

# SYMBIOTIC RESEARCH: A CASE FOR ETHICAL SCHOLARSHIP

*by David Carey, Jr.*

**O**n a brisk evening in July 2001, in San Juan Comalapa, a pristine town in the Guatemalan highlands, I found myself in the humbling and exhilarating position of speaking to a group of Maya-Kaqchikel indigenous people about their history. I had begun my research in 1994 with the goal of uncovering indigenous historical perspectives, methodologies, and theories through native oral histories.

In 1996, Guatemala ended the longest continuous armed conflict—1960-1996—in 20th century Central American history. The Guatemalan military, and to a lesser extent insurgency groups, killed 200,000 and displaced over one million people during the 36-year civil war, which escalated to genocide in the early 1980s.<sup>1</sup> It was in this setting, during my visit to Comalapa in the summer of 2001, that a local Kaqchikel ethnohistorian named Oxi' Q'anil asked me to present my findings to the community. I enthusiastically agreed because it was an ideal opportunity to give back to one of the communities that had been so supportive of my research and life in Guatemala. One goal of the meeting was to allow people to participate in the presentation of their history.

Surprisingly, an open exchange of information between researchers

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and target populations is a rarity in Guatemala. At least in the case of Latin America, zetetic foreigners often take an imperialistic and extractive approach to their research agendas. These researchers arrive with predetermined ideas and methodologies that they impose, apply, and test on their research subjects, yet they fail to invite and seriously consider input from the population under study.

Moreover, in most cases, investigators leave without sharing their findings or insights. Ethically, this behavior is abhorrent because it not only

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exploits people as objects, but assumes they are incapable of intellectual contributions to academic theories, methodologies and data, when, in fact, their very position as subjects of inquiry should define them as experts in the content area under study.

At the gathering that summer in San Juan Comalapa, I insisted on a dialogue, rather than a lecture. I was both inspired and intimidated by the audience. My colleague

Oxi' Q'anil had predicted a turnout of 10 to 15 people, but by the time the meeting began about 40 people had arrived, and others continued to file in and stand in the rear of the open air building. Other local historians, elders, the *rumi'al tinamit* (elected "daughter" of the town), teachers, *ajq'ij* (Mayan day-keeper—a religious and medical position), shopkeepers, artists, agriculturists and even my favorite bus driver arrived. I recognized friends and informants, but some faces were new. In a traditionally gracious Mayan introduction Oxi' Q'anil spoke about the importance of my research for the community and my willingness to share it with them. He concluded, "The present must be written with the past."<sup>2</sup>

As I began my talk I noticed eyes widen and faces light up when people recognized historical descriptions they had contributed to my research and/or oral histories they had heard previously from their elders. Their expertise and familiarity with the topic made my task a daunting one, yet at the same time their thirst for additional perspectives from oral evidence, and corroboration or contradiction from archival sources, made them an appealing audience. Oxi' Q'anil suggested I give my talk in both Spanish and Kaqchikel because he feared some attendees may not understand Kaqchikel. But the audience insisted I speak only Kaqchikel because that is how they felt most comfortable expressing themselves, and they were proud that I had learned to speak their language.<sup>3</sup> Speakers of the Kaqchikel language number about 400,000 and reside primarily in the

central highlands of Guatemala, a Central American nation of 10 million people. The participants listened attentively but also offered insightful comments, critiques, and additions to my historical presentation. They wanted to hear more about their history, but also to continue their agency in its writing and presentation.

As a heuristic exchange evolved, I soon realized that my goal of contributing to the community would not be the only outcome. I was benefiting from new perspectives and historical debates offered by the people who had lived and heard the history I was sharing.

The discussion continued for over three hours. One participant proposed establishing a museum to protect and showcase historical documents and archeological and historical artifacts from the surrounding area. Oxi' Q'anil agreed, "We need to do a museum to assert the blood of our ancestors. We need to do it ourselves because the government will not do it. They only make promises. We cannot wait for that. It has to come from us because we are the most excited about it."<sup>4</sup>

The existence of local museums has often encouraged participation by community members in the direction and emphases of their own history. For example, according to Alessandro Triulzi, the Museum of Peasant Civilization in San Marino di Bentivoglio, near Bologna, Italy provides a forum for "the workers' own answer to the cultural appropriation they have been subjected to by the dominant classes, and is a further incentive for the long-term work of cultural re-appropriation of values and contributions that have long been ignored or trivialized and distorted by the state official culture."<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the community of Casa Amarela in Recife, Brazil founded a "Memory Department" to house tape-recorded oral history interviews, radio programs, and photographic albums to assert ownership over their local history.<sup>6</sup> Like these people, Kaqchikel seek a more active and effectual role in their own history and the history of their nation.

Other participants in the Kaqchikel meeting suggested reinstating community meetings on historical topics. Such gatherings were common prior to the late 1970s when the Guatemalan civil war (1960-1996) struck the Kaqchikel-speaking region most violently. Kaqchikel hoped the 1996 Peace Accords would hold and as a nation they could recreate an environment where it was safe to organize the meetings again. In many

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ways the civil war not only devastated Kaqchikel communities but it also divided them. Community members were killed because of personal grievances, family rivalries, and intracommunal conflicts over land and other resources. Rescuing and developing their history has been one way to strengthen community participation and cohesion. In fact, in other areas, oral history projects have served as catalysts for communities to increase their efficacy in dealing with the state.

For example, in Brasília Teimosa, Brazil, the Ministry of Education designed and funded an oral history project that resulted in the publication of primary school books about the local community's history. This experience of communal cooperation and participation led to the organization of groups that successfully campaigned for improved road, transportation, water, housing, and health care provisions.

Prior to the civil war, Kaqchikel had a rich history of asserting their rights and achieving their goals through community organizing. Some meeting attendees hoped this history project would spur on other types of community activity. Most Kaqchikel are eager to assert and disseminate their knowledge to benefit themselves, as well as those beyond their communities.

In addition to talking about strategies for exploring and preserving their history, participants at the Comalapa meeting complained of their treatment by foreign, and even Guatemalan and local, historians, who used Comalapa to gather data but never returned to present their discov-



eries and analyses to the community. Researchers from the United States and Europe work in communities and archives, interview residents and peruse written documentation, then publish their findings in English or other European languages aimed at an audience that often excludes their hosts. Seldom are works published in Spanish and even more seldom are books and articles translated into indigenous languages or written for local consumption.<sup>7</sup> Academia does not generally recognize foreign language publications as noteworthy for tenure or promotion.

Researchers who engage in this self-indulgent behavior inflict suffering on the nations and people who open themselves up to such research, but these researchers also impair their research through this myopia. When scholars fail to invite input from local groups, they miss insightful assessments and contributions to their work from the very people whose past and present they wish to recreate and assess. The results can be mutually beneficial when researchers ask how they can be a resource to their study populations, as witnessed by my experience.

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Before I began my Fulbright fellowship in Guatemala in 1997-98, I inquired at Kaqchikel Cholchi', a linguistic research organization directed and staffed by Kaqchikel speakers, about their research needs. They were intrigued by my research with Kaqchikel oral histories and asked me to work on a project to compile these oral histories for a sixth grade level Mayan history textbook. We wrote the book in Kaqchikel so students could learn from their elders in their own language. This monograph is a sharp contrast to the Spanish language textbooks used in Guatemalan public schools that often denigrate Maya and eviscerate their historical perceptions and contributions.

Auspiciously, this project combined my interests in research and community development. It also provided a venue in which to test my data. At the end of my stay I used the remaining funds from my Fulbright scholarship to photocopy and distribute about 100 of these monographs to informants, teachers, schools, and municipal centers where I had lived and worked.

When word of the existence of a book based on autochthonous oral histories grew, local people requested copies from me. In July 2001 a Mayan publishing company offered to publish the book upon conferral

of a grant. Because the idea and information for the book came from Kaqchikel themselves, support for it continues to grow on many levels.

What I had intended to be an uncalculating gesture of gratitude contributed greatly to my understanding of Kaqchikel historical perspectives and enhanced my research. This effort further solidified my position in the community because people realized I was committed to providing them the information they had readily shared with me.

*What I had intended to be an uncalculating gesture of gratitude also contributed greatly to my research.*

Often, when I delivered the monograph it prompted discussion on new historical topics or more in-depth explorations of previously revealed themes. Some recipients rendered oral histories they had heard that differed from the ones in the book. I was pleased to learn on subsequent visits to these highland communities that Kaqchikel teachers were using the book in their classrooms. At the meeting I described earlier, many participants referred to the book, and others requested a copy, which I readily provided.

My understanding of Kaqchikel perceptions of the past have benefited greatly from people's reactions, comments, critiques, and additions to the textbook. I learned more by allowing Kaqchikel to interpret their history than I would have had I hoarded the data and analyzed it without their insights. For example, I had learned through oral histories that the liberal dictator Justo Rufino Barrios (1873-1885) ordered the execution of a Kaqchikel mayor because he presented a threat to local Ladinos' (non-indigenous Guatemalans) hold on power in Comalapa. This mayor used his Spanish language skills to advocate for and protect monolingual Kaqchikel speakers against avaricious Ladino government officials, landowners and business owners.

I had related this history during the meeting I mentioned earlier and Oxi' Q'anil added that the mayor was a conservative who actively campaigned against the liberal land reform policy. This political tension helped to further explain why President Barrios personally intervened in this matter. Oxi' Q'anil's insight redirected my analysis and broadened my understanding of how national politics and local realities interacted in nineteenth century Guatemala.

This is another example of how, through this meeting, a symbiotic relationship was cemented, whereby Kaqchikel continue to be agents of their history and its presentation and I gain increased insight into a distinct historical approach.

Maya have long understood the power and importance of history. Their centuries-old chronicles such as the *Popol Wuj* (Counsel Book; ca. 1555) and the *Anales de los Kaqchikeles* (Annals of the Kaqchikels; 1524-1605) attest to that.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, they would readily agree with oral historian Paul Thompson's assertion, "Oral history gives back to the people in their own words. And in giving a past, it also helps them towards a future of their own making."<sup>9</sup> An axiom of the Guatemalan organization, *Maya Decenio para el Pueblo Indígena* (Maya Decade for the Indigenous People), is that people who do not know their past cannot build a future.

Recently, Mayan scholars such as Edgar Esquit Choy, Alberto Esquit Choy, Luis Enrique Sam Colop, Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil, Víctor Racancoj, and Martín Chacach have been researching and writing about their own history, culture, economics, anthropology, linguistics, and social movements. Mayan students are enrolled in universities and seek to further the study of their people.

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In my interactions with semi-literate and illiterate Kaqchikel, I am constantly reminded of their desire to contribute to and learn from investigative studies of their people, culture, language, and history. Some of my research assistants were students at a university in Guatemala City. Most had attended classes on weekends and evenings to complete the coursework for their degrees, but often the extensive fieldwork requirements stalled their progress because few scholarships existed to allow them to dedicate their full energies to gathering and testing data. They marveled at the U.S. academic system that supports graduate student research.

Programs such as OKMA and the Guatemala Scholars Network scholarships for Maya seek to provide the means for Maya to study and research full time. Ideally, increased national and international opportunities will become available for Maya to study their own populations (and other peoples both within and outside of Guatemala), but until that time at the very least researchers should make their data and finished products available to the relevant populations. Both foreign researchers and nationals will benefit from the closure of the lacuna between research populations and the dissemination of information to them.

Inevitably, power relations, based on ethnic, socioeconomic, gender and other characteristics, are imbedded in the interaction between investigators and target populations. Unequal relations are inescapable. As Daphne Patai notes, "Others are always the subject of our research, almost

never the reverse."<sup>10</sup>

Even the field of testimonial literature, which attempts to redress these issues by allowing marginalized peoples to tell their story, suffers from similar shortcomings. The spokespeople/authors seldom truly enjoy equal status to the outsiders who provided or suggested this forum. Furthermore, those who speak in testimonial literature often enjoy more power than those they are trying to represent.<sup>11</sup> Alberto Moreiras posits that Latin American testimonial discourse can be likened to "a mask

through which one's own voice is projected onto another, where that other is always suffering from a certain inability to speak." He further argues that "the relational mediation is then always unequal and hierarchical, even at its most redemptive."<sup>12</sup>

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**I**n my work, I tried to mitigate this effect by inviting input from Kaqchikel research assistants and informants about how they would frame a historical project about their people. Most of the interview ques-

tions came from the community. In addition, the Kaqchikel history textbook allowed Kaqchikel to analyze the data and contribute to the final product. In this way Kaqchikel are primary sources of historical data, research assistants, and critical readers;<sup>13</sup> not simply objects of the research. Since Kaqchikel oral histories reveal their agency in their communal, national, and international forums, it is only natural that Kaqchikel direct the presentation of their historical perspectives.

I realized I would never be Maya-Kaqchikel or fully comprehend their lived experience; my position as *other* in Kaqchikel communities was readily apparent, but I did try to experience their reality more fully by actively participating in daily life and its struggles.<sup>14</sup> The nature of my research assisted this quest; I could be the student and Kaqchikel informants the teachers. "Consciousness raising" was not part of my research. I found the concept condescending because Maya already have a keen sense of their reality and have developed strategies to assert themselves against hegemonic forces. Moreover, attempts to "educate" Maya about their oppression and encourage them to take action often fueled increased violence during the civil war.<sup>15</sup>

I arrived two years prior to the official cessation of the civil war and my research continues into a period when people are hopeful for a peaceful and secure environment in their nation. The Kaqchikel history textbook simply gave people a project to rally around that was their own.

Community-based research projects that allow local people to define and lead the research agenda provide an excellent model for symbiotic relationships between scholars and research populations. This approach challenges the researcher because she will not have complete control over the project, but in most cases these results provide unique data that would otherwise have been unavailable to researchers.<sup>16</sup>

In many cases the process has pragmatic advantages beyond simply expanding research possibilities and knowledge. For example, the two aforementioned communities in Recife, Brazil, gained their land rights as a result of their historical projects.<sup>17</sup> Also, feminist economist Pamela Sparr developed a research and activism project that engaged the perspectives of low-income women from Arkansas, Chicago, and Appalachia (Kentucky) to comprehend the global economic process. This collaborative effort crossed national boundaries. Women from community organizations in Mexico taught their U.S.

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counterparts participatory research skills. Not only did academics learn from the participants' analyses; the women developed strategies to improve the socio-economic reality of their local communities. Sparr advocates co-equal relationships, which will provide opportunities for "southern expertise to tackle problems in the North."<sup>18</sup>

The meeting in Comalapa was an excellent example of the community based research process unfolding. After listening to my presentation, Kaqchikel took the initiative for future historical projects and I was poised to become a participant in the projects.

While few historians invite community participation and agency in the researching, writing, and editing of their projects, more historians of the modern period are engaging local peoples' historical memory (if not their analysis) to enrich their scholarly work.<sup>19</sup> But this methodology remains more problematic for historians of Latin America's colonial period or for ancient historians.

An historian of ancient Peru, for example, might argue that this methodology is irrelevant for her work. But people often preserve oral histories and traditions for scores of generations. Indigenous people especially have impressive time depth in their oral histories and oral traditions.

For example, Kaqchikel preserve oral histories that predate the

Spanish invasion of Guatemala in 1524. Other scholars have found oral evidence relevant for the study of time periods well before informants were born.<sup>20</sup> Archeologists who study Mayan hieroglyphs made tremendous strides in understanding these ancient stelae when they engaged linguists and modern Mayan language speakers. Michael Coe argues that they could not have deciphered the hieroglyphs without the assistance of Mayan speakers.<sup>21</sup>

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While not all historical studies lend themselves to local involvement and input, historians and other scholars should be aware of the possibilities for groundbreaking work when one treats informants as cognitive equals and invites their feedback, insights and critiques.

History is not unique in this regard; other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, political science, economics, and linguistics lend themselves to synergetic projects. In her study on childbirth, sociologist Ann Oakley found that better relations and data resulted from the

investigator sharing her insights and findings with the population under study.<sup>22</sup> Historian Gary Okihiro argues, "History would be incomplete if it did not eventually help us to lead better lives."<sup>23</sup> His assertion should be extended to all disciplines and the "us" must include populations beyond academic institutions.

The pursuit of knowledge is not an absolute good or right. At the very least, researchers must be cognizant of the consequences of their studies. The Federal Office for Human Research Protections and its affiliate institutional review boards at universities, colleges, and other research institutions safeguard and advocate for research subjects. But as scholars we need to go further, to share research agendas, goals, and potential benefits with the general population and to encourage their input. Mutual benefits and respect between researchers and their target populations necessitate not only the free flow of information, but also the creation of opportunities for subjects to become instigators of inquiry.

Scholars must share findings with research participants and present the findings in a format relevant to the participants. Consequently, writing in national, indigenous, or other relevant languages and using media such as verbal communication, videos, and music for non-literate people is essential.

When I explained my most recent research project in Guatemala to

Ix'ajmaq, a Kaqchikel primary school teacher, she wanted to be sure I shared my data and analysis with her. When I asked her how she would like the findings she replied, "Write a book in Kaqchikel, of course."<sup>24</sup>

When resources are available, a combination of media is often the most effective manner to transmit information. For example, Participatory Rural Appraisal programs have illustrated that many people can more effectively express themselves verbally when they use visual aids.<sup>25</sup> Establishing relevant means of communicating information and creating comfortable and familiar forums in which to do so facilitates the sharing of knowledge between target groups and researchers.

In a 1988 article anthropologist Alcida Ramos posited:

We are getting closer and closer to a time when our articles and books will have to be written with Indian readership in mind. Will we know how to do it? Will we be believed? Will we know how to respond to their questioning or challenging interpretations which, necessarily, will be different from ours? And, perhaps the most difficult of all, will we be able to reconstruct our language in such a way as to do justice to the amazing wealth of imagination and aesthetic resourcefulness we find in the field?<sup>26</sup>

*Ensuring that people have access to research to which they contributed benefits their communities, but it also advances the scholar's research.*

This time has arrived, and we will be enriched by responding to and incorporating indigenous interpretations precisely because they differ from our own. As Ramos implies, the largest obstacle that prevents us from truly inviting and embracing indigenous contributions to our scholarship may be our own insecurities and shortcomings. Scholars will find their comprehension and data expand by inviting input from their "subjects" and allowing them to become researchers, teachers, and editors. Ensuring that people have access to research to which they contributed, or which concerns them, benefits their communities, but it also advances the scholar's research and the field of study in general.

The importance of ethical research conduct has been argued convincingly elsewhere, yet exploitation, extraction, and exclusion remain too common in Latin American research projects. My goal in this article has been to introduce a methodology that advocates for ethical interactions but does so based on the utilitarian argument that all parties will benefit from symbiotic research.

In this way, academics who struggle with the pressures to publish sole-

ly in their own language may see that the time and effort required to include local populations and to assure their access to information will not detract from but rather enhance their scholarly productivity. Both researchers and indigenous people benefit from the sharing of knowledge that results from inclusive research agendas. 

## ENDNOTES

I would like to thank Aviva Ben-Ur and Sarah Johnson for their careful critical reading and valuable comments on an earlier draft of this essay. This research was supported by a grant from the University of Southern Maine.

- <sup>1</sup> REMHI, (*Recovery of Historical Memory Project*), *Guatemala, Never Again!: The Official Report of the Human Rights Office, Archdiocese of Guatemala*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999); *The United Nations Human Rights Report, Guatemala: Memoria del Silencio*, (Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico [CEH], [@hrdata.aas.org/ceh/mds/spanish](http://hrdata.aas.org/ceh/mds/spanish), 1999).
- <sup>2</sup> Oxi' Q'anil, July 7, 2001, San Juan Comalapa, Guatemala.
- <sup>3</sup> In Guatemala, Mayan languages are powerful ethnic markers because since the sixteenth century Spaniards and Ladinos (non-indigenous Guatemalans) have told Maya their adherence to indigenous languages makes them retrograde. Spanish language hegemony and assimilation has often been a goal of the state. See Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil, *Políticas para la reivindicación de los Mayas hoy (fundamentos de los derechos específicos del Pueblo Maya)* (Guatemala: Cholsamaj, 1994), pp. 11-26, 53-66. For a personal account of the effects of language, educational and cultural assimilation programs from a Mayan perspective see Wuqu' Ajpub' (Arnulfo Simón), "Language Contact Experiences of a Mayan Speaker," in *The Life of Our Language: Kaqchikel Maya Maintenance, Shift, and Revitalization*, ed. Susan Garzon, R. McKenna Brown, Julia Becker Richards, and Wuqu' Ajpub' (Arnulfo Simón), (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), pp. 171-87.
- <sup>4</sup> Oxi' Q'anil, July 7, 2001, San Juan Comalapa, Guatemala.
- <sup>5</sup> Alessandro Triulzi, "A Museum of Peasant Life in Emilia," *History Workshop* 1 (1976) p. 119.
- <sup>6</sup> Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson, *Listening for a Change: Oral Testimony and Development* (London: Panos Publications, 1993), pp. 108-9. While closely guarded by community leaders, some foreign researchers have utilized this community archive.
- <sup>7</sup> Inspiring exceptions exist such as linguist and anthropologist Judith Maxwell's extensive collaboration and publications with Kaqchikel and other Mayan language organizations; OKMA (Oxlajuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib', 13 Deer Mayan Writers), a group of Mayan linguists established by McArthur Genius Award recipient Nora England to train Mayan students; ethnohistorian Robert Carmack's monographs such as *Historia Social de los Quiches*, (Guatemala: Editorial "José de Pineda Ibarra," Ministerio de Educación, 1979); and anthropologist and historian Richard Adams' books such as *Etnicidad en el ejército de la Guatemala Liberal* (1870-1915), (Guatemala: FLACSO, 1995), but the pressure to publish in English in order to attain tenure discourages many U.S. and European scholars from broadening their pursuits. Judith Maxwell's works include *Roq'ik Kok* (a language text for Kaqchikel children who do not speak their native tongue) vols. I & II (Guatemala: Maya Wuj and Cholsamaj, 1996); *Ruk'utunik Roq'ik ri Kok*, (a guide for teachers to the Kaqchikel language textbook) vols. 1 & 2 (Guatemala: Maya Wuj and Cholsamaj, 1996); and she co-authored with Kaqchikel linguist Martín Chacach, *Rukemik K'ak'a' Taq Tzij: Criterios para la creación de neologismos (Criteria for creating neologisms)* (Guatemala: Nawal Wuj and Cholsamaj, 1995). Maxwell, Carmack and Adams have each published numerous works in Spanish. As Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai reluctantly admit even in the field of Women's Studies where feminist scholars often are determined to be advocates for the women who are the subjects of their research, many of these scholars fail to share their findings with their target populations. Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, "Introduction," in ed.

- Sherna Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 2-3.
- <sup>8</sup> Dennis Tedlock, *Popol Vuh: The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); Judith Maxwell and Robert Hill, III, *Kaqchikel Chronicles*, forthcoming. Many Maya consider the Popol Wuj their Bible. It describes the creations and cycles of the universe. It is a syncretic document that has been influenced by indigenous groups prior to and contemporaneous with the ancient Maya. Most notably Nahuatl speakers who began to filter into Mayan communities in the twelfth century. Some descriptions of the most recent "world" coincide with Mayan hieroglyphs and are historical in content. *The Anales de los Kaqchikeles* is a Xajil family document, which focuses on social, political, and economic relations before and after the Spanish invasion. Both the *Popol Wuj* and *Anales de los Kaqchikeles* use the past to chart a course for future Mayan resurgence.
- <sup>9</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 308.
- <sup>10</sup> Daphne Patai, "U.S. Academics and Third World Women: Is Ethical Research Possible?" in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. Sherina Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 149 (emphasis her own).
- <sup>11</sup> Examples of testimonial literature are Rigoberta Menchú (ed. Elizabeth Burgos-Debray) *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, (London: Verso, 1984); Domitila Barrios de Chungara (with Moema Viezzer), *Let Me Speak: Testimony of Domitila, A Woman of the Bolivian Mines* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978); Elvia Alvarado, (ed. Medea Benjamin) *Don't Be Afraid Gringo: A Honduran Woman Speaks from the Heart* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1987).
- <sup>12</sup> Alberto Moreiras, "The Aura of Testimonio," in *The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America*, ed. George M. Gugelberger (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996): 192-224.
- <sup>13</sup> Kaqchikel also critique my work through oral presentations and exchanges.
- <sup>14</sup> Clifford Geertz adeptly warns against the illusion of becoming "native" in his article "From the Native's Point of View: On the Nature of Anthropological Understanding," in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic, 1983), p. 58. See M. Brinton Lykes, "Activist Participatory Research Among the Maya of Guatemala: Constructing Meanings from Situated Knowledge," *Journal of Social Issues*, 53 (4) (1997): 725-46 ; M. Brinton Lykes, "Dialogue with Guatemalan Indian Women: Critical Perspectives on Constructing Collaborative research," in R. Unger, ed., *Representations: Social Constructions of Gender* (Amityville, NY: Baywood, 1989): 167-85; and T. Minh-ha Trinh, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1991) for a discussion of Participatory Action Research and the shifting subjectivity between researcher and subjects.
- <sup>15</sup> For evidence of foreigners instigating increased violence see David Carey, Jr., *Our Elders Teach Us: Maya-Kaqchikel Historical Perspectives. Xkib'ij kan qate' qatata'*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), p. 145; David Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchu and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999). Some feminist scholars critique the arrogance of academics who impose western analyses on research populations. See Marie-Françoise Chanfrault-Duchet, "Narrative Structures, Social Models, and Symbolic Representation in the Life Story," in *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History*, ed. Sherina Berger Gluck and Daphne Patai, (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 77-92; and Patai, "U.S. Academics and Third World Women" pp. 137-153.
- <sup>16</sup> The Loka Institute provides excellent examples of how the community based research approach is applied in the field of science and technology. The Loka Institute is a non-profit organization in Amherst, Massachusetts, that advocates for the inclusion of workers, citizens, grassroots organizations and other public interest groups in research agendas and analyses. By including the local populations impacted by technological research and its applications, the Loka Institute seeks to educate researchers and citizens as to the profound environmental, social, and political effects of technological experiments and advancements. Their model can be appropriately applied to the social sciences and humanities in many Latin American (and other international) settings. See [www.loka.org](http://www.loka.org). Other scholars also advocate for this approach in their fields. For

example, in his book *Science, Truth, and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), philosopher of science Philip Kitcher argues that citizens' perspectives should help guide scientific research. For an example from yet another field, scholars and practitioners of law advocate the process of "legal literacy" which teaches people, particularly women, about their legal rights and capacity to impact law by ensuring they are agents of their education. Legal literacy's holistic approach demands an understanding of the larger political, economic, social, cultural, and gender forces in people's lives. The main goal of legal literacy is to empower women not only in judicial settings but also in their societies. See Margaret Schuler and Sakuntala Kadirgamar-Rajasingham, eds., *Legal Literacy: A Tool for Women's Empowerment* (New York: UNIFEM, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Slim and Thompson, op. cit. 104-15.

<sup>18</sup> Pamela Sparr, "Looking through the Telescope at Both Ends: Participatory Research and Action as a Feminist Political Practice," *Women's Studies Quarterly* vol. 26, no. 3 & 4 (Fall/Winter 1998): 68-76 (quote from p. 71). For another stellar example of participatory research see Asociación de la Mujer Maya Ixil, *Voces e Imágenes: Mujeres Maya Ixiles de Chajul, Voices and Images: Mayan Ixil Women of Chajul, Iqul Tuch' Ivatzib'al: Inq'a Ixoq aj Tenam Tx'aul* (Guatemala City: Víctor Herrera de Magna Terra editores, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> Cindy Forster's, *The Time of Freedom: Campesino Workers in Guatemala's October Revolution* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001) is a fine example of the benefits of using oral evidence in historical analysis.

<sup>20</sup> See for example, Richard Price, *First Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro- American People* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1983).

<sup>21</sup> Michael Coe, *Breaking the Maya Code* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Ann Oakley, "Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms," in *Doing Feminist Research*, ed. Helen Roberts (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 30-61.

<sup>23</sup> Gary Okihiro, "Oral History and the Writing of Ethnic History," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, ed. David Dunaway and Willa Baum, (Oxford: AltaMira Press, 1996), p. 200.

<sup>24</sup> Ix'ajmaq, July 1, 2001, San José Poaquil, Guatemala.

<sup>25</sup> Slim and Thompson, op. cit. 57.

<sup>26</sup> Alicida Ramos, "Indian Voices: Contact Experienced and Expressed," in *Rethinking History and Myth: Indigenous South American Perspectives on the Past*. Ed. Jonathan Hill. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1988): p. 230.

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## ORAL SOURCES \*

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\* I use Mayan pseudonyms for Kaqchikel informants to protect their anonymity.