

**BEYOND INDIGENISMO:
CONTEMPORARY MEXICAN LITERATURE OF INDIGENOUS THEME**

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ABSTRACT

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(under the direction of María A. Salgado)

This dissertation reads seven recent texts about Mexican Indians in light of previous critiques of indigenismo. It asserts that literary indigenismo and its inherent contradictions persist alongside “hybrid” genres such as testimonio and also indigenous-produced literatura indígena, which is steadily growing in influence.

The introductory chapter gives a brief overview of literary indigenismo in Mexico, citing critics Antonio Cornejo Polar, Joseph Sommers, Cynthia Steele and Analisa Taylor. It establishes precedents for the readings in subsequent chapters. Chapter 2 treats Graciela Limón’s Erased Faces and argues that the influence of indigenismo is still evident in novels produced as late as the early twenty-first century. Changes and limitations in the testimonio novel are examined in Memorial del tiempo o Vía de las conversaciones by Jesús Morales Bermúdez [chapter 3]. The role of the author in testimonio as well as the emergence of literatura indígena is the subject of chapter 4. Distinct differences between texts produced by indigenous and non-indigenous authors are explored via a reading of Javier Castellanos Martínez’ Cantares de los vientos primerizos/Wila che be ze lhao: Novela zapoteca [chapter 5]. The final chapter examines four recent films/videos by indigenous and non-indigenous filmmakers: Día de muertos en la tierra de los murciélagos [K’in Santo ta Sotz’leb] by Pedro

Daniel López López, the Chiapas Media Project's Zapata's Garden, Japón by Carlos Reygadas and John Sayles' Men with Guns. Based on the experiences of marginalized groups in other countries, I assert that visual media offer opportunities beyond those of the novel for a community-based approach to cultural production, but that the genre is still susceptible to many of the same pitfalls of indigenismo.

The study concludes that recent literary and filmic texts reflect Mexican social reality, in which indigenous groups continue to struggle to define their identity in the face of continued inequality. Increased distribution and study of indigenous-authored texts is a path toward meaningful dialogue and progress on this front.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Indigenismo was official policy in Mexico from roughly 1920 to 1970, though its ideology has since been widely discredited in academic circles. There is now broad consensus that Mexican indigenismo was a government-sponsored, paternalistic ideology in which writers, intellectuals, artists and social actors from different disciplines knowingly or unknowingly cooperated in undermining indigenous communities instead of improving their lot. This was done for the sake of both “national unity” and economic advancement for the urban middle and upper classes. Henri Favre, writing in 1998, describes indigenismo as a “movimiento ideológico de expresión literaria y artística, aunque igualmente político y social, que considera al indio en el contexto de una problemática nacional” (8). Héctor Díaz Polanco labels integrationist indigenismo “ethnophagy” and declares, “this indigenism left behind it a tragic trail of cultural dissolution, destruction of identities, political repression, and ethnic-national conflict” (“Indigenismo” 68). Analisa Taylor condemns indigenista artistic production in Mexico as well:

[T]hese mimetic-symbolic images reveal what hegemonic indigenista discourse seeks to conceal: the conflicting forms of social relations and the ambivalent consciousness of the post-revolutionary elites who are pursuing rural capitalist development under the benevolent guise of revolutionary social justice. (16-17)

Critics trace the course of literary manifestations of Mexican indigenismo from the publication of Gregorio López y Fuentes' El indio in 1935 to Rosario Castellanos's Oficio de tinieblas in 1962.¹ These expressions nearly always took the form of narrative, mostly novels but also some short stories, and government-employed anthropologists frequently penned indigenista fiction themselves. While all indigenista fiction was complicit with official ideology to one degree or another, some later works became progressively more sophisticated in style, content and approach, culminating with qualities that reflect increasing internal critiques of the system of which they formed an important part.² By the time of the publication of the “last” indigenista novel in 1962, attitudes had evolved and Mexican society was on the verge of important changes.

The year 1968 is frequently signaled as a watershed for government-sponsored indigenismo and the nation as a whole, particularly because of the massacre of hundreds of students in the Plaza de Tlatelolco on October 2. This traumatic event signaled the beginning of the end for the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) as well as its patronage system and nationalist-populist messages, both of which directly or indirectly dominated the social sciences and arts in Mexico after decades of one-party control of government. Joseph Sommers asserts that the shock of the carnage at Tlatelolco made it clear to academics and others that there was a huge gap between intellectual activity and everyday reality in Mexico, and that it was time for a comprehensive “valoración crítica” of the status quo (“Literatura e historia” 9). The book De eso que llaman antropología mexicana, published in 1970 by a

¹ Well known examples are: Silvia Bigas Torres' La narrativa indigenista mexicana del siglo XX and Lancelot Cowie's El indio en la narrativa contemporánea de México y Guatemala.

² See Cynthia Steele's “Ideology and the Indigenista Novel in the Nineteenth Century U.S. and Twentieth Century Mexico,” Joseph Sommers' After the Storm: Landmarks in the Modern Mexican Novel, and Analisa Taylor's “Thresholds of Belonging: Myths and Counter-Myths of 'lo indígena' in Mexico (1940-1994).”

group of young Mexican anthropologists including Antonio Warman, began this process by for the first time openly challenging the practices of the government-run Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) and opening the door for others in Mexico and beyond to question indigenista ideology and aesthetics.

Much has changed in Mexico in the decades since 1970. Neoliberal economic policies have replaced the import substitution mode of industrialization and national consolidation that had been in place since the Revolution. Successive Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and now National Action Party (PAN) governments have implemented ever-increasing efforts to privatize industry, finance, media and cultural production. International free trade agreements have shifted focus outward, toward exportation and foreign investment, and tourism is one of the country's leading industries. But amidst this outward reorientation of national priorities, a group of indigenous peasant rebels seized national and international attention on January 1, 1994 by taking control of several provincial cities in the state of Chiapas, as if to declare to the world that Mexico still had serious internal matters to tend to first. The Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) and their spokesman Subcomandante Marcos skillfully utilized the modern communications possibilities of the internet to broadcast their demands for indigenous rights and autonomy around the globe. Thanks in part to the Chiapas situation, the once invincible PRI was finally ousted from power in 2000, but peace accords have yet to be signed as of February 2007, thirteen years after the initial insurrection.

The Zapatista uprising is but one concrete manifestation of the fact that indigenous peoples represent a significant force and presence in Mexico, and that there are still important issues to resolve with respect to identity, autonomy and how mestizo and indígena

cultures are to coexist in the future. Literature, especially understood broadly as it should be today, can and must play a central role in resolving these questions. Ironically, literature's pivotal role in indigenista ideology in the twentieth century is an indicator of its importance in Mexican society.

In theory, indigenous peoples were to assume a more prominent role in representing themselves, both politically and esthetically, following the critical stance taken by many in the 1960s and 70s. This expectation begs a question: how much have things actually changed in recent decades? The answer is that though there has been progress, the Zapatista uprising in 1994 confirmed that much remains to be accomplished, at least in the political realm. Post-indigenista literary production about Indians in Mexico reflects mixed results as well. Indigenismo continues to wield influence in esthetics as well as politics.

Given the extent of these social changes and their literary representation, the present study will explore various recent works of indigenous theme in an effort to shed light on how much Mexican cultural production of this kind has changed in the more than quarter century since the ideology of indigenismo began to be seriously questioned. While critics have written a great deal about twentieth century indigenista esthetics in Mexico and finally come to terms with its inherent contradictions, few have explored Indian-related artistic expression since the apparent end of indigenismo, particularly with respect to how it compares in terms of the criticisms leveled at the previous, flawed official ideology and its esthetic manifestations. The methodology employed in this study will be the dialectical approach used by many currently recognized critics to deconstruct indigenista narrative from the previously mentioned period of 1935-1962.³ This methodology will be used to read seven

³ These include Joseph Sommers, Cynthia Steele, Antonio Cornejo Polar, Analisa Taylor and others. Sommers defines this dialectical approach in "Literatura e historia":

recent literary works of Mexican indigenous theme: three novels and four filmic texts. Unlike in most previous studies of this kind, here texts produced by both non-indigenous and indigenous authors/directors will be employed. First, I will demonstrate that in spite of incisive and well known critiques of indigenismo, as well as extraordinary sociopolitical changes in Mexico, the influence of indigenismo continues to appear in artistic production, perhaps reflecting limited success in the political and social realms. This preliminary conclusion is based in part on the following assertion by Analisa Taylor:

Until indigenous peoples come fully into political autonomy and are able to define for themselves what non-mediated cultural production centered on “all things indigenous” will look like, to seize back control of the mechanisms for articulating, on a national and international level, what it means to be indigenous in Mexico, indigenismo, which is a white desire for union, a white desire to “resolve the social split between ‘Indian’ and ‘non-Indian’” will continually reappear in the most uncanny of guises. (167)

The study will point out significant differences between literary works produced by indigenous and non-indigenous authors.

Before specifying the structure of this project, I will begin by establishing some critical background and terminology as well as a set of problematic aspects of indigenismo employed in analyzing these texts. At the most fundamental level, though the term indigenismo is now commonly applied to many different areas of art, politics and the social sciences, its use was restricted before 1970 almost exclusively to the fields of literature and anthropology. In addition to proposing radical changes in the way that indigenista texts should be approached, starting in 1970, critics began to advocate a broadening of what sort of

Nuestro propósito es mirar de cerca algunos de los mismos textos, pero no viéndolos como una literatura que interpreta “lo indio”, sino como obras que a través de la presentación de personajes y grupos indios, revelan la actitud y el sistema de valores del escritor al dirigirse a la sociedad global. Así, el tema puede ser el indio, pero el asunto verdadero en cuanto a su enfoque, a sus categorías de entendimiento, a su visión del significado del tema y su percepción de las posibles soluciones a su problema, es el del México dominante. (10)

artistic production should be considered indigenista, in accordance with the new understanding of this phenomenon of indigenismo as an ideology that permeated society. In the article entitled “Literatura e historia: Las contradicciones ideológicas de la ficción indigenista,” Sommers criticizes some of his predecessors and their approaches:

Hasta ahora los estudios críticos que se han interesado en la ficción indigenista, por ejemplo los de Concha Meléndez, referidos al siglo pasado, o los de César Rodríguez Chicharro en lo que hace al presente, exhiben cierta uniformidad característica. A saber, la tendencia de ser descriptivos, a preocuparse por cuestiones clasificatorias, como la del deslinde entre “indianismo” e “indigenismo”, o aquella del contraste entre una modalidad romántica y otra realista, y, sobre todo, a concentrarse en ver cómo han interpretado los novelistas “el problema del indio”, sea que esto se haga a través de un enfoque en el pasado legendario, la singularidad cultural, la explotación económica o el conflicto político. El supuesto subyacente en todos estos estudios es que el novelista o cuentista, dotado de alguna intuición analítica y objetiva puede, ipso facto, nada más que gracias a una selección de los materiales y/o a una intención benevolente, develar la verdad y afectar al conjunto social. (10)

Sommers labels the novel, the genre critics have used for defining indigenismo, as problematic: “[es un] género privilegiado, asequible principalmente a la burguesía y en buena medida absorto en los gustos, las frustraciones y las aspiraciones de esta clase” (9). Due to these limitations implicit in the genre, he declares that the scope of study of indigenista artistic production should be opened up to include media such as mural painting, poetry and particularly film.

Perhaps the most important distinction to be made with regard to the term indigenismo is that it has always referred only to advocacy and/or expression both produced and intended for consumption by the non-indigenous urban bourgeoisie. The purpose of this national social and artistic project was ostensibly to raise public awareness of the plight of Indians, as well as better the situation of these disadvantaged groups through education, “progress” and integration into the economic life of the nation. A different term, indígena,

was and still is used to denote cultural production by indigenous peoples themselves, as in literatura indígena and video indígena. In the current age of globalization and seemingly increased cultural awareness, however, the term indigenismo is no longer routinely applied to non-indigenous artistic production of indigenous theme. New labels such as “neoindigenista” or “post-indigenista” have been proposed as substitutes to denote cultural production by non-indigenous producers. A change in jargon does not necessarily denote a radical departure in terms of ideology, style or content, however.

There is clearly more indígena artistic production commercially available now than at any other time in Mexican history, no doubt due in part to the attention given to events in Chiapas in the last decade. The focus on literatura indígena for this study will be what distinguishes it from texts produced by non-indigenous authors, as well as the nature of authorship, especially in film production. To facilitate this analysis, critical texts dealing with indigenous production from other countries will be employed.

Literary texts are central to the construction of identity, as John Beverley asserts about early European texts and the present study argues as well. In contrast to many previous indigenista portrayals, here identity is seen as an evolving and not a fixed notion in literatura indígena, as it is Mexican indigenous societies in general. All the indigenous-produced texts in this study incorporate western structural and cultural elements to some degree, creating multiple examples of hybridity. But this occurs via indigenous agency and choice, without regard for consistent indigenista preoccupations with “authenticity,” which is a telling difference. Taylor notes that, “[i]ndigenous movements for autonomy necessarily begin by attempting to seize back control of what it means to be Indian” (88).

However, these efforts at identity construction must also be seen as competing with what was until recently, and perhaps still is in some ways, the longstanding endeavor among non-indigenous, and particularly mestizo, intellectuals and political leaders to establish unique Mexican and Latin American identities as a counterbalance to the hegemony of Europe and the United States at the international level. Mestizaje, or the absorption of indigenous peoples into a society that romanticized a supposedly shared indigenous past while simultaneously marginalizing “backward” modern indigenous peoples, was one of the pillars of this effort. Contemporary indigenous peoples were used as an internal point of contrast to attempt to construct this identity, as Taylor observes:

The dual function of indigenista discourse, though not always obvious to its engineers and practitioners, has been the construction of an academic discipline and an aesthetic repertoire which would provide the emerging national bourgeoisie with an Other against which it could define itself, as well as the legitimating ideology that justifies a project of economic modernization (assimilation of human labor and natural resources) under the guise of cultural redemption. (35)

Notions of identity that have been reinforced for many decades, if not longer, cannot simply disappear, even in light of significant recent events in Mexico. In my study, I will make use of important work that characterizes the artistic manifestations of constructed Mexican national identity as divided into distinct opposing gendered binary elements. Citing Ana María Alonso and borrowing from Edward Said as well, Taylor convincingly asserts that the Hispanic aspect of this construction is associated with “the Universe, the upper body, the semantic, the adult, the civilized, evolved, masculine and rational” while the indigenous portion is linked to “the passive, raw material, Earth, the lower body, the semiotic, embryonic, unformed, primordial, feminine and irrational” (9). Discussion of the persistence of these elements in modern texts is a vital element in my project.

Another related criticism of indigenista literary production, which is applicable to modern texts as well, is that it often lagged behind progressive social currents and therefore undermined them, in spite of what appeared to be overt endorsement. This contradiction is frequently evident in the plot, structure and characters of works, as Cynthia Steele has observed. Sommers maintains that “[l]os autores, en algunos casos, produjeron obras que servían como validación literaria de ideologías dominantes retrógradas, mientras que en otros la literatura, lejos de ser una proyección, constituía un modo de desafío crítico” (“Literatura e historia” 12). Similarly, Sommers has referred to literary indigenismo as “paternalismo narrativo” (“Literatura e historia” 29), and this concept proves relevant in newer works as well.

This study includes an indigenista or at least significantly indigenista text, plus others that cannot be labeled indigenista, but that will be shown to incorporate retrograde associations as well. Explorations of mediation and agency in each work offer insight into the evolution of literary representation in Mexico, even if matters are significantly more complex now than several decades ago. Testimonio, labeled a “transitional” genre by Beverley and Taylor, is particularly relevant in this regard given that non-indigenous mediation is integral to the form, even if Indian input is increased. Taylor makes an observation in her work that demonstrates that this is not a new concern:

[I]ndigenismo is a representational mode (in the aesthetic and political sense) characterized by mediation and filtering, which estranges the subjects being represented from the means of representation, denying them the power of agency. This process lends itself to stereotyping and superficial remedies for deep-rooted social conflicts. (37)

Though non-indigenous mediation has diminished and taken on other forms in contemporary literature of indigenous theme, the concerns Taylor expresses in this passage are still worthy of critical exploration in recent texts.

With these critiques of indigenismo in mind, this study also considers whether traditional western literary modes of expression such as novels and film are appropriate vehicles for defining and expressing indigenous identity and concerns. These genres may preclude certain kinds of expression as well as some audiences. Analisa Taylor again makes a critical observation about indigenismo that must be accounted for, even with respect to the indigena texts included in this project:

Indigenismo is complicated by its status as both a social policy and a representational mode. For the humanities scholar, it generally refers to intellectual, artistic and literary representations of indigenous peoples that hold fast to Eurocentric epistemologies. In other words, the content or raw material may be indigenous (such as indigenous testimonials, myths and legends, material, spiritual and aesthetic practices), but the form or mold into which these representations are made to fit does not radically disrupt Eurocentric forms of academic, literary or political discourse. (92)

I contend that in spite of the fact that all modes of artistic expression are limited, films and videos are more accessible than novels for indigenous audiences. New, hybrid genres such as testimonio have emerged since the ostensible demise of indigenismo, and others have continued to evolve, integrating new techniques and opening up different possibilities for expression. The problems and opportunities inherent in the genres studied will be addressed, though each of the works discussed will also be treated individually, within the context of its own indigenista-referenced limitations and innovations.

The matter of audience will be an important consideration as well, especially in the light of events in Chiapas in the last decade. With indigenista narrative, there is no doubt as to who intended readers were. But with newer texts, this question proves more complex.

This study is organized by genre, with the first three chapters dedicated to novels. To illustrate the changing but still problematic nature of literary portrayals of Indians in Mexico, I examine three relatively recent novels of Mexican indigenous theme: Erased Faces (2001) by Graciela Limón, Memorial del tiempo o Vía de las conversaciones (1987) by Jesús Morales Bermúdez and Cantares de los vientos primerizos/Wila che be ze lhao: Novela zapoteca (1994) by Javier Castellanos Martínez, in descending order in terms of their degree of influence by indigenista ideology and esthetic practices. Erased Faces, a recent novel by a Chicana author who explores her Mexican roots while also portraying conditions in Chiapas prior to and during the Zapatista uprising, will be shown as significantly indigenista, notwithstanding its recent publication date. Memorial del tiempo is a testimonial novel, written by an anthropologist who spent years living in indigenous communities in Chiapas. A “hybrid” text, incorporating testimony provided by multiple indigenous informants, Memorial represents a notable departure from indigenismo, though it still employs certain indigenista elements. Finally, Cantares de los vientos primerizos is a novela indígena, one of the few novels written by an indigenous author to be published in Mexico to date. This text incorporates structural and stylistic elements that distinguish it considerably from indigenista novels, with which it sustains an implied dialogue.

The final chapter is dedicated to film and videos. Two videos by indigenous directors are included, Día de muertos en la tierra de los murciélagos/K'in Santo ta Sotz'leb (2003) by director Pedro Daniel López López of the Proyecto Videoastas Indígenas de la Frontera Sur and Zapata's Garden (2002) by seven filmmakers from the Chiapas Media Project. Also read are two feature films by non-indigenous directors: Japón (2002) by Carlos Reygadas and Men with Guns/Hombres armados (1997) by director John Sayles. Though differences are

not as marked between filmic texts as with the novels, there are significant distinctions between the indigenous and non-indigenous produced texts, as well as indigenista influence in the latter.

My readings of these texts are not meant to evaluate their literary merit or to exclude the wide array of possibilities for different readings. I employ previous critiques of indigenismo and focus on aspects of the works that relate to portrayals of Indians, and my observations should be taken in that context alone. My intention is to shed light on the current state of subaltern literary representation and production in Mexico, demonstrate the need for further change in the empirical world and reveal valuable points of comparison between the perspective of Indian and non-Indian producers of culture. In no way is praise or criticism in this regard meant to imply validation or indictment of the works as a whole.

CHAPTER 2

INDIGENISMO IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY: ERASED FACES (2001)

Erased Faces is an unusual novel in that it is “transnational,” meaning that it includes characters and scenes from the United States and Mexico (López Calvo 65; “Zapatistas, Literature, and the Chicano Experience”). The novel features three main characters: Adriana Mora, a Chicana, Juana Galván, an indigenous woman and Orlando Flores, an indigenous man, all of whom end up in a Zapatista rebel camp in the Lacandón jungle and then participate in the famous uprising, which is the central narrative in the work. Multiple lengthy flashbacks interrupt the main story to reveal the past of these three characters.

Some might balk that a novel written in English by a foreigner, even one of Mexican descent, does not belong in a discussion of Mexican post-indigenismo, as in this chapter. However, Bruno Traven, a twentieth-century indigenista author who wrote in English, German and Spanish, represents a clear precedent for inclusion of Limón on this count. Like Limón, Traven wrote about Mexican Indians and his novels were translated into Spanish and read fairly widely in Mexico and beyond. His works, which include Bridge in the Jungle/Puente en la selva, La rebelión de los colgados/The Rebellion of the Hanged, Treasure of the Sierra Madre and The Carreta/La carreta are included in several well known studies about indigenismo and receive equal consideration with those of his Mexican peers, precisely because they share many of the same characteristics as other indigenista novels from the

same period.⁴ Moreover, indigenous groups are just as much “others” to non-Indian Mexican authors as they are to those from other countries, where they often inspire the same curiosity and temptation to “defend” or represent their cause to a non-Indian reading public. However, unlike the other two novelists read in this chapter, the fact that Limón writes in English denotes that her intended audience is primarily people from the United States, particularly those attracted to the publicity generated by the Zapatista rebellion, which elevated Mexican indigenous struggles for autonomy from a national to an international stage.

Graciela Limón’s credentials are also impressive in their own right. Not only is she a noted Chicana novelist, academic and literary scholar, but her agenda in Erased Faces is ambitious, going beyond the indigenista aspect on which I will concentrate here. Limón establishes parallels between the marginalized position of indigenous peoples in Mexico and Chicanos in the United States, focusing particularly on the difficult situation of women from both groups. In fact, she includes three distinct struggles against patriarchy and repression in the novel – indigenous, feminist and homosexual – under the umbrella of unity and resistance to patriarchy.

Erased Faces has received significant praise from critics of Chicano literature, such as Ignacio López Calvo, who credits the work with exemplifying the effects of Zapatismo in broadening the horizons of Chicana/o leadership and cultural production (64). But López Calvo also recognizes Limón’s indigenista intention in the text as well, which is to defend and vindicate indigenous peoples in Chiapas: “She presents the intentio operis as an expression of support for Zapatismo and an earnest denunciation of the oppression of indigenous people in Southern Mexico” (73). This statement places Erased Faces clearly

⁴ Both César Rodríguez Chicharro and Lancelot Cowie include several of Traven’s works in their commentaries.

within the tradition of twentieth-century Mexican indigenista fiction, which will be my primary focus here. I will detail elements of now discredited indigenista narrative that are evident in Erased Faces, which ultimately makes the work predetermined to repeat the genre's pitfalls.

Though readers of Erased Faces will quickly recognize features of the style and content characteristic of indigenista narrative, particularly in one of its main subplots, let me first describe some ways in which the novel introduces innovative features that lend a more contemporary feel to portrayals of indigenous and other characters when compared to previous literature about Mexican Indians. For instance, a lesbian relationship develops between two of the main characters, which is clearly a departure from previous indigenista fiction and makes the novel topical in terms of other current subaltern rights struggles. It also contributes to a more realistic and nuanced reading of the historical situation depicted. Additionally, like Rosario Castellanos, a feminist who introduces the first complex female Indian characters in indigenista novels in the 1950s and 60s, Limón successfully integrates contemporary women's rights issues with the indigenous autonomy movement in Mexico. Two of the three principal characters in Erased Faces are women: Adriana Mora is from a Chicana/African American background from Los Angeles and Juana Galván is an indigenous Tzeltal. Written four decades later than Castellanos' novels, Limón's portrayal of women's roles is more progressive, as evidenced by the fact that Juana assumes an important leadership role in the Zapatista movement. With the possible exception of the protagonist Catalina Díaz Puiljá in Castellanos' Oficio de tinieblas (1962), who assumes a unique quasi-mythical religious leadership role based on her powers of prophecy, women in previous indigenista fiction most often face the double burden of submission to non-indigenous

Mexicans as well as to their own fathers and husbands at home. Even a strong and complex character like Catalina repeatedly worries about overstepping limits in her relationship with her forward thinking husband in Oficio de tinieblas. However, in a distinct departure for an indigenista novel, in Erased Faces Juana violently and justifiably rebels against both her husband and her father. Juana even symbolically violates her husband in the same way he repeatedly does to her in the novel, searing his buttocks with a burning stick before she finally escapes for good. At last independent, she eventually becomes a leader in the Zapatista organization, in charge of indigenous men. The fact that Juana and other women occupy roles of authority in the novel is a reflection of real world advances fought for by indigenous women. This is particularly evident in the Zapatista movement in Chiapas. Political scientist Kathleen Bruhn asserts that women occupy leadership roles and make up approximately one third of the total membership in the Zapatista organization (“Zapatistas, Literature, and the Chicano Experience”). Another significant precedent is the importance of roles played by women in Central American revolutions in previous decades, as well as fiction related to those events. Yet the strong feminist posture of the novel is noteworthy, given that in most previous indigenista fiction women are virtually always subjected to an inescapable “double subalternity.”

Limón also includes some revisionist history in Erased Faces, like Rosario Castellanos and the other post-indigenista authors discussed in chapters two and three of this study, all of whom recognize that the official version of many Mexican historical events is biased and incomplete from an indigenous perspective. Well known historical figures and defenders of indigenous rights Bartolomé de las Casas, María de la Candelaria, Archbishop

Samuel Ruiz, Subcommander Marcos⁵ materialize briefly at different points in the novel via narrations and visions. Fictitious female Indian characters appear as important behind the scenes actors in history as well. These reinterpretations or reenactments of historical facts question “official” versions of history as have traditionally been conveyed by the canonical non-indigenous males, and Limón should be praised for attempting to subvert them. However, these episodes in the novel are brief and seem tangential, contributing little to developing the main theme.

The main character of Erased Faces, Adriana Mora, is a Chicana photographer from East Los Angeles. At the age of twenty four Adriana goes to Mexico in search of her roots, as well as some kind of purpose in life after experiencing a traumatic childhood in which she witnesses the murder/suicide of her mother and father and then bounces from one difficult foster family situation to another. She ends up in a village in the Lacandon jungle, where Juana Galván, her future lover, asks her to document the Zapatista uprising with her camera for the outside world to see. Limón’s insertion of an uncommon complex, multiracial foreigner as her main character to “internationalize” the indigenista novel once again reflects real life actions on the part of the Zapatistas, since it is well known that they called international attention to their conflict with the Mexican government, especially via the internet. However, again in a reflection of authentic events, the fact that a non-indigenous spokesperson is to represent indigenous peoples in fact undermines the declared purpose of the novel, which is to empower and give voice to indigenous groups. In fact, this

⁵ Bartolomé de las Casas was a sixteenth century priest and defender of indigenous rights before the Spanish court. He is known as the “father of indigenismo.” María de la Candelaria was the young, female symbolic leader of a major indigenous uprising against the Spanish crown in Chiapas in 1712. Samuel Ruiz, now retired, was an advocate for indigenous rights while serving as Catholic Bishop of San Cristóbal, Chiapas from 1959-1999. Subcommander Marcos is a mestizo spokesperson and an internationally recognized participant in the Zapatista uprising that began in 1994.

arrangement mirrors one of the primary flaws of indigenismo, which is that when outsiders speak for indigenous people, it undermines efforts to foment self-expression and reinforces paternalism. Literacy, denoting privilege and power differences between indigenous and non-indigenous world, is a frequent trope in indigenista fiction, and Erased Faces holds true to this standard. Juana tells Adriana, “[w]e are about to embark on a plan for which we’ve been preparing for many years, one that will return to us what was snatched away long ago... All of our actions should be chronicled in writing as well as images for the world to see. You can do that for us” (39). The insinuation is that indigenous groups are not able to manage this for themselves, even at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The more progressive possibility of an internal “organic intellectual” to fill or at least complement this role, as is the case in other recent works of indigenous theme, as we shall see later in this chapter, is not broached here. In fact, the very concept of written communication is portrayed as foreign to Juana, when as a child she observes the scribes in San Cristóbal: “[s]he had envied those men because they could capture on paper what a person uttered with his lips. It was a mystery to her how signs and symbols scribbled on paper could be transformed into words that could be spoken and understood” (85). This marked difference in literacy undercuts the declared purpose of denouncing paternalism that Limón foregrounds in her work. The final chapter of the book is entitled “[s]he asked me to be the lips through which their silenced voices will speak” and it contains Adriana’s decision to “speak to others about la gente in Lacandona, about the atrocities in Acteal and in all the other places of misery” (256). Limón likely intended Adriana’s role in Erased Faces to intimate qualities of testimonio, but the ultimate effect is to emphasize indigenous reliance on outsiders. While the indigenous characters in the novel are proactive in military and other spheres, they depend on Adriana for esthetic and

verbal representations of their movement. Like the author Graciela Limón herself, Adriana, the skilled, literate, first world Chicana, assumes the role of representing these oppressed people for the outside world to increase the chances that they will be understood and liberated. Limón tries to soften this position by attempting to establish parallels to Adriana's marginalization during her difficult childhood in statements such as, "she was convinced that she understood their misery because it reminded her of something inside of her" (39-40). The overall effect, however, is of reinscribing a paternalistic aspect of indigenista fiction.

The portrayal of Adriana and Juana, the two main female characters, is particularly revealing of certain anachronistic indigenista attributes in the novel. The Chicana, Adriana, is by far the more developed character of the two. Adriana's background, while tragic, is complex. She is of mixed ethnicity and does not seem to belong anywhere exactly. She carries a psychological burden of guilt and confusion because of her parents' death. She struggles with her identity on multiple levels: ethnically, professionally, sexually and linguistically. Adriana's search for self can in fact be viewed as a metaphor for the larger Chicana/o community's explorations of roots and identity, based on what López-Calvo terms the movement's "fetishization of Aztec heritage" (68).⁶ Not surprisingly, since the author is Chicana and can draw on personal experiences, Adriana's viewpoint dominates in the novel and she is a much more sophisticated and well developed character than Juana. The portrayal of Juana is more one-dimensional, no doubt because Limón has significantly less direct experience with indigenous people and is therefore inadvertently drawn to

⁶ Though it is not my focus here, this metaphor suggests parallels to Cynthia Steele's observation that the nineteenth century Mexican indianista novel is "un intento de la clase criolla mexicana por legitimarse frente a España, creando una herencia clásica comparable a la de Grecia y Roma" (Narrativa indigenista 20).

oversimplifications and stereotypes to fill in gaps.⁷ Readers become acquainted with Juana in large part through the main omniscient narration, which is centered on Adriana, and only secondarily via subplots in flashbacks that flesh out Juana's experiences before she meets Adriana. Though Juana is ostensibly a kind of teacher for Adriana and helps her find direction in life, a close reading of the text, especially as regards Juana, reveals telling differences in the treatment each receives.

Unlike Adriana, Juana seems secure and not at all conflicted about her decisions, with the possible exception of entering into a homosexual relationship. There are lengthy descriptions of Adriana's thought processes, while Juana's are usually summed up in just a few words. This fact is sometimes linked to the difference in their education and literacy. For example, when Adriana first arrives at the rebel camp and begins to understand the seriousness of their undertaking, she writes in her journal:

She noted the impact that Juana was having on her and the confusion that was gripping her, as well as the unaccountable joy she was experiencing. With equal detail, she noted her fears and her admiration for the fierce determination she had detected in the insurgents. When she finished, Adriana reread her notes and absentmindedly mouthed a faint yes.

She sat at the rickety table for a while, allowing her thoughts to focus on the insurgents. Like vivid photographs, each face was etched in her mind, and she again felt apprehensive, understanding the magnitude of their mission. Again, Adriana wondered if she had the courage to be part of it. (52)

But when Juana makes the unprecedented decision to openly rebel against her abusive husband and then later to confront her stoic and unyielding father, there is no hesitation. Nothing holds her back. Though this difference is probably unintended on the part of Limón, Juana's life is simpler and her situations clear cut, manifesting little internal debate or dialogue for readers. When Juana leaves her husband for the first time, for instance, "[s]he

⁷ In the dedication section of the novel, Limón indicates that she spent some months traveling in Chiapas to conduct research, but nowhere does she claim to have prolonged or intimate firsthand knowledge of indigenous communities like that of the authors of the other two novels in this chapter.

stayed there until her thoughts cleared, until she could think of what to do next. One thought dominated the others: She had to leave Cruz Ochoa. She had to separate her life from his” (72). While Adriana is frequently unsure of herself, Juana displays single-minded determination and instinct. She always seems to know just what to do, even under the most difficult circumstances.

Juana’s early life, before she joins the rebels, is also tragic. But in contrast with Adriana, her experiences are presented in stark black and white terms, like those of many Indian characters from earlier examples of twentieth century indigenista fiction. Though undoubtedly the author’s intent is to lodge a strong and emotionally charged protest of the treatment of women in indigenous societies, the portrayal of Juana’s life before joining the rebels frequently slips into oversimplification and hyperbole. Juana’s youth is marked by poverty, and as we are reminded repeatedly, even more notably by her unfair treatment by men, starting with the injustice of being sold into marriage by her father for the price of a mule. Juana’s husband Cruz Ochoa is stoic and cruel, to the point of being inhuman. The fact that he is a Lacandón Indian while she is Tzeltal makes their rare verbal exchanges brief, staccato jabs directed at Juana in Spanish. The most common are “¡Quítese los calzones!” and “¡Abra las piernas!,” as if directed at an animal or slave. Ochoa rapes and severely beats her on multiple occasions. And if Juana’s situation were not bad enough, we read that her sisters suffer similar misfortunes:

One by one, they, too, had been married by her father and at an age even younger than hers. She saw them as they grew thin and sickly with each pregnancy. She saw them losing their teeth after being battered by drunken husbands. She saw them become sullen women, worn out before their time. (61)

Limón also intimates that Juana's experiences are not unique to her family or ethnic group, that in fact this fate is universal among Indian women in Chiapas, which is a stereotype:

Her isolation deepened as she became obsessed by the memory of her father bartering her. She tried to understand why this feeling gnawed at her. After all, it was a tradition; she was not the only girl to be exchanged. It had happened to her mother, to her sisters, to all the women she knew. (104; my emphasis)

This exceedingly bleak portrayal, intended to sum up the plight of all indigenous women, coupled with the previously noted lack of psychological depth given her character, almost reduces Juana to a "type," which by extension oversimplifies and homogenizes indigenous women's experiences as a whole in the work. In fact, Limón's portrayal of misogyny overall in Erased Faces represents a strong indictment of indigenous communities in Mexico, possibly revealing the author's limited outsider's perspective more than actual conditions. Limón's tone and choice of words in talking about Erased Faces at a University of California at Santa Barbara symposium reinforce my interpretation of her position on the subject: "Juana is a terrible victim of patriarchal oppression" ("Zapatistas").

Another problematic aspect with the indigenous character Juana is the repeated association of negative connotations with her throughout the novel. Though these are undoubtedly unconscious choices made by the author, they are revealing in that they undermine her intention to defend indigenous people in the book in the very same way that Joseph Sommers, Cynthia Steele and Analisa Taylor have shown with regard to other Mexican indigenista texts. At the most superficial level, while Adriana is described as tall and lanky, Juana is repeatedly referred to as "small," even on the book jacket: "Adriana is immediately attracted to the small indigenous woman and her cause..." Early in the novel, when Adriana first meets Juana, "[she] realized that she was much taller than the woman

standing in front of her. She saw that Juana was diminutive, smaller yet than the other women of the tribe” (35). There are other references to Juana’s short stature as well. But more significant is the repeated close association made between Juana and the earth, as well as things physical, something identified by Analisa Taylor in indigenista texts as being associated with the feminine, passive, and therefore indigenous, set of binary elements from twentieth-century constructed Mexican identity:

This vision of Mexican identity as a gendered binary play of indigenous and Hispanic elements is not unique to Paz; it echoes the sentiments of José Vasconcelos, the architect of Mexico’s post-revolutionary public education system and author of the influential essay La raza cósmica, who trumpeted that: “We are Indian, blood and soil: the language and civilization are Spanish.” For both Vasconcelos and Paz “lo indígena” is equated with the Earth, the lower body, the semiotic, embryonic, unformed, primordial, feminine and irrational; modern Mexico (for both thinkers, the domain with which “we”, “ourselves”, are to identify) is equated with the Universe, the upper body, the semantic, the adult, the civilized, evolved, masculine and rational. (9)

While Adriana is identified closely with the “masculine” or non-indigenous set of elements in this primitive/modern binary equation, Juana is constantly described as touching or lying on the ground or “earthen floor” (69; 74), while walking, sleeping, daydreaming or even when being raped by Cruz Ochoa. In a literal manifestation of romantic notions about indigenous peoples and harmony with nature, Juana is often described as directly “in contact” with the earth: “Her huaraches appeared to be part of the earth, curving around stones, molding themselves into the soft soil as she moved” (44); “Cruz nudged Juana toward the thickest part of the growth, forced her down to the ground, onto her knees, out of sight” (66); “Her feet were now planted on soil that was gray; it had no color” (67). After Ochoa attacks her on one occasion, Juana “leaped to her feet and ran, slipping over the muddy banks of the river, regaining her balance by clawing into the soil with her fingers” (72); “Juana awakened

to find that she was lying in mud” (72). Juana even smells like earth in the novel:

“[Adriana’s] nostrils picked up the other woman’s scent, a smoky fragrance mixed with the aroma of damp earth” (45). After Juana dies, Adriana and others dig her grave under a tree, “through the rugged, rocky soil” (243). Finally, “Juana’s body was lowered slowly into the ground until it rested on the bottom... The sound of dirt and rocks striking Juana’s body crept into Adriana’s ears” (244). There is an undeniable parallel between Juana and the earth in Erased Faces.

Comparisons of Juana to animals or other elements of nature are constant as well. Note the verbs usually reserved for animals used to describe Juana’s thinking: “Her thoughts once again leaped over the ceiba trees, scurried through palm fronds, hovered over rivers and ravines” (68; my emphasis). Later, “more lightning flashed, filling the palapa with a light charged with violence, made more threatening by the explosion of thunder that followed almost immediately. Juana felt the earth under her shift; it too was filled with fear” (70). After a rainstorm and prior to the previously mentioned beating, Juana is kneeling, washing clothes in the river that is “swollen, dragging tree trunks and dead animals down its course” (71). Immediately after Ochoa assaults her, Juana takes off what is left of her clothes and floats down the river herself, like the previously cited dead animals and debris, naked, badly beaten, in an initial impulse to commit suicide (73). There are many other obvious parallels made between Juana and animals as well. For example: “She understood that her liberation had been a false one, that it had been a trap that had just slammed shut, catching her inside” (74); “She was also afraid, and she recognized the feeling. It was what she felt after a torrential downpour, when the jungle and its animals fell so silent that she filled with apprehension” (107).

These repeated associations between indigenous women and animals are frequently direct, and not limited to just Juana. Just before Cruz Ochoa rapes her for the first time, Juana “passed butcher stalls where chunks of raw beef and pork were hung out on giant hooks. She looked disgusted at the pieces of meat, blackened with flies and dirt. The smell disgusted her, making her nauseous” (65). Later, Juana’s “thoughts filled with images of women her age who toiled on mountainsides, doing the work of mules and oxen” (84). Even if Limón’s characterization of widespread mistreatment of indigenous women is true or partly true, the fact that she associates them so closely with animals in the text seems counterproductive in much the same way as now discredited representations of Indians in indigenista texts. Though such descriptions inspire sympathy in readers, far from being empowering characterizations, they discount these women’s intelligence and resourcefulness. A more contemporary literary technique of some kind could possibly accomplish the former without incurring in the latter.

Instances of passivity by Juana also serve to weaken the novel’s ostensible purpose of affirming support for indigenous autonomy and to a lesser degree, even its feminist liberation messages, as well. Though she has excellent, almost animal-like determination once she makes a decision, Juana does not seem capable of much proactive or original thinking. The featured male character, Orlando Flores provides the impetus for important change in her life on at least two important occasions: when she decides to leave her husband for good and before she decides to become romantically involved with Adriana. Though in one sense he opens Juana’s eyes, the fact that he provides life-altering answers for her at these junctures paints him as a problem solver and Juana a passive follower. Juana is grinding corn when the rebel organizer Orlando Flores comes into her village and announces loudly to all the

women, “[a]re you not tired of being told whom to marry and when to do it? Would you not want to choose your own partner? Would you not want to say when you are to have children, and how many?” (79). Here a man leads efforts to gain greater freedom and rights for women, which again seems contradictory in terms of empowerment. Juana accepts Flores’ invitation and the ideas that accompany it, instead of fighting for them or discovering the rebels on her own, which might reflect a more assertive stance. Orlando Flores, and not a female character, also provides Juana with the idea that women can leave their husbands behind and live independently, as many in the insurgent camp have. She responds as if this was something she had never considered before: “Juana’s eyes widened as she wondered if she had heard Orlando’s words correctly” (80). Finally, while recounting his experiences on the Mayorga hacienda, Flores introduces Juana to the notion that two women can engage in a sexual relationship. “Juana sucked in a deep breath, feeling frightened without fully understanding why. She, herself, had never experienced love, much less had she ever imagined that a woman could have such feelings for another woman. Hearing and knowing this made her heart pound” (100). Given Juana’s symbolic importance in the novel and the recentness of the actions described, her dependence on a male character seems counterproductive overall to the message of resistance in the face of paternalism.

There is also a kind of sexual tension in the relationship between Orlando and Juana, and Orlando is clearly the dominant figure of the two: “Orlando’s face drooped, and Juana moved one step away from him without taking her eyes off of him. As she did this, however, he followed her, coming even closer to her than he was before she had moved. When he spoke, his voice was husky” (81). Juana’s deference to Orlando Flores furthers her association with the passive, indigenous side of the binary pattern of the novel.

Finally, the portrayal of Juana's life before and after she joins the rebels lacks nuance. As stated previously, Juana's life before she decides to join the Indian rebels in the jungle is miserable, but afterward, things suddenly become uniformly positive for her. She becomes part of a utopian community where everyone shares the workload and supports the other members, and where hard work and ability are the only requirements for obtaining increased responsibility and power, as Juana indeed does. She finally rids herself of Cruz Ochoa forever when surprised by his sudden appearance once more. Juana courageously manages to get her pistol and defend herself, threatening to kill Ochoa if he ever comes back and bothers her again. In the rebel community, Juana's life swings to the extreme opposite: she is judged only as an individual, not as a woman, and no interpersonal or ethnic tension at all are evident in these surroundings.

The contrast between the two main female characters in Erased Faces reflects a dualistic conception of Indians and non-Indians in the novel. The first world Chicana Adriana is associated with literacy, technology (mainly via her camera,) intelligence, psychological complexity and internal dialogue, while the indigenous Chiapan Juana is linked to soil, nature, animals, and raw instinct.

The relationship between Adriana and Juana also reveals another anachronism in the novel. The fact that their love affair is problematic and ultimately tragic ties the work to early indigenista and even romantic novels from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In a commentary on Heriberto Frías' Tomochic (1893) that can be applied to Erased Faces, Joseph Sommers writes:

Igualmente romántico es todo el episodio amoroso, artificialmente introducido. Con su melodramático defecto moral inherente, basado en un tabú social (Julia estaba viviendo incestuosamente con su tío, el santo, cuando Miguel se enamora de ella), la sugestión del "pecado original" sólo puede

presagiar inexorablemente un desenlace sentimental trágico. (“Literatura e historia” 17)

While the details and social circumstances are different in Erased Faces, the parallels are apparent. Additionally, César Rodríguez Chicharro characterizes pre-indigenista romantic novels about Mexican Indians as being of “emoción exotista” and “los amores, más o menos contrariados por cuestiones de religión y Estado” (265).

Also pertinent is the fact that in many previous indigenista novels, close relations between indigenous and non-indigenous characters serve as a foundational trope advocating mestizaje, progress and assimilation. The parallels between the love affair in Erased Faces and Cynthia Steele’s observation about another close inter-ethnic relationship in a well-known indigenista novel are noteworthy: “De conformidad con todo el indigenismo mexicano del siglo XX, Canek da por sentado que lo deseable es el mestizaje, que representa como la unión de la tierra y el viento, de la emoción y la razón, de la pasividad y la actividad” (Narrativa indigenista 76). Though this approach has been exposed and discredited, traces of it appear in modified form in Erased Faces. Adriana and Juana’s love affair argues metaphorically not for mestizaje, but rather for an alliance between two marginalized groups: Indians and Chicanos. This presents seemingly logical and positive possibilities on the surface, but given the negative associations with Juana, Indians would maintain their traditional role of passive participants in the arrangement, while the more educated outsiders would have the active, traditionally masculine role. However, the fact that Juana dies near the end of the novel seems to suggest that this alliance is not feasible after all.

The story of Orlando Flores/Quintín Osuna, told at length via a flashback that makes up roughly the middle third of the novel, seems as if taken directly out of an early indigenista text. This melodramatic story begins with the young and innocent hacienda servant Quintín

being sent away to labor under totally inhuman conditions as a boyero, or jungle mahogany harvester, for daring to cross race and class lines by befriending the son of the patrón. When Quintín flees into the jungle after murdering the cruel boyero overseer in response to multiple atrocities committed by the latter, the patrón orders the execution of his parents as retribution. Years later, Quintín, now Orlando Flores, returns to exact revenge by drowning Rufino Mayorga, the son and now patrón himself, in the same way that his parents had been killed, in the jungle mud. The cycle of revenge killings ends with the execution of Quintín/Orlando by a military firing squad not long after the beginning of the Zapatista uprising.

Most of the characters in this large section of the novel are what Analisa Taylor refers to as indigenista “stock characters,” which is to say flat types that adhere to indigenista patterns. These characters represent sectors of Mexican society that play a role in the author’s larger story of the oppression of indigenous groups. Even critics who praise Erased Faces, like López-Calvo, recognize that some of Limón’s characters are types: “Ultimately, Orlando’s affliction comes to represent that of all indigenous peoples in the Americas” (67). This characteristic extends well beyond Orlando/Quintín, however. Don Absolón Mayorga is the ruthless and crafty ultraconservative hacienda owner who publicly beats his own sister for engaging in a lesbian love affair and then later contributes to the distancing or demise of his three oldest sons in favor of the youngest, Rufino, whom he perceives as being most able and most similar to himself. Rufino begins life as an innocent boy but is manipulated by his father until he becomes an arrogant and malicious hacendado himself. The overseer, identified only as El Brujo, is horrifyingly ugly and cruel, with a harelip, bat eyes and magical powers that enable him to prevent the escape of any of his enslaved boyero charges,

many of whom end up drowned in the mud because they are dispensable, less important than the oxen that drag the tree trunks from the jungle to the river.

Type characters appear outside this episode in Erased Faces as well. Just a few pages into the work, readers meet the wise and mysterious Lacandón shaman, Chan K'in, who spends his time sitting cross-legged under a ceiba tree and whose main preoccupations are reincarnation and Adriana's dreams. Toothless and good humored, this shaman character closely resembles Carlos Castaneda's Don Juan. Toward the end of the book, at the massacres of Ocosingo and Acteal, Lieutenant Palomón Cisneros represents the Mexican army. Deceitful, brutal and efficient, Cisneros kills Juana and many other innocent victims.

As with previous indigenista fiction, these characters are marked by exaggeration and oversimplification. Absolón Mayorga is not just cruel, but extremely cruel. El Brujo is exceedingly ugly and inhuman. Juana's plight is meant to inspire tremendous compassion. Chan K'in is exceptionally wise, reserved and mystical. Orlando Flores' revenge is justified beyond all doubt. All of the male characters except Orlando Flores and Chan K'in are strident misogynists. Indians are victimized repeatedly and in multiple ways by the larger society. In fact, the binary nature of Erased Faces can be boiled down to the most basic human duality: like many of her predecessors, Limón largely portrays the struggle for indigenous rights as one of good versus evil, and she sees herself as a benevolent defender of Indians in this novel. In the previously mentioned symposium, the author offered fairly direct insight into her stance, belying her initial assertion:

Professor McCracken has talked about the villains. And as a writer, and even a professor of literature, I am so scared of stereotypes. On the other hand, how does one portray evil? And then, even a further question, how does someone like Rufino Mayorga get to be what he gets? Where do we start, you know? What is the turning point, for goodness' sake? We start out as children,

beautiful in every way, and then what makes us different? These are the questions I dealt with. (“Zapatistas”)

While well intentioned, this approach repeats many now discredited aspects of indigenismo and undermines the author’s stated aims, proving that indigenista influence continues in twenty-first century texts and society.

Erased Faces also contains stereotypes that contribute to a portrayal of indigenous characters as pre-modern, or in nineteenth century romantic period jargon, uncivilized. Chan K’in and other characters’ obsession with dreams and reincarnation suggest that indigenous people are superstitious and shamanistic. Catholicism is presented as an ostensibly benign but very much external influence, seen only through the brief appearances of Bartolomé de Las Casas and Samuel Ruiz. The Zapatista camp’s total isolation in the jungle hints at another indigenista stereotype, that indigenous communities have little contact with the “outside world” and their cultures are largely unchanged since pre-Hispanic times. Multiple references to illiteracy also contribute to an overall picture of primitivism. In the “Praise for Erased Faces” section on the book jacket, an author/critic phrases her reaction very much in binary romantic terms (civilización vs. barbarie): “Graciela Limón tells the stories of these unforgettable characters with skill and courage, deftly blending their sensuous, even mystical, interior lives with political, historical, and economic realities in the tradition of the best-loved writers of Latin and North America” (my emphasis.) Note the opposition established between “mystical” Indians and exterior “realities.”

Other indigenista stereotypes present in Erased Faces are Indian stoicism and invisibility. Though Limón’s main indigenous characters are not impassive, other Indians in the novel are, particularly those outside the rebel camp. This fact makes the protagonists and the Zapatistas exceptions to the unvoiced norm. When Juana attends her first meeting after

joining the rebels, for instance, she is shocked by the amount of conversation and debate that takes place: “These words unleashed a torrent of remarks and questions that pelted Orlando from different directions. Juana had never witnessed such outspoken men. Her experiences had taught her that silence was usually her people’s response” (90). Juana’s father is very much a stoic figure. When Juana returns to see him for the last time, “Juana waited, listening for a response, but all was silent in the hut... A long time passed before he began to murmur” (108). Analisa Taylor’s comments on a passage by Octavio Paz are helpful in understanding Indian silence and invisibility as frequent stereotypes in indigenismo:

El indio se funde con el paisaje, se confunde con la barda blanca en que se apoya por la tarde, con la tierra oscura en que se tiende a mediodía, con el silencio que lo rodea. Se disimula tanto su humana singularidad, que acaba por abolirla; y se vuelve piedra, pirú, muro, silencio: espacio. (El laberinto de la soledad 43-44)

This painterly image of “the Indian” as a stoic --indeed stonelike-- figure in Octavio Paz’s well-known social-psychological portrait of modern Mexico, El laberinto de la soledad (1950), exemplifies an indigenista literary sensibility: because indigenous peoples speak languages that are incomprehensible to the author, they are bestowed with an eloquent silence; because their values and practices are unfathomable to him, they are branded as hermetic and motionless, conspicuous by virtue of their near invisibility. The somber elegance of this image naturalizes a way of perceiving in which one does not have to know any “Indians” to know precisely what “Indianness” is all about. (97)

As its very title indicates, invisibility and voicelessness are central to the portrayal of Indians in Erased Faces, at least prior to and outside the uprising. The book jacket states that, “Graciela Limón in Erased Faces, creates a rich fabric that restores an identity to those rendered invisible, or whose faces were erased by years of oppression.” Chan K’in asserts of indigenous people:

We used to be like stones, like plants along the road. We had no word, no face, no name, no tomorrow. We did not exist. But now we have vision; we know the road on which we are to embark, and we invite you to come and

seek, to find yourself, and to find us. We are you, and you are us, and through you the world will come to know the truth. (41)

Notice once again that Graciela Limón and her character Adriana, both outsiders, provide the means for Indians to overcome this invisibility.

Indigenista emotional appeals and manifestations appear frequently in Erased Faces as well. Female indigenous characters in particular are portrayed as innocent victims, representative of others like them, who deserve readers' unquestioning sympathy and often outright pity. The jacket reads, "Limón expertly drafts images of the racism, exploitation, and class division that plague the region and the lengths that the impoverished indigenous people take to break the yoke of universal oppression that rests heavy on their shoulders." An example from the text itself is when Juana has a vision of an Indian woman who helped build the church in San Cristóbal, based on a story her mother often told. At the end, "[t]he woman's stooped, haggard silhouette suddenly melted into the vaporous air, vanishing from Juana's eyes, which had become bright with tears of pity and admiration for that woman" (59). This seems quite different from the position of the Zapatista movement that plays a central role in the novel. As I will point out in reference to a video text later in this study, the Zapatistas seem to show little inclination to feel sorry for themselves or to dwell too long on events from the last 500 years, instead choosing to focus on the present and the future. As Joseph Sommers astutely signals, indigenista fiction actually reveals more about the author's attitudes and ideas than about his or her indigenous subjects. This seems true in Erased Faces as well. Curiosity, sympathy, pity and perhaps some unconscious guilt may be what Graciela Limón felt during her research trip to Chiapas in June of 1999.

In spite of my long list of criticisms, however, Erased Faces does depart from previous indigenista literary practices in one significant way: it incorporates humor. Most

previous indigenista fiction paints an incomplete picture of indigenous people and communities as human by maintaining a virtually constant ambience of seriousness and gravity around Indians. Limón demonstrates, however, that poor and oppressed people are quite capable of laughter. Humor in fact is often even more important for marginalized groups as a form of refuge, as we shall see in a pattern confirmed by the other two novels in this study as well. There are two effective humorous scenes involving indigenous characters in Erased Faces. First, as a child, Juana secretly ties her mother's shawl to her bundle on the way to the market, making her look ridiculous as she tries to get up (56) and later Quintín Osuna parodies the patrón for the other workers, farting in the process (114-15). These are brief but effective episodes that serve to break up the tension in the text and also signal a key distinction between indigenista and post-indigenista texts.

Multiple elements in Graciela Limón's Erased Faces prove that indigenismo continues to appear in literary texts, even as recently as 2001. There is still a temptation for non-indigenous authors to portray Indian characters as passive, stoic victims. Just as with twentieth-century indigenista authors, Limón's intentions with respect to indigenous rights are undoubtedly positive, yet the text ultimately accomplishes the opposite effect of what is proposed in this respect. Readings of testimonio and texts directly authored by indigenous people in subsequent sections will reveal that even though indigenismo continues to exert influence in literature, significant departures are also evident.

CHAPTER 3

NOVELA TESTIMONIAL: MEMORIAL DEL TIEMPO O VÍA DE LAS CONVERSACIONES (1987)

Jesús Morales Bermúdez' Memorial del tiempo o Vía de las conversaciones is a novelistic variant of the testimonio genre, based on the author's interaction with indigenous informants in Chiapas. Starting in 1973, Morales spent four years with the Ch'ol people and two with the Tzeltales. Unlike most other examples of testimonio, Memorial is not based on the story of one indigenous informant, but rather on that of multiple individuals with whom the author had contact while living in their community. Morales maintains that the events in the novel are real and that the characters are not fictitious, though their names are changed and they represent an amalgamation of multiple individuals in real life:

El narrador Diego Alfaro Tigre-Pescado, por ejemplo, es la síntesis de muchos ancianos de los cuatro municipios pero también es la imagen fiel de don Diego Álvarez Parceró, indígena de la Colonia del Ceibal. Diego es conversador, caminante, sanmiguelero, bebedor, panadero, tejedor de redes, musiquero y muchos más. (11-12)

As its title suggests, Memorial is based on recollections of conversations that the author had with Diego and others. The work is narrated in the first person, mostly by the main character Diego. The voices of other indigenous characters appear as well, in frequently long tangential narratives from conversations with other Indians that Diego relates as the story unfolds.

Through the intervention of these additional voices, the novel includes "testimony" from three different generations who witness events starting with the 1910 Mexican Revolution up through the Indigenous rights congresses of the 1970s and 80s. The critic Rubén Medina

notes that this makes the testimonial aspect of the work both more comprehensive and collective, while at the same time providing literary sophistication by interrupting the linear flow of the main plot line (114).

Though he does not say so directly, there can be no doubt after reading Memorial del tiempo that Jesús Morales is familiar with the indigenista tradition in literature and anthropology in Mexico, as well as with the strong criticism that has been lodged against it. This is evident from the significant measures he undertakes to try to distance his work from its indigenista antecedents. As with other testimonio narrative, what Morales seeks most in this text is authenticity, an accurate representation of indigenous life in Chiapas, which he and many others see as lacking in previous indigenista fiction. In the prologue, after presenting background information about the experiences that led to writing the novel, he states his intentions very clearly: “Es un libro que testifica el mundo indígena y busca testificarlo desde lo indígena. Memorial del tiempo es: a) un producto de innumerables conversaciones; b) es una presencia que rompe el silencio tradicional indígena, y c) atrapa una modalidad del hablar popular” (12-13). In fact, the novel can be read as a dialogue with previous indigenista texts, as Medina implies in his thesis that Memorial argues for the demise of indigenismo. With this in mind, my reading of salient features of Memorial in this section will involve both implicit and explicit comparisons to works by indigenista writers such as Graciela Limón.

Unlike most indigenista fiction, Memorial del tiempo begins in medias res, as if the reader were in the midst of an everyday conversation with Diego Alfaro: “Así como venimos contando...” (19). The style is very informal, with the narrator seemingly speaking to a friend of the same gender, implying of course that this is the way that the original versions

were told to the author. The appositive “hermano” is used many times to reinforce the author’s acceptance in the Ch’ol community. Humor, crude language and overt sexual references appear frequently throughout the text.

Though it is written in Spanish, the style of Memorial is overtly, even excruciatingly oral, unlike in previous indigenista fiction. The author does this to imitate how Ch’oles speak as well as the way they pass on knowledge and experience. The dialogue and even the main narration are full of repetition, tangents, slang and seemingly impromptu interjections. The most immediately noticeable oral feature of the text, however, and what distinguishes it most from other narrative of indigenous theme, is the use of intricate “castía” or “castilla” Chiapan dialect throughout. This non-standard, regional and class-based variant of Spanish is difficult for most readers to follow at first, due to its frequently archaic, unusual and redundant grammatical forms, which the author asserts are based on Ch’ol linguistic features. Among others, these include “la confusión de sustantivos y de preposiciones, la preferencia por formas indirectas del verbo (‘me tiene visto’ en lugar de ‘me ve’), y la ausencia del subjuntivo” (Steele, “Indigenismo y posmodernidad” 251). This dialect is in many ways the central feature of the novel, and it is closely linked to Morales’ implied dialogue with indigenismo and search for authenticity. As Steele notes, castía requires readers to adjust or move out of their linguistic comfort zone, which does suggest more equity in the intrinsically hybrid, yet unequal, nature of indigenista literature. Medina states that the “shock” experienced by readers as they confront and have to adapt to the unusual language of the narration in a sense approximates what the author went through (“la misma experiencia ‘desfamiliarizadora’” [125]) as he entered and adapted to life in the indigenous communities where he lived. Based significantly on the use of “castía” dialect, both Medina and Steele

praise Memorial for more closely approximating indigenous subjectivity and offering a view of the Ch'ol world from within. Though the novel does show influences from the indigenista tradition, as I will ultimately demonstrate, it also includes many other remarkable innovations, which I will explore first.

Memorial is divided into three sections: “Cuando el sueño,” “Cuando la vida” and “Cuando la tierra.” In “Cuando el sueño,” Diego tells of a pilgrimage by members of his and other communities to the religious festival of San Francisco in the distant town of Moyos. “Cuando la vida” relates the personal journey Diego makes as the result of a prophetic dream that he has in Moyos. This leads him to become a sanmiguelero, or traditional seer and healer. “Cuando la tierra” focuses on indigenous and peasant congresses, or more generally, political, historical and cultural aspects of the preservation of Ch'ol identity.

The opening “Cuando el sueño” section consists of Diego’s detailed narration of an Indian religious pilgrimage and festival from a participant’s perspective, something not included in previous indigenista narrative. Of special note in this section is local and regional indigenous unity, a theme promoted and explored throughout the novel. Diego’s community offers provisions and gathers to send its pilgrims off. Groups from as far away as the neighboring state of Tabasco participate in the festivities. Diego and the others are welcomed and offered hospitality in the form of food, drink and lodging “de convidado” along the way, as well as in Moyos. The mood of the “Cuando el sueño” section is of prolonged celebration and gaiety, instead of the usual indigenista stoicism, solemnity and misery. The heretofore standard subjects of violence, oppression and hard work are replaced by music, happiness and cooperation. The words “alegre” and “contento” appear again and again. Recurring references to the central role of music in the festival are also of particular note as compared

to previous indigenista works. Diego marvels frequently at the stamina of the flutist Pioquinto, who seemingly plays nonstop at every public gathering during the pilgrimage and festival, often accompanied by other musicians.

Descriptions of Ch'ol beliefs and practices are also an important part of the first section of the novel, along with practical explanations of their purpose. This feature of the text reduces the romantic stigma of difference so frequently included in other works of indigenous theme, where a traditional anthropological approach is palpable. For example, Diego explains the Ch'ol practice of placing hay-like fans along the route of their pilgrimages in very transparent terms. The Ch'oles believe that a “Wolok ok,” a playful childlike spirit, makes pilgrims lose their way. They make and leave these circular fans (“juguetes del duende”), with no apparent beginning or end, along their route to distract the Wolok ok so he will leave them alone on their journey (21-23).

As with much indigenista fiction, alcohol plays a significant role in the festivities from beginning to end. But unlike in previous texts, in Memorial a coherent explanation is provided for the drunken excess so often associated with disdain or pity in indigenista works: “Como solo [sic] se lo pasan tomando refinado y echando plática y nomás lo tienen tomado un poco de pozol, por eso que se cae la gente tan bola como está la gente” (24). Morales takes the logical and more respectful position that a meager diet heightens the effects of alcohol, and therefore the problem is partly economic and more complex than it might seem at first glance.

Morales' most successful narrative tool, and one that distances him from previous indigenista authors, is humor. Because of their broad appeal, lengthy comical incidents and regular laughter, particularly in the first section, contribute to bridging the cultural gaps

inherent in indigenista narrative. For example, in Moyos, Diego's host Hesequio informs him that he and his family have been tormented recently by a bat that bites them on their toes, noses and ears while they sleep, in spite of his sworn mission to stay awake and kill their tormentor. When everyone turns in for the night, Hesequio declares: "¡Ah -dice-, puto murciélago -dice-; pero lo vo' a agarrar, lo vo' a agarrar -dice-; lo vo' a agarrar y lo vo' a chingar -dice-" (32). The next morning, however, Hesequio ends up bitten himself, to the amusement of all others present:

Y así se levanta el Hesequio y ai que nos sentamos para tomar café. ¡Hombre, cómo es que empieza a dar risa que ya ni me puedo aguantar! ¡Pero harta risa! Cómo quíereste que no me va a dar risa si nomás lo estoy mirando el Hesequio que ahí se ve todo enojado que lo comieron su dedo gordo sus pies el murciélago. Sus dos dedos que los comió el murciélago. Y aistá, su hija el Hesequio que también se mira su dedo gordo su pie lo tiene chupado de murciélago. ¡Ah, que cabrón sos, pues, le digo el Hesequio! Mero vivo sos para velar murciélago, lo digo; hasta vos mismo te chuparon, lo digo, y me da más risa. (33-34)

This situation with the "murciélago" continues the whole time Diego is in Moyos for the festival. Hesequio never manages to kill the bat, in spite of his constant swearing, declarations and repeated ribbing from both his wife and Diego.

The humorous episodes in Memorial are frequently lewd and irreverent as well, which also adds to their multicultural appeal. During a stopover in the town of Sabanilla on the way to Moyos, everyone is gathered to celebrate the arrival of the pilgrims. Diego feels the urgent need to urinate, so he decides to go to the ruins of the old church to relieve himself. The scene that follows is universal because it makes light of human bodily functions:

¡Hermano! ¡Qué chinga que los voy pegando! Ese templo como los tiene sus bancos en sus lados como que son que fueron sus altares; en sus lados, pues, como de bancos o de altares que ya se cayeron, allí hermano que lo miro el Ramón que se lo está echando su palo con la Inés; se lo está cogiendo, pues.

Seguro que ya lo miraron oscuro, como lo tienen visto que todos hacen de rezo en la ermita, yo creo que les agarró fuerte las ganas y ahí se metieron [sic] para coger. ¡Putá, hermano, ahí lo estoy mirando cómo hacen para coger! Pero como ya está muchas mis ganas que tengo de orinar, ni modos, hermano, no hay más que tengo que empezar a orinar. Entonces lo oyen su ruido la orinada y rápido, rápido, se tienen que levantar. Ahí se van corriendo cada uno por otra puerta; o sea, uno en una salida, otro en otra salida. Corriendo van. La Inés lo lleva bajando su vestido; el Ramón lo guarda su cosa en el pantalón. ¡Hasta risa me da todavía! Espantados iban. Ni modo que corro para decirles que se regresan, que otra vez pueden empezar para hacer su cogedera. No se puede, pues. Ya nomás no solo [sic] tengo para que voy a reír. (31)

The fact that urination and sex occur in a church takes humor in Memorial beyond the slapstick of the previous example, incorporating colloquial sacrilegious wit that resounds with many readers, particularly Catholics. Self-deprecation is evident in much of the humor as well, at both the personal and cultural level. The fact that Diego and those around him do not always take themselves or their practices completely seriously provides common ground for understanding with readers. For example, during the ritual washing of the saint's garments, Diego makes the startling discovery that the statue of Saint Francis, who is being honored by the festivities in Moyos, is in fact a representation of Saint John the Baptist. When he realizes the irony of this mistake and its implications, he is taken aback but keeps it to himself so as not to cause problems with the Moyotecos. He cannot contain his laughter, however, to the point that those around him think he is drunk (28-29). Diego's sense of humor and frequent laughing fits not only facilitate reader identification with him as a character, but also contribute to the overall accessibility of the novel because of the humanity they convey. Diego is in fact something not found in other indigenista fiction: an everyman. Even in serious moments, many of his expressions provide comic relief rarely found in previous Mexican novels about Indians. When he is deathly afraid in the dream that initiates his journey toward becoming a sanmiguelero, for example, Diego refers to important

religious figures irreverently and comically: “El puto San Franciso lo sigue riendo” (39), “Ai que vienen persiguiendo de San Franciso, de San Baptista, de Santo Diablo Panzón. No hay para reposo... ¡Putas, cabrones los tres jodidos!” (40). Diego is a groundbreaking character because of his ability to laugh at himself as well as question his beliefs and those of his community. His intelligence and humanity reach heights not seen in previous indigenista narrative.

Memorial also breaks with the usual paradigm of indigenista fiction because non-Indian characters are relegated to a secondary or background role. Though the communities in the novel are portrayed as clearly interconnected with mestizo Mexico, none of the major characters or narrators is ladino (meaning non-indigenous), and non-Indian characters appear only via the impressions and descriptions offered by the indigenous voices in the text. Of course indigenista literature, and Memorial as well, is intended primarily, if not exclusively, for non-Indian readers. Evidence for this begins with the fact that they are written in European languages. Given their integrationist underpinnings, Mexican indigenista works generally include at least one significant non-Indian character with which readers identify or feel implicated to some degree, as with Adriana in Erased Faces. Even in the most sophisticated texts, readers are provided a kind of lifeline of familiarity in the narration, either through a major ladino character or via alternating indigenous/non-indigenous episodes in the story. In Memorial, Morales demonstrates that indigenous voices and communities can be heard by outsiders directly and exclusively on their own terms. Though the mechanism used to accomplish this goal is questionable, as I will explain later, for the first time external thoughts and impressions about indigenous Mexico seem to be excluded in Memorial. This fact is closely tied to the novel’s progressive political posture, revealed most completely in

the third section, as evident in the following statement by Medina: “En la novela no aparece ningún indicio en los protagonistas indios de esperar que los mestizos puedan hacer algo por ellos” (122).

Another prominent difference in Morales’ portrayal of indigenous communities is their mutability and diversity. Though religious syncretism is evident in most indigenista fiction, many other practices and aspects of Indian identity are often treated as pristine and sacred, with outside influences characterized as negative.⁸ In Memorial, however, cultural hybridization is apparent in many forms and is treated with familiarity, not disdain. For example, musical numbers played on the marimba during the festival of St. Francis include “Totic,” “Bajalú” and “Maruchita,” as well as the universal Mexican “Mañanitas” (33). Useful technological innovations are also readily accepted by Diego and other members of his community, such as non-traditional building materials: “De material su casa el Hesequio. Ahí lo tiene su piso de cemento; su techo, también, de lámina. Bonito su casa el Hesequio” (32).

Indigenous identity and recognition are treated as evolving concepts in Memorial. The additional narrators that appear in the novel offer historical points of comparison in this evolution. The case of doña Lencha is particularly illustrative. On the last night of the festivities in Moyos, Diego dreams that Saint Francis, John the Baptist and the traditional Chiapan indigenous Santo Diablo Panzón chase him mercilessly, hitting him, laughing at him and unleashing wasps to attack him. One of the wasps stings him on the penis as he urinates in the dream. Finally, San Miguel appears and protects him from Santo Diablo Panzón. The

⁸ For example, Cynthia Steele characterizes indigenous characters in López y Fuentes’ El indio as “consistently portrayed as noble savages, children of nature whose innocence has not been corrupted by contact with urban civilization” (“Ideology” 78). See also Joseph Sommers’ emphasis on tradition in reading Carlos Antonio Castro’s Los hombres verdaderos (“El ciclo de Chiapas” 251) and Mauricio Magdaleno’s El resplandor (“Literatura e historia” 22-35).

next morning Diego is horrified to discover that his sexual organ is swollen in real life. On Pioquinto's advice, Diego sets out for Sabanilla to consult doña Lencha, a seer and the first of several supplemental narrators, in the hope that she can help him understand this unusual dream and cure his worrisome condition. During the course of a long conversation, doña Lencha advises Diego to travel to the towns of Chiapa de Corzo, Acala and Cupía because the dream suggests that San Miguel has plans for him. She also recommends that he go to Joloniél to recover his ch'ujlel, or soul, because Santo Diablo Panzón has most likely scared it out of him.

After dealing with the problem at hand, however, doña Lencha begins a long description of her earlier years on the ladino don Noé's hacienda "la Sinaloa." Indigenous life in this section forms a clear contrast to the events related by Diego up to this point. As in a typical indigenista narrative, the finca Sinaloa has a large Indian peasant community serving the non-Indian patrón, whom doña Lencha describes in very positive terms. As evidenced by references to Lázaro Cárdenas' land reform program as the main reason for the downfall of don Noé and his hacienda, the historical period of this narration is the 1930s, some fifty years before the setting of the main plot line in Memorial. Doña Lencha nostalgically describes fiestas centered on the hacienda's "Casa Grande" instead of at the regional level and planned by Indians themselves, as in the Ch'ol festivities outlined previously in the novel. Of particular note is the role of Catholic priests and coletos, or non-Indian, vendors, none of whom appear in the more recent festival.

By contrasting the experiences of Diego and doña Lencha, who appear to be from successive generations, Morales simultaneously compares Memorial with previous indigenista fiction while also demonstrating how narrative style has evolved. Most of doña

Lencha's story is strikingly reminiscent of earlier indigenista texts. The allusions to Cárdenas' land redistribution and don Noé's resistance to it, for example, plainly evoke the situation faced by the patrón César Argüello in Rosario Castellanos' Balún Canán (1957). Doña Lencha herself is an indigenista stock character in many ways, first of all as the Indian who betrays his or her own people. In her role as alcahueta for don Noé, she is very much like doña Esmeralda in Castellanos' Oficio de tinieblas (1962). Sexual subjugation is the most frequent symbol of oppression of Indians and abuse of power in indigenista texts, which is why Medina describes Lencha as an "india ladinizada" and sees in her a critique of the elements of internal colonization of indigenous peoples (117), which is to say a metaphor for indigenismo. But Morales' contrast is not a simple one, because when compared with the younger Diego, doña Lencha is not only a relic, but also represents a key symbolic point of departure for Indian rights struggles. For in spite of arranging Indian conquests for don Noé in her youth, doña Lencha does not allow him sexual privileges with her, though the price of asserting her own rights ("“Sos brava, pue, Lencha,’ fue su palabra el don Noé” [64]) is remaining abstinent. Hence, though unlike Diego, Lencha participates in and foment the oppressive indigenista system by contributing to her patrón's abuses of power, by refusing to submit herself to the old indigenista system of sexual privilege, she signals an initial break in the foundational cycle of ladino dominance in previous works. As a much older woman by the time she talks with Diego, even doña Lencha seems to have changed with the times: “Ya no estoy con fuerza para conseguirlo las muchachas. Mejor ya los recogí mis entenadas, una güerita, una murushita, ai para que se crían conmigo pobrecitas criaturas, ai que se casan bien y que lo piensan que la Lencha es su mamá. Así lo hago ahora” (66).

It is important to note that the contrast between these two characters is only partial, however, signaling that indigenous struggles have progressed but are far from over. Diego's thoughts and intentions with respect to Indian women illustrate the continuing temptation to abuse them sexually and perpetuate the cycle of dominance. Though he is married, Diego is attracted to Hesiquio's young daughter and even his wife, both of whom he observes longingly while his host sleeps (33). On the road back to Sabanilla, Diego considers at length the possibility of arranging to have sex with Hesiquio's daughter. The close relationship between sex, power, machismo and indigenismo, including the possibility of symbolically reversing the indigenista paradigm, are evident in Diego's thoughts:

Y como de por sí los usa chicos sus vestidos, cortos pues, que se miran bastante sus piernas su hija el Hesiquio, lo siento que hay ganas para que voy a agarrarlo sus piernas y para que lo miro cómo será que lo tiene su hondura; si ya es de buen tamaño o si tendrá pelazón como dicen lo tienen sus cosas las ladinas o si será que está peloncita como es su cosa mi mujer. (50)

Doña Lencha strongly encourages Diego to give in to his desires, offering to arrange things as before, and even providing detailed evidence of a similar, apparently recent success with a relative of Hesiquio's wife (67-71). The parallels with her long indigenista description of don Noé and his abuse of power with Indian women are clear. But in the end, both Diego and Lencha come to the conclusion that this arrangement is not possible and it is better not to give in to the old abuses: "Así mejor olvídate don Dieguito. Olvídalo su hija el Hesiquio. Así está bueno" (71-72); "Mejor que lo olvido su hija el Hesiquio" (51). Diego's temptation makes him a complex and flawed character who suffers from western machismo, unlike the simple idealized Indians in many previous works. But it also seems to indicate that even if the imbalance of power between groups seems to be improving, indigenista abuses linger in many ways.

Unlike in previous indigenista texts, indigenous struggles in Memorial are portrayed for the first time in concrete and complex political terms within the context of the Mexican nation. There are none of the usual lengthy, heartrending portrayals of mistreatment of Indians at the hands of ladinos, such as the Orlando Flores/Quintín Osuna subplot in Graciela Limón's Erased Faces, meant to create sympathy in readers and communicate abstract moral arguments for "better treatment" and "justice" for Indians. Even the Don Noé section in Memorial lacks the usual indigenista emotional appeals. Morales' narrative instead presents indigenous collective efforts in intellectual terms, as a fight for land rights and political power. A key element of this progressive portrayal of indigenous people is their role in the history of the nation. Medina notes that unlike in previous indigenista works, Memorial actually presents Indians as having and remembering history, as suggested by its title. Furthermore, it departs from the dualistic association of ladinos with history and Indians with myth and cyclical time (124). Limón also strives for this in Erased Faces but with much less success. The historical revisionism in Erased Faces that I discussed in the first chapter frequently comes via mythical visions and traditions closely tied to reincarnation, which is of course cyclical and indirect. Morales, on the other hand, favors remembrances by characters who are living eyewitnesses to unofficial versions of historical events. Indalecio's long narration about his experiences in the Revolution is the most prominent example (86-105). Limón also generally opts for remote colonial events in her revisionist efforts, while Morales stresses more recent happenings.

References by both authors to the same colonial historical figure, Bartolomé de las Casas, reveal fundamental differences in their approach to Indians and history, as well as to indigenous rights in general. Limón paints an idealized picture of las Casas through an

indigenista-influenced tradition handed down by the woman who is a previous incarnation of the main character Adriana:

Now, her thoughts were riveted on the image of our bishop, who had dared to unmask the evils that had gripped our land. She had no way of knowing that he would live many more years, never ceasing to decry what his countrymen were doing, never halting his stinging words that assured the world that she and her people were humans, humans with souls that wept because of pain inflicted on their bodies and for what was gone from their lives...

And so you see, my compañeras and compañeros, our bishop was among us then, just as he is living with us now. And then as now, our hermanas and hermanos were, and are, punished for defending him. In this very place, if one listens, one can still hear his voice raised in our defense, as well as the sounds of whips cutting into the backs of our people. If he has the courage now, as he had it then, to speak against injustice, I ask you: Why do we not have the strength to follow the path that he is again carving out for us? (149-50)

These paragraphs describe timid, reactive Indians following the lead of the European often cited as the first indigenista, even in the section that refers to the modern struggle. Las Casas is a focal point. Limón's historical alteration consists of the insertion of an indigenous woman into the story who defends las Casas from an assassination attempt.

Morales, however, takes a very different approach to las Casas in his novel, starting with the unusual egalitarian use of his first name in place of something more deferential. Diego's son-in-law Ezequiel refers to "Bartolomé" in the third section of the novel. While the text implicitly recognizes las Casas' contributions, it clearly looks toward the future, argues against traditional paternalism and emphasizes indigenous unity and self-reliance:

Entonces, hermanos, ya no está su tiempo el Bartolomé para que lo busquemos el Bartolomé, para que el Bartolomé nos lleva en sus caminos de libertad; el Bartolomé. No. Ya no hay Bartolomé. Pero aistá, pue, hermanitos que todos juntos es como que podemos para hacerlo más fuerte que el Bartolomé. Es que si lo juntamos todos sus fuerzas los comunidades, es como que vamos a juntarlo como un gran pensamiento, un gran corazón; para que nos luchamos juntos, para que juntos entre todos, juntos los compañeros, se van para formarlo entre todos un solo corazón, un nuevo Bartolomé. O séase, pues, que ai entre todos lo formamos el Bartolomé; que ora ya, mismo campesino como nosotros, es que vamos para hacerlo nuevo Bartolomé. Ya no hay que vamos a

pasar esperando que se llega otro Bartolomé para que los cuida de nosotros. No. Ora ya su fuerza de todos es lo que va a formarlo nuevo grande Bartolomé. Ya para que no se muere otra vez. Por que este Bartolomé es su cuerpo, es su sangre, todos los comunidades. Ya no hay que se va a acabar. (147-48)

Here las Casas still has symbolic value in the fight for indigenous rights, but with the difference that Indians are unmistakably proactive, community oriented and responsible for their own destiny. The language in these two extracts reveals key differences in approach between the two novels.

In portraying recent events in indigenous struggles, the contrast between the two authors is again revealing. Limón's portrayal is limited mostly to a romantically tinged picture of the armed Zapatista revolt in which Juana, Adriana's love interest, dies tragically. There is little historical, political or economic contextualization of the larger causes of the rebellion beyond the individual cases of mistreatment like those of Orlando Flores and Juana. Morales presents a much more complete and nuanced view of the situation, however. Though Memorial was published several years before the Zapatista uprising, it too includes less publicized but equally real Indian clashes with Mexican armed forces in the region, such as the late 1970s occupation of Sabanilla (177) and the massacre at Naquém (179). The background to these conflicts, comprising a large part of the third and final section of the novel, includes descriptions of a decades-long economic and land rights struggle, including the successes and frustrations of a series of indigenous congresses, as well as efforts to work within the system and get Indians elected as mayors. Personal stories are related within the framework of the larger effort to gain economic and political influence. Appeals to the reader are more logical than emotional. For example, Ezequiel explains that he must relocate to the faraway Lacandón region because the caxlanes (a synonym for ladinos) have taken over

communal ejido (community agricultural) land in the Ch'ol area for their ranches (131-39).

The story of Cristóbal tells of an Indian who has his land stolen by a ladino and then becomes an indigent in the community (168).

Memorial is also progressive in its portrayal of indigenous communities as diverse and sometimes deeply divided. In previous indigenista fiction, Indians are generally homogenous and act as a group. Harmony is virtually constant in Erased Faces, for example, even across ethnic and linguistic boundaries. The Zapatista community in the Lacandón jungle is a near utopia, and the meetings of its organizing committee are harmonious and orderly. Only increased roles for women and homosexuality seem to create any stir at all. Memorial presents a far more intricate picture, however, arguing for political unity that transcends traditional boundaries, but at the same time recognizing that enormous obstacles and profound divisions exist, even within single communities.

The most significant source of internal division in the novel is religion, with repeated references to the growing number of Indian converts to Protestant sects. This issue is one of the most important to face Mexican indigenous communities in recent decades, yet it is generally disregarded completely in other indigenista fiction, including Erased Faces. Diego and the other narrators that appear in Memorial are Catholic, though as previously mentioned, their religious practices are syncretic and occur with little reliance on priests or the Catholic church as an institution. In fact, Diego criticizes and ridicules priests repeatedly. Protestantism, however, is treated seriously and depicted as a real threat to most of the traditions described at length in the first section:

Pero otros compañeros que están idos donde adventista o presbítero, caso pues que pueden hacerlo fiesta o echar tragos o cigarro o comerlo coch o demás cosas. Entonces, más jodido. Porque no váiste a creer que lo guardan

costumbre como antes. Peor todavía. Puro cantar su himnario se lo pasan.
(129)

Even Diego's beloved music is frowned upon by the Protestants. Furthermore, Protestantism is portrayed as anathema to the indigenous rights struggle. Besides dividing indigenous communities, it smacks of submission to paternalistic outsiders, not unlike indigenismo:

Ya no está como antes que se puede todavía para que todos juntos lo hacemos acuerdo. Ya no. Ora no hay pleito pero más bien en un lado unos, en otro lado otros. Más todavía porque no hay de protestante que va a tener su voluntad para que lo luchamos por su derecho de campesino. No. Mero miedoso, mero apartado de compañero. Nomás himno, nomás rezo es su forma en que los gusta hacer. Jodido. (129)

In fact, the menace is so great in Diego's eyes that he compares Protestant conversion to castration, a recurring metaphor for powerlessness in the novel: "¡Qué esperanza! Ai de una vez que te buscan para caparte. Jodido, jodido, pues; tan mal costumbre que lo traen gentes que llegaron de predicador" (129).

Indigenous congresses, councils and other efforts to organize, discussed in the third section, also figure in the complex treatment of the subjects of armed struggle with the government and of solidarity between indigenous communities in Chiapas. Enthusiasm is high and cooperation excellent in the first congresses: "¡Alegre como se están pasando las cosas! Ai, pues, que en todos lados se van juntando sus palabras los compañeros" (143).

Later their reach becomes even greater, crossing ethnic and linguistic lines (152-53).

Regional economic projects are proposed: "Me acuerdo de cómo entonces lo vamos pensando que va a estar bueno que lo ponemos bodega, o cooperativa, para que lo surte todos sus tienditas los comunidad" (156), in addition to a cooperative transport project (159). These plans produce strong resistance from caxlán merchants, however, leading to violence against Indians (158, 161) and accusations of communist infiltration (160). Over time, indigenous

communities are intimidated and the congresses become manipulated by outsiders: “Desde en ese día, no hay sino que lo vas a oír que si por todo ‘son los congreso’. Que si pierde un su mula; son los congresos.... Los congresos. Es forma que no quieren de permitir para que podemos defender su derecho. Es forma que ya nomás lo buscan para que nos quieren chingar” (161). Indians are frightened into inaction and scrap their plans for cooperation, accompanied again by a lengthy metaphorical description of bulls being castrated (161-63). The idea of armed resistance emerges from a conflict in Sabanilla during a religious festival. A large group of Indians is jailed by the ladina mayor, but is then forcefully freed by a group of mounted and machete-wielding compatriots from a nearby community. When the community attempts to replace her by electing a caxlán sympathetic to their cause, he is run off by the feared judicial police (170). Then they decide that the best way to bring about change is from within the system, little by little, eventually electing an Indian mayor (171). But soon after, a group of Indians from another community convince many others to unite and peacefully take back ejido lands to create the cooperative community of Pancho Villa, composed of residents from many different areas (173). Ladino ranchers and merchants organize too, however, and convince the federal government to expel the Indians from the lands they occupied, using military force that includes violence and torture. This culminates in the massacre of women, children and the elderly at Naquém (174-79). The end of the section tells of the murder of one of Diego’s friends, Filemón, by an influential ladino landowner. Indigenous communities unite to force the mayor to have him arrested for the crime, but two years later, he still has not been tried for his offense (183). As with the real situation in Chiapas, there is no resolution to the novel, and it ends very much the way it started, in medias res.

Another characteristic of note in Memorial with regard to unity is that the author goes to significant lengths to blur the previously strong and politically manufactured epistemological distinction between indígena and campesino. Analisa Taylor argues that twentieth century Mexican indigenismo reveals efforts by post-Revolutionary elites to separate these two categories in an attempt to refocus national attention and free themselves from blame for poor economic conditions in the country:

Drawing upon the theories of mestizo nationalism of José Vasconcelos, Manuel Gamio, Alfonso Caso and others, the architects of official indigenismo created a complex mechanism through which national subjects could be interpellated at the level of ethnic – as opposed to class – identifications. (7)

In addition to proving that the esthetic and political aspects of the project worked hand in hand, she further demonstrates that even the Cárdenas administration participated actively, despite its rhetoric and popular beliefs to the contrary:

The 1940 Primer Congreso Internacional Indigenista was described as a watershed and an impasse, a particularly important moment in which the categories peasant and Indian were discursively de-linked. The “Indian problem” replaced the agrarian problem, such that now what was at issue was social behavior rather than social structure. At present, the possibility of re-linking these identities, of facing the agrarian problem through the affirmation of cultural and ethnolinguistic heterogeneity, offers the conditions from which to rise above that impasse and develop more coherent and empowering forms of political and cultural representation. (286)

Memorial marks a significant effort to reverse this process. Though they never deny or minimize their cultural identity, Diego and other narrators frequently refer to themselves as campesinos, emphasizing a more inclusive economic, and not just ethnic, status for Indians in Mexico. In the third section, for example, Ezequiel remarks, “mismos como nosotros, como campesino, como indio, pues” (141; with two other among many examples on 108 and 129). This apparently minor lexical departure from previous indigenista fiction is very significant,

especially given the overall implication of the work that, in spite of the tremendous obstacles that stand in their way, economically and culturally disadvantaged groups in Mexico can only improve their lot if they work together. Other details in the work that contribute to this epistemological re-linking and class solidarity in the novel include Diego's helping the "pobre caxlancito" who in section two has the same frightening dream he does (113-15), as well as his service to others, including even those who have converted to Protestantism (128). The recurrent use of the label "cristiano" to refer to Indians also breaks with the previous limiting lexical stance of indigenismo.

In spite of its many innovations, however, Morales' novel still adheres to some of the problematic aspects described by critics of indigenismo. Difficulty arises in Memorial when Rubén Medina asserts that Diego's story is "oral" (114). There can be no doubt that the style of narration is oral, but in fact, the text is a constructed, edited, and reviewed creative work designed for consumption by non-indigenous readers. John Beverley notes that the "real" subaltern voice in testimonio is in part an illusion that depends on "devices of an oral storytelling tradition" that the compiler uses to make the text out of the material (Against Literature 81; my emphasis). Though Morales goes to great lengths to mask it, his manipulation in constructing "orality" shows through in the text in some ways. Examples include the fact that the focus of the novel moves carefully from the personal to the political as it develops, no unexplained Ch'ol vocabulary appears in the text, and there are recurring literary devices such as symbolic references to castration. In the context of indigenismo, purportedly capturing indigenous "orality" seems to be yet another way for non-Indian critics and authors to congratulate themselves for the increasing sophistication of works that get progressively closer to representing the Indians' "inner world." I will address the subject of

authenticity in more depth later, but note now that the following praise for Rosario Castellanos' novels also emphasizes her use of "oral narrative" in producing indigenista fiction in the 1950s:

Rosario Castellanos no sólo asume para su obra todo el rico legado de la tradición oral mesoamericana desde los tiempos prehispánicos, sino que, más importante aún, lo recrea tangiblemente en el presente, incorporando a su arte narrativo los textos inspirados por la narrativa oral indígena. Utiliza brillantemente las técnicas narrativas de las literaturas orales, aprovechando múltiples aspectos de la fuerza de la palabra, las reiteraciones poéticas y rituales y las frases paralelas, contrastantes, anafóricas y mnemotécnicas. (Crumley de Pérez 591-92).

As with Morales' Memorial, Castellanos, a mestiza author, gets credit for bridging the gap between "oral" and literate worlds for readers.

The "castía" or "castilla" dialect, which is the crux of "orality" in Memorial, is itself quite problematic. Castía itself is of course just a local name for Spanish, the hegemonic language linked to colonization in Mexico, both European and internal. Yet even today, many Mexican Indians, particularly women and the elderly, speak little or no Spanish. This raises questions about how representative the text is of the conversations on which it is ostensibly based. Did the author converse with the Ch'oles in their language or in Spanish/castía?⁹ Indigenous languages are still widely spoken in Chiapas, so it seems very unlikely that indigenous informants spoke castía when Morales was not present. If Ch'ol was spoken with the author, translation would place even more distance and filtering between the original testimonios and their representation in the text, while the exclusive use of Spanish or "castía" might cast doubt on the author's access to Ch'ol culture, since he would have been limited by a language barrier. A mix of both situations may have been possible as well. In the

⁹ In an article in a Mexico City newspaper, Morales is quoted as saying that he had studied "unos cursos de lengua chol" before living in Sabanilla, but he is not specific about how he communicated with his informants nor how much fluency in Ch'ol he attained either before or after his stay (Molina 1).

novel, however, “castía” is used throughout, for the benefit of non-indigenous audiences, and this question is not addressed.

Critics and readers, including myself, must recognize our own limitations in making assumptions about how representative castía is of everyday Ch’ol communication. Medina appears to assume too much when he asserts that “[u]n lector indígena podría ver expresado en él su realidad lingüística” and also when he affirms Memorial’s “veracidad lingüística” (125). Nevertheless, castía can justifiably be viewed as another level of filtering of Ch’ol testimonio since it had to be either meticulously constructed or reconstructed by the author as a text. Morales even recognizes some of the problems with his use of castía: “La modalidad que ofrece el libro es una modalidad indígena de comunicarse en español; más aún, es una modalidad ch’ol. Es de alguna manera, una traducción... Intenté llevar hasta sus últimas consecuencias el habla, traducirlo en literatura” (14). Translations, even direct ones, are at best approximations. Castía is an effective indigenista-influenced literary device used by the author to strengthen his case that the text comes directly from indigenous sources. In the prologue to Memorial, Morales reveals how fundamental he perceives castía to be to the overall message of the work, while simultaneously exposing some redemptive indigenista intentions: “Este libro es testimonio de un lenguaje, como testimonio de lo que es la vida interna de estos hombres del campo, he procurado fidelidad a cuestiones fundamentales: a la sintaxis, al sentido de la oralidad, a las formas de contar, mediante frases largas, interconexas. Tan largas como su desplazamiento en la sociedad, interconexas a la marginación y al desprecio de siglos” (14). The hybrid nature of castía effectively masks the constructed nature of the text by making it sound very “oral.” Because the language used is

strange and exotic for most readers, it contributes to a greater sense of “authenticity,” while diminishing reader perceptions of the author’s central role in the writing of the novel.

Furthermore, while the non-standard aspects of the castía dialect of Spanish give the impression of tilting the hegemonic linguistic imbalance as compared to previous examples of indigenismo, they also have the potential risk of stereotyping Ch’ol and other Mexican Indian speech, not unlike the case of Jim’s slave dialect in Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn. The author also seems to view (re)constructed castía as uniquely representative of Ch’ol culture. He characterizes its importance in Memorial thus: “Quizás su virtud sea la de ofrecer ‘la’ traducción de una concepción del mundo, de una filosofía, de una sensibilidad diferente. Es la búsqueda de acercar dos mundos a través del lenguaje” (14). I contend, however, that no translation, no matter how good, could adequately express Ch’ol worldview, philosophy or different sensibility, even if it were possible to sum up a culture in such terms in the first place. Morales’ statement also implies that most Ch’oles speak Ch’ol to other members of their community and that castía is an approximation, a second, colonial, language used for communication with outsiders. Such a language must certainly be limited with respect to representing the complex cultural concepts cited by the author.

Castía in fact reinforces indigenista contradictions in some ways, because praise for the “authenticity” of Memorial is based heavily on the novelty of castía dialect. Like many previous indigenista narrative devices, the use of castía gives non-indigenous readers the impression of literary sophistication and progress in portraying Indians, of moving a step forward as compared to other works of indigenous theme. Medina declares that castía “simula la voz del indio” and “ofrece en cambio una visión interior de su mundo” (126). He even affirms that, “[e]l carácter testimonial y la verosimilitud que postula el texto se apoyan

en el habla auténtica del indígena” (112; my emphasis). These statements suggest unfounded assumptions by Medina, but more importantly, they are strikingly similar, if not identical, to what has been said before about other indigenista novels, which clearly demonstrates the influence of indigenismo in Memorial.

Previous commentaries point out startling evidence that Morales’ use of castía dialect itself is in fact just a variation of a pre-existing indigenista literary technique. For example, in La narrativa indigenista mexicana del siglo XX, Silvia Bigas Torres reads Mexican indigenista fiction published only through its purported end in 1962, and yet states that the authors were already adept at manipulating the language:

Los narradores mexicanos de las últimas décadas, al recrear al indio, se preocupan por plasmar la mente de éste en sus palabras, en sus diálogos, en el fluir de su pensamiento. Incorporan rasgos de las lenguas indias a la sintaxis castellana, emplean una forma de lenguaje figurado y hacen uso libremente del vocabulario indígena sin sentirse obligados a explicar su significado. (59)

Though Joseph Sommers would later radically change his approach to indigenismo, in 1964 he likewise attributes the “authenticity” of Los hombres verdaderos (1959) in representing indigenous thought to the author’s deep understanding of the Tzeltal language. The cultural and linguistic assumptions he makes here are remarkably similar to those of Medina about Memorial:

Un rasgo literario significativo en Los hombres verdaderos se deriva de la sensibilidad profunda del autor hacia la lengua tzeltal. La sintaxis y los modismos del personaje central, presentados en español, captan con frecuencia la forma y resonancia del tzeltal. Por medio de esta técnica, Carlo Antonio Castro logra una estilización poética la cual, además de su calidad literaria, conduce al lector a comprender el pensamiento y la expresión indígenas. La autenticidad resultante expone con claridad la ignorancia etnocéntrica de los que, al oír a los indios de Chiapas hablar español, llegan a conclusiones de torpeza indígena y simplicidad expresiva. El talento de Carlo Antonio Castro en comunicar la elocuencia de la lengua tzeltal, lleva a valiosas penetraciones psicológicas. (“El ciclo de Chiapas” 252)

Sommers expresses similar ideas about Rosario Castellanos' collection of indigenista short stories: "Ciudad Real demuestra una prosa llana y expresiva, que reporta autenticidad valiéndose de voces y giros populares [...] integrando con eficacia en sus mundos novelescos el concepto indígena de la realidad" ("El ciclo de Chiapas" 256). Though he is referring to Andean manifestations of indigenismo, Cornejo Polar sums up the development of similar linguistic tools in the novels of the Peruvian José María Arguedas and those who preceded him. Given the previous citations about Mexican indigenismo, his perceptive analysis could very easily be applied to Morales and his Mexican predecessors as well:

La novela indigenista plantea, pues, un difícil problema: a partir de su heterogeneidad de base y asumiendo su carácter necesariamente "artificial" tiene que producir una apariencia de autenticidad, y esta apariencia, siendo tal, es decir: una ficción, debe significar la mayor aproximación posible a la realidad del universo indígena. De aquí que el ritmo de estas aproximaciones sea correlativo al empleo de recursos cada vez más elaborados, menos directos, si se quiere más "artificiales". Es sintomático en este sentido que el problema del lenguaje dialógico de los personajes indios se haya resuelto primero con la cruda interpolación de vocablos aymaras o quechuas, seguidos de su respectivo glosario, y mucho más tarde, a partir de la narrativa de José María Arguedas, con la creación de un lenguaje artificial que otorga tonalidad quechua al discurso en español. No deja de ser curioso que este recurso, evidentemente lícito y en más de un aspecto ejemplar, sea el que confiere a la obra de Arguedas ese signo de autenticidad que unánimemente se le reconoce. (56)

Morales likewise has undeniably taken his Indian characters' linguistic expression to new heights of sophistication in Memorial. Yet, like his indigenista precursors, his main preoccupation in Memorial is "authenticity," and castía is one of his primary tools in this quest.

Since the beginnings of post-Revolutionary indigenista narrative in Mexico in the 1930s, non-indigenous authors and critics have congratulated themselves again and again for reaching new plateaus in representing "indigenous reality," for achieving "authenticity" or a

view of the “inner world” or “cosmovisión” of Indians. Multiple stylistic innovations in the genre have been heralded as breakthroughs in “authenticity,” with critics proclaiming successive new works far superior to those that preceded them and mestizo authors ever more sophisticated transmitters of indigenous “truth.” In addition to the linguistic elements already mentioned, examples of literary techniques that have produced such acclaim include the integration of anthropological fieldwork carried out by the author, the use of first person indigenous narrators, the incorporation of elements of sacred indigenous texts such as the Popul Vuh, the use of magic realism and poetic language, and the presence of strong female characters. I submit that this pattern continues in Memorial, as evidenced not only by praise for Morales’ use of castía, but also in the hybrid testimonio genre the author employs. Both can be viewed as new authorial tools in the same vein. The following comparison of commentary about Memorial and previous indigenista fiction will substantiate my claim.

Medina contends that Memorial represents a significant departure from previous examples of indigenismo: “Esta obra constituye una nueva forma literaria del indigenismo que logra plasmar más profundamente la vida interior del indio” (111). Cynthia Steele also commends Morales’ work for distinguishing itself from previous indigenista novels:

Esta literatura se diferencia de las obras de Rosario Castellanos, por ejemplo, al lograr acercarse mucho más a una subjetividad indígena, mediante un conocimiento cultural más profundo de parte de los autores, y a través de recurrir más extensivamente al testimonio de informantes indígenas. (“Indigenismo y posmodernidad” 249)

Yet in the light of my previous comments, the distinction she makes sounds suspiciously similar to those made about indigenista writers whose works were published before testimonio existed as a genre. Crumley de Pérez has argued that previous indigenista writers have been equally well informed: “Tanto Arguedas como Castellanos tuvieron experiencias,

vivencias, participaciones en los mundos indígenas y, por consiguiente, pudieron transmitir una visión profunda de esos mundos en su narrativa” (592-93).

Numerous other examples of praise for mid-twentieth century indigenista narrative also closely mirror critical acclaim for defining elements of Memorial. The critic Gabriela DeBeer extols innovation in Ramón Rubín’s El callado dolor de los tzotziles (1949) that purportedly distinguish it from previous examples of the genre. Her praise for this work sounds similar to Medina’s, Steele’s, and I must admit, even my own, for Memorial:

El indígena descrito por Rubín es antes que nada un hombre como cualquier otro que en la vida se ve obligado a enfrentarse a ciertos problemas y a vivir de acuerdo a decisiones tomadas. Así, el protagonista nos atrae no por su exotismo, sino por su condición universal. Rubín nos deja entrever el mundo interior indígena, libre de los acostumbrados estereotipos. De igual trascendencia son las muchas descripciones incluidas por Rubín de las tradiciones y costumbres que subrayan la supervivencia en estas regiones de la cultura tzotzil después de casi cinco siglos de transculturación. Es evidente que El callado dolor de los tzotziles contribuye a fijar un el nuevo indigenismo mexicano basado en la observación directa y el estudio detallado de la etnia con el propósito de ofrecer una visión desde dentro de este mundo y su interacción con la cultura dominante. (564)

She continues: “Ahora [el indio] aparece tal y como es, con sus virtudes y defectos, sus tradiciones y mitos, sus vicios y prejuicios” (561). DeBeer underlines that Rosario Castellanos’ works deemphasize her central role as author, revealing that Morales’ use of testimonio to minimize his role is not a radical innovation, either:

Para Castellanos el indio debe ser visto como cualquier ser humano, capaz de ternura y nobleza, de odios y rebeldías. A su vez, esta aproximación conlleva un fenómeno de reducción de la perspectiva del escritor, que ya no se esfuerza por abarcar la totalidad, sino que se fija en colectividades reducidas que de ningún modo son representativas. (562; my emphasis)

Even Joseph Sommers, who was probably the first critic to fully recognize the inherent contradictions in Mexican literary indigenismo, once praised non-Indian Mexican authors for their ability to comprehend and represent “indigenous reality”:

Los nuevos escritores que toman por tema a los indígenas de Chiapas escogen un punto de partida distinto: el indio mismo, en su propio contexto cultural [...] Estos autores más jóvenes que tratan ahora de penetrar en la psicología y la cosmología indígenas revelan una conciencia antes inexistente, al novelar tomando en cuenta criterios culturales. (“Ciclo de Chiapas” 247)

Sommers also praised the supposed reduction of authorial voice and power in indigenista fiction, again paralleling assertions about Memorial: “En una obra de marcadas dimensiones literarias, Ricardo Pozas pone en escena un indígena representativo, para confirmar el valor de su vida, y para enfocarla desde su propio punto de vista” (“El Ciclo de Chiapas” 251; my emphasis).

There are many other similar examples I could cite to provide evidence that Memorial inherits and follows certain indigenista patterns. Renowned critic Cynthia Steele openly labels it as indigenista, though not pejoratively (250). But perhaps the best indicator of indigenismo in a work of fiction of indigenous theme is the simple criterion laid out by Antonio Cornejo Polar: “Es propio de la novela indigenista afirmar su fidedigno apego a la realidad” (56). Authenticity is what has both compelled and eluded indigenismo since its beginnings as a politically committed esthetic movement. Morales, like other indigenista authors and critics that preceded him, goes to great lengths in the introduction to Memorial to downplay his importance as author and stress the authenticity of his work. In the text itself, in the very first paragraph that Diego narrates, he affirms that what he is about to tell is the truth: “Igual como nosotros que dicen la palabra verdadera” (19). In the last section, his insistence on truth becomes almost a fetish: “Es como, en verdad, que está sucedido” (150). “No hay mi engaño, pues. Todo como te digo es verdad; todo” (184).

Yo aquí de mi persona te lo puedo decirlo, porque seguro que me lo podés creerlo así como no hay manía mi corazón para que va a decirlo mentira; como tengo mi encargo de Sanmiguelero, pues. Por eso, pues, que lo podés

creerlo de mi palabra, que nada de su mentira tengo para que te puedo decir.
(159)

Though Steele tries to contextualize her critique, she also notes the inherent contradiction of insistence on authenticity in Memorial, as well as problematic associations with nature, which I will discuss below:

Esta idea de la autenticidad que, por un lado, subraya el orgullo de un pueblo históricamente explotado y vejado, por otro constituye un chovinismo y una mistificación semejante a la efectuada por los ladinos con respecto a los pueblos indígenas; quizás sea una internalización de lo mismo. De manera semejante, la insistencia de la narración en relacionar a los campesinos indígenas con la tierra, específicamente, y con la armonía de la naturaleza, en términos más amplios, tiene el mismo efecto. (255)

Given the heterogeneous, syncretic and evolving nature of indigenous identity, portrayed eloquently by Morales in Memorial, authenticity is ultimately an illusion. Though it seemingly can be approximated ever more closely, with increasingly creative narrative or other representational tools, if one accepts the basic premise that identity and culture are not static, and are too complex to be reduced to a literary or any other esthetic representation, then authenticity is at best subjective and transitory, and it can ultimately never be achieved.

Furthermore, a preoccupation with authenticity may belie insecurity on the part of the author because s/he is an outsider. My next chapter examines whether there is a need for authenticity when an author writes about her/his own culture, or whether the need to insist on truth and the concept becomes irrelevant. Cornejo Polar sums up the paradox of authenticity very effectively:

En la medida que [la novela indigenista] se perfecciona como género, y también conforme se reduce la insularidad real del mundo indígena, los relatos indigenistas subrayan su voluntad de interioridad; vale decir, su decisión de expresar “desde dentro” las peculiaridades del espacio referido. Sucede, sin embargo, que tanto la vocación realista cuanto la voluntad de interioridad son objetivos imposibles en términos absolutos y su búsqueda, por tanto, un

empeño señalado de antemano por el fracaso: si se lograra a plenitud, la literatura indigenista habría cedido su lugar a la literatura indígena. (56)

Though Cornejo Polar does so in exclusionary either/or terms, he correctly implies that authors who are members of the groups they represent esthetically have a huge advantage with regard to authenticity.

Perhaps as an attempt to give Memorial more “authenticity,” Morales also sometimes falls into the indigenista stylistic tendency to overemphasize indigenous associations with land and nature. Land is a primary concern throughout the novel, as Medina notes (116). This is not surprising, given its obvious importance to agriculture and its tangible significance in struggles for autonomy. Yet on more than one occasion, Morales romanticizes the connection between Indians and the land, edging towards the binary association between Indians and the earth discussed at length in the first chapter of this study, and getting away from his generally grounded and intellectual approach to indigenous rights. For example, in the second section, “Cuando la vida,” referring to entering the church of the Señor de Tila reverentially, Diego declares:

Como somos campesino, de pobre pues, por eso que lo entramos hasta arrastrando [nuestros cuerpos] en el suelo. Es que así está su vida que somos de campesino. Tamos pegados en suelo, pues. Se parece que es igual su piel nuestro cuerpo con su piel la tierra. Mismo color, mismo su olor, mismo que estamos hechos juntos de tierra y de su cuerpo de campesino pues... Allí en la tierra, si lo tenés visto, allí está su petate para dormir, su fuego nuestra casa, su juguete los chiquitos. Así igual se encuentra nuestro corazón. (108)

Though it appears far less frequently, this emphasis of physical contact between Indians and the earth is reminiscent of the same phenomenon in Erased Faces. Medina observes just how central land is to the indigenous characters in Memorial: “La novela enfatiza que la tierra es lo que sustenta su identidad” (125). This statement reveals a hint of traditional indigenista stereotyping or oversimplification on Morales’ part that comes through in Memorial.

Idealized Indian/land/nature parallels in Memorial are most apparent at the beginning of section three, “Cuando la tierra.” This section opens with two quotes, one of which reads: “¿Qué es el indio sin la tierra, sin las plantas, sin los animales? Somos dueños milenarios de esta tierra americana” (119). Diego begins the narration in this section with a nostalgic remembrance of his childhood, stressing his close ties to land and nature, which links him with indigenista-tinged nostalgia and innocence. This introductory section is more descriptive than narrative, with obvious poetic features, including metaphors, anaphora, and alliteration. Two of the following three statements are even laid out like verses on the page: “Por eso que antes lo tengo ya pensado que su paso de mi vida se parece que fuera viento, que fuera viento, que fuera viento... Su paso mi vida... O, como si fuera quetzal, quetzal...” (123). Diego compares his words with the wind, then enters into an extended metaphor equating Indians, and specifically himself, with the quetzal, a tropical bird prized for its beautiful plumage: “Porque el quetzal lo gusta la montaña; es su casa el quetzal la montaña; la montaña.” (123) Diego asserts that this bird cannot be kept in captivity, that it requires freedom above all: “Hay compañero que se muere como si fuera quetzal que se queda triste; que se muere porque está tan triste según como es que se llega intruso que va a acabarlo con su libertad. Lo tengo visto, pues; bien visto compañeros que se murió” (125). This extended metaphor seems out of place compared to the rest of the novel, though at least it employs an animal with positive connotations as opposed to the parallels in Erased Faces. Still, the comparison unintentionally objectifies and idealizes Indians, not only because it reinforces the Indian/nature stereotypes, but also because it insinuates that outsiders have overwhelming control in intercultural relations and that their interference is uniformly bad. This idealization reveals indigenista influence and undermines the fundamental message in Memorial that,

although the Ch'oles face huge barriers to achieving autonomy and prosperity, they are intelligent, practical and self-sufficient people. The representation of indigenous identity is a complex phenomenon, based on multiple factors that go far beyond land and animals, and particularly when placed in the hands of an outsider. People are what ultimately sustain and nourish indigenous identity, or work to undermine it, not land and nature.

The idealistic pairing of Indians and nature suggests the binary association in other indigenista texts such as Erased Faces, as discussed at length in my first chapter. Given its long tradition, it is easy for readers to either overlook or accept this binarism, proving Analisa Taylor's assertion that indigenismo "will continually reappear in the most uncanny of guises" (167). Statements by Morales confirm, however, that the romantic link between Indians and nature in parts of Memorial is not at all inadvertent. In the introduction he remarks: "Habría que imaginar que los ritmos se desenvuelven conforme a los ciclos agrícolas; habría que leer tratando de escuchar la cadencia de la lluvia, el canto de las aves y del viento. Ahí están las claves de los relatos orales; de estos que conservan la misma intención" (14). Here again we see idealized emphasis on nature with regard to identity. Ideas expressed by the author as quoted in a newspaper article show clear vestiges of indigenista dualistic associations and stereotypes:

Lo que a mí me parece que es como una revelación de otro mundo es porque el mundo moderno, occidental, procura su encadenamiento o su liberación en la racionalidad, en las ideas, en el progreso, mientras que el mundo indígena procura su encadenamiento y su liberación en la naturaleza. (Molina)

At best this statement reflects a rigid cultural division that is proved naive by the majority of Memorial, and at worst it is a stereotype that denies indigenous diversity and intelligence, particularly given the growing influence of Indians in urban and intellectual settings. The lure of indigenista generalizations apparently is still strong, however, as even the great critic of

indigenismo Cynthia Steele once seems to slip into stereotyping when she says the following about the protagonist of Memorial: “Su mismo nombre, Diego Alfaro Tigre-Pescado, sugiere lazos con el mundo de la naturaleza y, por lo tanto, con la sabiduría” (252).

References to castration, a recurring trope in Memorial, also reinforce Indian/animal associations and work against the overall message of the novel. In the third section, the caxlanes threaten to castrate indigenous males when they attempt to organize cooperatives: “O tal vez que vamos para hacerlo capazón de indios, que de una vez se quedan sin güevo” (161). In the very next scene, the ranchers carry out a mass castration of bulls to frighten the Indians into inaction, which achieves the desired result for a time. This primordial fear of castration depicts the Ch’ol community as complacent and animal-like rather than intelligent and resourceful. Medina sees the metaphor as having broad implications: “El miedo constante que Diego Alfaro expresa por todo el testimonio sobre la castración, alude claramente al derrumbe y liquidación de su cultura” (115). Medina’s reading seems exaggerated, however, given that the rest of the novel affirms the relevance and perseverance of Ch’ol identity, as well as the determination to continue the struggle for rights. But the repetition of the castration metaphor uncharacteristically highlights Indian weakness in the face of adversity and again contributes to binary associations between Indians and animals.

Another difficult issue in reading Memorial is its classification as testimonio. The nature of authorial power in the testimonio genre itself is a difficult subject, and I question the degree to which the label is actually appropriate for Memorial, since it is at best a hybrid example of the genre. Beverley argues that testimonio is a fundamentally democratic and egalitarian form of narrative (Against Literature 75). But even in the best of circumstances one could make the case that the subaltern informant suffers from certain initial

disadvantages and may have little choice but to depend on an interlocutor for access to hegemonic means of production and consumption. There is tension between the longstanding tradition of individualistic authorial power in the novel genre and the more egalitarian pact suggested by Beverley. Beverley sees the relationship between the narrator and the compiler, perhaps overoptimistically, as an allegory and a concrete manifestation of alliances between a “radicalized intelligentsia” in a society that has created resistance movements (Against Literature 78). I would argue that while the genre opens the door to possibilities for more equity, the fact that a work is labeled testimonio offers no guarantees with respect to power sharing. A broad continuum of equity/inequity is possible within the genre and works should be judged individually on this account.

If one looks closely, especially in the light of previous indigenista works, authorial privilege is not at all diminished or shared in Memorial. First, Memorial is a novel, even if based on testimonio. Jesús Morales made all the decisions in producing the text, not only with respect to structure and what to include and what to leave out, but also even merging and blending characters, as in the case of Diego Alfaro Tigre-Pescado, the protagonist mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Though Morales’ intentions are undoubtedly good (as are those of most indigenistas, it is important to recall) he recognizes that the work is an individual effort centered on his own perceptions and experiences while living among the Ch’oles: “En este caso, para decirlo con sus palabras, los protagonistas han venido a asentarse en mi corazón, han venido a vivir un tiempo en mí, para no vivir solos; para no volvernos olvido... No he hecho sino abrir la memoria y estructurar los relatos” (Memorial 11).

A further complication with the testimonio label as applied to this text is that the author freely admits that the conversations in Memorial were reconstructed from his memory some years after they occurred, and that he made no notes or recordings while living among the Ch'oles (Memorial 11). Hence readers can never really know exactly what the source of given words in the text is or how much is faithful reproduction, an amalgam, edited, or simply Morales putting words in the mouth of his characters. Even the author himself is probably incapable of being completely objective on this front. What is clear is that the text is a product of Jesús Morales' memory and creativity, and he is not Indian.

It is tempting to believe that the Indian narrators' voices are unfiltered in the novel, as does Rubén Medina when he maintains that Indians in Memorial appear “articulando sus propios discursos” (112) and even that Morales “cede su voz al indio” (119). Yet if Morales had indeed yielded his voice to his indigenous characters, they would have participated in the production of the text at the time it was produced, not just as a passive, remembered amalgam of voices several years after the conversations took place. Besides, “yielding” in concrete economic terms should entail listing one or more co-authors for the work, as well as sharing the royalties! A work like the well known Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia seems much more progressive in this sense, because the oral source of the narrative is a clearly credited and real individual in the work, instead of a blend of mostly unidentified informants. Furthermore, though perhaps the comparison is unfair, the huge notoriety generated for a subaltern by the cooperative efforts of Elizabeth Burgos and Rigoberta Menchú in Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú in a way makes the authorial individualism and quasi-anonymity of the indigenous voices in Memorial seem reminiscent of the power imbalance inherent in indigenista novels. Though previously unknown,

Rigoberta Menchú received money and attention for social and political endeavors in Guatemala, particularly as a result of receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, while Morales' characters remain only constructed figures in a book. The possibilities for real world empowerment of indigenous voices in Memorial are limited by comparison. It may be a flaw, but modern capitalist audiences tend to respond to individual heroes or “stars” as the representatives of causes. Cults of personality are frequent, and Memorial provides no opportunities for creating any, except around its mestizo author. Having yet another non-Indian standard-bearer for indigenous causes perpetuates the fundamental contradiction of indigenismo. By not sacrificing some authorial privilege, Morales may have missed the chance to create one or more real life indigenous public figures in Mexico, of whom there are precious few. I stand by my previous affirmation that in general Morales skillfully paints the indigenous rights struggle in concrete terms of politics and power. But given the precedent of shared authorship in testimonios such as Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú, as well as the strong precedent of inherent contradictions in previous indigenista texts, the imbalance of power implied by the relationship between the author and the indigenous characters he portrays in Memorial undermines its basic stance, even if the text is in fact faithful to their original testimony.

In spite of my criticisms, however, Memorial del tiempo is indubitably a novel worthy of further reading and study. Though it suffers from some of the pitfalls of indigenismo, it moves beyond its predecessors in significant ways. Its main characters are intelligent, multidimensional, flawed human beings, Indians who in spite of tremendous challenges are able to laugh at themselves and even their own culture's ideas and practices.

Morales' work is also an extremely entertaining and skillfully produced novel. Cynthia Steele accurately summarizes many of its literary merits:

La originalidad de esta novela testimonial no reside en estas imágenes del hombre natural, sino en las extrañas pero en última instancia lógicas yuxtaposiciones de lo sagrado y lo profano, de lo solemne y de lo cómico, que construye el discurso del viejo chol. La novela de Jesús Morales es un testimonio de la sobrevivencia de un pueblo explotado y reprimido, no sólo a través de la resistencia pacífica, la organización y la lucha, sino también a través del sincretismo cultural, junto con lo onírico y lo lúdico, los sueños y el placer. Pero no se trata de una idealización de los choles; para cada instancia de resistencia política y cultural se presenta otra de internalización de la represión y su reproducción dentro de la misma sociedad chol. (255)

Indigenous communities in Memorial are portrayed as evolving, ideologically diverse and sometimes conflictive, as are all human populations. Morales' work breaks new ground by presenting still unresolved issues that divide indigenous communities, such as the growing influence of Protestantism. Even more importantly in the light of major national political developments since the Zapatista uprising in 1994, Memorial underscores the emergence of Indians as important actors on the Mexican political stage (Medina 122). The author's portrayal of Indian frustration with administrative processes, real-life violent episodes directed at indigenous communities, as well as emigration to the interior of the Lacandón jungle, seem to foreshadow major recent events in Mexico with uncanny accuracy.

The poetic ending of Memorial also seems prophetic with respect to the ongoing indigenous struggle for recognition and autonomy in Mexico:

Todavía anda la noche. Todavía. Todavía hay tiempo para sufrir.
Pero hay vez que lo va a haber, cuando es que se principia su crecimiento el pueblo, su arribo. Como si fuera que es su resurrección el Sto. Señor Jesucristo. En misma forma es como se va a suceder su resurrección el pueblo. Su resurrección...
Todos juntos son que se van a levantar. Juntos.
Los van a llevar palos y coas. Como cuando amanece; cuando es que van en sus milpas.

Así será el paso cuando es que se van a levantar; cuando es que se romperán
las cadenas; cuando así se va a pasar. Bajo nuevo sol...
Todos juntos.
Bajo nuevo sol. Bajo nuevo sol. (185-86)

Citing San Miguel as the source in this page-long final section about the future, Diego intones suffering, hard work, faith, hints of violence, music, resurrection, and ultimate optimism for his people. Most importantly, he predicts that the Ch'oles will accomplish this united as a community and independent of outside influence.

CHAPTER 4

MOVING TOWARD INDIGENOUS SELF-REPRESENTATION

Like John Beverley, Analisa Taylor sees testimonio as a genre of transition, in which non-indigenous spokespeople play a positive role in the struggle for indigenous rights. She discusses the role of the “non-indigenous interlocutor” in the last chapter of her dissertation. Yet it seems condescending to assert, as does Taylor, that the intervention of a white intellectual is essential for transmitting the message or, as she puts it, that “[i]n order for disenfranchised people to tell their versions of history to a civil society of readers who might take an interest in their struggles, they must gain the ear of well-connected, urban intellectuals who can shape their stories into a narrative frame that will assure their appeal to a now transnational cosmopolitan audience” (284). There must be at least some indigenous individuals who can fulfill this intermediary function as well. Nonetheless, the fact that none have emerged at the national level suggests that significant change is still required with respect to cultural production and indigenous communities.

Taylor does recognize that testimonio’s essential paradox is that it “undermines the very distinction between writing subject and referent or object of representation at the same time that it reinscribes it” (268). This criticism is valid and also strikingly similar to well known objections raised by critics of late examples of indigenismo. Indigenista authors go to considerable lengths to present themselves as well informed “insiders” with respect to

indigenous cultures, to give a more credible perspective in their work and in a sense minimize distance between themselves and their characters. But as critics have shown repeatedly, they ultimately fall into the very trap of patriarchy that they decry. Even if the mechanism for literary production is altered, the same can be argued about testimonio authors. While it is rarely stated directly, criticism of texts about Indians produced by non-Indians is really about power. There is power inherent in the speaking voice of a literary work, but much more so in authorship, specifically in the ability to make decisions about what to include or omit, how to organize materials and what to emphasize or deemphasize, among others. Again, Beverley argues that testimonio is a “fundamentally democratic and egalitarian form of narrative” (Against Literature 75), but this is an overestimation of the changes in power structure offered by the genre, in my view. Testimonio maintains and perhaps even perpetuates the same pattern of indigenista patriarchy, with most decisions remaining in non-indigenous hands. No matter how benevolent a non-indigenous author’s intentions, in both indigenismo and testimonio s/he always has the potential to wield more power than the indigenous referents in the work.

Since at least the 1980s, critics have heralded the increasing emergence of texts produced by indigenous people themselves, or literatura indígena, as a remedy for this situation. In fact, indigenous authors in Mexico have published quite a number of texts in the last two decades, particularly poems and short stories, but also video, theater and some long fiction. Many of these publications have been under the auspices of nationally known mestizo academic and literary figures, however, such as Miguel Leon-Portilla, Carlos Montemayor and Carlos Lenkersdorf, who have published compilations and translations of indigenous texts for non-indigenous audiences. These sponsors should be lauded for opening

channels of communication for indigenous authors and exposing new audiences to marginalized voices in Mexico. Yet paradoxically, by placing themselves at the center of their projects and using their own name recognition, these promoters of indigenous voices in a sense also reinforce the patriarchal patterns of indigenismo. Taylor describes this continuing cycle as it has occurred with the Zapatista movement and its well known spokesman Subcommander Marcos: “Ironically, Marcos’s protagonism in the Zapatista struggle has itself served to reinforce this notion that indigenous peoples cannot ‘speak truth to power’ for themselves, but must rely on a non-indigenous interlocutor to do so” (280). Like indigenista authors, nobody doubts spokespeople’s positive intentions and concern for indigenous groups, but perhaps unavoidably, they too seem to reinforce the old pattern of inequity and dependence.

Another problem is that even with increased production by and promotion of indigenous authors, audiences continue to be limited to mostly academic and regional circles. The average Mexican cannot name a single contemporary indigenous author, director or artist, and this is in spite of an indigenous minority population that in Mexico represents a larger percentage than the African American population in the United States. Taylor points out that mediation by non-indigenous intellectuals and also the State continue to impede Indian self-expression:

I posit that while many indigenous and non-indigenous writers are creating spaces for their work in which they might rearticulate what it means to be indigenous, and Mexican, in Mexico in more dignified terms, the production of images and discourses of indigenous identity has continued to be conditioned by mediation by non-indigenous intellectuals and state institutions. (267)

Many critics have noted that mediation in cultural production in Mexico is closely tied to longstanding class distinctions and privilege, which are unlikely to crumble on their own. In

the final analysis, it is indigenous groups and authors themselves who must bring about change. Though they face enormous challenges of all kinds, indigenous communities must write, promote, read and study more native literary texts, from their own group and others. Furthermore, they must seek national and international audiences for their work without mediating agents.

In Against Literature, Beverley points out how important the development of a national literature was to the formation of the modern European nation-state, and a parallel most certainly can be made to indigenous struggles for autonomy in Mexico. He essentially argues that literary expression does not follow once sovereignty has been achieved, but rather is an integral part of the struggle for autonomy itself. Literature is and always has been closely linked to identity and collective power. Literary texts can even function as stimuli for struggles for autonomy, since they give people concrete representations of culture with high symbolic value, or easily accessible and reproducible “grails” around which to reinforce cultural boundaries. When a member of a historically oppressed community succeeds in breaking down barriers, such as publishing a successful literary work that is widely read both inside and outside the community, the symbolic value to that group is tremendous. Given that identity is constructed and constantly evolving, “organic” literary works are fundamental to group identity. Not only can a literary text serve to preserve or rescue traditional cultural practices, but in today’s world, the fact that an author achieves economic success and notoriety can be an important political rallying point as well.

CHAPTER 5

LITERATURA INDÍGENA: CANTARES DE LOS VIENTOS PRIMERIZOS/WILA CHE BE ZE LHAO: NOVELA ZAPOTECA (1994)

Javier Castellanos Martínez's Cantares de los vientos primerizos is one of the few novels published by a Mexican indigenous author to date. This genre is overshadowed within the production of literatura indígena by the more common shorter, “oral” based texts such as poetry, theatre and short story. Some may argue that the novel is not a very suitable vehicle for indigenous literary expression, given its traditionally individualistic authorial role and also the fact that it is a canonical genre “cuyo modelo y convenciones nos remiten necesariamente a la tradición literaria occidental y letrada,” as critic María José Bustos points out (94). Nevertheless, I include this important work because of its clear literary merit, as measured by canonical standards, as well as its significant symbolic value as a spearhead into canonical literary production by an indigenous author. Furthermore, the novel has historically been the focus of any discussion of literary indigenismo and Cantares offers salient points of comparison with the previous two works in this study, as well as indigenista novels in general. By choosing to write a novel, Castellanos takes the bold and highly symbolic step of providing an indigenous voice to a historically privileged genre. In doing so, he both establishes an implied dialogue with previous novels about Indians in Mexico and opens doors for other indigenous authors.

Cantares represents a significant departure from the other two novels read in this study, particularly with respect to form, but also content. Though it too focuses on the interaction between indigenous and mestizo cultures in Mexico, its title and text appear in a bilingual edition, with Zapotec plainly privileged over Spanish. In the glyph-like illustration on the cover, the indigenous figure appears to be spinning thread, perhaps figuratively underlining who is actually doing the spinning in this work.

From the moment readers pick up Cantares, its design cleverly and effectively subverts previous hegemonic affronts, both blatant and unintentional, to indigenous groups by the dominant culture. This scheme may not be new, and it may even have been implemented partly or wholly by editors and not the author himself, but it is unmistakably part of a calculated strategy meant to question previous representations of indigenous culture in texts written by non-Indians. By putting non-Indians at a calculated cultural disadvantage, the physical structure of Cantares highlights contradictions and in fact reverses some of the stereotypes signaled in previous works, such as the two other novels read in this study.

From the very first page, readers not proficient in Zapotec are served notice that they are limited in their possibilities for understanding the novel and the cultural concerns it addresses. This fact reinforces the work's subtext as both a critique of and a dialogue with previous narrative of indigenous theme. Cantares begins with a brief prologue in the form of a linguistic note entitled "Sobre el zapoteco en Yojovi." In part, it reads: "Se advierte al lector que la rh que usamos corresponde a la Ih que utilizan otros pueblos" (1; my emphasis). In an ingenious reversal of the usual cultural hierarchy, non-Zapotec readers are put on notice immediately that they are at a clear cultural disadvantage.

Upon turning to the novel's chapter 1, this admonition continues. Unlike bilingual editions of many other texts, where the two languages are presented side by side on facing pages, in Cantares chapters are presented sequentially, alternating between the two languages. Zapotec precedes Spanish. In what she refers to as the text's performative function, María Bustos observes that non-Zapotec speaking readers repeatedly have to skip over many pages to reach the sections that they can understand, which physically underscores their cultural limitations with respect to the subject matter. She notes that Castellanos skillfully uses the layout of the text to signal a break from old patterns: "se convierte en una primera estrategia textual del narrador, un espacio de silencio, páginas ininteligibles y la evidencia de un mundo impenetrable para el lector monolingüe" (94). Clearly upending the old indigenista paradigm, silence is now thrust upon the reader and no longer on indigenous characters.

Further subtle but significant indication of Cantares' affirmation of indigenous rights and critique of previous fiction of indigenous theme is a marked change in the terminology used to refer to native American languages. Throughout the novel, these are exclusively and respectfully termed "idiomas," on par with European languages, and not "lenguas" or even "dialectos," as is the case in previous works and also in Mexican mestizo culture in general. For example, the word "idioma" appears six times on pages 23-24 to refer to the Zapotec language. This small lexical shift is very telling with respect to the novel's position on Mexican patriarchy and power relationships when compared to its predecessors.

The content of Cantares reinforces its challenge to mestizo hegemony as well. Numerous references in the text are unintelligible to those unfamiliar with Zapotec culture, including myself. Culturally specific historical and religious allusions abound, particularly in

the three key trance-induced “revelations” of the main female character, which form a central part of the text and will be explored later. In many instances Zapotec vocabulary is left untranslated, possibly for lack of an adequate equivalent in Spanish. Though explanatory footnotes are provided for some of these references, in others, they are left wholly or only partly explained for those not familiar with Zapotec language and culture. Some examples are: “Ni le entiende uno a esa cosa, creo que es de los viejos sa, ya nomás se deshace ese viejo papel” (41); “Cada uno, esa noche, platicaba su tema: uno sobre hacer una gozona, otro sobre sus animales y el otro sobre los problemas que hay en el pueblo” (40); “Por esos años y andando en sus diligencias conoció a los retoños de Goziobe” (102-103); “Y de esta manera hicieron desaparecer de la casa al bejaga, ya que en esos tiempos ese animal se criaba como hoy se cría un cuche o un guajolote” (103); “Casi obligaron a la gente a criar al bchhenbia que es el que vive en el nopal” (103). Though not major obstacles, these references keep non-indigenous readers slightly off balance and reinforce the message that our knowledge is limited in this environment. Not surprisingly, one Zapotec term that is translated is benextirha: “Literalmente quiere decir gente de Castilla, actualmente se usa para designar a los que vienen de la ciudad” (footnote 36).

In spite of the aforementioned, however, Cantares is still penetrable, entertaining and meaningful for Spanish speaking readers. In fact, my previous observations about signaling cultural limitations actually highlight the fact that the work is intended to be read by non-indigenous audiences, and perhaps even mainly by them. The novel’s conscious reversal of hegemonic patterns is directed at Mexican society as a whole, and not just the marginalized.¹⁰

¹⁰ It is interesting to note, however, that the novel may also contribute to developing Zapotec literacy and also to standardizing written forms of the language. In his acceptance speech for the Nezahualcóyotl literary prize in 2002, the author noted, “[i]ncluso, los 500 mil zapotecos tampoco podrán leerla porque esta lengua ya está tan fragmentada que resulta ininteligible. Aún es tiempo de revertir esta situación, de volver útiles las lenguas

Its upending of previous patterns of cultural privilege is in large part intended to make non-indigenous audiences reconsider the status quo by opening their eyes to their own inadequacies with respect to indigenous groups, as well as giving them some idea of how it feels to be excluded from key information, even if in a small way.

Further proof that Cantares is aimed at a broad non-indigenous audience is that it is actually a hybrid example of the novela indígena genre. Citing Víctor de la Cruz, Bustos notes that the salient characteristic of literatura indígena is that it is produced in an indigenous language, which is what distinguishes it from indigenista literature. But since Cantares is bilingual, with no translator listed, author Castellanos Martínez penned both versions of the text, meaning that he intended it for a broad national and even international audience. The fact that the cover of this edition of the work lists the title first in Spanish, and then in smaller italics in Zapotec is another small but significant detail that contributes to this point. The text's hybridity underscores Cantares' dialogue with and challenge to previous fiction about Mexican Indians.

More evidence of the novel's wide appeal is that despite the cultural specificity of many aspects, its overall plot structure, like that of its indigenista antecedents, is broad enough that it could be applied to most any indigenous group in Mexico in its interaction with the larger mestizo society. After the title and preliminary linguistic note, Zapotec culture is not referred to again specifically until the beginning of the second chapter (35). The central element of the plot is that Jaime, the main character, is torn between loyalty to his native culture and assimilation into mestizo society, and he must ultimately choose between the

indígenas, pues esto implica una manera de ver al mundo y de situarse ante él, una alternativa a otras formas de vida.” He also observed that literacy in Zapotec is sadly lacking: “Lamentó que la mayoría de las 17 mil 400 personas que hablan su variante del zapoteco tendrán que leer su novela en español porque no saben ni escribir ni leer en zapoteco” (de León).

two. As a child, Jaime is taken by his impoverished Zapotec parents to live in an orphanage in an unidentified mestizo town. From the very beginning and throughout the novel, there is a rigid cultural distinction made between Indians and mestizos. Jaime stresses the difference between himself and Mexican mestizos when he lives outside his native village: “Es asombroso cómo se logra uno hallar con gente que en nada se parece a uno” (20). Though he escapes the orphanage and returns to his village on one occasion, with time, Jaime adapts to life with the mestizos. He works hard at his studies and eventually earns a degree as a teacher, “maestro titulado” (20). He intends to return to his native village and give something back to his people by teaching. But in a heavily picaresque turn of events, a characteristic that marks much of the work, Jaime is put in jail when he tries to leave his pregnant girlfriend behind. He then settles into the life of a mestizo campesino for six years, but then abruptly leaves his family for a woman, about whom Jaime says nothing except that his desire destroyed what he had before: “Iba bien lo nuestro hasta que la contradicción entró a nuestro hogar en forma de una mujer hermosa, que trastornó mi mente y movió mi corazón y así nuevamente quedó destruido lo mío. Insignificante es la vida” (22-23).

Alone again, Jaime decides to apply for a government teaching job once more. After problematic teaching assignments in several different towns, from which Jaime is almost run off because of excessive drinking, absenteeism and accosting of older female students, Jaime is called to work in the government’s administrative offices in Mexico City. He is happy about this because of his easy new routine as a bureaucrat. While working in the city, one of Jaime’s superiors teaches him to read and write in Zapotec. After he learns, this same person asks him to go back to his community and collect material in his native language for publication. Jaime is worried about this prospect at first, particularly because he has gotten

used to city life and its comforts, but once he hears that he will be paid royalties in addition to his teacher's salary, he readily agrees.

Jaime soon returns to his hometown to seek out an old document written in Zapotec that he remembers seeing in his deceased father's trunk. In his village he is mistaken by everyone for a mestizo because of his city clothes. The town itself seems paradoxically changed but in many ways the same. Jaime finds his parents' old house now replaced by a cement dwelling inhabited by one of his brothers and his family. When they discover who Jaime is, he is welcomed by everyone and invited to stay. His eldest brother promises to lend him his father's old document, but keeps putting it off and never actually gives the document directly to him. While Jaime becomes reacquainted with his place of origin and waits for his brother to make up his mind and give him the document, he begins to socialize and indulge heavily in alcohol.

On one of these occasions he meets the beautiful Thron Lia¹¹ and begins to pursue her. Thron is married, but her husband is in the United States, working to send money back to his wife and children. Thron resists Jaime's advances at first, but then gives in. Soon her husband finds out about the affair and sends a curt letter advising her that their marriage is over and instructing her to hand over their son to his parents and do what she wishes with their daughter. Thron becomes very distressed, gets drunk and has the first of her three visions or "revelations," about which I will comment later in this chapter. Thron then rejects Jaime, and he is called back to Mexico City to give a report on his progress with the Zapotec materials project. In the city, Jaime lies to his boss and says that he has compiled quite a bit, but inadvertently left it all in the village. The boss seems happy with this report, but sends a

¹¹ Several different spellings of this character's name appear in the novel. Like María José Bustos, I will use the first spelling for consistency, except when quoting a different spelling directly from the text.

young female anthropologist back with Jaime so that they can complete the work together. The anthropologist stays with Jaime in the room he rents in the village. While the anthropologist rests after the long journey, Thron and Jaime reconcile and he promises to stay with her no matter what. But soon Thron discovers that Jaime has returned with a strange white woman that, in a humorous moment of drunken stupor, he says is his wife. Jaime subsequently begins to be attracted to the anthropologist and her exotic white body.

At the anthropologist's urging, Jaime takes her to his brother's house to ask for the old Zapotec document. Much to Jaime's surprise, and apparently in part because a female outsider's presence catches him off guard, Jaime's brother gives the anthropologist the document so that she can take it to make a copy. Though she doesn't understand a word, she repeatedly exclaims, "¡Interesantísimo!" while looking at the old text (97).

Thinking all is lost, and angry at herself for believing Jaime, Thron gets drunk again and shares her second revelation with Jaime. When she is herself again, Jaime sends her home and takes the anthropologist to a celebration in a neighboring town. They grow tired of the festivities and start drinking heavily. Jaime finds them a place to sleep. There he tries to initiate sexual activity with the anthropologist, but she warns him that she is not ready for that sort of thing with him, though she does not rule out the possibility in the future. Jaime grows impatient and tries to force himself on her, but the anthropologist takes control of the situation and screams loudly for help. Jaime is arrested and taken away to jail, and the anthropologist and the manuscript do not appear again in the text.

After four days, Thron comes and bails Jaime out. Thron drinks again and shares her third revelation, after which she knocks Jaime to the ground and laughs out loud at him. He hits her back, she cries, and they make up. Jaime and Thron then spend the next three years

scraping by, working for others and foraging for food while living in a rundown hut they rent in a nearby town. They are very poor and fight about this. Jaime is frustrated by their condition, but Thron seems contentedly resigned to poverty. During a heated argument, Jaime burns down the house they rent. In the face of this small disaster, he finally understands that Thron's ideas are right. Jaime and Thron move to another town, where Jaime finally accepts a life of poverty. All of those around him are poor as well. One day, however, on an impulse, Jaime steals some corn and ends up in jail again, accosted by a mob and accused of being the culprit of a spate of corn theft in the community.

A new, unidentified narrator suddenly takes over on the very last page of the text, revealing that Jaime is an old man who has shared this entire tale with him from his jail cell while awaiting sentence for stealing corn. The whole text has come via this narrator, but readers do not realize this until the very end. The action of Cantares concludes when Jaime and Thron are condemned to exile and paraded in front of the townspeople as thieves. Jaime accepts his punishment serenely. When the narrator sees Thron Lia for the first time, he too finds her beautiful and understands that it has all been worth it for Jaime, who finally discovers what he wants in life, to be a poor Zapotec by Thron's side.

The plot of Cantares emphasizes Zapotec unity and values, by discrediting materialism and assimilation, as well as official versions of history, as I will show in my discussion of Thron's revelations. The imminently flawed picaresque character Jaime finds redemption and self-realization only by returning to his roots and recovering his true identity. He is not educated by the formal schooling he receives in the mestizo world nor by his contact with non-indigenous intellectuals, but rather by making huge mistakes and finally listening to Thron's wisdom, though she is considered "illiterate" by western standards.

Cantares conspicuously incorporates stylistic elements from a wide range of previous literary works, including indigenista, testimonio, and even classic Spanish language canonical texts, such as the picaresque. Though he is an innovator and distinguishes his work from its forebears, Castellanos Martínez shows that he is well read in Spanish and sees Cantares as both the inheritor of a long tradition as well as part of a fundamental shift in literary representations of indigenous peoples. The intertextual influence evident in the work is quite unusual for the mostly straightforward anthropological realism that this genre has exhibited in Mexico.

The style of narration in Cantares is direct and colloquial, even oral, as in testimonio. But at the same time, its complex multilayered Quijote-esque narrative structure consciously points to the indirect nature of testimonio narrative and even seems to question the validity in indigenous communities of the authority traditionally attributed to novelists. As Bustos observes, there are at least three discursive layers of reporting in Cantares, each dependent on the last, as illustrated by a key sentence in the text: “Todo esto también me lo contó mi Trhon Lia aquella vez primera que entré a su casa, aquella vez fue cuando me contó esto que le acabo de contar a usted” (76). Trhon shares her revelations with Jaime, who relates these and his own story to the unidentified narrator, who then writes the text that we read (Bustos 93). As early as the beginning of chapter 2, there are hints that the main character is not actually the narrator of the story, such as: “Usted que también viene de la ciudad y que hace mucho no ha vuelto a su pueblo, comprenderá como lo vi cuando volví a él” (35). Other interjections are slightly odd as well, at first seeming only to indicate that Jaime is a narrator who indulges in occasional conversational asides to readers: “Mejor le sigo platicando” (54). “Discúlpeme usted, que ya le esté platicando hasta detalles de mi historia, no piense usted que es porque

no tengo nada que hacer encerrado acá” (57). After reading the final page, however, readers suddenly realize that they have been reading Jaime’s story secondhand all along. The structure and style of narration in Cantares closely mirror characteristics of testimonio, which in the light of the surprising last-minute narrative shift, can be interpreted as holding up the filtering of testimony for closer scrutiny by readers. As with previous iterations of this literary technique, the re-telling of the story makes readers examine notions of authorship and perspective, both with regard to the text and its subject matter. When readers reach the end and finally understand Jaime’s previous remarks, they are forced to question their previous interpretation of events in the story and possibly readjust their perceptions. Also, as in the Quijote, individual authorship and credit for the content of a text become somewhat muddled, perhaps appropriately in light of frequent collective efforts and authorship in indigenous communities.

The dramatic shift at the end of Cantares also figuratively mirrors late twentieth-century critical repositioning with respect to indigenismo. Critics Joseph Sommers, Cynthia Steele and Antonio Cornejo Polar in a sense revealed “hidden information” not unlike the narrator revealed at the end of Cantares, and obliged readers and society to alter previous acceptance of indigenismo as ever more “authentic” representation of indigenous “reality” or “cosmovision” and reformulate their conceptions of how these genres really operate with respect to the cultures they portray. With the benefit of hindsight, we now see indigenista texts for the hybrid texts that they really are, in fact revealing more about hegemony and stereotypes rather than “indigenous reality.” To borrow Bustos’ term again, Cantares’ narrative structure fulfills a performative function by underlining the distinction between literatura indigenista and literatura indígena.

The most obvious literary influence in Cantares is the picaresque. This Spanish Golden Age genre has continued to influence more recent canonical literature, as Fernando Alegría notes: “Por su castiza tradición, el género no muere ni España ni en América y reaparece intermitentemente a través del siglo XIX y XX en las novelas de un Baroja o de un Cela, de un Manuel Rojas, un José R. Romero y un Xavier Icaza que adaptan el género a nuevas formas de novelar” (17-18). Cantares features several prominent characteristics of the novela picaresca. With his bungling, poor decisions, drunkenness and mistreatment of those around him, the main character Jaime is decidedly a picaresque anti-hero, the radical opposite of typically idealized indigenista Indian characters. The episodic plot consists largely of wandering and misdirection on Jaime’s part, both physical and metaphorical, in his search for identity. Again, he begins life in a small indigenous village, is taken to an orphanage in Oaxaca by his parents, experiences life among non-indigenous campesinos in a mestizo town, then later moves to Mexico City, where he lives as a middle class government employee before ultimately returning to his native land. Like in previous picaresque works, Jaime recants his youthful indiscretions as he retells them as an older man. Absurd situations and corruption also abound, as evidenced in particular by Jaime’s time as a teacher and bureaucrat.

Picaresque humor is a central element in the work, as in Memorial del tiempo. Likewise here, humorous episodes give universality to the characters and serve as a kind of bridge to compensate for cultural gaps. Beverley observes that the testimonio genre is related to the picaresque because it relates stories of repression that need to be told, plus there is a strong element of survival implicated in the telling of the narration itself (Against Literature 73). In Cantares, however, the relationship is clearer and the implications farther reaching,

since Castellanos Martínez makes direct use of the picaresque, which fits well with the important social implications of the work. Thus, unlike Memorial, Cantares has a strong satirical tone. In general, the humor in Cantares is briefer, darker and more self-deprecating on the part of the protagonist. For instance, after Jaime reads Thron the letter from her husband declaring that their marriage is over and that she is to give up their son, he can only manage to say, “[e]s de tu esposo, ¿verdad?” and then “[y] también te está pidiendo el burro, ¿verdad?” (60). Jaime is very fatalistic, as is much of the novel as a whole: “Insignificante es la vida” (23). Like picaresque novels, Cantares is also decidedly moralistic, with the overall message that it is vital to recover and preserve Zapotec culture, tradition and wisdom. Again, like many previous examples of the novela picaresca, Jaime has a guide or educator in his journey, who in this case is Thron Lia. Near the end of the novel, she helps him finally understand who he is and where he belongs, as well as how important it is to maintain shared identity:

Qué diferente sería que en este momento tú estuvieras en la ciudad, en Oaxaca o México, vestido con buena tela, tus pies con zapatos, viviendo con una mujer blanca como a la que desperdiciaste, como la que te metió a la cárcel; sin embargo aquí estás por no haberte atrevido a dejar lo que es tuyo, sólo porque te volvió a gustar lo que ya habías dejado, y es que lo que es nuestro, sea lo que sea. Si queremos conservarlo pues tendremos que cuidarlo a como se pueda y si en cambio ya nos cansamos de él, que ya no nos gusta, lo único que tenemos que hacer es abandonarlo y solito se perderá. Yo estoy segura que tanto a ti como a mí, nos gusta lo que tenemos hasta el día de hoy, por eso es que seguimos con él. (138)

Castellanos employs ironic twists of elements from the hegemonic canon to fit his purpose of scrutinizing and upending traditional hegemonic hierarchy. Jaime is fully bilingual and literate, schooled in the mestizo system and even trained as an educator, but in a departure from traditional pícaros, Thron, though less educated, clearly is far more astute than he throughout the story. The illiterate Thron Lia’s revelations instruct Jaime, and by extension,

readers, about Zapotec culture and history, rewriting previous official versions and telling the real story: “Así también te anticipo, no esperes escuchar cosas que hacen reír a los niños o cosas que asustan a los que quieren asustarse, hoy vas a escuchar lo que pasó realmente entre la gente de donde yo soy, de donde viene mi descendencia” (71). This reversal of the traditional scheme where the young, undisciplined main character learns from an older, well-educated mentor, fits well with the anti-hegemonic social implications of the work and contributes to an inversion of many of the binary oppositions established in previous works.

Thron teaches Jaime and readers mostly via three long trance-induced monologues referred to by the heavily religious term “revelations.” In her first revelation, Thron relates Zapotec origins and the arrival of the Spanish, who bring materialism and a new truth, “otra verdad que es mejor que la nuestra, pero nadie se dio cuenta que eso es el poder, la riqueza, el tener, el dolor y la carencia” (73). In a clear parallel to the widely known story of Hernán Cortés, la Malinche and the Aztecs, Thron relates that during the early colonial period, two Zapotec women betray their people by telling the Spanish that twenty towns are organizing a force to expel them. After the Spanish crush the rebellion, these women marry Spanish men, become elites, and help impose the foreign concept of private property.

In the second revelation, situated later in the colonial period, economic and religious life revolve around “los de Castilla.” A rebellion is planned, but the leader is captured and taken to be executed. An old woman helps him escape. His granddaughter, Lia Kaxhon, ancestor of Thron Lia to whom she refers as her older sister, becomes the leader of yet another uprising. She scolds the men for their cowardice: ““Si ustedes no se atreven, vayan a preparar alimentos a nosotras las mujeres y veremos la manera de escapar de esta soga que nos sujeta a nosotras y a nuestros hijos y nietos” (104). She sums up the distinction between

the Indians and Spanish this way: “¡Para que sepas que no es que no podamos ser como ustedes, sólo que nuestra hambre no es grande como la de ustedes. Nos conformamos con vivir, ¿qué más podemos pedir?” (105). The Spanish soldiers are expelled, but they send in Catholic priests to pacify the indigenous people. Soon after, the armies return. Thron condemns Indian passivity in the face of adversity: “Los paisanos, así como eran y siguen siendo, cuando vieron que los de Castilla ya eran ganadores ya nadie quiso comprometerse” (106).

In the third revelation Thron sees yet another “sister” from the past. In the events she relates, a rift develops in the Zapotec community between those who accept “los de Castilla” living in the region but insist on maintaining their distinct way of life and others who want to assimilate the outsiders’ ways in order to escape poverty. “Desde entonces nuestro pensar así está dividido” (133). When this “sister” grows old, the Zapotecs publicly humiliate her, forgetting that she is a Donaxhe, or “mujer con mucho poder” (133). Her curse of poverty on the Zapotec people is heard and carried out by the gods: “fama van a tener por su pobreza” (134), establishing a pattern of economic disadvantage that continues to the present.

Thron’s revelations and her mentorship of Jaime highlight a major objective of this novel, which is to undermine the longstanding indigenista binary opposition of poverty vs. progress. Poverty is not presented as the usual all-consuming obstacle for the Zapotecs. On the contrary, Thron chooses poverty, and in the end, so does Jaime: “Parado allí, viendo arder lo que había sido nuestro hogar durante varios años, me convencí de la verdad con que siempre ha hablado mi mujercita y no me aguanté las ganas de ser como ella y casi sin darme cuenta pronto estábamos los dos abrazados, como dos niños, riéndonos de mi estupidez” (140). Castellanos problematizes, and even “resemanticizes” as Bustos asserts (98), the

subject of poverty instead of presenting it one-dimensionally, as in previous texts, where miserable Indians are victimized by a lack of education or by non-indigenous abuses.

Speaking from an empowered moral and intellectual posture, Thron even laughs openly at poverty and Jaime, who is closely associated with materialism and assimilation to white culture in the text: “Ja, ja, ja, miren al hombre que le tiene miedo a la pobreza y acaba de quemar su humilde hogar, casa que ni siquiera es de su propiedad y de esta manera cada día es más pobre, pobre hombre que le tiene miedo a la pobreza, ja, ja, ja...” (140). Poverty is a means of resistance in Cantares, as Bustos correctly observes.

One explanation offered for poor economic conditions in Thron’s revelations is the previously mentioned supernatural curse uttered by the Donaxhe: “Tanto a ti como a ellos, a los dos se les olvidó que eras una Donaxhe, y por eso cuando lloraste amargamente por lo que te habían hecho, te escuchó el Señor del Monte, el Señor del Río y el Viento Primerizo, nítidamente oyeron tu voz cuando dijiste ‘fama van a tener por su pobreza.’” (133-34).

Zapotec values are also offered as a justification: “Lo que pasa es que nuestra situación está así por nuestra forma de ser, la riqueza es lo contrario de lo que nos gusta ser, por eso nuestros antepasados nunca se propusieron ser dueños únicos de la tierra y por eso toleraron al extranjero” (139). Internal divisions in the community are another explanation: “Ojalá ésta sea la última vez que hablas de pobreza, porque si buscas salir seriamente de esto y con tu pensamiento, tendrías que pelear y no va a faltar quien te siga pero tampoco va a faltar quien te traicione” (139). What all these explanations have in common, and what separates Cantares from its predecessors, is a perspective that emphasizes indigenous agency instead of traditional victimization and passivity.

The old poverty/progress dualism is in fact completely inverted in Cantares. Western consumption and materialism are portrayed as destructive from an indigenous perspective. Jaime's recurring lust and preference for Western clothing and women serve as a metaphor for materialism. From the very first page of the novel, Jaime's stated goal in assimilating into mestizo culture is to "overcome" poverty: "¡Ay!, de nosotros que nacimos junto a las hierbas, con tal de salir de la pobreza, con tal de salir del lugar que creemos que no vale, por eso salí de mi pueblo y desde entonces he caminado mucho y he visto más" (19-20). Before Thron finally educates him, Jaime seeks little besides material wealth and pleasure. He uses and discards women, adopts mestizo dress and basically focuses his professional efforts on maximizing his income while minimizing his responsibilities as much as possible. In a complete reversal of the traditional indigenista paradigm, Jaime cannot progress as an individual until he rejects materialism and recovers his indigenous identity. His laziness, associated here with Western-style materialism, is also a distinct upending of the old stereotype of indigenous indolence and passivity, since these were previously associated with traditional Indians who resisted "progress."

Throughout most of the novel, the contrast between Jaime and Thron represents the choice between indigenous assimilation and resistance to modernity and, more recently, the homogenizing forces of globalization. As Bustos observes, the fact that Jaime has a Spanish name while Thron's is Zapotec is no coincidence. The assimilated Jaime is corrupt, self-serving and immoral in his behavior, while the traditional Thron is consistently loyal, generous and wise. Cantares redefines indigenous struggles, or at least seeks to correct erroneous simplifications from previous literary works. Bustos describes its departure, again

evident principally through Thron, as a deconstruction of and resistance to western beliefs and versions of history:

El camino elegido por Thron establece las resistencias básicas al pensamiento mercantil, a la premisa moderna, racionalizadora, pragmática y utilitaria de que hay una única versión del desarrollo en virtud de la cual la marginación se supera. Repito, no está haciendo Thron una apología de la pobreza y la marginación. Sí está diciendo que ella y el pueblo zapoteco tienen otra historia que contar en donde los contenidos básicos de la historia oficial se invierten de signo [...] De allá la necesidad en la posición de Thron de desconstruir esta centralidad, los principales pilares en los que se asientan conceptos como subdesarrollo, miseria, pobreza e ignorancia. (98)

The interaction between Thron and Jaime in Cantares, as well as the author's status as an insider, convert the former indigenista search for "authenticity" into a completely new paradigm of strengthening of cultural identity vs. assimilation.

Paradoxically, however, the character Thron and her revelations reveal a strong influence on the author by Rosario Castellanos' indigenista novels, Oficio de tinieblas in particular. Zapotec culture is in fact fairly widely known for its matriarchal tendencies,¹² but the similarities between basic elements of the two novels are striking. Like Oficio, probably the most widely read Mexican indigenista novel, Cantares has a strong female character that experiences trance-induced visions that feature mythic-religious foundations for revisionist history, including a lineage of female leaders called ilol in Oficio de Tinieblas and Donaxhe in Cantares. Thron Lia is clearly based partly on Catalina Díaz Puiljá. Both exceed their male partners in intelligence and bravery and seek to reinforce ethnic identity among their people by revealing hidden truths about Indian and European interaction since the sixteenth-century encounter. Certain episodes in Cantares also seem startlingly similar to incidents in previous indigenista fiction. The disappearing pregnancy is very reminiscent of the bad omen of the

¹² For more on this, see Jordan Elgrably's "Myth and Matriarchy in Mexico: A Profile of Photographer Graciela Iturbide."

eclipse birth in Oficio de Tinieblas. These parallels are intriguing, particularly considering that critics starting with Joseph Sommers have shown that Rosario Castellanos' novels suffer from the longstanding problems of indigenista patriarchy. Castellanos Martínez manages to redirect the efforts of his indigenista predecessors, ironically by employing many of their own tools.

The fact that Javier Castellanos is Zapotec instantly does away with the problematic indigenista obsession with cultural “authenticity” and purity. On the contrary, Castellanos seemingly embraces hybridity and transculturation as fundamental to Zapotec society. The importance of music in Cantares illustrates the author's stance on the subject. When Jaime first returns to his village after years of absence, he hears a song sung in Zapotec and likes it so much that he transcribes and learns the lyrics, not unlike a non-indigenous anthropologist, perhaps thinking that he could use them to fulfill part of his charge to compile material in his native language. But when Jaime asks the singers who wrote the song and what it is called, one of them replies: “No sé nada de eso, la sacamos de un disco y la pasamos al zapoteco” (41). Here an outside cultural influence on an indigenous community is treated as commonplace and not at all threatening, with the key detail that the agents for the incorporation are Zapotecs themselves. Other examples of Castellanos' different approach to hybridity are comments on technological change in the novel. When Jaime enters the new concrete house built where his parents' thatch home stood, he observes, “[c]uando me asomé al interior pronto me convencí que por más que nos cambiemos de ropa siempre seguiremos siendo los mismos, ya que allí, todo estaba idéntico a como hace mucho: costales medio llenos de maíz, de café, un poquito de frijol, igual que antes, una gallina clueca empollando en un rincón, bastante basura y muchas cosas tiradas” (38). Hybridization does not seem to

dilute or diminish the Zapotec community in Cantares. Adaptation has apparently become an intrinsic part of the culture itself. Unlike in previous fiction, however, an implicit distinction is made between hybridization and assimilation.

As in Memorial del tiempo, music plays a central role in Cantares. Here too music discredits previous stereotypes of Indians as stoic figures and in fact goes even farther as a vehicle for indigenous cultural expression. Music in Cantares is associated not only with happiness and celebration, but with a broad range of other emotions as well. Furthermore, unlike in Memorial, music in Cantares is lyrical, reinforcing the theme of alternative forms of literacy, which is a common thread in the novel: “Entendí porque [sic] la gente canta, cualquier canto parecía, en ese entonces, que había sido escrito para mí o para Trhon Lia” (79; my emphasis). Five sets of song lyrics are reproduced, in two cases in their entirety. One is clearly attributed as non-Zapotec, another is singled out as traditional (“Canto wego” 131) and the others are of unclear precedence.

Many elements of Cantares distinguish it from previous narrative about Mexican Indians as well. Most importantly, the traditional association between Indians and nature is almost entirely absent. There are no descriptions or scenes involving forests, rivers or other natural elements, and the only references to nature at all are the previously cited, “¡Ay! de nosotros que nacemos junto a las hierbas” (19) and a few metaphorical references in the previously mentioned Zapotec song (131). In yet another reversal of old dualisms, instinctual behavior in Cantares is more closely associated with the assimilated Jaime, while the traditional Trhon is more closely linked to abstract concepts like history and community. Perhaps for the first time in a Mexican novel of indigenous theme, Castellanos Martínez dispenses with nature references almost completely, avoiding longstanding romantic

associations and underlining indigenous intelligence as being worthy of respect on equal terms.

Another important departure from most previous novels about Mexican indigenous groups is Cantares' multiple references to migration, in this case including not only internal migration, but also the important issue of emigration to the United States. This extremely relevant concern in economically disadvantaged communities in Mexico is seemingly left completely out of other similar texts, even the recent ones read in this study. Cantares takes a subtle but strong anti-migration posture, establishing a parallel between migration and assimilation. Its overall structure mirrors the reality in indigenous communities across Mexico that males are far more likely to emigrate, temporarily or permanently, relegating to women the role of preserving language and culture. Jaime is an internal migrant whose departure from the Zapotec community distances him from the Zapotec values that Thron helps him recover once he returns and decides to stay. The simple act of being taken away from the village at the beginning of the novel seems to be what starts Jaime down the errant path in the first place. Thron's husband, who lives and works in the United States, loses his family and we never know what becomes of him afterwards. Like many other indigenous migrants, his participation in the household is limited to the money and final letter he sends.

The indigenista obsession with truth is referenced and distinctly modified in Cantares. Perhaps signaling the late arrival of postmodernism to the novel of indigenous theme, Castellanos relativizes truth in the text, first indirectly with the previously cited multiple layers of reporting in the narrative structure. Truth is mentioned directly many times as well, however. But instead of the truth, as before, Cantares contains corrections of previous false truths, such as "hoy vas a escuchar lo que pasó realmente entre..." (71), and also

postmodern-sounding multiple truths in phrases like “ya hay otra verdad” (73); “hablando con su verdad”; “la nueva verdad” (73; with my emphasis in all cases), not only giving the work a postmodern flavor, but also reinforcing its subversive stance with regard to indigenismo through questioning of previous simplifications. The validation of Thron’s mythic revelations as compared to the failure of Jaime’s rational/intellectual consumer attitudes also contributes to Cantares’ decidedly relativist stance when compared to its indigenista antecedents. This is manifested in the complexity of its flawed characters, open acceptance of hybridity, as well as questioning of Western versions of history and even notions about literacy.

Another departure from previous Mexican fiction of indigenous theme in Cantares is an ambivalent and nuanced presentation of the theme of violence. At first, armed struggle seems to be the solution to domination of the Zapotecs. As previously mentioned, in Thron’s second revelation, her forebear Lia Kaxhon incites her people to expel the Spanish by force: “Ahora, encuentren su camino y váyanse, hemos decidido ya no tolerarlos!” (105). As in much indigenista fiction, the context leaves no doubt that she is justified in doing so, even if the long-term results backfire. But the end of the novel reveals a radically different position by Thron. After her third revelation, Jaime presumes to educate Thron about how their people can escape their inferior economic conditions, based on “history”: “Si tú supieras leer un poco, te enseñaría que hasta en los libros de los niños está escrito que antes, nosotros éramos esclavos y cuando llegó el año de 1810, nos cansamos de ello y luchamos; desde entonces dejamos de ser esclavos” (139). But based on her more insightful and intimate knowledge of her people and history, Thron rebuffs him and rejects violence as a solution:

Es verdad cuando dices que yo no sé leer, pero aunque así esté el montón de libros, diciendo eso; yo no lo puedo creer. Nosotros no hemos estado en

guerra con nadie y no vamos a estar en guerra con nadie, porque ahora lo que nos sucede no es que alguien nos haya arrebatado nuestra riqueza y que ahora no nos la quiera entregar y por lo cual es necesario hacerle la guerra para recuperarlo, no, no, no es así. Lo que pasa es que nuestra situación está así por nuestra forma de ser, la riqueza es lo contrario de lo que a nosotros nos gusta ser, por eso nuestros antepasados nunca se propusieron ser dueños únicos de la tierra y por eso toleraron al extranjero, si todos pensaran como tú, entonces sí pelearíamos, pero hasta ahorita sólo unos cuantos han pensado como tú, ojalá ésta sea la última vez que hablas de pobreza, porque si buscas salir seriamente de esto y con tu pensamiento, tendrías que pelear y no va a faltar quien te siga pero tampoco va a faltar quien te traicione, porque nuestro pueblo aún piensa como yo y el día que seriamente se lo proponga vas a ver que no va a ser con guerra como lo va a resolver. (139)

Thron comes to see violence as too easy, an oversimplification of what indigenous communities need to resolve their problems. By the end of the novel, in fact, it is Jaime that becomes directly associated with violence and indulges openly in it, in contrast to Thron. He admits to hitting her when words fail him: “Tanta palabra ya me estaba desesperando y por eso, cuando terminó de hablar y sin saber qué decirle, comencé a pegarle” (139). As he burns down the hut where they live, he screams at Thron: “¡Te voy a matar aunque aquí seamos consumidos los dos!” (140). Continuing the symbolic value of the two characters and again subverting stereotypes, Western-educated Jaime frequently evokes base instinct and violence, while traditional, ostensibly illiterate Thron relies on contemplation and verbal expression. Thron’s attitude of considered passive resistance proves to be more effective in the end, of course, as she ultimately converts Jaime to her way of thinking.

Even Thron’s apparently confident posture is heavily problematized at one point, however. After her second revelation, she expresses contradiction and even postmodern-sounding futility with regard to her charge as a Donaxhe:

Hoy platiqué la historia de mi hermana mayor, de la cual aún traigo su sangre y por lo mismo, su carácter y su bondad, si es que yo quisiera ser bondadosa, pero no lo soy ni lo seré porque sé que desde que llegaron los de Castilla hemos sido anulados, nuestra simiente ya no crece, por eso no quiero

afligirme en cumplir con lo que está dicho que es mi deber, aunque sé que me espera un castigo por no cumplir, no me importa, olvidaré a mi pueblo. (106)

As Bustos notes, Thron's questioning and mistrust extend beyond hegemony from outside the indigenous community, to include even her own ideas. Her despair is a reflection of Hayden White's postmodern notions about irony in the face of the impossibility of positive political action (Bustos 100).

Not surprisingly, there are no solutions offered at the end of Cantares. Instead, the conclusion is open and somewhat contradictory, again giving it a decidedly postmodern and updated feel as compared to its predecessors. By choosing to accept Thron's ideas and way of life, Jaime seems fully reintegrated in Zapotec society for the first time since he was a child. The couple moves on to another small town and Jaime embraces poverty: "He sido obediente a todo lo que me han dicho y he cumplido sin reserva con los carguitos que me dieron. No me he quejado de pobreza durante mi estancia en este lugar, ya sé que este [sic] es un lugar pobre, pero no sólo para mí sino que todos aquí somos pobres" (145; emphasis in the original). But just as Jaime's long search for identity and place seems over, like before, he makes a bad, impulsive choice by stealing corn from someone in the village. In the process he is blamed for a whole rash of recent thefts, which seems to reinforce Thron's previous critiques of needless internal division in the community and provides somewhat dim prospects for the future. Jaime laments, "[t]an siquiera aquellos que han robado mazorca debieran compadecerse de mí y apoyarme, pero casi estoy seguro que ellos son los que con más celo han de estar pidiendo mi cuello" (146). On the positive side, however, Jaime definitely considers himself part of the Zapotec community now, as evidenced by the change in perspective in some of his last words, "Ya conozco a mis paisanos" (146). When the unidentified narrator takes over, he paints an equally ambiguous Picture of Jaime's, and by

extension, the community's future: "Como él mismo dijo, había muchos que pedían que se le cortara el cuello por ladrón, pero fueron más los que lo consideraron y pedían por su perdón. Esto hizo enojar a los que no lo querían y no quedaron conformes hasta no lograr que se decidiera su expulsión del pueblo" (147). Thron remains by his side, however, and she is extraordinary in the narrator's estimation. The last words of the text are purposefully vague, as if to say that the future is wide open: "Quién sabe dónde andarán ahora" (147).

Javier Castellanos Martínez' Cantares de los vientos primerizos is a complex and entertaining novel that presents a dialogue with and also a distinct departure from previous fiction about Indians in Mexico. Though employing many of the same elements, starting with the novel genre itself, it reformulates problematic indigenista paradigms while incorporating innovative literary techniques and also making clear references to previous texts in Spanish. Cantares makes a strong case against indigenous assimilation while embracing cultural hybridity on indigenous terms. Important themes of current relevance are also included, such as migration, violence and poverty, all by means of a sophisticated postmodern-influenced approach. Cantares' layered narrative structure decenters the role of the conventional individual author and perhaps indirectly points toward more common collective indigenous literary efforts that are the subject of the next chapter of this study.

CHAPTER 6

BEYOND THE NOVEL: FILM AND VIDEO OF INDIGENOUS THEME

The majority of Mexican literature of indigenous theme to date has appeared in novel form.¹³ Especially since the Revolution, but even long before, writers, critics and teachers have traditionally viewed the novel as the vehicle par excellence for portraying conditions in indigenous communities and ostensibly arguing for change, as we have seen in the previous chapters of this study. Yet in the twenty first century, trends point to a move away from the novel and toward other genres and media. The bulk of literatura indígena in print form in Mexico today is volumes of poetry and short stories. But perhaps the most important genres and media for representing these themes, now and in coming years, are those that do not rely directly on the printed word and that emphasize a shared community experience by audiences. With the rapid advance of technology, film appears to be the genre that holds most promise in the opening years of the twenty first century.

With noted exceptions, such as Cantares de los vientos primerizos, subject of the previous chapter, the novel of indigenous theme seems trapped in what John Beverley terms the “complicity of literature and modernization” (Against Literature 10). This critic points out the paradox of literature as a tool traditionally used to both reinforce as well as resist hegemony. He argues that while literature is used to innovate and resist traditional power structures, it generally falls back into the first pattern afterward. Novels of indigenous theme

¹³ One of the few studies of manifestations of indigenismo in other genres and media, particularly symphonic music and painting, is Henri Farve’s El indigenismo.

with innovative literary devices and approaches at first seem to break the mold of the genre. Over the last seven decades, there has been a distinct pattern with novels of Mexican indigenous theme penned by non-Indians. First these works receive critical acclaim and are held up as symbols of advancement in the struggle for indigenous rights. But after close scrutiny, they are shown to reinforce longstanding patriarchal models, just like their forebears. Beverley observes: “Hegemony--this was, after all, Gramsci’s point--is founded on the incorporation and neutralization of contradictions, not on a purely monological discourse” (Against Literature 25). The ideology of indigenismo, with the novel as its primary esthetic medium, is based precisely on this principle of assimilation and neutralization of difference. Given this longstanding association, as well as the novel’s identification with western bourgeois writers and audiences, it seems unrealistic to think that there will be any proliferation of novels written by indigenous authors in the near future.

Another factor that argues against the continued predominance of the novel is low rates of literacy in indigenous communities, at least as “literacy” is understood in western terms.¹⁴ Furthermore, the novel genre emphasizes individualism, which seems contradictory for cultures that appear to value collective identity and group collaboration over the individual. With few exceptions, the novel is written by a single author and focuses on one or a few select characters. With these inherent drawbacks, as well as more widespread access to new technologies and forms of expression, the novel genre will most likely continue to diminish in importance for literature of indigenous theme.

In Against Literature, Beverley prophetically declares that in a post-capitalist, democratizing world, definitions of literature and culture need to be broadened to include

¹⁴ Pilar Maynez provides the following statistics for illiteracy in Mexico: 48.4% Indian, 8.5% non-Indian. Lenguas y literaturas indígenas en el México contemporáneo.

mass culture and media (10). Though he does not refer directly to indigenismo and its problems per se, Beverley's main argument is very pertinent to the evolution of representing indigenous subjects treated in this study:

From a postmodernist perspective, not only does the left need to aestheticize politics, it needs to make of the aesthetic experience itself--cultural creation and consumption--one of the forms of agency of postcapital social life.... Such a shift involves accepting the challenge of mass culture and the mass media--rather than simply dismissing these, as has been the case in the dominant models of Latin American media criticism--as sites for the production of false consciousness. It also involves critiquing the ways in which the left in its previous incarnations was, in its own cultural ideologies, implicated with a university-based, essentially Eurocentric literary humanism and, since the thirties in particular, with aesthetic modernism in the English-language sense of the term--a relation that empowered but also limited its political reach and effectiveness. (118-19)

In the first part of the citation, Beverley asserts that artistic self-representation is critical for struggles for increased autonomy, which in the present context affirms the importance of literatura indígena. He proceeds to argue in favor of democratizing the arts, for allowing those not schooled in traditional western forms such as the novel to be recognized for creative expression that has not traditionally been accepted as "canonical." In other words, if applied in the framework of the current discussion, indigenismo's fundamental premise that indigenous groups must change and evolve was exactly backwards. It is the hegemonic establishment, particularly politics and academia, which requires change. Anthropologist Annette Hamilton provides an argument from a social sciences perspective that is astoundingly similar to Beverley's:

The closing years of the twentieth century are witnessing a radical re-orientation of thought in the human sciences which defies traditional disciplinary boundaries and demands a new "turning": away from the rationalizing modes of modernity and towards a different grasp of the nature of knowing itself.... The power of visual media as a means of knowledge-creation is only hesitantly grasped by many in public life.... But, from the viewpoint of the emergent visual-aural culture of the twenty-first century,

“what’s on” creates the context for what is known and hence finally for what “is.” (qtd. in Ginsburg “Embedded Aesthetics” 365)

Organizations dedicated to the production of video by subaltern groups in Mexico are currently pursuing precisely the kind of reorientation in esthetics described by Beverley and Hamilton. For example, the website of the Proyecto Videoastas Indígenas de la Frontera Sur (PVIFS) in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas emphasizes the “necesidad de romper el monopolio (pos)colonial de la ‘representación del Otro’” in their work. The members of this group see themselves as inheritors of the anthropologists who began to seriously question indigenista ideology in the late 1960s, and on their website they declare that video is the best medium for accomplishing their goals:

El presente proyecto forma parte, sin duda, de esa tradición de investigadores que desde los años sesenta, se preocuparon por encontrar puntos de contacto entre sus investigaciones y las necesidades de educación, autodeterminación y resistencia cultural de las comunidades indígenas. Y como algunos colegas ya han apuntado, creemos firmemente que los indígenas de comunidades y organizaciones, usando los medios de comunicación en general, y el video en particular, pueden empoderarse y apoyar sus movimientos de resistencia cultural equipándose de mejor manera para negociar cuotas de poder dentro del sistema político global.

Use of the internet and film by Mexican indigenous groups during and since the Zapatista uprising in 1994 offers concrete evidence that electronic and visual media have increased dramatically in importance as means for indigenous self-expression in Mexico. The PVIFS website points specifically to the Zapatista movement as the key point of departure: “Sin duda alguna el impulso más importante que se ha dado al desarrollo de los medios de comunicación indígena en los últimos diez años, ha venido de la política cultural y mediática del EZLN.”

Prohibitive print production costs and international consolidation of publishing as a result of globalization also suggest that filmic and electronic media present the greatest

possibility for disseminating indigenous cultural production. Advances such as the internet, cheaper VCRs, DVD players, video cameras and computers have become more accessible to individuals and communities, providing attractive alternative means for production and distribution of literary texts, as understood in Beverley's twenty-first century terms. While perhaps still in their infancy in some ways, these tools offer platforms for the possibility of direct or at least less mediated distribution and consumption of literary texts authored by Mexican indigenous peoples.

Another important factor in indigenous communities' access to technology is immigration. Much of the equipment used for producing and screening video indígena is brought back from the United States by migrant workers. Video cameras are becoming so common, in fact, that according to well known indigenous video producer and promoter Juan José García, in some villages it is common for there to be "hasta venticinco cámaras" all told, if one adds up the equipment in individual households.¹⁵ These cameras and other equipment are a means for people to stay in touch with their families and communities while working for extended periods abroad.

Minority and indigenous groups from other places around the world have turned to visual media as an effective form of expression as well. Groups in Canada, Brazil and Australia have been involved in media production since the late 1980s (Cusi Wortham 363). Studies of other marginalized groups' experiences are useful for understanding the challenges faced by indigenous groups in Mexico, since subaltern groups all over the world have many similar goals and problems. The example of Australian Aborigines is particularly relevant, since they are also a culturally and linguistically diverse colonized population spread out over a large area, plus Aborigines seem to be further along the path of organizing

¹⁵ Personal interview, 19 Feb. 2007.

mass media production and dissemination. One group, the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) has established a private commercial television station called Imparja with a government satellite concession and programming in several different Aboriginal languages (Ginsburg “Indigenous Media” 275-76).

Anthropologist Faye Ginsburg’s writing about innovative Aboriginal cultural production in visual media offers valuable insights that can be applied to the situation for Mexican indigenous groups as well. Ginsburg notes that visual media are the means with the most potential for disseminating native voices: “Aboriginal people, both individually and collectively, are turning to film, video and television as the media most likely to carry their messages to one another and into the consciousness of white Australia” (MacDougall, qtd. in Ginsburg “Indigenous Media” 280). She points out the unique opportunity for cultural mediation implicit in texts by indigenous producers:

Work being produced by indigenous people about themselves is... directed to the mediation of ruptures of time and history. They work to heal disruptions in cultural knowledge, in historical memory, and in identity between generations occasioned by the tragic but familiar litany of assaults: the taking of lands, political violence, introduced diseases, expansion of capitalist interests and tourism, and unemployment coupled with loss of traditional bases of subsistence. (“Indigenous Media” 265)

Unlike in much of western cultural production, the social and practical aspects of Aboriginal video production are valued far more than the form of the work. Productions are understood as a form of social action. “My argument, then, is that this new and complex object – Aboriginal media – is understood by its producers to be operating in multiple domains as an extension of their collective (vs. individual) self-production” (Ginsburg “Embedded Aesthetics” 368).

Ginsburg's work also reveals that although the medium of film/video may be more accessible, the problems faced by producers are in some ways similar to those already discussed in previous chapters about the novel. First, though it may not be a "traditional" or canonical mode of expression, film is also closely identified with western mass culture and consumption ("Indigenous Media" 256-57) and therefore theoretically is also subject to potential perils of Beverley's "complicity of literature and modernization." Indigenous producers are again faced with the ironic task of using the hegemonic group's tools to subvert hegemony. Ginsburg notes concretely that in Australia, many western conventions are used in indigenous visual media, which presents the negative possibilities of either alienating some aboriginal viewers or enticing them to watch western shows ("Indigenous Media" 279). The same risks apply to indigenous media in Mexico as well.

Falling into stereotyping and tokenism is also a common hazard in film, just as in the novel. This is particularly true where financial resources are lacking. Writing about black filmmakers in Great Britain, Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer note that:

Where access and opportunities are rationed, so that black films tend to get made only one-at-a-time, each film text is burdened with an inordinate pressure to be "representative" and to act, like a delegate does, as a statement that "speaks" for the black communities as a whole. Martine Atille, producer of [a] film, suggests that the "sense of urgency to say it all" stems less from the artistic choices made by black film-makers and more from the material constraints in which "sometimes we only get the one chance to make ourselves heard." (357)

Julien and Mercer observe that when few voices from a group are heard, they bear the impossible burden of serving as a cultural mouthpiece, of representing a large and diverse group that cannot be summarily encapsulated in a single work of art (357-58). This problem also unfairly places constraints on subject matter for subaltern filmmakers: "Here in England there is a danger, if you are black, that all you are allowed to make is films about black

people and their problems. White film-makers on the other hand, have the right to make films about whatever they like” (Horace Ove, qtd. 360). Western genre conventions may also represent an obstacle in some ways. A blurring of traditional “genre” lines within film may be necessary and helpful in much the same way that testimonio represented a step away from the indigenista novel. Ginsburg again quotes MacDougal: “The dominant conflict structure of Western fictional narratives, and the didacticism of much of Western documentary, may be at odds with traditional modes of discourse. The division into fiction and documentary may itself be subversive.” (“Indigenous Media” 266). This observation seems a logical extension of Beverley’s case to broaden canonical norms.

Visual media also face a problem parallel to that of “authenticity,” as previously discussed in the novel of indigenous theme. Much as with literary realism in previous centuries, audiences and even filmmakers today can be tempted to see the visual product as an unfiltered representation of indigenous “reality,” instead of as a constructed fictional text. The importance of television news and documentary film has undoubtedly contributed to widespread modern perceptions of video images as indisputable truth. Ginsburg points out that the origin of this problem can be traced back to positivism, an ideological pillar in the construction of Mexican indigenismo: “The lack of analysis of such media as both cultural product and social process may also be due to our own culture’s enduring positivist belief that the camera provides a ‘window’ on reality, a simple expansion of our powers of observation, as opposed to a creative tool in the service of a new signifying practice” (“Indigenous Media” 258). Critics and viewers of productions about indigenous groups should be aware of this persistent peril.

Furthermore, the paradoxical question of who is entitled to represent indigenous subjects persists in visual media. With access to cameras and film production easier than publishing novels, the possibility of complete exclusion of outsider viewpoints is raised and rejected by Ginsburg:

Some simply want to abandon or declare “colonialist” any attempt to film “the other” since indigenous media production makes it clear that “they” are capable of representing themselves. For example, critiques coming out of some branches of cultural studies, while raising important points about the politics of representation, are so critical of all “gazes” at the so-called other that, to follow the program set by some, we would all be paralysed into an alienated universe, with no engagements across the boundaries of difference that for better or worse exist.

Underlying these responses, of course, is the idea that “we” and “they” are separate, which is in turn built upon the trope and mystique of the noble savage living in a traditional, bounded world, for whom all knowledge, objects, and values originating elsewhere are polluting some reified notion of culture and innocence. (“Indigenous Media” 263)

This argument may appear to contradict my objections in previous sections of this study about the participation of outsiders as authors of indigenista and testimonio narrative as well as compilers/translators/editors of literatura indígena. However, I agree with Ginsburg that “outside” voices are perfectly valid in a cultural debate and evolution such as the one taking place with regard to indigenous groups in Mexico, provided that there is an opportunity for multiple voices from within indigenous communities to be heard as well. Historically this has not been the case. Exclusion of indigenous voices is equally, if not more problematic. If non-Indian filmmakers produce all or most of the texts about these communities, as with the novel, then the problems of indigenismo will persist.

Along these same lines, Julien and Mercer warn that dualism and cultural absolutes still present significant obstacles in film. Much as I contend with respect to the novels discussed in previous chapters of this study, they argue for greater cultural relativism and

moving away from binarism in visual media: “The deconstruction of binary relations thus entails the relativization and rearticulation of ‘ethnicity.’ This is an importantly enabling argument as it brings a range of critical issues into an explanatory structure, however tentative” (Julien 358). Ginsburg likewise stresses the importance of perceiving visual representations of indigenous identity as constructed and ongoing as opposed to static and pristine (as in Cantares): “[Many recent works dedicated to asserting and conserving Aboriginal identity] are about the processes of identity construction. They are not based on some retrieval of an idealised past but create and assert a position for the present that attempts to accommodate the inconsistencies and contradictions of contemporary life” (“Indigenous Media” 265). Finally, Julien and Mercer signal a fundamental binary contradiction that I believe should be explored in these and other literary forms in order for significant long term changes in hegemony to occur. They contend that white (or in the present context, white and mestizo) ethnicity should be pointed out and explored as well:

The desire to “correct” the omissions of the past within the western avant-garde, on the other hand, has led to a one-sided fixation with ethnicity as something that “belongs” to the Other alone, thus white ethnicity is not under question and retains its “centered” position; more to the point, the white subject remains the cultural reference point in the power ploys of multicultural policy. The burden of representation thus falls on the Other, because as Fusco argues, “to ignore white ethnicity is to redouble its hegemony by naturalizing it.” (359)

This omission in indigenismo and beyond is fundamental to maintaining the status quo of power imbalance in both the esthetic and political realms.

Many aspects of visual media seem to offer more promise for subaltern empowerment than canonical literary representations of Indians. The first is that film and video productions generally require collaborative efforts, which would seem to fit better with the community orientation of indigenous groups as well as offer promise for reintegrating members who

have drifted away, particularly from younger generations. With new and cheaper technologies, distribution and consumption of these cultural manifestations is also much easier than with traditional literary forms, as Ginsburg observes:

Indigenous filmmakers, scholars, and policy makers have been advocating indigenous use of visual media as a new opportunity for influence and self-expression. In their view, these technologies offer unique potential for the expansion of community-generated production and for the construction of viewing conditions and audiences shaped by indigenous interests and, ultimately, cultural regeneration. (“Indigenous Media” 266-67)

Like Castellanos Martínez’ strategy in Cantares, as discussed in the previous chapter, these creative outlets can span generations by ironically incorporating outside elements while simultaneously reinforcing community traditions and values. But as Ginsburg notes, visual media offer greater possibilities of completing the circuit of production and consumption within indigenous communities, which would more closely approach the strict definition of literatura indígena, something impossible at this stage with a traditional literary form like the novel. Additionally, technological advances mean that video production, distribution and consumption are easier to control locally than print media publishing.

Film and video production of Mexican indigenous theme is broad and complex. Alongside the growing number of indigenous productions, there continue to be ethnographic documentaries and even popular Hollywood movies of indigenous theme made by non-Indian filmmakers, one of which will be discussed later in this chapter. All of these texts reflect different degrees of hybridity and influence by twentieth century indigenismo.

Like Australian Aboriginal film and video and even indigenismo itself, the use of visual media for self-expression in Mexican indigenous communities began through government sponsorship. Erica Cusi Wortham notes that a president Carlos Salinas-era project first sponsored multiple eight-week training sessions in the fundamentals of video

production by the National Indigenous Institute (INI) from 1990-1994. The INI then established several regional video centers and trained hundreds of indigenous people in video mechanics. Influential indigenous videomaker and producer Juan José García asserts that there were 900 participants in different workshops in just the Oaxaca regional center between 1994 and 2000 (Brígido-Corachán 371). These regional centers attracted politically oriented, critical indigenous video makers, but funding for the project slowly began to decline. Disagreements about the Zapatista rebellion led the government to pressure the centers until many of their most creative and capable people formed or joined non-governmental organizations to continue this work (Cusi Wortham 363-65). Cusi Wortham notes, however, that these media have now been appropriated by indigenous groups in Mexico and are being used to their advantage: “Like the term ‘indígena’ itself, video indígena has been appropriated and self-consciously resignified as a postura or political position vital to indigenous struggles for self-determination” (365).

While the purpose of Hollywood productions is primarily to entertain, objectives in indigenous productions are more varied and intricate. Many are clearly intended as a means for political struggle and dissemination of information about indigenous struggles nationally and internationally. Land and political conflicts as well as cases of human rights violations are common subjects that promote indigenous struggles for autonomy (Brígido-Corachán 370). Other videos document ceremonies, traditions, testimonies and community organizational practices for the purpose of constructing and reinforcing indigenous identity, as well as preserving this information for future generations. Video can also be a vehicle for expressing what is new (Cusi Wortham 366). Furthermore, video seems to be an effective tool for building bridges between cultures. The PVIFS declares on its website: “En nuestro

proyecto el objetivo ha sido abonar el camino del desarrollo de una antropología colaborativa descolonizada que permita diálogos interculturales más horizontales que los que normalmente se dan en nuestra disciplina.” But perhaps what distinguishes indigenous video centers and projects most is that they actively seek to spread their skills and capacity for self-expression to others. Juan José García’s describes how this process works at the Ojo de Agua center in Oaxaca:

[People] would then ask us to go to the festivities of their towns to make a video, or they would point out that in some other place there was a similar tradition and would wonder why we had not gone there to make a record of this other event? But this was not our entire purpose; we were just making certain things possible. However, we gladly offered them a camera workshop and we lent them the camera so they could go and make a visual record of their own. (Brígido-Corachán 371)

García maintains that a community focus is the common thread in indigenous video production. Filmic work represents an intersection between the individual and the community. Even though García recognizes that films are individual efforts on one level, he prefers to think of filmmakers as “responsables de comunicar cosas” and not creators, because they “are not creating knowledge or an aesthetic concept, they are rather interpreting collective knowledges” (Brígido-Corachán 371). Humor is also a very common element in indigenous video, as in other forms of literatura indígena. García explains, “the truth is that a community can be suffering terribly, but there are always some pleasant moments, so humor springs up naturally – it is not planned, it is rather part of everything” (Brígido-Corachán 372).

Incorporating video production in indigenous communities has been problematic in some ways, however. First, sometimes members of some communities are reluctant to view it as important work, since it does not produce the kind of tangible product that results when

people build a house, for example. When the community is engaged in collective physical labor and one or two members are filming, there is sometimes pressure for them to put their cameras aside and contribute to the “real work.” There is also debate about whether filmmakers should lead the community to issues that should matter to them--such as critiques of globalization--that may not be explicitly perceived as a problem (Cusi Wortham 366). Finally, like other examples of literatura indígena, debates about participation by non-Indians are complex. The PVIFS website is explicit in its acceptance of hybrid production:

Por “video indígena” se podría entender aquel en el que los indígenas son responsables de todo el proceso: desde la definición del tema, el desarrollo del mismo, la redacción del guión, el trabajo de cámara, la edición, la posproducción y, finalmente, la difusión de los materiales. Sin embargo este tema es muy polémico y lo que a nosotros nos queda claro, al final de esta primera etapa de cinco años de trabajo, es que los videos producidos en este proyecto son “híbridos” que muestran, antes que nada, diálogos interculturales dados en el Chiapas multicultural y pluriétnico.

Yet other centers, while they clearly depend on non-indigenous advisors and technicians, are not so forthcoming about this question.

Like most all literature of indigenous theme, indigenous video production is closely tied to intricate and evolving power structures in Mexico. Cusi Wortham sums up the current situation for this emerging representational tool this way: “Video indígena, like indigenous media more generally, indexes a range of negotiations and broader relationships of power and positioning between state-led institutions and categories of identity, and indigenous activists” (367).

Following are readings of four videos/films of Mexican indigenous theme. These are not meant to be a representative sample, given that the amount and range of material available is quite large. Instead, in making these selections, I was guided by the critiques of indigenismo outlined in the first sections of this study. I tried to choose recent filmic texts,

directed by both Indians and non-Indians, which contained illustrative examples of adherence or departure from indigenista ideology, as well as films that were esthetically pleasing to me personally.

6.1 Día de muertos en la tierra de los murciélagos [K'in Santo ta Sotz'leb]. Dir. Pedro Daniel López López. Proyecto Videoastas Indígenas de la Frontera Sur, Chiapas, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social (CIESAS) and Centro de Estudios Superiores de México y Centroamérica de la Universidad de Ciencia y Artes de Chiapas (CESMECA - UNICACH), 2003.

Día de muertos en la tierra de los murciélagos is a thirty-minute documentary video made by the young indigenous filmmaker Pedro Daniel López. The film documents Day of the Dead observances in Zinacantán, Chiapas, seen from the perspective of the filmmaker's family.

Día de muertos begins with melancholy but pleasant, almost tango-sounding music, most likely produced by a keyboard, and a black screen. Seconds later, a scene of the sun rising behind a mountain appears and narration by the filmmaker commences, in Spanish: "Desde que el hombre apareció en la tierra, su amor a la vida lo ha llevado a luchar contra la muerte. Pero ante lo inevitable, mantiene una esperanza y se conserva fiel a su creencia sobre la vida eterna, aquella que principia con la muerte." This introduction establishes a universal human context as a backdrop to the culturally specific and syncretic practices that follow. The beauty of the sunrise and the music also set the tone for a positive and accessible portrayal of what comes after. The music continues but the visual cuts to a grave with colorful flowers foregrounding a deep blue sky.

The next scene shows a procession for the Day of the Dead, and the music changes to indigenous flute and drum. The narration in Spanish continues:

Por ejemplo, los pobladores de Zinacantán en Chiapas han llevado a su esplendor el culto a los muertos, creando una forma tradicional de riqueza entre la vida terrenal y la del más allá. Ellos creen que las almas sobreviven al cuerpo. Por ello intentan retener al espíritu cerca de ellos. En las tumbas depositan todo cuanto le pudiera ser agradable al espíritu de sus muertos. Este legado ha trascendido de generación tras generación.

This section of narration creates a bridge between the universal theme of death and the syncretic Catholic/prehispanic beliefs and practices of Mexican indigenous groups on All Saints Day, orienting those unfamiliar with the subject of the film and to a degree demystifying what they are about to see. One of the primary aims of Día de muertos is to inform outsiders about customs in Zinacantán while simultaneously revealing the universal human qualities of the people it portrays. The Spanish language introduction, subtitles and transition titles underscore the educational aspect of the film.

While the introductory narration continues, the scene again segues to scenes of the Zinacantán municipal cemetery brightly decorated with flowers and candles for the Day of the Dead festivities. Cultural hybridity is evident from this early moment in the film, as we see three colorfully dressed community leaders chanting in Latin while they sprinkle holy water on graves in the cemetery. Only after this introduction does the title of the film appear, first in large letters in Tzotzil and then in smaller Spanish below, overlaid on a background scene of a cave with bats flying.¹⁶

From this point on, speech in the film is entirely in Tzotzil with subtitles in Spanish, making it clear that an indigenous audience is intended as well. There are transitional titles in Spanish to orient viewers with respect to the preparations for the community event as they unfold sequentially: “Unos días antes de la fiesta,” “Panteón municipal de Zinacantán,” “Las compras,” “Adornar el panteón,” and “1º de noviembre.” But the main character, the

¹⁶ Zinacantán means land of bats, though this is not stated specifically in the film.

filmmaker's grandfather, describes longstanding practices and appeals for the preservation of tradition with the clear intent of documenting, demarcating and maintaining cultural practices within the community. However, as in the previously discussed novel Cantares del viento primerizo, there seems to be no contradiction in the video between preserving tradition and integrating new elements from outside the community. Day of the Dead observances in Mexico are in fact a mingling of Spanish Catholic and traditional indigenous rituals, but more recent change is also evident later in the film when the grandfather describes a very concrete way in which the Day of the Dead celebration has changed: "Antes la gente utilizaba flores pequeñas. Había puras flores rojas: sempasuchitl y ch'oliv, entre otras. De veras, antes no teníamos tantas flores; y para encontrar estas flores, se mandaba una comisión para que vaya al monte a buscarlas... Pero ahora ya no es lo mismo." He does not seem to view this negatively, however, since he participates in buying and placing the abundant flowers as part of the observance.

The first scene after the introduction shows an old indigenous man, identified as Don Mariano López, walking down a well-worn path. He walks toward the camera, and in a clear departure from indigenista depictions of Indians, he looks directly at it, waves amiably and continues on his way. We see him ascend from behind. The next shot shows Don Mariano in a milpa, where we discover that he is the grandfather of the filmmaker and the voice that narrated the first scene in Spanish. This illustrates why he showed such familiarity with the camera and none of the stereotypical indigenista reticence: Don Mariano and the person behind the camera share much more than participation in this film and there is no cultural distance or power imbalance between them. In fact, none of the people that appear in Día de muertos display any kind of reserve or hesitation in front of the camera, and they are

indigenous without exception. This fact underlines a vital difference evident when the producer of a text comes from within the community. As critics of indigenismo have pointed out repeatedly, the author's perspective and relative cultural positioning play a primary role in portrayals in their work. A common myth exists in non-indigenous circles in Mexico that Indians do not like to have their image captured on film for superstitious reasons such as fear of having a part of their souls taken away. Día de muertos lays bare that mistaken interpretation by showing completely natural interactions between subjects and no negative reactions to the camera. Like people from any other ethnic group, adult members of this community likely are conscious of the power of images and want to know the reason for recording their likeness before they agree to take part. Also significant is that indigenous people are subjects in this film and not objects, as has been frequently true in ethnographic documentaries or particularly in the case of tourists who want snapshots or video to show their friends at home. Along the same lines, just as with other texts by indigenous producers, indigenista preoccupation with "authenticity" is completely absent in Día de muertos. This seems even more evident in a filmic text and the subjects' reaction to the project.

Día de muertos represents a significant esthetic literary expression and personal statement by the filmmaker, as well. Even though it is a documentary, the video is also a remarkable work of art, due partly to the inherent splendor of the decorations and surroundings of the Zinacantan cemetery, but in equal measure to the filmmaking skills of Pedro Daniel López and those who collaborated with him on this project. Unlike many other documentaries, it is very narrow in its scope, focusing on a particular man from a particular family in a particular hamlet (Nachij) within Zinacantan. This careful delimiting, combined with the very personal narration of the grandfather, precludes the frequent temptation and

pressure for “ethnic” films to be representative, as cited at the beginning of this chapter. Intentionally or not, Día de muertos loosely adheres to the Aristotelian unities of place, time and action. The entire film focuses on one family’s preparations for and observation of the Day of the Dead festivities in one given year. The film represents a personal tribute to the director’s grandfather and a preservation of his voice, knowledge and practices that will far outlast his life on earth.

The visual element of the second post-introduction scene is of the older man inspecting and harvesting corn for the holiday, while on the audio track his grandson asks him his age and how many children and grandchildren he has. When he says that he has thirty six grandchildren, the young narrator seems astonished at the number, pensively repeating “treinta y seis ...” This detail underlines the film’s emphasis on the future of community traditions and establishes the second aim of its producers, which is to document identity and assure preservation of cultural practice for future generations.

Next, viewers are inside Don Mariano’s house, beside the cooking fire. Here he continues his conversation with his grandson in a very informal, everyday fashion. Don Mariano is not a romanticized character in any way. He and his grandson chat about whether or not there is going to be a bull killed for the Day of the Dead festivities, and then he proceeds to tell how he went about such things when they were his responsibility in the community. He comes across as a very normal, accessible human being, much like anybody’s grandfather sharing past experiences. He even yawns at the end of this scene.

The film then cuts to the scene of some younger men from the community attempting to purchase cows for the coming event from another Tzotzil man on a horse. While they negotiate the price, the man on the horse takes off his cap and affirms their mutual Christian

values, even breaking into Spanish to utter the phrases, “somos hijos de Dios. Somos cristianos.” The owner of the cows wants five thousand pesos, but the potential buyers offer only four thousand. After a bit of haggling and drinking of the local liquor pox, perhaps oddly to western audiences, the price agreed to is four thousand and not somewhere in between the two starting points.

The following scene shows the slaughter, butchering and distribution of the cow to community members. Obviously this material is unusual and might seem repulsive to western audiences, but here it is treated just like any other scene. In fact, the subject almost seems somehow neutral even for a westerner by the end of the fairly lengthy sequence. There is blood and carving of flesh, but no visual or audible signs of struggle. The grandfather’s voice continues calmly narrating his previous experiences over this scene, which is another ameliorating factor.

A young female narrator takes over briefly in the next segment, which shows weeding, cleaning and painting of graves in the cemetery in preparation for the Day of the Dead observance. There is a panoramic shot of the undecorated graveyard that serves as a contrast to its spectacular decorated state in previous and later scenes. Surprisingly, it looks beautiful and colorful even without the adorning flowers and candles.

Following in the film sequence is a market scene where the family buys flowers and other items for the celebration while Mexican popular music plays in the background. But after this point, local indigenous music drones in the background and remains until the end of the film. When the day of the festivities arrives, it is depicted as a serious but not somber occasion, unlike frequent portrayals in indigenista fiction. In fact, there is no depiction of misery, persecution or hunger of any kind in the film. On the contrary, the Day of the Dead

observance is an uplifting occasion of relative plenty, with food being prepared and served in multiple scenes. The commemoration is also a social and family oriented event, with groups including small children gathered throughout the incredibly ornate cemetery. Also perhaps surprisingly for outsiders, gatherings are shown during the day and not at night.

The film closes with incredibly beautiful shots of colorful flowers and candles in the cemetery with a clear blue sky in the background. Don Mariano ends the narration with an admonition directed at his offspring and seemingly all indigenous members of the audience as well: “¡Así es, hijos! Esta es una tradición de nosotros y ustedes deben de continuarla. Porque mis padres y sus padres y hasta los más viejos han seguido esta costumbre. Y ustedes cuidarán sus padres, cuando abandonen este mundo. Porque sólo van a descansar en este lugar especial. Ustedes irán al panteón a visitarlos y continuarán esta tradición y así seguirá.” Pedro Daniel López’s video represents a significant literary and social accomplishment for both indigenous and non-indigenous audiences.

6.2 Zapata’s Garden. Chiapas Media Project - Promedios, 2002.

Zapata’s Garden is a nineteen minute documentary video narrated in Spanish and Tzeltal that presents a communal vegetable garden project in the town of Emiliano Zapata, created on land occupied by indigenous campesinos as a result of the Zapatista uprising in 1994. Unlike Día de muertos, Zapata’s Garden is straightforwardly political, as even its title suggests. The intended audience for the film is different as well, which is evident immediately by the English subtitles throughout. In keeping with Zapatista custom, the seven filmmakers cited in the credits are identified by first name only.

The film opens with a short historical introduction. The first two brief shots are panoramic views of a mountain landscape and a river, with indigenous music played on a flute and drum on the audio track. The scene then cuts to the decaying ruins of a traditional Mexican hacienda “casa grande,” much like the ones that are frequently central in indigenista fiction, and two narrators offer the following background in Tzeltal:

Collective work did not exist when the landowner lived in this house. There was only suffering; we were servants. We did not have cattle or corn, only rich people did. Because they were rich they could ride horses and drink milk. We did not have land to work, so we did not have anything at all. The landowners used to scold us and beat us up. I worked for them and they used to pay me very little. Today things are not the same, things have changed.

This speech appears to be an implicit dialogue with twentieth century Mexican indigenista texts as well as a brief historical setup for the film. In contrast to traditional literary texts, there are no depictions except views of the partially fallen house to illustrate the descriptions of injustices suffered at the hands of the patrón. The narrators’ faces are not even shown, which minimizes the emotion attached to their assertions and stresses objectivity, distance and control with respect to past wrongs. The information is presented as fact, a kind of testimonial, without the extra “baggage” associated with indigenista fiction.

The introduction continues with a shot of a third, academic-type indigenous narrator seated in an office or school who in Spanish asserts that traditionally in Chiapas, there were twenty three families that controlled huge tracts of land with government support. 1994 marked a turning point, however, because the Zapatista uprising inspired organizations that had not yet taken lands from these families to begin to do so. As this narrator speaks, the film cuts to graffiti sprayed in black on a white wall inside the old “casa grande” that shows a masked Zapatista and the slogan “todo para todos. Nada para nosotros.” The entire

introduction lasts only a couple of minutes, as if to say that the film, and the Zapatistas, are clearly more focused on the present and future than the past.

The title screen appears at this point, in English only, followed by the following text in the same green lettering: “Chiapas, Mexico, eight years after the uprising. New village Emiliano Zapata, occupied lands at the former farm of San Antonio Tecoja.” The music shifts to a Revolutionary-era song about Zapata performed on guitar and harmonica. The opening verses are “soy la tierra, soy el surco, la lluvia...” The film cuts to sunrise over the mountain and a crude painting of Emiliano Zapata.

The following scene of an indigenous girl and her mother making tortillas sets the tone for the rest of the film, which is of people working for the benefit of others in the community. The narration over this visual, in Spanish, summarizes the overall message: “Since 94, we can say that we have achieved something. Today we can see the results because we are organized. We all agreed to work together and in an equitable way, as if we had one common voice and one thought, and everyone has something to contribute... We work together in order to achieve a better quality of life.” A new narrator continues, grounding the message in the small but significant concrete project depicted in the film: “At Emiliano Zapata we are organizing to grow vegetables. That is why we are all here: children, adults and elders.”

Unlike in Día de muertos, poverty is quite evident in Zapata’s Garden. Dirt and dust are everywhere, and many residents of the town are shoeless, particularly the women and children. Clothing and houses in Emiliano Zapata also appear significantly inferior to those in Zinacantán. In fact, poverty and malnutrition are openly discussed in the film as the primary reasons for creating the community vegetable garden. A young woman resident

describes high rates of illness and death among children due to poor nutrition, and a Doctors without Borders volunteer reinforces her assertions. Her words reinforce the proactive and practical attributes of the indigenous residents reinforced in the film, again representing a clear break with indigenismo and the old hacienda system described in the introduction: “We are doing this work because we suffer from many illnesses, especially the children get sick and die young due to malnutrition. People tried to figure out a way to avoid this and started to organize themselves for the work. Today, you can see how their work has grown.”

An indigenous man blows a conch shell on the road in the early hours of the day, and community residents gather to go work in the garden together. One of the filmmakers holds the camera and joins the group as they head toward the fenced-in plot. S/he pays special attention to an older resident on crutches because she has just one leg, and in the process captures her/his own shadow in the shot. The latter is something that would most likely be edited out of a western production, but its inclusion here stresses that the camera operator belongs to the community. As s/he walks among the group at the end of the shot, the camera moves up and down in stride.

The next sequence shows members of the community weeding, preparing the soil and planting seedlings in the intended vegetable plot. The academic narrator takes over again and introduces the international aspect of the film. He speaks of the broader implications of the community vegetable garden project, noting that it is a way to reduce reliance on imports and increase local production of goods while also protecting residents from possible harm due to genetically modified foods and agrochemicals. This scene cuts to a local working in the garden who says that the vegetables are fertilized with a locally produced natural liquid. The previous narrator takes over once again and asserts that government loans for campesinos

only serve to create foreign debt and are mismanaged and insufficient anyway. Another worker chimes in to say that he does not want the government's "crumbs," which are only 150 pesos, so little that people spend it all on one bottle of alcohol. The variety of voices in this scene shows that the filmmakers have gone out of their way to emphasize that these opinions about the negative effects of globalization, at least in this context, are shared by many. The array also stresses the importance of community over individual concerns.

Scenes of work in the garden continue, in fact making up the majority of shots in the film. During a break from the chores in the garden, residents sit down and drink pozol, corn meal mixed with water, which is a standard peasant's meal in Chiapas. But as in Día de muertos, far from displaying indigenista stoicism and misery, community members talk, smile, laugh and interact confidently with the camera during this intermission. Even while they work, everyone seems fairly content and engaged in their tasks. Smiles and laughter appear throughout the film after the brief introduction. The indigenous subjects seem completely at ease and frequently look directly into the lens of the camera, often smiling, making it apparent that the filmmakers are not outsiders intent on producing a third-person objectification of these people, but rather more of a second-person interactive representation based on shared cultural experience.

Seedlings in the garden are repeatedly watered and then appear as full grown tomatoes, corn and cabbages. The community again works together to harvest cabbage leaves. These are distributed evenly to the women, many of whom work with children on their backs. The Spanish language narrator speaks again here, noting that NAFTA and the Plan Puebla-Panamá aim to privatize land and promote agricultural conglomerates such as Pulsar, Novartis and Monsanto at the expense of peasant workers. He declares that land is

being used by international concerns this way as a “mechanism of control,” stressing by contrast an important theme in the film, which is indigenous self-sufficiency and autonomy.

The film ends on a positive note, with the distribution of cabbage, the product of everyone’s hard work. Another narrator notes at this point that carrots, cilantro and radishes have also been produced and consumed already. He says, “We are very happy because we have vegetables. We have the garden.” The song about Zapata plays in the background once again.

The brief final shot of the film is enigmatic and has a literary feel. A young boy sitting inside a local building smiles and then places his index finger over his lips as if to say “shh.” This can be interpreted as a sign of complicity with the audience, so we do not betray the existence of indigenous campesinos to those who may do away with this way of life.

Zapata’s Garden emphasizes community life and the centrality of land to indigenous struggles for autonomy. It openly defies indigenista stereotypes by showing a hardworking, organized indigenous community working together to solve problems without government help. And though it is not as esthetically appealing as Día de muertos, Zapata’s Garden makes a strong statement of political strength by the community and the filmmakers that resonates locally, nationally and internationally.

6.3 Japón [Japan]. Dir. Carlos Reygadas. Tartan Video, 2002.

The first scene of the feature film Japón shows a busy highway in Mexico City and then cuts to a foggy highway leading into the countryside.¹⁷ A rural scene of planted fields appears next, and then a road in the middle of nowhere. This establishes the background of

¹⁷ Reygadas says that the title of the film is purposely vague. He wanted to leave it untitled but found this to be impractical.

the protagonist's journey from urban to rural Mexico. Though Japón is not about Indians per se, its Mexican mestizo director Carlos Reygadas notes that all of the characters in the village where most of the action takes place are “non-western” except for the unnamed protagonist, who is a depressed city dweller who has come back to the area where he used to hunt with his father in order to kill himself.¹⁸ The setting is the state of Hidalgo, north of the Capital. Part of the protagonist seeks to recover his basic instincts, to feel again, so he comes to as anti-intellectual and “natural” a place as he can find to do this. The people, animals and scenery all radiate vitality, innocence and complete freedom from “civilized” worries. Life and death manifest themselves everywhere in the village and its surroundings, without much thought getting in the way.

A clear pattern of binaries is evident in Japón. In addition to the urban/rural contrast and the director's comment about “non-westerners,” this is evidenced by the name of the village, “Ayá,” meaning way over there and an obvious reference to the Other. The dark-skinned townspeople are uneducated and mostly deferent to the European-looking outsider, sometimes almost as if to a patrón. The contrast is further manifested in details such as the protagonist enjoying classical music on modern headphones, while the campesinos listen to popular ballads on an old boom box that the newcomer breaks in drunken frustration. The Indian-nature trope is also heavily used, with long panoramic shots of milpas, agave cactus and mountains. The slow pace, general stoicism and aloofness of the characters also give the film a dark, romantic indigenista-tinged feel. Old dualistic pairings like urban/rural, intellect/ignorance, rationality/instinct and progress/poverty come through clearly throughout the work.

¹⁸ In the interview with the director available on the DVD version.

The main female character, Ascen, an obvious foil to the protagonist, is a slight, dark-skinned woman with a classically stoic face chiseled by wrinkles. She is supremely generous, almost to the point of being naïve. In a shocking and uncomfortable love scene, she sacrifices her elderly body so that the protagonist can be redeemed. Though this could hardly be described as a foundational moment, it does repeat the indigenista pattern of the white patrón fulfilling his needs at the expense of the Indian peasant. In line with the strong religious motifs of the film, Ascen later sacrifices her home as well so that her delinquent nephew can use the stones to add on to his house. Unlike traditional indigenista characters, however, Ascen is plainly intelligent, well-spoken and even opinionated. On at least one occasion she even lashes out verbally at the protagonist.

One particularly telling sequence in the film reveals canonical indigenista associations as well as a certain preoccupation with documentary-style authenticity by the director. Reygadas dedicates a long scene to the simple and very poor peasant workers who help Ascen's nephew tear down her house. During a break, she serves them tequila and they talk a bit in front of the camera, even convincing one member of their group with a severe speech or voice impediment to sing a love song. As Moira Sullivan describes it, "[the protagonist] drinks with the villagers who offer refreshments to the team and like the mare stare at the camera. This mix of documentary realism does not seem to interfere with the story in progress" (2). Like indigenista novelists, Reygadas' aim is to show outsiders these people "as they are." In the interview featurette on the DVD, he states very directly, "I wanted, as I said, to work with pure, real matter. For the sake of authenticity, I needed it.... Everything you see go through the camera is real. You can go there and see it exactly as it is. Nothing was constructed, but the form is fiction." As stated previously, in cultural

representation, and particularly when an artist attempts to represent a culture other than his or her own, there is no such thing as objectivity or authenticity. Postmodern interpretations of art argue strongly against such stances. Reygadas' authority, outsider status and decisions about the final product cannot be separated from the work. His preferences and biases are logically intrinsic in the work, which illustrates how the director falls into the same trap as authors of indigenista fiction. Reygadas' overall intentions in the film are clearly not indigenista, however, since his purpose is not to defend or vindicate campesinos or Indians faced with social injustice. Unlike indigenista novelists, Reygadas is much more concerned with the aesthetics of the film, the characters and the story than the social context of the work. Japón does illustrate, however, that certain aspects of indigenismo do and will continue to appear even in works that are not indigenista.

6.4 Men with Guns [Hombres armados]. Dir. John Sayles. Columbia Tristar, 1997.

Men with Guns, by American independent director John Sayles, is a very entertaining, relatively low budget Hollywood film inspired in part by Francisco Goldman's novel The Long Night of White Chickens.¹⁹ Shooting was completed in six weeks and took place in various locations in Veracruz and Chiapas, Mexico. The film portrays political violence in Latin America, especially as directed at indigenous populations. With dialogue in Spanish, several indigenous languages and some English, Men with Guns is set in an unnamed Latin American country, somewhat along the lines of Ariel Dorfman's play Death and the Maiden. Men with Guns is not indigenista as such, since it addresses other elements

¹⁹ Sayles cites the figure of two million dollars in his director's commentary.

of national and international concern alongside the “indigenous question,” such as the power of the military and dramatic class distinctions between urban and rural areas in Latin America. It does deal extensively with indigenous themes, however, and it incorporates or is influenced by elements of indigenismo, which will be the focus of my reading.

Sayles’ film offers a strong indictment of ignorance and naiveté among the Latin American bourgeoisie with respect to endemic violence directed at indigenous populations. This is evident mainly through the main character, Doctor Fuentes. At the beginning of the film, Fuentes lives an isolated and privileged existence in the capital, not realizing how much government-sponsored violence is affecting people in other parts of the country. He treats generals and rich housewives in his private practice. Upon approaching retirement age and worried about his personal legacy, he trains several students to go out and work to improve health in indigenous communities. He boldly and ironically declares to the students, “sus principales enemigos serán las bacterias y la ignorancia.” Over the course of the film, Fuentes discovers that almost all of his students have been killed by the military and that he has been incredibly ignorant about his country and its government.

The most prominent indigenista-like feature of Men with Guns is its use of Indian stereotypes. The majority of the many indigenous characters in the film are taciturn and stoic. Most never speak a word of dialogue and instead are seen fleeing contact with outsiders or silently giving directions by pointing. One important Indian character, the young woman who joins the journey to the utopian refuge of Cerca del cielo near the end, is even mute. Some might argue that indigenous silence in the film fits with the story of violence, fear and lack of Spanish skills due to poor education, but its use as a trope is unmistakably similar to portrayals in indigenista novels.

Likewise, there is almost no indigenous laughter, music or happiness in any form depicted in the film. A few examples of dark humor directed at the audience lighten the mood on a few occasions, but like in much indigenista fiction, Indians are portrayed as lacking fundamental human emotions. This is especially noteworthy when the work is contrasted with the indigenous-produced films in this chapter.

Like early examples of twentieth century Mexican indigenismo, much of the depiction of Indians in Men with Guns is romanticized, with significant simplification and exaggeration. All of the indigenous characters are extremely poor, uneducated and persecuted. Few speak Spanish and most are malnourished. One of their virtues is that they are also supremely patient. Padre Portillo, the ex-priest played by Damián Alcázar, observes the following of the Indians in the village where he lived: “Paciencia. Los habitantes abrieron un claro en la selva porque sabían que podía tardar hasta siete u ocho años para una rendición digna. ¿Alguno de ustedes conoce a alguien con ese tipo de paciencia?” As with indigenista fiction, a basic message inherent in the film is that outsiders should work to improve conditions in indigenous communities. Indians are portrayed as either desperate or resigned, but virtually powerless overall.

Like much fiction about Indians produced by non-Indians, Men with Guns also emphasizes the Indian-nature trope, starting from the very beginning of the film. The soundtrack opens with sounds of the rainforest, before any images appear at all. The first characters we see are an indigenous seer and her daughter by the fire. Multiple panoramic shots of fields and mountains accompany the doctor’s journey into indigenous areas. The final shot of the movie is the mute Indian woman’s smiling face followed by a pristine mountain seen through a small clearing in the jungle.

Furthermore, Men with Guns shows traces of indigenista “stock characters” as described in the first chapter of this study. The classic patrón figure appears at the beginning of the film, if only briefly, as the companion of Dr. Fuentes’ daughter. He asks the doctor the following: “¿Cuántos de sus pacientes son indios? Mi familia ha convivido con ellos en la hacienda durante siglos. Y entre más haces por ellos o más les das, más flojos se vuelven. Eso de darles una probadita de lo moderno, ideas, medicinas, televisión, no hace más que destruirles el alma, doc.” The typical gringo looking to get rich quick, and who will meddle in local politics if necessary, also appears, though this character has been updated to the most common type of gringo adventure-seeker in Latin America today: the tourist. In this case there are two of them, complete with the requisite stereotypical abrasiveness, ethnocentrism and bad Spanish. Domingo, the military deserter, fills the frequent role of the Indian character in search of identity that leaves his community to live among the mestizos, but after much suffering decides that he belongs with his own people after all. The local comisario is the standard inept government official who looks down on the indigenous people from the surrounding area: “Y los indios, bueno pues, son indios. Usted sabe, ¿no? No hablan con nadie. Ven una cara blanca y...” While Sayles does not follow the traditional indigenista formula for characters or plot in the film, he is undoubtedly influenced by it.

Another similarity to indigenista works is that guilt is what motivates three of the four main characters in the film: Dr. Fuentes, Domingo and Padre Portillo. Almost all of the characters on the journey to *Cerca del cielo* seek some kind of redemption, which is not very distant from the Indian “vindication” sought in indigenista fiction. Class and ethnic-based social guilt of the sort depicted in Men with Guns is a strong motivator for indigenista writers as well.

Sayles also employs some of the dualistic divisions associated with indigenismo.²⁰ The white/Indian contrast is emphasized by the physical surroundings associated with characters in two key scenes at opposite ends of the film. In an early one the doctor is wearing a suit and walking on the sidewalk in a big city. He gives some money to an Indian beggar in the foreground. By contrast, one of the last scenes is of the doctor, denuded of most of his possessions, resting among the roots of a large tree in the jungle, panting and struggling to survive after managing to climb all the way up to Cerca del cielo. Sayles notes in his commentary that this parallel is by design, that he purposely inverted roles from the early scene with an indigenous beggar out of place in the city and the late scene of the doctor in the jungle “like a fish out of water.” This symmetric inversion illustrates an overall pattern of marked differentiation between white and Indian associations that pervades the film and resembles indigenista conventions.

Reason vs. instinct is one of the main white/Indian binaries emphasized in the film. In his commentary, Sayles asserts that Dr. Fuentes is “running up against a manner of perception that he is not used to, a way of seeing the world.” The director implies the differences between the white protagonist and his indigenous countrymen are far more significant than the similarities, which romanticizes and stereotypes Indians and their way of thinking as being separate, homogenous and impenetrable for outsiders. A minor detail that reinforces this characterization is that one of the place names on the map that is in the background as the doctor travels out of the city is “El Otro Mundo.” More significantly,

²⁰ As noted in the first chapter, Analisa Taylor gives the following description of the ideological underpinnings of this pattern found in twentieth century Mexican indigenista novels: “For both Vasconcelos and Paz ‘lo indígena’ is equated with the Earth, the lower body, the semiotic, embryonic, unformed, primordial, feminine and irrational; modern Mexico (for both thinkers, the domain with which ‘we’, ‘ourselves’, are to identify) is equated with the Universe, the upper body, the semantic, the adult, the civilized, evolved, masculine and rational” (9).

however, Dr. Fuentes and the priest are verbal and cerebral characters, while their indigenous counterparts are stoic and decidedly corporal in their communication. In one important scene, Fuentes and Portillo have a philosophical discussion about life, death, legacies, failure, guilt and sin, while Domingo consistently relies on staccato barked orders, foul language and his pistol to communicate his wishes. Even when he attempts to confess to the ex-priest, his words are truncated in favor of a violent flashback with bloody action. The chants of other soldiers egging him on in the background are the only speech. The boy character, Conejo, thinks of little besides food, his “dos reales” and adventure. The fact that he has an animal name is noteworthy as well. This basic intellect/instinct contrast holds true throughout the film.

Another binary found in the film is an opulence/misery disparity. Characters in the film are either very rich or very poor. In a brief moment of dark humor, Fuentes’ son asks him just before he sets out on his journey, “Oye, pa, ¿puedo usar el Mercedes hasta que regreses?” The doctor gradually loses all of his material possessions as he ascends to progressively higher terrain and encounters more and more poverty.

Like many indigenista novels, Men with Guns idealizes indigenous cultural purity and reinforces associations with passivity by attributing Indian problems to outside interference. As the title itself asserts, men with guns are responsible for the Indians’ problems. The doctor’s journey represents a teleological drive toward cultural purity and utopia at increasingly indigenous higher altitudes in the film, though it does not turn out exactly that way in the end. When referring to Cerca del cielo, the quasi-mythical hidden refuge of those driven out of their villages by the military, the doctor asks, “¿Para qué venir acá?” Conejo replies, “Para escapar de los blancos.” The doctor then adds, “Debería de haber

un lugar donde no pueden entrar los blancos.” The influence of whites/mestizos in the film is clearly blamed for indigenous people’s miserable living conditions. Sayles asserts in the director’s commentary track that Latin American governments are propped up by the rich oligarchy and are intent on maintaining a cheap pool of manual labor from indigenous populations. One of Domingo’s lines in the movie neatly sums up the director’s ideas on the subject: “Los ricos usan al ejército pa’ que saque a los indios de las tierras buenas y se mueran de hambre. Entonces, pues, los indios tienen que regresar a la pisca del café.” There is unquestionably some truth in these statements, but as with indigenista fiction, their defect is that they discount any kind of indigenous agency and thereby paradoxically reinforce the patriarchy they apparently decry.

There is an element of blurring of traditional white/Indian divisions in the film, however, as expressed by the line “cuando un indo se pone el uniforme, se vuelve blanco.” Indians are depicted participating in violent acts as well. To be sure, the movie condemns violence, no matter who perpetrates it. But even Domingo, the complex, partially assimilated and “bad” Indian character, only becomes corrupt because of his indoctrination in the non-indigenous institution of the army. He is also redeemed at the end, when he joins the isolated community of Cerca del cielo and fulfills his destiny of helping others. Also noteworthy as an exception is that the doctor’s legacy is fulfilled by Domingo in his new role at the end of the film, perhaps signaling hope for a degree of healing of ethnic divisions. The brief appearance of a non-indigenous character living in Cerca del cielo is also a departure from indigenista binary patterns.

Though it is not indigenista, another dualism apparent in Men with Guns is a strong North/South or First/Third world differentiation, as evidenced mainly by the American

tourists and their various interactions with Dr. Fuentes over the course of the film. Sayles notes in his commentary that in many ways they know more about what is going on locally than the doctor, who becomes educated about human rights abuses in his own country as the film progresses. The implication is that the bourgeoisie in developing countries indirectly contribute to violence directed at the poor through almost willful ignorance. Blame is placed squarely on urban whites, as apparent from what one of the doctor's former students tells him near the beginning of the film: "Usted no tiene idea de lo que pasa aquí, ¿verdad?... Dr. Fuentes, usted es el hombre más preparado que he conocido, pero también el más ignorante." The doctor's repeated preoccupation with "sins of omission" is a reflection of guilt on this count as well. Ironically, Sayles' commentary signals a similar lack of awareness with respect to diversity in education and living standards within indigenous communities.

Additionally, there is a touch of overconfidence and condescension in Sayles' remarks that is often attributed to Americans by those from other places. At one point he mentions that he has been to lots of "poor places around the world." He never questions his own values or authority in the commentary track, even when discussing the process of directing actors whose dialogue was in an indigenous language he could not begin to understand:

I had to tell them, "If you blow the line, you've got to tell me, because I'm not going to know if you mispronounce something in Tzotzil".... And the people in this village, the main thing they were concerned about was [that] we had painted their church and they liked it the way it was before. They wanted to make sure we painted it again before we left [laughs].... It was very interesting for me as a director to direct a scene where I didn't really understand, line for line, what people were saying, you know. I wrote the scene, I knew what they were talking about, but I didn't know the exact words that they were saying. Just to follow it emotionally and really, there were scenes that I could tell were just better emotionally than others. It was a nice exercise.

This almost certainly unintended attitude in a way resembles well-intentioned indigenista patriarchy. There is some quasi-indigenista pity evident in some of Sayles' comments as well: "It was sad that the people in this village knew this [violent] story so well. That was not part of their personal lives, but was something that was familiar to them." Oddly, U.S. involvement and support for the kind of brutal regime Sayles portrays is a subject never alluded to at all, either in the film or his commentary. Sayles sees no problems with an outsider from a hegemonic world power "summing up" the political problems of an entire region in his film. The fact that the movie takes place in an unnamed Latin American country reinforces stereotypes about the "Third World." For the typical uninitiated Hollywood audience, the violent and chaotic political situation portrayed can be interpreted as a blanket description fitting all Spanish-speaking countries in the hemisphere, or at the very least those with a large indigenous population.

Men with Guns also contains literary traits that distance it from the realist style of indigenista fiction and the quest for "authenticity," as discussed in the section on Japón. The clearest example of this is the Indian mother and child seen at the beginning and end of the film. Sayles, perhaps somewhat presumptuously, refers to these scenes and the mother's seemingly psychic powers as providing a "touch of magic realism." The director also employs a hodgepodge of languages, dress and decoration from indigenous groups from many parts of Mexico and beyond, such as the seer, who Sayles says speaks a language from an area off the coast of Venezuela. The character Conejo lends a picaresque feel to parts of the film, since he is an orphan who lives by his wits and whose primary concern is food. He is also considerably more sophisticated than the doctor in many ways and educates him about what is really happening in his country. Religious motifs of sacrifice and redemption appear

throughout the film. One exception to the non-realist feel to the film, however, is the scene of workers cutting cane, which Sayles describes as unplanned. While filming the schoolhouse scene, the crew heard noise outside and offered to pay the workers as film extras if they could film them working. This short scene has a documentary style similar to the workers' scene in Japón.

Even though Men with Guns cannot be classified as indigenista, it is indisputably influenced by indigenismo. The film is entertaining, innovative in many ways and merits further study, yet at the same time it proves Analisa Taylor's prediction that indigenismo will continue to appear in the most uncanny of guises.

CONCLUSION

I began this study with an overview of indigenismo in Mexico, as well as the reasons why it is now a discredited ideology. Critics trace literary manifestations of Mexican indigenismo to novels produced between 1935 and 1962, when indigenismo purportedly ended. Until this study, little had been studied about what has transpired in cultural production of indigenous theme since the “last” indigenista novel.

Events since the ostensible demise of indigenismo demonstrate that centuries-old power imbalances persist in Mexico, as well as still unresolved political issues dating from at least the 1910-1921 Revolution. Cultural expression reflects this somewhat tumultuous and troubled political situation. The importance of indigenous voices in recent national events is self-evident and increasing, particularly in the Zapatista uprising of January 1, 1994, but also the 2006 presidential elections and the extremely unsettled situation in Oaxaca since that time.

My readings of three recent novels of Mexican indigenous theme show that indigenismo and its inherent contradictions still exist in literary expression, alongside “hybrid” genres such as testimonio and also indigenous-produced literatura indígena, which is steadily growing in influence. The reading in chapter 2 of Graciela Limón’s Erased Faces indicates that indigenismo can still be found in novels produced even as late as the early twenty-first century. Chapter 3 exposes both departures and limitations in the hybrid testimonio novel Memorial del tiempo o Vía de las conversaciones by Jesús Morales

Bermúdez. By reading Javier Castellanos Martínez' Cantares de los vientos primerizos/Wila che be ze lhao: Novela zapoteca in chapter 5, I show that texts by indigenous authors reflect distinct differences from those produced by non-Indians. These are particularly apparent in comparisons of the search for “authenticity” in addition to the use of longstanding binary associations and stereotypes. Finally, I argue that if cultural imbalances are to be addressed, definitions of literature and the canon must be broadened to include media such as film and particularly video, which has become a primary medium of expression in indigenous communities in Mexico. Filmic texts and related technologies such as the internet hold unique promise for both empowering indigenous voices as well as facilitating constructive cultural dialogue of the sort that needs to occur in Mexico and beyond with respect to indigenous cultures. In chapter 6 I read four recent films/videos by indigenous and non-indigenous producers and point out that this genre offers opportunities beyond those of the novel for a community-based approach to cultural production, but that the genre is also susceptible to many of the same pitfalls of indigenismo.

Mexico is now at a critical juncture, in the midst of a process of reevaluating its past and defining its path for the future. Indigenous groups are continuing to define their identity within the context of this national process. Until more texts produced by indigenous authors/filmmakers circulate among both indigenous and non-indigenous audiences and a dialogue on more equal terms begins in earnest, the paternalistic influence of indigenismo will continue to be felt in cultural production in Mexico. Alternate perspectives provided by the work of indigenous producers offer significant hope, however. Increased distribution and study of these texts marks a clear path toward establishing meaningful dialogue to advance the struggle for justice and respect for autochthonous peoples.

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