has facilitated the development of "fortified networks" which allow elites to live, work and move through networks of secure spaces, disembedded from the rest of the city.

Such processes are highly visible in Guatemala City, especially in the form of urban renewal projects that have "cleaned up" public spaces while making them less accessible to some city residents, such as those working in the informal economy

(O'Neill et al 2011, Mérida 2011, AVANCSO 2003). However, the government's investment in integrated and accessible public bus transportation in the form of the Transmetro and Transurbano projects as a response to insecurity complicates this picture of urban fragmentation and state withdrawal. The system's expansion has been halting and remains far from complete, and the entrenched systemic presence of private bus companies in the overall urban transportation system, which I discuss at length below, has prevented the municipal government from developing a fully public system. The following discussion of the planning and implementation of the Transmetro and Transurbano, then, illustrates the complexities of a security-driven urban development project that defies neat categorization as an example of either strong state investment in security and access, or of neoliberal forms of state withdrawal.

To trace the social aims and effects of transportation planning in Guatemala City, I also employ theoretical tools from anthropologies of infrastructure. Abrams, citing Weber, suggests that in order to demystify the state, we should turn our attention from defining the state and its boundaries to examining the practices through which state power is legitimated (1988:63). Anthropological studies of infrastructure and planning provide a valuable approach to demystifying the state by allowing for a micro-level examination of the visions, processes, relationships, and resources through which specific state projects are imagined and realized. Rather than viewing infrastructure as a product of predetermined and unified conceptions of development and modernity, ethnographies of infrastructure and planning examine the processes of negotiation, compromise, and improvisation through which such projects are realized (Barker 2005; Harvey 2010; Holston 1989; Humphrey 2005). Drawing on these discussions, this paper does not view



the Transmetro and Transurbano systems as straightforward products of official processes of planning and engineering, and therefore as transparent reflections of the visions of their designers and funders. Rather, it views them as the highly contingent and unstable products of messy (and at times violent) processes of negotiation between a range of state and non-state actors, including not only planners and funders but also private business and organized crime. Thus, this analysis provides a nuanced sense of how visions and rhetoric of security are shaped, and often severely compromised, by political and economic realities.

Several ethnographies examine how infrastructure systems function as political technologies, allowing their designers to “act at a distance” (Latour 1992) to shape the attitudes, behaviors, and social practices of users (Kooy and Baker 2008, McFarlane and Rutherford 2008, Von Schnitzler 2008). Drawing on this scholarship, this research examines the functions of infrastructure in Guatemala City, and specifically how transportation infrastructure is employed by politicians and planners to shape both urban space and the subjects who inhabit it. While an emphasis on planning draws attention to political and social work of infrastructure, networks do not always function as intended. The forms of unpredictability introduced by the physical and social environment in which systems operate, as well as the inevitable gap between the users imagined by designers and the “user in flesh” (Latour 1992), open possibilities for subversion or appropriation of infrastructure technologies (Anand 2011, Spitulnik 2002). These studies suggest the need to examine not only the social and political work of planning Guatemala City’s transportation systems, but also how these projects work out on the ground, including the perceptions and responses of users. While primarily focused on violent crime on

Guatemala City buses and responses by the municipal state and civil society groups, the following analysis also provides insight into how city residents, including bus riders and drivers, engage with the still incomplete Transmetro project.

This paper contributes to the above-outlined discussions through a historical and ethnographic description of violence and insecurity on Guatemala City buses. I draw on participant observation, interviews, informal conversations with Guatemala City residents, and analysis of municipal government documents to describe “transportation crises” as well as state and civil society attempts to address these crises. Research in Guatemala City was conducted in June and July of 2013 and June and July of 2014. Informants were identified through personal contacts, and include city residents from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds as well as political and professional positions, including human rights advocates, researchers, taxi drivers, domestic workers, students, and business owners. Part one places violence on city buses, and specifically the extortion and assassination of bus drivers over the past decade, in the context of a longer history of transportation crisis, as well as the relations of capital and labor that underlie the city’s bus systems. The second section describes the implementation of the Transmetro and Transurbano systems, which have among their primary aims the reduction in violent crime on buses, as well as the potential and limitations to these infrastructural responses to insecurity. The final section discusses two additional projects to address the city’s transportation crises: citizenship campaigns implemented by the Municipal Government and the civil association Compromiso Ciudadana, and the work of the Defensoría del Usuario, within the Procurador de Derechos Humanos, to advocate

for the rights of bus riders and drivers. In conclusion, I discuss the implications of these two responses for understanding both the nature of the crisis and its possible solutions.

## **Section I: Transportation Crisis**

### *Guatemala City's First "Transportation Crisis": 1970s-1990s*

According to Celia Vargas, professor at San Carlos, Guatemala's national university, there are two distinct phases to the history of "transportation crisis" in Guatemala City: the first began in the 1950s and intensified through the early 1990s, and was characterized by issues including bus overcrowding to substandard maintenance to discrimination against riders based on age, gender and ethnicity. The second began in the late 1990s but did not enter into full force until the mid-2000s, with the continuation of existing problems as well as the advent of unprecedented levels of violence on city buses. A brief history of the capital city's bus systems helps to situate contemporary violence on city buses within this longer history of crisis.

Guatemala City's first public or "collective" buses began operating in 1932, and quickly replaced existing mule and trolley car systems (CEUR 1995:4). When the first buses were introduced, Guatemala City was home to 250,000 inhabitants and occupied ten percent of its current metropolitan area (CEUR 1995:1). However, by the 1950s rates of rural-urban migration had increased sharply, and the city began a pattern of population growth and urban expansion that would continue over the next half-century. Bus systems were unable to keep up with urban growth, and by the 1970s Guatemala City faced what was identified at the time as a "transportation crisis," with slow and inefficient bus transport, irregular routes and fares, severe congestion on major thoroughfares, and

insufficient coverage, especially in the city's rapidly growing peripheral settlements (González and Hartlben 2012:3).

While the *buses rojos* that emerged from this mid-century process were and continue to be owned and managed by private companies, the Municipal and Central Governments have regulated routes and fares and have provided limited subsidies for bus operation since at least the 1960s (CEUR 1990:3). In general, the power of both private bus companies and drivers' unions have limited the state's control over the city's bus system; but periodic episodes of popular unrest from the 1970s through the 1990s have forced the both the Municipal and Central government to intervene in the provision of collective transportation. In 1973, the *Sindicato de Pilotos Automovilistas* (SPA), the city's bus drivers union, demanded a 50% increase in their daily rate of pay and threatened to strike (CEUR 1990:5). In response, bus companies raised fares illegally and implemented the pay raise. Bus users protested, and the Municipal Government intervened and forced the companies to return fares to the former rate. The Central Government, months away from the 1973 national elections, also placed pressure on the companies and provided a temporary monthly gas subsidy to offset costs.

In 1978, as cycles of guerilla activity and state counterinsurgency violence escalated in Guatemala's northern highlands and popular discontent and state repression intensified throughout the country, the bus drivers union (SPA) initiated another series of strikes over salary increases (CEUR 1990:5-8). Bus companies again responded with fare increases, which tipped off a series of multi-sector mass protests in the capital known as the *Jornadas Populares de 1978*. Public demonstrations were met with brutal police repression, leaving 24 dead and 254 wounded, an episode that marked the beginning of

one of the worst periods of selective state repression in the capital during the country's 36-year civil war (1960-1996).

These cycles of bus driver strikes, authorized or unauthorized fare hikes, popular protest, and Municipal and National Government intervention continued through the 1980s and 1990s. In 1996, municipal planners issued a report containing a series of proposals to transform Guatemala City's bus systems, including the regulation of hours and routes, the gradual replacement of antiquated buses with newer vehicles, a reduction in the number of private companies in operation, the reform of the 1970 Reglamento de Transporte to delegate more responsibility and discretion for transportation planning from the Central to the Municipal Government, and the creation of a municipal-run transit police (Muni 1996). An assessment undertaken at that time determined that it would not be feasible financially or technically for the city to implement a metro or light rail, and plans for transportation development remained focused on improving the city's bus systems (González and Hartlben 2012:9). While some limited changes were made to the existing bus system, it would be another decade before the report's recommendations would be fully implemented.

#### *Guatemala City's Second "Transportation Crisis": 2000-Present*

In 2011, InSight Crime, an institute that studies organized crime in the Americas, identified driving buses in Guatemala City as one of the most dangerous jobs in the world.<sup>2</sup> The organization's 2011 article states that 500 drivers have been killed since

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<sup>2</sup> Dudley, Stephen. "InSide: The Most Dangerous Job in the World," InSight Crime, 3/08/2011 <http://www.insightcrime.org/investigations/inside-the-most-dangerous-job-in-the-world>

2007, while other sources put the number at 900 or even higher.<sup>3</sup> In the light of such figures, organizations that advocate for bus drivers and riders have worked to counter what many identify as efforts by the government to falsify statistics in order to minimize concerns over transportation-related crime and improve the city's image for tourists and investors. While the Municipal government's official line is that crime on buses is diminishing as the Transmetro and Transurbano systems have made transport safer, according to the records of one local organization the total number of murders (drivers, ayudantes, and passengers) rose from 165 in 2013 to 319 in 2013 to 178 in the first half of 2014. This means that far from on their way to being under control, bus driver extortion and assassinations are at an all-time high. Such were the conditions of my initial ethnographic engagement with security and Guatemala City's bus systems in the summer of 2014.

### *Economies of Violence on Guatemala City's Buses*

The advent of widespread extortion schemes in the mid-2000s added terrifying and violent dimensions to what was already understood as a crisis in Guatemala City's mass transit system. At the same time, the consolidation of these forms of organized crime and violence relied upon a system of capital and labor that was in existence long before such schemes began. As explained above, buses in Guatemala City have been privately owned and operated, with some degree of state involvement in the form of regulations and subsidies, since the advent of mass bus transit in the city in the 1930s. For the past two decades, all of the city's bus companies have been owned by around thirty

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<sup>3</sup> Elbein, Saul. "The Most Dangerous Job in the World: How Did 900 Bus Drivers End up Dead in Guatemala City?" New Republic. 6/14/2013 <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/113293/900-bus-drivers-dead-guatemala-city-worlds-most-dangerous-job>

individuals.<sup>4</sup> Buses are big business in Guatemala City, and these owners are both wealthy and extremely powerful. While widely circulating rumors of owners with mansions in Europe and off shore bank accounts may or may not be apocryphal, stories of owners' involvement with organized crime-- including their complicity with the extortion and murder of drivers as well as the buying of police officers and politicians and assassination of union leaders and others who get in their way-- are equally ubiquitous, and less easily dismissed.

Bus drivers, those risking their lives every day as they navigate converted US school buses through congested city streets, hold a strikingly distinct position within the economy of Guatemala City's bus systems. Drivers are neither employees nor contractors of companies. Rather, similar to the case of taxis in the US, they pay by the day to rent buses. National government subsidies for fuel, maintenance, and, as of more recently security, are given directly to bus companies in exchange for compliance with regulations and fare limits. Drivers, union leaders and advocates I spoke with explained that subsidies are not passed on to drivers themselves, who have to pay for their own fuel and maintenance and are, in the vast majority of the cases, without paid security guards. Drivers also employ their own *ayudantes* (helpers), young men who hang out of the front bus door, calling out routes and collecting fares from riders. While *ayudantes* receive notoriously low wages, many are in the business because they hope to be drivers themselves one day. Based on these precarious conditions it comes as very little surprise

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<sup>4</sup> Here I do not address the *micros* or small vans that operate within particular neighborhoods, often where coverage by red buses is insufficient or non-existent. However, these buses, while often owner-operated and only loosely organized among themselves (and, as I understand it, subject to neither regulations or subsidies), are also subject to extortion, though not necessarily by the same groups.



that bus drivers have long employed various strategies to ensure their livelihoods, from raising tariffs illegally to striking in demand for increased labor protection and security.

In the mid 2000s, organized crime groups (with levels and types of organization that are still far from understood), began to demand *impuestos* from bus drivers and companies, supposedly in exchange for keeping their routes safe but with the explicit threat of violence for failure to pay. These extortion schemes quickly became ubiquitous, with few if any companies, routes, or drivers in the city spared from the payment of *impuestos* (taxes). Extortion schemes take on two main forms. The first targets company owners. Generally someone drops off a cheap cell phone in a bus company office, with directions that the phone be given to the owner. The phone soon rings, and the speaker demands extortion payments that are to begin immediately. In cases in which owners initially refuse, drivers are shot on their routes until the first payment is received.<sup>1</sup>

While this type of extortion continues to happen in Guatemala City, the increasingly common arrangement, according to those with whom I spoke, is the direct extortion of bus drivers. In an interview, a Guatemala City activist recounted for me the typical process: an extortionist approaches one driver from within a particular company, demanding that he (nearly all, if not all, drivers are men) collect a particular quantity of money from each of the other drivers each week or month. The driver is then responsible to ensure that all drivers comply, and to pass the money along to extortionists. In this arrangement, *impuestos* are taken directly from the drivers' already meager profits, and owners are largely spared cost or involvement. As the involvement of company owners with organized crime and extortion is widely assumed, it is easy to speculate that the increased prevalence of this second arrangement is no coincidence. While the majority of

drivers pay what is demanded of them, some refuse, either on principle or because they simply can't afford these "taxes" that can amount to several hundred dollars a month. According to the activist cited above, attempts by drivers to organize together and refuse to pay, in unions or ad hoc groups, have been largely unsuccessful, and those drivers who are unwilling or unable to flee the country have been killed.

This second form of extortion interpellates drivers not only as victims but sometimes as participants as well. In some cases drivers, who are often only barely making ends meet before the imposition of impuestos, have seen extortion schemes as a way to collect additional profits. These drivers, after being forcibly recruited to collect impuestos from their peers, demand slightly more from each driver and keep the margin for themselves. Extortionists often have multiple informants, including drivers and ayudantes, within a given company, and drivers are generally found out and killed by extortionists within a month or two. Advocates report that drivers' complicity and cooperation with extortionists has become increasingly common in the last few years, as many of those who drove buses in the 1990s and early 2000s, before extortion became so common, have either been killed or have changed lines of work. These more seasoned drivers have been replaced with young people willing to assume the risks now associated with the profession, many of whom are rumored to already be involved in gangs or other forms of organized crime.

If the role of drivers within extortion is less than completely straightforward, questions of who is behind these schemes is even more unclear and contentious. Several city residents with whom I spoke claimed that Guatemala's two main gangs or *maras*, Marasalvatrucha and Calle 18, are responsible. These groups are composed primarily of

poor, local youth, and their level of centralized organization and operational sophistication is highly debated. While maras do use extortion extensively, both to raise funds and maintain control of social and economic activities at the local level, they do so mainly in the poor, peripheral neighborhoods in which they are active. While their capacity to carry out complex extortion schemes at a city-wide level is doubtful, the extreme stigma surrounding these gangs has made them an easy scapegoat for criminal or violent activity (Levenson 2013; Burrell 2013), including extortion of bus drivers.

Regardless of the maras' role in administering extortion schemes, it seems clear that young gang members do serve as the primary source of cheap and disposable labor for those administering and profiting from these operations. According to Guatemala's Ministerio Publico (federal Justice Department), the average age of people who carry out bus driver assassinations is between 14 and 17, and many of these youth belong to a local *clica* or cell of Calle 18 or MS 13.<sup>5</sup> These gangs provide a convenient source of labor indeed, as these young people often have their own arms, and are willing to kill a bus driver for 150 quetzales, or around \$20 USD.<sup>6</sup> While recent efforts by the Ministerio Publico, in the face of intense public pressure, have led to several arrests and prosecutions of shooters and accomplices over the past months,<sup>7</sup> those who are arrested

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<sup>5</sup> Herrera, Paola. "Niños y adolescentes los más usados en extorsiones y asesinatos de pilotos." Noticias.com.gt. 11-11-2010. <http://noticias.com.gt/nacionales/20101011-ninos-y-adolescentes-los-mas-usados-en-extorsiones-y-asesinatos-de-pilotos.html>; "Capturan a Presuntos Responsables de Intentar Asesinar a un Piloto de Bus." Gobierno de Guatemala. 9/1/2014. [http://www.pnc.gob.gt/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=1934:capturan-a-presuntos-responsables-de-intentar-asesinar-a-un-piloto-de-bus&Itemid=410](http://www.pnc.gob.gt/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=1934:capturan-a-presuntos-responsables-de-intentar-asesinar-a-un-piloto-de-bus&Itemid=410)

<sup>6</sup> "Sicario Capturado Cobraría Q150 por Asesinar a Piloto." Siglo 21. 9/09/2014 <http://m.s21.com.gt/afecta/2014/09/09/pilotos-ruta-1-san-miguel-petapa-suspende-servicio-extorsiones>

<sup>7</sup> "Capturados Cuando Pretendían Asesinar al Piloto de un Bus." DeGuate. 9/26/14. <http://www.deguate.com/artman/publish/seguridad-capturados/capturados-cuando-pretendian-asesinar-al-piloto-de-un-bus.shtml#.VDBMCudgPZs>

generally know little or nothing about extortion schemes beyond their own direct involvement, and these arrests have not, in any case that I am aware of, resulted in the prosecution of any of the more powerful actors involved. Such law enforcement actions, in other words, work as a site of political performance in which politicians, judges, and prosecutors can show the public that they are doing something about violence on city buses, without getting any closer to identifying or prosecuting those behind extortion schemes. The nearly endless supply of poor young people desperate enough to take on such risky and low-paying work guarantees that these “successful” efforts at fighting extortion can continue indefinitely while violence continues unabated.

### *Violence and the Municipal State*

In the context of fear and uncertainty generated by violence on city buses, rumors of government involvement in extortion schemes and driver assassinations are widespread, and can be heard from city residents from a range of social and political positions. In June of 2014, drivers on the Ruta Maya, which runs through zones 6 and 18, went on strike to protest the shootings of 25 drivers on that route alone in 2013 and to demand that the municipal government provide armed security guards for all units. Ostensibly in response to the consequent bus stoppage, which left thousands of residents without transportation, the Integrated System of Guatemalan Autobuses, a partnership between private bus companies and the national government, brought in Transurbano units to resume service.<sup>8</sup> At the end of the strike the new units were kept in place, and drivers of red buses lost their jobs.

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<sup>8</sup> The structure and operation of the Transurbano system is described in detail below.

A former Ruta Maya driver, in a recent interview with an online newspaper, questioned why the municipal government had refused their demands to provide security guards on buses, citing a lack of resources, and, after a year of unprecedented violence in which 25 drivers were killed, replaced their units with Transurbanos, all of which count with private security guards onboard.<sup>9</sup> The driver was not implying mere negligence, but rather that the municipal government had intentionally taken advantage of a situation of extreme violence, standing by while drivers were killed, in order to justify the imposition of a new system. The author of the article goes a step further by pointing to a pattern in which the number of assassinations of bus drivers on a given route has spiked in the months before the implementation of a Transmetro or Transurbano route. In the context of public terror and outrage over heightened violence, drivers and unions struggle to find a receptive audience for the complaints over unfair labor practices, and the new systems can more smoothly replace the old. The author calls these patterns “suspicious,” and stops just short of accusing the government of direct complicity in the assassination of drivers on these routes.

Such accusations attribute a great deal of power and coherence to a municipal government that has supposedly orchestrated the systematic extortion and murder of hundreds of bus drivers, and then effectively covered up its own involvement. At the same time, rumors of complicity in extortion portray a weak municipal government, unable to control crime on existing buses or to stand up to bus owners and drivers’ unions in order to impose a new transportation system. This municipal state must instead use violence to create a widespread sense of fear in order to make its actions appear

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<sup>9</sup> Osegueda, Sergio. “Asesinatos de Pilotos Coinciden a Cambios al Sistema de Buses. Diario Digital. 10/13/2014. <http://www.diariodigital.gt/2014/06/11/asesinatos-de-pilotos-coincidencias-en-cambios-al-sistema-de-buses/>

necessary and inevitable. This picture is further complicated by the well-known involvement of politicians, officials, and police officers with bus companies, drivers, and unions. The benefits derived from these relationships and also the dangers they pose to those involved impact decision-making at every level, and presumably work to support or undermine official municipal strategies and responses to violence on buses in ways that are multiple and complex.

Such rumors and suspicions blend images of the Guatemala City government as weak and strong, as pulling the strings behind organized crime and as unable to intervene to stop violence on buses, and in doing so reveal what Nelson (2009:218) has identified as a deep ambivalence toward the postwar state, an uncomfortable mix of desire, fear, and revulsion. This ambivalence was perhaps most readily apparent in my own research in conversations with city residents from a variety of socioeconomic positions and political affiliations who openly stated their mistrust for police, who they saw as corrupt, abusive, and ineffective, but who also complained about the lack of police presence in buses, in the city center, and in their own neighborhoods. Not surprisingly, I found that complex and contradictory affective relationships with the state also mark city residents' engagements with the Transmetro and Transurbano projects, though not always in the ways that I had imagined.

Such is the entanglement of actors constituting Guatemala City's contemporary transportation crisis. Bus company owners negotiate with politicians to maintain their dominance within the mass transportation market while cutting costs in terms of both labor and maintenance, and their relationship with organized crime and the role of violence in these business tactics remains unclear. Drivers employ multiple strategies,

from union organizing and strikes to participation in extortion schemes, to make a living and keep themselves safe as widespread violence compounds the risk and vulnerability of what has long been a precarious occupation. Those actors who administer extortion schemes collect hundreds of thousands of dollars a year from bus drivers and keep their identities and forms of organization hidden with remarkable success, while the faces of the poor youth who perform the labor of extortion and assassination for a just a few dollars are displayed on the cover of national newspapers. Bus users, primarily members of the city's poor and working classes, have no option but to utilize the city's transportation systems, with all their dangers and inconveniences, in their daily movement through the city. Also present in the above description are non-human features of Guatemala City's bus systems: converted school buses with faulty breaks, the city's mountainous terrain and extremely narrow streets and bridges, and neighborhoods, such those in zones 6 and 10, that are home to a large portion of the city's bus users and are also the principal sites of violence on buses.

These actors and elements constitute the moving parts of the city's bus systems. They are both the site of intervention and the raw materials with which politicians and planners must work in their efforts to create a secure and modern transportation system. Of course, these experts charged with remedying the city's transportation crisis do not stand outside of, but rather form an integral part of, these systems. The following sections describe efforts to resolve the city's ongoing transportation crisis and address violent crime on buses through the creation a bus rapid transit system.

## **Section II: Secure and Modern Transportation: The Transmetro and the Transurbano**

In 2007, as public concerns over violent crime on city buses began to mount, Guatemala City mayor Alvaro Arzú announced plans to introduce the Transmetro, an integrated transportation system based on the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) model. The BRT model is intended to combine the flexibility and relatively low capital investment of buses with the safety, efficiency, and positive public image of metro and light rail systems, and is characterized by high-capacity buses, dedicated lanes, accessible platforms, and off-site payment.<sup>10</sup> With funding from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, the Transmetro project promised to address issues of security, but also to cut congestion and pollution by decreasing the number of private vehicles on the road and improving transportation times, especially during busy hours and on principal thoroughfares (González and Hartlben 2012:15).

While long-term plans for the Transmetro system include the construction of ten lines that connect the city's center to its outermost *barrios* (see Figure 1 above), the Transmetro project has not amounted to a massive overhaul of the city's transportation systems, but rather the gradual construction of lines over a 14-year period, with a target completion date of 2020. Figure One, taken from a 2012 presentation given by

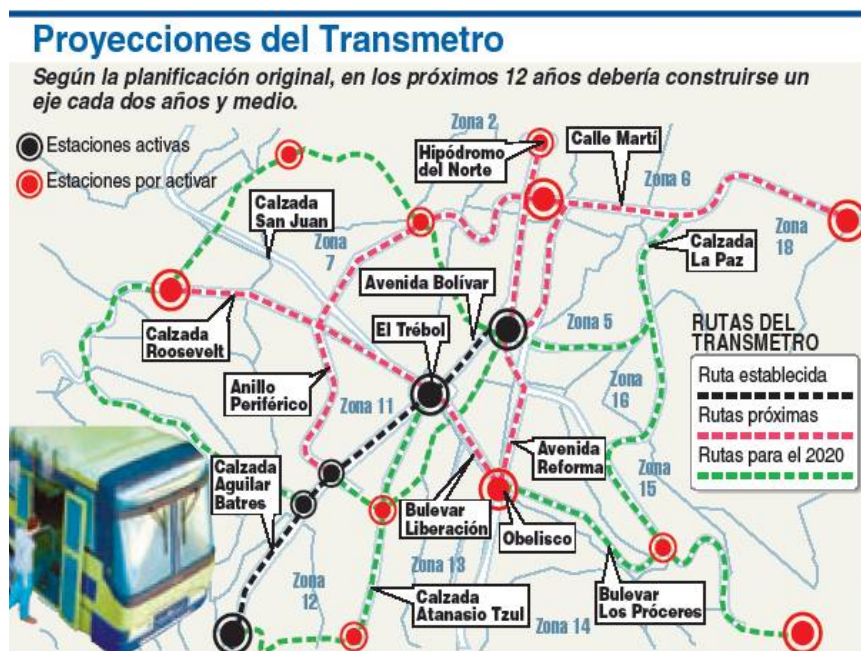
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<sup>10</sup> The first BRT system was designed and implemented by municipal planners in Curitiba, Brazil, in the 1970s. In the 1990s the BRT model gained widespread attention from municipal governments throughout the region as well as funders including the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, which hailed the model as a relatively inexpensive solution to the formerly intractable problem of public transportation in large and medium size cities of the global south. While many of the first BRTs were introduced in Latin America and the region still has the majority of BRT systems, BRTs now operate in cities throughout the world including Istanbul, Jakarta, Brisbane, Quebec City, Cleveland, and Miami, among others (Levinson 2003).



Allessandra Loussau, Coordinator of Planning for the Transmetro, demonstrates the timeline for the expansion of the system, with two new routes to be established every two and a half years for twelve years. However, seven years after the project’s inauguration and slightly past the projected halfway point, only three lines—Eje Sur, Eje Corredor Central, and Eje Centro Historico— have been completed. Routes leading to Zones 6 and 18, the most densely populated areas of the city and also the location of the majority of bus robberies and driver assassinations that have taken place in recent years,<sup>11</sup> were to be completed in 2009; but the process of construction began in February 2014 and continues slowly.

Figure 1.<sup>12</sup>



Several factors have caused the slow and halting expansion of the Transmetro system. While BRT systems have been popular in large cities throughout Latin America

<sup>11</sup> “Entrevista Alcalde Álvaro Árzú.” Municipality of Guatemala City. <http://www.muniguate.com/index.php/component/content/article/107-entrevistas/1348-entrevistaalcalde>

<sup>12</sup> Lossau, Alessandra. “Transmetro: Sistema BRT de la Ciudad de Guatemala.” <http://www.slideshare.net/sibr/Transmetro-sistema-brt-de-la-ciudad-de-guatemala-alessandra-lossau>

largely because they are much less expensive than metro or subway systems, the Transmetro has in fact required intensive capital investment. Guatemala City's dense development, narrow streets and bridges, and mountainous terrain make the construction of the dedicated bus lanes that the BRT model requires both technically challenging and extremely expensive. Each phase of construction and implementation has gone over budget, and the introduction of each subsequent line has been preceded by an extended fundraising phase, in which resources from the municipal and national governments are supplemented by those of international funders such as the Inter-American Development Bank.

The Transmetro project has also required the municipal government to expend extensive non-monetary capital (or force, depending on one's perspective). As discussed above, lines have replaced existing red bus routes, and as they have done so the municipal government has met resistance from both private bus companies and drivers' unions. In the case of the Transurbano project, discussed in detail below, these interests have been especially strong, and negotiations have resulted not only in the extremely slow expansion of the system, but also in compromises in terms of its administrative structure that may impact the ability of the (in this case, national) state to provide safe and efficient transport in the long term.

### *More Transmetro*

Inspired by work within the critical anthropology of security (Goldstein 2011, 2012; O'Neill et al 2011; Burrell 2010, 2014; Zeiderman 2013, 2014), I began my study of the Transmetro expecting to find points at which dominant narratives of security and

modernity broke down. By examining how the Transmetro, designed for an ideal and anonymous citizen-subject, might not have felt comfortable or secure for everyone (Murphy 2006), or how the aesthetics and the physical space of the Transmetro might be alienating rather than reassuring, I hoped to reveal distinct conceptions of what security, and by extension modernity, might look like.

These theoretical designs were quickly undermined by what city residents had to say, both in interviews and informal conversations. While many residents expressed frustration over the extremely slow progress of the Transmetro system, I heard very few complaints about the Transmetro itself. While exceptions are surely to be found in certain quarters, city residents with whom I spoke-- including researchers, yoga teachers, domestic workers, and human rights defenders, some identifying as ladino and others as indigenous, from a wide range of political orientations and locations in the city—love the Transmetro. These residents enjoy the convenience and predictability of the system’s set routes and stops and they appreciate that the dedicated lanes, where they are in use, allow buses to cut through rush-hour traffic, making their trips faster. While one person commented that going to an office to load money on a card rather than being able to pay with cash is annoying, she also mentioned that she understands how the prepaid card makes the system function better more generally. No one I spoke with even seemed to mind the large “informative-inductive screens” installed in Transmetro units, which broadcast a loop of programming that combines information about the Transmetro system and orientation for users with inspirational quotes and photos of international celebrities and women in bathing suits.

So, like the Zimbabwe bush pump (de Laet and Mol 2000), people seem to *love* the Transmetro. Unlike the case of the bushpump, however, the quality of the Transmetro that inspires this love is not fluidity. This bulky, complex, and capital-intensive form of infrastructure both requires and facilitates strong state presence and precludes, to a great extent, flexibility and adaptation. What people love about the Transmetro, among other things, is precisely what the Municipal government wants them to love: security. Several people echoed the Municipal government's assertion that there have been *zero* cases of violent crime on the Transmetro, and they credited the security mechanisms -- from guarded stations and the presence of municipal police on buses, to the use of prepayment systems and the separation of the driver from the passengers by bullet-proof plastic -- with preventing robberies and extortion on Transmetro buses. People I spoke to also reported feeling that the Transmetro is safe, and feeling safe on the Transmetro. In other words, the Transmetro is not only effective in ensuring the security of riders, it is also *affective*, in the sense of creating a feeling of security that goes beyond mere incidence of crime or lack thereof (Masco 1999). I do mean to not suggest that city residents share in any unified or complete way a vision or experience of security, amongst themselves or with the municipal state. Rather, I suspect that the severity of violence on red buses, from robberies to *secuestros* to the assassination of drivers, has brought together many residents behind a basic demand for security, defined minimally as the absence of these forms of violence.

When people complain about the Transmetro, they most often complain about its very limited coverage, which makes it almost impossible for residents to use this secure and modern form of transport as their principal way to move around the city. Residents

complain that the Transmetro has not come to their neighborhood, either because of delays in the system's expansion or because they are not on one of the planned routes, and question the Municipal government's commitment to providing secure and efficient transportation to *all* city residents. In other words, city residents consider the Transmetro effective as a transport system, but not as a solution to violence, inefficiency, and other issues that plague the city's existing systems. What city residents want, then, is more Transmetro. What they will mostly likely get, however, is something quite different.

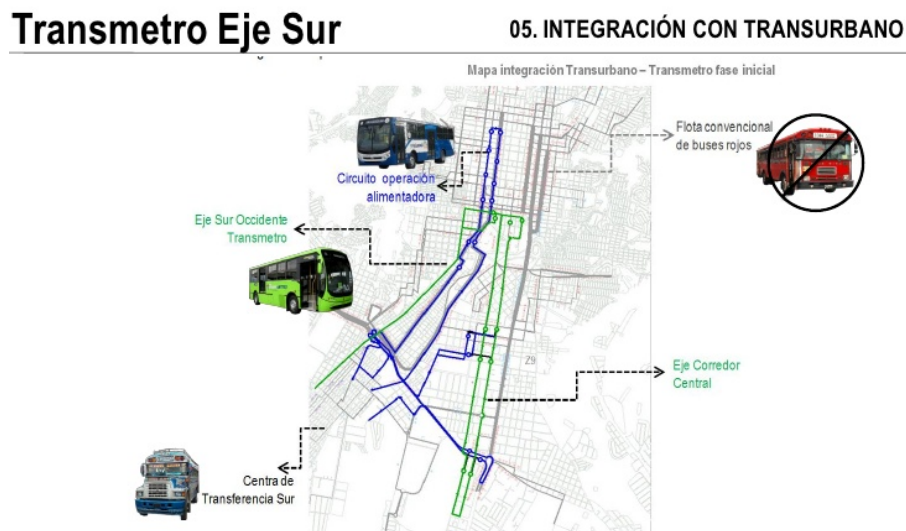
### *The Transurbano*

If and when the municipal government does establish all of the system's planned routes, this will mean greatly expanded coverage and greater access to the Transmetro from many areas of the city. However, very few city residents will be able to begin using the Transmetro as their primary form of transportation. The number of routes and their distribution will mean that for many residents the Transmetro will not provide the most direct route between their home, work, and school, and all but a small proportion of residents who do use the Transmetro will need to use it in conjunction with another form of public transportation. For example, while nearly 200,000 people live in zone 18, the zone will have only one Transmetro line when the municipal plan is complete.

The Transmetro system is not, in fact, intended to cover all city bus routes. Similar to subway or metro systems in other cities, the Transmetro system will provide a network of lines, supported by a "feeder" system (See Figure 2), in this case the Transurbano. The Transurbano is a system of buses operated in the Guatemala City Metropolitan Area (AMCG) by the Integrated System of Guatemalan Autobuses, a

public-private partnership between the national government and the Association of Urban Bus Owners (consisting of the same bus companies discussed above). The system's operations are supervised by the Superintendent of Public Transportation, part of the Guatemala City municipal government. Initiated in 2010, the project aims to eventually replace all of the city's *buses rojos* with Transurbano units (see Figure 2 below. The green bus is a Transmetro and the blue bus a Transurbano).

Figure 2



While Transurbano units do not count with all the security mechanisms of the Transmetro system, for example guarded stations and designated lanes, they do utilize prepayment technologies and designated stops (unlike red buses, which stop anywhere passengers are waiting), both mechanisms designed to increase security. The main issue with the Transurbano, like the Transmetro, is the lack of sufficient coverage. The purchase and distribution of new units, and the public-private partnerships involved, have

been subject to frequent accusations of corruption, such as in 2010 when, according to rumors that I heard from multiple sources but was unable to substantiate, the Secretary of Transportation supposedly paid millions of quetzals to a Brazilian company for the purchase of 3,500 buses, and somehow ended up with only 445 buses, far from sufficient for covering promised routes.

Unlike the Transmetro, which is subsidized by the national government and administered by the municipal government, with many functions such as maintenance subcontracted to private companies, Transurbanos are units purchased by the national government with a mix of public and private funds. These units are provided to private bus companies, which own and operate them, in exchange for both conditions such as maintaining fixed routes and stops and the provision of increased subsidies. The companies operating Transurbanos are the same powerful companies that operate red buses, with their suspected involvement in organized crime and extortion as well as their well-know history of both labor abuses and provision of bus services that are consistently both inefficient and unsafe. Nonetheless, red bus drivers on these routes are replaced with “professional” drivers, subject to training and background checks. While this policy aims to eliminate drivers who have been involved in criminal or gang activity and bring in those who will be less vulnerable to involvement in extortion, it has, not surprisingly, encountered resistance from drivers themselves and their unions, who claim that officials and politicians are taking advantage the new arrangement to provide jobs to friends and family members.

At the time when I conducted fieldwork, riders as well as advocates generally agreed that Transurbanos were safer than red buses, though not as safe as the Transmetro.

While there had been some reported robberies, there was no evidence of drivers being subjected to extortion. However, these same people recognized that while Transurbanos have the same shiny paint and municipal logos as the Transmetro, they are not controlled by the municipal government but by the same companies that operate red buses, and that the ability and will of these companies to protect buses from extortion in the longer term is highly questionable. All of this suggests that the Transurbano project, far from extending the Transmetro's ambitious, if only partially realized, ideal of creating an urban planning and engineering solution to Guatemala City's security crisis, represents a fundamentally realpolitik negotiation between politicians and officials at both the state and municipal level and bus company owners, with the direct or indirect involvement of organized crime interests.

### *Rendering Security Technical*

The municipal government's *Plan Guatemala 2020*, published in 2005, outlines a plan for urban mobility with goals to be reached by the year 2020. This document, the most recent comprehensive urban development plan published by the municipal government, portrays an urban transportation system with problems that can be addressed through the mechanisms available to planners, engineers, and policy makers: the regularization of routes, improved systems for informing the public of traffic accidents and delays, the implementation of a modern and transparent tariff payment system, and greater enforcement of traffic laws.<sup>13</sup> The masterplan for the Transmetro system, released three years later, also focuses on planning and engineering solutions, but shows a much

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<sup>13</sup> "Movilidad Humana." Municipality of Guatemala City.  
<http://www.muniguate.com/index.php/g2020/5372-g2020movurbana>



greater deal of technical specificity, laying out route locations and schedules and describing mechanisms of policing and surveillance, communication, and control of movement. These documents lay out ambitious strategies to address Guatemala City's violence on city buses through planning and infrastructure design, and what they have in common is the application of technical solutions to what are seen, by many, as intractable social, political, and economic problems.

In keeping with the theoretical framing discussed above in relation to infrastructure, I have found it productive to view the Transmetro project in relation to Li's work on development interventions in Indonesia (2007). Li asserts that in order to devise a program of intervention, experts must first "render technical" a given problem by defining it within a bounded and intelligible field of intervention, such that it is amenable to technical solutions. Here, there is an intimate relationship between the identification and definition of a problem and the available potential solutions. Experts' claims to expertise "depend on their capacity to diagnose problems in ways that match the kinds of solutions that fall within their repertoire" (2007:7). Re-framing questions in technical terms means excluding a whole range of factors that are outside of the influence of the resources and mechanisms that planners and other experts have at their disposal. These include political-economic questions "about control over the means of production, and the structures of law and force that support systematic inequalities" (Li 2007:11).

This process of "rendering technical" and the related processes of exclusion are clearly evident in the documents cited above. Not surprisingly, neither plan acknowledges or directly addresses the underlying social and economic causes of crime and violence, such as poverty, corruption, residential segregation, and lack of

employment. What is perhaps more noteworthy is the highly bounded and circumscribed nature of the Transmetro as an intervention to address urban violence. The Transmetro project literally aims to place mobile zones of supposedly absolute security in some of the city's most insecure neighborhoods. The irony of this kind of solution was apparent in one conversation I had with Gerson, a young man who lives relatively nearby a stop on the Transmetro's Centra Sur line. The Transmetro is so safe, he explained, that you can even get out your iPhone and check your email on the bus. "I would never do that, of course," he quickly added. "If I did, someone would follow me off the bus and steal my phone." In neighborhoods where such armed robberies are frequent and often result in shooting deaths, this is not merely a matter of potentially losing a phone. While planners and administrators have demonstrated their capacity to make Transmetro buses into largely theft-free zones through the implementation of a range of highly coordinated safety mechanisms (and to install WiFi in all Transmetro units, a point of pride emphasized in the system's propaganda), they can do nothing to protect Gerson from a potentially deadly robbery in the several blocks between the bus stop and his house.

At the outset of my research, I suspected that municipal planners with modernist ambitions might imagine municipal-green Transmetro buses and bus stops as "subversive set pieces" with the potential to transform landscapes of urban violence through their very presence (Holston 1989:53). While my inability to gain access to spaces of planning and design during fieldwork severely limit my ability to confirm or deny such theories, municipal plans, speeches by officials, and other documentary sources continue to suggest modernist principles of ecological determinism as at least one of the ideologies underpinning the Transmetro and other municipal development projects. Such ambitions,

to the extent that they drive infrastructure projects in Guatemala City, come up against the realities of urban poverty and violence that are as ubiquitous as they are apparently intractable. A more modest faith in infrastructure and its ability to create bounded spaces of relatively safety, but not to transform its surroundings, is reflected in Gerson's assertion that while the Transmetro is a great change (*un gran cambio*) for him and other residents of his neighborhood, he will continue to keep his phone in his backpack while riding the bus.

### **Section III: ¡Modernízate!: Citizenship, Security and Transportation**

When city residents walk by the Transmetro station at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Third Street, they see a large poster with bright green print, urging them to “¡Modernízate!” (Modernize yourself!). Under the text is a photo of a group of Transmetro riders, including youth with backpacks, a person in a wheelchair, and two women in indigenous dress or *traje* that identifies them as Ixil and Quiche. At the bottom of the photo is information about how you, like these diverse city residents, can modernize yourself by going to the nearest Transmetro office and getting your own personalized Transmetro card. Similar posters demonstrate the behaviors required of Transmetro users: carrying identification, ceding bus seats to the elderly, turning in found items to Transmetro staff, and reporting suspicious activity. While these might simply appear to be the guidelines or regulations for system users, they are presented here as something more: interpellation into a form of modern municipal citizenship.

Such campaigns have been an integral part of the Transmetro since its inception, and they reflect what planners identify as the project’s “socio-urban” goals, laid out in a 2012 report by Transmetro consultants:

1. To change citizens’ manner of behaving, including the development of a culture of waiting in line, not throwing trash on the floor, and ceding space to those in need.
2. To create a chain effect that transforms the conditions around the system, including formal and informal commerce, the use of space, and urban landmarks and icons.
3. To change the mentality of a people (*un pueblo*), breaking current paradigms and opening up opportunities for new projects. (González and Hartlben 2012:15)

Alongside municipal campaigns such as those that form part of the Transmetro project, a range of civil society groups have launched public campaigns to promote active and responsible citizenship as a solution to problems of insecurity in Guatemala City. “Plan Guatemala 2020+,” a proposal for comprehensive development released by the group Compromiso Ciudadana in 2011, provides an example of a call for greater citizen responsibility in the development of the city’s transportation systems from outside (though not far outside) the municipal building. Compromiso Ciudadana, a “civic committee” and would-be political party (their 2011 mayoral candidate lost to incumbent Alvaro Arzú), has been one of the organizations to most explicitly link questions of citizenship to infrastructure and urban development. In their Plan Guatemala City 2020+, they outline their proposal for a “shared agenda” between citizens and those who govern for the city’s long-term development. This agenda is primarily focused on what could be called questions of infrastructure, including water and sewage, housing and zoning, and especially transportation. And though addressing these elements of urban development commonly assumed to be the domain of the state, they emphasize throughout the importance of “cultures of citizenship” and the responsibilities of city residents in creating “una ciudad para vivir” (a city to live in, or a livable city). While the authors of Plan 2020+ call on the municipal government to implement new development projects to improve existing infrastructure, they also make it clear that the real transformation of Guatemala City will come about through a transformation of its residents “from neighbors into citizens” (2011:4). They define citizenship culture, here, as “the intersection of customs, actions, and minimum standards of behavior that generate a sense of belonging, facilitate ‘convivencia urbana’ (urban social life), and lead to respect

for our common patrimony and to the recognition of our citizenship rights and responsibilities” (2011: 4). This citizenship culture is to be achieved through the “re-education of beliefs and habits, with the intention of modifying ideas, attitudes, and behaviors” of city residents (2011: 4).

Compromiso Ciudadana’s framework is applied to questions of transportation in a section titled “Constructing a Citizenship for Mobility,” which outlines practices for the construction of a “Cultura de Convivencia Vial (Culture of Roadway Sharing)” (2011:16). Here, the authors suggest the implementation of a permanent campaign of citizen education, including neighborhood events with recreational activities for children, as a solution to the city’s transportation problems, from crime to traffic accidents. And while the report calls for the municipal and national governments to address insecurity through a range of efforts from the completion of the Transmetro to the reform of judicial systems, it suggests that the solution to crime and violence will ultimately come from citizens themselves. It cites the successful cases of other cities (which remain unspecified) in “dramatically reducing delinquency” (4) through active and responsible citizenship, suggesting that Guatemala City residents, through their own self-transformation from “neighbors to citizens,” could do the same.

Compromiso Ciudadana’s campaign can be understood as an example of the emerging forms of middle and upper-middle class security politics identified by several critical scholars of urban violence and security (Caldeira 2000; 2008; Coelho 2011; Low 2003). Largely but exclusively centered in neighborhood organizations, this emerging politics employs ‘civilized’ modes of engagement such as media campaigns, public forums, and courts rather than mass strikes and public demonstrations associated with

popular urban politics (Coelho 2011: 23). Here, those who are arguably less affected by crime and violence but have greater access to political and economic resources are shaping the security agenda and mobilizing security discourse to further their interests. As a movement of middle and upper class city residents, many with ties of either business or municipal government, *Compromiso Ciudadana* articulates a security agenda that eschews the language of rights and demands for that of empowerment and responsibility, a position that is arguably less viable for residents living in gang-dominated neighborhoods or relying on forms of mass transportation in which violent crime is an ever-present possibility.

In an ethnographic study of Christian citizenship in postwar Guatemala, O'Neill (2010) describes the appearance of glossy citizenship campaigns in Guatemala City, directed by the municipal government, groups of elite ladinos, and evangelical mega churches. These campaigns place slogans such as "Tú Eres la Ciudad" (You are the City) and "Soy la Revolución" (I am the Revolution) on billboards, bus stops, t-shirts, and bumper stickers, and encourage residents to transform the city one day at a time by changing their own attitudes and behavior. Drawing on the work of Foucault (1986), Rose (1996) and O'Malley (1990), O'Neill suggests that citizenship can best be understood as "a kind of subjectivity that has certain responsibilities and dispositions," among them the capacity for self-governance (14). Viewed from this perspective, these campaigns can be understood as interpellating city residents into a particular kind of neoliberal citizen-subjectivity where the responsibility for social change lies squarely on the individual. "Rather than prompting the state or multinationals, for example, to do things the promise of citizenship makes people do things, to themselves and often by

themselves (2010:214).” And in a context in which substantive citizenship in the form of social and economic rights and political inclusion is elusive for many, it is precisely this “do it yourself” citizenship that offers to extend its responsibilities to all city residents.

Much like the campaigns that O’Neill examines, we see in the call to “¡modernízate!” the clear “hey you!” of the municipal state, interpellating city residents as modern municipal citizens. Citizens can take responsibility for the city’s transportation systems, and in doing so can improve security for themselves and their neighbors. O’Neill’s critique of such campaigns and the forms of transformation they offer is relevant here as well. O’Neill concludes his study with reflections on the limits of citizenship, in general and in the specific context of violence and inequality that shape life in contemporary Guatemala City. Ideologies of citizenship, whether promoted by the evangelical mega churches that are the main focus of O’Neill’s ethnography, the municipal government, or civil society groups, ask citizens themselves to shoulder the weight of Guatemala City’s multiple forms of crisis, and to pull the city out of the depths of crime, violence, and poverty through the strength of their attitudes and actions. Not only do such ideologies present the danger of exempting the state and other powerful actors from responsibility for the multiple forms of violence and insecurity that they have been complicit in creating and continue to benefit from, it also sets up for failure those city residents who are interpellated as municipal citizens. Learning to wait in line, to place trash in the proper receptacle, to give your bus seat to mothers with children—in other words, to modernize yourself-- might make urban public life more pleasant, more orderly, more hygienic, and even more livable. However, as O’Neill points out, such



changes in “cultures of citizenship” stop far short of addressing conditions of inequality and exclusion that drive and perpetuate violence in Guatemala City.

#### **Section IV: La Defensoría Del Usuario: Transportation as a Human Right**

As I waited to be shown to the office of Carlos, who works in the Defensoría del Usuario de Transporte Publico within the Procurador de Derechos Humanos, a woman in her thirties dressed in traje characteristic of the Quich'e region entered the reception area.

After telling the receptionist that she was there to speak with someone in the Defensoría de Derechos Indígenas, she sat down beside me and pulled a thermos of coffee and a bag of tortillas out of her bag. Carefully arranging her breakfast on her lap as if she knew she was in for a long wait, she explained to me that she lives in Quich'e with her family but comes to the capital, where she works as an accountant Monday through Friday. She had come to the Defensoría to register an official denuncia against a group of men who work in a parking garage near her office and harass her every day on her way to work, making comments about her clothing and her presumably rural origins. She explained that this was her first time at the Procurador, but that she had heard that “this is where you come when you know you have human rights, and you know it’s wrong that they’re not respected.”

At first the location of the Oficina del Usuario in the Procurador de Derechos Humanos may seem surprising, in a country where “human rights” as a term and a concept has been closely associated with indigenous rights, and with efforts to denounce the horrific violence of the country’s 35 year civil war. During the Peace Accords process and in the context of ongoing racism, discrimination, and exclusion of the country’s

indigenous majority (as well as the ongoing denial of genocide by many of the country's political elite), the human rights "toolkit," including international law, mechanisms of monitoring and denunciation, and a vast network of international supporters, continues to be central to efforts to assert and defend indigenous rights.

The Procurador itself was established by Congress in 1985 under a military government, two years before peace negotiations would officially begin, and can be seen, at least in part, as an attempt to pacify those in Guatemala and abroad who criticized the government's genocidal campaigns. Nonetheless, the Procurador functions fairly independently from the Guatemalan government, and continues to be one of the primary recourses for those seeking to denounce human rights abuses, including those committed by, or in complicity with, the state. In the 1990s and 2000s the Procurador greatly expanded the reach of its work, creating Defensorías of Sexual Diversity, Youth, People with Disabilities, and Migrants and Displaced People. The creation of these offices, according to Procurador staff, both reflect expanding definitions of human rights internationally and represent efforts to expand the range of rights that are recognized and respected, both within the legal system and within Guatemalan society in general. As the human rights toolkit has proved remarkably effective in the postwar and post-postwar period in securing international financial support and moral backing for the rights of indigenous peoples, as well as some concrete legal and policy reform, organizations like the Procurador have mobilized this toolkit for other struggles.

The creation of the Defensoría del Usuario de Transporte Publico in 2013 was an effort, in response to violence on city buses as well as ongoing issues of safety and efficiency, to define safe, efficient, and dignified public transportation as a human right.

In light of Guatemala's particularly dramatic history of both human rights abuses and human rights activism, urban transportation as a human right might seem, in a word, mundane. However, as evidenced in the history of student and worker mobilization around city bus systems detailed above, urban transport in Guatemala City has been anything but apolitical. Additionally, human rights organizations and activists who fought for justice, reparations, and reform in the civil war and post-war period are increasingly dedicating their energies to questions of urban violence, organized crime, and related impunity. This application of the language and the legal tools of human rights to address Guatemala's contemporary "security crisis" provides a precedent for the Procuraduría's efforts to approach violence on buses as an issue of human rights.

In our interview, I asked Carlos what it means, in practice, to define public transportation as a human right. He responded by describing the various facets of the work of the Defensoría del Usuario, which mirror the strategies of the other Defensorías within the Procurador. The work of the office centers, largely, around the *denuncia*, a denunciation or complaint. A denuncia can be presented by a citizen to a higher authority, traditionally the state but increasingly non-state actors as well, against a wide range of actors, from police or state agencies to corporations to neighbors. While the denuncia as a legal mechanism is not specific to human rights in Guatemala, it has been employed widely by organizations and activists to draw public attention to rights violations while demanding some form of justice or reparation. This mechanism, like the citizenship campaigns described above, can be understood as a form of interpellation, calling on city residents to enact a particular kind of citizenship, in this case based on awareness of one's own rights and the ability to make demands on the state.

Shortly after he joined the Procurador, Carlos's office launched public education campaigns to make Guatemala City residents aware of their rights in relation to public transportation, as well channels for denouncing any violations. The Defensoría accepts such denuncias, both in the office as well as through a hotline set up for this purpose. City residents can call the hotline to denounce anything from armed robbery to discrimination to reckless driving or improper bus maintenance. Staff of the Defensoría also collect denuncias through periodic monitoring efforts in strategically chosen sites. For example, during *Semana Santa* (Holy Week), a time in which many Guatemalan families travel, Carlos and his team, along with a group of national police officers, set up a check point along one of the highways heading out of town. They randomly boarded buses, clipboards in hand, and gave passengers the opportunity to sign pre-printed denuncias related to bus overcrowding, improperly maintained brakes, and inflated bus fares imposed during the holiday season.

Carlos proudly explained that in the three months before he joined the Defensoría, only 20 denuncias were registered. Over the following nine months, under his direction, the office registered 900 denuncias, and by the time I interviewed Carlos in June the count for 2014 was up to 3,800 denuncias. While the majority of Carlos's time and energy is devoted to addressing violence on city buses, including driver assassinations and the emerging phenomenon of *secuestros* or kidnapping of buses, the great majority of these denuncias are related to issues such as mechanical safety and bus overcrowding. In explaining the high proportion of denuncias focused on these more "mundane" sorts of rights violations, Carlos insists on two points. First, that city residents have a human right to transportation that is both *safe* and *dignified*. Hundreds of residents die every year in

traffic accidents in and around the city, most of which could have been prevented by appropriate bus upkeep and more careful driving. Additionally, for the thousands of residents who rely on red buses as their primary form of transportation, being forced to stand in a crowded aisle for several hours per day or to pay illegally inflated fares is a violation of their basic human dignity. In our conversations as well as in his public communications, Carlos is at pains to stress the ways in which these issues that form part of Guatemala City's longer-term transportation crisis shape the lives, livelihoods, and wellbeing of residents. Just as importantly, he emphasizes the importance of what he calls a "culture of denuncias," the general awareness that one has rights, the conviction that these rights should be respected, and the knowledge and ability to seek out the proper channel to protest rights violations. In Guatemala, he suggests, 36 years of civil war and state violence and ongoing violence and impunity have left people generally scared, mistrustful, and suspicious, and education is needed to foment a "culture" in which Guatemalans both demand respect for their own rights and defend those of others.<sup>14</sup> In this understanding, the act of denouncing violations is valuable for those who participate, regardless of the content or the results.

While the vast majority of denuncias focus on these more mundane types of violations, people do come to the Defensoría office or call the hotline to report incidents of crime and violence on buses. Over the past few months, several passengers who were onboard buses during armed robberies have called the hotline and the Defensoría has

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<sup>14</sup> I have heard similar comments about the deficits of Guatemala's "postwar citizenship culture" from almost every politician or public official I have spoken with, and several researchers, teachers and business owners. Such statements, in addition to pathologizing the effects of war and violence, are problematic for their positioning of the speaker (educated professional) outside of a dynamic that is implicitly understood to apply to those who were most directly victimized during the civil war (rural indigenous people, many of whom have now joined the ranks of the urban poor.)

been able to follow up with the police and the Ministerio Publico to push for a more immediate response and thorough investigation. The Defensoría has collaborated with investigators and prosecutors, using information drawn from denuncias, in the successful apprehension of at least a few bus robbers. What has proven more of a challenge for the Defensoría's staff is intervention in precisely the phenomena that most concerns them, the extortion and assassination of drivers. A few bus drivers have come to the Defensoría seeking to file a denuncia against extortionists. Such actions expose bus drivers, while the extreme difficulty in identifying and prosecuting those behind extortion schemes, due in part to the complexity of the powerful interests involved, as well as the inability of the Procurador to offer immediate and effective forms of protection to these drivers, limits what the Defensoría can do to help them if they chose to come forward. It is of little surprise, then, that so few do. This dilemma highlights the vulnerability of drivers who, as the principal victims of violence on buses, have few mechanisms at their disposal for demanding respect for their rights to either security or justice. Such obstacles to the Defensoría's work point to some potential limits to the human rights model of public denuncias, developed largely to address human rights violation by the state, in addressing the decentralized networks of state and non-state actors responsible for much of contemporary violence in Guatemala City.

## **Conclusion: Rights and responsibilities**

The citizenship campaigns and the work of the Defensoría described above represent distinct approaches to resolving Guatemala City's contemporary "transportation crisis." Both campaigns propose solutions to crime and violence related to shifts in "culture," understood as a shared set of civic values, attitudes, and behaviors (Compromiso Ciudadana 2011:4). However, the form of these intended shifts and the hopes for results are distinct. The municipal government's "¡Modernízate!" campaign and Compromiso Ciudadana's Plan Guatemala 2020+ call on residents to transform themselves from city residents to municipal citizens by taking personal responsibility for their city and its bus systems. By learning and practicing certain behaviors associated with modern citizenship, such as boarding buses in an orderly fashion, not sharing one's personal prepayment card with others, and reporting suspicious activity to the proper authorities, residents can do their part to make buses more secure. It is important to note that this conception of citizenship, while it employs the language of empowerment and responsibility, is quite distinct from those evident in neighborhood self-defense patrols (Goldstein 2012; Sieder 2011) or even the hiring of private security guards (Caldeira 2000; Dinzey-Flores 2010; O'Neill et al 2011). Despite all the rhetoric of citizens transforming their city, this is a highly centralized and state-centric vision of security that asks residents not to take their safety into their own hands, but rather to behave in such a way as to facilitate, rather than impede, the efficient functioning of state security



measures. The modern citizenship culture proposed by these campaigns, then, is largely a culture of following the rules, of respecting authority, and of maintaining minimum standards of order and hygiene.

The Defensoría, in contrast, is attempting to foment a culture of citizenship in which Guatemalans recognize their own rights and their ability and responsibility to make demands upon the state. The state here is not assumed to be the guarantor of security and development, but rather a fragmented and complex institution with the potential to both defend and undermine human rights, in need of constant vigilance and prodding by both citizens and their advocates. Additionally, while the citizenship campaigns above celebrate diversity through their images of bus users, their conception of citizenship culture leaves little space for difference in relation to engagement with public transportation systems. In contrast, the location of the Defensoría del Usuario inside the Procurador and its close interaction with the other Defensorías, including Defensorías of Women, Older Adults, and People with Disabilities, has allowed for a more explicit focus on how age, gender, ethnicity, and ability shape both the experiences and needs of transportation users.

In this paper I have outlined three distinct approaches to violent crime on buses in Guatemala City and other longstanding problems with the city's transportation systems. This analysis highlights both the techniques and the underlying logics at work in these state and civil society projects: The Transmetro and Transurbano projects employ varying proportions of technical interventions and political negotiation and compromise in order to display a strong state response to crime on buses while simultaneously placating private business; citizenship campaigns led by the municipal government and civil

society groups use billboards and other forms of public media to call on citizens to take responsibility to act in a way that facilitates these state projects; and the Defensoría del Usuario the mechanism of denuncias to empower citizens to make demands on the state based in a conception of safety as a human rights. All three of these projects work to mobilize non-state actors, from city residents to private businesses, while maintaining a central role for the state vision of secure transportation.

Taken together, these projects reveal a range of conceptualizations of security, from the absence of crime in delimited spaces to the provision of protections by the state. They also reveal distinct ways in which rights and responsibilities are allocated within security projects. The Transmetro and Transurbano systems themselves, as major infrastructure projects, are assumed to be the responsibility of the municipal and national governments, with city residents receiving the benefits. However, the projects' accompanying citizenship campaigns call on city residents to take an active role in assuring the functioning of the system and by extension their own security. Similarly, while organizations such as Compromiso Ciudadano focus on the responsibilities of residents for transforming their city, they also call on the municipal government to comply with its own responsibilities, principally related to infrastructure and urban development. In these cases we see an idealized division of labor, with the state providing infrastructure that facilitates security while citizens do their part by behaving in ways that keep themselves and their fellow citizens safe. In the case of the Defensoría, city residents, including bus drivers and riders, are to hold the state responsible by presenting denuncias, This very process places responsibility on residents themselves for ensuring that the state complies with its responsibilities. What this analysis reveals, then, are not

straightforward divisions, either between state and civil society projects or between conceptualizations of security as right or security as responsibility. Rather, efforts to address violence on Guatemala City buses reveal an intertwining, within and between specific projects, of distinct techniques and visions of security and how it can be achieved.

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