

Los Mayas de las Tierras Altas en el Siglo XVI: Tradición y Cambio en Guatemala. By Elías Zamora Acosta. (Sevilla: Diputación Provincial, 1985. 485 pp., 4 maps, 5 diagrams, bibliography.)

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For those who study the colonial Maya, the past few years have witnessed a flood of English-language publications, at least one of which—the book by Nancy Farriss on the Yucatan—is already recognized as a landmark contribution.¹ While this output has certainly not gone unnoticed, it has tended to absorb North American and British attention to the detriment of recent work published in Spanish by a new generation of “mother country” scholars.² Guillermo Céspedes del Castillo, of the Universidad Complutense in Madrid, has written with insight on the ways in which *americanistas* in Spain presently engage in colonial-period research.³ Elías Zamora now joins Cristina García Bernal in having produced a Maya ethnohistory that far surpasses, in quality and scope, much of the less-inspired work of their peers and predecessors.⁴

Zamora's geographical focus, as his subtitle indicates, is Guatemala, specifically the western region administered during early colonial times as the *alcaldía mayor* of Zapotitlán and Suchitepéquez. If Zamora's spatial unit is both far-flung and environmentally diverse, he sensibly limits himself, temporally, to a reconstruction of Maya life for the sixteenth century only. His book is divided into two parts, one of which concentrates on land and settlement, the other on economy and society. The first part contains three chapters, the second six, with the 135 pages of the former more replete with interesting ideas than the 240 pages of the latter. Zamora's depiction of Maya-Spanish interaction, like that of Farriss, is one in which Indians are viewed not as vestiges of a romantic pre-Columbian past or the victims of imperial exploitation so much as actors who responded to invasion and domination in ways that ensured meaningful group preservation.⁵ Zamora thus takes ethnohistory one step further by helping to demystify “National Geographic” representations of Maya cultural survival that are redolent with Rousseau-like imagery. At the same time, he puts more flesh, blood, and collective responsibility onto Marxist notions of the Maya that all too often are lifeless and crude.

Followers of the debate on the demographic impact of Spain in America will find much to ponder in Zamora's balanced discussion of this complex issue. Adapting the critique made by B. H. Slicher von Bath of the methodology of Sherburne F. Cook and Woodrow Borah in the context of central Mexico, Zamora proceeds to make the case that western Guatemala on the eve of Spanish conquest supported approximately 300,000 people. Between 1524 and 1600, primarily because of intro-

duced Old World diseases, Zamora reckons Indian population declined by some 70 percent. Depopulation, he contends, was most intense in the first twenty-five years after conquest and slowed down considerably in the second half of the century. Unlike Cook and Borah in Mexico or Noble David Cook in Peru, Zamora claims that no great variations exist in mortality rates between piedmont areas and highland areas. His specific findings and his scholarly predilection in general may be regarded as shrewd modification, as opposed to unreasonable rejection, of the "high" population estimates of the Berkeley school, a position that puts Zamora in the "middle range" camp of William T. Sanders rather than the "low range" camp of Angel Rosenblat or Francisco de Solano.

Equally stimulating is Zamora's analysis of the operation of *congregación* and the implications of depopulation and forced resettlement in nucleated centers, after the initial wave of conquest, for Maya community life. Zamora demonstrates convincingly, as have (among others) Robert Carmack, Robert Hill, David Robinson, and Carol Smith, that it is time for scholars to be more mindful of the limitations of such general concepts of acculturation as Eric Wolf's model of the closed corporate peasant community. Zamora is skeptical about just how closed and corporate, just how harmonious and homogeneous, colonial Maya communities actually were. He observes that, at least during the first century of Spanish rule in Guatemala, "pueblo and community were not analogous concepts. In most instances, *parcialidad* descent structures defined the limits within which each Indian perceived community to lie, considering members of other descent groups as strangers even though they all lived in the same pueblo" (p. 171).

This is a fine book, written in crisp, at times elegant Spanish by a young and immensely talented *sevillano*. Zamora's work has already gained the distinction of winning the prize awarded annually by the Diputación Provincial de Sevilla for Latin American monographs. It deserves the serious attention of all Maya scholars and also will be of interest to anyone committed to the theory and practice of innovative ethnohistory.

NOTES

- 1 Nancy M. Farriss, *Maya Society under Colonial Rule: The Collective Enterprise of Survival* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).
- 2 For a review of this literature, see Grant D. Jones, "Recent Ethnohistorical Works on Southeastern Mesoamerica," *Latin American Research Review* 22, no. 1 (1987): 214-24.
- 3 Guillermo Céspedes del Castillo, "Hispanic American Historical Studies in Spain: Trends and Prospects," *Itinerario* 8, no. 1 (1984): 118-36.
- 4 M. Cristina García Bernal, *Población y Encomienda en Yucatán bajo los Austrias* (Sevilla: Escuela de Estudios Hispano-Americanos, 1978).

- 5 Nancy M. Farniss, "Indians in Colonial Yucatán: Three Perspectives," in Murdo J. MacLeod and Robert Wasserstrom, eds., *Spaniards and Indians in South-eastern Mesoamerica: Essays in the History of Ethnic Relations* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 1-39.

Humane Development: Participation and Change among the Sadama of Ethiopia. By John H. Hamer. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1987. xi + 281 pp., tables, figures, maps, photographs, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.)

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The title of this work presumably derives from the author's hope that this study may promote more humane, sensible socioeconomic development in the third world, development that would lead to increased productivity while "balancing self-interest with community responsibility" (p. 4). The book is organized into an introduction, ten chapters of description and analyses, and a conclusion. The material is based upon thirteen months' fieldwork in southern Ethiopia in 1964 and 1965 and six additional months in 1973 just prior to the Ethiopian Marxist revolution. The study concerns the Sadama (Sidamo), one of several Cushitic peoples living in the remote southern highlands of Ethiopia. These peoples are of great interest to social anthropologists because they possess very complex age-set organizations that challenge the ethnographic and analytical skills of the most persevering researcher. To some extent writers on the Konso, Galla, and other groups have begun to solve some of the puzzles involved.

The first half of this volume is devoted to describing the general aspects of Sadama society: the cultural area, history, basis of economy, and the main features of social organization, values, and beliefs. The author touches briefly upon all of these, yet he fails to convey a clear and convincing picture of any of them. In part this is inevitable given the brief space utilized (129 pages). The material on the age-set systems is particularly thin and unrewarding, even though it appears to be the central feature of Sadama social organization and the key to those values by which Sadama define themselves as a people.

My impression is that the author's ethnography is thin and that he has stretched out what he has with many statements of a normative, generalizing nature that at first glance appear more informative than they actually are. There is little detailed material presented in terms of case studies, ethnographic terms, notions of how people and groups interact, what their strategies may be, and how their different values and beliefs intermesh. The material that is reported seems adrift from any set of per-

