



Introduction

"And as I observed their ill will toward the service of his Majesty, and for the good benefit of this country, I burned them and ordered that the city be burned to its foundation."

Pedro de Alvarado, letter to Carlos V of Spain

From: Perrera, Victor. Unfinished Conquest: The Guatemalan Tragedy. ©1993 by The Regents of the University of California. University of California Press.

One month after the conquistador of Guatemala, Cortés's blond captain Pedro de Alvarado, was crushed under a horse during a campaign in Nochistlán, Mexico, rainwater spilled over the crater of majestic Agua volcano and flooded the newly founded capital of Santiago de los Caballeros de Guatemala. Among the hundreds of Spaniards buried by the mud slides and the ensuing earthquake was the grieving widow of Pedro de Alvarado, who had dubbed herself "Doña Beatriz the Unlucky." The opening chapter of the Conquest of Guatemala ended as it began, in a violent convulsion.

Five hundred years before the arrival of the Spaniards, the Mayas who built the great temples at Tikal, Palenque, and Yaxchilán abandoned their cities for reasons that continue to mystify scholars. They left behind the majestic shells of what was probably the most advanced civilization to have ever flourished on the American continent. Only fragments of their achievements in mathematics, philosophy, astronomy, and calendrical science survived at the time of first contact with the European invaders. Many of those fragments went up in flames in the infamous auto-da-fé celebrated in 1562 by Yucatán's Bishop Diego de Landa in the plaza of Maní. As the climax to his personal and unauthorized inquisition into Indian heresy, Landa burned possibly hundreds of hieroglyphic Mayan books and codices, which he denounced as "superstitions and falsehoods of the devil."

A remnant of what may have been the Mayas' equivalent to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* surfaced in highland Guatemala in the sixteenth century as the *Popol Vuh*, or "Book of Council." Composed in Quiché Maya and rendered in the Spanish alphabet, the *Popol Vuh* recounts the migrations of the Quichés' ancestors to Guatemala from their ancient capital of Tula in the Mexican highlands. Another, perhaps older section of the *Popol Vuh* recounts the adventures of the heroic wizard twins, Hunahpú and Xbalanqué, who defeat the Death Lords of the Maya underworld, Xibalbá, and initiate the present cycle of creation. A growing body of evidence suggests that the twins' epic encounters inspired the symbolic chthonic journeys undertaken by the *Ahauob*, the philosopher kings of the classical Maya era.

After the ancient Mayan sites were abandoned, many of the survivors dispersed to what is today Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, while others made their way to the highlands of Chiapas and Guatemala, dividing into the thirty or so warring kingdoms of the post-classic Maya era. Today's twenty-one Mayan linguistic communities, headed by the Quichés, the Cakchiquels, the Tz'utujils, the Mams, and the Quekchís, are descended from the warring kingdoms of the post-classic Mayas.

At the time of first contact with the Europeans, the highlands of Guatemala were rent by internal dissensions caused by the break-up of the powerful Quiché empire, whose king, Quicab the Great, had ruled over approximately 26,000 square kilometers of high plains, or *altiplano*, and collected tribute from more than one million subjects.

Captain Pedro de Alvarado was commissioned by his commander Hernán Cortés to explore the territories making up present-day Guatemala and to "endeavor with the greatest care to bring the people to peace without war and to preach matters concerning our holy faith." In the performance of his commission the mercurial, rapacious Alvarado strayed so far from his commander's behest that his Indian name, Tonatiuh, meaning "sun"—a reference to his blond hair and beard—has become synonymous with the bloodiest chapter in the Conquest of the Americas.

In 1523 Captain Alvarado climbed to the altiplano from the Pacific with 120 horsemen, 300 foot soldiers, and several hundred Mexican auxiliaries from Cholula and Tlascala. They were accompanied by two priests, Juan Godínez and Juan Díaz. Alvarado's expedition met

scant resistance until it reached the plains near present-day Quezaltenango (Xelahú), where it was met by a large army of Quichés led by their king, Tecún Umán, grandson of Quicab the Great. Had the Quichés persuaded their neighboring Cakchiquels and Tz'utujils to join them in repelling the Spaniards, the Conquest might have had a different and more complicated denouement. But the Cakchiquels still smarted from decades of harsh treatment by the Quichés, who had exacted exorbitant tributes, and both nations were distrusted by the Tz'utujils, who had fought bitterly to defend their territories on Lake Atitlán. Alvarado cleverly exploited these animosities to divide and conquer the altiplano.

The Quiché warriors, who greatly outnumbered the invading Spaniards, gave a good account of themselves, fighting the armored foot soldiers toe-to-toe with obsidian-tipped arrows, lances, spears, and leather shields. The Maya warriors feared the Spanish mastiffs and the cavalry far more than their steel weapons or their light artillery. In the Spaniards' version, the sight of man and horse merged in a single terrifying beast persuaded many of the Quichés—as it had the Aztecs before them—that they were locked in battle with superhuman beings. According to a colonial Quiché document cited by Victoria Bricker [1981], Tecún Umán was a great sorcerer who "flew up like an eagle" and vanquished Alvarado when he thrust his lance at his mount, beheading it in one stroke. But the unscathed Alvarado instead passed his own steel lance through the heart of Tecún Umán. With the Quiché king lying mortally wounded on the ground, the battle was soon decided in the Spaniards' favor. The sight of the noble Tecún Umán covered in quetzal feathers and crowns of gold, silver, and precious stones profoundly moved Alvarado, according to the Quiché documents. In a gesture of deference toward his adversary, Alvarado stopped his mastiffs from tearing apart the fallen monarch and returned the body to his subjects for burial. Alvarado named the site of battle Quezaltenango in honor of Tecún Umán.

Alvarado's own chronicle drily reports the death of "one of the four lords of Uatlán who was captain-general of this realm." The conquistador's ruthlessness would reassert itself in his next encounter with the Quichés, when they attempted to lure the Spaniards into their fortress capital of Gumarcaah (Uatlán) and ambush them. Sensing a trap, Alvarado stopped his troops at the entrance to the citadel.

He ordered the capture of the Quiché kings and nobles, strung them up to high posts, and burned them alive, ignoring their pleas for mercy.

The defeat of the Quichés was followed by Alvarado's betrayal of the Cakchiquels, whom he first befriended and recruited to brutally subdue their enemies, the Tz'utujils. Having disposed of the Cakchiquels' enemies, Alvarado founded the first Spanish colonial capital beside the Cakchiquel's citadel at Iximché, near present-day Tecpán. Wasting no time, he ordered their kings to hand over one thousand leaves of gold weighing fifteen *pesos* each. Stunned by the abrupt turn in Tonatiuh's amicable disposition, the Cakchiquels balked, pleading with him to lower the tribute. Infuriated by their demurrals, Alvarado threatened to hang and burn the kings if they did not meet his demands in full within five days. "Woe to you if you do not bring it!" he shouted. "I know my heart!"

Alvarado's execution of Cakchiquel nobles and his numerous other abuses recorded in the *Annals of the Cakchiquels* provoked the first uprising against Spanish domination. The Cakchiquels fled to the mountains, where for four years they engaged in an early form of guerrilla warfare against the Spaniards. They dug pits with pointed stakes that caused the death of many horses. But the conquering Spaniards would not be denied. Alvarado captured the rebel Cakchiquel kings one by one and hung them in the central plaza. After quelling the rebellion the Spaniards concluded that Iximché was no longer safe; they set fire to the majestic temples, palaces, and courtyards and relocated their ill-fated capital of Santiago de los Caballeros to the valley of Almolonga.

In the following years Alvarado and his lieutenants subdued each of the remaining Mayan kingdoms of the altiplano, conducting further massacres and stifling all resistance with their habitual brutality. The last to be brought under Spanish domination was the Kingdom of Tayasal, situated in the northern forests of Petén, which was not secured until 1697.

Estimates of the numbers of Mayas killed by the Spaniards vary widely. In his *Very Brief History of the Destruction of the Indies*, published shortly after Alvarado's death, Friar Bartolomé de las Casas accused him of killing 5 million Indians and "committing enormities sufficient to fill a particular volume, so many were the slaughters, violences, injuries, butcheries, and beastly desolations." Although the

substance of las Casas's denunciation is beyond dispute, modern scholars calculate that no more than 2 million Mayas inhabited Guatemala at the time of first contact. As many as 750,000 may have died from plague, violence, and other Conquest-related causes in the first decades after the Spaniards arrived. Another million Mayas had died of European diseases by the middle of the seventeenth century. For all the righteous indignation of the saintly Friar de las Casas, the truth is that smallpox, yellow fever, influenza, diphtheria, and a host of other diseases unknown to the New World killed several times more Mayas than the most sanguinary of conquistadores ever intended to.

Las Casas lived long enough to witness the establishment of the social hierarchy that persists in Guatemala to the present day: European (*criollo*) landowners and generals dominating the mixed-blood (*ladino*) administrators and officers, who in turn oppress the lowly Mayan campesinos, often through Indian intermediaries in the guise of labor contractors, pastors, army sergeants, and municipal officers. The Spaniards named their Indian proxies—most of whom were former *caciques* or chieftains—*principales*, and set them above their fellows by extending them privileges and favors they denied to their communities. This was an early example of a continuing practice by the ruling *criollo* and *ladino* establishment to eradicate the Mayas' identity by co-opting and "ladinizing" their leaders.

Despite the concerted efforts of *criollos* and *ladinos*, the Mayas have safeguarded many of their ancient customs by assimilating them with Iberian Catholicism into a system of syncretic beliefs and rituals they call *costumbre*. The main repository of *costumbre* is the *cofradía*, or brotherhood, that has endured in many highland Mayan communities for over 450 years. The original *cofradías* imported from Spain were craft and labor guilds, governed by a patron saint or virgin. The Mayas transformed them into religious sodalities that practiced animal sacrifices and pre-Columbian prayer ceremonies under the guise of Catholic saint-worship. *Cofradías* in the more remote communities still have shamans who observe the traditional Maya calendar. These "day-keepers" call on the powers inherent in each of the twenty name-days in order to heal the sick, invoke beneficent spirits, and—in extreme cases—cast spells on their enemies.

One year after Volcán Agua devastated Santiago and the Almolonga Valley in 1541, the Spanish capital was moved to what is now Antigua, Guatemala, in the valley of Panchoy. The move inaugurated the three-hundred-year colonial era, whose rigid hierarchical structures, feudal patterns of land ownership, and ruthless exploitation of Mayan communities persist, in modified form, to the present day.

In the territory governed by the city of Santiago, the sixteenth-century colonial capital of Guatemala, the task of converting the hundreds of thousands of Indian subjects was divided among the Franciscan, Dominican, and Mercedarian missions, while the conquered lands were carved up by Alvarado's officers into vast estates, or *haciendas*. Indigo, cochineal, and cacao were cultivated in the humid lowlands and highland foothills, while cattle ranching predominated in the temperate highlands and the dry Oriente. The labor to work these estates was provided by royal grants or *encomiendas*, which gave the *hacendado* full title to the Indian serfs living on the estate.

The practice of *encomienda* dated from the *Reconquista* in Spain, when the victorious Spaniards recruited vanquished Moors as serfs to work their Andalusian *haciendas*. Even so staunch a defender of Indian rights as Friar Bartolomé de las Casas was an *encomendero* for a time, during his sojourn in Cuba. The *encomenderos'* peons not only had to work without pay but also had to render tribute to their masters in the form of produce, poultry, and woven goods.

Las Casas was instrumental in the abolition of the *encomiendas*. In 1537 he prevailed on Carlos V to introduce a more humane treatment of his Indian subjects by gathering them around mission churches, where they would receive proper religious instruction. Las Casas's revolutionary precept that Indians were not inferior by nature but were instead "infants of the faith" made a deep impression on Carlos V. In 1542 the monarch incorporated las Casas's ideas into a more humane code of New Laws for the Spanish colonies. Las Casas put his precepts to work in the formerly war-torn regions of the eastern highlands, where he pacified the Quekchi Mayas with the introduction of Dominican missions. These eastern highland regions came to be known as Verapaz, lands of True Peace. Four hundred and fifty years later the military's war of counterinsurgency caught up with Baja and Alta Verapaz, killing several thousand of

its Mayan residents and turning tens of thousands of others into refugees.

Las Casas's sworn enemies, the intemperate conquistadores and their immediate descendants, used their influence in court to ensure that the New Laws would be short-lived. After the death of las Casas the *encomiendas* were replaced by *repartimiento*, a system of forced labor that included a negligible wage.

To facilitate the Catholic missions' labor of converting the Mayas, as well as to provide additional serfs and tribute, the scattered communities outside the *encomiendas* were concentrated together through a process called *congregación*. After the first uprisings by abused laborers and tribute slaves a second *congregación* was aimed at breaking communal bonds by gathering the rebels from dispersed regions into closely supervised *pueblos indios*. This strategy would serve as an inspiration for the model village program introduced by the Guatemalan military in the 1980s to pacify insurgent highland Mayan communities in the Ixil Triangle, the Ixcán, and other "Zones of Conflict." In both cases, the forced nucleation of idiosyncratic Mayan communities not only undermined their cultural identity but also inflicted severe economic and environmental hardships.

Severo Martínez and other historians have written of the centuries-long tug of war for political influence and privilege between the peninsular Spaniards loyal to the throne and the *criollos*, or New World Spaniards, whose Indian mistresses birthed the first mixed-breed *ladinos*. Beneath the *ladinos* in status were the Indian *principales* chosen to keep order and collect tribute from the lowly peasants, who were and continue to be the most cruelly exploited native underclass in the Americas. (Colonial Mayas accepted las Casas's term *naturales* in place of the *criollos'* demeaning *indio*, *mozo*, and *peón*. *Naturales* is still widely used among highland Mayas.)

With occasional alterations, this hierarchical infrastructure remained in place throughout the colonial era, and with some twentieth-century refinements it continues to be operative. About three hundred large landowning families still represent the *criollo* interests, now in growing competition with an influential business and industrial elite. Along the Pacific coast, where coffee remained Guatemala's chief export crop for over a century, sugarcane, bananas, cotton, and, more recently, cardamom have replaced the colonial plantations of indigo,

cochineal, and cacao. These large landholders (*latifundistas*) represent less than 2 percent of Guatemala's population but control over 65 percent of the arable land.

The traditional ladino role is now embodied by the army officer class and by the expanding middle class whose breadwinners fill white- and blue-collar occupations. Today's Maya principales tend to be more independent than their colonial forebears; they are often small landowners, tradesmen, municipal officers, and more recently the mayors of small towns and villages throughout the upper highlands.

The fortunes of the campesinos who worked as tenant farmers and manual laborers remained remarkably unchanged for over three and a half centuries—as attested to in the writings of travelers Thomas Gage, John Lloyd Stephens, Jackson Steward Lincoln, among others.

The system of *encomienda* and *congregación* was porous enough to allow hundreds of Mayan communities to go on farming their *milpas*, or cornfields, and to retain ownership of ancestral lands. In these remote outposts, the cultivation of corn remained a sacrament that linked the Maya farmer to his gods. The preparation and planting of a milpa, in times of plenty as well as in times of want, is at the heart of the Maya's conception of himself. This situation would change in the second half of the nineteenth century, after a sustained peasant rebellion against colonial and post-independence structures and institutions. The uprising was headed by the mestizo, or mixed-breed, cacique Rafael Carrera, whose invasions of fincas and assaults on the capital with hordes of Maya campesinos brought the criollos and ladinos face to face with their worst fears. These fears appeared to be substantiated when Carrera seized control of the government in 1840 and ruled the country directly and through puppet presidents during the next three decades.

Carrera was tamed to some degree by his alliance with the conservative Catholic church, and his thirty-year dominance left the land-owning elites shaken but unmoved. The most radical change in Mayan communal land tenure came about a decade after Carrera's passing with the ascendancy of the self-styled Liberal Reformer, Justo Rufino Barrios. Beginning in the late 1870s, Barrios passed debt-peonage statutes and abolished hundreds of Mayan land titles in order to create an army of seasonal laborers for the huge coffee fincas that were springing up along Guatemala's Pacific piedmont. In 1884 alone, more

than one hundred thousand acres of Maya-owned municipal lands passed into private hands. Hundreds of thousands of indigenous farmers who had never traveled more than a few kilometers from their milpas were conscripted to work in the coastal fincas as coffee pickers and peons.

Guatemala's agricultural elite has good reason to commemorate Justo Rufino Barrios as their great benefactor, and Guatemala's Mayan communities have equal reason to revile the memory of their greatest scourge after Pedro de Alvarado. The "Liberal Reformer's" lasting legacy was a thriving coffee-centered economy that controlled 14 percent of the world trade by 1905 and accounted for 85 percent of Guatemala's annual export revenues. Barrios's undermining of the milpa-based Mayan culture proved just as enduring. By the 1920s the growing taste for coffee in North America and Europe created the first millionaire fortunes in Guatemala at the same time that land-poverty became institutionalized in the Mayan highlands. Barrios's statutes remained on the books until 1934, when the "benevolent dictator" Jorge Ubico replaced them with vagrancy laws that obligated all campesinos owning less than three *manzanas* (two hectares) to do manual labor for a minimum of one hundred days a year. This assured plantation owners vast reserves of migrant laborers for their coffee and sugar harvests. Paradoxically, the new vagrancy statutes also planted the seeds of Mayan resistance; in the mid-nineteen-fifties, they led to the formation of the first peasant unions under presidents Arévalo and Arbenz.

Many historians now regard Barrios and the rise of the coffee fincas as the second chapter of the conquest and exploitation of Guatemala's indigenous population. The third and potentially final chapter may have begun in the late seventies with the massive counterinsurgency campaign mounted by the first of three military presidents, Romeo Lucas García. The total cost of the war that began in the early sixties with the rise of the first guerrilla organizations is now calculated at 120,000 Guatemalans killed, and another 46,000 disappeared and unaccounted for. (The transitive verb "*desaparecer*" [to disappear] originated in Guatemala.)

Although the leftist guerrillas who incited the most bloody military reprisals in Central America's history probably never numbered more

than seventy-five hundred trained militants, they succeeded in recruiting close to half a million peasant supporters in the western and central highlands and in the northern department of El Petén. Had the three main guerrilla organizations, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP), the Revolutionary Organization of People in Arms (ORPA), and the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), been able to coordinate and arm their enormous followings, this would have been a far different story. In 1982 these three organizations banded together with the military arm of the Guatemalan Workers Party (PGT) to form the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG); but by then the guerrillas' best opportunities had already passed. Everyone underestimated the tenacity and ruthlessness of the ladino military officer class, which had been tempered by five centuries of subservience to criollo land-owning elites.

The first real prospect of an end to Guatemala's war arose with the Esquipulas Peace negotiations held in Guatemala in 1986 and 1987 under the auspices of President Cerezo. The five Central American presidents signed agreements that disarmed the Contras in Nicaragua and provided the framework for peace negotiations between government and guerrilla leaders in El Salvador and Guatemala. (In 1987 Costa Rica's former president Oscar Arias received the Nobel Peace Prize for his skillful diplomacy.) In 1991 the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front and President Alfredo Cristiani signed a peace accord in El Salvador that is not yet fully implemented. Guatemala's military and government representatives have engaged in ongoing negotiations with leaders of the URNG for the past three years. Despite sporadic signs of progress, negotiations have repeatedly stalled over the issue of accountability for human rights violations and the prosecution of the war.

2

More than any other country in the Central American isthmus, Guatemala sits on the cusp of interlocking contradictions. At 9.5 million, Guatemala is the most populous of the six Central American republics, the richest in natural resources, and it attracts the most investment dollars from the United States and the large multinational corporations in Europe and the Far East. And yet its Maya majority of nearly

5 million has the lowest per capita income in the region. (A study published in 1991 by the National Institute of Statistics revealed that 90 percent of highland residents live in conditions of extreme poverty.) Guatemala is the Central American country closest to our borders, yet it is by far the most neglected by the U.S. media. After the overthrow of democratically elected Jacobo Arbenz in 1954, a curtain of silence descended over Guatemala. The country and its war, which has lasted more than thirty years, have remained largely invisible, even to North Americans who defy the State Department's negative travel advisories and fly to the Mayan ruins of Tikal or visit the artisans' markets of Atitlán and Chichicastenango.

An important part of this story is the role played by Israel, Taiwan, Argentina, and other arms dealers who replaced the United States for four crucial years as suppliers of weapons and technical assistance to the Guatemalan military. In 1977 Guatemala stopped importing arms from the United States in anticipation of a credit ban from President Jimmy Carter, who deplored Guatemala's abysmal record of human rights abuse. Direct U.S. military aid began again in the early eighties, under Ronald Reagan.

One major result of the war is a shift in the power balance that has created a new landowning elite among military officers, who are proclaiming themselves the victors of a war that has by no means ended.

A remarkable product of Guatemala's war is the rise of a Protestant evangelical movement imported from the United States, which has already converted over one-third of Guatemala's nominally Catholic indigenous population. The early Protestant missions in Guatemala allied themselves with authoritarian Liberal governments, beginning with that of Justo Rufino Barrios. Until the rise of the communist specter in the early 1950s, the impact of these traditional Protestant churches on the Catholic Mayan communities had been negligible. The century-long influx of missionaries from traditional Protestant churches as well as the newer fundamentalist and Pentecostal sects crested into flood tide following the devastating earthquake of February 1976, which left over 27,000 dead and hundreds of thousands injured and homeless. The large majority of the quake victims lived

in the highland Mayan departments of Chimaltenango and Quiché, which had borne the brunt of Alvarado's cruelty. Beginning in the late 1970s, these two departments would also become the prime targets of Alvarado's descendants, the criollo and mestizo generals who planned Guatemala's counterinsurgency strategy in the Mayan highlands.

The evangelicals who came to Guatemala to comfort and rehabilitate the survivors of the earthquake remained behind to convert them. Hundreds of temples associated with churches like the Central American Mission, Elim, Assemblies of God, and the Nazarenes rose from the rubble of Catholic churches leveled by the big quake. Mayan communities disillusioned with their priests' offers of heavenly rewards flocked to the new sects, drawn by promises of redemption through prayer, puritanical temperance, and individual enterprise. In the areas the army calls Zones of Conflict, thousands of survivors were drawn to the exorcistic rituals and millennialist prophecies of the Pentecostals, whose histrionic services placated their fears and helped them forget the loss of their relatives.

As the war widened under evangelical General Efraín Ríos Montt, who seized the presidency in a bloodless palace coup in March 1982, the agendas of many evangelical missions expanded to include wider geopolitical objectives. Ríos Montt's own Church of the Word, an offshoot of the California-based Gospel Outreach, planned to secure the countryside for a military occupation friendly to the United States. Evangelical groups like Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship became bulwarks of the Reagan Doctrine and waged holy war against the "diabolical" tenets of Marxism-Leninism and Liberation Theology. Many evangelicals openly boasted that Guatemala was to be the bridgehead for a Protestant takeover of Latin America, to be completed in time for Christ's Second Coming at the end of the millennium.

Once again, as in the early years of the Spanish Conquest, when three missionary Catholic orders competed for the salvation of Indian souls, war and religious conversion worked hand in glove to effect a profound transformation of the native Mayan culture. The devil of idol worship had been replaced by the devil of communism and Marxist theology. To the long-suffering descendants of the Mayas, who believed in interrelated time segments of *tuns* and *katuns* that recur

in predetermined cycles, the wheel had turned full circle, and only the masks on the white faces had changed.

Once each year over the past four and a half centuries, highland residents have celebrated their patron saint feast days with a Dance of the Conquest. Hand-picked villagers stoke themselves with cheap rum and deck themselves out in the burgundy and green velvet finery of sixteenth-century Spaniards. In some versions of the dance, a participant will wear a brown or black-tinted mask of Tecún Umán. The charade is topped off by subtly crafted rose-and-cream wooden masks with blond beards and mustaches. For hours on end, the masked villagers move back and forth, shaking gourd rattles as they high-step and gyrate in random configuration to the strains of a marimba, tirelessly reenacting their ancestors'—and their own—defeat and humiliation.

In this book, I will focus on four highland regions where guerrilla insurgency, military counterinsurgency, and evangelical conversion had the most dramatic impact on traditional Mayan patterns of subsistence—the Ixil Triangle, Atitlán, Huehuetenango, and Chimaltenango. A separate section deals with the northern lowland region of Petén, where the Rebel Armed Forces have been concentrated. The radical transformation of these communities has taken on the character of a third conquest, whose full parameters are only now becoming apparent. Because the transformation of these areas—and of Guatemala itself—by the most underreported war of recent times is multifaceted, its story will be told in a layered format of journalistic reportage, personal narrative, oral testimony, and ethnographic investigation.

With the resurgence of a native Maya movement in Guatemala, marked by congressional approval of a standardized Maya alphabet and the more recent ratification of the Academy of Mayan Languages, the colonial pejorative *indio* (Indian) has, justifiably, fallen into disrepute. The award of the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize to the Quiché-Maya human rights activist Rigoberta Menchú has cast further opprobrium on colonial terminology and on the term *indio*, in particular. As a general rule, *Indian* will refer only to newly Christianized and colonial Mayas, and *Maya* or *Mayan* will refer to that pre-Columbian civilization as well as to the renaissance indigenous communities that are its direct descendants.