The Construction of Collectivity in Historical Narratives of Ixil Mayan Women

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1. Introduction

The construction of historic memory is a topic of serious study in anthropology today. The recent bloody conflicts in Rwanda, South Africa, and Central and South America give rise to questions about what the written record of these violent times will be, how it will be produced, and what effect it will have on contemporary political and social life. These are not questions that the discipline takes lightly. In terms of the communities affected, one hopes that anthropologists will consider the cost at which this information is shared and the importance of careful consideration in the dispersal and analysis of these records, particularly for the futures of communities whose situations are precarious after years of violence. Additionally, at the level of the text, anthropologists have had much to say about how the relationships among social scientists, their consultants, and the past and present social realities of each consultant's situation affect the stories that get transmitted and eventually recorded, and they have given much space to reflection on how these stories change official records of the past (Trouillot 1995, Haraway 1991, Kondo 1986, Spivak 1988, Remijense 2002, Visweswaran 1994) . However, in spite of the fairly extensive work on the construction of historic memory on the level of institutions, states, academia or truth commissions, little attention has been given to the production of histories that operate on a daily basis in the communities most affected by violence. Although historic memory can be created and expressed in a number of forms (art, the organization of public space, monuments etc), one of its most basic vehicles is that of personal narrative. In part because most of these communities are non-literate, but also in part because narrative is such a fundamental unit of human communication, personal narrative is a primary mechanism for the construction of these local histories on which contemporary values and political ideologies are based. However despite its importance in the construction of historic memory, narrative practices of communities have been largely ignored in anthropological work on historic memory.

Similarly, anthropologists have written extensively about genocide in recent years and particularly as it relates to historic memory of genocide. And yet, again, the effects that genocide has had on the daily lives of community members both during and after the years of violence has been neglected in favor of questions about the State, the international community, national and international NGOs, truth commissions, and the role of the academic in writing about genocide. Consequently, the place of personal and communal narrative in the social phenomenon of genocide and post-genocide reconstruction is often neglected.

In his classic work, *Genocide: Conceptual and Historical Dimensions,* George Andreopoulos quite appropriately points out the obvious importance of "genocide as a social process" (1994: 2). According the United Nations Genocide Convention, genocide consists of the "intent to destroy in whole or in part racial, ethnic, national or religious groups as such." (1994: 230).[1] That is, what genocidal movements seek to destroy is not simply a mass of individuals, but individuals who are defined by their social behavior and identity. Part of the social process of genocide, then, is the attack on those things that allow a group of people to form a social collectivity. Community leaders are targeted and populations are purposefully scattered and dislocated, separated from one other. The practices of many communal acts that define culture and that bind a social group together are made impossible. Insofar as communities are defined discursively, during genocide the discursive practices which constitute membership in a social group are also disrupted. One important way that we can understand membership in a social group is the sharing of discursive practices and of a discursive repertoire. Members of a community know the same stories, be they community histories or fables, and they share them with each other in a way that is recognizable and familiar to other members of the community. One of the aims and consequences of genocide is the destruction of this practice. People are most often physically separated from each other, making the communal practice of storytelling difficult. The elderly who are most practiced in the community's narrative traditions often die before their knowledge can be transmitted to the next generation. And fear silences would-be storytellers from repeating either the stories of the community's history or those which identify the community in any way as a distinct social group. Both tellers and listeners are endangered by such storytelling.

Reviving the discursive traditions of a community has the potential to be a crucial element in the reconstruction of social groups destroyed by genocide. Beginning to tell the stories of the recent past can be part of the long and complicated process of rebuilding. This is a position that has been supported fairly consistently in the substantial anthropological literature on genocide and post-genocidal states in general and in Guatemala in particular. In her recent work, *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* (2003)*,* Victoria Sanford acknowledges the significance of the histories of violence told by survivors and recognizes these personal narratives as common in the literature about Guatemala (Sanford 2003: 24). However, for Sanford, personal historical

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[1]   While the Genocide Convention definition has been criticized by a number of major theorists, including Andreopolous himself, it is still the starting point of most discussions on genocide, and it's significance cannot be understated.

narratives function primarily within the context of forensic anthropology in Guatemala and in particular as they relate to proving that the Guatemalan state committed acts of genocide against the Mayan population. For other authors (Manz 1999, Zur 1998, Walton Williams 2000), narratives have served as a window to the history of communities, indications of the psychological trauma suffered by community members, and in a general way, as the vehicles for collective reconciliation and rebuilding. None have studied the mechanisms through which these stories work at the community level to build a collective identity.

For all the importance that the discipline of anthropology has given to the histories of those who have survived genocide, it has not made use of methodologies for analyzing these stories that have rigor appropriate to the importance of the subject matter. Taking for granted the narrative conventions and traditions that vary among cultures can lead researchers to misunderstand the import of personal narratives. Controversy arose recently as many in the academy rightly critiqued David Stoll's *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (2000) for not taking into account the collaborative story-telling practices of Mayan communities, practices that lead to personal narratives which reflect the past of the whole community rather than that of an individual (Arias 2001 ed, Gossen 1999, Sanford 2001, 1999). However, none of the recent work on historical memory in Guatemala takes the unique narrative practices of Mayan communities as a focus.

The lack of attention to the conventions of Mayan narrative in the work on historic memory is not due to a lack of linguistic or linguistic anthropological research in this area. We do not have far to go in order to find the tools for analysis of the social dimensions of narratives. In the 1960s and 70s, linguistic anthropologists Dell Hymes and Joel Sherzer posited that language and speech, like social organization, have a patterning that is all their own which cannot be taken for granted as given or as the same everywhere (Sherzer 1996: 11, Hymes 1962). This is precisely the issue that much of the literature on historic memory has failed to take into account, as the Menchú – Stoll debate brings to the fore. Anticipating just these sorts of dilemmas in analysis, Hymes and Sherzer developed the field of the ethnography of speaking which examines the patterns and systemic coherence in the ways that speaking is organized. These patterns and regularities are particular to each culture and are thus to be discovered ethnographically (Bauman and Sherzer 1996: xi). Bauman and Sherzer's foundational edited volume, *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking* (1989) provides numerous examples in which authors consider concrete examples of speech in ethnographic contexts in order to arrive at insightful and grounded analyses of social phenomena. In fact, three of the articles in this volume specifically address the ethnography of speaking in Mayan communities: Brian Stross on Tenejapa Tzeltal (1989: 213-39), Victoria Bricker on Yucatec (1989: 368-88), and Gary Gossen on Chamula (1989: 389-416). In other work, Joel Sherzer and Greg Urban have further developed the field of linguistic anthropology in framing the discourse-centered approach to language and culture which sees discourse as a shaper of life and experience, thus reflecting the view that discourse is constitutive and not just indexical of experience (Urban 1991, Sherzer 1987). Sherzer's *Kuna Ways of Speaking* (2001) provides an excellent example of a full length ethnography that makes

use of these tools in order to provide a description of Kuna speaking practices and of both his and the Kuna's own theories about the social significance of such practices.

Further, in a different but related approach, Nora England (1987), Gary Gossen (1999), Jill Brody (2000) and Laura Martin (e.g., 1987, 1994, 2000) bring the tools of linguistic discourse analysis to Mayan narrative. These authors have used linguistic, sociolinguistic and linguistic anthropological methodologies to reveal the discursive devices that characterize this genre in Mayan communities. However none of these works on Mayan narrative or even in the broader field of linguistic anthropology have applied this knowledge and set of methodological tools to the construction of contemporary Mayan community history and memory. This paper attempts to begin to fill this gap in understanding by combining the methodologies and understandings that have previously been developed as separate bodies of literature in linguistics and anthropology.

2. The Community of Speakers

We consider here the histories of recent violence that are actively being constructed and reconstructed by the Ixil Mayan women of the *Grupo de Mujeres por la Paz* of Nebaj, El Quiché, Guatemala. The *Grupo* was organized in 1998 by its members with the purpose of finding collective solutions to the economic, political, and social destruction caused by the Guatemalan civil war, destruction that especially affected Mayan women. Most of the members of the *Grupo* are widows or the daughters of widows, and all live in extreme poverty. Although all of the women suffered great losses during the war and all are affected by current poverty, their experiences during and after the war were quite different. Some of the women lived in the CPRs (*Comunidades de Poblacion en Resistencia)*, refugee communities in the mountains. Others fled burned and massacred villages to live in the municipal center of Nebaj while still others barricaded themselves in their homes in the municipal center to wait out the violence. Some of the women have managed to rebuild homes on land they recovered after the war, while others rent rooms and struggle to feed their families. Nonetheless, group members are insistent that they share a common past of suffering and that they are all equally poor. They reject differentiations which separate them into different categories or levels of oppression. In both overt and subtle ways, they have constructed a collective history which draws on common elements of their past. This history is both a part of and the foundation for their contemporary ideology which requires that all resources generated by the group be shared equally by all members.

This collective history developed by the group can best be understood through careful analysis of the personal narratives that the women produce in representing themselves in an organizational setting. Just as the group firmly believes that members must work together for the benefit of all members collectively, they take the same attitude towards representation. They prefer acts of representation of their organization or of its members to be done collectively. When visitors are present or when documents reflecting the work and history of the group need to be drawn up, the group does not send representatives but rather organizes for the work to be done collectively. The following histories were recorded on occasions when the group was introducing itself to visitors, meeting with us in various forums, or composing texts that they intended for those not familiar with the area or with the work of their organization.

This first collection of stories is taken from recordings of Ixil language learning sessions undertaken by María Luz García with the women of the group. For these lessons, she asked each woman to set aside an hour to converse with her in Ixil. Before each meeting, she prepared a few questions relating to the women's families or their work. In none of these cases did she aim to specifically "elicit" war stories. Usually, she asked the women how many children they have, and the results often included stories of the Violence in which their children were killed. In establishing how these lessons would be conducted, the women did not appoint a teacher or even a team of teachers to practice Ixil with García, but rather they insisted that each woman must work an equal number of hours with her, and any who missed their hour were responsible to the group, not to her. Additionally, as we will see in the following analysis, the women drew on narrative conventions that indicate that these stories have been told repeatedly, almost undoubtedly among other members of the community, and that they are in the process of entering into the discursive repertoire that defines this collectivity of people as a community.

3. Stylistic and Structural Conventions in Ixil Narrative

In the analysis that follows, we focus on stylistic and structural strategies in the narratives of the women of the *Grupo* that mark the stories as typical of Mayan narrative in general. By using strategies of lexical repetition and grammatical parallelism, a fixed sequencing of content, and the co-construction of narrative, the narrators shape the stories as collective rather than as personal history. The extensive presence of these traditional characteristics indicates that these stories have entered into the discursive repertoire of this community, a process documented by England with myths of Spanish origin that are told in Mayan communities (England 1987).

3.1 *Lexical Repetition and Grammatical Parallelism*

This first story is told by Doña Elena Bernal López, one of the older members of the group. Although at the time, this exchange was only between Doña Elena and García, the content and context of the stories made it clear that these were acts of representation of the group.

Elena Bernal López

1	U sol ni tilun o'.	
2	Kat ul u helicóptero	
3	tu almika'.	
4	Ba ba ba ba,	
5	ba ba ba ba.	
6	Taq' kan u tiro sqi.	The soldier was chasing us.
7	B'ot'in kuxh vet qib'	The helicopter came
8	xema'l u tz'e'	in the sky.
9	xema'l u k'ub'.	Ba ba ba ba,
10	Kutej vet kan qetz.	ba ba ba ba.
11	Oqoma'l qoksam sqan,	It left bullets among us.
12	ijamal sqan	

We were very hidden[2]
among the trees
among the rocks.
We left our things behind lost.
We took our clothes,
we carried it
  13 ijamal sqan
  14 Kat kusuti vet kan vatz naj.
  15 Kat ilej vet naj.
  16 Ma't kuq'axh vete'.
  17 Ma't kuq'axh vet tu ma't parte.
  18 Kat ilej vet naj
  19 u qoksame'.
  20 Kat toksa vet naj
  21 u xamale' sti'.
  22 As ma't kuxh vet qoksam.
  23 Ma't kuxhe' uva.
  24 Ye vet qetz ati.

we carried it.
We left it thrown down in front of him.
He found it.
We had moved on.
We had moved on to a different place.
He found
our clothes.
He started
a fire there.
Only one set of clothes.
Only one.
We didn't have anything.

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[2]   several of the women defined *b'ot'in* as "like chicks all huddled together that are just waiting to die."

Doña Elena's discourse is characterized by the extensive use of repetition and grammatical parallelism. Following the example that Martin gives in identifying types of repetition in Mocho stories (Martin 1987, 1994), we see many examples of both lexical and syntactic repetition. In lines 4 and 5, Doña Elena's stylistic repetition imitates the staccato of an automatic weapon fired from the helicopter. The use of various linguistic forms, like affective words and onomatopoeia to indicate actions and noises is a resource commonly used in Mayan narrative (England 2004). Lines 12 and 13 offer another example of exact repetition as Doña Elena indicates the extended period of time during which she carried her clothing only to have to leave it discarded in front of soldiers one day when the Army surprised her.

Additionally, her narrative makes use of syntactic and lexical repetition in lines 8 and 9 (*xema'l u tz'e'* "among the trees"; *xema'l u k'ub'* "among the rocks") forming couplets of the sort that England describes as common in many types of Mayan narrative (England 1987). Consider in particular the next example of this syntactic repetition in lines 14 and 15:

14) Kat kusuti vet kan vatz naj.   'We left it thrown down in front of him.'
15) Kat ilej vet naj.   'He found it.'

In this example, Doña Elena begins with the completive marker, *kat,* follows it with the ergative marker, *ku* in line 14 and *i* in 15, plus the verbs *suti* or *lej* both modified by *vet*. The constructions both end with the lexical repetition of *naj* although *naj* has different grammatical functions in the two cases. Line 15 is repeated again in line 18, and this same syntactic structure is again found in line 20. The extensive use of various forms of repetition and parallelism found in Doña Elena's narration is a characteristic that Brody, England and Martin note as a key element in Mayan narration (Brody 1986, England 1987, Martin 1987, 1994).

The narrative of another woman in the group, Feliciana Matom, shares many of these same characteristics with Doña Elena's story. In this fragment, Doña Feliciana tells how the violence forced her and many of the other women in the group to work on coffee or cotton plantations (*fincas*) on the Guatemalan coast. Although the subject matter of Doña Elena's and Doña Feliciana's narratives are very different, the form and stylistic elements are markedly similar.

1 Después, ay Dios, kat txumun in.	Afterwards, oh God, I was sad.
2 Mas ni b'oq'e'.	I cried so much.
3 Ay Dios.	Oh God.
4 Pero penya,	But *penya*[3],
5 mas gente,	so many people,
6 mas us.	so many flies.
7 Ni chion txoo	The bugs bit
8 tu kuxikin	in our ears
9 kuvatz.	our faces.
10 Iiiiii chupi o' txoo,	Aaaand the bugs bit us,
11 chupi o' txoo,	the bugs bit us,
12 chupi o' txoo,	the bugs bit us,
13 chupi o' txoo,	the bugs bit us,
14 chupi o' txoo.	the bugs bit us.
15 Mas ni chione' u txoo tu piinca,	The bugs bit us so much on the finca,
16 u xa'n.	the mosquitos.
17 Mas at txoo tu piinca,	So many bugs on the finca,
18 mas txoo tu piinca.	so many bugs on the finca.
19 Ay, mas suprir nu kub'an naytzan.	Oh, we went through so much suffering back then.

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[3] a kind of biting fly found on the coast

What is most immediately notable here is the identical repetition of the phrase, *chupi o' txoo*, or "the bugs bit us," used to express the repeated action of the insects that bit Feliciana Matom and her family on the *finca*. She uses this technique again in lines 17 and 18 with an almost exact repetition of the phrase *mas txoo tu piinca*, "so many animals on the *finca*." Also significant are the couplets in lines 5 and 6 formed by semantic and grammatical parallelism in a way that is very similar to those found in Doña Elena's narration as well as to the couplets presented in separate works by England and Brody as common in the narratives of both Mam and Tojolobal speakers respectively. Doña Feliciana's repetition indicates the immense quantity of people and bugs on the *finca,* and at the same time, it gives cohesion to the narrative. Equally important, this rhetorical strategy marks the narrative as Ixil and as Mayan, shifting it away from interpretation as a personal anecdote and imbuing it with the status of a community narrative. Doña Feliciana's story, like that of Doña Elena's, illustrates many of the stylistic features that characterize traditional Mayan narrative.

In addition to these stylistic features, these two stories are similar in that they highlight those situations and events which were experienced by other members of the *Grupo*, rather than those which are particular to an individual. For example, in no part of her narrative does Doña Feliciana mention details like the name of the *finca* where she lived and worked nor particular people that she met. What she spends most time and discursive energy describing are the general conditions shared by all of the women in the group who spent time on the *fincas*. The bugs bit everyone mercilessly and this is a detail recounted in every *finca* story.

In the same way, Doña Elena describes a situation, that of machine gun strafing from helicopters, that all of the women have lived through. The repetition that she uses to highlight the key elements of her narrative, the strafing from the helicopter and the loss of her clothes, are, again, the same elements that are highlighted in the stories of the other women in the group as well.

In addition to sharing important information about the years of violence, the women of the *Grupo de Mujeres por la Paz* use their histories to construct cohesion in their history as a group, and on the basis of this cohesion, to carry out contemporary collective action. Being able to tell these stories using conventionalized stylistic techniques is one of the aspects that defines who belongs to this community.

The histories that we have presented by Doña Elena and Doña Feliciana were told to García personally as part of the group's work in which each of the women spent an hour working with her. The following example comes from a meeting in 2004 and represents another type of collective narrative. In this example, Petrona Luis Chávez contructs a collective history to represent all of the women of the group. In this fragment alone, it is clear that Doña Petrona is a different sort of narrator than Doña Feliciana and Doña Elena. In part, these differences in their narrative styles are due to Doña Petrona's comparatively younger age and her separation from older narrators, that is older family members, during her formative years. The differences in narrative may also be due to the difference in settings and audience as this story is told during a meeting and not during a one-on-one exchange. Nonetheless, her narration includes many of the same elements of traditional Mayan narrative present in Doña Feliciana and Doña Elena's narratives. Although Doña Petrona tells about particular events like the separation of families and

hiding in the mountains, the discursive content and the grammatical forms that Doña Petrona chooses make it clear that this is a collective history rather than a story that is particular to her own life.

1	Tan kuxhe' la valchaj	This is all I'm going to say
2	a kat kutxak u ch'a'oje'	that we survived the war
3	la qale'.	let's say.
4	Mamala sole',	A lot of soldiers,
5	pues mamala b'oxe'	well so many guerrillas.
6	pues ma'l kat xoov o'.	Well maybe we were afraid.
7	Ma'l kam kat kub'an vete'.	Maybe we did anything.
8	Hasta kat kujatx qib'	Even separate ourselves
9	tuk kutxutx	from our mother,
10	tuk kub'aal.	from our father.
11	Katich kuxh kub'en vete'	We went anywhere
12	jaq' a tz'e'.	in the mountains.
13	Pero kam sti'?	But why?
14	Kam sti kat max oj kat o'?	Why did we go, did we run?
15	Tan ti u txumb'le' b'ale'	There is a great sadness
16	at vas tename'	in our town
17	la qale'.	let's say.
18	Ye' ni qitz a vet qib'	We don't think about ourselves
19	kat kuxh nu kuqul	wherever we can
20	kat vet chaj qib' b'i'ch'oj.	we find just a little.
21	Pues estie' ta' cheel	Well that's why today
22	ve nu kub'i kat qib'	we are meeting
23	kayil vet o',	all of us,
24	la qale',	let's say,
25	la aq'om vet o'	we're going to work
26	aq'al va la ch'iu kutename',	so that our town grows,
27	la qale',	let's say,
28	aq'al va la ch'i o'	so that we grow
29	tuk' chas kutalintxae',	with our children,
30	la qale',	let's say,
31	aate ye' la kuchaku u necesidade',	because if we don't see about our needs
32	kam chaj la kub'an vete?	what are we going to do?
33	kat chaj la tz'aa kat?	who is going to give it to us?

In this fragment, lines 4 and 5, and again lines 9 and 10 present examples of coupleting formed by semantic and grammatical parallelism. Note also the repetition of the phrase, *la qale'* "let's say" or "we could say" in lines 3, 17, 24, 27, and 30. This phrase is a frozen form, frequent in Ixil discourse, used regardless of if the speaker actually participated in the events being described. A similar form *ni tale'* "they say" ocurs in the Ixil folk narratives from Cotzal, one of the three main Ixil towns where a different dialect of Ixil is spoken, recorded by Paul Townsend (Townsend 1980). Like *ni tale', la qale'* acts as a discourse marker, pulling from "the flow of information in discourse a temporary focus of attention which is the target of self and/or other management" (Schiffrin 1999: 276). In other words, by anchoring the discourse to the narrator, *la qale'* distances the narrator from the narrated and links her overtly to the audience instead.

3.2 *Sequencing of Narrative Content*
In some ways, Doña Petrona's narrative goes even further than Doña Elena's and Doña Feliciana's in using stylistic strategies to frame her personal narratives as a communal narrative belonging to the group. In addition to the stylistic feature of repetition noted above, this fragment also has a narrative structure which also serves to mark it as a collective history. Doña Petrona begins by briefly telling what happened during the years of violence. Next, she proposes that this is the cause of the contemporary poverty that brings them together today, and lastly, she indicates the responsibility of people outside of the community to support their efforts at reconstruction. What is notable about this narrative sequencing is that it is almost always repeated in the discourse of all of the women in the group in circumstances in which the group is introducing itself as a collective. In the videos that we have made of meetings of the group with visitors on various occasions when there has arisen the need for the group to create a representation of itself as a collective, we have noted dozens of instances of this three-part structure. During this same meeting, Cecilia Pérez Chávez provided another example of this structure.

1	In ta'	16 ve eche vi yol ixoje'.
2	la q'alchaj	17 B'a'n tan ni chuk chi ixoj
3	vetes eche aane' echeve.	
4	Yel o' ta' qulel k(u)xh koj,	
5	pet tiu me'b'ale' ta' ni b'anon o'.	
6	Nu ku mol q'ib'	
7	pau b'i tu b'e ta' ve	
8	at k(u)xh ch'a'oje' sukuxol.	
9	Pues como ye'l q'etz ati,	
10	pues kat ku mol vet q'ib',	
11	as katil ichee vas ku suuchil	
12	ni q'ale'	
13	b'an b'a ta'	
14	va kat ile' vas ku suuchil.	
15	Ojala va la ku loch ixoj uve	

Like me,
let's say,
for example
we are not just meeting here,
but it's because of poverty that we do it.
We are meeting here
for fault of
the violence that came among us.
Well because we don't have anything,
well we come together
and wherever we find a solution,
we say
that it is good,
because a solution has been found.

Hopefully she will help us
like she says,
it will be good because she will look for
18 qokb'al ni tok chi ixoj kab'al
   sq'i...
19 ti u necesidade' sta's
20 ato' tzitza
21 la q'ale'.
22 Tan k(u)xhe' la vale.
the way we can find some entry…
Out of need
that we are here,
let's say.
That's all I'm going to say.

In Doña Cecilia's discourse, the three parts of the narrative, 1) that they suffered from previous violence (lines 6-8), 2) that this has caused poverty today (lines 9-14), and 3) that they are asking for outside support (lines 15-18), are clearly visible. In this meeting alone, there are six other examples of women using this same model. Additionally, on a separate occasion, another one of the women, Jacinta Ceto de León, summarizes the narrative ordering, indicating that the women realize that there is a common structure to their discourse. On this occasion, after another meeting had ended, García asked the women to explain to her, if they could, why they always shared their personal histories from the years of violence during meetings. In the excerpt below, Doña Jacinta, in order to rephrase the question for the other group members, abstracted exactly this sequencing of wartime violence (lines 8-11), current poverty (line 12), and the need for assistance (lines 13-17). She even began her paraphrase in line 7 with the words that almost always introduce a woman's story, *eche in* or "it's like me," which precedes a brief individual example of past suffering and current struggle then relates it to the situation of the collective and the collective's need for support. Doña Jacinta describes the structure of narratives as follows,

1 Axh la alon
2 at ni tokat
3 la qala.
4 Kam ni k(u)xh kuchoti uvee
5 la qala.
6 Es que
7 "eche in,
8 ech unb'an ile'
9 ak untzumele',
10 eche b'an chaak untxutxe',
11 eche b'an chi ile,
12 exh b'en ta'n ile'."

13 Entonces kam nu kusa' q'i ti u
   yole'
14 ve ase qala ta'
15 la qala.
16 Kam tokat sqe b'aj,
17 kam ni teesan kat sqe,
18 ae' ni sa' ixoj tootzita'.

You say,
what do you mean,
let's say.
That's what we're asking.

let's say.
It's that,
"it's like me,
this is what happened to me,
and my husband,
this is what happened to my mother,
that's what happened.
That's how it is now."

Then what do we want with these words
that we say,
let's say
what does it mean for us,
what do we get.
That's what she wants to know.

Here, in addition to summarizing the structure of these Ixil narratives, Doña Jacinta provides the motivation for this structure: it links the personal to the general, progressing from 'it's like **me**' to 'what does it mean for **us**'.

3.3 *Co-construction of Narratives*

One further illustration of this progression from personal to collective in the narratives of the group comes in the co-telling of stories. The following narrative was recorded as part of a project that the women are engaged in to compose a video archive of the things that they feel are important to share with those who do not know them personally. The archive, still in progress, includes numerous weaving demonstrations, an example of how to make a thick corn drink, and many, many narratives about their past. In fact several small groups of women, like the one from which the following story comes, met with the explicit purpose of telling their stories and having them recorded. In cases like the example below, one woman will begin to tell a story about her history, and then it will be taken up by a second woman. Here Cecilia Marcos Ceto and María Cedillo Matom co-construct the story of Doña Cecilia's loss of property to her in-laws in the aftermath of the violence. Another woman, Marta Cobo Raymundo, is also present and an active participant in the conversation, but she does not speak during this exchange.

CMC: K'am kuxh nun b'anchaj. Ech kuxhe'. Ile' ta' ati, poro nu kutaq' vet chalab'. Cuando kam vet vas valib'e', yaa vet tzitzi

MCM: Tetz vet chana'e' ta' ni tale' taq' kat vet chaana'e'.

CMC: Lab'e' ye nu max aq'on vete.

MCM: "Tuk' kooli ku'l ka telex jaq' tz'e'." Ye'le tetz lab' eli chaj kuxh vet chalab' eta. Tuk' koj kuku'l ni qele' tan ti uve ta' kat kutaalb'e unq'a vaalexhe'.

CMC: Ye ni nach chalab' ve kat el chalab' tan au tu chalab' kat eli. "Q'eyile ni b'anon naj ojik b'en naj tzitzi. O' ye'laj aq'on vet tu tx'ava'e' til naj tzitzi." Ta' vet chalab'.

MCM: Poro q'eyil koj tan ipau…[*overlap*]

CMC: [*dice esposo*] "La chit oleb' ine' ta' tan at unq'a xaake' como at ich'e'x ak valib'e' tan como at ich'e'x ak valib' ixoje' pajtej, as la veq'on

CMC: I'm just renting. That's all. It's there, but they don't give it to me (my

land). When my in-laws died, it stayed there.

MCM: They think that it's theirs now. Now they don't give it to you.

CMC: Now they won't give it to us.

MCM: "Because you went to the mountains." [*the in-laws say*] They're not going to give it to you. But it's not our fault but because bad things happened.

CMC: They don't remember that they left too, that they left. "He's lazy, that's why he went there. Now we're not going to give him the land." They say.

MCM: But it's not for laziness, but because of [overlap]

CMC: [*her husband says*] "Maybe I can get it by taking my children with me because one of them is named after my father-in-law and also after my mother-chintxa, as la chit oleb' ine'" ta kam chaj kuxh li chaaki ch'ooj kuxh vete'. Eesti lab'. Chaj lab'e' ye ni aq'on vet lab' cheel. Mamala café at vet xee chalab' cheel. Il chalab' ni tul vet taama. Pet aavet o' (un)q'a o' chit ye ni tul vet vas qaama.

MCM: Como kat tz'ex xu veto' b'axa tixe' altzan kam qi la ulsan vet aama? Kam qi la k'a'yi vete? La loq vet b'i'to eetz sti'. Como achite' ye kat kaavete. Como eche u o'e' tan kayil chit vetz kat tz'exi, ak'atxe', eche kuchicham, vaakaxh, qaq'omb'al. Ata chan kuxh tulaj kupuaj. Kolel chan kuxh sq'an qulaj kab'al. Kam kuxh ta' nu kuk'ayil

chaj. Nu kuk'a'yi txikon, nu kuk'ayi txut. At chan k'um eche u tiempoe' chel, mamala txikon kupaq'a. Kayil u txikone' kat tz'ei.

in-law, also taking my children, I'll be able to." But why if it's just going to be more problems. Let it be. Those people never gave it to us. Now they have a lot of coffee. Now they are advancing. But us, we're not advancing.

MCM: Since you lost everything from the beginning, with what are you going to advance? What are you going to sell to buy a little bit for yourself? Since there's nothing left. It's like us, all of my things were lost, even my chicken, like our pig, cow and our plates. We had our money. It's stored in the crook of the house. We sold anything. We sold beans, we sold *miltomate*. There was squash like today, a lot of beans, beans taken out of their shells. All the beans were burned.

Doña Cecilia's in-laws are withholding property, claiming that she and her husband forfeited it by hiding from the military during the war. "Now they won't give it to us," Doña Cecilia says. Doña María takes up the story at this point, quoting the in-laws as saying, "Because you went to the mountains," and then continues in her own voice, "They're not going to give it to you." In her next sentence, Doña María shifts the story from a personal one to a general one, one that is true for all the women of the group: "But it's not our fault but because bad things happened."

It is important to note that Doña María has not heard this story before, and yet she co-tells it as a way of establishing solidarity with Doña Cecilia. The sort of co-telling done here is also significant as Doña María does more than provide elaborate back-channels, she actually provides significant detail, quoting what she presumes the in-laws would have said. Such co-telling is frequent in the stories told by the women. However, given that most previous research on Mayan narratives focuses on those told by men or in contexts of elicitation, often with a single narrator, it is not surprising that such co-tellings that are frequent whenever these women gather are not visible in the literature about Mayan narrative practices. Although further research is needed in order to determine all the particular characteristics of this method of co-telling, it is clear that these women have become quite practiced at co-constructing their narratives. According to Schiffrin (1994), speaking for another, as Doña María speaks for Doña Cecilia here, is a discourse strategy that can be used to signal identity and alignment. It is used here also as a way of generalizing this personal story, of making it clear that it is also a group story. "It's like us," Doña María says when Doña Cecilia's story has reached it's conclusion, and then she proceeds to give matching evidence of poverty and loss.

3.4 *Summary*

The presence of the typical elements of Mayan narrative in the histories of the women of the *Grupo de Mujeres por la Paz* indicates that these stories have been told many times throughout the years so that today they form part of the discursive tradition that defines this community. The fact that a paradigm has emerged in the collective representations of the history of the women of the group also indicates a consolidation of a type of collective narrative that forms the essence of historic memory in this community of Ixil Mayan women. A more detailed study of these narratives that takes advantage of the advances in the linguistic and linguistic anthropological study of Maya narrative can serve as the basis for greater understanding of the process of conventionalization of

narrative and of the construction of historic memory in Mayan communities, and it can also respond to the importance that members of these communities give to these histories.

4. Conclusions

In the opening pages of his "meditation on the subject of memory-and-narrative," Olney (1998) quotes this exchange between Estragon and Vladimir from Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

ESTRAGON:	All the dead voices.
VLADIMIR:	They all speak at once.
ESTRAGON:	Each one to itself…
VLADIMIR:	What do they say?
ESTRAGON:	They talk about their lives.
VLADIMIR:	To have lived is not enough for them.
ESTRAGON:	They have to talk about it.

In this respect, the living are much like the dead. We have to talk about our lives, recount the important events and the daily happenings because doing so helps us to understand them by giving them coherence. As Freeman (2003:123) points out,

> …the meaning and significance of experience often emerge or are transformed in retrospect, when that experience assumes its place as an episode in an evolving narrative…we *interpret* the past form the standpoint of the present, seeking to determine how it might have contributed to this very moment.

Personal narratives are stories that we tell to ourselves and to others with the purpose not just of recounting events, but also of structuring those events as a part of our lifetime experience. When something unusual, particularly something terrible or catastrophic, happens to us because of actions by others, we experience what Neimeyer and Tschudi (2003:168) refer to as a "disruption of one's sense of autobiographical continuity," as we suddenly find ourselves quite literally to be "not the person we used to be" as our habitual behaviors and ways of conducting our lives are changed. (See aslo Polkinghorne, 1991; Sewell, 1997). And, as our external lives are changed, our beliefs and assumptions about how the world is supposed to work, how life is supposed to be, and how other people will treat us and react to us are also changed. (Neimeyer, 2000). Personal narrative is a way of making sense of these experiences and fitting them into a coherent framework.

The same is true of communal narratives and the work that they do to integrate significant experiences into the contemporary reality of a group. Stories like Doña Elena's, Doña Feliciana's, Doña Petrona's, and Doña Cecilia's and Doña María's create the framework and the discursive tools to place individuals' stories as part of the collective's narrative which itself gives the community a way to understand their experience as part of their history. In essence, they create historic memory. The result is a destabilizing of the categories of personal and collective narratives which have previously been thought of as discrete. The relationship between the formation of the community and the re-formation of the autobiographical narratives after a period of disruption is a reciprocal one as the women find reinforcement of their personal narratives by hearing similar stories from the others. This reinforcement gives external

cohesion to the individuals' narratives which allows for the construction of a new internal coherence. As Jacinta de León Ceto said, "That's what happened. That's how it is now." Through the repetition of these stories, making use of the conventions of traditional Mayan narrative, the women are creating what will become the collective history of their community. In analyzing the process of conventionalization of these narratives, we are observing the creation of historic memory for this community of Guatemalan women.

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