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The Primacy of Larger Truths

Rigoberta Menchú and the Tradition of Native Testimony in Guatemala

W. George Lovell and Christopher H. Lutz

There can rarely be a definitive version of the past and rarely a
particular truth, only the larger truths of existence.

—Meryl Simonds, *The Lion in the Room Next Door* (1999)

Like many whose work pertains to Guatemala, we find ourselves not only puzzled by the manner in which David Stoll (1999) approaches the testimony of Rigoberta Menchú (1984) but also perplexed that Stoll's dissection of the debatable details of one individual's life serves to divert attention from the undeniable deaths of thousands of others. Although the corrosive effects of the latter are cause for regret, it is the former disposition that we address here. Stoll appears to believe that, unless Menchú's version of certain events and circumstances can withstand being subjected to the magnifying glass of social-science inquiry, any flaws or inconsistencies uncovered in the course of the exercise discredit the testimony in question, cast doubt over its authenticity, and thus render it suspect. It then becomes possible for the entire narrative to be dismissed as mere fabrication or perhaps even lies, especially at the hands of the narrator's adversaries. All this may be far removed from Stoll's original intentions, whatever they are, but it constitutes an inevitable outcome in a country as politically fraught and divided as Guatemala. Rather surprisingly for an anthropologist whose earlier research on Ixil country (Stoll 1993) demonstrates a more grounded appreciation of the past, Stoll seems unconcerned in his analysis with the historical

tradition in which Menchú's testimony is rooted and in which it can readily be contextualized in order to be evaluated more appropriately.

Some of the features that Stoll identifies as problematical in Menchú's testimony, we observe, have antecedents in native texts extant for the sixteenth century, indeed, surface throughout as among their inherent characteristics, the properties of their words. These features include: (1) factual discrepancies or contradictions; (2) questions of authority and representation; (3) the purposeful act of simplifying, embellishing, improvising, and orchestrating what is being said in order to emphasize specific points and to downplay or conceal others, but not to alter the substance of what actually happened; and (4) political protest that is both conscious and overt, fueled by the need to speak out against injustice and repression in an attempt to have one's rights respected. Although a comprehensive survey of the ethnohistorical literature is beyond the scope of our discussion—the work of Robert Carmack (1973), which we highlight prominently, remains the single most insightful commentary available in English—we will illustrate what we have to say with reference to an array of native sources. None of these sources is as well known as Menchú's is today, but they both prefigure and echo her testimony, at times in a striking fashion. First, however, we must establish the salient frames of our comparative perspective.

The Sixteenth Century and the Twentieth

For Maya peoples in Guatemala, the arrival in 1524 of a Spanish military expedition led by Pedro de Alvarado marked the beginning of a process of conquest that has lasted centuries. Several scholars have commented on the enduring nature of conquest in Guatemala, but few have done so with the clarity and succinctness of the late Oliver La Farge (1947, 100). "While these people undoubtedly suffer from drunkenness," he wrote of the Q'anjoba'les of Santa Eulalia, "one would hesitate to remove the bottle from them until the entire pattern of their lives is changed. They are an introverted people, consumed by internal fires which they cannot or dare not express, eternally chafing under the yoke of conquest, and never for a moment forgetting that they are a conquered people."

La Farge viewed conquest not as a distant, historical experience but as a discernible, present condition. Sol Tax (1952) and the anthropologists Carl Kendall, John Hawkins, and Laurel Bossen (1983) concur, interpret-

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ing native life as a "heritage of conquest" that connects present-day Mayas with their ancestors of centuries ago. Although, to be sure, the forms of this "heritage of conquest" have varied considerably over the years, conquest as a way of life lingers as the central *fact* of life for the five to six million Mayas who today make up roughly half of Guatemala's national population (Lovell and Lutz 1996). To assert otherwise, as Borges once put it, would be "mere statistics," though plenty of these are at hand to counter any credible argument to the contrary.

Just as Menchú's testimony tells of conquest by state terror in the twentieth century, so dozens of native texts record conquest by imperial terror in the sixteenth. For what he calls "Quichean Civilization," Carmack (1973, 24-79) identifies four different categories of native testimony written in the sixteenth century, a total of thirty-nine texts in all. The most important documents, he informs us, "appear to have been based upon prehispanic historical and cultural traditions, which in several cases must have been transcribed in native codices." Carmack concludes that these documents "were written by descendants of the most important ruling lines in prehispanic highland Guatemala, and thus express the 'official' versions of native history."

Although Menchú's testimony has no elite origins beyond "*primero básico*" or grade-seven education, and certainly no "official" seal of approval, its fundamental purpose is the same as many of the Quichean documents that Carmack analyzes—to put memory to work so as to produce a record of the past, furnish an account of the present, and preserve both for the benefit and betterment of future generations. The need to tell one's story comes about in myriad ways and for countless different reasons, but the need becomes more urgent when calamity is the order of the day, when one's very survival is threatened. The Commission for Historical Clarification (1999, 85-86) has established that, during thirty-five years of civil war between 1962 and 1996, some two hundred thousand people (83.33 percent of them Mayas) lost their lives in Guatemala, a disconcerting number of them in horrific massacres carried out by the national armed forces, whom the truth commission holds responsible for 93 percent of recorded human rights violations. Menchú's urge to communicate what was happening to her people arose from, and must be seen in, the murderous context of that conflict. Her testimony is particularly important, for it broke the eerie silence imposed by the fear and violence of those terrible years.

Similarly, the catastrophe that befell Maya populations in the sixteenth century was unleashed by Spanish invasion of their territory, an invasion that resulted almost immediately in the outbreak of hostilities. The devastation and loss of life unleashed by a prolonged war of conquest also triggered an outpouring of testimony, which is again directly linked to the appalling extent of the tragedy in which Guatemalan Indians found themselves. We reckon, for instance, that Maya numbers fell from around two million at contact in 1520 to around 135,000 in 1600 from a combination of conquest-related factors, among them armed confrontation, culture shock, ruthless exploitation, forced migration, and especially the impact of Old World diseases on an immunologically vulnerable native population (Lovell and Lutz 1996). How could the plight of those caught up in such a traumatic spiral of depopulation fail to capture the attention of those charged with recording native history? As with Menchú, Indians in the early colonial period were moved to put into words a record of what life was like under the rule of their oppressors.

Both the sixteenth century and the twentieth thus represent junctures when the disruptive experience of violent conquest spurred native testimony. Let us now consider some of the features connecting Menchú's narrative with the narratives of her K'iche' forebears and those of other relevant actors engaged in constructing vital, if imperfect, memories of what befell them. We will focus our attention more on the historical sources in the hope of providing the reader with a better appreciation of the origins and traditions of native testimony.

Were the K'iche' Kings Hanged or Burned?

Stoll (1999, 63–70) links a good deal of his argument, and attributes much of his being disquieted by Menchú's testimony in the first place, to the depiction in *I, Rigoberta Menchú* of the killing in 1979 of the narrator's sixteen-year-old brother, Petrocinio. Menchú (1984, 176–79) describes it thus:

The lorry with the tortured came in. They started to take them out one by one. . . . Each of the tortured had different wounds. . . . but my mother recognized her son, my little brother, among them. . . . My brother was very badly tortured, he could hardly stand up. . . . He was cut in various places. His head was shaved and slashed. He had no nails. He had no soles to his feet. The earlier wounds were suppurating from infection. . . . I found it impossible to concentrate, seeing that this could be. You could

only think that these were hurt. . . . I had felt to arrive at this unrecoverable. She almost risked her own life for other brothers and my father. . . . herself. . . . The captain said, "there's another one yet. . . ." They put petrol on them; and then the

During fieldwork in which the episode, Stoll (1999, 69) re-story of prisoners being buried. . . . vested were quizzical looks." gathered while he was investigating rates with information contained in 1980, distributed by the Dem army murdered a number of following scene:

From a military truck they took one. I think there were several of the people, to say that [the dead] they were from San Miguel. . . . afraid, to make an example. . . . But he was already dead; he

Stoll himself acknowledges a group of people killed at brother" (70).

Just as oral testimony re be plagued by factual discrepancies. . . . nohistorical record of the episode for understanding Maya history. *Memorial de Sololá*, allow us to see "major documents" in the eyes of the killing of Petrocinio, did not. . . . executed two K'iche' rulers. . . . cinos 1950, 230) runs: "Oxi Dog], the twelfth generation. . . . when Donadiú came, and

In Nahuatl, the language "the Sun" and is the name

only think that these were human beings and what pain those bodies had felt to arrive at this unrecognizable state. . . . My mother wept. She almost risked her own life by going to embrace my brother. My other brothers and my father held her back so she wouldn't endanger herself. . . . The captain said, "This isn't the last of their punishments, there's another one yet. . . ." They lined up the tortured and poured petrol on them; and then the soldiers set fire to each one of them.

During fieldwork in which he interviewed a number of people about the episode, Stoll (1999, 69) recounts that "when I brought up Rigoberta's story of prisoners being burned alive in the plaza of Chajul, all I harvested were quizzical looks." Stoll favors another version of events, one gathered while he was investigating the affair and which he corroborates with information contained in an "Open Letter," dated January 31, 1980, distributed by the Democratic Front Against Repression. After the army murdered a number of guerrilla suspects, one man recalls the following scene:

From a military truck they threw down the cadavers, one by one, one by one. I think there were seven. They rang the church bell and summoned the people, to say that [the dead] were guerrillas. The army also said that they were from San Miguel Uspantán. This was done to make the people afraid, to make an example [of the victims]. . . . Yes, they burned a body. But he was already dead; he wasn't alive. (Stoll 1999, 68-69)

Stoll himself acknowledges that, "as best anyone can determine," the group of people killed at Chajul "included her [Menchú's] younger brother" (70).

Just as oral testimony recoverable in the late twentieth century may be plagued by factual discrepancies or contradictions, so too is the ethnohistorical record of the early sixteenth. Two of our most valued sources for understanding Maya history and culture, the *Popol Vuh* and the *Memorial de Sololá*, allow us to reflect on one case in point. These "major documents" in the eyes of Carmack, as with Stoll versus Menchú on the killing of Petrocinio, differ on the means by which Pedro de Alvarado executed two K'iche' rulers. One English edition of the *Popol Vuh* (Re-cinos 1950, 230) runs: "Oxib-Queh [Three Deer] and Beleheb-Tzi [Nine Dog], the twelfth generation of kings. These were those who reigned when Donadiú came, and who were hanged by the Spaniards."

In Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, Donadiú or Tonatiuh means "the Sun" and is the name that several early sources give for Alvarado,

on account of his fair complexion and blond hair. Another English edition of *The Book of the Dawn of Life* (Tedlock 1985) reads: "Three Deer and Nine Dog, in the twelfth generation of lords. And they were ruling when Tonatiuh arrived. They were hanged by the Castilian people."

The *Memorial de Sololá*, also known as the *Annals of the Cakchiquels*, records the K'iche' kings, identified as Ahpop and Ahpop Qamahay, as having been tortured and burned at the stake, not hanged. Adrián Reinos and Delia Goetz (1953, 119–20) render the incident as follows:

On the day 1 Ganel [February 20, 1524] the Quichés were destroyed by the Spaniards. Their chief, he who was called Tunatiuh Avilantaro, conquered all the people. Their faces were not known before that time.

Having arrived at Xelahub [Quetzaltenango], they defeated the Quichés; all the Quichés who had gone out to meet the Spaniards were exterminated.

Then [the Spaniards] went forth to the city of Gumarcaah [Utatlán], where they were received by the kings, the Ahpop and the Ahpop Qamahay, and the Quichés paid them tribute. Soon the kings were tortured by Tunatiuh.

On the day 4 Qat [March 7, 1524] the kings Ahpop and Ahpop Qamahay were burned by Tunatiuh. The heart of Tunatiuh was without compassion for the people during the war.

Writing to his commander in chief in Mexico, Hernán Cortés, a month later from Gumarcaah, Alvarado himself provides us with an account of the incident that matches the *Memorial de Sololá* version of the killing of the kings, not that of the *Popol Vuh*. Sedley J. Mackie (1924, 62–63) translates the conquistador as stating:

And seeing that by fire and sword I might bring these people to the service of His Majesty, I determined to burn the chiefs, who, at the time that I wanted to burn them, told me, as it will appear in their confessions, that they were the ones who had ordered the war against me and were the ones also who made it. They told me about the way they were to do so, to burn me in the city, and that with this thought in their minds they had brought me there, and that they had ordered their vassals not to come and give obedience to our Lord and Emperor, nor help us, nor do anything else that was right. And as I knew them to have such a bad disposition towards the service of His Majesty, and to insure the good and peace of this land, I burnt them, and sent to burn the town and to destroy it, for it is a very strong and dangerous place, that more resembles a robbers' stronghold than a city.

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Mexico, Hernán Cortés, a month provides us with an account of the *Historial de Sololá* version of the *Popol Vuh*. Sedley J. Mackie (1924, 1930):

bringing these people to the chiefs, who, at the time will appear in their confessions, the war against me and were about the way they were to do as thought in their minds they ordered their vassals not to help the Emperor, nor help us, nor do them to have such a bad destiny, and to insure the good of the town and to burn the town and to take place, that more resembles

The question we would put to Stoll is this: Does it matter whether the Guatemalan army shot Menchú's brother or torched him alive, any more than whether Alvarado had the K'iche' kings hanged or burned? Does it matter that one source of information says one thing and another something slightly different? Is not the most pertinent piece of information the incontestable fact that murder took place for political reasons in an atmosphere of terror that all parties not only agree upon but can also describe with as much convergence as divergence of opinion?

Stoll (1999, 70) concedes that "in and of itself, the contrast between Rigoberta's account and everyone else's is not very significant," but he goes on to assert that "the important point is that her story, here and at other critical junctures, is not the eyewitness account that it purports to be." Stoll's sense of what "the important point is" raises our next query. Does Menchú actually claim that her testimony is exclusively an eyewitness account, any more than did scores of native sources in the sixteenth century?

Speaking for All Poor Guatemalans

Questions of authority and representation are difficult ones to resolve when dealing with most texts, but more so with ones that have oral origins, as Menchú's certainly does, or in all likelihood are offshoots of an oral tradition, as are many sixteenth-century native documents. Let us consider Menchú's claim to authority and representativeness first.

Stoll lifts the title of his book from the opening lines of Menchú's testimony (1984, 1), in which the protagonist states:

My name is Rigoberta Menchú. I am twenty-three years old. This is my testimony. I didn't learn it from a book and I didn't learn it alone. I'd like to stress that it's not only *my* life, it's also the testimony of my people. It's hard for me to remember everything that's happened to me in my life since there have been many very bad times but, yes, moments of joy as well. The important thing is that what has happened to me has happened to many other people too: My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people.

Rather than establish the worth of her testimony purely on the basis of eyewitness credentials, we contend that Menchú's words make it clear that the narrative strategy she is about to adopt leans as much on collective memory as individual recall. "It's not only *my* life," she takes pains

to stress, "it's also the testimony of my people." Menchú reiterates this essential point not once—"What has happened to me has happened to many other people too"—but twice: "My personal experience is the reality of a whole people." The repetition of an idea, expressed for emphasis and for effect in slightly different ways, is a standard rhetorical tactic, in this case deployed unequivocally to establish not only personal but also communal validity. The communal validity of Menchú's words, having been made quite apparent at the outset of her testimony, in our eyes makes redundant, or at least minimizes, the relevance of Stoll's elaborate exercise in fact checking, which he conducts as if Menchú's account was *only* cast as that of one eyewitness.

Although the historical record allows us to recover the names of certain individuals as being the ones who actually penned native testimonies in the sixteenth century, it is usually the case that what is documented as having occurred is worded so as to have not individual but group applicability. Consider the following poignant extract from the *Memorial de Sololá*, which may be a description of how smallpox reached and ravaged Guatemala three or four years before the arrival of Alvarado:

It happened that during the twenty-fifth year the plague began, oh, my sons! First they became ill of a cough. They suffered from nosebleeds and illness of the bladder. It was truly terrible, the number of dead there were in that period. The prince *Vakaki Ahmak* died then. Little by little heavy shadows and black night enveloped our fathers and grandfathers and us also, oh, my sons! when the plague raged.

It was in truth terrible, the number of dead among the people. The people could not in any way control the sickness.

Great was the stench of the dead. After our fathers and grandfathers succumbed, half of the people fled to the fields. The dogs and the vultures devoured the bodies. The mortality was terrible. Your grandfathers died, and with them died the son of the king and his brothers and kinsmen. So it was that we became orphans, oh, my sons! So we became when we were young. All of us were thus. We were born to die! (Recinos and Goetz 1953, 115-16)

Use of a collective voice to capture a collective lot is a feature of several other native texts besides the *Memorial de Sololá*, among them a genre Carmack identifies as *titulos*. These "titles" were often presented, long after they were written, as "evidence" in land disputes, frequently between Indian communities. Carmack (1973, 19) observes that *titulos* were written "primarily for legal and political purposes." The original

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reason for penning *títulos* was to defend the interests of elite Maya lineages. In a curious twist of fate, however, their subsequent use as land titles benefited not just the nobility but the common folk as well, especially those who worked the land and who depended on it to meet their tributary obligations.

Unlike *títulos* in which members of an elite make reference to pre-Hispanic ancestors in order to establish their status and authority, the composers of the Nahuatl *memorias* had lost a sense of association with, or awareness of, their pre-Conquest origins. This unusual situation came about, in part, because some members of the communities in question, which were located on the margins or in the vicinity of Santiago de Guatemala, were immigrants or the descendants of immigrants who had fought alongside Alvarado as Mexican auxiliaries. Most residents of these particular *barrios* and *pueblos*, however, were former slaves or the descendants of slaves held by Alvarado or by his companions in conquest between the mid-1520s and emancipation around 1550.

A good example of elite invocation of the past is the *Título Tamub* from the Totonicapán area, identified as such by Carmack (1973, 31–32) but referred to by Recinos (1957, 25ff.) as the "Historia Quiché de Don Juan de Torres." This document alludes to "migrations by ancestors from the East" and describes lineage genealogy in some detail. On the other hand, only a few communities for which we have *memorias* could recall the different towns, regions, and language groups from which their pre-Conquest ancestors originated. The authors of the *memorias* make no grandiose claims, as their elite counterparts often do, but instead speak to us from the heart in simple but poetic language. They do not hesitate, as elected members of town councils or *cabildos*, to restrict themselves to their own grievances but instead seek to draw attention to the suffering of elderly widows, orphaned children, and the physically impaired. The *memorias* thus represent, as in our time do the testimonies of Menchú and her Popti' colleague Victor Montejo (1987), a cry from the humble depths of society. It is not without hazard, we concede, but it is possible for texts to be put together that speak, if not for *all* poor Guatemalans, then for a significant number of them, in a valid collective voice.

Accommodating Textual Distortions

Stoll (1999, x–xi) goes to painstaking lengths in his scrutiny of Menchú's testimony to highlight what he correctly identifies, among a plethora

of other narrative conventions, as the "condensing," "concealing," "revising," "glossing over," or "filtering out" of information. Why, as a diligent researcher who has spent time not only interviewing in the field but also poring over archival documents, he should be surprised by such tendencies we find rather odd. Even a cursory examination of the historical record indicates (1) a notable incidence of the practice and (2) the need to accommodate such distortions as an integral part of the research process, especially if we wish to know more about native points of view and thus gain a better appreciation of how what happened in history might look through their eyes.

In order to engage a more indigenous perspective, let us now examine some historiographical issues in terms of changes that may have had an impact on how the ancestors of Mayas such as Menchú viewed and articulated their sense of the past. Why might those who wrote native history more than four hundred years ago not necessarily have followed the methodologies used by colonial-period, non-Indian chroniclers, let alone modern social scientists?

Carmack points out the existence in K'iche' society, up to the time of the Spanish Conquest, of a scholarly community known as *aj tz'ibab*. These men of letters were priest-historians trained to read, interpret, and write sacred texts and calendars. After the arrival of the Spaniards, the *aj tz'ibab* did not maintain their prestigious social position for long. Having witnessed what they held to be pagan excesses among the Aztecs and other Mexican peoples, Spanish clergymen set out to destroy all aspects of Maya religious practice. Their acts of destruction included (1) tearing down temples and altars, as noted by Carmack (1973, 301) and Tzaquitza Zapata (1993, 25) in the *Título C'oyoi'* or *Coyoy*; (2) destroying sacred texts, as noted by Carmack (1973, 17), who cites as his source Las Casas (1958, 2:348); and (3) hunting down and persecuting all those whom the invaders considered practitioners of a demonized religion, among whom were the *aj tz'ibab*. Carmack (1973, 17) puts it succinctly thus: "Shortly after the conquest," he writes, the *aj tz'ibab* "ceased to function in the way they had before the conquest."

Once the practice of training "historians" was curtailed—it was a Kaqchikel custom also, we should note—the loss must have had a serious impact on the accuracy and care with which Maya authors later wrote *titulos*, *memorias*, and *relaciones*. The disappearance of professionals such

as the *aj tz'ibab* would surely have passed down through the generations.

Mercedes de la Garza (1975, 110) notes that many of the *titulos* and *relaciones* codices were destroyed and the preservation of historical memory could not be done. "But we have information of their ancient customs," she writes. "According to de la Garza, (1) learned native elders passed their knowledge on to their children, who recorded what had been told to them. (2) Indians learned to write in their own languages, producing new texts based on previous ones. Although, to be sure, these cultures were destroyed intensely in Mexico, their importance was not lost. But although "historical memory" was not lost, it came with the continuity of an oral tradition and the discipline and precision of *aj tz'ibab*.

A striking exception, however, was the case of Francisco Hernández Arana (ca. 1500–1550), ruler of the Xajil lineage, who died of a fatal illness quoted earlier as well as a chronicler of the Spanish Conquest. Hernández Arana, he had witnessed, as long ago as the late sixteenth century, particular attention to dates and events, and his scrutiny far better than most of his contemporaries. Some examples of the latter are given by Conquest authors who seem to have known him.

Like Hernández Arana, most of the *aj tz'ibab* were age or clan leaders who received their education from the friars in the rudiments of the generation of scribes, with few exceptions. It was often a lapse of two decades between the death of the *aj tz'ibab* and the appearance of a new generation of scribes, which had been lost in the hiatus.

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as the *aj tz'ibab* would surely have affected how Maya oral tradition was passed down through the generations.

Mercedes de la Garza (1975, 110–11), however, notes that "[even] if the codices were destroyed and the priests persecuted and murdered, Maya historical memory could not be destroyed, [and] precisely because of it, we have information of their ancient history, their myths, and their customs." According to de la Garza, "historic memory" did *not* die because (1) learned native elders passed their knowledge on to Spanish friars, who recorded what had been told to them in their chronicles; and (2) some Indians learned to write in their own languages using the Latin alphabet, producing new texts based on pre-Hispanic codices and oral traditions. Although, to be sure, these cultural processes were at work far more intensely in Mexico, their importance in Guatemala cannot be disputed. But although "historical memory" may have lived on, the training that came with the continuity of an unbroken tradition, as well as the discipline and precision of *aj tz'ibab* composition, was seriously eroded.

A striking exception, however, is the author of the *Memorial de Sololá*, Francisco Hernández Arana (ca. 1505–ca. 82), grandson of a Kaqchikel ruler of the Xajil lineage, who was an eyewitness to the outbreak of sickness quoted earlier as well as other events leading up to, and following, the Spanish Conquest. Hernández Arana began to record the events he had witnessed, as long ago as sixty years earlier, in the 1570s, paying particular attention to dates and details. His text holds up to critical scrutiny far better than most other surviving documents. Before we furnish some examples of the latter, a comment about who these new post-Conquest authors were seems appropriate.

Like Hernández Arana, most post-Conquest Maya authors were lineage or clan leaders who received instruction from Franciscan or Dominican friars in the rudiments of European forms of writing. This new generation of scribes, with few exceptions, only began to be taught how to read and write in native languages in the 1540s. This means that there was often a lapse of two decades between the destruction of the *aj tz'ibab* and the appearance of a new historiographic order. Much would have been lost in the hiatus.

The loss, of course, was compounded by the fact that Indians now had to function in a radically different political setting. The *aj tz'ibab* and other such priest-historians belonged to elite groups who governed

independent political realms. Newly formed native leaders cum authors, on the other hand, were placed in charge of perhaps only a town and its surrounding territory, and were always beholden to Spanish civil and religious authorities. Although vestiges of pre-Hispanic social organization survived, any sense of exercising absolute control over land and resources soon evaporated. Thus the challenge for native authors frequently involved making a case for the importance of their particular lineage or social group by any means possible, in order to convince Spanish authorities that their demands for recognition were sound and just. Carmack (1973, 19–20) notes:

Most documents refer to either local rights of administration or to rights of tribute. Administration rights, usually, were based on mythological associations between the land and the local groups, or on mere occupancy, in which case land boundaries and markers were given. Tribute rights were based on narration of the conquest of the territory and subsequent instances of tribute payment by the subjected peoples.

He adds:

Besides land claims, some documents contain claims to special cacique privileges given by the Crown to *señores naturales* (members of the aboriginal ruling stratum, though not priests). Most claims were made in the decade of 1550–1560, possibly in response to the Crown's attempt to limit the tribute rights and other privileges of Indian caciques. . . . Evidently, under increasing pressure for acceptable verification of ties with prehispanic nobility, the Spanish courts began to demand of the caciques special native documents on their genealogy and history. (19–20)

One such special K'iche' document Recinos (1957, 74–91) refers to as the "Títulos de la casa Ixquín-Nehaib, señora del territorio de Otzoyá," which Carmack, whose designation for this same document we follow, calls "Nijaib I." It belongs to a set of four titles that Carmack reckons "contain claims to prehispanic territorial holdings by the Nijaib branch of the Quiche" (32). *Nijaib I* records elaborate information on lineage matters and on strategic aspects of K'iche' conquest, but some of its contents are difficult to accept at face value.

Without specifying a date, the document claims that, during the reign of Moctezuma, word was sent to "our ancestors" that they pay tribute to the Aztec ruler. This they did, or so asserts the document: "They sent many quetzal feathers, gold, emeralds, pearls, diamonds, cacao, *pataxte* [white cacao] as well as cloths, everything that here they gave to the lead-

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ers, the same things they sent to Moctezuma in Tlaxcala, which is where the said Moctezuma was" (Recinos 1957, 84). Recinos rightly queried the veracity of this claim, observing that no other document known to him registers that the K'iche' ever paid tribute to Moctezuma. Carmack, however, identified at least one other such case years after Recinos was investigating the topic. If, indeed, tribute was paid to Moctezuma, why wouldn't this notable fact be mentioned in other more important K'iche' sources? Also, why wouldn't mention of K'iche' tributary status be included in Mexican codices that recorded the tribute furnished by distant peoples? Would the K'iche' have had easy access to all the items listed, especially diamonds and emeralds? And what was Moctezuma up to in Tlaxcala, a city well known to be hostile to the Aztecs, rather than seeing to affairs in his own capital, Tenochtitlán?

Nijaib I also claims, contrary to a host of other sources, that "for many years the K'iche' were not involved in acts of conquests, staying instead in their town and paying tribute to Moctezuma, until the time of the new conquest by the Spaniards and by Don Fernando Cortés and the [one] they call *Tunadiú*." The document goes on to state that, in 1512, Moctezuma sent a messenger, Uitzitzil, to the K'iche', advising them that the Spanish Conquest was about to begin and that they should take all necessary measures in order to defend themselves. Other peoples were advised to follow suit. According to this account (Recinos 1957, 84-85), the lords of Uatlán "raised their banners" and began preparations for war with the invaders. Time here is telescoped and events distorted to have us believe that the K'iche' were warned of the Spanish Conquest more than a decade before Alvarado invaded Guatemala and some seven years before Hernán Cortés even reached Mexico.

In making claims regarding, first, payment of tribute and, second, being in contact with Moctezuma about events that had not yet occurred, the purpose is clearly to associate the ancestors of the writer(s) with the glory that once was Moctezuma and the Aztec empire. Similar claims of close ties between the K'iche' and the Aztecs, including a tributary relationship, surface in the "Buenabaj Pictorials" from Momostenango. An inscription in this document, according to Carmack (1973, 63), makes the "startling statement" that "Moctezuma had married two of his daughters to the Quiché rulers." Carmack interprets this distortion as illustrating a desire to "establish the legitimacy of cacique privileges held by the rulers of Momostenango (*Chwa Tzak*) by showing their affiliation with

the ruling line of Utatlán" (Carmack 1973, 63). A map, Carmack tells us, "shows Momostenango to be one link in a chain extending west from Utatlán." The depiction of a Spanish coat of arms, he contends, demonstrates "the acceptance of the Utatlán rulers by the Crown, while the linkage with the house of Moctezuma shows an acceptance of their pre-hispanic nobility and rulership by the Aztecs." However, if Moctezuma arranged for two of his daughters to marry K'iche' rulers, why don't other *títulos* and other documents mention what would have been highly significant links with the Aztecs?

Nijaib I, furthermore, states that four Franciscan friars accompanied Pedro de Alvarado in the conquest. These friars, it is alleged, baptized a number of caciques in the Quetzaltenango area. *Nijaib I* also states that thirteen lineage heads, all recently baptized as Christians, and forty K'iche' soldiers accompanied Alvarado as guides in his campaign of conquest. Rather than seek legitimacy and acceptance through Moctezuma, here it is maintained that the ancestors embraced Christianity quickly and then played a key role in helping Alvarado attain his military goals. Franciscans, despite what the *título* asserts, did *not* enter Guatemala with Alvarado. It also seems improbable that other K'iche' nobles would have participated voluntarily in the Spanish conquest of Utatlán, which followed soon after the battles near Quetzaltenango. The *Título del Ajpop Huitzitzil Tzunún* (Gall 1963), however, which was written around 1567 by lords of Utatlán, Quezaltenango, and "probably other towns," depicts the K'iche' leader Huitzitzil Tzunún, according to Carmack (1973, 41-42), as a "Christian leader among his people" who aided the Spaniards in the conquest of Utatlán as an effort to "procure special privileges for him and his descendants."

Why did members of the K'iche' nobility make these claims? Why did they undermine their credibility by advancing information that runs the gamut from doubtful to absurd? Was it because of a lack of sophistication on their part, or was it because they saw themselves and their society in a state of severe crisis and decline and thus acted out of a sense of desperation?

Another matter that has generated debate and is the subject of controversy is that of Tecún Umán, grandson of the great King Quikab and the "captain general" reputed to have led K'iche' forces against Alvarado at El Pinar (Pachah) near Quezaltenango (Xelaju'). Tecún Umán, according to some K'iche' sources, engaged in man-to-man combat with Al-

varado and died as a result of formed himself into a quetz mounted Alvarado, decapita weapon. According to *Nijaib* varado did not die after he Alvarado himself lanced and

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varado and died as a result of it. Legend has it that Tecún Umán transformed himself into a quetzal bird and propelled himself toward the mounted Alvarado, decapitating the conquistador's horse with his weapon. According to *Nijaib I*, Tecún Umán was startled to see that Alvarado did not die after he had beheaded his horse. Almost instantly, Alvarado himself lanced and killed the K'iche' leader.

Legend aside, although Alvarado does mention that a prominent K'iche' warrior died in this first battle and that, the following day, a number of important K'iche' leaders were taken prisoner or died in a subsequent engagement, no specific reference is made of Tecún Umán (Mackie 1924, 58–60). The K'iche' hero also escaped the notice of Alvarado's contemporary Bernal Díaz del Castillo in his account of the conquest of Guatemala (Díaz del Castillo 1974, 410–15). Only much later, toward the end of the seventeenth century, did the chronicler Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán (1969–72) and, after him, other historians begin to write about Tecún Umán. In our day, Tecún Umán has been appropriated and embraced by the Guatemalan army (Anonymous 1963) as a national hero. Menchú herself makes reference to the K'iche' figure, as do countless others.

Recently, however, historians Jorge Luján Muñoz and Horacio Cabezas Carcache (1993, 52–53) have cast doubt on whether Tecún Umán ever existed, let alone died in mortal combat with Alvarado. Although we cannot begin to do justice to the story of Tecún Umán, it serves to illustrate the complexity of such issues: what seems a matter of fact to many, including the Guatemalan army, Robert Carmack, and Rigoberta Menchú, appears at best hazy and contradictory to ourselves and strikes two historians of Guatemala as baseless legend. At times the research we do calls for us simply to accept ambiguity, accommodate distortions, and move on. The fact that we have good reasons to query certain statements in sixteenth-century Maya documents, or in the testimony of Menchú, hardly means that they are fraudulent and next to worthless in terms of the information they contain.

Our Sorrow, Our Suffering

Stoll is in no doubt about the *raison d'être* of Menchú's testimony: "Rigoberta's purpose in telling her story the way that she did," he writes, "enabled her to focus international condemnation on an institution that deserved it, the Guatemalan army" (1999, viii–xi).

Menchú's account is many things, but above all else it is an act of political protest aimed at capturing the attention of an international audience that she believes, rightly or wrongly, can ameliorate the dire situation of her people. In its clamor to be heard, Menchú's testimony has a fascinating if little-known counterpart in sixteenth-century Guatemala, when Indian communities in the environs of the colonial capital of Santiago, today Antigua, wrote a series of *memorias* (Dakin and Lutz 1996) to King Philip II of Spain, "memoirs" or "memorials" that describe in moving detail "our sorrow, our suffering."

In a strict linguistic sense these testimonies are not Maya, because they are written mostly in Nahuatl, the lingua franca of New Spain and, to a lesser extent, of early colonial Guatemala. In other ways, however, they are very much Maya testimonies, for they express the deeply felt sentiments of a score of native communities, the overwhelming majority of whose inhabitants were Maya (Lutz 1994). Only one of the original twenty-one *memorias*, as well as a letter of introduction from a past president of the Audiencia or Royal Court of Guatemala, Francisco Brizeño, were written in the language of the conquerors. Due, most likely, to failure on the part of Spanish officialdom to respond to the grievances being aired, the same *pueblos* and *barrios* furnished the Crown with another set of *memorias*, this time composed in Spanish (AGI, Guatemala 54). The first set of *memorias* dates to 1572, the second to 1576.

Like Menchú, the authors and signatories of the *memorias*, almost without exception, were of humble origin; in fact, most of their ancestors had been enslaved a half-century earlier, in the course of military conquest. If their forefathers at one time had been members of the nobility, it was, by the 1570s, beyond anybody's ability to prove it. Thus, while those who signed the *memorias* were male authorities serving as *alcaldes* (mayors), *regidores* (aldermen), or *escribanos* (scribes) of municipal councils, like Menchú they spoke not just for themselves but on behalf of entire communities. Having been emancipated for more than twenty years, these communities wrote to the king to protest the excesses they suffered at the hands of several parties, including low-level and high-ranking royal officials, Spanish settlers, and even African slaves who saw fit to serve their Spanish masters by themselves abusing Indians.

The *memorias*, in many respects, are more inclusive and democratic than the elite-generated texts we have discussed so far. Maya *títulos* often had a political motivation, but they do not speak out against social

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injustice in the direct manner that the *memorias* do. Whereas the native voices of Menchú, and those articulated by Victor Montejo and Q'anil Akab (1992), may have been heard, the *memorias* sent to the Crown in 1572 and 1576 languished in silence for four centuries in the Archivo General de Indias in Seville. Despite having been forgotten for so long, the voices of protest that surface in the *memorias* continue to be relevant, resonating even today for Mayas who maintain that aspects of contemporary life in Guatemala, especially the way they are treated by government officials, Ladino landowners, and city housewives, remind them constantly of their status as "second-class" citizens.

Unlike today, however, when we describe certain behavior and attitudes in terms of discrimination and racism, the authors of the *memorias* did not possess such a terminology. Instead, in their plaintive, poetic style, they recount the slanders and insults they had to endure at the hands of Spaniards, detailing mistreatment at all levels of society, from the behavior of the Audiencia's top judges or *oidores* to the slights of a lowly jailer or *carcelero*. Narrative repetition in the wording of the *memorias* is seldom boring. On the contrary, it makes it easier for the reader, as with Menchú, to pay attention and become absorbed by a compelling story.

The *memorias* are filled with harrowing details of the hardships of daily life. By the early 1570s, Indians who lived close to Spanish settlements in Guatemala knew Spaniards personally—they lived on their lands, they labored in their fields, and they worked as servants or artisans in their houses. Most paid burdensome tribute to the Crown and complained bitterly of Spanish census takers. Many had to provide labor under the terms of a draft known as *servicio ordinario*, which saw them not only work but also supply commodities such as fodder for livestock for a pittance. Because of the heavy demand placed on the best lands surrounding the capital city, native communities there complained of a scarcity of land to grow essential foodstuffs, especially corn. Other woes included the seizure and sale of orphaned children and the mistreatment leveled at Indian *alcaldes* and *regidores* who were responsible for the flow of labor and tribute and who were punished when the system inevitably faltered. Another thread that runs through the *memorias* is the high incidence of physical and verbal abuse, of institutionalized violence. We will now touch briefly on these subjects, selecting appropriate quotations to illustrate the key points.

Paying Tribute

Everyone pays tribute, even blind persons who cannot see.

—*Memoria* 8 (Dakin and Lutz 1996, 37)

In their petitions to the Crown, the Indians who lived near or on the outskirts of Santiago complained most bitterly about the tribute they had to pay. They were especially aggrieved by irregularities in how new tributary lists were compiled, for they were subject to systematic overassessment. The heavy-handed manner in which Spaniards went about tribute collection also pained them. One judge in particular, Licenciado Valdés de Cárcamo, who was personally responsible for carrying out the tributary counts of nearly all of the *pueblos* and *barrios* that composed the *memorias*, was singled out for his obnoxious behavior. In Santa Ana, adjacent to the capital city, local officials wrote to their parish priest in the hope that he would draw Valdés's indiscretions to the attention of the king:

You must already know how Licenciado Valdés made us suffer when he carried out his tribute count. He lived among us, here in Santa Ana, for nine days. Each day he ate four chickens. The *nahuatlato* [interpreter] Bobadilla paid *one real* for every four chickens. He who did not deliver a chicken went to jail. The men were frightened. They gave him their chickens. You know this already, our Father Friar Sebastián. There are twenty loads of fodder that they take to [his] house every day, and four loads of firewood to cook [his] food. Nothing has been paid. They collect forty eggs from the houses each day. They don't even pay at the houses where they go [to collect]. . . . Inspections were carried out. [Valdés] registered in the tribute census all the men, their children, the poor, and the orphans, who only eat and drink with the help of the rest. . . . By order of the *Corregidor* Gabriel Mejía, the tribute of those who died also [had to be] paid. The *alcalde*, the *regidor*, and the *alguaciles* (constables) — . . . everyone pays tribute, even blind persons who cannot see. (Dakin and Lutz 1996, 36–37)

In the Barrio of Santo Domingo, inhabited by Mexicans as well as Kachiqueles, the *cabildo* officials wrote: "Some who are very old and poor or who are one-handed and crippled or who are blind and maimed, we don't dare demand [tribute] of them, and for this reason they apprehend us and throw us in jail until it is collected" (Dakin and Lutz 1996, 73). The allegations appear not to have been exaggerated, for they are

recounted time after time in the community, not just in

Providing Services

They give these

The fulfillment of *servicio* by Indians the provision of *servicio* holds in Santiago in a city on the cityside. Routine city *servicio* carrying water, supplying *servicio* of fodder was on hand *servicio* equally diverse, involving *servicio* the tending of livestock *servicio* *servicio*, a system of *servicio* were residents of an urban *servicio* on being called to perform *servicio* rewarded, if paid for their *servicio* demands for their labor *servicio* payments from their native *servicio* clearly felt overwhelmed

Here is the labor obligation *servicio* twenty men harvest *servicio* cut sugar cane close *servicio* fodder [to the Spaniards] *servicio* Six bring fodder by *servicio* make them sweep. *servicio* out of sadness. (Dakin and Lutz 1996, 73)

For Guatemala, however, *servicio* by. It may strike the *servicio* tion removed from a *servicio* tant to note that, in *servicio* likewise protested the *servicio* for one *tomín*, a measure *servicio* tury later, in 1672, the

recounted time after time with remarkable consistency, community after community, not just in Santa Ana and the Barrio of Santo Domingo.

Providing Services

They give these services to the Spaniards, [who] are our masters.

—AGI, Guatemala 54: “Los indios que eran esclavos . . . [1576],” folio 25

The fulfillment of *servicio ordinario* (“ordinary service”) entailed for Indians the provision of labor, often on a daily basis, for Spanish households in Santiago in addition to working on Spanish estates in the countryside. Routine city chores included cleaning, cooking, baking bread, carrying water, supplying firewood, and ensuring that a plentiful supply of fodder was on hand to feed Spanish horses. Rural obligations were equally diverse, involving all sorts of agricultural activities, including the tending of livestock. *Servicio ordinario* in time gave way to *repartimiento*, a system of low-paid forced or corvée labor. Whether they were residents of an urban *barrio* or a rural *pueblo*, Indians would count on being called to perform tasks that were frequent, onerous, and poorly rewarded, if paid for at all. To make matters worse, on top of heavy demands for their labor, the Spanish officials extorted illegal fines and payments from their native charges. In the Milpa de Dueñas, local leaders clearly felt overwhelmed by the labor duties imposed on them:

Here is the labor obligation of the men who work in Dueñas. Each week twenty men harvest maize. When they finish harvesting maize, they then cut sugar cane close to Dueñas. There [live] here those who go to carry fodder [to the Spaniards in the city] and one worker who is sold [rented]. Six bring fodder by order of Valdés. Others work on the streets. They make them sweep. Now the people suffer with that. Now they weep a lot out of sadness. (Dakin and Lutz 1996, 65)

For Guatemala, historical testimony of this nature is hard to come by. It may strike the reader as little more than an odd piece of information removed from a longer or larger context. This is why it is important to note that, in 1572, the leaders of San Antonio Aguas Calientes likewise protested that “each week six men deliver six loads of fodder for one *tomín*,” a meager sum worth only one-quarter of a *tostón*. A century later, in 1672, the *alcalde* and *regidores* of San Antonio petitioned

the authorities that, as was well known, their community was obliged to provide fodder to the city all year long. As the people of San Antonio had neither fodder nor sufficient land to spare, they were obliged to go elsewhere to buy the fodder, which they did at great cost, in order to meet their tribute requirements. An indifferent response would not have been any less than was expected: instead of delivering the fodder, it was decreed that an equivalent amount in cash would suffice (Dakin and Lutz 1996, 49 and 113 n. 13). The conditions that the authors of the *memorias* complained about, which often vanish from the historical record, in this case did not disappear from the daily grind for some time.

Selling Orphans

Valdés asked for the orphans he was going to sell, for whom we were held to ransom at the sum of five reales each.

—*Memoria* 7 (Dakin and Lutz 1996, 31)

One of the most nefarious practices of early colonial officialdom, in which Spanish residents were also involved, was the seizure and subsequent sale of Indian orphans, both boys and girls, to willing accomplices and, on occasion, to native families in the children's home community who wanted them back. As in the 1980s, when tens of thousands of Maya offspring were left orphaned by army counterinsurgency campaigns, untold numbers of children lost one or both parents in the wake of the Spanish Conquest. The orphan issue dates back in the historical record to the 1550s and 1560s (Dakin and Lutz 1996, xxxiv–xxxvi). Even after the period of intense fighting had ended, Indians continued to die or to flee from epidemics that struck, with heavy loss of life, throughout the colonial period (Lovell and Lutz 1996). Native men in particular often saw flight, to escape tribute and labor obligations, as their best option, leaving their wives and children behind to fend for themselves. Population displacement as well as population decline thus meant that Spaniards always had to be on the lookout for innovative ways to overcome shortages of labor. Trafficking in orphans was one such strategy.

As early as July 1, 1570, a newly appointed inspector of all the native towns ten leagues around Santiago was instructed to record the number of orphans and place them in useful employment. His instructions went so far as to decree that if he were to find that some two-parent families "had many children," some of them should be put to work. Al-

though the policy was vigorous in the early 1570s, in the case of Cárcamo in the early 1570s, it was as an extortion racket, a means of control that did not wish to have the orphans in order to hold on to them.

Numerous *memorias*, both from the Spaniards and the orphans. Officials of the Barrio

They have done many things for the orphans and orphans, sons and daughters of the Spaniards. And when they receive tribute in reales to the scribe Juan de Chaves in order and another *tostón* for the orphans (Dakin and Lutz 1996, 73, 75)

These "charges" put the total at 100 pesos. Santo Domingo's officials had to pay two hundred *tostones* for some fifty of them were "brothers." Far from being a unique case, this was another neighboring community until at least the end of the sixteenth century.

Usurping Land

Now we don't have land

Spaniards expropriating land, especially unusual in the history of the area around Santiago de Chile. The Spaniards began to complain of a shortage of labor when their numbers were in a decline (Lutz 1996). In Guatemala, Spaniards of Santiago began in 1527, resulting in the appearance of orphans of conquerors and colonists. On the other hand, Indian slaves. The communities that characterize Santiago's distinctive rural settlements, the Spaniards of Almolonga, destroyed by mu-

though the policy was vigorously enforced by the infamous Valdés de Cárcamo in the early 1570s, it appears to have been used predominantly as an extortion racket, a means of exacting bribes from communities that did not wish to have their children siphoned off and so paid up in order to hold on to them.

Numerous *memorias*, both urban and rural, bemoan the seizure of orphans. Officials of the Barrio of Santo Domingo lament:

They have done many things to us here. They have taken step-children and orphans, sons and daughters from us, in order to give them to the Spaniards. And when they return the boys and girls to us, we pay seven *reales* to the scribe Juan de Chávez and one *tostón* for an official retention order and another *tostón* for the constable who goes to retrieve the child. (Dakin and Lutz 1996, 73, 75)

These "charges" put the total cost of ransoming one child at nearly two pesos. Santo Domingo's officials claimed that, in one transaction, they had to pay two hundred *tostones* to recover abducted children, meaning some fifty of them were "brought back" from captivity in this manner. Far from being a unique case, the experience of Santo Domingo befell other neighboring communities, and the noxious practice continued until at least the end of the sixteenth century.

Usurping Land

Now we don't have lands where we can harvest hay to sell.

—*Memoria* 2 (Dakin and Lutz 1996, 7)

Spaniards expropriating land from indigenous populations is nothing especially unusual in the history of Latin America. What is notable about the area around Santiago de Guatemala, however, is that native inhabitants began to complain of a shortage of land relatively early on, even when their numbers were in steep decline (Lutz 1994, 63–78; Lovell and Lutz 1996). In Guatemala, Spanish appropriation of land in the vicinity of Santiago began in 1527, resulting in the steady erosion of Indian holdings, and in the appearance of scores of private estates held by Spanish conquerors and colonists. On these estates were settled recently acquired Indian slaves. The communities that came into being in this way still characterize Santiago's distinctive cultural landscape. Aside from these rural settlements, the Spaniards founded two cities: in 1527, Santiago in Almolonga, destroyed by mudslides in 1541 and subsequently relocated

a short distance to the north as Santiago de Guatemala. Such a flurry of activity within a few decades of conquest, followed by the emancipation of some three to five thousand Indian slaves at mid-century, led to the founding of indigenous *barrios* around the edges of the capital. Indian communities required land from which to derive a livelihood. They had to compete for land, however, with Spanish properties that occupied the best valley locations in order to grow wheat and graze livestock. By the 1570s, as Santiago expanded, Indians in both rural and urban areas began to feel the pressure, exerted also, especially in city districts, by poor Spaniards, free blacks and mulattoes, and mestizos who had appeared on the scene.

Land scarcity was not viewed by the authors of the *memorias* as an isolated problem. On the contrary, they relate it directly to the myriad economic demands of Spanish rule, which in their case included paying a land rent known as the *terrazgo*. In 1572, the inhabitants of the Barrio of La Merced told the king: "We who are here in Santa María de la Merced suffer greatly because we live on land for which we [each] have to pay two *tostones* a year" (Dakin and Lutz 1996, 9). Rent in this instance was paid to the Mercedarian Convent.

The inhabitants of the Milpa de Ceballos made their *terrazgo* payments to the landowner Pedro de Ceballos in kind as well as in cash: "Our tribute to Pedro de Ceballos is twelve loads of maize, twelve chickens, and twelve *tostones* each year" (Dakin and Lutz 1996, 61). Even though Pedro de Alvarado and Francisco Marroquín, Guatemala's first bishop, were by now long deceased, and even though Indian slavery had formally ended twenty years or so earlier, the Kaqchikel and K'iche' inhabitants of Jocotenango, situated at the northern edge of the Spanish capital, wrote to the king as if they were still slaves who lived on the properties of their onetime masters. They proclaimed:

No longer are there royal lands where we could live. . . . We now ask that King Philip of Castille help us. That he grant us a provision here for the lands of Don Pedro de Alvarado and Bishop Francisco Marroquín. That he may help us in our need. That he help the sons of the Emperor, King of Spain. (Dakin and Lutz 1996, 81)

Four years later, the leaders of the Barrio of Santo Domingo spoke even more forcibly about their lack of land:

We, the poor Indians of this city, have no land to call our own, it having been taken away from us for the benefit of the Spaniards. We have to pay

terrazgo to them, to work the land to grow wheat. They have taken [we have left]. Because of this, we are poor. (Dakin and Lutz 1996, 81)

Like Menchú, the leader of the *terrazgo* revolt and saw nothing but death in order to get a crucial piece of land edged still to have some control over the gravity of their situation. "Call our own." A state of emergency order for it to have value.

Abusing Indian Repression

Always, our sons

In Guatemala, as elsewhere, the executed social groups were a variety of ways, to fund the reaukracy and membership delegated to represent or far away in some remote less individuals who administering the operations.

When tribute was not provided in the requisite amount were not handed over, confronted Indian resistance take action. No doubt, sure to deliver the goods with the impossible task at a time of precipitous noted, was to register including many who pre-Enlisting widows, the thing; another matter Indian leaders were a swift and demeaning

terrazgo to them, to work [the land] for them, or to lease it for pasture or to grow wheat. They want to take from us the little land and house lots [we have left]. Because we live close to the city, they harass and bother us. (Dakin and Lutz 1996, xxxviii)

Like Menchú, the leaders of the Barrio of Santo Domingo had no difficulty and saw nothing problematical in contradicting themselves in order to get a crucial point across. The people of the *barrio* are acknowledged still to have some land remaining, yet their representatives depict the gravity of the situation as one in which "we have no land to call our own." A statement surely does not have to be literally true in order for it to have validity and meaning.

Abusing Indian Representatives

Always, our sole award was to be imprisoned.

—*Memoria* 12 (Dakin and Lutz 1996, 49)

In Guatemala, as elsewhere in Spanish America, one of the most persecuted social groups was local Indian officials whose job it was, in a variety of ways, to function as intermediaries between the colonial bureaucracy and members of the community they were either elected or delegated to represent. Whether on the doorstep of the Spanish capital or far away in some remote and isolated province, it was these often luckless individuals who were held responsible for collecting tribute and administering the operation of labor drafts.

When tribute was not fully paid or when native workers were not provided in the requisite numbers at the assigned time, even when orphans were not handed over before a declared deadline, Spanish officials soon confronted Indian representatives, bullying and intimidating them to take action. No doubt colonial authorities were themselves under pressure to deliver the goods, as was the case with Valdés de Cárcamo, charged with the impossible task of furnishing the Crown with Indian tribute at a time of precipitous native depopulation. Valdés's strategy, as we have noted, was to register anyone and everyone as an eligible tributary, including many who previously had been exempted from the obligation. Enlisting widows, the blind, and the physically handicapped was one thing; another matter entirely was to collect from them, which is what Indian leaders were expected to do. When they failed, punishment was swift and demeaning. *Alcaldes* made up the shortfall by enforcing fines

or exacting bribes. Spanish retribution, furthermore, was accompanied by a barrage of abuse and derogatory remarks. The *cabildo* members of the Milpa de Juan Pérez Dardón were among those community representatives unfortunate to incur the wrath of Valdés and his nasty henchmen:

They punished us when Valdés de Cárcamo, his scribe, Juan de Chávez, and his interpreter, Juan de Bobadilla, arrived. They came on a Saturday and on the Sunday they threw us in jail. None of the men attended Mass. On the Monday he had us pulled on to the street by horses, which scared us. They gave us two hundred lashes in the street. Twice the punishment was carried out, that is two times, here in our town. They gave twenty lashes to each of us and then they shaved off our hair. This was done in the month of August. (Dakin and Lutz 1996, 23)

Town after town, *barrio* after *barrio*, the stories go on and on. The indignity of it all is nowhere more poignantly expressed than by the words of the *cabildo* members of Santa María de Jesús. At the end of an eight-day stay, the Indian leaders tell us, Valdés, Chávez, and Bobadilla brought their tribute assessment to a close by saying: "You are sodomites. You are pigs. You are bestial men." It all proved too much for the *alcalde* and *regidores* to bear. "That is what they said. Here we became very sick because of their words."

Conclusion

A woman who knows how to tell a good story effectively, one that sounds true, is aware that she can skillfully conceal many another fault she might have.

—B. Traven, *Trozas* (1936)

The Maya nobility who were the authors of sixteenth-century *títulos* appealed for Crown recognition of their status and privileges, marshaling and embellishing "facts," as they saw them, in an attempt to restore or, at the very least, try to preserve what remained of a way of life that was fast disappearing. Likewise, the common folk of more popular or unknown origins who authored the Nahuatl *memorias* called out for action to counter the abuses they endured at the hands of royal officials as well as Spanish settlers and landowners: "Help us, you, *our* King, Don Felipe," was the cry from the Indian *pueblos* and *barrios* of Santiago de Guatemala. Their cry actually reached Spain in 1572, but it fell on deaf ears, prompting the same communities to call out again in 1576. Perhaps the tributary reforms implemented in Guatemala in the late 1570s

and early 1580s by President state response to native p of too little, too late.

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and early 1580s by President García de Valverde constituted a form of state response to native protest, but if so it was another sorry instance of too little, too late.

Similar to these sixteenth-century appeals for justice, Rigoberta Menchú also cried out against even greater horrors perpetrated against her people by twentieth-century equivalents of Pedro de Alvarado and Valdés de Cárcamo. Alas, unlike her sixteenth-century counterparts from in and around Santiago de Guatemala, Menchú had no delusions that an appeal to the president of the republic would do any good. She made her pitch, instead, to the international community in the form of moving speeches and a powerful testimony given the permanence of print by her collaboration with Elisabeth Burgos-Debray. However problematic the latter may appear to David Stoll, we contend that it is the primacy of larger truths that should concern us, in the sixteenth century as much as today, in order to get at the essence of what has happened in Guatemala since the Spanish Conquest on.

We close with one final reflection: What is the point of it all? Does not Stoll, in effect, exhibit exactly the same selectivity in constructing his text as Menchú does in constructing hers? As best we can discern, Stoll could easily have arranged his findings to support what Menchú has to say as much as criticize her for how she goes about saying it. Stoll, well aware of the work of the Catholic church's project for the Recovery of Historical Memory (REMHI 1998) and the United Nations' Commission for Historical Clarification (1999), could equally have fleshed out the truthfulness of one person's testimony with the disclosures of lots of others, including some of his own informants. Why he chose to do things the way that he did remains a mystery not only to us but also to many of his fellow scholars of Guatemala.

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