

**“Strange Lands and Different Peoples”:** Spaniards and Indians in Colonial Guatemala. By W. George Lovell and Christopher H. Lutz, with Wendy Kramer and William R. Swezey. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013. 360 pages. \$45.00 cloth.

Having collaborated in the past to great effect, in this book George Lovell and Christopher Lutz, two of the foremost scholars of colonial Guatemala, draw upon their decades of research and scholarship to explore contested colonial relations from a variety of vantage points. The authors tap into the expertise of Wendy Kramer and the late William R. Swezey while adding to their synthesis new arguments about economics, labor, and demographics. With explicit explorations of methodology and sources, the book will appeal to scholars both for their own knowledge and as a teaching tool.

The first two sections of *“Strange Lands and Different Peoples”* reexamine the contact period, drawing primarily on secondary sources. As the authors weave in Maya perspectives of battles against and alongside Spaniards and the early years of occupation, the conqueror Pedro Alvarado dominates the narrative. Many of the themes will be familiar to Guatemalan historians: Alvarado as a megalomaniac, feuds between him and other Spaniards, the Kaqchikel-Maya alliance with Spaniards against the K’iche’-Maya, the Spaniards’ betrayal of Kaqchikel, and the latter’s eventual resistance to Spaniards. The concise explorations of historiographical and demographic debates provide readers unfamiliar with Guatemalan history with enough background to construct their own interpretations and conclusions.

The authors hit their stride in the third section when they introduce new archival materials from the Archivo General de Indias in Seville, Spain, and the Archivo General de Centro América in Guatemala City. Some chapters are broken up into small units that describe or transcribe primary sources, a few of which contain indigenous voices, and then analyze them. The accessibility of that format more than compensates for the loss of narrative flow. Students reading the short source descriptions and subsequent analyses will gain a rich sense of how scholars move from evidence to argument and narrative. At times the pleasure of archival research is palpable. When Lovell and Lutz describe handling singed documents that survived a fire, or finding documents long considered lost, or viewing the striking illustrations that accompany Archbishop Pedro Cortés y Larraz’s *Descripción geográfico-moral* (1768–1770), “which thrill all those fortunate enough to consult them,” the authors convey the excitement of conducting archival research, even as they concede that much of it can be tedious and boring (244).

Lovell’s and Lutz’s exploration of the Spaniards’ attempts to relocate indigenous peoples to concentrated communities is welcome, given the paucity of knowledge about what life was like in *congregaciones*. The authors use the community of Sacapulas as a case study to explore the dynamics of colonial power and control in a location where the social experiment was problematic from the beginning. Instead of forming a single community as Spaniards had hoped, residents at Sacapulas divided into two rival factions that struggled over political representation and resources, particularly land. As was common throughout highland Guatemala, many Mayas fled Sacapulas for the

autonomy of harvesting corn on their ancestral lands, or simply retreated to remote locations to carve out an existence. As early as the 1570s, indigenous and Spanish leaders alike observed *congregaciones* that were abandoned completely. Indigenous leaders' complaints about "rebellious Indians" who refused to fall in line and pay tribute suggest that divisions among natives often were based on wealth and power (114).

While shedding new light on colonial institutions, this volume points to areas that beg for more research. As rich as Lovell's and Lutz's description of Sacapulas and other *congregaciones* is, their quotidian life and the number of people who fled them remain an enigma. Limited by the gaps in colonial sources, the authors turn to the twentieth-century ethnographic record to work "back from the present to the past" (96). Such an approach risks dismissing historical contingency, but the authors tread carefully. Taken as a whole, indigenous resistance to relocation resulted in disparate, disconnected communities that enjoyed varying levels of autonomy from colonial rule.

In other areas of the colonial record, natives' plights are disturbingly clear. The chapter on Diego García de Valverde's presidency (1578–1587) resonates with historical studies that document exploitation of Mayas by officials and *encomenderos*—Spaniards awarded indigenous tribute. Refusing to recognize flight or death, Spaniards taxed indigenous communities for residents who were long gone. "Expecting them to meet unrealistic quotas causes their numbers to wither, in some cases until not even one Indian in town is left alive," lamented Valverde (214). This and other evidence of exploitation lend credence to the Defender of the Indians, Bartolomé de las Casas, who asserted that Guatemala was home to the worst abuses of the *encomienda* system, which granted indigenous tribute in the form of goods or labor.

As Lovell and Lutz document, Mayas who sought to live outside the colonial rule were susceptible to abuse as well. In an act that conjures images of the scorched-earth campaigns during Guatemala's twentieth-century civil war (1960–1996), Juan de Espinar coordinated the burning of at least four indigenous communities that lay beyond the confines of his *encomienda*. By destroying their homes and farms, he compelled residents to move into his jurisdiction. Complicating the tragic events, Mam-Maya leaders collaborated in the destruction and convinced families to burn their own homes. Although most residents testified that they were following de Espinar's orders, they also emphasized that the low-lying land to which they moved was better for growing corn than the high-elevation land where they had lived. With the cessation of battles against the K'iche' and the Spaniards, Mam peoples could move to the less defensible low-lying areas.

Unpacking the complex reasons for apparent indigenous complicity in the destruction of their own communities without dismissing the greed that motivated de Espinar makes for a fascinating read. One of the ways Lovell and Lutz bring the historian's craft alive is by problematizing their analyses with methodological transparency, and here as elsewhere in the book, the authors address the challenges of interpreting historical documents. Since de Espinar conspired with indigenous leaders to tell the same story and threatened to kill those who exposed his exploitation, discerning indigenous perspectives in their testimonies is difficult. Added to that filter are the meanings lost in translation between Mam and Spanish. As aptly as they capture colonial exploitation

and suffering, Lovell and Lutz's conclusion that "against such odds Indians in Guatemala served their Spanish masters" belies their more sophisticated and nuanced analysis of indigenous resistance and autonomy throughout the sixteenth century (252).

Wading into demographic debates in the final section of the book, Lovell and Lutz articulate how they evaluated the sources and derived their estimates. Placing their process and conclusions squarely in Woodrow Borah's and Sherburne F. Cook's estimates for colonial Mexico, the authors estimate that the population of about two million at the time of European contact in Guatemala dropped by 93.4 percent by 1628. Even into the early-nineteenth century, epidemics continued to threaten the survival of indigenous peoples. The population did not stabilize and steadily increase until 1760.

As colonial historians of Guatemala, the authors had little choice but to rely primarily on Spanish sources for their analysis. Extracting indigenous voices from those sources is often perilous if not impossible. Both Lovell and Lutz have offered sophisticated analyses of ethnic relations in Guatemala in previous publications that they do not revisit here. Surprisingly, the authors did not make more use of indigenous sources (albeit hybrid) such as the *Kaqchikel Chronicles* or the *Memorial de Sololá*. Scholarship on Central America and Mexico has demonstrated how indigenous language and even Spanish-penned sources can forefront indigenous roles, responsibilities, and perspectives. Lutz has worked on just such a volume: *Nuestro pesar, nuestra aflicción: Tunetuliniz, tucucuca, memorias en lengua Náhuatl enviadas a Felipe II por indígenas del Valle de Guatemala hacia 1572* (1996). Other examples include recent work by Laura Matthews and her coedited work with Michel R. Oudijk, which situate indigenous participation and views at the center of Spanish invasions and the colonization of Guatemala. In some ways, the authors' reliance on Spanish sources even manifests itself in writing. Instead of using Maya orthography, the authors maintain colonial conventions when writing the names of such indigenous leaders as Belehé Qat and Cahí Ymox (61). The effect perpetuates colonial relations, which to be fair, may have been their point. Like Guatemalan historian Severo Martínez Peláez, the authors argue that racism rooted in the colonial period continues to dominate the social, political, and economic fabric of Guatemala today.

Even given the gendered nature of colonial sources, women receive short shrift in this volume. Except for a few descriptions of indigenous women's daily lives, "*Strange Lands and Different Peoples*": *Spaniards and Indians in Colonial Guatemala* reveals little about women or gender relations in the early colonial period. Read against the grain of history, as Martha Few and Catherine Komisaruk have recently demonstrated, colonial sources can offer rich windows into the often unconventional lives of women, and gender relations more broadly. Yet these critiques of "*Strange Lands and Different Peoples*" are minor when set against its incisive interpretations of colonial relations and the rich ways it engages the fields of history and demography. This latest collaboration between Lovell and Lutz, with assistance from Kramer and Swezey, merits a wide readership among students and scholars alike.

David Carey Jr.  
Loyola University Maryland