

# *Maya Nationalisms and Postcolonial Challenges in Guatemala*



## *Introduction* Globalization, Coloniality, and Social Movements

In January 2000 the Ecuadorian indigenous movement overthrew President Jamil Mahuad. Three years later, in October 2003, Bolivia's Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada suffered the same fate at the hands of the peasant movement, which has a high incidence of indigenous participation. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation's campaign against the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in Mexico was a key factor in the PRI's defeat during the 2000 elections, after a little more than seventy years in power. In Guatemala, a month before the last round of elections in 2003, the two presidential candidates, Álvaro Colom and Oscar Berger, were surprised by a mass mobilization in which seventeen Maya organizations demanded "to be included in the administrative structure of the next government."<sup>1</sup> The protestors expressed this demand making reference to other Latin American governments that had fallen as a result of pressure from indigenous peoples. Guatemala's 2007 elections also witnessed the candidacy of Rigoberta Menchú, which, although she did not win, demonstrated the political gains that have been made by Mayas in Guatemala.

In the past few decades, indigenous movements throughout the Americas have become the cornerstone of popular mobilizations. These movements have made their mark in diverse institutional and political landscapes, ranging from public participation in popular protests to participation in the mass media, literature, parliaments, ministries, mayorships, and even a presidency (I refer to Evo Morales in Bolivia). Although this prominence has

been considered a recent phenomenon, it is but the latest example of the ongoing creativity of indigenous peoples in their efforts to achieve civil rights and legal recognition as differentiated cultural entities. Their struggle has changed the makeup of Latin American nation-states to the point that these can no longer be conceived in conventional terms, that is, as culturally and linguistically homogenous.

If we are to celebrate these social irruptions in the name of indigenous rights, it is also important to ask ourselves, What are these movements proposing? Where are they directing us to go? Where are these new political and ideological currents situated in relation to the phenomena of globalization and neoliberalism? What kind of nation is being (re)constructed? What social and interethnic relationships do these movements propose to their mestizo (Ladino in the case of Guatemala), criollo,<sup>2</sup> and black counterparts? This book explores these questions by focusing on the emergence and political-cultural implications of Guatemala's Maya movement.

Being of Maya K'iche' ethnicity myself, I am interested in examining the Maya movement's efforts toward revitalizing and affirming indigenous cultures, through a study of the discourses of literature, journalism, testimonial narratives, educational projects, and other cultural texts about or produced by the representatives of the movement. My primary interest lies in exploring how, since the 1970s, indigenous peoples have been challenging established, hegemonic narratives of modernity, history, nation, and cultural identity as these relate to the indigenous world. For the most part, these narratives have been fabricated by non-indigenous writers who have had the power not only to produce and spread knowledge but also to speak for and about the Maya world. I argue that contemporary Maya narratives promote nationalisms based on the reaffirmation of Maya ethnicity and languages that constitute what it means to be Maya in present-day society, as well as political-cultural projects oriented toward the future.

The importance of analyzing the Maya movement and the recent debates surrounding it resides in the fact that the movement offers an opportunity to reflect upon a new relationship between indigenous peoples, the nation-state, and its hegemonic narratives. There is no doubt that the movement has brought about a significant opening in its historic, social, cultural, and epistemological implications. In many cases, however, instead of offering an opportunity for dialogue and intercultural coexistence, this opening has initiated misunderstandings and political anxieties regarding the movement. These cannot be overlooked; they must be clarified. Here, I will reference one particular case.

Charles Hale, for example, reminds us of the October 1992 edition of the Guatemalan magazine *Crónica*, an issue dedicated to Rigoberta Menchú

Tum after she had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The cover title, “Indigenous Power,” is followed by the subtitle “What Are Their Objectives? Integration or Division? Revenge or Justice? Peace or Conflict?” (Hale, *Más Que un Indio* 19). It is not difficult to perceive that these questions display a sentiment of anxiety about the prominence achieved by indigenous peoples. It is curious to note that this attitude can be compared to that of white intellectuals in the United States who responded to the continental movement of black revitalization in the 1960s by asking a similar question: What do blacks *want*? Lewis R. Gordon responded to this question by quoting the words of Jean-Paul Sartre in “Black Orpheus,” which can also be related to the Maya movement and the anxieties expressed in *Crónica*: “When you removed the gag that was keeping these black mouths shut, what were you hoping for? That they would sing you praises? Did you think that when they raised themselves up again, you would read adoration in the eyes of these that our fathers had forced to bend down to the very ground?” (38).

To what extent do we find “praises” of and “adoration” for whites, criollos, and Ladinos in Maya discourses? To what extent does the Maya movement seek a kind of “vengeance” against those who have “forced” Mayas “to bend down to the very ground”? It must be said at the outset that, in effect, certain confrontational indigenous discourses go so far as to propose a nationalism that epistemologically places the other in a position of subalternity. Equally, there are more moderate revolutionary narratives of cultural revitalization, as well as those that, despite recognizing a Maya locus of enunciation, opt for an elitist, neoliberal Mayacentrism that excludes populations in conditions of subalternity. The primary intent of this book is to examine the texts of the Maya movement’s intellectuals in the context of the debates the movement has generated. I also compare these texts with the words of those who have considered themselves lettered authorities in representing the indigenous world. I suggest that focusing on these debates will enable us to understand what the movement is responding to. More important, this will demystify anxieties and skepticism about the indigenous world and its proposals, helping us to appreciate its contradictions, ambiguities, and material and ideological contributions to the Guatemalan nation.

In general terms, the emergence of the Maya movement is the result of a long political struggle that, to the present, has coincided with a period of profound, generalized economic crisis and the failure of the models of development of the Guatemalan nation-state. According to Demetrio Cojtí (*Configuración; El movimiento*)<sup>3</sup>—a member of the movement and one of its most widely recognized intellectuals—the movement began in the 1970s as the result of significant events. Cojtí mentions, among other factors, the

participation of Mayas in the Guatemalan armed struggle (1960–1996); the progressive awakening of the rural sector, leading to the emergence of the Committee of Peasant Unity (CUC) in 1978; and the decision of a group of educated intellectuals—schoolteachers, health promoters, doctors, lawyers, notaries, and the like—to reaffirm their cultural identity and history from a Maya perspective. Also, experiences of economic and ethnic inequality generated the need to change indigenous peoples’ material conditions of existence. For Cojtí, these processes challenged the nation-state to assert “the recognition of the Maya as a Nation or a People...and propose solutions and means to achieve such recognition” (*Configuración* 45). In this context, the movement has responded to a colonial situation based on oppression, racism, exploitation, and marginality. Its primary objective is, obviously, to change the structures of the nation-state, proposing a new model that acknowledges the Maya as a political and differentiated cultural entity.

From the time of the movement’s consolidation in the 1990s, it has pursued many objectives. For example, it has actively worked in favor of human rights, especially cultural rights, since the end of the 1970s; it has stimulated national and continental debates about the 500th anniversary of the so-called discovery of the “New World”; since 1991 it has advocated a continental campaign called “500 Years of Indigenous, Black, and Popular Resistance”; it has consolidated the world leadership assumed by the Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú Tum, who in the last elections ran for president of the country; it has institutionalized the declaration of the International Year of the Indigenous Peoples initiated by the United Nations in 1993, and this declaration, in turn, served as grounds for the ratification of the Agreement 169 on the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples of the International Labor Organization (ILO); and in March 1995 it achieved the consolidation of the Accord on Identity and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples that was later ratified with the Peace Accord Agreement signed in 1996 between the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) and the government, putting an end to Guatemala’s thirty-six-year civil war.<sup>4</sup>

The movement has gradually developed two ideological tendencies representing two complementary and, at times, contradictory paths. The first of these tendencies has been defined by some as the Maya cultural rights group (*Maya culturales*). This group is composed of Maya intellectuals (the majority of whom are professionals) and indigenous organizations that prioritize an ethnic adscription and the vindication of indigenous cultural specificities. For instance, the group advocates the revitalization of a Maya (not “Indian”) identity, Maya *traje* (traditional dress), and indigenous languages and religion. The primary objectives are to explore and question racism and to elaborate pedagogical materials that emphasize the affirma-

tion of indigenous cultural identity and history. The group's organizations include the Academy of Maya Languages of Guatemala (ALMG), an institution that has produced dictionaries and grammars in Maya languages, and the Association of Maya Writers of Guatemala (AEMG), which has produced didactic materials and educational curricula relevant to Maya culture.

The other tendency can be identified as the Maya popular rights group (*Maya populares*). According to some scholars, this group understands "Guatemalan society in terms of class" and "assume[s] the indigenous identity as secondary" (Bastos and Camus, *Abriendo caminos* 29). Rather than focus political efforts on cultural demands, these intellectuals and organizations denounce the effects of the violence—past and present—against rural and urban communities (Maya and non-Maya). Their members include widows, relatives of the disappeared, people displaced by the civil war, refugees, and communities in resistance that question the nation-state's violation of human rights (Bastos and Camus, *Abriendo caminos* 27–28). Their organizations include the aforementioned CUC and the National Coordination of Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA).

The two groups of the Maya movement have experienced tensions and even rupture, especially after the 2000 elections, which were won by the Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG). To illustrate, in that year certain Maya intellectuals decided to accept jobs in some of the official party's institutions. One of these was Demetrio Cojtí. Until that time, he had engaged in denouncing the politics of genocide against the Maya population during the civil war and had rigorously questioned the Guatemalan nation-state, which he saw as sheltering the structures of internal colonialism. Cojtí's credibility and the confidence he had earned fell apart.<sup>5</sup> It was not so much his decision to become part of the government that caused controversy, but rather that he chose to become part of a government that housed "General" Efraín Ríos Montt as one of its leaders. Ríos Montt is a general who held the Guatemalan presidency during a short period from 1982 to 1983. In the recently ended civil war, his government perpetrated some of the worst massacres against the country's rural population, specifically the Maya, the most affected by the war. The general attempted to return to power in the 2003 elections, running for the presidency, but failed, in great measure because of a campaign of civic consciousness-raising led by Rigoberta Menchú.

Menchú initiated a project called "We Are Guatemala" (a slogan countering that of Ríos Montt, "I Am Guatemala") to promote the vote against the general. On one occasion, the Maya K'iche' activist was attacked for bringing a lawsuit in the Guatemalan Constitutional Court against the general, accusing him of racism and genocide. After this incident, many Mayas questioned the morality of intellectuals like Cojtí who became part of the FRG.

The late activist Amanda Pop, in a letter titled “What will you do now, Dr. Cojtí?” (“¿Qué hará doctor Cojtí?”), asked him, “You, who for many years dedicated yourself to denounce and write about the racism that we Mayas suffer, what will you do in protest against the violent racist attack of the official party [the FRG] against our sister Dr. Rigoberta Menchú and, consequently, against our people?”

By seeing the tensions within the Maya movement, we can notice the ambiguities in and contradictions between its “cultural” and “popular” tendencies. These insights demystify many of the perspectives—at times overly celebratory—on the Maya movement, pushing both its members and scholars to rethink it and understand it in ideological and political terms. By focusing on some of the debates that the movement has generated, this book explores the political complexities in Guatemala’s reconfiguration as a multilingual, multiethnic, multinational country. While recognizing the similarities and differences between cultural and popular Mayas, this book also extends, broadens, and works with the notion of “indigenous movement” developed by Maya Pérez Ruíz. She proposes that a movement is not a well-defined and delimited entity, but rather a project that stems from an entire political process in which one sees the convergence and involvement of organizations of varying hierarchy and trajectory. Leaders and advisers, in an individual way or through their own organizations, participate with their own distinct orientations. A social movement

*should [not] be understood as a predetermined essence, but as something that is forged as a product of complex internal processes of interaction and negotiation, in which decisions are made, leaderships and interests confront one another, and diverse modes and forms of communication and participation are at stake. . . . It is generated in conflict and interaction with adversaries, competitors, and even allies who, in large measure, contribute to define the field of opportunities.<sup>6</sup> (Pérez Ruíz 277–78)*

In this same vein, I do not assume that the “Maya movement” denotes a series of analogous ideological and political objectives and aspirations, nor do I suggest that all of the movement’s intellectuals fully coincide in their causes and goals. It is worth mentioning that the Maya nationalisms I study here derive from a concrete reality: the recognition of a colonial condition and the quest to realize indigenous peoples’ historical demands. Nonetheless, Maya intellectuals approach these problems in diverse ways and in diverse fields, many times taking directions that produce tensions, as Cojtí did.

When I speak about Maya nationalisms, I refer to how indigenous intel-

lectuals are not only reimagining Guatemala but also developing proposals and political strategies to reconstruct the nation within and outside the indigenous movement. The debates I study and the existent tensions that emerge from these, in one way or another, make reference precisely to an unfinished colonial experience and the efforts to eradicate that experience *via* nationalist discourses. These nationalisms operate, as Partha Chatterjee would argue (42), within a structure of knowledge derived from Europe and appropriated specifically to repudiate colonialism and propose a new national order. In the case of the Maya, this means materializing a recognition and place within the structures of the nation-state and modernity. Thus, their voices and activism can pave the way for a future in which their prominence and their differences (languages, cultural specificities, spirituality) acquire a dignity that has not been recognized, a future in which they become part of the decision making of the nation. But if we recognize this project's breadth and ambition, then, upon close examination of the practices and local proposals of Maya intellectuals, we will find similarities, contradictions, and ambiguities regarding their nationalisms. For example, de Lión's radical project of mayanization is different from but complements that of Menchú's; in turn, these two projects contradict those of Maya intellectuals such as Estuardo Zapeta and Cojtí. I consider it important not only to analyze the relation between those who defy Maya nationalist proposals but also to consider the nationalist contradictions within the indigenous movement itself.

Critics, for the most part foreign, have acknowledged the complexity that any study of the Maya movement represents. First, in general terms, most of the existing bibliography highlights the historical context of the Maya movement and the growth of an influential Maya intellectual class with a nationalist authority since the post-war period.<sup>7</sup> Second, these studies explore the challenges that Mayas face in a new age of economic and cultural modernization, as well as the tensions and contradictions between Maya culturales and populares. Third, they emphasize the movement's efforts to revitalize languages, Maya dress, and political self-determination. Some scholars have even questioned the movement's exclusion of Maya women from its organizations, its reluctance to encourage their participation. Others have been concerned that Maya intellectuals put too much emphasis on cultural aspects while neglecting issues of race and class and, in doing so, recycle capitalist systems of oppression.

Despite these valuable contributions, I feel that certain gaps need to be filled. Although these studies concentrate on the post-war period and question fundamental aspects ignored within the movement itself, I feel that they still privilege the movement's demands and politics of cultural and

linguistic revitalization without giving enough attention to the reproduction of existing relations of power, nor the political-institutional order that continues to recycle a normative and cultural frame of colonialism and coloniality. In other words, I feel that these studies lack a rigorous questioning of modernity—now called globalization—and its intimate relationship with epistemologies that continue legitimating colonialism and coloniality to maintain a hegemonic status quo. My project aims to complement and engage the studies outlined above, by focusing on the challenges that the movement faces in its efforts to eradicate its condition of subalternity through nationalisms that rethink Guatemala in its cultural, political, and economic dimensions.

This book departs from understanding the category of “modernity” as an institution that presupposes and shelters a colonial order in relation to the American continent. Following critics and theorists who have focused on the theme of colonialism and coloniality,<sup>8</sup> I depart from the assumption that globalization is a process that has reproduced and developed more sophisticated forms of financial, commercial, communicative, and informational domination over the realities of the so-called Third World.<sup>9</sup> Through the expropriation of resources, military and political hegemony, and the institutional control of local economies, modernity has as its dark side coloniality (Mignolo, *The Darker Side; Local Histories*). Because discussions of colonialism and rigorous interrogations of categories like “modernity,” “development,” “hegemony,” and “nation” as colonial constructions are evident in the textual production of Maya discourses, I situate the debates surrounding the movement within the political and epistemological context of what the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano and, later, Walter Mignolo (*The Darker Side; Local Histories*) have called the “coloniality of power.”

Quijano and Mignolo explore the forms by which the West and its agents have constituted a model of power that, at present, is globally hegemonic. This model supposes that, despite the end of “colonialism” as a formal political system, coloniality “has not stopped being the central character of contemporary social power” (Quijano, “‘Raza,’ ‘etnia’ y ‘nación’” 168). The hegemony of dominant groups, according to Quijano, continues being legitimated through coloniality. Sustaining this are Eurocentrism and the idea of race—the supposed structural, biological difference that places the “Indian,” the “black,” and the “yellow” races in a natural situation of inferiority to their “white” counterparts. Quijano argues that, alongside colonialism, another conquest has taken place: the “colonization of the imagination of the dominated” (“Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality” 169). Through the expropriation of knowledge and through the repression of modes of signification, social structure, modes of knowing, and the production of knowledge, this coloniality imposed “the rulers’ own patterns of



expression, and of their beliefs and images with reference to the supernatural. These beliefs and images served not only to impede the cultural production of the dominated, but also as a very efficient means of social and cultural control” (Quijano, “Coloniality” 169). This hierarchical articulation and imposition of power are what Quijano calls the coloniality of power; it characterizes the other face of colonialism (military campaigns, genocide, the plunder of lands). In a “peaceful way,” it has served to legitimate a structured control of the workforce, natural resources, and products, based on capitalism and the global market. These models were imposed on all structures of control and material production and reciprocity in existence before the conquest of America (Quijano, “Coloniality” 534).

According to Quijano, the category of the coloniality of power operates through a classification and reclassification of the world’s populations, established by institutions with the capacity to articulate and codify meaning and knowledge. The state, the church, the media, and the school, among others, impose a Eurocentric epistemology on dominated populations in order to define peoples, territories, and spaces according to the political, ideological, and economic objectives of the dominant groups. For instance, the conquest of the Americas and the consequent creation of the viceroyalties initiated the first phase of the coloniality of power. The introduction of the alphabet and writing constituted the first exercise of domination, serving as the basis for administering and classifying the territories and the First Peoples of the “New World.” The first guidelines of this process are revealed by Christopher Columbus. Believing that he had arrived in India and justifying his authority in the name of the sword and the cross, Columbus culturally defined the first populations of the Americas as “Indians.” From that moment on, the diverse peoples of the “New World” were incarcerated within this discursive construction that was conceived a priori.<sup>10</sup> For centuries, it has kept indigenous peoples in a condition of subalternity.<sup>11</sup> Equally, the “new” territories, even when recognized as having been named already by native populations, received different names in order to become part of the Spanish Empire. For example, Columbus mentioned the following when writing to the Spanish king and queen: “‘this [island] of San Salvador’ (October 14); ‘this [island] which *I named* Santa María de la Concepción’ (October 15); ‘which *I named* Fernandina’ (October 15); ‘which *I named* Isabela’ (October 19)” (quoted in Lienhard, *La voz* 40).

The same colonial attitude of “naming” the First Peoples and territories was adopted with even bloodier violence by the conquistadores who came after the admiral. No one better illustrates these experiences than Bernal Díaz del Castillo. In describing Hernán Cortés and the storming of Tabasco, in what today is México, he writes:

*Cortés, having thus made himself master of the town, took formal possession of it for the crown of Castile. He gave three cuts with his sword on a large ceiba tree, which grew in the place, and proclaimed aloud, that he took possession of the city in the name and behalf of the Catholic sovereigns, and would maintain and defend the same with sword and buckler against all who should gainsay it. The same vaunting declaration was also made by the soldiers, and the whole was duly recorded and attested by the notary. This was the usual simple, but chivalric, form with which the Spanish cavaliers asserted the royal title to the conquered territories in the New World. It was a good title, doubtless, against the claims of any other European potentate. (Prescott, History 264–65)*

As can be seen, the attitudes and actions of the admiral, as much as those who followed him, suppressed an entire series of knowledges that were previously held about this “New World.” Thus begins a colonial and epistemological violence that, along with new illnesses, the exploitation of labor, and the theft of lands, “organizes the totality of space and time—all cultures, peoples, and territories on the planet, past and present—in a great universal [European] narrative” (Lander, “Modernidad, colonialidad” 84).<sup>12</sup>

The imposition of the Latin alphabet elaborated an epistemology that spread and legitimated the first Spanish imperial enterprise. Language and writing—“the companions of empire,” according to Antonio Nebrija (i)—gave Spaniards the power to divide the “Indians” racially and territorially through documents that derived their legitimacy from “God” and the king and queen. In this way, writing constituted an institution that disseminated an epistemology affirming Spain as the culturally dominant power in the native imaginary. Spain imposed its values and norms on indigenous peoples’ forms of social cohesion, knowledges, and forms of writing. What the “Indians” offered culturally (in the broadest sense of the word) was inferior because it lacked the supposedly “universal” legitimacy of Spanish values and written documents.

For Quijano, the second phase of the coloniality of power takes place in the nineteenth century when England and France established their hegemony on a global scale. The “independence” of Spanish America from Spain enabled these centers of power to spread the cultural categories already established in the first phase by the agents of “civilization” in the Americas: the criollos. In the second phase, cultural categories such as “Indian,” “race,” “nation,” and “ethnicity” were reconfigured to create a new epistemology that divided and affirmed the hegemony of these centers of power as places where scientific knowledge was privileged. Here, the well-known dichotomy of civilization/barbarism, spread by Domingo Faustino Sarmiento (*Facundo*),

legitimized a cultural and civilizing project based on the promotion of Europeans immigrating to Argentina, as well as the extermination of indigenous peoples and blacks who did not convert to “civilized” subjects.

With the category of the coloniality of power, then, Quijano and Mignolo guide us toward studies that examine relations of power (cultural, economic, racial/ethnic, gender) and the diverse epistemological mechanisms of establishing and maintaining hegemony used by institutions to recycle the elements of colonialism. That is, the idea of the coloniality of power continues to determine the relationship between hegemonic institutions and peoples in conditions of subalternity. Today’s indigenous cultures, for example, still serve as “objects of study,” whereas the West serves as the “authority” that produces concepts to categorize these objects of study. The coloniality of power also exposes the fact that Latin American modernity and nation-states, as well as their institutions, perpetuate Eurocentric colonial legacies. Starting from the dark side of modernity contributes to the elaboration of discussions that force a confrontation with the colonial experience and the relevance of this experience to indigenous peoples in Latin America. This is especially true today as the United States leads a new Western hegemonic expansion: that is, the West continues to superimpose the universal and economic “narrative” that seeks to absorb subaltern peoples into a hegemonic system based on the Universalist narrative of Europe.

If the coloniality of power is modernity’s dark side, then how is this being resisted or recycled? How does the Maya movement propose to alter the established narratives of the nation, citizenship, and modernity? What do Mayas propose as means of overcoming the adversity represented in the coloniality of power? These are precisely the questions that this project focuses on and problematizes by analyzing the ongoing debates between Mayas and non-Mayas. My contention is that any discussion involving indigenous peoples and the ideas of “modernity,” “nation,” or “citizenship” as referents must confront the coloniality of power in order to reconceptualize such categories. Within these epistemological territories, we encounter not only the diverse ideological and political objectives of indigenous rights movements but also, most important, an immanent battle and debate about competing national imaginaries. I feel that an examination of these discussions reveals unresolved tensions that will allow us to reflect upon possible paths to follow in forming an intercultural Guatemalan nation-state.

Some readers might argue that beginning with these unresolved tensions implies advocating a “division” based on differences. However, would not turning the page on modern Guatemalan history be an act that consciously or unconsciously supports racism and the marginalization of indigenous peoples? Is that not a way of continuing to divide Guatemala?

I feel that departing from these tensions and conflictive intercultural relations is precisely the first step in the creation of a more fruitful, interethnic dialogue. In this sense, my book echoes the sentiment of Gerald Graff when he says that instead of evading conflicts, we should confront and discuss them (“Teach the Conflicts” 58).

This book is divided into two parts. The first (chapters 2 and 3) deals with questions of literature and *testimonio*. During the recently ended civil war in Guatemala, a large number of Mayas participated in the armed struggle. However, we know little about what this struggle meant to the indigenous population. My focus here is the category of “revolution.” I hypothesize that the objective of the “revolution” for Mayas, more than replacing the government, was their own “national liberation” (Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*), as well as the decolonization of Maya culture, subjectivity, and knowledges. In this first part, I primarily examine the works of the first Maya Kaqchikel writer, Luis de Li3n (chapter 2), and his efforts to disarticulate previous representations of Mayas in literature authored by non-indigenous writers. I pay particular attention to his novel, *El tiempo principia en Xibalb3* (Time Begins in Xibalb3), his dialogue with the Nobel Prize novelist Miguel 3ngel Asturias, and his narrative construction of an alternative Maya nationalism. Chapter 3 focuses on Rigoberta Mench3. First, I examine the debates about the “veracity” of her testimonio, *I, Rigoberta Mench3* (Mench3 and Burgos), generated by David Stoll’s *Rigoberta Mench3 and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*. Then, I focus on Mench3’s second book, *Crossing Borders*, and explore her efforts to promote interculturality through human and civil rights activism in Guatemala and internationally.

The second part (chapters 4 and 5) revolves around discussions on modernity and identity politics. Chapter 4 examines the “intercultural” or “interethnic” debate in Guatemala over the past two decades. Through an examination of Mario Roberto Morales’s *La articulaci3n de las diferencias* (The Articulation of Differences) and Estuardo Zapeta’s *Las huellas de B’alam* (The Jaguar’s Footprints), I show how emerging Maya and non-Maya discourses postulate a new, multicultural Guatemalan identity that can better embrace the challenges of a global order. I point out some of the limitations in these perspectives and offer alternative reflections, especially regarding (inter)cultural identity.

Finally, I turn to the question of education in Guatemala (chapter 5). For many reasons, education has become the practical, concrete way to carry out a project of interculturality that promotes indigenous perspectives and languages in our country. In 2002 the Guatemalan Ministry of Education began an educational campaign to teach Maya languages in various kindergarten and elementary public schools in rural and urban areas.

First, I provide a historical context for the discourse of education in Guatemala and its relationship to indigenous peoples. Then, I examine the new *Diseño de reforma educativa* (Educational Reform Design) of 1998, outlining the specific objectives of the previous and current discourses on education in Guatemala. Some basic questions I explore are, Does the new intercultural program demystify or reproduce the role of public schools in the production of the “ideal” Guatemalan citizen (for example, a citizen who is linguistically and culturally homogenous) for the globalized era? How are other identities consigned to or rescued from the margins? What kind of “nation” or “intercultural citizenship” is being projected for Guatemala?

Before proceeding, I should clarify a few things. I am familiar with the debates on postcolonialism in Latin America and elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> I make use of the concept “postcolonial” to converse with those who have questioned and analyzed “European territorial conquests, the various institutions of European colonialisms, the discursive operations of empire, the subtleties of subject construction in colonial discourse and the resistance of those subjects, and, most importantly perhaps, the differing responses to such incursions and their contemporary colonial legacies in both pre- and post-independence nations and communities” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: Key Concepts* 187). I feel that postcolonial and subaltern studies have best problematized the category of “culture” and the ways in which culture has been used to develop a politics destined to marginalize Maya, even when these politics are well intentioned. In referring to “Maya nationalisms” with regards to the postcolonial, I hope to create and locate epistemological and political spaces in which to question and counteract the identities imposed upon the “dominated.” Not only do I contest the existing and historic deformations and distortions of Maya cultures, but also I clarify the economic policies that have maintained their subalternity.

I should also point out that I acknowledge the “essentialism” into which I might fall in referring to the “West,” “Europe,” and “Ladino” as categories. I understand that many subjects feel (and will feel) interpellated. I do not suggest that the West, Europe, and Ladinos are locations and identities in which all the world’s evils are situated, but rather I attack Eurocentrism as a fundamental principle legitimating the domination of indigenous peoples. By making these references, my aim is to center a history of colonialism and the colonality of power, which have not ended for indigenous peoples. At the same time, to begin with the debates that the Maya movement has spawned situates current conflicts and tensions within a broad historical context that reveals the movement’s transformations from the colonial period to the present. As Robert Stam observes, a critique of the “West,” in itself, seeks to expose “Europe’s historically oppressive relation to its internal and

external others” (193). Such a critique also can criticize “the assumption of a ‘natural’ European right to dominate others, whether through force, as in colonial times, or through domineering financial institutions and ethnocentric media, as in the present” (193). Eurocentrism is not a political position that is consciously assumed by anyone. No one announces himself as “Eurocentric.” On the contrary, Eurocentrism is an implied ideology that needs elucidating, a pattern to which even some Mayas have fallen prey. From this derives the importance I find in the category of the coloniality of power; it is a theoretical framework that invites reflection on discourses that, consciously or unconsciously, have recycled these ideologies and attitudes.

Maya discourses and nationalisms, especially those that assign a capital role to Maya cosmivision (chapters 2 and 3), are situated in a new epistemological and political field that enables alternatives to a project of modernity that recycles the coloniality of power, as well as a critical perspective on this. For the most part, some of these discourses can be understood as a search for what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls “provincializing Europe.” With this notion, Chakrabarty seeks to construct “a politics and Project of Alliance between the dominant metropolitan histories and the subaltern peripheral pasts” (42). One strategy that the Indian thinker proposes is to counteract notions of European modernity and historicity by inscribing in the history of modernity “the ambivalences, contradictions, the use of force, and the tragedies and ironies that attend it” (43) and also “other narratives of human connections that draw sustenance from dreamed-up pasts and futures where collectivities are defined neither by the rituals of citizenship nor by the nightmare of ‘tradition’ that ‘modernity’ creates” (46).

As I will make clear, the movement’s epistemological and political perspectives and contributions to the project of “provincializing Europe” are situated precisely within the effort to materialize “a project from subalternity” (Guha, *Elementary Aspects*) based on Maya cosmivision. Despite the diverse meanings and even lack of meaning that this notion has acquired for some,<sup>14</sup> I use the term *Maya cosmivision* to refer to the use that intellectuals, writers, activists, and indigenous and non-indigenous subjects have made of the sacred K’iche’ texts, *Popol Wuj*, with the goal of rearticulating a political and epistemological locus of enunciation against anything that threatens the values and struggles of indigenous peoples. That is, the reconceptualization of *Maya cosmivision* seeks to reference ancestral values in order to articulate them in the present, thus maintaining vital aspects of indigenous communities such as language, spirituality, and dress. Furthermore, this cosmivision demonstrates indigenous people’s intimate relationship with Mother Earth and Mother Nature, their defense of these, their value of the community and the collective over the individual and

competition, and, finally, their articulation of the histories of the sacred texts to show not only a historical and cultural epistemological connection but also a simultaneous cohesion between the past, the present, and the future of Maya peoples.

Centralizing the role of Maya cosmivision also implies centering the important role that interculturality plays in these reflections.<sup>15</sup> As chapter 4 makes apparent, speaking of interculturality brings up contradictions: at times, we fall into the trap of recycling the coloniality of power. This becomes especially clear in the second part of the book, where you will see how “interculturality” acquires diverse connotations, depending on who is talking about it. In some cases, the intellectuals in the interethnic debate merely end up proposing an intercultural perspective that is intimately related to neoliberal multiculturalism.<sup>16</sup> My goal, especially in the second part of the book, is to problematize the discussions on interculturality between Mayas and non-Mayas to clarify the contradictions, tensions, and limitations of this category with regard to the themes of nation, citizenship, and modernity in Guatemala. These facets of the debate elucidate what is at stake in the discussion on interethnic politics. Highlighting these enables us to recognize those Maya discourses that originate from a subaltern locus of enunciation. We can then propose a *politics of the possible*, that is, approaches and dialogues for an intercultural national formation and coexistence.

Another clarification I should make has to do with the categories of “Indian” and “indigenous” employed in this book. I am aware of the colonial precedents that these categories imply, as well as the efforts on the part of indigenous movements to reconceptualize cultural signifiers like “Maya,” “Aymara,” and “Quechua” in order to affirm their respective identities. When I use categories like “Indian” and “indigenous” in this book, I do so in a spirit similar to that of Frantz Fanon in his use of the category “black” (*Black Skin, White Masks* 109–40). Fanon recognized the potential of inverting and rearticulating this category in a positive way to establish an epistemological, political, and differentiated locus of enunciation. We find this same spirit in Menchú when she uses the category “Indian” in order to invert it. According to her, being Indian represents a permanent, anticolonial, antiracist struggle and ancestral values: “I am proud of my roots. I feel that I am a granddaughter of the Mayas, and I am proud of what the term ‘Indian’ means to us” (Yáñez 98). Sometimes, I put the category in quotation marks to indicate a pejorative use, but for the most part, it holds the positive value attributed to it by Menchú.

The reader familiar with the Maya movement in Guatemala will wonder about the absence of other key intellectuals participating in the country’s current interethnic debates. Among these are Humberto Ak’abal, Víctor

Montejo, Luis Enrique Sam Colop, Gaspar Pedro Gonzáles, Rosalina Tuyuc, Irma Alicia Velázquez Nimatuj, Maya Cú Choc, Arturo Arias, and Rigoberto Juárez Paz. My aim is not to present new literary faces,<sup>17</sup> nor to shed light on Maya and non-Maya politics in a Guatemalan context, nor, even less, to open up a discussion about more well-known Maya and non-Maya intellectuals. Nor am I suggesting that I do not consider their activism and texts substantial in the national interethnic debate. There is no doubt that these intellectuals have made valuable contributions to the formulation of Guatemalan interculturality, and they have certainly developed sound criticism toward eradicating racism and political exclusion. One incident in particular, involving Humberto Ak'abal, attests to their participation in the interethnic debate.<sup>18</sup> In the present study, however, I have selected texts that, according to my criteria, stress those elements of the movement that are more militantly nationalist, because they demonstrate ongoing tensions about cultural identity, modernity, and the colonial experience in the country. The discussions upon which I focus here do not represent *all* Mayas and Ladinos in Guatemala. Rather, they best represent the unresolved tensions that have prevented (and continue preventing) the construction of a truly intercultural project.<sup>19</sup>

One limitation of this book is that it does not center on the role of the country's Xinka and Garífuna populations.<sup>20</sup> From the Maya perspectives studied here, especially in the first part, I hope to at least open up the possibility of a dialogue not only with Ladinos but also with Xinkas and Garífunas, who, I imagine, have much to say about their experiences of colonialism and the colonality of power. In general, I would venture to say that, like the Maya, they would agree with questioning the state's repressive and ideological apparatuses. As with the Maya, the Xinka and Garífuna have been perceived and interpreted from Eurocentric perspectives, their material conditions of existence and their cultures measured by the signifiers of "civilization" and "modernity."

My foremost objective resides in proposing Maya-ness as an alternative locus of enunciation for Guatemala. I present the challenge of constructing an epistemological, political axis that destabilizes the presently constituted hegemonic systems of knowledge and classification established around categories that still presuppose elements of colonialism. More important, I seek to situate Maya-ness as a space that allows the construction of a more inclusive and democratic nation-state.

For some readers, my use of a Maya "we" in this book might seem paradoxical or contradictory. Despite being "outside" my national and communal environment, I speak from an indigenous locus of enunciation, and I identify with a history of anticolonial and antiracist struggle. For me, this



development of an anticolonial and antiracist consciousness has involved a return to and reclamation of a cultural identity that was denied to me in my childhood—by a system of values that, instead of reaffirming my indigenous subjectivity, taught me to hate and even destroy it. Part of my adolescence was spent negating my past and ethnic origin. But later, after sharing struggles, books, and discussions about my ancestral past, the Western values were inverted and defied, making my voyage (and, in large measure, this project) something very personal. This book expresses a favorable point of view on the Maya movement. Writing it has involved my sensibilities and affectivities toward the indigenous world. From these, I think, act, and articulate my reflections in order to respond to that history of marginalization, racism, and exploitation, as well as to the struggle to eradicate these. I yearn for a better future for “we” Maya and also for a subaltern “we” in general. By this, I do not want to imply that I am holding back any criticism I might have of the movement. On the contrary, despite an understanding that this project is the fruit of specific and legitimate historical demands, there is also a necessity to analyze and question the movement’s causes and the alternatives it offers—not to undermine the movement, but in the spirit of animating a more global, critical debate that favors an indigenous “we” and a multiethnic, multicultural collective as well.

This project is the result of three periods of research about Maya education, social movements, and political activism for human rights over the past decade in Guatemala and in Chiapas, in southern Mexico. This project became more clearly defined in 2002, when I took an eight-month research leave from the Department of Hispanic Languages and Literatures at the University of Pittsburgh, where I did my doctoral work. I participated in various workshops on indigenous and popular education and human rights in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. In addition, I did volunteer work in Cómitan, Chiapas, with Education for Peace (Edupez), an organization founded by the diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas. On these occasions, I had the opportunity to work with various Maya communities on projects promoting self-sufficiency, cultural and linguistic revitalization, and peaceful solutions to conflict. My conclusions here reflect these activities, as well as additional research that resulted in my doctoral dissertation. Many of the thoughts developed in that project have been expanded, even re-elaborated. The end result is this book.

Finally, being Maya, I feel that this project is important simply because it seeks to overcome the prejudices, anxieties, and fears of class and ethnicity, in order to promote a dialogue about interculturality and the historical problems and challenges that indigenous peoples have confronted in the era of globalization. I hope that my reflections contribute to such a dialogue.