

Nationalist Contradictions

*Pan-Mayanism, Representations of the Past,
 and the Reproduction of Inequalities in Guatemala*

For over three decades the Maya peoples of Guatemala have been transforming the ways in which they struggle against continuing colonial power relations in the country. Local processes of protest are now accompanied by protests with a national character that challenge not only the state, but also other dominant ideologies, like patriarchy, Protestant and Catholic visions, and certain popular constructions of history and identity. Now, new discussions about the Maya's national position occur between different actors and across opposing spaces. According to these analysts' different conceptions, the so-called pan-Mayanist or Mayan movement is engaged in a complex process of defining demands, discourses, ideological constructions, diverse forms of political struggle, new relationships of power, and the construction of other identities (Warren 1998; Fischer 2001; Cojtí Cuxil 1991; Bastos and Camus 2003). As this movement progresses, contradictions have emerged in relation to demands, representativeness, the conformation of intellectual elites, and ways of imagining the past.

In this essay I delineate relevant aspects of the Maya political movement, principally the reconstruction of history and its link to the present. The Maya political movement is primarily guided by an intelligentsia that produces and adopts a series of organizing and discursive ideological definitions and strategies about the struggle in which it is engaged. These leaders, linked to debates on human rights, religion, education, languages, Maya rights, and racism, belong to different organizations that get reorganized during each crisis the movement suffers. They generate a series of ideas and images about the Maya past with the double aim of pinning down the idea of the Maya

people (Maya unity) and challenging the exclusionary makeup of the Guatemalan nation-state.

The general questions guiding the essay can be stated as follows: In what way does this emerging sector of educated Maya delimit a new narrative about the past? How is this narrative linked to the definition of new identities and the formation of unexpected power relations? Being a Maya and a researcher, I am personally involved in this process of constructing imaginaries (*imaginarios*) about the past.

We understand the notion of Maya as both a construct that evolved as the Maya movement developed and as a tool for defining the ethnic identity of those who up to now have been called indigenous, Indians, or aboriginals (*naturales*). This definition acknowledges the contradictions and political differences that Maya individuals encounter as they appropriate other identities. The Mayanists, as they are defined in this essay, are the people and institutions that openly promote Maya political rights and recover a culturalist definition of their own past. They do so with the purpose of assigning meaning and giving historical support to the notion of Maya peoples and multiculturalism.

Finally, since I will be speaking about the colonial forms of power relations in Guatemala, I consider how some of the Maya movement's intellectuals have characterized the concept of colonialism. Some of them define colonialism in relation to the Guatemalan state and ladinos, affirming that only one community, the ladino, currently controls the state.¹ They assert that ladinos instrumentalize the state to control and limit the development of subordinate indigenous nations. According to these intellectuals, Guatemala is a colonial state that manifests an internal colonialism in which one national group oppresses others within the same environment (Cojtí Cuxil 1989, 140–41).

Demetrio Rodríguez posits that colonialism, by definition, starts from the political domination, economic exploitation, and cultural and linguistic assimilation of one people over another and involves diverse historical conditions like invasion, conquest, or annexation (Rodríguez 2004, 46). Following the same line of thought, Demetrio Cojtí proposes that colonialism is a doctrine that legitimizes one people's domination over another and employs various arguments to justify Maya subordination (Cojtí Cuxil 1995, 148). These notions attempt to explain the political relations between indigenous peoples and ladinos in Guatemala, understanding the latter as almost homogeneous entities.

Colonial relations, however, are highly complex and must be observed at different moments and in specific spaces. Colonialism traverses relations between social sectors, genders, classes, regions and localities, institutions, and diverse organizations. In this case, one can talk about the colonial shape of power relations in Guatemala, where class relations are strongly tied to society's ethnic makeup, establishing a racial hierarchy that acts as the basis for exchange among social groups.²

Imagining New Histories

In their article “The Maya Workshop of Hieroglyphic Writing” Linda Schele and Nikolai Grube describe a series of activities related to teaching and learning the Mayas' ancient writing that they and other epigraphists developed together with a group of Maya activists and intellectuals (1999). The authors note that some Maya intellectuals requested that they carry out different workshops from 1987 to 1995. The workshops took place in the city of Antigua and in archeological sites like Tikal, Copán, and Iximché as well as in certain municipalities and smaller localities like San Andrés Semetabaj in the department of Sololá. Attendees at these activities included Mayas linked with organizations dedicated to strengthening and studying indigenous languages, professionals in linguistic fields, and people with less formal academic and professional training in these fields.

According to the authors, the Mayas who participated in these events showed a great deal of interest in the writings' meanings and were very creative when comparing the interpretations the specialists proposed with those that were recognized in their mother tongues. The participants were keenly interested in studying the glyphs in order to understand ancient Maya history and particularly Maya cultural development. Schele and Grube propose that the workshop on the classical period's story of creation was one of the most meaningful because it related directly to religious, social, ritual, and agricultural practices of the modern Maya. According to the authors, the participants' reactions and conversations over the following year suggest that the information extracted from the epigraphic texts created strong ties between contemporary experience and the ancient pre-Colombian past (Schele and Grube 1999).

In addition to the workshops in Guatemala, Schele and Grube developed a workshop in Mérida, Mexico, attended by a sizable number of Yukateco

speakers. During the final event, held at the ruins of Chichén-Itzá, a participant named Kokom affirmed that on his previous visits to the ruins he had not taken the glyphs and their meanings into account. Yet on this occasion he had noticed that his last name was written in the glyphs. The authors think it is important that the Yucatekan and Guatemalan Maya meet in the future to share their knowledge. This and other experiences led different Guatemalan organizations to use the glyphs in new ways to support sharing their newfound knowledge and newly recognized history. By participating in similar workshops, other Maya took this newfound knowledge to their communities of origin, such as Chimaltenango, Cobán, Palín, and Tecpán, and shared it with community members. The authors propose that this represented the transfer and dissemination of a system of teaching and writing into Maya hands.

Kay Warren wrote an article about a weeklong workshop developed in 1992 by a group of Kaqchikel linguists. The participants studied the book *Annals of the Kaqchikels*, a work written by Kaqchikel authorities (*principales*) during the colonial era (Warren 1999). Warren explains that the participating linguists had taken part in other community education projects and had developed a series of activities and, later, published extracts of the book, which were used as material in informal educational programs. Warren argues that Maya culturalists see these ancient texts as both vital resources for learning about the past and fundamental guides for contemporary projects.

According to Warren, the participants believed the study of the ancient texts could reveal that Kaqchikels have a unique origin. However, some of the participants thought this revision was not necessarily an argument against official history, but a search for the truths that have not been completely understood. Citing another participant in the workshop, Warren highlights new perspectives on the ancient texts. Some Maya activists, she says, think this book describes official Maya history. In other words, they see the book as a retelling of Maya origins, cosmology (*cosmogonía*), and experiences with the European invasion as well as of the genealogical continuity of one of Guatemala's most important peoples.

Warren's text proposes that the culturalists argue heatedly among themselves as they try to strip Maya cosmology of its contact with European religions, other ideologies, and intentional manipulations. The new readings of certain parts of the text are counterposed to traditional ones made by na-

tional and foreign scholars in relation to, for example, the arrival of the Spanish and the ensuing armed struggle. In their eagerness to imagine continuity in Maya descent, culture, and languages, Maya activists face the challenge of confronting official histories that talk about conquest and assimilation (Warren 1999).

The texts I have cited show some of the activities Mayanists are engaging in to recover and define another representation of their past. This interest, however, is not recent. The effort to develop a new perspective on the Maya past and present likely has its origins in these individuals' first attempts to study their mother tongues. In the mid-twentieth century Adrián Inés Chávez, an eminent K'iche intellectual, organized congresses of Maya educators to discuss topics related to languages. Since then, Chávez has posited the need to establish truly indigenous symbols to write K'iche, while emphasizing linguistic and cultural unity (Fischer 1990, 90). In 1979, he translated and published the *Pop Wuj* (*Popol Vuh*) into graphics that laid out a new alphabet exclusively for this language (Chávez 2001).

In the 1980s and 1990s Maya intellectuals began shaping a new content and meaning of Maya history by organizing activities such as meetings, workshops, and seminars as well as by editing bibliographic and didactic material. They produced a number of important texts on this issue, for example, those by Víctor Racancoj (1994), Raxche' Demetrio Rodríguez (1995), Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil (1991, 1995), and Víctor Montejo (1997). Important Maya leaders and investors founded a press that reprinted books by national and foreign authors, among them Robert Carmack, Carlos Guzmán Böckler and Jean-Loup Herbert, and Robert M. Hill, that analyze the history of the Maya.³ Currently, various institutions are also editing popular texts, including children's stories that evoke the Maya past. Many people are putting a great deal of effort into building new ways of representing and analyzing Maya history.

These representations can be synthesized as the construction of a historical base, which recognizes the principles that unite the actions and knowledge of the ancient Maya with those that nourish the contemporary Maya. By examining these sorts of ancient texts as well as works by archeologists, anthropologists, linguists, and historians, Mayanists try to rebuild a version of their past that specifies the particularity or essentiality of Maya culture. They also attempt to reconstruct the history of resistance and leadership that they believe can have an important role in thinking about and imagining resistance today.

Mayanists look to contribute to a definition of Maya unity with this new historical narrative. Through these efforts they affirm that we Maya share common ancestors who bequeathed us a common culture and languages of origin that we need to protect. We Maya participate in a specific way of looking at the world and at ourselves, recognizing that all Maya intellectuals have shared a similar adversity since 1524—an adversity Maya intellectuals have defined as internal colonialism.⁴

The new historical narrative feeding the pan-Mayanist movement's political struggle has defined dates and periods of historic succession, tracing the greatness and catastrophes lived and suffered by the Maya people. Now, we could say that as a people we probably have a date of birth (some five thousand years ago) and of growth, something that until just a few decades ago was not defined in the historical narratives that our parents, grandparents, elders in general, and the leaders and community guides presented to us. In different ways this new historic Mayanist imaginary is expressed as the real Maya history that reveals a past hidden or distorted by official history. These discourses form the notion of the Maya people and are tied to the speeches about multiculturalism that are generated by Mayanist intellectuals and their organizations as well as by the state.

This way of evoking the past represents an important break in the Maya imaginary and in the ways they are recreating themselves to build and confront their own present and that of Guatemala. This narrative generates pride among those familiar with it, primarily Mayanists. Maya individuals, for example, can make reference to their millenarian past when they present their demands to the government, just as they can cite their history of greatness when they appear in public, attend universities, or talk on national and international stages.

Maya educators who are directing schools known as Maya schools are teaching children this new way of understanding the past. Here, the ancient Maya are not seen as a civilization of great inventors who disappeared before the arrival of the Spanish, as the state schools taught and continue to teach. Instead, teachers instruct students that they are the grandchildren of Maya ancestors who created a great civilization, as evidenced in architecture, mathematical advances, and hieroglyphic writing, in the artistic creations found in our sacred centers and in our ancient books, as well as in our restored political and religious ceremonies. In addition, some community histories and histories of municipalities with a Maya majority incorporate this way of viewing the past.

Educated Maya and Narratives about the Past

It is primarily one sector of educated Maya who construct and evoke this new narrative. From Chávez in the middle of the twentieth century to Montejo at the start of the twenty-first century, what characterizes these historical narrators is their professional formation.⁵ In this case, the new imaginary or historical representation is generated not only from communities' oral tradition, but also (and more extensively) from other knowledges acquired as a result of close contact with schools, organizations, and other worlds, from Western or ladino to North American.

Since the 1960s, a sector of the Maya from different communities entered secondary schools and university (Bastos and Camus 2003). In subsequent decades, in spite of the repression this population suffered in the 1970s and 1980s, some continued this trajectory, adding to the number of Maya who have graduated from secondary school and university. These well-educated Maya assumed other identities that partly contrasted with those of uneducated (*iletrados*) Maya, men and women who cultivate the earth and maintain a subsistence economy.⁶ Those identities also contrast with those of the ladinos with whom they had lived in their communities as well as with those of colleagues in schools and workplaces (Sincal Coyote 2004).

This tradition of education since the 1960s was most evident among the Kaqchikels and K'iche, but similar processes can be observed in other ethnic groups. An exemplary case is that of the Comalapa municipality, located in the central department of Chimaltenango, where the majority of the inhabitants are Kaqchikels. From the beginning of the twentieth century a small group of distinguished families characterized by their status as intermediaries, their economic resources, and their capacity for political negotiation, began to implement a series of transformations at the productive level, in political participation, and in the educational formation of some of their young members. In the 1920s a small group of Maya teachers from this community graduated from the country's normal schools. They returned to their community, where they served as primary school teachers in a school founded by prominent families specifically for indigenous people. From the 1970s until the present, the number of professionals emerging from this municipality has increased significantly. They distinguished themselves in several important professions. Many graduated as primary school teachers and others as accountants, engineers, doctors, lawyers, linguists, soldiers, priests, and administrators. Many lived through processes of cultural change and

economic ascent that transformed their ways of relating to one another and to the people in their communities who are involved in agricultural, artisanal, and commercial activities. Most of these professionals continue differentiating themselves from ladinos, but at the same time they value highly their professional identities and their ties with urban centers like the department capital, Chimaltenango, or the country's capital, Guatemala City. They also recognize the importance of their linguistic, ideological, and nationalist connections.

These well-educated Maya now define themselves as Kaqchikels, Mayas, Chimaltecos, inhabitants of the capital, and as Guatemalan. Their identification with liberal state ideology is prominent when they speak about citizenship, democracy, the legal system, their political participation, and human rights. They have so capitalized on their time and knowledge that they can now reject so-called traditional forms of cooperation and ties with other groups and peoples in Comalapa. The remaining Comalapans, agriculturalists and merchants, can simultaneously reject or legitimize these new professional identities, thoughts, and practices according to the specific circumstances.

Starting in the 1970s people from this community with a lower level of education began participating in different organizational bodies, such as Protestant and Catholic churches, political parties, and guerrilla groups—although certainly some professionals did likewise. Through this participation, these less-educated Maya discovered other ways of living and understanding their communities' social reality and thereby devised their own ways of transforming the lives of Comalapans and of the Maya in general. Other Comalapans have recently occupied important posts in the government, including the National Congress and some ministries.

Some national leaders who support Mayanism are from Comalapa and are members of this professional sector.⁷ Together with activists and intellectuals from other Guatemalan communities, principally Kaqchikels and K'iche, these leaders foster the novel discourse about the Maya past. Nevertheless, at present most of these Comalapans can simultaneously resort to discourses and political practices inherently tied to the liberal state's ideology. On the basis of these facts (paraphrasing Dipesh Chakrabarty), I must still insist on asking, Who speaks in the name of our Maya ancestors (Chakrabarty 1999)? The answer is obviously not simple because it requires understanding other important facts.

Heretofore the analysis of Guatemala's pre-Hispanic and colonial history

has been in the hands of Creoles, ladinos, and foreigners, commentators who have constructed different images about the Maya and their past.⁸ At other moments, the state has used this historiography and archeology to delineate a national history that is taught in schools and transmitted through official discourses. That history has been expressed in racist and colonial terms. It fosters a vision of the Maya and of indigenous people in general as backward, childlike (*mozos*), uncivilized peasants subject to integration and incapable of realizing, to use a contemporary concept, development without outside intervention.⁹

Despite these tendencies, people in the communities continue to narrate their own histories, which are also categorized disdainfully by liberal and racist Guatemalan ideology. In any case, Maya narratives delineate and construct images about recent and remote ancestors. In diverse ways these histories have given life to past indigenous communities, to their identities and ways of organizing as well as to the conditions of resistance produced at different moments and in distinct eras (Florescano 2001). In many of these stories the ancestors remembered are nameless and the dates of events are not precisely defined because the stories simultaneously relate to the daily life of listeners and narrators.¹⁰ Many Maya people in communities and villages have never stopped sharing and listening to these remembrances. Nevertheless, these narratives do not comprise the dominant history. Even though they form part of the social and ideological reproduction of the Maya, they do not resonate nationally. Instead, other voices are taken to be the true ones, primarily Creole and ladino narratives that up to now have told us how our past truly happened.

For the past two decades well-educated Maya have been telling their own stories, talking about the Maya past through the use of westernized images and narrative styles. As a rule, these new stories questioned the literary constructions of national and foreign academics and of official discourses. For some people, such self-expression means that the Maya are starting to take their turn at speaking about their past, and consequently the history they are telling now represents the truth for them. Now, well-educated Maya are the narrators and are often legitimated as such and welcomed by different sectors. Carmack, for example, affirms that great civilizations like the K'iche are destined to influence the modern world and that this great culture's time has come inside Guatemala and must be welcomed (Carmack 2001; see also Warren 1998; Fischer 2001; Cojtí Cuxil 1991; Bastos and Camus 2003; Fischer and Brown 1999). These assertions raise many questions: Who receives us?

In what space are we welcome, and why are we appreciated now (or not until now)? Finally, if this is the Maya's time, what importance can a critique have for imagining new ways to giving meaning to the past?

Elites, Narratives about the Past, and Fragility

Even though it has been said that Mayanists' new versions of the past challenge official history, the reality is not that simple. The contemporary Guatemalan state also speaks about Guatemala's history, about the history of the Maya as a people, and about interculturalism. This represents an apparent acceptance of Mayanist discourse and demands from the four peoples (Maya, Garífuna, Xinka, and ladino), their multiculturalism and diversity.¹¹ The state has thereby supposedly accepted educated Mayas' version of history and rights.

Mayanists and the State Construction of Multiculturalism

In the past two decades Maya leaders have created a series of organizations like the Consejo de Organizaciones Mayas en Guatemala and the Coordinación de Organizaciones del Pueblo Maya de Guatemala. Using these associations as platforms, the Maya leaders wrote documents and negotiated, protested, and elaborated discourses about history, cultural diversity, rights, and identity. Through this process, they created ties with the government and the state, setting the terms of their relationships.

The discussion and signing in 1995 of the Identity and Rights of the Indigenous Peoples Accord between the Unión Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) and the government is considered one of the key moments in the consolidation of these relations. Mayanists took part in this process, and their proposals were incorporated into the document's formal definitions. In this way, the Guatemalan nation's multiethnic, pluricultural, and multilingual character was formally recognized. This accord embraced Mayanists' concept of a people, a concept that alludes to and is based upon their new notions of history.¹²

Currently, the government has promulgated some secondary laws that give legal support to Maya rights, spirituality, languages, and education. There are government entities designed to support the Maya peoples' effort, such as the Fondo Indígena (Indigenous Fund), the Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (Academy of Maya Languages of Guatemala), and

the Defensoría de la Mujer Indígena (Indigenous Women's Defense Office). School texts sponsored by the Ministry of Education include new lessons about the Maya's millenarian history, and children in public schools even learn Maya numeration. From the moment the multicultural discourse gained legitimacy, the state began defining ethnic difference in Guatemala and recognized Maya organizations and their leaders as interlocutors and representatives of the Guatemalan Maya.

Many would interpret this new situation to mean that the state's recognition of Guatemala's cultural diversity implies that the nation is now a democratic, plural body.¹³ Alternatively, one might see the state's recognition as a Mayanist victory in the Maya's ideological and political struggle to influence dominant history and thought. This victory, however, was not so straightforward because it also represented the state's influence in the political definition of multiculturalism, identity, and rights. Even though the state purports to support Mayanist claims, this recognition also restricts Mayanists' capacity to establish their own parameters and discourses of the past and of their identity, their rights, and the elaboration of proposals (Bastos and Hernández 2005). This suggests that the Guatemalan state and governing elites are able to nourish themselves with Mayanist ideology and discourse to again impose and redefine their own legitimacy at the local as much as the international level. Brackette Williams has defined this process as transformist hegemony; in other words, a process through which the state appropriates certain resources defined by subaltern groups, leaving these peoples once again at the margins of the national process (1989).

An interesting example in this regard is that of a group of Kaqchikels from the western department of Sololá who, in early 2005, protested against the establishment of a mining company in the Guatemalan highlands. They claimed that nature ("Mother Earth," they said) was being damaged and that the government had not consulted indigenous peoples or communities regarding the company's new installations; some groups invoked Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization on the rights of indigenous peoples within existing states. The protests were violent, and the government used the police and the army to repress the population opposed to the mine's operations. The Mayas in the region succeeded in achieving strong political cohesion around the so-called indigenous municipality and managed to sustain an important discourse and practice regarding the "traditional" conservation of their natural resources. Because of their protests, they were repressed.¹⁴

We can see here, as Rachel Sieder posits, that the recomposition of the state and of Latin American multiculturalism tie into other processes, such as neoliberalism and subsequent subaltern challenges to these policies. Tensions emerge between the state and Maya groups when state actors seek to exploit natural resources located in territories historically occupied by the Maya, territories they wish to continue using according to their local interests. Sieder proposes that the public policies implemented by Latin American governments contributed to the reorganization of the state but did not necessarily reduce existing inequalities. This establishes that a model of a multicultural society must not only address the rights of ethnic groups but also confront patterns of development established by neoliberalism or capitalism (Sieder 2004).

The intervention of Maya peoples is central in defining a new model of the nation. Their ideological constructions of the past overlap with current notions and images of a multicultural Guatemala. Here one has to analyze how the state legitimizes itself through Mayanist discourses of the past and of Maya culture but at the same time uses force and violence, also legitimized, against those supposedly represented in the plural nation to impose the realities and new logics of the global economy.

The newly deployed historical discourse about Mayanness and multiculturalism influences official acts, including the teaching of national history and the discursive definition of the rights of the peoples who live together in Guatemala. Nevertheless, images of our past greatness and discourses about a multicultural country have little impact on other processes, including the definition of coexistence, development, the establishment of rights and obligations, and citizenship. The question therefore is, What is the place of a people, of their culture and their rights, in the definition and negotiation of the country's democracy and economy? Within liberal, capitalist logic, the question is of little importance and might even be understood as imprudent. Yet it is highly relevant if one thinks of the colonial manner in which power, democratization, and cultural and social diversity are exercised in Guatemala.

How are the discourses about the Maya past and about multiculturalism that are formulated by Mayanist intellectuals used? And what status are they granted? Rather than constituting a simple opposition to official history, Mayanist history can itself constitute the basis for developing new discursive perspectives that the state then replicates. Mayanists can believe they have achieved their objectives when the government begins to print books reproducing their new history and recreated symbols. The ministers and vice

ministers of education who encourage the publication and use of these new texts may even be Mayas themselves, yet the majority of the Maya continue to be seen as backward and ignorant when the state supposedly brings them progress and development that they oppose.

Unfortunately for the Mayanists, they still do not have enough power to control the reconstructions and ideologies that their movement has generated and that are now reshaping the state and government. Their incipient participation as government functionaries still does not represent a significant force, yet their ideological creations about the past and the present are molding the narratives that strengthen new images of the multicultural nation. These narratives also construct other forms of legitimacy and state power that do little to eliminate privileges or equalize the concentration of resources and power.

In light of the preceding discussion, we are now in a better position to determine who speaks in the name of the Maya past. Now that they are well educated and have the power to do so, Maya elites effectively discuss their past. Nevertheless, the power achieved by some Mayanist leaders coexists with other conditions and contexts that may generate contradictions. On the one hand, Mayanists do not have the capacity to control how others use their discourses and images. On the other hand, some Mayanists are satisfied when they hear government functionaries talking about Guatemala's cultural wealth. Many Mayanists speak in the name of all Maya and their past, but their new discourses of the glorious Maya past run counter to the reality that many Maya individuals and communities still face a power that responds to their concerns with violence and continues to exclude them from the nation.

Mayanist Elites: Redefining Identities and Power Relations

One can ask how Mayanists, or at least some Mayanists, live these new histories. In other words, how are they using these new discourses to nurture their social life, their identity, and their political activity? The intellectuals of the Maya movement are primarily educated men and women who are highly visible at the local and national levels. In some central highland communities, principally in the department of Chimaltenango, they are present in sizable numbers. Even though many do not live in their communities of origin, but in cities like Chimaltenango or the capital, at certain moments they run into and greet each other in their local communities. Likewise, when they

converge on places like Guatemala City, they also distinguish their fellow Maya who come from specific towns, regions, and linguistic groups. They also cross paths with Maya who profess Mayanist ideology only moderately or not at all but who are also educated or hold positions in the professions and who are familiar with ladino and Western spaces and perspectives.¹⁵

The story of a Maya political leader from the department of Chimaltenango, a man who was prominent at the local and national levels, is instructive in this context. In the mid-twentieth century the man was an important promoter of Acción Católica in his municipality and one of the most widely known catechists. His allegiance to this organization led him to participate in the local branch of a major national political party, as a result of which he rose to the post of mayor in his home municipality during the second half of the twentieth century. In the 1970s his party nominated him to fill a seat in the federal parliament, making him one of the first Maya deputies to sit in Guatemala's Congress.¹⁶ Although little was heard about his political activities at the national level during the 1980s, his name was associated with Mayanist organizations in the 1990s and up to the present. At one point, he was a member of the Consejo de Ancianos del Fondo de Desarrollo Indígena de Guatemala (Council of Elders of the Indigenous Development Fund of Guatemala), a government entity founded at the demand of and led by Mayanists. He was also an active member of organizations that encourage Maya spirituality.

Though the man lived his last years outside of his municipality, his remains were transferred there after his death. The day of his funeral, his friends and relatives, myself included, attended a Mass celebrated in the community church; several of these people held important positions in the national political arena, either at the governmental level or in popular or Mayanist organizations. During the Eucharist ceremony the priest spoke of how this was an uncommon and even special ceremony given the dignity and trajectory of the deceased. Once the religious service ended, we left for the cemetery, where a customary prayer was said. Afterward, a close K'iche relative of the deceased climbed onto a podium and spoke in his native tongue about how the deceased was now reunited with Maya elders (*abuelos*). The speech was translated into Spanish. Some said that the deceased had probably heard these same words about respect for the ancestors spoken to him by his mother in K'iche when he was a child. The same relative read a text about the deceased's life, highlighting his participation in the Congress and in organizations that fought for and defended Maya rights. Most of those

attending the wake returned to the house, where a vigil was held and coffee and bread were served. At the vigil someone circulated a photograph of the deceased, explaining that it had been taken in the Congress during his tenure in that legislative body.

Several conclusions can be arrived at from this anecdote. On the one hand, even though the dead man's ancestors were not explicitly labeled as Maya, such labeling was implicit in the discourse. When Maya peasants remember their dead, they generally affirm that the deceased's soul now rests in peace to be resuscitated by God when the world ends. The speeches at the wake likewise made references to the ancestors using allusions to Mayanist discourses about elders. On the other hand, many people who attended the wake were promoters of Mayanism, and by translating the K'iche speeches into Spanish they were positioning Mayanist values and symbols at center stage and thereby using Spanish in an instrumental way.

What I want to highlight here is the relationship between Maya historical discourse, the new identities of the professionals and leaders who promote this discourse, and their linkage with the state through policies regarding Maya rights and multiculturalism. What is happening among these elites? The description of the funeral highlights how Maya professionals can link different events or facts by articulating them with their new historical discourse and with their connections to state policy on rights and culture. We can see that in this case Mayanists are not deploying a discourse about history and culture in an isolated way, so as to define their nationalism, difference, and pride only in relation to their glorious past, as they might do in other speeches and texts. In cases like this, for Maya historical discourses to succeed they must interconnect with other narratives about contemporary Mayas' ability to enter the state apparatus, become professional, and engage other worlds assumed to be closed to most Maya. They must also connect with arguments and proclamations about their own capacity to represent and defend the rights of the rest of the Maya people. Evidently in operation here is a complex process of attempted legitimation in which new power relations are being constructed.

To understand all of this, I want to continue exploring the historical effects of Western modernity, liberal ideology, capitalism, government policies regarding education and integration, and racism in the lives of Mayanists and the rest of the Maya people. It is important to analyze both the particular ways in which political and economic elites are constituted historically and the links they establish with systems of inequality.

Greg Grandin and Irma Alicia Nimatuj entered into this discussion with their analyses of historical processes lived by the Quetzalteco elites in the nineteenth century and the twentieth. Grandin proposes that K'iche leaders of this area reconfigured their communal relations and maintained their social and cultural authority by forming alliances with the colonial and republican states. Amidst the political and economic changes of the eighteenth century and the nineteenth, K'iche elites transformed Quetzaltenango into a commercial, multiethnic city. Ethnic leaders (*principales*) used Creole elites to sustain their domination over K'iche cultural processes, strengthening their political power and access to capital. With the support of indigenous principales, Creoles maintained the city's caste divisions and thereby controlled the population and the possibility of multiethnic alliances. These nineteenth-century elites pursued similar alliances with the Guatemalan president Rafael Carrera to protect their privileges.

These alliances, in combination with late nineteenth-century liberal ideology and capitalist economy, led K'iche elites to develop alternative understandings of ethnicity and nationalism. The elites built a conception of ethnicity that was intimately tied to ideas of progress encouraged by liberal intellectuals. They thought that indigenous people's regeneration would necessarily lead to civil and political equality. These ideological constructions ultimately justified K'iche elites' positions of authority as well as those of ladinos at the local and national level. Privileged K'iche looked to reproduce an ethnic identity based on their common origin and on the maintenance of cultural markers primarily grounded in women's roles (Grandin 2000).

Nimatuj, in turn, observes that these elites were not homogenous and responded in different ways to historical processes and concrete social contexts. Similarly, she shows that this Quetzalteco sector, characterized by their commercial economic power, shared and continue to share diverse contexts with the rest of the Guatemalan Maya. They thereby reproduce a patriarchal system that subordinates Maya women. Like the rest of the country's Maya, they confront the racism dividing Guatemalan society and share general Maya cultural patterns like dress, collective memory, languages, and diverse wisdoms (Velásquez Nimatuj 2002).

At the beginning of the twentieth century and in a way similar to the K'iche elites in Quetzaltenango, indigenous elites from different Chimaltenango municipalities simultaneously acted as intermediaries, speaking on behalf of Chimaltenango's indigenous peoples and their rights, while also competing with local ladino elites even as they shared some privileges with

those elites, such as the right to vote and exemptions from forced labor and taxes. Indigenous elites' competition with ladinos led them to not only discuss and demand citizenship rights, but also to take action. They founded schools for indigenous people and educated a small group of youth who in certain ways and at certain moments could compete with ladinos.

At the present time ladinos in many of this department's communities no longer have decisive political power, and it is Maya who lead local politics. But as we have seen, the Maya are also gaining prominence within the governmental apparatus at the national level. In diverse ways they often act as intermediaries speaking in the name of all Maya, doing so by building a linear discourse about the past, demanding rights, and establishing development programs for the Maya.

Many of these indigenous elites have been successful because they understood and entered the world of national politics and familiarized themselves with the practices and customs of ladino elites. Much of this awareness was the result of education and adaptation. Even though the indigenous elites still endure what they view as virulent racism, they do not experience it in the same way or under the same conditions as other Maya. Education has been central to the elites in achieving recognition and relative acceptance in some nonindigenous circles; once educated, they are still indigenous, but "civilized." Likewise, the Mayanist version of their past has acquired moderate acceptance by certain intellectuals, politicians, and businessmen because it entails a rational, as opposed to a mythical, way of comprehending the past, while at the same time serving to minimize the violence used against Maya protests.¹⁷

These processes empower Mayanists (and also other professional Maya who do not follow this ideology) in the eyes of some ladino and Creole sectors and also of community and village-based Maya. Maya students and professionals enjoy greater prestige where they live or originate from, not only because of their knowledge, but also because of the ties and networks they presumably have developed with ladinos, organizations, and institutions at the national level. An important differentiation thus arises between sectors of the Maya, one that cannot be analyzed simply in terms of a description of social stratification within localities or municipalities, but must consider processes like power relations, the development of ideologies, and the historical constitution and reproduction of elites.

During the nineteenth century and the twentieth, some ladinos and Creoles reproduced their power, prestige, and legitimacy by claiming to be civi-

lized and modern. Similarly, in the twenty-first century Mayanists and some non-Mayanists are constructing their prestige and legitimacy on the basis of education, professionalization, and links to the government apparatus. New to this contemporary construction, however, is the identification with a People that has a glorious and millenarian history, one that is imagined by these selfsame actors.¹⁸

Apparently, Mayanists' discursive control over the past and their demands regarding rights ultimately have produced results for these individuals. Nevertheless, this discursive control is diluted by the control and power relations established by Guatemala's oligarchy and political class. As Claudio Lomnitz-Adler proposed in 1995 in the Mexican case, intellectuals' discourses often serve to generate closer relationships between the intellectuals and dominant groups and in this way continue to perpetuate state ideologies (Lomnitz-Adler 1995). Much the same can be said about contemporary Mayanists' historical narratives.

Alternative Histories and the Present

How can we Maya benefit from this power to locate not only our past but also our present? In what way does the Maya people's alternative history, as developed by Mayanists, generate the possibility of imagining a different nation and nationalism? There are many answers to these questions because these new historical narratives also question the forms of exclusion historically reproduced by the state and the dominant sectors. We can see nevertheless that Mayanist history partly constructs itself by taking official history as a model when it establishes or seeks to represent the unity of the four peoples living in this territory.

When Mayanists elaborate a historical narrative delineating the Maya people's cultural inheritance and their existential basis, while at the same time constructing an imaginary about the four peoples of Guatemala, they are helping to build the myth of the multicultural nation. This myth, as we have seen, is easily appropriated, manipulated, and redefined, both in the discourses of governing elites and in the auxiliary laws they have proposed and approved. From this historical definition of the four peoples, it is possible to build linear and diaphanous narratives about identity, equality, and cultural inheritance—that is to say, about Guatemalan multiculturalism. These narratives underestimate the differences, contradictions, power relations, and economic inequality prevalent in the country.

Some Maya, for example, can now speak about multiculturalism and globalization processes like free trade treaties as inescapable realities in which we must necessarily involve ourselves. These Maya hold that multiculturalism offers a formula for confronting globalization, implying that so long as we maintain our identity as a people and remain creative, we will be able to navigate free trade successfully and offer the world important goods and products.¹⁹ This Mayanist reasoning is centered in market logics and leaves history and the present agenda of the oligarchy almost unquestioned. In this case, the Maya, too, can participate in the colonial form taken by Guatemalan and global power relations.

Under such conditions it is crucial to bring different Maya historical experiences into the discussion, for they are central to the definition of multiculturalism's ideological and material foundations. Different sectors of the Maya (and Guatemalan) people have long developed, according to their own life situations, a variety of relations with their social and natural surroundings. Just like well-educated Maya, peasants, women, merchants, and others have had contact with the national society, the global economy and politics, the culture and knowledge preserved by other societies, and diverse religious forms. The Maya have not been isolated from Guatemala's politics, economy, and liberal and nationalist ideologies, or from the ladino and Western worlds. It is unlikely they have lived in a homogeneous way. Their diverse historical circumstances have given rise to diverse viewpoints, interests, and identities. Among the Maya, one can therefore discern many forms of memory and thought. In short, we Maya must pay close attention to the relationship between memory and identity in order to recognize that our own images about history are not uniform and instead reflect the complexity of our lives and relations (Norval 2001).

We must therefore focus our reflections on how these memories can support the construction of the present and control of the future. It is important to posit, as Partha Chatterjee says, that the form of remembering the past and the power to represent oneself is nothing other than political power (Chatterjee 1995). We Maya can imagine a multicultural society by taking into account these multiple historical conditions. Also central to constructing a multicultural society is an understanding of the ways in which Guatemalans have historically linked themselves and been linked to their environment, keeping in mind their experiences, positions, and relations of power.

All of this can help us reflect more deeply about the many ways in which we can construct our alternative histories, perhaps seek out a variety of

styles of development and understand and construct a multicultural nation. Santiago Bastos and Domingo Hernández, for example, highlight an interesting case detailing the process of state control and the Maya struggle for autonomy (Bastos and Hernández Ixcoy 2005). They analyze some of the attempts to advance the recognition and indemnification of the victims of armed conflict. They argue that the social and political experiences of people involved in the process have prompted them to rethink how they imagined and spoke about the past and about Maya needs and rights.

According to Bastos and Hernández, the people and organizations involved in this task have assumed the category of Maya as part of an ideological construction tied to the indemnification, using it as an ethnic category that also helps explain the past and the violence suffered. In this case, the process of recovering the Maya's long-term history is also linked with more recent memories of political violence endured by Maya peasants, women, and students. In this way, peoples' own actions, that is, their struggles and the paths they chose to take, mark them not as victims but as individuals and as Maya who have struggled in the face of repression and exclusion. All these factors form part of the Maya experience and the memory they are constructing.

These efforts are fundamental, and their recognition through ethnographic description is central to the discovery of other explanations related to the interactions of different political actors (Hale 2002). These academic analyses are important contributions as long as they do not fall into a simple celebration of Maya resistance. By taking a more critical perspective we can see the contradictions generated in the different arenas where Maya launch their struggles and the ensuing consequences. By focusing on these multiple arenas, we can understand how political resistance and memory often challenge the control and power of dominant groups and of their common sense, even as they can sometimes reinforce the established order and neutralize the strength of Maya organizations and communities (Hale 2002).

Epilogue

Nobody could argue that the Guatemalan Maya movement has not been an important force in the transformation of Guatemalan society. Over the past two decades a national discussion of indigenous peoples' cultural and political rights has opened multiple opportunities for struggle for people in different regions and localities. Many Maya women, for example, now make their

voices heard in diverse contexts, emphasizing their suffering, desires, and struggles and challenging patriarchal domination in their homes, localities, and country (Chirix 2003). Similarly, Maya spirituality represents an important challenge to the Protestant and Catholic churches as well as to society in general through the public presentation of religious rituals prohibited until the 1990s. Mayanists have brought to light many issues and problems, including racism, an outdated educational system from the elementary to the postsecondary level, political and social exclusion, and unequal landholding patterns.

My essay does not talk in terms of betrayal. Rather, it has dealt with social processes that deserve recognition and careful analysis so as to further clarify the relation between hegemonic processes and indigenous resistance in Guatemala (Scott 2002). I have attempted to represent and analyze the relationship between the narratives about the past constructed by Mayanist intellectuals and the vested interests present in the state that are also involved in defining Guatemalan multiculturalism. We have been able to observe that the ties established, the discourses and ideologies promoted and implemented, are often contradictory because they both represent and unfold within Guatemala's complex social reality. Elite and nonelite Maya have also been fundamental participants in the construction of the Guatemala of the past two decades. They participate not only because they have been and continue to be the most important labor force in the country's economy, but also because they model the Guatemalan state with their ideological constructions and political interests. They remain linked to nationalist ideologies—ideologies whose form dominant groups adopted and used to build their hegemony—but they also constitute an important social force in the transformation of our society.

This work is a critical approximation by the Maya themselves to the social processes we live. Our experiences in these diverse environments provide evidence both of what our struggles have achieved and of the mistakes we have made. We Maya will not give too much away if we see our intellectual activity and creations in a more *problematic* way and not as diaphanous, as we would like our reality or our past to be.²⁰ This may be too much to ask, given how we Mayanists make strategic use of essentialist notions about the continuity of our past and present.²¹ Yet we must also listen to our many voices, which, though contradictory, influence the processes we live.

Maya peasants, businessmen, women, Catholics, and youth have many historical experiences and talk in many ways, and their discourses and prac-

tices tie into the ideologies they employ. With their multiple identities, interests, and dreams, they inevitably, together with elites, take part in the contradictions our current nationalisms generate.

Notes

1. In the Guatemalan context, *ladino* refers to most non-Indians, including Guatemalans of European or mixed descent (translator's note).

2. In citing Quijano, Walter Mignolo (2004) explains how one should understand the concept of the colonality of power and talks about the historical establishment of a racial division of labor in America. A racial hierarchy that overdetermined social relations and ideologies and influenced ideas of equality and liberty was put in place. At the beginning of the nineteenth century and with the onset of independence, he argues, instead of being overcome, colonialism was rearticulated. Following Greg Grandin's (2000) ideas, we can also say that even though all the Maya of Guatemala are not oppressed for being Maya, they suffer domination as Maya.

3. Carmack (2001), Gúzman Böckler and Herbert (1998), and Hill (2001). The first two books were first edited in the 1960s and the last in 1992.

4. See Edgar Esquit (2004) for a more in-depth critical study of this topic in relation to recent narratives about the past by Maya activists.

5. Montejo (2004) is a recent text about Maya history.

6. In some municipalities these identities also contrasted with Maya merchants, most of whom have a low level of educational training.

7. Many other professionals from Comalapa or the region have few or no ties with the Maya movement and its discourse.

8. Creoles (*criollos*) refers to elite Guatemalans of European descent (translator's note). For example, see Batres Jáuregui (1989), Martínez Peláez (1973), and Carmack (2001).

9. But the political, cultural, and economic exclusion of the Maya within the nation does not occur only at the discursive level. There are concrete, material practices that establish exclusion, implying that the state's historic narrative contributes to the construction of colonial forms within Guatemala's power relations.

10. In the K'iche language, for example, *najtir*, meaning "ancient," is used only to talk about an ancestor's past and culture. In the Mam language, *ojtse* refers to the remote past. García Ruiz (1992).

11. Mayanists have created the image of Guatemala as made up of four peoples—the Maya, Garífuna, Xinka, and ladino—each with its respective history.

12. MINUGUA (2001).

13. See Donna Lee Van Cott's (2000) discussion about constitutional multiculturalism. Santiago Bastos deals critically with this issue in the notion of cosmetic multiculturalism, which refers to the creation of new state policies that adopt laws

and discourses attempting to always include indigenous people (Conference at the Colegio de Michoacán, 2003).

14. Some people have suggested that political members of the leftist party Unión Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) manipulated the Maya in these events. Though it is clear that the URNG has influence in the Indigenous Municipality of Sololá and other departmental organizations, we cannot disregard the interests and agency of the region's Kaqchikels.

15. Uneducated Maya are also not isolated from liberal Guatemalan politics, economics, and ideology or from the ladino and Western world. The problem is not whether the Maya are tied to national and global processes or not; rather, it is important to understand the forms and conditions in which such connections happen and, extrapolating from there, peoples' experiences, positions, and relations of power.

16. Two former Maya congresspeople were the K'iche Augusto Sac Racancoj, a lawyer, and Pablo Pastor, a professor. They obtained their posts in the 1940s only because of the space the Revolution of 1944 opened. Velásquez Nimatuj (2002).

17. Nevertheless, there are ladinos who question the way in which Mayanism recovers the past through essentialist and fundamentalist arguments. See Morales (1998). Some provincial ladinos also question Mayanism, but their main arguments originate within official history. They affirm that indigenous peoples no longer have the right to call themselves Maya because the Maya empire disappeared with the Spanish conquest and subsequent communities were no longer pure but mixed. Moreover, these provincial ladinos believe the adhesion of indigenous peoples to the ancient Maya is a strategy of some opportunistic individuals. Hale (2002).

18. This comparison is not overly ahistorical because the nation is still constructed on exclusion, even though the national and global social, political, and economic contexts have varied.

19. For Walter Mignolo (2004) globalization is a rearticulation of the coloniality of power, similar to what happened in the nineteenth century with the foundation of nations in America. Many Mayanists who have adopted a perspective that includes the concept of internal colonialism hardly question globalization processes and the contexts in which they are produced.

20. I use the term *problematic* to denote the complexity of our social life and to argue about the many paths our struggles can take if we pay attention to our many realities.

21. In discussing cultural continuity, Fischer and Watanabe (2004) affirm that we frequently do not realize the different ways it can happen, such as through the recreation of the present or through profiling the legacy of our ancestors as unchanging. According to the authors, Mayanists would have opted for the first way. The authors' conclusion may be quite correct; nevertheless, we also have to point out that the recreation of the present is mediated by power relations, social contexts, and new identities.