

**STABILIZING TECHNOLOGIES, CONFIGURING AN ARMED SOCIAL SELF:
FIREARMS IN POSTAUTHORITARIAN, POSTWAR
GUATEMALAN DEMOCRACY**

by

Camar Díaz-Torres

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Examining Committee:

Kim Fortun, Dissertation Advisor

Nancy Campbell, Member

Edward J. Woodhouse, Member

Tamar Gordon, Member

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
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Abstract

The aim of this study is to provide new understanding of how technologies are stabilized in society and how technologies are implicated in the development of democratic citizenship and its alternatives. The specific focus is on how firearms are culturally conceived, legalized, and used in the postauthoritarian and postwar context of Guatemala. Oriented by previous work in the ethnography of technology, the study is based on extended fieldwork in Guatemala involving participant observation, document review, and interviews with people variously positioned in Guatemalan society—including gun aficionados, gun control advocates, and people concerned about personal security. The study illustrates that cultural, legal, and material mechanisms stabilize the presence of firearms in contemporary Guatemala. Theoretically, this work advances understandings of how cultural practices and a seemingly delimited law on firearms have very broad social and cultural implications, the most immediate being the constitution of both an “armed social self”—an identity given to Guatemalan society as a whole—and “armed citizenship.” This dissertation’s analysis moves beyond the dominant discourses of firearms associated with crime and deaths caused with guns in order to broaden discussions of the role of firearms in creating unique forms of citizenship, security, and democracy in Guatemala. Results of this study can inform efforts to understand and build democracy in varied postwar, postauthoritarian contexts by highlighting the profound significance of the laws and culture built up around firearms.