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“He Wished It in Vain”: Subordination and Resistance among Maya Women in Post-Conquest Yucatan

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Abstract. This essay discusses the status of Maya women in both indigenous and Spanish societies in colonial Yucatan. An analysis of records of one Spanish and one Maya incident of attempted rape against Maya women, substantiated by evidence from the larger corpus of Maya-language notarial sources, suggests that Maya women pushed the limits of their culturally assigned roles to resist subordination to gender and colonial structures.

The captain Alonso López de Avila, brother-in-law of the adelantado Montejo, captured, during the war in Bacalán, a young Indian woman of lovely and gracious appearance. She had promised her husband, fearful lest they should kill him in the war, not to have relations with any other man but him, and so no persuasion was sufficient to prevent her from taking her own life to avoid being defiled by another man; and because of this they had her thrown to the dogs.

—Diego de Landa, *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán*

The nobleman Don Jorge Xiu . . . hates me. . . . He committed the worst of his deeds when four times he came into my house to take my wife by force to fornicate adulterously with her. He wished it in vain and was not to fulfil his desire. I then told this official, Don Jorge Xiu, that it was not fitting for him to act like that with us, so that we might obey him. This is all I said to him, but he wouldn't stop. This was the cause of the quarrel.

—Deigo Pox, *Tierras de Tabí*

In the 1560s Yucatan's infamous ecclesiastic, Fray Diego de Landa, wrote down the first incident quoted above in a brief entry on Maya women in

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his *Relación de las cosas de Yucatán*.¹ Shortly afterward, in the Maya community, or *cab*, of Dzan, one Diego Pox dictated in the Maya language his account of the second quoted incident.² The following discussion uses these texts not as necessarily representative but as certainly symbolic of the relationship of Maya women both to Maya men and to Spaniards during the colonial period, a relationship characterized by complex forms of subordination and resistance. My analysis, based primarily on Maya-language notarial sources, is intended to complement and supplement previous brief studies of Maya women based on Spanish sources.³ (Clendinnen 1982 is essentially a reworking of the relevant passages in Landa 1959 [1566]; Hunt 1974, Farriss 1984, and Patch 1994 lend some space to Maya women, mostly as domestic economic participants.) My purpose is to contribute both to our understanding of Maya society and colonial relations in post-Conquest Yucatan and to the exploration of the potential for “gender” as “a useful category of historical analysis” (Scott 1988) in colonial Latin America.

At first glance, Diego de Landa’s brief account of the fate of an intransigent Maya woman seems to illustrate the “impious, criminal and ignominious deeds” used by Las Casas to characterize the conquest of the Indies.⁴ Yet a closer look raises certain questions. Why was the Maya woman not raped? Her captor, López de Avila, presumably had the power to do so. In a discussion of this Landa passage, Tzvetan Todorov concludes that the Maya victim was cruelly dispatched because of her otherness, “because she is both an unconsenting woman and an Indian woman. Never was the fate of the other more tragic” (1984: 247). Yet if she was not worth Avila’s trouble, her fate decided by a racially based noncommitment (or by what Todorov calls “cultural exteriority” [ibid. 246]), this interpretation surely undermines one motor that drives the short tale to its tragic conclusion—namely, the Maya woman’s desirability.

Perhaps Avila found the woman so alluring that consummation could only maintain the integrity of that desire if she submitted to it voluntarily or if she shared it; the Spaniard needed the Indian to be so enveloped in his wanting that she too became a part of it, a party to it. What spoils her, from Avila’s perspective, is her resistance. His need reflects a broader one that is visible in a context far greater than colonial Yucatan, a culture-wide need to validate a cosmic race that would otherwise be engendered in rape. For example, in proclaiming his mestizo identity with pride, the Mexican American writer Richard Rodriguez must assert that “I am alive and I count my life to be the result not simply of the European man’s will on my ancestral Indian mother but of her interest in the European, too” (1992). Thus the mother of modern Mexico is not a rape victim—the unwilling were thrown to the dogs—but the Maya princess of folk history

who married Gonzalo Guerrero (see Landa 1959 [1566]: 6–7; Clendinnen 1987: 17–18, 21–22); the moment of creation is untainted by resistance.⁵

Nevertheless, can the Maya woman escape historical oblivion? Guerrero, the Spaniard who, after being shipwrecked on the Yucatec coast, went native (in British terms), won immortality as the father of mestizo Mexico, and gained a full-length portrait in the Palacio del Gobierno in Mérida. We know nothing, nor do we hear of, the woman—or women—who made such immortality possible. Likewise, the “lovely and gracious Indian woman” of Landa’s recounting is given no further identity, although we are provided with the name, title, and good connections of her captor.

The depersonalization of the Maya woman is not only a product of ethnocentric dismissal, for if we cross the line from a region of encounters with Spaniards described by Spaniards into a region populated only by indigenous actors, the Maya woman is still anonymous. In the second quote that began this essay, Diego Pox, a prominent, though not noble, Maya man of the cah of Dzan, concludes his petition of complaint against the *batab* (municipal governor) of his cah with an accusation of attempted rape. Pox argues that the *batab*, Don Jorge Xiu, is attempting to take Pox’s lands through an invented inheritance dispute, the motive being resentment of the resistance offered the *batab* by Pox’s unnamed wife.

This accusation, coming at the end of a detailed petition describing the land dispute, seems almost an afterthought; perhaps the land dispute had other origins; perhaps political factionalism was at play. But even if we concede veracity to Pox’s story, his wife still appears subordinate to the male antagonists. The anonymous wife is a battleground, not the ultimate object, of the dispute—which is, presumably, the land. Thus she exists, through this document, only as a metaphor for that land and only in relation to the men in conflict partly over her. She is not the author of the complaint; she is not defending herself through litigation. Likewise, the anonymous woman of Landa’s story exists only as a measure of the power held over her by her captor, Avila, and her Maya husband. Todorov remarks that the woman of Landa’s account is “no more than the site where the desires and wills of two men meet” (1984: 246). This is true of both Maya women; they are the subjects not only of the “acquisitive relation” that Frantz Fanon ascribed to colonial interaction but also of an acquisitive relation between men and women, or between those in authority and those subordinate—the two often (and certainly in this case) being meaningfully inclusive.⁶

Yet these two women are more than mere battlegrounds; what ultimately ties them together from our analytical perspective is the simple fact of their resistance. In both cases, the women’s prevention of rape is interpreted by the male narrators as the cause of hostile male reaction (Avila

sends one woman to her death; Xiu persecutes the other woman's husband). The women are not passive victims but active participants in the struggle of will and desire that is the nature of colonial relations and often of gender relations.

The key word is *active*; for although the quoted examples are useful as dramatic entrées into analysis, they fail to portray the complexity of female responses to colonial and gender relations in post-Conquest Yucatan. The circumstances were not always violent, nor did women always choose the resistance options that have become the standard view of indigenous reactions to colonialism, as reflected in the classic Mexican novel, *El Indio*: “Abandon the rancheria; take refuge in the mountains as in past epochs of persecution; resist when the situation was favorable; . . . and finally, for whoever fell into the hands of the whites, this order—sealed lips. That was their strength!” (López y Fuentes 1988 [1937]: 64). As Grant Jones has observed, “Rebellion in Yucatán has been elusive because it was defined primarily in nonconfrontational terms” (1990: 192). In other words, we return to the interest in the European shown by Richard Rodríguez's ancestral Indian mother, to Gonzalo Guerrero's Maya wife, to the assertion of strength inherent in indigenous willingness. The unfavorable colonial and gender structures of Yucatan elicited more than the silent resistance of the anonymous Maya woman, a resistance that might only succeed Pyrrhically. Maya women also actively engaged the individuals and institutions that represented those structures. In the following sections I examine first the burden of those structures on women—the roles of subordination that provided resistance with its *raison d'être*—and then the various manifestations of that resistance. (The two categories are, of course, an artifice created for analytical purposes; role often meant both subordination and status, and even resistance, as we shall see.)

Structure and Subordination

Maya society contained an essentially patriarchal structure of representation that is visible in the two predominant Maya social units, the family and the *cah*. The *batab* represented the municipal (or *cabildo*) officers beneath him and, by extension, all members of the community. The opening phrase, *ten cen batab*, “I who am *batab*,” defines a notarial document as a *cah* product as surely as the pervasive *uay ti cah*, “here in the *cah*.” In this sense the *cah* was a family and the *batab*, its head; the ubiquitous Maya term *yum* means “lord” or “father” or both, as in the *batab*'s case. Because women were denied access to office in the civil and religious hierarchies of the *cah*, they were, by dint of their gender, always the represented rather

than the representatives. Female political activity was necessarily unofficial and consequently lacking in prestige, as well as hidden from us—an audience dependent upon the male *cabildo* notaries. Indeed, as only the *cabildo* offices of *escribano* and *maestro* required literacy and afforded access to books, Maya women (like most Maya men) were illiterate.

The disadvantage of this system of social and political representation by the *batab* and *cabildo* is apparent from the Dzan attempted-rape incident; women, as a represented group, depended on the goodwill (and thus were vulnerable to the ill will) of their representatives. Diego Pox's wife, though victimized by her *cah* representative (the *batab*), still had the protection of her family representative (her husband). Yet this protection was of potentially dubious value: Pox's only recourse is an attempt to bypass his *cah cabildo* (to whom he is also subject, but whose ratification of his petition he fails to procure) and appeal to the Spanish authorities, an uncertain strategy, since colonial rule depended on stable indigenous self-government. Furthermore, Pox's priorities (to keep his land or to protect his wife) are also uncertain. On such uncertainties was Pox's wife dependent.

As in many other cultures, the head of a Maya family represented its members; even today the collective use of the pronominal first-person singular is common among the Maya (Hanks 1990). Male representation of family (either the nuclear unit or the larger patronym group, the *chibal*) is clearly seen in Maya testaments and was also reflected in land-tenure references in Maya documentation. Although women are recorded as buying, selling, inheriting, and bequeathing land, a woman is never described by a neighbor as the owner of a plot; a testator of Ixil, for example, locates his *kax* (forested land) in relation to "Francisco Canul to the south, Manuel Cutz to the east," and so forth, with Canul, Cutz, and the others transubstantially representing these neighboring plots as family patriarchs (TI: 54). Such references to male representatives cannot be dismissed as private ownership by those males, for in the context of wills, petitions to sell, or bills of sale, the male representative(s) are often joined at some point in the document by other family members, women included (AGN-Tierras: 1359, 5, 9; ANEX: 1835ii, 101; et al.). Some records suggest a hierarchy of representation within the *chibal*. In her will of 1766 (TI: 23), Viviana Canche mentions

my share of the wells and house-plot given to me by my father in his will when he died, which I leave to my husband and also to Juan Cante; the intention of my father—who is with our lord in God—may be seen in his will, given to our lord magistrates; which is why today I leave these three wells and their house-plot jointly to my husband, my son, my uncle, my older brothers, and their younger siblings.⁷

Some of these male relatives are identified elsewhere in the will. Viviana does not specifically mention any women, but it is clear from her own role, from the likelihood of some of the men being nuclear-family heads, and from the broader context of Maya-language sources that female inclusion is implied. The hierarchy of representation suggested is thus (1) male kin of the nuclear family (in this case, husband and son), (2) male kin of the extended consanguineal family, and (3) their female and dependent male relatives, consanguineal or affinal.

The question of Maya land tenure provides a conceptual link between the macrorepresentation of *cah* by *cabildo* and the microrepresentation of family by male head; one plot of land could be owned, simultaneously and on different levels, by a woman, jointly by that woman and her relatives, by their male family representative, and by the *cah* represented by its *cabildo*. From different perspectives such a female landowner was either subordinated by a complex structure of ownership (literal and metaphorical) or provided a secure access to land within a system that delineated the roles of all its participants.

The notably indigenous style of post-Conquest Maya land description makes it unlikely that its patriarchal implications were a colonial innovation (Restall 1992: 326–49). Indeed, scholars have not yet shown that pre-Conquest matrilineal descent was appreciably different from colonial-era inheritance patterns, by which women bequeathed and inherited property, but much of that property was gender specific and, on balance, less valuable than male holdings. The evidence of hieroglyphic texts has so far indicated that female participation in politics and society was active but circumscribed by gender-specific roles (Schele and Freidel 1990: 133, *passim*)—just as it was after the Conquest. Colonial-era evidence of a matrilineal descent system comparable to the patrilineal is scant and primarily lexical. The term for noble, *almehen*, which had evolved before the Conquest, includes both the word for a woman's child (*al*) and that for a man's son (*mehen*)—but note that only the gender of the man's offspring is indicated. In addition, the pre-Hispanic naming system recognized the importance of the female line through the *nal*, or maternal, name. After the Conquest the *nal* name was replaced by a nonlineal Christian name, and although a woman kept her Maya patronym after marriage, it was (as its name indicates) her father's patronym, just as her children received their father's patronym (Restall 1992: 294–304).

This slight modification of Maya naming patterns to accommodate Hispanic patrilineal traditions might be taken to reflect the compounded subordination of Maya women to both Spanish and Maya male-dominated structures of rule and representation. Spanish colonial practice was to demand of the indigenous population whatever was of economic value to

the Spaniards—generally tribute in the form of product and labor. Maya women bore the brunt of product-tribute demands, because a major portion of such payments usually consisted of goods produced or nurtured on the *solar*, or house plot, which was primarily the female domain—namely *mantas*, or cotton cloth, hens, honey, and beeswax, as opposed to the field crops of maize and beans (Scholes and Roys 1968 [1948]: 151–53; Restall 1992: 278–85). Of course, the fact that women bore the burden of *mantas* demands also increased the value of their labor to the indigenous community and to the colonial economy.

However, women were also subject to direct labor-tribute demands. In the early-colonial period, Maya women were forced to perform domestic service in Mérida and in Spanish towns (Clendinnen 1982: 432), a pattern that persisted as Spaniards brought indigenous women into their communities for one- to three-week stints as weavers, flour-grinders, wet nurses, and maids, many of whom stayed (Hunt 1974).

In the Spanish urban environment Maya women lacked whatever protection the *cah* system of representation afforded them, sometimes becoming concubines and, by and large, becoming dependent upon the reluctance of individuals to exploit their institutionalized vulnerability. I have said that Spanish demands were economic in motive, but on a deeper level they could reflect the desire of the dominant to exert and demonstrate authority over the subordinate. This phenomenon took various forms. For example, one Spanish resident of Mérida gave her Maya servant a small house following decades of domestic service, but the maid apparently failed to demonstrate adequate gratitude and shortly afterward the donor filed legal papers to have the gift rescinded—a final reminder of who was boss (AGEY-Tierras I: 22). That Spanish demonstrations of dominance often took sexual forms is not surprising; by the end of the colonial period the people of Campeche were labeling Mérida, not without snobbery, a “mestizo” society (Piña Chan 1977).

Even in the overwhelmingly indigenous environment of the *cah* Maya women were not necessarily safe from Spanish sexual predacity. The Landa account of Avila’s female captive reflected the violence of the Conquest; more representative of the colonial period in general, though also reflecting the Spanish association of the imposition of colonial rule with the imposition of male domination, was a 1589 group complaint by five *cah* *cabildos* against their curate: “This is the truth: When [the curate] gives confession to the women, he then says, ‘If you don’t give yourself to me, I won’t confess you.’ This is how he abuses the women: He won’t confess a woman unless she comes to him, unless she fornicates with him. This is the whole truth about how the women are driven mad” (AGN-Inquisición 69, 5:277).⁸

This petition is contextually part of a colonial Maya tradition of com-

plaint against Spanish church and crown officials (Restall 1992: 49–79). However, the above form of abuse was especially effective given the patriarchal nature of Maya society, for in asserting his authority over Maya women—based on a monopoly over divine access as granted by the colonial authorities—the curate also challenges the authority of Maya men over Maya women (given emphasis by the fact that these and many other Maya communities used the word for woman, *chuplal*, also to mean wife). Again, men are seeking to use women as weaponry in a male battle of wills, thereby subordinating women to male control while still recognizing female potency.⁹

A similar example looks at this battle from a slightly different angle—an anonymous petition of 1774 accusing four Spanish priests of sexual depravity in highly explicit Maya terms. The petitioner refers to the offending priests as censorious of Maya sexual activity while practicing such activity blatantly themselves: “Only the priests are allowed to fornicate without so much as a word about it. If a good *macehual* [commoner; in this case, a Maya commoner] does it, the priest punishes him immediately, every time” (AGN-Inquisición 1187, 2: 60).¹⁰ In other words, the Maya men resent the Spanish assertion of power through an exhibition of sexual monopoly; the battle of wills between men over sexual rights is in this case between two symbolic colonial groups, the men of a Maya community and the local Spanish priests.

The explicit nature of this rare document makes it relevant to the question of gender relations on another level. The petition is a commentary on hypocrisy: the Maya accuse the Spanish priests of being shocked by sexual activity they themselves practice, yet the Maya are pretending to be shocked by sexual activity while describing it with obvious relish:

Nor does the true God descend in the host when they say mass, because they have erections. Every day all they think of is intercourse with their girlfriends. In the morning their hands smell bad from playing with their girlfriends. Fray Torres, he only plays with the vagina of that ugly black devil Rita. He whose hand is disabled certainly does not have a disabled penis; it is said he has up to four children by this black devil. Likewise Fray Díaz, squad corporal, has a woman from Bolonchen called Antonia Alvarado, whose vagina he repeatedly penetrates before the whole cah, and Fray Granado bruises Manuela Pacheco’s vagina all night. Fray Maldonado has just finished fornicating with everyone in his jurisdiction, and has now come here to carry out his fornication. The whole cah knows this. When Fray Maldonado comes [here?] on a weekly basis, a woman of Pencuyut provides him with her vagina; her name is Fabiana Gomez.¹¹

The Maya culture of sexual humor, vivid and highly developed, is evident in premodern texts such as the books of Chilam Balam and has been detailed by modern ethnographers (Burns 1991; Hanks 1990; Holmes 1977). The petition—anonymous (which is extremely unusual among Maya notarial sources) but clearly male—is a joke aimed seriously at both the local clergy and the upper echelons of the Spanish church, into whose heart the Maya have thereby dispatched sexually explicit material; it is an ironic Maya exploitation of the repressed sexual values of Catholic dogma as a weapon against the perpetrators of that dogma. But—again—women give potency to that weapon, while at the same time the joke comes at the expense of women, who are degraded by its execution. They are objectified not only (allegedly) by the Spanish priests but also by the Maya notary. They are also named, unlike the Maya women of the sixteenth-century petition quoted above; significantly, the women thus humiliated are certainly from outside the *cah* and almost certainly non-Maya—Rita appears to be African, and the names of the other three imply they are *mestiza* or *mulatta*. In other words, gender as a determinant of status was either exacerbated or offset by the determinants of ethnicity and—probably just as important—community or *cah* affiliation.

Role and Resistance

If, on the one hand, the Maya tradition of social representation subordinated women and rendered them powerless to defend themselves, on the other hand, it also indirectly afforded women with *cah* affiliation protection from external threats. In contrast to Maya women in a Spanish town, Maya wives within the *cah* were defended by their husbands against threats to the family and community—from Diego Pox's petition against his own *batab* to the petition from five *cah* *cabildos* against a Spanish curate. Just as through the *cabildo*'s notary women had access to the legal protection provided by testaments and bills of sale, so through their male representatives were women given access to the redress that the Spanish legal system potentially afforded. Maya-language petitions uncovered so far suggest that later in the colonial period Maya women cease to be cited as anonymous victims of generalized abuses and instead become named victims of specific offenses. To take two early-nineteenth-century examples: the *cabildo* of Bolompoyche filed a lengthy Maya petition in 1812, accusing the parish priest of malpractice and physical assault and listing a dozen detailed incidents, in a third of which the abused were named women (AGN-Bienes Naturales 21, 20: 2–8); in 1811 Ebtun's *cabildo* notarized a complaint on behalf of Valentina Un, whose daughter, while working as a servant in a

Spanish kitchen, had suffered an injury to her arm at the hands of a Doña Rafaela Rosado (TE: 275).

Furthermore, patriarchal representation may itself account for the fact that men appear wealthier through testaments than women; during their lifetimes women had access to more wealth through their fathers, husbands, and even brothers. Sometimes this access becomes formalized, and thus visible to us, in the form of men's deathbed gifts to women, which were primarily bequests from husbands to wives, from fathers to daughters, and between other kin. However, a woman was not necessarily excluded from such economic benefits if her relationship to the donor was extramarital—Pedro Mis of Ixil divided up his property among his wife, another woman who appears to be his mistress, and a child who appears to be their illegitimate son (TI: 30). There was no apparent socioeconomic prejudice against single mothers; two such women in eighteenth-century Ixil passed their property and their patronyms on to their sons. In a few cases women are revealed through their testaments to be not only wealthy but economically independent and financially active. Ana Xul of Cacalchen, for example, was a local banker and dealer in women's clothing and tribute mantas; upon her death in 1678 she was owed money by almost twenty clients in her home cah and in neighboring communities (LC: 33).

The subordination of Maya women in cah society to gender-specific roles needs to be elaborated within two primary areas of social interaction in which men and women were assigned such roles: labor and interfamily politics. In both instances, women were not necessarily worse off than men; I would also argue that women resisted subordination by exploring and extending the limits of their expected roles, as exemplified by Ana Xul, the female Maya banker. Another example is Pasquala Matu of Ixil, who took advantage of her pivotal role as a link between her own (her father's) patronym group, that of her mother (Coba), and that of her husband (Yam), to nurture an estate that, by the time of her death in 1766, consisted of land, wells, and forty items of clothing. Like Ana Xul, Pasquala was clearly in business for herself: her clothing fortune included eleven complete male outfits (shirts and trousers) and five complete female outfits (dresses and petticoats) (TI: 29). No doubt Pasquala also had a hand in two of her sons marrying women of her mother's patronym group and a third son marrying a Couoh; the four patronym groups to which Pasquala was connected (Matu, Coba, Yam, and Couoh), though not nobility, were among the most privileged in her cah. Other such examples of women functioning as key links between families and patronym groups, often via the marriages of a woman's sisters and daughters, are found in the Maya-language sources from Ixil and Cacalchen (TI; LC).

The tendency observed in many cultures for men to “act in the public sphere, while women are often restricted to the domestic sphere, at home” (O’Brien 1977: 122–23) is confirmed by the evidence of Maya-language wills from colonial Yucatan (mostly in LC, TE, and TI; see Restall 1992: 278–88). Division of labor by gender is demonstrated in four interrelated inheritance patterns. First, although both genders equally inherited house plots (the Maya rarely bequeathed houses; it was assumed buildings accompanied the plots on which they were built), women were twice as likely to bequeath a house plot as they were to bequeath nonresidential land (*col* and *kax*, cultivated fields and forested land). In other words, though property was divided equally among offspring, over time house plots gravitated into female hands and farming lands into male hands.

Second, most of the flora and fauna found in wills from Ixil and other communities was located on the house plot, and women dominated or monopolized ownership and inheritance of botanical items, pigs, fowl, and bees. The exceptions were animals with location or usage primarily away from the home: cattle, horses, and mules. Men dominated ownership of these animals, but they commonly left them to daughters as dowry goods and to wives as widow support. Third, men maintained a virtual monopoly on tools such as machetes and axes. Fourth, although ownership of clothing tended not surprisingly to be gender specific, women owned four times as much cloth and clothing as did men, including items never owned by men, such as yarn, washing bowls, and looms. Most of these items were Maya clothing and thus nontribute products; Maya women weaved clothes for sale, for their immediate family, or even for future family members (such as unborn granddaughters and future daughters-in-law).

A final aspect of labor division that is gender-related—the bearing and nursing of children—tied Maya women to the home. The average number of living children mentioned by Maya testators increases from two in the mid-seventeenth century to over four by the end of the colonial period, but we can assume, by factoring in infant as well as adult mortality, that Maya women on average gave birth to at least twice that many children. On the one hand, Maya women were thereby reduced to the status of reproductive vessels, slaves to (male and female) biological function, confined to the “bitter trap” (Scott 1988: 33). On the other hand, childbirth empowered and dignified women; only women could provide families with new sources of labor, new opportunities for interfamily alliances, and new possibilities for emotional fulfillment through reproduction.

In her study of the case of Chan Kom during the 1970s, Elmendorf fears for the future of her female subjects, who may be drawn away from “a subsistence economy where they have been part of a mutually dependent

relationship with their husbands” and into an urban environment “where their role is undefined, uncertain, undignified” (1985: 124). The implication is that community society traditionally defined for a woman a role that was certain and dignified; in the case of the colonial period this appears to have been true. Gender roles conveyed and commanded mutual dependency and respect. Men and women were separated by labor and by the rituals of organization, but they were bound by the ties of family, *chibal*, faction, and *cah*. Role boundaries limited action but also provided an assured arena in which women, as much as men, could pursue social, economic, and informal political objectives with some degree of independence. Silverblatt’s argument that the interplay and complementarity of women’s work and men’s work “was essential for Andean life to continue” (1987: 9, 14) seems most apposite to Yucatan. As Clendinnen has pointed out (1982: 431), subordination did not mean subjugation; Diego Pox’s wife may have been subordinate in gender and status to her attacker, but she resisted subjugation.

Although we must assume that Elmendorf’s fears for twentieth-century Maya women in an urban environment were a reality for many Maya women in colonial Spanish towns and Mérida, the colonial record also reveals Maya women resisting such a fate in their pursuit of the opportunities presented by engaging the Hispanic world. Here we find not the victims of Spanish dogs but the ancestral Indian mothers of Richard Rodriguez; examples of such women range from semi-Hispanized indigenous nobles (such as Doña Inés de Viana of Motul) bringing substantial dowries into marriages with prominent local Spaniards, to domestic servants (such as Catalina Chable in Mérida) whose mestiza daughters were granted money and urban property by their father (their mother’s employer)—a degree of economic security and social status that they might not have gained in *cah* society.

Not that engaging the Hispanic world necessarily meant sacrificing community connections, as demonstrated by the life story of Doña Maria Cristina Chuel, the daughter of Maya nobility in Dzibikak. During her first two marriages Doña Maria lived in Samahil, married first to a local Maya noble, from whom she inherited enough property (along with bequests from her father) to start a cattle ranch and subsequently marry a mulatto employed by a Spaniard. After her second husband’s death, Doña Maria married a resident of Mérida, a merchant named Manuel de Flores Jorge, who was Hispanized but of mixed descent. Doña Maria died in 1692 a rich widow, leaving all her land and almost all her urban property and other goods to her Maya relatives in Samahil; thus Doña Maria’s pursuit of mo-

bility outside the *cah* resulted in the augmentation, rather than alienation, of the wealth she had acquired in the *cah*.¹²

Conclusion: Double Jeopardy?

The dual themes of subordination and resistance are reflected in the complexity of gender and colonial relations in post-Conquest indigenous Yucatan. The status of Maya women had much in common with that of Nahuatl women in central Mexico. Women in both areas, to quote scholars of the Nahuas, “had rights to alienate property . . . [and] received equal rights to houses and landed property, though their ability to use such rights, in relation to land especially, must be seen as more limited” (Kellogg 1979: 85, 99); indigenous women “asserted their claims to property through the Spanish judicial system,” their status being determined by class and wealth more than gender, though women “would have been expected to follow the work patterns of their gender. They would have been excluded from high office [and] would have been illiterate” (Cline 1986: 122–23).

Does the evidence of colonial-era Maya-language notarial documentation therefore support Clendinnen’s inference (1982: 437), based on her reading of Landa (1959 [1566]), “that one outcome of the Spanish conquest was a subtle but real diminution in the status of the women of Yucatán”? Perhaps in the sense that women were now placed in double jeopardy—subject to a traditional gender structure intensified and supplemented by the new structure of colonial rule. Significantly, in an archival example of 1589, the *cah* of Tetzal apologized in writing for prior complaints made by the community against their priest—the same curate accused of soliciting women during confession (see page 583)—and dismissed their objections as “tale-telling and women’s gossip” (*canxectzil y chupulchi*); the Spanish interpreter general glossed the phrase as “some Indian gossip” (“algunos chismes de yndios” [AGN-Inquisición 69, 5: 275]). Silverblatt has written of the “genderization” of class in Inca and colonial Peru (1987: 212); here Spanish and Maya men play complementary roles in perpetuating an ideology of class that is genderized and ethnicized.¹³ Thus in colonial Yucatan gender was indeed “a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (Scott 1988: 42); it was also “reciprocally related, in multiple and shifting ways, to other modes of cultural, political, and economic organization and experience” (Montrose 1993: 177).

Clearly, women were not necessarily perceived as inferior simply by dint of their gender, and although they may have been perceived as inferior by Spaniards because of ethnicity, Maya women resisted the full implica-

tions of that racism, willingly and successfully engaging colonial society where generations earlier the unwilling woman had been assigned a cruel death. Often the very ideology or system that subordinated women paradoxically gave women value. For example, Maya communities depended on women to meet tax obligations; in addition, the Spanish (and male Maya) association of male dominance with colonial (or political) dominance made the Maya woman's sexual resistance all the more potent.

By delving into both Spanish and Maya-language sources we can acknowledge Maya women heretofore treated as silent, depersonalized victims, and we can recognize their voices and names. We can also affirm that, although Avila's captive may have been a prisoner not only of the Spanish captain but also of her Maya husband's monopolistic will, it was she, not her husband, who resisted assault—and although Diego Pox's wife was betrayed by the community system of protection and dependent on the uncertain priorities of her husband, it was ultimately she who determined that the *batab's* desires went unfulfilled, that “he wished it in vain.”

Notes

- 1 Translation taken from Todorov 1984: v, whose translator uses *The Maya: Account of the Affairs of Yucatan* (Chicago: O'Hara, 1975), an edition of Landa 1959 [1566].
- 2 My translation, fairly idiomatic, from the following Maya (late-sixteenth-century petition by Diego Pox of Dzan): “Almehen don jorge xiu . . . u kuxil ten . . . yan u lobil u beel uicnal can muc u kuchul ychil u otoch u chochopayte in chuplil u pakic keban yetel u kati tilolob maix tan u dzocabal yolah catun u alah ti u bel don jorge xiuh loe mail la u nah u beltic ti on uchebal ca tzicic he tulacal than u alah ti e matan u hauez lay u chun u nupilen loe” (TT: 33).
- 3 This study is an extended and revised version of the third in a trilogy of papers on gender and sexuality in post-Conquest Yucatec Maya society, presented at successive meetings of the American Society for Ethnohistory (ASE), 1991–93; earlier versions of some of the material appear in Restall and Sigal 1992 and in Hunt and Restall forthcoming; my general remarks about colonial-era Maya society and much of the supportive material for this essay are based on research that appears in Restall 1992 and forthcoming. I am grateful to Helene Myers for comments made on a draft of the ASE 1993 version and to Susan Kellogg and Kevin Gosner for comments made at the 1993 ASE meeting.
- 4 From the will of Bartolomé de Las Casas (quoted in Todorov 1984: 245).
- 5 The ambivalent attitude of Mexican culture toward Doña Marina (La Malinche) also relates to this intellectual current; the first indigenous mistress of the first conquistador is alternatively seen as mother to and traitor of the Mexican people (there are myriad sources on this topic, but the usual starting point is Paz 1961; also highly recommended is Karttunen 1994: 1–23).
- 6 “The white man wants the world; he wants it for himself alone. He finds him-

- self predestined master of this world. He enslaves it. An acquisitive relation is established between the world and him” (Fanon 1967: 128).
- 7 My translation. The original is as follows: “Yn parte chen y solal tu patah ten Yn Yum ychil u testamento ca cimi lae cin patic ti yn uicham xan y Juan cante te bin ylabac tu testamento yn Yum lae bix yanili ca Yumil ti D^s bin >aic u nucul y ca Yum Jus^{as} u kinil tumen oxac lay chen y solalae heuac multialbil licil yn patic tu kab uicham y yn ual y yn tio y yn sucunob y u i>inob lae” (see Restall 1995 for a full transcription and translation of this testament).
 - 8 My translation. The original is as follows: “Hahilae he tilic u >aic confesar ti chuplalobe tilic yalic ua matan a >ab aba tene matan y >ab confesar tech lay licil u payic chuplalti matan u >ab confesar ti ua matan u talel chuplal tamuk u pakic u keban chuplalob matan u >ab confesarti lay u hahil tulacal baix u coilob tu >acan chuplal.”
 - 9 I am not aware of examples from Yucatan of Maya men imposing their will on Spanish women, although such an example is found in the 1712 Tzeltal Revolt, in which captive ladina or mestiza women were forced to take Chiapan Maya husbands (Gosner 1992: 133–34).
 - 10 My translation. The original is as follows: “Chenbel Padresob ian u sipitotal u penob matan u than yoklalo uaca u ment utzil maçehuale tusebal helelac ium cura u dzaic u tzucte” (see Restall and Sigal 1992 for a complete translation and fuller treatment of this document).
 - 11 My translation. The original is as follows: “Maix tan u yemel hahal Dios ti lay ostia licil u yalicob misae tumenel tutuchci u cepob sansamal kin chenbel u chekic ueyob cu tuculicob he tu yahalcabe manal tuil u kabob licil u baxtic u ueyob he p^e torrese chenbel u pel kakas cisin Rita box cu baxtic y u moch kabi mai moch u cep ualelob ix >oc cantul u mehenob ti lay box cisin la baixan p^e Diaz cabo de escuadra tu kaba u cumaleil antonia aluarado xbolonchen tan u lolomic u pel u cumale tutan tulacal cah y p^e granado sargento humab akab tan u pehchic u pel manuela pacheco hetun p^e maldonadoe tun>oc u lahchekic u mektanilobe uay cutalel u chubes u cheke yohel tulacal cah ti cutalel u ah semana uinic y xchup ti pencuyute utial yoch pelil p^e maldonado xpab gomes u kabah.”
 - 12 The examples of Doña Inés, Catalina Chable, Doña Maria, and unmentioned others originate in the ARP and are courtesy of Marta Hunt (see Hunt and Restall forthcoming; Restall 1992: 269–74).
 - 13 As Scott has observed (1988: 30), the categories of class, race, and gender do not enjoy a consensus of usage, especially the latter two. I take class to denote a system of social ranking, with race/ethnicity and gender as descriptive terms that—in the case of colonial Yucatan—are two of the determinants of an individual’s rank in that system (Restall 1992: 213–29).

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 AGN Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City.
 ANEY Archivo Notarial del Estado de Yucatán, Mérida. (Cited numbers for AGEY, AGN, and ANEY are legajo, expediente [if any], and folio numbers.)

- ARP Archivo del Registro de la Propiedad, Mérida, Yucatan.
 LC Libro de Cacalchen. Rare Manuscript Collection, Latin American Library, Tulane University, New Orleans. (Cited numbers are folio numbers.)
 TE Titles of Ebtun. (Cited numbers are document numbers assigned by Roys; published in Roys 1939.)
 TI Testaments of Ixil. Colección Carrillo y Ancona, Biblioteca General del Estado de Yucatán, Mérida. (Cited numbers are document numbers assigned by me; published in Restall 1995.)
 TT Tierras de Tabí. Rare Manuscript Collection, Latin American Library, Tulane University, New Orleans. (Cited numbers are folio numbers.)

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