

MÁS QUE UN INDIANO

MORE THAN AN INDIAN

Preface

El ladino suele discriminar al ladino que no discrimina al indio; y mas lo discrimina si se pone de parte del indio. He gozado esta discriminación.

(Ladinos regularly discriminate against ladinos who do not discriminate against Indians. Even more so if the ladino takes the side of the Indian. I am proud to have suffered from this discrimination.)

—Luis Cardoza y Aragón

As the Pan-American Highway makes the steep climb westward, leaving behind the congested, contaminated tangle of Guatemala City's Calzada Roosevelt (Roosevelt Boulevard), the human geography turns indigenous. Hand cultivated patches of *milpa* (traditional corn and bean cultivated plots) begin to appear on the hillsides, roadside signs announce Maya-sounding place names like Santa María Cauqué and Santo Domingo Xenacoj, and women wearing indigenous *traje* (clothing) go from being a distinctly marked minority to the norm. As the road reaches a crest just past Sumpango, the valley of Chimaltenango comes into full view, a verdant plain, lined on the southeast by a ridge of hills, punctuated by two prominent volcanoes. Kaqchikel Maya who lived in this valley before the arrival of Europeans called their principal settlement *Bok'ob*, which means "shielded city," a reference to the surrounding hills. Although Spanish colonizers established a presence early in the sixteenth century, and rechristened the place in the tongue of their Mexican indigenous guides, Kaqchikel Maya always remained the vast majority in Chimaltenango and in the region that would later become a department of the same name. To this day, the census reports the Chimaltenango department to be some 80 percent indigenous, a proportion that has remained roughly the same for the last century. The gateway to the vast indigenous highlands, Chimaltenango marks the beginning of, to adapt a phrase from Guillermo Bonfil Batalla (1987), Guatemala *profunda* (deep Guatemala).

A second look along the same highway from the capital city to Chimaltenango troubles this image of gradual transition to Guatemala profunda. The road is lined with enormous warehouses that serve as maquila production sites, which hire hundreds of workers from the area, mainly young indigenous women. Interspersed with the milpa are crops of a very different sort—luxury vegetables, berries, and flowers—sold fresh through intermediaries on the international market. During peak hours buses to and from the capital city are jammed with passengers traveling daily the 55 kilometers for work or studies, turning Chimaltenango and surrounding towns into bedroom communities. Chimaltenango city itself, after being leveled by the devastating earthquake of 1976, was rebuilt with rebar, cinderblock, and corrugated metal roofing, giving the urban landscape a generic, third-world feel, with very little that appears distinctively indigenous. The section of the highway directly adjacent to the city is lined with an array of hardscrabble storefronts, their walls covered with highway filth: a “*pinchazo*” (tire repair shop), the Manantial de Vida Eterna (Spring of Eternal Life) evangelical church, a mortuary, a hardware store, and a string of twelve brothels with alluring names like *Buen Gusto*, *Descanso Feliz*, and *Fogata* (Good Taste, Happy Resting Place, and Campfire). This second look recasts Chimaltenango as the epi-center of an intense process of cultural and economic change, with an ambiguous relationship to things indigenous: a space that left Guatemala profunda far behind, for what Nestor García Canclini (1989) has termed *culturas híbridas* (hybrid cultures).

Anthropology, whether carried out by national scholars or foreigners, has a well-established preference for Guatemala profunda. Hundreds of monographs have been written on indigenous peoples, covering nearly every highland *municipio* (township), while there are at most a handful of works on the other half of the population, people who identify as ladino, mestizo, or criollo Guatemalans. Even given the widespread postmodern skepticism of bounded identities and claims to authenticity, many anthropologists have a residual aversion to the hybrid spaces that thrive in Chimaltenango: brothels with Salvadoran sex workers whose clientele include the mainly indigenous conscripts from the nearby army base; a vibrant twice weekly market where generic commercialism has subsumed indigenous particularity; poor neighborhoods where youth wear baggy clothing and listen to hip hop, and cinderblock walls feature graffiti that mark gang territories (see figure 1). While the *Ruta Maya* travel guide may be too blunt for academic sensibilities, anthropology has in effect heeded its recommendation: “[Chimaltenango city is]...mostly just a place to change buses, with little to detain you.”¹

Curiously enough, my motives for making Chimaltenango the central place of this study were not all that divergent from those that would have led most to avoid it. The spaces of cultural hybridity did come to fascinate me, and I soon took a certain pleasure announcing that I lived in Chimaltenango and then watching eyebrows raise. My principal interest, however, was to carry out a study in alignment with the Maya rights movement that had been on the rise since the late 1980s. From the early days of this movement, Chimaltenango has been a central place for Maya organizations to locate;



Figure 1. Cholo gang graffiti. The Cholos were one of the most popular gangs in Chimaltenango during my principal year of fieldwork. The 18 refers to one of the two principal gang moieties, apparently taken from the streets that divide gang territory in Los Angeles, CA. The other moiety number is 12. This photograph was taken on a street in a neighboring department. Photo credit: Christa Little-Siebold.

by the early 1990s it was home to dozens of Maya NGOs, with specializations covering the spectrum from community development to language rights, some with local areas of influence, others regional and national. The processes of economic and cultural change underway make Chimaltenango an odd choice for the central place of Maya cultural rights activism. The Maya organizations located there do not have an especially strong connection with the urban population that surrounds them. Their rationale, rather, is more logistical than political. Solidly within the indigenous highlands, yet only an hour from the capital city, Chimaltenango allows Maya organizations to move easily between the two worlds, taking advantage of minimal urban amenities, while operating within a majority indigenous milieu. This strong, visible presence of Maya organizations, in turn, also made Chimaltenango an ideal location for what became the main focus of my study: ladino responses to Maya ascendancy.

Ladinos in Chimaltenango, as in the rest of the highlands, are heterogeneous but generally dominant in relation to the indigenous majority. Self-identified ladinos occupy a wide range of social and economic positions, from manual laborers to elite politicians and landowners. Moreover, to state that the city's population is 20 percent ladino leaves out a large and growing sector of *chimaltecos*—like the gang members from poor neighborhoods—who refuse both sides of the ladino-Indian binary that guides official efforts to determine who is who. Amid this heterogeneity, however,

people who identify as ladino generally have absorbed an ideology of racial superiority in relation to Indians: viewing themselves as closer to an ideal of progress, decency, and all things modern, in contrast to Indians, who are regrettably and almost irredeemably backward. Until recently, this ideology had a resounding echo in the local and regional racial hierarchy: from middle-class positions upward, ladinos predominated and Indians did not belong. Organizations associated with the Maya movement have confronted these conditions with a wide variety of strategies, which advance Maya rights and challenge ladino racism. Their success on both fronts, however partial, has been impressive. One measure of this success, in turn, is that ladino political sensibilities have changed: they have ceded some ground, assumed a self-critical stance toward the overt racism of the elder generation, and repositioned themselves as cautious advocates of multicultural equality.

This study documents and probes these ladino positions, both in Chimaltenango city and in the surrounding municipios. My topic took shape initially as a product of the most elemental methodological principle of activist anthropology: talk over research ideas with the people with whom you are primarily aligned, in hopes of producing knowledge that might be useful to them. The original idea I brought to these discussions with Maya friends and colleagues focused on coalitions: under what conditions could Mayas and ladinos work together on relatively equal footing? Without overtly discouraging this topic, they pushed me in a different direction, saying “we really need you to study them [ladinos].” Gradually, the idea of studying ladinos took hold. As the study’s scope and purpose evolved beginning in the mid-1990s, I had ample opportunity to discuss the research design and the preliminary results with Maya colleagues. But the requirements of the research itself placed limits on this interaction. I carried out only a handful of interviews with Mayas, and never made Mayas the subjects of ethnographic scrutiny, except when the purpose was to observe Mayaladino interactions. I spent the vast majority of my research time in exclusively ladino settings, which in turn reflects the still largely segregated character of social spaces in the region. Especially when asked to share their hopes and fears in relation to the rising power of their Maya counterparts, most ladinos would only give candid answers when there were no Mayas listening in.

In addition to the advantages that Chimaltenango offered as a field site for my study, family considerations played a central role in my decision. My wife, Melissa, is a family physician, with a longstanding interest in public health and popular education. After a survey of organizations doing this kind of work, she settled on the Asociación de Servicios Comunitarios de Salud (Association for Community-Based Health Services or ASECSA), an organization based in Chimaltenango that trains health promoters to work in rural communities across the country. We also sought a place with quick access to high quality medical care for Amalia, who would arrive in Guatemala at age two months, and for her sister, Sofia, who would join us two years later. After an initial stint in the cramped quarters of an apartment in the middle of town we settled in to a rented home in the middle-class neighborhood of Las Quintas,

with a walled-in garden where the children could play, and a beautiful view of the Acatenango volcano. In good anthropological fashion, we lived in roughly the same conditions, and with many of the same daily routines, as my principal research subjects.

During the first years that we lived intermittently in Chimaltenango, 1993 through 1996, the country was still in the early stage of a profound transition. Although the return to democratic rule had formally begun in 1985, the militarized state remained on a war footing. Details of the army rampage against civilians in the early 1980s were beginning to circulate more widely, both a sign that times were changing, and a vivid reminder of the brutality of the same state actors and institutions that continued to rule. People talked in hushed voices, if at all, about the guerrilla; they still assumed, based on past experience and current analysis, that opposition to the government could result in disappearance, torture, or death. When we first took Amalia to a pediatrician who cares for Guatemala City's elite, he asked casually about my work, and followed up, just as casually, on my reply: "Anthropology... isn't that what Myrna Mack was doing when they killed her?" An elite and decidedly right-wing chimalteco, who offered us his house to rent, had the same reaction, and put it in the form of friendly advice: "Stay away from politics in your investigations, Carlos. You know what happened to Myrna Mack."² All relationships had multiple layers, revealed or not depending on degrees of *confianza* (trust); most people still could not fathom the idea of processing their traumatic memories of the period of armed conflict because, in their minds, that period had not yet come to an end. In one of my first exploratory trips to Chimaltenango I contacted a left-leaning ladino intellectual and political actor, on the recommendation of a mutual friend. He agreed to pick me up on the corner of Chimaltenango's central plaza at 10:00 a.m., but never showed up. The long wait, watching one anonymous driver after another pass, gave me plenty of time to worry about how I would ever gain enough *confianza* with people to carry out this study. His evasive apology later only deepened these concerns: why would ladinos, left, right, or center, agree to open up with me?

Yet the great enigma of Guatemalan society at that time was the entangled presence of two disparate political conditions: pervasive continuing effects of state terror amid a democratic transition whose protagonists portrayed that political violence as a thing of the past. The atmosphere of democratic transition, however partial and confusing, was indispensable to the viability of my research plan. The bizarre attempted self-coup of President Jorge Serrano Elías in June 1993 had provoked widespread indignation, sending the clear message that powerful forces in the country, from the military to the business elite, had no stomach for a return to military rule. Spurred on by the dramatic achievement of Santiago Atitlán in 1990, indigenous communities throughout the highlands were organizing to eliminate army presence and put an end to the civil patrols. Maya organizations, at first low profile and cautious, had begun to find their collective voices, and were rapidly becoming major actors in the national political arena. Rigoberta Menchú, who maintained a semi-clandestine status as late as 1991, was now established as a Nobel laureate, directing a well-endowed foundation

devoted to Maya rights and social justice. Even in Chimaltenango, where changes often followed in a faint echo of national-level trends, we felt the political thaw. Although the enormous army base would remain on the former grounds of the Pedro Molina teachers' school for another decade, the concerns of the military turned from defeating the insurgency to governing a postwar society. In general, the victors' arrogance was almost certainly a more important impetus for the political opening than a commitment to democratic values. Ladino political elites would never have been receptive to my study had they not felt so secure about their victory. Early on, I gained an appointment with Don Miguel Angel Rayo Ovalle, a man of impeccable upper-class ladino pedigree who served as Chimaltenango's governor.³ I presented him with a letter describing my proposed research on economic development and ethnic relations in Chimaltenango. With an enthusiasm that mystified me, and little time for details, which came as a great relief as well, he gave me his blessings—“*este estudio me cae como anillo al dedo*” (this comes like a ring on my finger)—and issued me a letter of support.

From the start my research was a family affair, which created its share of anxieties and difficulties, but also helped immensely to make it possible. Having children in tow accentuated our worries about health, highway safety, kidnapping, and the shocking rise of violent crime. Early on, while running a workshop with community-based midwives, Melissa handed one-year-old Amalia to one of the participants so she could focus on the tasks at hand. Suddenly, the woman and Amalia were both nowhere to be found, and no one knew what had happened. For an hour or more, Melissa searched frantically and switched into emergency mode, sure that someone had snatched the child for ransom. The woman eventually returned, cheerfully announcing that she had decided to take Amalia for a long walk to the market, to allow her mother to work unperturbed. Anxious moments like that one, however, were more than outweighed by the rewards of being in Chimaltenango together, and by the research doors that my family helped to open. Having a family transformed perceptions of me, from a suspicious outsider to someone with an identity at least in part like everyone else. My first experiences with ladinos beyond formal interactions and interviews, sharing the intimate spaces of conversations around the kitchen table, invariably occurred not as a research initiative but, rather, because Melissa, Amalia, Sofia (and I) were invited over to eat.

We became especially close to two ladino families, one whose members have no presence in this book, and the other who occupies a central place. I cannot explain this contrast here, beyond a general reference to the inevitable tension between one's relationship to people as research subjects and as friends. For whatever reason, Yolanda Valencia and her family seemed to thrive on that tension. I first sought out Yolanda on a hunch in 1994; she worked in an office dedicated to adult literacy, and I associated literacy work with a social and political outlook that would make it likely that she and I were of like minds. We began to talk regularly; eventually she invited our family to dinner with hers; little by little we got to know the entire extended family network. In November 1997 Yolanda's daughter Elena got married to Héctor, and

they asked Melissa and me to be their *padrinos de matrimonio* (marriage godparents). By the time that week of activities had ended—from Elena’s “farewell” party, to the wedding itself, to the long discussions afterward revisiting the emotion and complexity of it all—Chimaltenango felt like a second home. Yet it was a peculiar sort of home, for me at least, since these people with whom we were growing close were also my research subjects. Yolanda affirmed and enjoyed this dual role: she is intellectually curious, confident, and self-reflective, oriented toward research of sorts in her own work. Her comfort with the dual role, in turn, helped to put me at ease. When I finally thought I had finished the research and began to conceive this book, I presented Yolanda with the proposal that her family provide the narrative anchor. She agreed, and this initiated a new research phase of filling in gaps, going together to interview additional family members, and finally, an intense work session in Austin, when she presented her feedback on the Spanish translation of the first draft.

The Valencia family in some respects follows the pattern of what they would call—with a hint of self-mockery—“typical ladinos,” and in other ways they are utterly anomalous. Yolanda’s father Luis would have beamed with pride at the designation, proceeding to regale us with details of his family line of solid European stock, deeply invested in the boundary between ladinos and their Indian inferiors. Don Luis and Doña Concha would surely have concluded that Yolanda married well, since Alejandro came from a family of Chimaltenango’s ladino elite, a clear step upward from the rural township where the Valencia family had its roots. Luis and Concha would also have nodded with approval when, in 1971, Yolanda decided to abandon her university studies in law to raise a family. For the next decade Yolanda and her family lived in a typical middle-class ladino milieu, not especially wealthy but comfortable, with private school for the kids, regular participation in ladino elite sociability, and with extra money for occasional vacations outside the country. During this phase of her life Yolanda was completely immersed in ladino society, and took on the manner and attributes of someone who occupies a higher rung in the racial hierarchy. Perhaps the only visible sign of the transformation to come was that Yolanda had grown restless with her homebound existence and decided to resume her studies, this time in Pedagogy.

The next two decades brought a process of change that set Yolanda radically apart from most of her Chimaltenango peers. Alejandro was killed in 1984, under circumstances that would never be clarified; after a brief exile in the United States, Yolanda returned, and dedicated the next fifteen years to her career and to raising her children, with support from a tight-knit and loving extended family. She became a professor in the Chimaltenango campus of the San Carlos University, and later combined this with a position as director of the literacy program DIGEA and an increasingly active role in local politics. When I met Yolanda she already was reflecting critically on these multiple strands of work, eager to analyze all aspects of the changing relations between ladinos and Mayas, both her own, and those of ladinos chimaltecos in general. In part, Yolanda’s receptivity to discussions about race matters was a direct product of the

Maya efflorescence. Especially given that all three facets of her work life—literacy, university teaching, and local politics—put her in daily contact with indigenous people, she experienced Maya contestation directly and needed to figure out how to respond. In part it was a critical transformation of her own making. Many ladinos took Maya contestation as an affront and responded with defensive bitterness; they most surely would have shied away from the vulnerabilities of a dual role as informant and friend, which Yolanda, in contrast, clearly relished. Yolanda fully “came out” as a ladina dissident in 1998, when she and Genaro became *compañeros* (partners in a committed relationship), and decided to live together.

With the addition of Genaro, the Valencia family came to encompass the entire political spectrum of Guatemalan ladinos, from the right-wing and racist old guard, to the revolutionary, adamantly antiracist Left. Genaro was born in Escuintla, and grew up mainly in the capital city, but his family on his father’s side was from Chimaltenango. He made periodic visits back to Chimaltenango as a teenager to visit his grandparents, who held significant amounts of land on the outskirts of the city. During these visits, he became good friends with Alejandro, and met Yolanda in passing. Genaro went to medical school at the San Carlos University during the tumultuous mid-1970s, became a physician, and went to work in the public hospital of Escuintla, which had become a hotbed of political activism. Through his work with radicalized health and religious workers, he developed ties with the rising tide of revolutionary opposition to the military regime; in 1980, he found himself on a list of ten people targeted by the right-wing death squads. He went into hiding and within two days six of the ten had been killed. Soon thereafter, Genaro was spirited out of the country and began work with a hospital in the Nicaraguan town of Somoto, on the front lines of the contra war. At the end of 1982, Genaro returned to Guatemala, now as a member of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor or EGP, and spent the next ten years in the lowland jungles of Quiché department, dispensing medical care to guerrilla combatants and their civilian allies. He left the guerrilla in 1994, fed up with what he viewed as the leaders’ abandonment of their revolutionary ideals; he worked in Mexico and Spain before returning to Guatemala in 1997. Genaro continues to affirm the ideals that led him to become politically active twenty-five years earlier, and speaks of his first few years in the jungle as a deeply transformative experience, a chance to work together with indigenous people according to egalitarian principles, to catch a glimpse of a new society in the making. By the end of the 1980s, the allure of this social transformation had begun to fade; he continued for a number of years out of commitment to his comrades, but with deepening cynicism about the possibilities for change and great indignation toward the hypocrisy and opportunism of the revolutionary leadership. To this day, Genaro displays the qualities that made him, by all accounts, a much loved *compañero*-doctor: a high and demanding political idealism combined with a keen sense of the absurdity of the human condition, a fervent and principled critic of injustice with an unusually generous endowment of *humor chapín* (a uniquely Guatemalan sense of humor).

For a long time Genaro responded to the invitation to be included in my study with affable refusal. I met him first in 1997, before he had reconnected with Yolanda. A mutual friend, who knew of my study, insisted that an interview with Genaro would challenge all my conclusions about ladinos, and she arranged for us to meet. The conversation was cordial but distant; he said he'd call me when he had some free time to talk further, but never did. Long after Genaro and Yolanda were living together, and their Chimaltenango house had become our base for return visits every summer, Genaro still made it clear, in contrast to everyone else in the family, that he did not want to appear in my book. Meanwhile, Genaro's established presence in the family deepened the process of change underway, from moderate dissent to outright rebellion against the trappings of ladino respectability. Yolanda retained a solid foothold in that ladino world, through work and social networks, but in the inner circles of home and family, in thought and practice, they moved steadily toward the margins. Instead of tea on a Saturday afternoon, their compound would be host to Maya ex-guerrilla and their families, Genaro's friends from revolutionary days, who live in nearby settlements created after the 1996 peace accords. Instead of well-kept gardens, the grounds in back of the house have the overgrown feel of Macondo, surrounded by cement walls with irreverent and incendiary graffiti (for my favorite, see figure 2). Only in my final session with Yolanda, when she came to Austin to comment on the draft, did I finally learn the reason for Genaro's refusal. He worried that any study of ladinos could only end up being an apology for ladino dominance and wanted no part of such an endeavor. After reading the draft, Genaro changed his mind and sent word with Yolanda that he would like to be interviewed after all. Just before concluding this manuscript, Genaro and I had a daylong conversation about his life, an interview I drew from in final revisions and in writing the epilogue.

Although at times I was tempted to make this book into a narrative focused primarily on the Valencia family, this would have prevented me from achieving my principal objectives. The Valencia family, and especially Yolanda, play a crucial role in this study in two respects. They helped me immensely, to figure out who was who, to set up interviews, interpret the results, and generally to navigate the layered complexities of ladino society in Chimaltenango. They also served as research subjects, representing one pole on a wide continuum of ladino stances toward their own identity, racial privilege, and responses to the Maya challenge. Although I do not spare them critical scrutiny, and Yolanda herself insists on an ample dose of self-critique, the Valencia family in general represents an encouraging transformation toward a category of what might be called ladino race progressives. Indeed, as I write these lines, in January 2005, a debate rages in the Valencia household: Yolanda insists on remaining "ladina" while Genaro and her son Camilo argue that a crucial step toward antiracist practice is to renounce the ladino heritage altogether in favor of a newly construed identity as mestizo. This debate—inconceivable in most middle-class ladino households in Chimaltenango—is symptomatic of the broader point: it would have been profoundly misleading to draw general conclusions about ladino responses to Maya ascendancy



Figure 2. "If priests gave birth, abortion would be a sacrament!" Valencia home wall painting. Photo credit: Charles R. Hale.

from the Valencia family. Since I wanted to provide Maya activists and intellectuals with a complete and candid view of the dominant group who are their adversaries, it was crucial to register the whole range of standpoints, and to analyze the center of gravity of ladino political sensibilities. While Yolanda and Genaro continue to be of this ladino world, they are so deeply critical of it that I sometimes worry that their position is too contradictory to sustain.

The central conclusions of this study, then, derive from field research with more than one hundred ladinos and ladinas, who occupy a wide range of social positions, over a period of about twenty-four months beginning in 1994 and ending in the year 2000. I carried out most of this research myself, at times with the help of research assistants, rarely with any significant involvement of my family. It involved travel to fifteen of Chimaltenango's sixteen municipios (excluding the distant and inaccessible Pochuta), pursuing structured interviews and specific categories of quantitative data collection. The most valuable flashes of insight in this study, however, came not from this planned and systematic data collection but from the chance encounters, informal conversations, and serendipitous openings that participant observation makes possible. One Sunday, for example, I shared a relaxed afternoon with Don Caralampio and Don Rigoberto, two elderly ladino men who previously had been key players in local politics. Now, they both lamented (while sipping rum and munching on chorizos wrapped in hot tortillas), Indians have taken over the municipio, leaving ladinos on the side-

lines. Don Caralampio recounted how he had resigned in disgust from the city council when indigenous *concejales* (city councilors), encouraged by the mayor, had taken to switching into Kaqchikel, the indigenous language, excluding him from the proceedings. Mention of the current mayor reminded them of the last time they had an indigenous mayor, twenty years earlier, and how different that experience had been. They chuckled as they remembered how Don Edelberto ended his term in close alignment with town ladinos, and with an angry indigenous constituency who felt betrayed. The chuckle turned to hearty laughter as Don Caralampio recounted what Edelberto, primed with a few drinks, would blurt out to his fellow carousers: “*No quiero ser un indio más, sino más que un indio*” (I don’t want to be just one Indian more, I want to be more than an Indian).

Más que un indio—a phrase that two decades ago expressed an Indian’s self-denigrating desire for upward mobility in a racist society, ironically enough, captures the predicament of ladinos like Don Caralampio and Don Rigoberto today. At times begrudgingly, at times with the fervor of recent converts, most ladinos in Chimaltenango now accept the idea that indigenous Guatemalans merit better treatment than they received in the past. They now affirm respect for indigenous culture, agree that racism should be eliminated, that the principle of equality should reign, echoing the Guatemalan state’s endorsement of “multiculturalism.” Yet these same ladinos also harbor deep anxieties about the prospect of Maya ascendancy, anxieties that condition their resolve, and undermine the very egalitarian principles that, in another register, they heartily endorse. We can best understand these sensibilities, I contend, as racial ambivalence, which embodies desires for two incompatible social outcomes: they want to shake free of their racist past, to live according to a more egalitarian ideal; yet they also believe, and continue to benefit from the structured belief, that ladinos are “más que un indio.” What follows is an ethnography of this “más que un indio” predicament, and of the partially successful efforts of some ladinos to combat its effects.

Yolanda, her family, and to a lesser extent Genaro, appear in every chapter of this ethnography, but play an especially prominent role in the last two, where I reflect on the possibilities for Guatemala, and ladinos in particular, to move beyond their racist past. My argument revolves around a central paradox that race progressives like Yolanda acknowledge but also inevitably embody. The deep, pervasive ladino desire for intercultural relations with Mayas, and the closely related commitment to cultural equality, stand both as unquestionable evidence that old regime racism is fading, and as the first salvos in a new mode of governance that is just beginning to take hold. To espouse intercultural equality, many ladinos have come to intuitively understand, requires them to give up very little of their inherited racial privilege, and produces only minimal changes in their position in the racial hierarchy. Moreover, these principles can provide a highly effective defense against Maya demands that advance more radical goals. This paradox, expressed in raw and at times homely ways in Chimaltenango, has a more elaborated parallel in the global shift to neoliberal multiculturalism.

At this broader level as well, recognition of cultural rights and equality signals both dramatic shift away from the assimilationist policies of times past, and a more effective way for states to govern culturally diverse societies, while toeing the line of neoliberal political and economic reform. The paradox of neoliberal multiculturalism, like ladino racial ambivalence, is that a progressive response to past societal ills has a menacing potential to perpetuate the problem in a new guise.

Yet the very thrust of this critique also points to a more encouraging alternative scenario. The problem, of course, is not the newfound principles of cultural respect and equality in themselves, but rather, the slippage between these principles as future goal versus description of conditions already achieved, which diverts attention from persisting inequity and injustice. For the most part, ladinos continue to think about their immediate political environs, and about Guatemalan society in general, as if they were the majority and the Indian population were a minority to be managed through the application of high principles and tough love. Once this standpoint is abandoned, the equality ideal can take on a very different political valence, a mandate to actively dismantle the racial hierarchy, an invitation to consider the possibility of indigenous (majority) rule. The point is not that the Maya of Guatemala naturally think alike and could easily be represented as a bloc; nor is it that Maya are somehow inherently more democratic than ladinos. It is, rather, that they have been systematically and structurally subordinated *as indigenous people*, and that a full application of the equality principle would assign special priority to rectify this basic problem.

When confronted with even fairly moderate versions of this more expansive notion of equality, most ladinos in Chimaltenango cry foul. When the occasional ladino dissident supports this notion, expressed as active solidarity with Maya efforts to take their rightful position in Guatemalan society, their peers view their motives as suspect, traitorous, or perhaps a little bit crazy. Yolanda told me recently, for example, that her colleagues at the university have taken to ridiculing her because she gives so much extra time and attention to her Maya students. Genaro's militancy would provoke even stronger reactions, except that he's already so completely *fuera de la canasta* (outside the norm), by virtue of having been a *guerrillero* (guerrilla combatant). This resentment toward the "race traitor" is an old pattern that Luis Cardoza y Aragón observed in Guatemala many years ago, and that surely can be found the world over where stubborn racial hierarchies persist. Arguing in part by analogy with my own experience in the United States, and in part from a decade of study and reflection in Guatemala, I am convinced that an active, visible political alignment of this sort is an essential first step for people who occupy a dominant position in the racial hierarchy and who want to practice the equality principle without allowing it to become a menace. It is a first step only, with no guarantees, fraught with ambiguity and contradiction. If this book, as it circulates in Guatemala, contributes to critical awareness of the need to take this first step and to candid discussion of the difficulties that follow, while also lending hearty support to those ladinos (or mestizos) courageous enough to try, its principal objective will have been achieved.

Excerpt from

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