“David Stoll, History, and the Guatemalan Civil War”

by

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Martin Luther King plagiarized his doctoral dissertation and cheated on his wife; Betty Friedan’s feminism grew not from her alienation as a suburban housewife but from her experiences as a Popular Front radical; and now we learn that Rigoberta Menchú fabricated portions of her famous testimonial in order to elicit international support for the Guatemalan guerrillas. As these examples suggest, scholarly investigations into the lives of famous social activists often reveals uncomplimentary information that clashes with the popular images of these figures that have been generated by the mass media. At best, such studies transform super heroes into ordinary humans; at worst, they help undermine the ideals that these activists claim to uphold. David Stoll’s study of Rigoberta Menchú falls mostly into the latter camp, for he aims not to discredit a Nobel Prize winner, as so many mainstream commentators have incorrectly assumed, but to challenge how Westerners have used Menchú’s testimonial to portray the Guatemalan civil war as a popular revolution against an entrenched oligarchy.

Stoll’s argument, in brief, is that Menchú fabricated certain parts of her testimonial in order gain the sympathy of idealistic Westerners who succumbed to romantic notions of the noble savage. He concedes at the outset that certain elements of Menchú’s story are beyond dispute: she is a legitimate Mayan Indian who has suffered human rights violations in a country where dictators routinely massacre thousands of peasants. But Stoll scrutinizes many of the details of Menchú’s testimonial in order to refute her opening claim: “My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans.” Menchú portrays herself as an illiterate peasant whose family endured economic hardship brought on by disputes with powerful ladinos over land. When her father helped organize a peasant union, the army began to terrorize her village. One by one, the members of Rigoberta’s family are killed: one brother died of hunger; another was executed in the public square; her father perished in a spectacular fire set by the police to evict protestors from the Spanish embassy in Guatemala City; and her mother was raped and tortured to death by soldiers. The repression, however, had the opposite of the intended effect on Menchú, who blossomed as a community activist until increasing threats from the death squads eventually induced her to flee into exile.

Menchú’s testimonial suggests that the origins of the Guatemalan civil war can be traced to economic injustice, racial discrimination, and fierce military repression. Another obvious message is that Guatemalan Indians have not been passive victims, but active defenders of their communities. Given the extraordinary brutality inflicted upon them, is it any wonder that Guatemalan peasants would take up arms to start a revolution? Such a conclusion, however, would be unwarranted according to David Stoll because many of the events that Menchú describes never really happened. He finds that Menchú was not an illiterate downtrodden peasant forced to work on a coastal plantation. She actually came from a fairly wealthy Indian family that owned several thousand hectares of land in the highlands. Her father was not a radical agrarian leader, but a stubborn conservative who fought constantly with his relatives over incredibly minute portions of his estate. The fire at the Spanish embassy was set not by the police but by the protestors themselves in an act of suicidal martyrdom. Neither of Menchú’s brothers died in the manner she described, and during the period when Menchú was supposedly slaving away on a plantation, she was actually attending a Catholic boarding school. Perhaps most important, the
voluntary popular organizations described by Menchú were in reality guerrilla fronts designed to lure unsuspecting peasants into the revolutionary struggle.

Given the glaring contrast between these two versions of Guatemalan history it is not surprising that Stoll’s book would evoke strong controversy. In some ways, the Stoll-Menchú debate says more about Western intellectual culture than it does about Guatemala. Stoll’s defenders include right-wing scholars and media commentators, such as David Horowitz and Dinesh D’Souza, who denounce *I, Rigoberta Menchu* as an elaborate left-wing hoax that naive academics have adopted uncritically to promote multiculturalism and political correctness. Menchú’s defenders, on the other hand, tend to be professors whose teaching and research focuses on Latin America, and Guatemala in particular. Most academics, with some notable exceptions, fault Stoll for shoddy scholarship that has played into the hands of those who would deny Indians a legitimate voice in Guatemalan society.

This essay assesses the Stoll-Menchú debate by exploring two main questions. First, how well does Stoll’s research describe the origins of the Guatemalan civil war? Second, did U.S. academics, solidarity activists, and human rights organizations seriously misconstrue the conflict in Guatemala, even prolonging it, as Stoll alleges? In response to the first question, I argue that although Stoll provides a valuable service in directing our attention to certain groups of highland peasants who pursued a neutralist strategy to escape the violence of the early 1980s, his narrow focus on these groups causes him to miscast the Guatemalan conflict as a “war between two armies.” Neutral peasants are certainly part of the story, but they are by no means the whole story as Stoll implies. He is even further from the mark in his assessment of responsibility for the violence. To blame the guerrillas for provoking the military’s massacres is bad enough, but to accuse human rights organizations, solidarity activists, and leftist academics for prolonging the war is a gross injustice, which is not to say that those groups never made mistakes or misjudgments. Many of Stoll’s arguments sound remarkably like State Department propaganda, which doesn’t necessarily invalidate them, but the resemblance ought to at least raise a few eyebrows. As I will argue, many of Stoll’s conclusions rest on questionable research methods, weak evidence, and faulty logic.

One of the biggest disputes between Stoll and his critics concerns how well Menchú’s story represents Guatemalan reality. Stoll points out that many Latin Americanists regard “testimonio” as "testimony--reliable sources of information and representative voices for entire social classes." Stoll thus proceeded to interview as many of Menchú’s former acquaintances as possible, constantly cross-checking her version of events against theirs.’ Stoll found so many discrepancies that he deemed Menchú’s testimonial as unreliable, much the way that an expert trial lawyer discredits the testimony of a single witness by introducing a parade of counter witnesses.

Critics have offered many objections to this approach. Richard Gott complains, for example, that Stoll "seems unaware of the difference of interest between an American researcher who unearths ‘facts’ that may lead to ‘truth’ and ‘understanding’, and a Third World
revolutionary who believes that ‘myths’ are important well springs of political action.” Other scholars, mostly literary critics, argue that because testimonies are designed to represent entire groups their truth value cannot be determined using legalistic Western standards. This position has infuriated the anti-political correctness pundits. After the chair of the Spanish Department at Wellesley College, Marjorie Agosin, announced out of frustration: “Whether or not the book is true or not, I don’t care,” conservatives sounded the alarm that multicultural academics were poisoning their students by undermining universal truth standards.

One need not be a postmodernist to question Stoll’s legalistic approach to analyzing *I, Rigoberta Menchu*. I, for one, think it would matter a great deal if Menchú’s story bore little or no resemblance to Guatemalan reality. But what makes her testimonio so compelling is that the general story line captures vividly many features of the Guatemalan conflict which appear throughout the scholarly literature. As Gary H. Gossen has suggested, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* can be interpreted as a riveting epic narrative that drew the world’s attention to the horrors unfolding in Guatemala. “Furthermore,” he adds, “the generic facts corroborate her story.” The real issue then, is whether Menchú’s testimonial provides a useful first approximation to understanding the dynamics of the Guatemalan civil war.

Stoll accepts that Menchú represents a legitimate Mayan voice, but he complains that too many readers have relied solely on her story to bolster their own preconceived notion of the Guatemalan conflict and of revolutions in general. The party line, as Stoll might put it, is that a popular peasant uprising in the late 1970s was triggered by deteriorating economic conditions, especially as ladinos began to usurp more and more Indian land. Peasants with the help of radical priests initially organized non-violently, but when their activities threatened the interests of wealthy ladinos, the army was sent in to kill off the leaders. When the repression became unbearable in the early 1980s, thousands of peasants began to join the guerrillas as a “last resort.” According to Stoll, this picture is all wrong. He claims that economic conditions were not deteriorating for most highland peasants in the 1970s; land conflicts were nearly as common among Indians as they were between Indians and ladinos; the army was not motivated by racism; and finally, the guerrillas did not represent the popular will but rather an outdated vanguard sect that fostered illusory hopes among the peasants and then cruelly abandoned them when the struggle began to go in the army’s favor.

Even a cursory review of the historical literature reveals that Stoll imagines a scholarly consensus where none exists. Although a hazy outline of the conflict can be traced, explanations for the war are nowhere near as Stoll would have us believe. I know of no serious scholar who would rely solely or even primarily on Menchú’s testimonial to support an interpretation of the Guatemalan civil war. Just because *I, Rigoberta Menchú* is used widely in the classroom to introduce students to Guatemala does not mean that researchers treat her testimonial as the last word. Stoll does not appear to be very familiar with the vast comparative literature on revolutions, much of it written by historians who by trade tend be wary of the grand generalizations that he objects to. In Guatemala’s case, scholars have pointed to a wide variety of historical developments that triggered the civil war: the 1954 U.S. intervention, land conflicts,
uneven capitalist modernization, the emergence of liberation theology, not to mention the revolutionary inspiration of the successful Cuban and Nicaraguan Revolutions. Also crucial was the role of the Guatemalan oligarchy, which tolerated and in some cases encouraged the military’s attack on the popular movement and the guerrillas. Stoll reduces a complex array of explanations to simplistic formulas, such as “injustice + reactionary government = revolution,” which he then dismisses because they fail his empirical tests on the basis of a single testimonial.

The land issue provides a good example of how Stoll mishandles evidence. Most investigators, in his view, have ignored land squabbles between Indians because they are too eager to condemn ladino economic domination. “It is ironic,” he comments, “that INTA [National Institute for Agrarian Transformation] was more successful mediating Chimel's boundary with ladinos than its boundary with other indígenas.” But it is more logical than ironical that land disputes would be more prolific among the Indians than between ladinos and Indians. Ladinos, as an historic bloc, had long established hegemony over the best land in Guatemala, and taking on wealthy landowners could cost the challenger his or her life.

Stoll's selective use of the INTA archives is also open to question. Jim Handy's study of rural land struggles during the 1944-1954 reform period, known as the "ten years of spring," shows a great sensitivity to the very complexities that Stoll alludes to but does not explore himself. Because Handy consulted records across many departments, he was able to incorporate regional, class, and ethnic variation into his analysis of the 1952 agrarian reform (Decree 900). He concludes that the civil war that erupted after Arbenz was overthrown can be traced in part to Castillo Armas’s reversal of Decree 900.

Because Stoll fails to find agrarian disputes as a proximate cause of rebellion, he misses the deeper structural significance of Guatemala’s highly skewed land tenure system. He rejects Menchú’s explanation for the military attack on Chimel as resulting from a land dispute because the soldiers wanted only to punish the village for allowing the guerrillas to assassinate two prominent ladinos. While it may be literally true that the army came seeking revenge in this case, Stoll ignores that the guerrillas often targeted wealthy landowners precisely because they exploited the peasants. Even more important, the unequal distribution of land fostered non-violent protests that all too often ended in bloody repression. If the history of other peasant revolutions provides any sort of guide, it seems clear that once a revolutionary effort commences, specific incidents of violence are going to be triggered for all kinds of reasons. Is Jeffrey Race's landmark study on the agrarian origins of the Vietnamese revolution wrong because the presence of the Vietcong in the Long An province frequently provoked government's raids? Were struggles over land mostly irrelevant to the origins of the Mexican Revolution?

Stoll contention that deteriorating economic conditions did not foster the rural upheavals of the early 1980s also deserves careful scrutiny. When pressed to support this claim, Stoll declared that statistical data were unnecessary because “many Mayas felt they were making modest political and economic gains through the Catholic Church and other institutions in the 1970s.” Stoll’s observation is essentially correct, but the whole issue of the peasantry’s economic status needs to be considered much more broadly. According to several studies, including my own, U.S. development assistance programs launched in the 1960s helped lay the
foundation for a democratic grass roots movement in the highlands that prospered under the religious guidance of Maryknoll missionaries.\textsuperscript{20} The creation of cooperatives and the introduction of more modern farming methods enabled some Indians to challenge the economic domination of ladinos in their villages. As Indians began to organize peasant leagues they encountered stiff resistance. Anthropologists working in these areas observed that hundreds of community leaders began to “disappear,” presumably at the hands of death squads dispatched by wealthy ladinos who feared a challenge to their power.\textsuperscript{21}

Eric Wolf has observed that those most likely to join a rural revolutionary movement come from the middle not the poorest ranks of the peasantry. Given the conjuncture of historical forces in Guatemala during the 1970s—a burgeoning dislocated seasonal labor force, uneven capitalist modernization, indigenous challenges to ladino power, and severe government repression—it is tempting to conclude that the Guatemalan guerrillas found in the western highlands a “tactically mobile” group of peasants, ideally situated to be incorporated into the revolution.\textsuperscript{22} One important caveat, however, is that most peasants did not exhibit a strong interest in joining the guerrillas until the violence rose to such high levels that it appeared that there was little to lose. Stoll dubs this explanation the “last-resort paradigm” because of the suggestion that peasants tried non-violent protest first, but decided to join the armed struggle after state repression reached unbearable levels.\textsuperscript{23}

Stoll firmly rejects the “last resort paradigm” because his own research on the Ixils revealed that most peasants had to be forced to join the guerrillas. Those who didn’t were caught “between two fires.” Stoll also discounts nearly every popular organization as an expression of the peasantry’s true will. The Committee for Campesino Unity (CUC), for example, did not spring from popular aspirations but was organized by Jesuit priests.\textsuperscript{24} Indians became the dupes of radical theologians who sought to foment revolution in an otherwise inert population. Stoll even goes so far as to accuse the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) of turning \textit{concientización} (a method developed by liberation theologians to raise political consciousness among the poor) into a “cover for transforming catechists into guerrilla organizers.”\textsuperscript{25}

Problems abound with this analysis. For one, Stoll’s research methods seem seriously flawed. Stoll interviewed many subjects in public spaces at a time when it still would have been dangerous to speak freely. Some critics charge that Stoll found what he wanted to find and that he did not allow for the possibility that his informants might have remembered the past differently after the revolution failed.\textsuperscript{26} The historian Greg Grandin faults Stoll for ignoring Ixils who lived in refugee camps known as the Comunidades de Poblaciones en Resistencia (CPR).\textsuperscript{27} The charge that indigenous peoples were fooled into joining revolutionary movements that they did not understand smacks of racism. As Norma Stoltz Chinchilla has commented, to assert that Indians would prefer "to be left alone to live the life they have always lived," is to treat Indian culture as a "timeless static, trans-historical" entity.\textsuperscript{28}
Stoll never interviewed military commanders, peasant leaders from popular organizations, or guerrilla leaders to determine how they viewed the conflict. The dead, of course, cannot speak so we will never know what hundreds of thousands of victims thought about the war. But there is scattered evidence that supports the “last-resort” thesis. One former university student recalled: “We began to ask ourselves whether life in communist countries could possibly be worse than the situation we ourselves were in and whether in reality the coups, curfews, and states of siege and the many kidnapping and murders were going to keep communism from destroying the freedoms that we had in any case never enjoyed or even known.”

North American activist Jennifer Harbury’s collection of testimony from Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG) recruits also provides interesting insights into the guerrilla movement of the 1980s. Many of the individuals she surveyed claimed to be idealistic social reformers who joined the guerrillas after severe repression made it impossible to work for change peacefully. Manuel, a priest, says he never would have left his village had the army not arrived and threatened to kill him. Anita, a medical student from Guatemala City, left for the mountains because she knew she would eventually be killed if she stayed in the city. Sara, a rural peasant, followed her brothers into the guerrillas after the army repeatedly brutalized her village. Jorge, who helped organized cooperatives, joined the guerrillas after the army destroyed the village coop and kidnaped his wife. Abraham, a catechist from Santiago Atitlan, claims he never would have left his village had the army not murdered church members including a prominent local priest.

By not considering all the evidence Stoll fails to grasp how revolutions unfold. He makes it sound as if the priests in Guatemala imposed their ideas on the peasants rather than engaged in a dialogue with them that led to revolutionary action. Stoll also sets an impossible standard when he demands that organizations must be based on a consensus before they can be considered legitimate. Rarely has any reformist or revolutionary organization had the full support of the community, especially when establishing itself. The goal of all revolutionaries is to build popular support until sufficient strength is obtained to confront the enemy. The leaders of the American Revolution, for example, struggled to obtain a following by publishing thousands of pamphlets explaining why a break from England was necessary. Certain colonists, known as loyalists, were never convinced, and they eventually fled to Canada. Does that mean that the Declaration of Independence was a complete farce concocted by Thomas Jefferson and his followers who duped the average American into supporting the revolution?

Because Stoll denies that the Guatemalan revolution had any real popular support among the Indians, it follows that the guerrillas and the army were to blame for escalating the violence. Stoll especially faults the EGP for failing to warn peasants about "the potentially disastrous implications" of joining the rebel cause. When the guerrillas suffered huge losses, Stoll claims they became fanatics who wanted to avenge the loss of their fallen comrades. In the early 1980s, the EGP recruited followers recklessly with little concern for their survival. "Pulling popular organizations into the war," Stoll alleges, "was a disaster. By infiltrating the peasant movement, then mobilizing it, the guerrillas brought down ferocious repression."
Many of the criticisms that have been made of the Guatemalan guerrillas seem to me to be valid. The movement in its early years, which was entirely ladino-oriented, adopted the Cuban style of warfare known as the *foco*. This strategy turned out to be highly unsuitable given Guatemala’s unique political and social environment. The Guatemalan guerrillas also splintered into Marxist factions at an early stage of the struggle, thus weakening their ability to expand and to coordinate attacks against the army. Although attempts were eventually made to incorporate Indians into high ranking positions, ladinos appear to have dominated the URNG well into the 1980s.\(^{33}\) The Guatemalan rebels themselves have admitted to committing many of the errors that Stoll mentions, including a failure to anticipate the military's brutal scorched earth campaigns, and leaving the mass base "unprepared, unarmed, and unprotected."\(^{34}\)

Evidence also exists to support the “between two armies” thesis. Anthropologist Shelton Davis reported that many Indians in the Kanjobal region spoke of the violence they experienced from 1980 through 1982 as being "between two thorns." The population blamed the army and the guerrillas for “creating a situation of generalized violence and making it impossible for them to carry on their traditional way of life.”\(^{35}\)

Stoll’s analysis, however, misleads because it implies symmetry between the guerrilla and government forces. Blaming both armies undoubtedly became a convenient slogan for many individuals to evade further entanglements. Amnesty International, for example, reported that one foreigner living near an indigenous village whispered to the human rights delegation in English that the army was responsible for local deaths, but then announced out loud in Spanish: "These poor people. They are caught in the middle. They are being killed by both sides."\(^{36}\) Also revealing is that the internal security forces frequently tried to disguise themselves as guerrillas before committing atrocities. Peasants quickly learned to distinguish the two groups; when later asked to assess responsibility for the violence, they blamed the government far more often than they blamed the guerrillas.\(^{37}\) The Recovery of Historical Memory Project (REMHI), which has issued the best study to date of human rights violations in Guatemala, has concluded that the government and its paramilitary allies were responsible for committing about 90 percent of the human rights violations. The REMHI report attributes only 5 percent of the human rights violations to the guerrillas, and has observed that: “Most testimonies describe the arrival of the guerrillas as something that came from outside of the community and that in some cases corresponded to preexisting demands. In others, it was seen as supporting education and consciousness-raising initiatives, and in still others, it was seen as a distortion or constriction of community dynamics.”\(^{38}\)

According to the REMHI report, the scale and type of human rights violations committed by the military and the guerrillas differed considerably. Massacres committed by the government forces were highly systematic and clearly designed to control and intimidate entire communities; the massacres committed by the guerrillas were aimed at hostile civil patrols, especially in 1982. In most cases, the guerrillas did not use informants, forced participation, rape, or razed hamlets. The guerillas did not employ torture as a combat strategy, but they did treat cruelly or execute hundreds of people suspected of being government informants or collaborators.\(^{39}\) The REMHI report also vindicates the “last resort” thesis: "People joined the insurgency out of their desire to
bring about a more just society and the impossibility of accomplishing it through the established system. This went beyond those seeking to install a socialist state to include many who—without being Marxists or espousing a particular political position—became convinced by, and felt compelled to support, a movement that seemed to represent the only possible path: armed struggle.\textsuperscript{40}

Oddly missing from Stoll’s responsibility list are the major perpetrators of the violence, namely the Guatemalan oligarchy and its U.S. ally.\textsuperscript{41} Instead, he concentrates on attacking the international solidarity movement and human rights organizations, which marched in step with the guerrillas, even after it was clear that the revolution was lost. Rigoberta Menchú’s testimonial, Stoll alleges, served as a major propaganda weapon that misled foreigners into falsely assuming that the guerrillas had popular support. As a result, Mayas “who repudiated the guerrillas were often ignored or discounted.”\textsuperscript{42} Most leftist academics, Stoll charges, won’t admit that “the guerrillas committed the first political murders in Rigoberta’s municipio or that student protesters started the fire at the Spanish embassy. That puts the blame on the wrong side, the guerrillas, when the purpose of solidarity thinking is to put all the blame on the other side.”\textsuperscript{43}

In his zeal to condemn academics, activists, and the many international organizations working for constructive social change in Guatemala, Stoll dispenses with the need to provide evidence. The claim that most American academics sympathized with the Guatemalan left, for example, is largely unwarranted. A review of the anthropological literature conducted in 1990 concluded that most anthropologists working in Central America were studying topics unrelated to the physical violence that engulfed the region. The report blamed the lack of attention to policy-based research in Central America on the anthropological tradition of “studying communities as isolated, timeless cultures that are unaffected by regional, national, and international events taking place outside their borders.”\textsuperscript{44}

Stoll also falsely accuses human rights organizations of ignoring guerrilla atrocities. Amnesty International, Americas Watch, and the Guatemalan Truth commission all routinely reported cases of human rights violations committed by the guerrillas. Given that the majority of the violations were committed by government forces it is not surprising that the reports would not dwell on guerrilla attacks. The claim that solidarity activists heaped “all the blame” on the army or completely ignored peasants who sought to stay neutral is a gross exaggeration. Throughout his study Stoll uses the term ”left” and "foreigner” without defining them precisely.\textsuperscript{45} Stoll’s practice of attributing to the "left" many statements without documentation or citing specific names is especially infuriating. To be sure, some activists did romanticize the guerrillas, but in my personal experience most members of the solidarity movement were much more interested in persuading the U.S. government to cut off military aid to the Guatemalan government than they were in supporting the URNG.\textsuperscript{46}

After reading Stoll’s work and his responses to his critics, I have no doubt that he sees himself as the lonely defender of a group of peasants who have been ignored for too long. Stoll claims in the beginning of his book that he held back his findings in the late 1980s because he
feared that exposing Menchú would undermine negotiations between the government and the guerrillas. This is a curious admission, for later on in his book Stoll blasts the international community for prolonging the war by giving so much attention to *I, Rigoberta Menchú*. Apparently, Stoll himself is guilty of prolonging the war for he could have challenged the Menchú testimonial much earlier, which in his current view would have been justified as a way to force an earlier peace settlement.

In any case, Stoll decided in the late 1990s to release his findings about Menchú because the war had ended and now the truth could be told. Stoll was not surprised that his book sparked controversy, but he was very unprepared for the criticism he received from his colleagues in Latin American studies. He has defended himself on many occasion and will no doubt do so here, but I would like to raise a few points about Stoll’s charge of censorship. Clearly, no one has prevented Stoll from speaking or publishing his findings. In a literal sense, Stoll’s complaint that he has been silenced is invalid and seems especially exaggerated when compared to the kind of severe censorship faced by many intellectuals in Latin America. As one scholar has pointed out, to disagree is not censorship.  

A much larger question looms, which is whether Stoll should have published his book on Menchú at all. The answer here is not so clear, but the Menchú-Stoll controversy illustrates that intellectuals need to consider how their findings will be used before they decide to embark on a particular research project. The anthropologist Ricardo Falla advises that "research and social action must not be senseless or empty activities or foster unjust relations among human beings." If we accept that premise, then intellectuals do not necessarily have an obligation to tell the truth about everything no matter what the cost. As the social critic Noam Chomsky has explained, "the responsibility of the writer as a moral agent is to try to bring the truth about matters of human significance to an audience that can do something about them." To illustrate the matter, Chomsky once asked if it would be morally responsible for a German citizen in 1938 to write an accurate article in the Nazi press about Jewish atrocities carried out in Palestine, or an article about the crimes of Jewish businessmen. If we agree that the answer is no, then we have to admit there are circumstances that require us to apply our intellectual talents to more pressing matters.

Stoll undoubtedly believes that his own decision to wait until the peace agreement was signed before releasing his findings about Menchú, absolves him of any responsibility regarding the backlash that his findings might cause. But considering how right-wing journalists and commentators are now using Stoll’s book to pummel Menchú, the Maya movement, human rights organizations, community activists, the United Nations, and many academics, one has to wonder if Stoll made the right decision. After all, unlike Germany and the Jews, the United States has hardly apologized for the crimes it has helped perpetrate against the Guatemalan people. How difficult would it have been to predict that a book attacking Rigoberta Menchú and her supporters would fuel the post-Cold War triumphalism that permeates U.S. intellectual culture? The United States continues to supply military assistance to Guatemala under the dubious assumption that the reduction in human rights violations indicates that the Guatemalan military has finally been reformed. Stoll’s book will contribute to a political climate that makes it possible to dismiss
critics of Washington’s policy toward Guatemala as “crackpots” who don’t understand that America won the Cold War.
Endnotes


7. Stoll also implies that because Menchú was not well known in many parts of rural Guatemala, and because some Guatemalan Indians did not believe she deserved the Nobel Prize, she could hardly be representative of her people. Stoll, *Rigoberta*, pp. 221-222.


15. Menchú points out that Stoll consulted only about half of the official file on the land dispute, which involved conflicts not only among indigenous families, but also between indigenous families and big landowners. Jo-Marie Burt and Fred Rosen, "Truth-Telling and Memory in Postwar Guatemala," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 32 (March-April 1999), 8.


25. Ibid., p. 103.


32. Ibid., p. 175.

33. On ethnic tensions within the guerrillas, see Wade Davis, "Observations from Guatemala," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 7 (Summer 1983), 57.


39. Ibid., pp. 140-41, 152, 222, 294.

40. Ibid., p. xxviii.

41. Stoll does admit the United States shares some responsibility but then describes the "specter of foreign communism" as the real culprit. Stoll, *Rigoberta*, p. 279


45. By lumping together solidarity activists, human rights organizations, academics, and guerrilla combatants, Stoll employs the same reasoning that was used by the army and the U.S. State Department to justify the killing of "communists. Victoria Sanford, "Between Rigoberta Menchú and La Violencia," *Latin American Perspectives* 26 (November 1999), 43.


