

Representational Spaces in Testimonial Literature: Rigoberta Menchú and the  
Indigenous Other

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## ABSTRACT

JAMEY COOK: Representational Spaces in Testimonial Literature: Rigoberta Menchú and the Indigenous Other  
(Under the direction of Dr. Alicia Rivero)

This thesis focuses on the literary representation not only of Rigoberta Menchú, author and minority subject, but also of Mayan women as “othered” by the obstacles that race, gender, and class pose in Guatemalan society. I take into account the polemics surrounding testimonial discourse in her first book, but do not concentrate primarily on it, as it has been thoroughly expounded upon in previous studies. Instead, I explore Rigoberta Menchú’s first two books, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, and *Rigoberta, nieta de los Maya*, which have hardly been studied in conjunction by others, through the lens of Mary Louise Pratt and other relevant cultural theorists such as Ortiz, Rama, García Canclini, and Foucault. Without discounting the impact of the first book, I demonstrate how Menchú’s resistance to oppression and racism following her observations of and realizations about the effects of the structures of power on her and her people, have afforded her the opportunity to help her own community and Guatemala. To conclude, I touch briefly on obstacles to democratization in Guatemala in recent years. I also explore the necessary changes that Menchú, a Guatemalan Maya advocate and the 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner, believes have occurred in Guatemala, as well as which problems she believes still need to be addressed.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### CHAPTER

I.	INTRODUCTION: A STORY ONCE LIVED, NOW SPOKEN.....	1
II.	FROM UNHEARD TO UNSPOKEN: THE CONUNDRUM OF DEFINING SPACES IN VOICE AND LITERATURE.....	8
III.	PERSISTENTLY KNOCKING: RIGOBERTA MENCHÚ AS ADVOCATE FOR FREEDOM IN GUATEMALA.....	24
	WORKS CITED.....	38
	WORKS CONSULTED.....	42

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: A STORY ONCE LIVED, NOW SPOKEN

The appearance of Rigoberta Menchú's first book in 1984: *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, launched her into the international public eye as a spokesperson for the Guatemalan Maya-Quiché, other Amerindians, and indeed, for the indigenous and poor people around the world. Many of the previous studies of her writing focus on the polemical intersections within testimonial literature itself, such as its tendency to blur genre lines and intersect with various disciplinary foci. In contrast to those studies, I examine how Menchú has advocated for change in agricultural policy, workers' rights, and inclusion of Guatemala's Mayan population in political decisions. I analyze *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* and *Rigoberta, nieta de los maya* through the theoretical lens of Mary Louise Pratt, as well as other relevant cultural approaches, such as those by Ortiz, Rama, García Canclini, and Beverley. This thesis makes an attempt to apply said theorists to all of Menchú's experiences, and explores the way she represents indigenous subjects, including herself, in both of her testimonial accounts, while not discounting the valuable contributions of other scholars. Her two books have not been studied together in detail before, and also, other scholars tend to use Rama and Canclini to study Menchú, whereas I prefer Pratt's "contact zone" and "mirror dance," as well as Ortiz's "transculturation," for reasons that will be detailed later. Furthermore, I revisit Sommer's notion on the function of silence in Menchú, and complement it with Foucault's incorporeal discourse.

The theoretical evolution of the many forms of Ortiz's transculturation sets up an understanding for the reader of the systems of inequality perpetuated since the Spanish conquest, and Foucault's theory of incorporeal discourse permits readers to glimpse Menchú's experience from the vantage point provided by both the spoken word and its reciprocal silence, as will be seen in what follows.

*Pratt's Imperial Eyes*, published in 1992, proposes a closer examination of how the travel writer (the colonizer) and the indigenous other (the colonized) interact within a sphere that Pratt calls "the contact zone": a "space of colonial encounters . . . in which people geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" (6). Within Pratt's contact zone, two types of representation coincide: anticonquest, "[b]y which I refer to the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony" (8).

According to Pratt, the second is "autoethnography, which describes instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that engage with the colonizer's own terms" (98). While ethnographic texts are generally means by which Europeans represent themselves as conquerors, and their colonial subjects as subjugated others, autoethnographic texts are those the others construct in response to or in dialogue with such ethnographic representations (8).

Through domination, the Spaniards created a hierarchical society based on racial, class, and cultural differences. The vestiges of this structure persist in Guatemala's current society, and the Maya-Quiché have fought against them with great resilience. Owing to this perseverance, Lovell and Lutz state that the Maya are greater in number now than they were either at the time of conquest, or by the date of independence (407). Anderson and Collins note that racism is located within the structure of social institutions (62); this observation has been supported by a number of other studies and stands in opposition to the analysis of Powell and Duncan, who support the traditionalist idea that racism is based on biological characteristics due to physical traits which could be perceived with the eye (17).

Race is a prominent factor in the thinking of *ladino (mestizo)* cultures, in Guatemala, but it is not an exclusive and singular focus that can explain all of the differences in class and socioeconomic status. Rather, every culture has created a system of values which shapes its knowledge about difference. For instance, in contrast to the *ladino* culture, community is at the center of daily life for the Maya-Quiché. Therefore, they see western-style individualism as a negative dividing line which allows corruption and greed to enter into and change the thinking of the *ladinos*, especially the *ladino malo* criticized by Menchú. According to Menchú, the rich *ladinos* who own the majority of agricultural land believe that both indigenous people and poor *ladinos* are exploitable. They do not wish to recognize the Maya-Quiché as deserving of respect as their equals. In addition, violations of indigenous land rights and other types of racism dating back to colonialism are among other factors that affect indigenous/*ladino* relations in Guatemala.



In order to weather change, the Guatemalan Maya-Quiché have employed transcultural methods that blend Amerindian and non-indigenous elements. The Cuban sociologist, Fernando Ortiz, the first to define “transculturation,” conceived of the term as a mutually influencing and interchanging phenomenon taking place between the conquered and conquering cultures (92). Allatson notes that Ortiz was the first to propose a theory by narrative example as a new approach to cultural, anthropological and literary studies (230). Ortiz asserts that Cuban culture was a mix of blackness and whiteness, and that people were not able to assimilate into either of these; instead, these two cultures reciprocally influenced each other with neither one being dominant (Allatson 230).

Pratt’s “contact zone” takes this concept of transculturation further, identifying a “mirror dance” of knowledges and practices, which encompasses the wider and more complex nature of the phenomenon of continuous cultural interchanging (137). The concept of the mirror dance involves aspects of the dominant culture as they are reflected in and used by the dominated culture. This, in turn, begins to blur identities, molded from various experiences and other forms of new knowledge after emerging from the contact zone.

Ortiz envisioned transculturation as a more balanced approach to respecting and integrating oneself with the “other” than that of acculturation or assimilation. Spitta gives a comprehensive definition of how transculturation is different from acculturation, although she takes issue with Ortiz’s optimistic perspective elsewhere, with respect to gender, etc.:

On one side is acculturation, the sheer and irredeemable loss of one’s culture, language, history, tradition—even the body and its rhythms; on the other side is

transculturation, the overcoming of loss by giving new shape to one's life and culture after the catastrophies of conquest, colonization, and modernization. Transculturation can thus be understood as the complex processes of adjustment and re-creation-cultural, literary, linguistic, and personal-that allow for new, vital, and viable configurations to arise out of the clash of cultures and the violence of colonial and neo-colonial appropriations. . . . Cultural influences, even if not equivalent in force, nevertheless do not flow unidirectionally. It is this point that theories of assimilation tend to overlook. (1-2)

Many variants of Ortiz's theory sprang up over time in the work of Ángel Rama, Néstor García Canclini, John Beverley, and Mary Louise Pratt. However, other theories which developed between the original conception of transculturation by Fernando Ortiz and the present day tend to be limiting, especially Rama's exclusive focus on the Latin American literary canon, and Canclini's insistence on art as a hybrid cultural production, which is why my approach draws on Pratt more than on these other theorists.

Beverley reflects that Rama's dependence on the "lettered" for change limits the scope of his theory: "Rama cannot conceptualize ideologically or theoretically movements for indigenous identity, rights, and/or territorial autonomy that develop their own organic intellectuals and (literary or nonliterary) cultural forms" (46). In other words, from Rama's theoretical viewpoint, the current political climate and openings created for the Maya-Quiché, women, and other minority groups in Guatemala, such as Menchú winning the Nobel Prize, are perceived through Rama's theory as impossible accomplishments.

Canclini focuses on the economic and social implications of art as cultural production. Due to the racialized connotations of *mestizaje* or racial mixture implied by the term “hybridity,” Néstor García Canclini prefers the term “hybridization” to refer to cultural mixtures (Allatson 226). Menchú does mention some economic aspects, mainly those linked with oppression, but since Rama and Canclini’s interests center on art or scholarly literature, their theories do not provide the appropriate avenue to explore Menchú’s works. Pratt and Ortiz, on the other hand, emphasize changing cultural relationships within society. Pratt is more concerned than Ortiz and the other theorists mentioned with the contact between cultures that occurs in everyday colonial life, in her case as it is expressed in travel writing, and on the implications this has for postcolonial societies. In other words, transculturated subjects like Rigoberta Menchú have characteristics of varying cultures which form an independent identity after passing through the contact zone of their life experiences.

During her lifetime, Menchú enters two consecutive contact zones: her experience of racial, religious, and educational inequality and the arena of Western politics. Constructing her identity as she gains insight from her experiences, she learns about society's structures of power and attitudes toward cultural difference. She also gives an account of some of the traditions of her people to bring her culture's values and rich heritage into perspective.

Overlapping contact zones force Menchú and many other indigenous people into very difficult lives of poverty and systematic mistreatment; these inequalities have been perpetuated since the conquest. The lack of knowledge of Western politics as they apply to unraveling such disparities in the face of Guatemala's increasing participation in

globalization is another factor which leaves indigenous peoples at a disadvantage. The role that the Guatemalan government and the legal system played in the oppression of Amerindians caused additional struggles. Much like Pratt's travel writer, the ruling classes see the indigenous as laborers and servants, while hiding behind the mask of anticonquest as the justification for the deception. Menchú, in her determination to overcome racism, discrimination, and class struggle, was drawn into the movements for indigenous rights. This participation often required her to speak out about certain matters while leaving others unspoken. This balancing act and its implications are the focus of the following chapter as I address her texts.

## CHAPTER 2

### FROM UNHEARD TO UNSPOKEN: THE CONUNDRUM OF DEFINING SPACES IN VOICE AND LITERATURE

*Testimonio* describes a type of literature that arose after the Boom period of the 1960's and 1970's in Latin America. A *testimonio* in and of itself is a work typically dictated by an illiterate or semiliterate individual to an intellectual other, such as an anthropologist or journalist. Dulfano and Maier argue that some important features of testimonial literature can be summed up in its resistance to classification, crossing of genre lines, and use of competing discourses (4). Arias observes, in "Authoring Ethnicized Subjects," that the interpretation of *testimonio* depends on the reader's ideological and disciplinary foci (77). Both of Menchú's first two books are considered to be *testimonios* because they tell the story of her life and her struggle as an indigenous person in an unequal society.

As Sommer mentions in "Not Just a Personal Story," the "I" in *testimonio* is often spoken from the perspective of one who represents the community as a whole and who considers herself to be different from both the academic interlocutor and the sympathetic reader to whom the book is directed (109; also see "Rigoberta's Secrets" 39; "No Secrets" 146). In contrast to an autobiographical narrator, the woman who gives a testimonial account does not hope for fame, but wants someone to notice atrocities and help change them through political struggle and shifts in the hegemonic structure of society ("Not Just" 109). Sommer also stresses the linguistic complexities that the narrator of the *testimonio* must navigate:

Conscious of working in a borrowed, translated language, they do not have to be reminded of the arbitrary nature of the sign. They live the irony of those linguistic disencounters. From their marginal position vis-a vis existing discourses, they may adopt features of several, not because they are unaware of the contradictions among being a mother, a worker, a Catholic, a Communist, an indigenist, and a nationalist, but precisely because they understand that none of the codes implied by these categories is sufficient to [explain] their revolutionary situation. (“Not Just,” 121; “Rigoberta’s Secrets,” 44; “No Secrets,” 152)

Other salient characteristics contribute to the uniqueness of testimonial literature.

Unlike an autobiography, a *testimonio* is written by a specific type of person:

[E]l testimonio ciñe los contenidos de la protesta y la afirmación, del juramento y la prueba. Sus funciones corren la gama que va desde la certificación a la acusación y la recusación. Sus personajes son aquéllos que han sufrido el dolor, el terror, la brutalidad de la tecnología del cuerpo; seres humanos que han sido víctimas de la barbarie, la injusticia, la violación del derecho a la vida, a la libertad, y a la integridad física. Ellos aunque inocentes—la represión sólo reconoce a culpables entre quienes no forman sus falanges—se unen, en las páginas del testimonio. (Jara and Vidal 1-2)

While it is true that testimonial narrators have much in common, sometimes they clash with the academics who help them. In Rigoberta’s case, the role of the editor/writer has been questioned, as well as that of the narrator (Burgos 155). For example, while Elizabeth Burgos claims that she simply corrected Menchú’s Spanish and literally cut and pasted the typed manuscript together into thematic sections, others such as Arturo Taracena

claim that they themselves did most of the editing ( “Arturo Tarasena Breaks,” 84). This created a rift between Menchú and Burgos, but the greater cause of the controversy surrounding *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* arises from the North American anthropologist, David Stoll. Stoll interviewed informants in and around the Quiché province where Menchú grew up in an effort to falsify her words. As has been thoroughly considered in other studies, Stoll’s research methods resemble a journalistic ferreting out of information much more than objective, anthropological field work. Following the 1999 publication of his book *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*, academics split into two camps: one group valued Menchú’s narrative as lived experience, while the other, following Stoll’s argument, contested that Menchú manipulated or lied about certain events in her story in order to turn her book into a piece of political propaganda for popular organizations such as the Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres, or EGP (Arias, “Authorizing” 75.) Pratt explains that on the one hand, the Right demonized *I, Rigoberta Menchú* as destructive multiculturalism, while on the other, those on the Left argued that the book generated a discussion as to what forms the decolonization of knowledges might take and how subalterns are represented in academic inquiry (“Culture Wars” 37).

Among the academics who have latched onto Stoll’s questionable research methods and tenuous evidence is Mario Roberto Morales, a novelist, literary critic, former Leftist, and now a vehement opponent of the Left who analyzes cultural politics (Hale, “Travel Warning” 300). Focusing almost exclusively on the first *testimonio*, Morales declares Menchú’s multi-faceted purpose and the mix of races that combined to finish the product to be enough to negate its authenticity or originality. In discussions of race, he refers to the collaboration of a

white intellectual, a *ladina*, Menchú, and perhaps others in the information-gathering and editing of *Me Llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (Morales 131). Others have remarked on Morales's tendency to see the *testimonio* as a cultural product:

a propósito del testimonio de Menchú, Morales tampoco ve la posibilidad de que la Premio Nobel construya su propia narrativa, sino que necesita de un grupo de personas que le ayudan a hacerlo. De ahí surge su lectura del testimonio como producto cultural colectivo y étnicamente híbrido.” (Del Valle Escalante 144)

The conclusion by Morales that Menchú consciously fictionalizes events and that her lived, though mediated, testimony is more “fictional” than Miguel Ángel Asturias's *Hombres de Maíz* seems incongruous because it compares her story based on experiences in a Maya-Quiché community with an outstanding novel that, nevertheless, represents the indigenous Other prejudicially and problematically, and which simulates, through fiction, what real life experiences might be in such a community. In his fictional portrayal of a Maya community, Asturias depicts the families as lacking love, being addicted to alcohol, and performing violent acts without guilt or remorse, and all of these characteristics can be found in the actions of the main character Gaspar Ilóm. Regardless of Morales' viewpoint, readers know that Menchú does not represent her community in this vulgar and racist manner. She explains that she was poor, but that she did live in a family who loved her and taught her many useful things about life in general.

Proposing that Menchú was linked to the URNG (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca), Stoll claims that Menchú did not come into politics of her own free will, but



was a militant of the Left (Morales 127). It is true that Menchú's politics are a blending of Communism and Liberation Theology, as she herself explains:

Así que mi tarea es más que todo . . . . organizar a la gente . . . . practicando con ellos la luz del Evangelio. No soy dueña de mi vida, he decidido ofrecerla a una causa . . . . Eso traté de hacerle comprender a una compañera Marxista que me quería decir cómo quería hacer la revolución siendo Cristiana. Yo le dije que toda la verdad no estaba en la Biblia, pero tampoco en el Marximo [sic] estaba toda la verdad. (Menchú, *Me llamo* 270)

In a later interview with Bernardo Oxtaga, Menchú refutes Morales' claim even further:

Conozco a muchos antropólogos o sociólogos y no estoy en contra de la carrera, dijeron que yo era manipulada por la izquierda porque se me había adoctrinado, y que traía un cassette de izquierda porque hablaba de la unidad entre indígenas y ladinos pobres. Cuando hablaba de los temas de derechos humanos, de la militarización, cuando hablaba de los desaparecidos . . . . Se supone que mi discurso debería ser un canto del pasado en clave exclusivamente indigenista. (Menchú, Rigoberta y el CUC 1992 )

Morales further criticizes Menchú's work with RUOG (Representación Unitaria de la Oposición Guatemalteca), on a rumor that it, too, was linked to the URNG. Menchú vehemently denies that she or any workers were at all associated with the URNG when she recalls her teamwork with the RUOG (Menchú, *Nieta* 299-300). As Zimmerman points out:

It is by internationalizing all she has experienced and learned that Menchú has come to embody and represent transformative possibility and hope in her country and

region in the epoch of globalization. The controversy surrounding her name . . . cannot erase what she has accomplished. (125)

Many researchers have questioned Stoll's premises and methods, primarily by gathering evidence of their own. According to Victoria Sanford, who herself has worked with the Comisión de Esclarecimiento Histórico or CEH, proof exists that the army wiped out 626 villages, accounting for the loss of more than 200,000 lives (40). Arias points out that *Me llamo* achieved the goals of ending massacre and creating respect for the Maya-Quiché culture, and that its conformation to documentary facts is hardly relevant ("Authoring" 87.)

Integral to the understanding of how Menchú became an agent of change for the Maya-Quiché is an examination of her experience that was first tape recorded by Elisabeth Burgos and others such as Arturo Taracena, and later clarified by Menchú herself, as an arduous journey through history. Gilberto Arriaza, in "Claiming Collective Memory," states:

What happened during the struggle of 1978 to 1984 was a replay of the Spanish Conquest of 1524 when, for the first time, a well-organized attempt was made to physically eliminate the Maya and to stamp out all cultural traces of their heritage among the survivors. Nonetheless, the efforts of the Conquistadores, as well as the colonial and postcolonial subjugation of the Maya, have proven to be historical failures. (70)

Using several strategies and eventually by communicating with her readers through a transcultural discourse, Menchú is able to help her community and tell her story to the whole world. Situating herself in various spaces of cultural experience and knowledge (or contact zones) she is able to speak, sometimes communicating through an eloquent silence and other

times through actions, and, finally, through language. For instance, she works with the CUC, (*Comité de la Unidad Campesina*), helps friends who were raped by soldiers, organizes the community for self-defense, and tries to learn other Mayan languages well enough to communicate with those in neighboring communities (Menchú, *Me llamo* 128, 148, 167).

Michel Foucault breathes life into what he calls “naive knowledges,” or those knowledges subjugated by the officially dominant knowledge. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, he argues that in incorporeal discourse there is a voice “as silent as a breath, a writing that is merely a hollow of its own mark” (25). This silence, or almost-silence, expresses fear and passion, indicates subversive thoughts and precedes actions. It also aids the readers’ ability to understand the formation of the ideological and sociopolitical identity of the “Other” (Estrada, “Las voces”).

Elisabeth Burgos is quick to point out that in her introduction of *Me llamo*, “por la boca de Rigoberta Menchú se expresan los vencidos de la conquista española. Hay una voluntad para romper el silencio, de hacer cesar el olvido para enfrentarse a la empresa de muerte,” which, while true, glances off the surface of what is not said (9). Doris Sommer speculates that cultural difference would allow non-indigenous readers to understand Rigoberta’s secrets only imperfectly; Sommer also suggests that Menchú wishes to create a “craving to know,” thereby piquing her readers’ curiosity through silence. (“Rigoberta’s Secrets” 34-35; “No Secrets” 132).

Foucault’s incorporeal discourse affords us another perspective. As Foucault observes, “A statement is an event which neither language nor meaning can quite exhaust” (28). The dialectic of silence and speech is not counter-productive; Foucault claims that silence and speech run parallel to each other. One might say that her silence is a mode of

resistance to those in power, as her unique knowledge gives her control over what she will reveal or leave unsaid (Ludmer 50). Identity struggles, language difficulties, and the desire to protect her indigenous culture through guarding secrets about the latter might cause Menchú to keep silent. She withholds secrets, not wanting to reveal many specifics about her cultural identity in order to respect her ancestors and those in the community around her (*Me llamo* 28, 34, 38, 85, 110). In some cases, the secret booby traps and resistance techniques helped to protect her community and, thus, did not allow the army or other people access to precious indigenous knowledge (*Me llamo* 173, 195, 213-14, 271).

A cause of her silence, veiled at first but later confessed to the reader, is sheer anguish. She admits to being emotionally broken by all that she has witnessed personally or through her community (Menchú, *Nieta* 231-32). Emotional turmoil accompanies her silence. Menchú spent fifteen days in silent restlessness in a convent in Huehuetenango, and then moved to the capital where she became a servant in another convent and remembered her mistreatment by the rich housewife (*Me llamo* 274; *Nieta* 232). The weight of her anguish and her continued isolation due to language barriers made her feel overwhelmed, and she could not speak to anyone directly about what she had experienced, fearing for her life as a fugitive from persecution.

After leaving Guatemala, she slept for another fifteen days under doctor's orders in Mexico while her body's physiological reaction to the trauma of civil war subsided (*Nieta* 234). After overcoming her own anguish, she was able to sympathize with the unhealed emotional brokenness of others who belong to a younger generation. Her niece, Regina, for example, "una niña de pocas palabras," who has seen unimaginable atrocities, came to live with her in Mexico (20). The kidnapping of her nephew, Pablito, though it happened within

the family, recalls memories of the psychological warfare from the past, and also serves as an act of silent defiance which derails Menchú's ability to perform political work:

Quería crear comisiones de observadores en las mesas electorales. Reunirme con el Tribunal Supremo Electoral para exigir que hubiera traductores de los idiomas de los pueblos indígenas en las mesas de votación . . . . Sucede el secuestro de Pablito, mi nieto sobrino, y hace un gran daño a mi contribución. (Menchú, *Nieta* 52)

Belief systems also play an important role in the dialectic of sound and silence. The spoken word is not the only sound that matters in her Maya-Quiché community. Signs or omens understood among the Maya are often not communicated in words, but are as important as the future they signal. This is also an example of foreshadowing. Prior to the war, three separate events involving animals signaled danger: her mother's pig showed signs of insanity, bees entered the house, and night birds called before her brother Nicolás was tortured (Menchú, *Nieta* 120). These were sounds interpreted by ancestral knowledge as clues to the future.

Other experiences which might be considered to be upsetting are converted into joy through silence. For instance, Menchú becomes famous after she has been captured at the airport:

Jamás había vivido y conocido cuales eran las consecuencias de ser detenida por las autoridades con tanta [sic] rencor de represión y impunidad en este país . . . .era el momento de homenajear, en uno mismo, a los desaparecidos, los secuestrados, a los torturados en centros clandestinos. (Menchú, *Nieta* 59)

Also, though taking great risk, she returns to Guatemala and to the CUC, which was another moment to venerate the dead (*Nieta* 211-12). In addition, the celebration of the *Quinto Centenario* (the Mayan celebration of five hundred years of resistance to conquest after Columbus's arrival in the "New World"), served as the time to escape from 500 years of silence (285).

In *Me llamo*, Menchú's basic knowledge at first comes about by silent observation. Many of the foremen on the plantation are indigenous, though they have changed their style of dress and customs to become "*ladinizados*," a term which signals both social and cultural difference. The foremen, for example, spoke Spanish, wore non-indigenous clothing and lorded over the workers, no longer treating them as equal members of their community. Arturo Arias says the term was originally coined to identify someone who spoke Latin and Spanish, and thus served as translator for the local priest (Sommer 168). Víctor Montejo explains the modern meaning of the word *ladino*:

As colonial society grew, *ladinos*, who were often bilingual, were used by the Spanish to control Maya life. Attempts were made to assimilate Mayas into Spanish patterns of life, to convert them to Christianity, and to stop the use of their Maya language and inculcate the speaking of Spanish, that is, to ladinoize them" ("Voices from Exile" 31, 33).

Even amidst trials, Menchú finds joy "a mí, la vida me maravilla," in the shadow of a field of coffee bushes, the feel of being outdoors, and the silent pride of the indigenous people (Menchú, *Nieta* 160). The education of the community focuses on respect for all created things and for the stages of life from childhood to old age (163). Thus, when she works as a servant in the urban household of an upper middle class family, she is bothered by

the housewife's assumption that she is of no or little value, which runs contrary to her cultural knowledge that every human being is valuable (*Nieta* 44.) In fact, Menchú praises the refugees whose silence guards their knowledge of collective identity and whose deep roots sustain a dynamic community, even when that community is transplanted to southern Mexico (Menchú, *Nieta* 159).

After silently observing and becoming angry with the housewife's perpetuation of inequality, Menchú takes actions of her own. One of the most crucial skills she learns from this experience is how to fight back. This becomes a blurring of cultural skills: Menchú has to challenge someone who is older and in a position of authority, which is atypical for a young, indigenous person, who was taught all her life to respect elders. This disobedience is positioned in the book after the housewife accuses the Indians of being lazy and not working hard enough to overcome their poverty. The housewife does not even acknowledge her part in the system of inequality and again chooses to sanction the status quo by treating Menchú as less than a human being. Menchú's anger, combined with her awareness that the housewife would likely be incapable of performing her mother's difficult daily chores in the community, help Menchú to realize that the inequalities she suffers as a servant in the capital have nothing to do with being indigenous, and everything to do with systematic racism and structures of power perpetuated since the Conquest. Nowhere does Menchú experience this more clearly than during her protests at the United Nations—silently waiting days for a diplomat to talk about the razing of villages and the destruction of the Maya (Menchú, *Nieta* 201-02). Political complicity still plagues Guatemala in the twenty-first century. Victims remain silent when Menchú's brother, Nicolás, is tortured and the judges allow those who kill people to go free (171-74). She sees the indigenous identity as almost erased, in the

Western sense, because the indigenous people of the world do not exist in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights prepared by the United Nations since their languages are not recognized as official. Menchú wishes to change this fact in the future (*Nieta* 224). In addition, Menchú criticizes the fact that, while science and technology are a part of everyone's heritage, they remain concentrated in the hands of a few (*Nieta* 153).

Menchú criticizes structures of power found in education, politics, and racial relations, but she also attacks the notions set forth by the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, explaining the theological divide between rich and poor. Although Menchú does not use the term "liberation theology," much of what she ascribes to the "Church of the poor" as she calls it, comes from this theology (Menchú, *Me llamo* 270). This movement originated with Vatican II in 1962, but became much more influential after the second conference of the episcopate, a gathering of bishops in Medellín in 1968, in which a corpus of documents clarified the church's role as a beacon of solidarity. No less important was the educational theory of the Marxist teacher, Paulo Freire. Liberation theology then became part of a worldwide trend begun by lay people frustrated by the clergy's tendency to separate themselves from the world of the working class and the failure of the Church to address the problems caused by the Industrial Revolution (Bidigaín 6).

Catholic Action, a movement meant to steer people toward the Church and away from Communism, came to Latin America in the 1930s, and encouraged lay people to participate in cultural activities and labor politics. Despite their efforts, little religious revival took place. People baptized their children, honored the priest when he came on an annual visit to their village, and prayed to the saints, but remained totally unaware of Christ's teachings (Eagleson and Scharper 7).



Similarly, Chiapari notes that many works have emphasized the failure of liberation theology to attract new converts and prevent the loss of Catholics to Protestant churches. This new trend has not brought fundamental structural changes either in society or within the Church hierarchy (47).

Eventually, in the early 1960s, Washington, Rome, Christian democratic parties in Latin America, and the UN all were in favor of developing the Third World. Pope John the XXIII addressed this concern in his encyclicals *Mater et magistra* and *Pacem in terris* (Eagleson and Scharper 8). Just prior to the Second Vatican Council in 1962, the Latin American bishops proposed that the focus of their pastoral program would be the integral development of the continent (Eagleson and Scharper 9).

From the Alliance of Christian Democrats and the Church came a Brazilian, church-sponsored, literacy program for peasants, in which the educator Paulo Freire played an important role (Eagleson and Scharper 9). Freire believed that people must see social structures that cause injustice before they can be made aware of their role in changing society. This process is called “consciousness-raising” (Freire 49).

Some aspects of liberation theology began to concentrate on the unique alliance of Marxist terminology and Christianity. Writers in this school insist that the poor and their everyday experiences are valuable. They describe class conflict and exploitation in order to make the poor and the rest of society aware of injustices (Levine 143). Some of these writers even live among the populations they serve, in order to avoid the disconnect between the Church and the people. Another branch considers revolution to be the only viable means of solving social problems. However, not all proponents of liberation theology are either Marxist or Catholic. Many Christians feel a strong call toward resolving social inequalities

because the impetus comes from Christ's overarching commandment to love all people, and treat them as one would like to be treated

From this connectedness came the Christian basic communities, which were meant as cells of lay people studying the Bible and applying its teachings to daily life (Burtchael 264; Eagleson and Scharper 8). Levine stresses that the poor who have learned to read and comment on the Bible in the base communities both promote understanding among themselves and ultimately have the power to change society's discourse about them, as well as to modify society's perceptions of them as inferior and can work together to create a more equitable and brighter future for themselves and others (Burtchael 248). Acting for the poor means sharing with and learning from them as one works alongside them in grassroots organizations (244).

For the case of Central America, since the Conquerors understood Christianity to be the dominant religion and used it to subjugate the indigenous population, Mayan spirituality was devalued historically. To this day, many Mayas practice syncretic Catholicism along with their other ceremonial rites. Be that as it may, the Maya deeply value their spiritual and cultural roots. This, in particular, brings to the forefront the need to find an equal playing field that allows both cultures to participate in Guatemalan society by promoting mutual respect for each others' values (Menchú, *Nieta* 82-83).

Menchú clarifies in *Me llamo* that Mayan spirituality is devoted, among other things, to not wasting what is necessary for survival, such as water, but explains that her people also hold sacred *copal* (a type of incense), Mother Earth, and Grandfather Sun (80). She mentions the tradition of burying the ashes of the umbilical cord near one's birthplace. She is proud of cultural traditions that link her to the land in body, mind, and spirit: "simplemente me siento

orgullosa de que mi ombligo esté en Chimel. Plasmado en las montañas de Chimel y de Guatemala" (Menchú, *Nieta* 114).

As for her thoughts about Catholicism, Menchú emphasizes that they provide another channel to God that does not take away from the cultural traditions she has learned from her people (Menchú, *Me llamo* 106). For instance, Menchú says when the Catholic priest accuses the indigenous people of loving witchcraft, she believes he is simply speaking without a true understanding of the customs of her community, and this leads to mistrust (*Me llamo* 29). In the interplay of cultures and knowledges (in *Me llamo* in particular), all people who are helping Menchú, both community members and religious leaders, examine their stance on what religion means to them. In many cases, identity lines blur. For example, Menchú is proud to have been a catechist who taught her community about the Bible, but she does not approve of the way that Christians traditionally saw themselves as practitioners of the only legitimate religion, having access to the only path to God.

This mixing of religious influences concerns some researchers. While identity, culture, and politics are all part of each religion's manifestation, current legal documents, such as the Guatemalan Constitution do not necessarily take that into account (Váldez 360). For this reason, some worry that the Guatemalan government will see Mayan religion as confined to a ghetto of sorts, rather than as a legitimate form of worship practiced by Guatemala's indigenous majority (365).

Members of the clergy and lay people dedicated to liberation theology, though putting their own lives at risk, greatly helped Menchú further her cause when they decided to work with her and other Mayas to seek social, cultural, and legal equality (Menchú, *Me llamo* 224). Until receiving help from these ministers, priests, nuns, and lay people like her *ladino*

friends and comrades, Menchú faced many stumbling blocks, such as needing to learn to read, write, and speak Spanish, as well as venturing into the labyrinth of knowledge necessary to unravel political struggles. She states how grateful she is to those who helped her to learn Spanish (Menchú, *Me llamo* 140, 146, 188, 191; *Nieta* 141, 252-53). She is not serving as an interpretative bridge to allow her Mayan culture to conform to that of the *ladino* but, instead, is offering to educate and bring her community's perspective to those *ladinos* who will listen to her and help her people (Burdell 32). Part of the communication involves learning Spanish, but the exploration of political solutions is equally important to Menchú.

Menchú narrates her life story to Elisabeth Burgos, and then works with Dante Liano and others to continue it. Both of these books are examples of testimonial literature. One of the most salient characteristics we touched upon here is the dialectic of the spoken word and silence, and how the use of both nuances Menchú's communicative possibilities with her readers. Despite many obstacles, she is working to bring greater freedom to Guatemala's indigenous communities and to mold an understanding of the interactions that the Maya-Quichés have with the dominant Spanish-speaking culture. The next chapter describes her political work in more detail and emphasizes the progress she continues to make toward creating mutual respect for the values and traditions of both cultures.

### CHAPTER 3

#### PERSISTENTLY KNOCKING: RIGOBERTA MENCHÚ AS ADVOCATE FOR FREEDOM IN GUATEMALA

At the time that Menchú's father was in prison, the contact zones of inequality and politics began to overlap significantly in her life. She grew up with an understanding of her community's politics: her father and mother were the elected leaders of the community. Menchú was to become an advocate for the Maya-Quiché, particularly for changes in wages, working conditions, and rights in general, because of her parents' political participation. Language is only a small part of the understanding that she needed to gain in order to overcome the rift between her own knowledge and that of those in power. Indigenous people were aware that they received different treatment than others when dealing with land or labor disputes or legal matters and, often, they did not understand the laws, legal details, or judgments used against them. In addition to these cultural problems, non-Indians took advantage of them in various ways (Adams 158).

In spite of the victories and great strides gained by the Maya-Quiché and by other Amerindians or the poor, Menchú will never forget the victims of the civil war, or the psychological trauma of growing up in Guatemala. This is illustrated by comments from her 2008 lecture at Vanderbilt University:

Nosotros para ilustrar el genocidio en Guatemala . . . . Hemos tenido que hacer más de doscientos veinte[sic] exhumaciones donde hemos sacado los restos mortales de nuestros trescientos o cuatrocientos[sic] personas en fosa común, para ilustrar que

eran menores de edad, que eran Mayas, que eran mujeres embarazadas, que habían sido torturadas, o sea, hemos tenido que agarrar el dolor de los propios muertos, y aun no se ha juzgado ese genocidio.” (Menchú “Healing Communities”)

Through political activism, she learns about the components of Communism and liberation theology and was able to lead the Maya of her community and others out of a maze of corruption, human rights violations, and other crimes which have been committed against them. She also helps them to understand legal struggles over past crimes which continue into the present. From 1999 through 2008, she fought for extradition of several perpetrators of genocide, and was finally successful (Menchú, “Healing Communities”). More importantly, her entrance into politics persuaded international organizations to help the people of Guatemala. As many authors note, by breaking with tradition through studying Spanish, learning about liberation theology and agrarian reform, and becoming an international figure, Menchú had to make unusual choices to be most helpful to her people (Ekstrom 52).

In order to better understand Menchú’s role, it is necessary to highlight key historical and political facts. The Guatemalan civil war lasted from 1960-1996, ending with the signing of the Peace Accords on December 29, 1996 (Carey 69). The struggle for equality began before the civil war and continues even after the signing of formal, legally binding agreements that take precedence over all previous laws.

The UN established MINUGUA (Misión de las Naciones Unidas a Guatemala), on September 19th, 1994, which was given the task of following the government’s progress as it laid the groundwork for the implementation of these accords (Baranyi 78; Brett 90).

MINUGUA, governed by the Peace Accords signed by all parties, was able to maintain trust,

collect more detailed data than other institutions, and make a modest but useful contribution to indigenous people's rights (Baranyi 78).

The primary goal of the Accords was, of course, the cease-fire. Part of this was demobilizing the URNG and the Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil (PACs), reducing the size of the army by 33% and incorporating all ex-combatants into civilian life (Carey 71). The military achieved its goal by ceasing to recruit new members; however, the officer corps remained virtually untouched (Carey 70). The return and resettlement of war refugees, both internal and external, was an important goal, but the process was disorganized and sometimes violent (Carey 69).

The civil war was not the first time that popular organizations had united in favor of change. After the Second World War, the plantation economy began to break down, and the agricultural products for export were not as widely sold. At the same time, industrialization began to dominate in urban areas (Sáenz de Tejada Rojas 28-29). In the ten year period of democratic rule from 1944 to 1954, the agricultural and industrial workers of Guatemala first united through the Confederación General de Trabajadores de Guatemala (CGTG). Farm worker leagues, cooperatives, Catholic Action, and a cultural revitalization were all active during the 1960s and 1970s (Sáenz de Tejada Rojas 35; Brett 86).

After an earthquake struck the Guatemalan highlands in 1976, the CUC and Jesuits worked together to rebuild the region (Sáenz de Tejada Rojas 40). Marveling that a miners' strike had gathered over 200,000 participants by the time it reached the capital, popular groups realized the power that they held (41). In an effort to squelch this power, union leaders were murdered by the government of General Arana between 1976 and 1980, and government sponsored death squads continued their repression throughout the presidency of

General Lucas García, which ended in 1982. Survivors had to work doubly hard to ensure the permanence of change (Front 47). This was followed by General Ríos-Montes' destruction of hundreds of Mayan communities from 1982 to 1983.

Menchú points out a stark reality underlying the horrible period in which so many lives were lost:

Si revisamos la historia de la humanidad, en estos cincuenta y cinco años [desde la Segunda Guerra Mundial], no ha habido un solo caso de juzgamiento del genocidio. Yo no sé que pasó con todos los ciudadanos del mundo y con toda la comunidad internacional que jamás hizo un compromiso para juzgar los crímenes contra la humanidad. (Menchú, "Healing Communities")

While Menchú does acknowledge that a small ray of hope appeared after the capture of Pinochet, in responding to questions at the end of her "Healing communities" lecture, one sees the magnitude of her statements about lack of initiative and responsiveness from the international community with regard to these crimes. During the height of the civil war among the Maya-Quiché and other indigenous groups, and the military, action seemed the best course for survival. Protests, barricades, dismantled machinery, and striking workers sent a strong message (Menchú, *Me llamo* 252, 258). In her own community, Menchú describes the practice of capturing soldiers, who had been trained by the Spanish-speaking army, and who were forced to believe that they were inferior because they did not speak Spanish and have the same education, mannerisms, and racial make-up as the *ladinos*. In short, they were taught to reject all the values and practices they had learned in the various Mayan communities. Their capture served as a means of accountability, whereby the community leaders could question the soldiers and beg them not to forsake the ancestral



ways, although they knew that the soldiers would likely be killed for disobeying the army's orders when they released them (164).

Outside of her community, Menchú became involved in labor politics during a protest for a decent wage, for example. Though Menchú now advocates for protest through peaceful means, the actions taken by the workers did not go without notice: they were given a raise in pay and several days of rest around the time of May 1, 1981 (Menchú, *Me llamo* 258-59). On August 7, 1987, the *Esquipulas* II Agreement was signed by all Central American governments as a commitment to establish a firm and lasting peace in the region (Fonseca 56). In October of that same year, the CNR (Comisión Nacional de Reconciliación), was established to supervise provisions for democratization in the *Esquipulas* Agreement, and it opened the Great National Dialogue in Guatemala the following year in order to advance the peace process (57). Despite representing almost all social sectors, some ultra-right-wing political parties, the army, the URNG, the Unión Nacional de Agricultores (UNAGRO) and the Cámara de Agricultores, Comerciantes, Industriales y Financistas (CACIF), did not participate (58).

From 1988 to 1990, the protests of indigenous groups grew, especially those of the Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala (CONAVIGUA), which publicized the repression of husbands and spouses, and ran workshops on the constitutional right to livelihood. The Consejo Étnico Runajeljunam (CERJ) spoke out in opposition to army abductions and Civil Patrols, which took workers away from the fields, and primarily affected indigenous people (Front 32). Alliances between the Mayas and *ladinos* began to build as the CUC combined efforts with the CNUS (Comité Nacional de Unidad Sindical),

and then the UASP (Unidad de Acción Sindical y Popular), which was formed to protest price increases in 1988.

In addition, the UASP drew up the March Accord in the mid-1980s, which focused on such salient issues as agrarian policy, minimum salaries, recognition of unions, adequate health and educational services, and measures to combat corruption and human rights abuses (Front 33). Both the March Accord and *Esquipulas II* led to other processes and meetings of all groups involved for furthering peace in the region, which culminated in the Oslo Declaration (51-52.)

In 1993, Menchú actively protested the *Serranazo*, being one of the first to join with other leaders in the formation of the ASC (Asamblea de la Sociedad Civil), which decided to protest in favor of restoring the national constitution (Zimmerman 121). When this failed to sway Serrano, she organized a religious service for peace, in which she urged the international community to place strict sanctions on Serrano's regime.

When a workers' rally that Menchú organized was broken up with tear gas, several thousand demonstrators attended a protest mass at the cathedral. They marched with Menchú to the Governor's Palace where she hand-delivered a letter to Serrano asking for the restoration of constitutional order (Zimmerman 122). Later, a petition she had written condemning the coup and asking for the resignation of Serrano and others, as well as for the prosecution of corrupt officials, was read in pulpits throughout Guatemala and was circulated internationally (122).

Menchú was one of the advocates from RUOG who participated in the Spring meetings of the Subcommittee on Ethnic Issues, which took place in Geneva, Switzerland. This was a diplomatic branch of the Guatemalan opposition, founded in 1982, which lobbied

at the United Nations in New York City (Arias 10-11). As opposed to the negotiations between the URNG and the military which took place before the opening of the Great National Dialogue in 1989, promoters of both the Dialogue and the Oslo Process of 1990 worked through what Marco Fonseca refers to as the “Discursive Paradigm” in which “no proposal of national or constitutional import is agreed upon or considered generally acceptable without first being discussed within a framework of open and extensive participation” (58). Unfortunately, the communications which took place during the Great National Dialogue, the Oslo Process, and the formation of the ASC in 1994, were considered by the government to be non-binding (Fonseca 70). Menchú was instrumental in the talks which led to the disarmament of the URNG, the formation of the CNR, and the CUC’s remembrance event called the “Segundo Encuentro” (Sáenz de Tejada Rojas 62-64; Fonseca 70).

Also, in 1994, the United Nations became a mediator in the Guatemalan peace negotiations, as opposed to its former role as observer. The UN peacemaking effort helped the parties come to agreements on curtailing human rights violations, holding institutions responsible for such heinous acts, and combating the impunity associated with such crimes. Another issue was negotiating the safe return and resettling of refugees, with the assurance that representatives for both the government and the refugees had ample opportunities for voicing their concerns and settling misunderstandings. As a symbolic gesture of unity and hope, Menchú accompanied almost 900 Guatemalan refugees across the Mexican border (Zimmerman 124; Menchú, *Nieta* 71). Many other legal matters were still quite pressing in Guatemala. Defining changes in constitutional and legislative policy to guarantee an end to discrimination and the free exercise by indigenous peoples of civil, political, economic,

social, and cultural rights became a priority. Finally, transforming the system of land tenure, labor-capital relations, and the administration of both fiscal policy and social services was paramount (Baranyi 76). Where legal negotiation takes place, politicians soon follow.

One of the processes which defines how culture and society interact is politics. According to Hale, two factors must be considered before Guatemala can move toward a true democracy which acknowledges the rights of all cultural groups: the *ladino* “political imaginary,” and the redefinition of *mestizaje*, so that it is not seen as synonymous with assimilation (146).

Hale defines the political imaginary as a “cluster of intense emotions---fear, desire, guilt, anger---that come to the forefront in frank, unguarded discussions with *ladinos* about Mayas,” but states that most of the time it does not necessarily impact daily interactions between the two groups (160). Elites or those who have decided to become more *ladinoized* use said imaginary as a screen onto which they project their wishes for a unified Guatemala. The definition of *mestizaje* has broadened to include both *mulato* and *Maya mestizos* (Montejo, *Maya Intellectual Renaissance* 2). As Hale asserts, theoretical terms, more than clarifying are emphasizing the struggle to update outdated ideas and embrace a new identity. For instance, what he terms the “political imaginary” could be called “guarded prejudice,” and his reference to *mestizaje* below, could be better understood as referring to assimilation:

Though national and provincial elites find *mestizaje* enormously useful in deconstructive endeavors, they have not quite been able to convince themselves (nor the Indians) that it will work as a metaphor for building the nation. They seem to endorse, without fully believing, vague statements about unity in diversity; they are discontent with the identity term *ladino*, cannot fully own the term *mestizo*, and do

not feel the least bit comfortable with the confident way more and more Indian people are calling themselves ‘Maya.’ (Hale, “Travel Warning” 310)

Several critics are attempting to legitimate the assimilationist label of *mestizaje* as the only viable cultural and political option for Guatemala’s future.<sup>1</sup> On the opposite side are those like Menchú, who wish Guatemalan society to be a place where all cultures and languages can coexist peaceably (Menchú, *Nieta* 155). The swaying of the political pendulum between these two poles is what Front calls the connection between political parties and their associated “blocks of power” (48). Political parties are often divided along class lines. In other words, popular movements led by poorer citizens sometimes triumph, and, at other times, the elites block them, thus temporarily favoring the status quo of the government, the military, or the elites (Front 27).

The vying for power Front sees proves to be a valid viewpoint, especially when considering governmental measures set forth to reinforce those provisions of the Accords that had been previously neglected. After the Accords were approved, conservatives and political parties challenged them, and Congress drafted 50 constitutional reforms which were to be considered in a national referendum in 1999, but this referendum failed to garner enough support from the *ladinos*, who ultimately voted against it (Carey 71).

Positive strides did punctuate this struggle, however. The decade from 1986 to 1996, which incorporated the transition to a civil government and the signing of the Peace Accords, marked the beginning of the Maya movement, a unifying process involving cultural and civil rights (Sáenz de Tejada Rojas 57). After the signing of the Accord on Indigenous Rights, the movement was able to assert itself in 1995. In 1999, after the failed referendum, or

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<sup>1</sup> For a fuller discussion of *mestizaje*, see Del Valle.

*Consulta Popular* as it is known in Spanish, the Maya movement split into groups with two differing agendas. One group favored a superstructural model which focused on cultural and spiritual rights, as well as the use and recognition of Mayan languages in cultural and educational spheres (Sáenz de Tejada Rojas 69). The second group favored a more structural approach which tried to establish paths to better opportunities for all with regard to education, livelihood, and politics (Brett 85). In addition, the reality that lobbying for ethnic and civil rights did not influence the elites who were in power or the actual terms for peace meant that the Maya movement took on more of a focus on ethnic unity than of civil rights or syndicalism than before (Brett 109).

Like other Mayan activists, Menchú aids her people not only on an international level, but also locally. For instance, after having learned Spanish, she returned from her international travels to her native town of Chimel (located in the Guatemalan highlands), in order to fulfill a dream that her father, Vicente Menchú, was unable to complete himself: she advocated for the restoration of the land to its former owners (Menchú, *Nieta* 79). One tremendous accomplishment of Vicente Menchú was the formation of the CUC, in which Menchú participated. She recalls the beginnings of her political struggle in the CUC, where the foundations of her leadership skills were strengthened. She learned that having a clear head meant knowing that peoples' wisdom was limitless, and that experiencing the will to fight together with hands and hearts would help create a united front in favor of change (Menchú, *Nieta* 256).

Menchú was greatly saddened by the massacre at Pansos in May of 1978, which Carol Smith says began the Guatemalan civil war (119). After hearing of this horrific incident, Menchú became even more determined to help with the legal battles. Without any

formal legal training, but able to read important documents, she proposed a way to form a case for the community of Xamán following a massacre of many of its inhabitants. Menchú visited several tribunals and combed paragraphs of legal documents in order to apply their texts to the case. Sadly, proceedings dragged on and she remains unsure what the ultimate outcome of her endeavors will be (Menchú, *Nieta* 105-06).

Outside of Guatemala, Menchú has been able to see much of the world while working to aid the international community in her pursuit of peace and justice. Traveling broadened her knowledge of the world, and she was deeply touched by the common suffering among the poor. She describes the somewhat frenzied, but very successful tour she took of over twenty-eight countries while actively working for peace: “Cuando uno está en una casa elegante, una siente mucha tensión y uno anda cuidando lo que hace, y luego, llega a otro mundo en donde viven los pobres, los marginados, y lo que siente es cansancio y dolor de conciencia y es admiración por el valor de la gente” (Menchú, *Nieta* 251). She was often very moved by her experiences in other countries and, even though the rest of her team rotated between staying in Mexico and traveling with her, she knew she could not stop working for peace. Often, the hours spent traveling were long, but rewarding. She had a dream upon entering Thailand for the first time which showed her the doors of freedom. She had never been to Asia before, but she was truly welcomed by three elderly people in this dream, and she felt the interconnectedness of the human race. She was seeking peace not only for her people, but for all the poor and marginalized around the world (Menchú, *Nieta* 257).

In spite of her gained political power, Menchú describes the shifting nature of her own dual identity. Often, people hold a stereotyped view of her, because she has the facial features of an indigenous person; she is often mistakenly viewed as someone poor or out of

place and people are surprised to learn that she is an important political figure when she passes through their airports: “yo soy Premio Nóbel de la Paz en los protocolos, cuando me recibe un rey, un jefe de estado, una persona o una artista, o cuando hay un golpe de estado o cuando hay un conflicto en el que uno tiene que necesariamente hacerse presente . . . . pero cuando yo cruzo las fronteras, ninguna autoridad de aduanas tiene paciencia conmigo” (Menchú, *Nieta* 59).

This statement can be better clarified by returning to Menchú’s political activism: only after receiving the Nobel and being nominated Ambassador of Goodwill by the United Nations during 1993, the International Year of Indigenous Peoples, was Menchú able to move freely throughout Guatemala (“Healing Communities”; Fundación Rigoberta Menchú). Furthermore, she helped to elaborate the Universal Declaration of Indigenous Rights (Paz 30). She organized and directed a summit of Indigenous Peoples in Chimaltenango in 1993 and personally presented a speech to the World Human Rights Conference in Vienna later that year. Most importantly, the Rigoberta Menchú Foundation now has its official home in Guatemala (30).

In 1998, Menchú received the Prince of Asturias Award, and in 2007, she formed a political party called “Winaq” and ran for President of Guatemala (Zuckerman, “Can Nobel Prize”). Edilberto Torres-Rivas says of Menchú’s 2007 candidacy for president: “su condición de mujer, de indígena, de pobre, salida del oscuro mundo rural-campesino califica su candidatura como nuevo momento político de la democracia guatemalteca . . . . Votar por ella pone a prueba las identidades del revolucionario, del mestizo de izquierda, de los ciudadanos mayas” (85-86). Menchú did not win the presidency in 2007, but perhaps she will try again in the future. Torres-Rivas also mentions her involvement in *Salud Para Todos*, a



Mexican company which is lobbying for a low price on generic prescriptions (86). After the talk given at Vanderbilt University, Menchú was asked if she thought Guatemala was more peaceful, and she replied with good humor— “por lo menos yo ya puedo llegar al noventa porciento del territorio nacional sin que nadie me tire tomate encima”—before lamenting the state of the Guatemalan congress, with corrupt officials still in power even after they participated in multiple episodes of genocide (Menchú, “Healing Communities”). Her hope is that racism, discrimination, and exploitation will someday come to an end and thereby demonstrate the value of each individual. The fight continues for equal distribution of land and a return of democracy in all its fullness to Guatemala (Menchú, Nieta 131-32).

Menchú began as a humble Maya-quiché woman interviewed by Elisabeth Burgos. This interview later became a book which allowed the foreign world a previously unavailable glimpse into Guatemala and, in particular, its treatment of indigenous people. Many years after the publication of *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* came *Rigoberta, Nieta de los maya*—a continuation of Menchú’s life story—revealing some previously veiled secrets and confessing reasons for her silence, as well as expounding upon Menchú’s local and international peace work. Previous research focused almost exclusively on the first book, and therefore, primarily examined the first half of the story. Listening intently to all of Menchú’s experiences, provided in both of her testimonial accounts, rounds out the picture for the intended reader. The theoretical evolution of the many forms of transculturation sets up an understanding for the reader of the systems of inequality perpetuated since the Spanish conquest, and the theory of incorporeal discourse permits readers to glimpse Menchú’s experience from the vantage point provided by both the spoken word and its reciprocal silence. Examining both books, the reader is invited to interpret the

dialectic of language and silence. This dialectic allows readers to see the multi-faceted nature of a voice that Menchú gave to indigenous and poor people. Foucault suggests that the silence referred to in his theory of incorporeal discourse precedes actions, and readers now have a fuller view of Menchú's process of leadership formation, as well as of how she came to be a candidate, and eventually a winner, of the Nobel Peace Prize through her work with diplomats, politicians, scholars, religious and lay leaders. The questions raised by Stoll and others, while they did offend her at first because they appeared to be coming from a racist perspective, have not deterred Menchú in the least from pursuing peace. She has learned to address a variety of audiences, and has patiently educated her readers with regard to her life and the democratic struggle taking place in her beloved Guatemala. Proud of all the victories thus far, Menchú will continue to support efforts for change and unity among her fellow citizens of Guatemala.

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