

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In *All the Names*, José Saramago conjures the labyrinthine archives of an unnamed city, its grim Central Registry of Births, Marriages, and Deaths. The registry's musty depths are populated only by an archon—the all-powerful Registrar—and the beleaguered clerks at his service. Such was the abiding disorder and dereliction there that from time to time a bumbling researcher would fall victim to the archives; one lost soul, a genealogist unable to find his way back to the main desk, was only discovered, “almost miraculously, after a week, starving, thirsty, exhausted, delirious, having survived thanks to the desperate measure of ingesting enormous quantities of old documents.” In response, the Registrar, who had written the wayward genealogist off as dead, did what bureaucrats do best: he issued an internal order. Thereafter, to avoid other such unsavory incidents, it would be “obligatory, at the risk of incurring a fine and a suspension of salary, for everyone going into the archive of the dead to make use of Ariadne’s thread.”²¹

The notion of Ariadne’s thread ties this work together in several ways. As a methodology intended precisely for solving problems that suggest multiple manners of proceeding, it pushed me to embrace inter- and multidisciplinary approaches in tackling the National Police archives as a site of analysis. As a metaphor, it could not be better suited to thinking about a sprawling warren of records whose rescuers call its decaying storage facility *el laberinto* (while the facility’s former occupants, who used the space as a torture and detention center, termed it *la isla*). Above all, though, the idea of Ariadne’s thread serves me best as a way of visualizing the lifeline—constituted by a dense network of relationships, love, and solidarity—that has enabled me to navigate the archives of the dead.

First, I thank the archivists, who too often are left for last and upon whose perspectives and labor this project relied. Chief among them were Thelma Porres and her staff at the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica; Thelma Mayen de Pérez and her staff at the archives of the Tipografía Nacional; Anna Carla Ericastilla, the director of the Archivo General de Centroamérica, a voice of reason and a friend; and, at the National Police archives,

Ingrid Molina and Lizbeth Barrientos. Anna Carla, Ingrid, and Lizbeth were themselves actors in the story I am about to tell, but their good sense and ideas also contributed to my approach in telling it. And Trudy Huskamp Peterson—tireless and engaged, the globetrotting gonzo archivist extraordinaire—enriched this study in more ways than I can name. I hope she will forgive the artistic license I have taken over the years in translating her discipline’s foundational concepts both into Spanish and into this book.

In Guatemala, I was fortunate to draw upon the expertise of still more wise women: Tani Adams and Marcie Mersky, who gave me thoughtful advice at the early stages of this project, and Kate Doyle, a valued comrade and mentor without whom I would never have been granted anything approaching the access I enjoyed to the police archives. The fact that the Project’s leaders accepted this stranger into their midst as warmly as they did, on Kate’s voucher alone, is a testament to the invaluable work done by Kate and her colleagues at the National Security Archive. At the Project, many of those individuals whose commitment and friendship I most appreciate cannot be named here for confidentiality reasons. But some can: Gustavo Meoño and Carla Villagrán let me join their fledgling archival rescue initiative in early 2006, granting me nearly unfettered access to the internal workings of the Project along with their trust, which this work hopefully bears out. Alberto Fuentes urged me to focus on young workers’ experiences of laboring in the archives. Enmy Morán provided an example of how academic historians’ skills can be brought to bear upon contemporary political concerns, and I thank her for her friendship. Most of all, I thank the Project’s rank-and-file workers for welcoming me as a *compañera*—especially the members of the 2006 historical investigations team and the 2007 Joint Operations Center table team, alongside whom I worked most closely. I am always moved by their tenacity and dedication to imagining a different future for their country. Other friends and colleagues outside the Project offered ideas, comfort, and camaraderie: Laura Arriaza, Michel Andrade, Edeliberto Cifuentes, Iduvina Hernández, and Mario Castañeda. Thanks, too, to the talented photographer-activists whose images appear in this book: James Rodríguez, Jean-Marie Simon, and Daniel Hernández-Salazar, who work to make visible what Guatemala’s powerful would prefer to obscure.

As I imagined and executed this project, Stuart Schwartz and Carlota McAllister offered constructive criticism, sound advice, and good cheer when it was most needed. Greg Grandin accompanied me on this venture from the moment of its inception, and along the way he taught me about power, about Guatemala, and about engaged scholarship. Michael Denning is a boundless

reservoir of creative thinking and practical ideas, ever ready to turn a writing problem on its head in unexpected ways; I have benefited so much from his engagement with my work. And Gil Joseph is an incomparable mentor, fan, editor, friend, and sage. He was at my side at every step, and I am proud to be part of the generation of historians he has trained. More recently, Silvia Arrom, June Erlick, Joe Tulchin, Liz Oglesby, Jean-Marie Simon, Diane Nelson, and several anonymous peer reviewers read the manuscript and gave generous, indispensable feedback. Dagmar Hovestädt and Günter Bormann facilitated my enlightening visit to the Stasi archives in Berlin. My research and writing were supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the International Dissertation Research Fellowship program at the Social Science Research Council, Yale's Council on Latin American and Iberian Studies, Yale's MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, and the Florence Levy Kay Fellowship in Latin American History at Brandeis University, where I was lucky enough to have Jane Kamensky and Silvia Arrom as mentors. The Harvard University History Department and the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies have been most genial home bases from which to complete the process of crafting this book, a process expertly and empathically guided by the inimitable Valerie Millholland and Gisela Fosado at Duke University Press. Of course, as the refrain goes, any flaws in the final product are mine alone.

In New Haven, where this book was born, I shared dreams, frustrations, and bourbon with dear friends. My warmest thanks go to Caitlin Casey, Steve Prince, Julia Irwin, David Huyssen, Louise Walker, Jesse Franzblau, Alison Bruey, Lisa Pinley Covert, the 2005–2007 members of the Working Group on Globalization and Culture, Jack Hitt, Christopher York, Ezer Vierba, Jeffrey Boyd, the Connecticut Center for a New Economy, and the Graduate Employees and Students' Organization (GESO) at Yale, whose long and ongoing fight for recognition made my graduate school experience both possible and worthwhile. My New York Bureau—Patrick Guyer, Holly Beck, Seth Prins, and company—launched me on many overnight and early-morning flights to Central America. The world's best *suegros*, Susan and René Aramayo, helped me with footnotes (Susan) and cured the archivist's lung with which I would invariably return from Guatemala afflicted (René). Jesse, Louise, Susan, Lisa, and particularly David and Jeffrey read parts of this work in its earlier incarnations and offered a raft of suggestions for its improvement; David also provided critical last-minute help with editing and sources. As for my friends and family from back home in Canada, I thank Kate Lunau, Esmé Webb, Daniel Aldana Cohen, Jonah Gindin, Nick Hune-Brown, Krista Stout, Megan Dunkley, Wayne

Nadler, Lisa Nadler, David Wachsmuth, Sylvie Nicholson, Michael Wernikowski, Maxime Rousseaux, Sophie Rousseaux, Phoebe Rousseaux, and Judith Rae for their love, thoughts, and/or engagement with this project in various forms and at various times. It was Judith who, innocently, first brought me to Guatemala, not knowing at the time that she was setting me upon a much longer journey. And throughout, I have counted on the backing and hearty encouragement of my parents, Howard and Suzanne.

Finally, I thank Carlos Roy Aramayo, whose incomparable intellect, unerring revolutionary ethics, and irrepressible goofiness make every single one of my days better. Always with me as we navigate life, the universe, and everything, Carlos truly is my Ariadne's thread.