

**LITERARY PERSPECTIVES OF ETHNIC IDENTITY IN
CONTEMPORARY GUATEMALA**

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Abstract

“Literary Perspectives of Ethnic Identity in Contemporary Guatemala” explores the way indigenous and non-indigenous Guatemalan authors depict Maya culture in their works. This comparison is highlighted through literary analysis of canonical works of Guatemalan literature by Ladino and Maya authors. This analysis traces the development of a contemporary indigenous literary corpus in Guatemala, and explores the socio-political importance of this literature. This thesis argues that works by Ladino authors, namely Miguel Ángel Asturias’ *Leyendas de Guatemala* [*Legends of Guatemala*, 1930] and Mario Monteforte Toledo’s *Entre la piedra y la cruz* [*Between the Cross and the Stone*, 1948] often reflect ideologies of *mestizaje* as possible solutions to the issue of ethnic fragmentation in Guatemala. More recent works by Maya authors, such as *I Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1983) by Rigoberta Menchú and Elizabeth Burgos and *A Mayan Life* (1992) by Gaspar Pedro González, on the other hand, depict ideas of coexistence while still preserving separate cultures as possible manners to improve ethnic relations. In this way, literature serves to understand changing attitudes regarding race and ethnicity in Guatemala over time, and reflects the emergence of indigenous activism in the nation. Literature is therefore used by indigenous authors to depict the conditions of oppression that Maya people experience, as well as to reaffirm their own ethnic identity.

Chapter 1

Introduction

As I sat in a 10th grade Social Studies classroom, a student in a private Guatemalan high school, I learned about the pre-Columbian Maya civilization in great detail. I was thoroughly examined on its various contributions to language, art, science and astronomy. My teachers spoke proudly of the monumental ruins of Tikal, which had been the location of a weekend-long class field trip in middle school. In class, we carefully dissected the literary relevance of the *Popol Wuj*, a mythological text that expresses Maya myths of creation. All of the achievements of this civilization were taught in great depth, and were expressed as a great source of Guatemalan identity, and most of all, pride. I became confused, however, when in one lecture my teacher claimed we would discuss the various theories regarding how and why the ancient Maya civilization disappeared completely, leaving nothing tangible behind but ruins and a few codices. Thinking about the fact that over half of the current Guatemalan population is indigenous, and belongs to one of 22 ethno-linguistic Maya peoples (Bastos and Cumes 13), I found these theories hard to believe. My teacher referred to the indigenous people that inhabit present day Guatemala as *inditos*, meaning little Indians, and it is easy to note how the condescending diminutive was used to mask racism with compassion. The possibility that these peoples could be in any manner related to the sophisticated ancient Maya civilization was never mentioned, and this connection seemed unfathomable, even to my educated teachers.

What we didn't talk about in class was the manner in which the nation's colonial past created the social stratification that exists in Guatemala today, and that living descendants of the Mayas comprise the bulk of Guatemalan society, sentenced to rampant discrimination and impoverishment (Arias, *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* 3). In an attempt to learn more

about these issues, I began volunteering with several cultural organizations in Guatemala City, and in this process met various indigenous university professors. It was then that I began to understand the challenging fight of contemporary indigenous intellectuals in Guatemala and their desire for cultural rights and recognition. I was particularly interested in the rich literary output of Maya writers, and the way they used the act of writing to carve a space for themselves within society. Having always been passionate about literature, I quickly became enthralled with the works I was recommended, and felt a deep connection to these authors, whom I had never read despite our shared nationality.

The significance of indigenous literature has become increasingly apparent in recent years, as many indigenous intellectuals have gained prominence in both the cultural and political arenas. This has mainly been due to a revitalization of the Maya movement, and an implementation of multicultural policies on the part of the government to protect the cultural rights of indigenous people. These policies have in part been instated due to Maya activists' efforts to construct a multicultural nation-state in Guatemala, in order to foster equality between indigenous and non-indigenous individuals (Montejo, *Maya Intellectual Renaissance* 36). I believe that this literary output is essential to understanding Guatemalan society today, as well as how attitudes of ethnic identities and constructions have progressed.

Reading texts by indigenous authors for the first time, I found them to be strikingly different to the works of Guatemalan authors I had previously encountered or read for school. This drew an interest in exploring what the differences between these works are and why they are so marked, and this has been my main point of departure for my research. In this thesis, I will therefore analyze works by non-indigenous Guatemalan authors and indigenous Maya authors, focusing on *Leyendas de Guatemala* [*Legends of Guatemala*, 1930] by Miguel Ángel Asturias,

Entre la piedra y la cruz [*Between the Cross and the Stone*, 1948] by Mario Monteforte Toledo, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* [*I Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*, 1983] by Rigoberta Menchú and Elizabeth Burgos, and *La otra cara: la vida de un Maya* [*A Mayan Life*, 1992] by Gaspar Pedro González. I will then compare the nature in which these authors, through their respective works, understand and perceive ethnic and national Guatemalan identity. In doing so, my project will highlight how Maya authors are able to find a voice after years of repression.

Background: History and Ethnic Labels

In order to understand the plight of indigenous authors and intellectuals, it is crucial to comprehend how a massive civil war that took place between 1960 and 1996 was particularly decimating to indigenous Guatemalans. This was a harsh time for Guatemala, as the country underwent an immense armed conflict; over 100,000 people were killed and half a million were displaced (Warren 52). This armed conflict began as a grassroots response to the rightist, military government and its violations of human rights and brutality towards ethnic minorities, as well as the Cold War and US military intervention in Guatemala. The military deeply suppressed the indigenous insurgents as well as perpetrated acts of genocide, while the insurgents attacked and kidnapped various civilians and political figures.

Between 1978 and 1984 the conflict reached a brutal peak, and indigenous peoples were persecuted and massacred on a large scale under the pretense that they were Communists and supporters of guerrilla warfare. Also, there were claims that Mayas were holding back the country's progress (Cojtí, *El racismo contra los pueblos indígenas de Guatemala* 29). This ruthless violence, however, gave rise to the resurgence of indigenous organizing in Guatemala,

as indigenous movements begin to fight for rights and recognition as never before (Warren 4)¹.

In 1996, Peace Accords were signed by President Alvaro Arzú, in collaboration with Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), the insurgent group, and the Guatemalan army, ending the 36-year-long conflict. However, contemporary Guatemala is still permeated by remains of the war, which is primarily visible in the stark divide that still exists between the nation's ethnic groups.

In order to discuss these issues, it is important to understand the terms that are used in Guatemalan ethnic discourse, and the contemporary societal hierarchy at play in the nation. The main gap that has divided Guatemalan society since the nineteenth century is the one that exists between indigenous individuals, or *indígenas*, and non-indigenous individuals, grouped under the umbrella term *Ladinos*. Ladinos identify as a mixture of indigenous and Spanish descent, and the term is analogous to the word *Mestizo*, which is typically used in other Latin American nations. The ethnic label of *indígena* has become the politically correct term in Guatemala and is meant to indicate people of Mayan descent. It is usually outwardly associated with pre-Hispanic roots of indigenusness, the language spoken and the traditional costume worn (Bastos and Cumes 15). It has replaced the use of the derogatory term *indio*, or Indian, which carries colonial and post-colonial connotations of racial and social inferiority. (Montejo, Maya Intellectual Renaissance 2). In the past two decades, the term "Maya" has also gained currency, as a way for indigenous people in Guatemala to identify themselves. The use of this word is a direct result of indigenous organizing and Maya activists' efforts to reaffirm a collective identity among indigenous people in Guatemala. It is a way for indigenous people to articulate their identity with pride by asserting a connection to the nation's millenary past, and signals the political and social mobilization that has been taking place in the nation (Bastos and Cumes 21).

¹ This activism will be further examined in Chapter 2.

In Guatemala, the indigenous subject has always existed in binary opposition to the Ladino, this term being the Guatemalan manner of referring to oneself as non-indigenous, a problematically rigid term as it negates any trace of indigenous identity (Bastos and Cumes 15). It represents the Mestizo subject who aspires to a Western identity, therefore underlines his or her European ascendancy by denying any indigenous origins (Arias, "The Maya Movement" 536). While the term Mestizo directly connotes some form of racial mixing and hybridity, the term Ladino does not allow for this. The term has been associated with contemporary Guatemalan identity, symbolizing modernity and Western ideals. In current society the Ladino is still considered to be socially "above" the indigenous individual. As Guatemalan anthropologist Jorge Solares has adequately expressed, the term Ladino now seems not to mean only "not indigenous" but rather "anti-indigenous" (qtd. in Bastos and Cumes 15). These labels are crucial to understanding ethnic relations in Guatemala, and how these relations are visible in the nation's literary output.

Methodology

This historical background information is provided so as to complement the actual purpose of my research throughout this thesis. I propose to discuss the aforementioned canonical works of literature in contemporary Guatemala, and analyze them within the multicultural context that Guatemalan society represents. My main goal is to determine how literary perspectives by Maya and non-Maya authors vary according to the socio-historical context under which the texts are written, as well as how each author's ethnicity affects these perspectives. I

find it essential to contrast external explorations of the Maya world² by Ladino authors to the way indigenous authors characterize this world internally, from their own firsthand experiences.

I will focus primarily on the progression that exists in contemporary Guatemalan literature, beginning with Ladino authors writing *about* the indigenous subject, and shifting to a point where indigenous people are actually writing about themselves. This gain of autonomy is connected with the surge of Maya activism in contemporary Guatemala, mainly in the 1990's, through which Maya intellectuals and activists have fought to gain rights that have been denied to them for centuries. I believe this is important as the literary production of indigenous authors is a form of activism, as writing itself becomes a political act of self-representation and empowerment. Furthermore, this literature is a product of a specific socio-political context that has shaped the lives of indigenous people since Guatemala first became a Spanish colony. Much has been written on the development of indigenous activism in Guatemala, but I have found that the actual works of literature this movement and its participants have created have not been as closely examined, and I therefore hope to contribute to this discussion.

As a native Spanish speaker, I have chosen to read these four works in Spanish, so as to experience these texts in the language they were originally written in. Furthermore, *Leyendas de Guatemala* and *Entre la piedra y la cruz* have not been translated into English at this time, and I have provided my own translations for these titles. From here on, I will refer to these primary texts by their Spanish titles, including the ones that do have available English translations,³ for the sake of consistency. I also feel more comfortable using the Spanish titles, as these original editions are the works I read and analyzed, and I cannot account for any differences or

² The "Maya world" encompasses the areas of México, Guatemala, Honduras and Belize inhabited by Mayas (Cojtí, "The Politics of Maya Revindication" 20) In this thesis, however, I focus on the particular representations of the Maya world in Guatemala.

³ Menchú's testimony and Gonzalez' novel both have English editions, titled *I Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* and *A Mayan Life*, respectively.

discrepancies that might exist in comparison to the English editions. While working on this project, I also used a variety of sources written in Spanish, and many of these are not available in English. When directly quoting from these sources, I have opted to include the original Spanish text within the text of my thesis, and have provided my own English translation in a footnote. I have done this in order to prevent any possible bias in my translations from being reflected in my analysis, as my work is based on the original Spanish words rather than my own translations.

In Chapter 2, the following chapter, I begin by providing the necessary background to my analysis of works of Guatemalan literature. I focus on the important political role literature written by indigenous authors has in Guatemala, and the relationship between this literary output and the rise of the Pan-Maya movement. I begin by discussing some theoretical views regarding postcolonial literary theory, which can be applied to literature in Guatemala due to the nation's colonial past, and the remnants of these colonial structures in current society. The development of postcolonial studies reflects a global movement to give voice to marginalized populations, and this correlates with a growing indigenous movement and literary output in Guatemala. I also trace the history of the Pan-Maya movement, which consists of one of the main forces of indigenous activism in Guatemalan history, and is still active today. The movement has had an important role in obtaining rights and recognition for the Maya people in Guatemala, and has brought national and international attention to many Maya intellectuals, authors and artists. For this reason, this activism facilitated the possibility of indigenous writing, and is one of the main reasons that contemporary Maya literature exists in present day Guatemala.

I then proceed into my analysis of Guatemalan literature by indigenous and Ladino authors, in order to understand the differences between internal and external explorations of the Maya world. In Chapter 3 I provide an examination of two major works of Guatemalan

literature, which are written by Ladino authors. I also explore the authors' backgrounds and ideologies regarding ethnicity and Guatemalan identity, in order to find traces of their beliefs in their works of fiction. I begin with Asturias' text, *Leyendas de Guatemala*, which is published in 1930 and is a groundbreaking work of surrealist Latin American literature. He becomes the first author to incorporate indigenous traditions and elements into an overall Ladino work, creating a hybrid text. The innovative work, however, still represents the impositions of Ladinos onto an indigenous population, by appropriating the "good" elements of its culture into the overall Guatemalan identity and national consciousness. I also discuss Mario Monteforte Toledo's novel *Entre la piedra y la cruz*, written in 1948, which provides a more realistic portrayal of Ladino-indigenous relations in Guatemala at the time. Even though the author's attitude towards the indigenous protagonist is sympathetic, the character's only chance for redemption still lies in assimilating into Ladino culture. This work then, rather than incorporating indigenous elements for a mystical and artistic effect, as Asturias' does, has a more evident socio-political goal. Monteforte's work reflects the author's own ideas that indigenous individuals must learn Spanish and assimilate into Guatemalan urban society as their only hope for social mobility, seeing this process as the country's only possibility for progress.

In Chapter 4, I continue my analysis of Guatemalan literature, this time focusing on two works by indigenous authors, which are relevant to Guatemala's literary history as they are both groundbreaking in their internal depictions of the country's indigenous communities. The first work I explore is Rigoberta Menchú's 1983 testimony, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*. This work is of paramount significance to Guatemalan literature, but also to the nation's social and political history in general. Published during the apex of violence during Guatemala's armed conflict, this work brought international attention to the rampant human

rights violations that the army was perpetrating against indigenous peoples. However, Menchú's narrative also serves to provide insight into the world of a Maya woman, focusing on the traditions and customs of her people, a perspective that has previously mainly been written about by Ladino authors and anthropologists. The final work I analyze is a more recent text by an indigenous Guatemalan author, which is different from Menchú's testimony in that it is a work of fiction. This work is the 1992 novel *La otra cara*, written by Maya author Gaspar Pedro González. Like Menchú's testimony, this novel condemns the atrocities perpetrated by the army towards the indigenous community during the armed conflict and highlights how relationships between Ladinos and indigenous people are experienced by Mayas themselves. Furthermore, he also uses fiction to depict his own experiences as an indigenous man in Guatemala, and to propose his own solutions regarding issues of ethnic identity in the nation. Upon these reflections, I compare the works by indigenous authors to the previously discussed works by Ladino authors, in order to understand how they depict the Maya world in Guatemala.

In this thesis, I hope to contribute to the present conversation regarding ethnicity and racism in Guatemala, as I attempt to highlight the way in which views on these issues have changed over time, and how these changes can be traced through the nation's literature. The Maya world has been written into history primarily by Ladino authors, and I explore the social and political conditions that allow Mayas to start writing themselves into history. I believe this is important as it is only in recent decades that Maya authors are able to enter the nation's literary canon and reclaim their voices, which have been previously silenced. Through literary and social analysis, I hope to prove that indigenous literature therefore cannot be understood as a spontaneous phenomenon that is independent of its socio-historical context. Rather, the act of creating this literature is a political act that results from specific conditions of oppression and

marginalization. Because of this, the development of Maya literature contests the nation's status quo and therefore has powerful social, political and cultural effects on Guatemalan society as a whole.

Chapter 2

The Rise of Maya Activism and Indigenous Literature in Guatemala

In order to understand the manner in which indigenous peoples in Guatemala understand their ethnic identities, it is possible to turn to their literary output and gauge how they internally represent their world and experiences. In this thesis, I will examine works of Guatemalan literature by Ladino and indigenous authors that strive to depict the Maya world. I will highlight the similarities and differences regarding the representation of indigenous subjects in the works. My goal in doing this is to understand the different ways that Mayaness is understood in Guatemala, and how these perceptions have changed over time. In order to begin this analysis, it is significant to review the role literature plays in political resistance. This will help understand the importance of indigenous people finally gaining access to writing about themselves in a nation where they have systematically been quieted and oppressed. This chapter discusses the background to delving into an analysis of Guatemalan literature based on ethnic perspectives, which will make up the bulk of the next two chapters of this thesis.

I therefore provide a brief summary of the development of literary theories that deal with postcolonial literature, as these theories can help better understand the importance of literature in a social and political context. I argue that these studies and theories are applicable to indigenous literature in Guatemala, and can be used to characterize the growing literary corpus of indigenous authors in the nation. I also present a history of the Pan-Maya movement, the growing indigenous mobilization for rights and recognition in Guatemala. Understanding this movement is crucial, as it explains how and why Maya intellectuals begin writing after centuries of repression, as well as the central role literature has in socio-political organizing. This movement has had various successes, and is responsible for the improving conditions of

indigenous peoples in Guatemala. However, there are splits within the movement, as well as critics and other detractors that disagree with the manner that it has operated. I mention some of these diverging views both within and outside the movement, not as to delegitimize it in any sense, but rather to express the important challenges that it faces in its goals of transforming the Guatemalan nation state.

Literature as a Tool for Resistance

In the 1980's, with the development of postcolonial and postmodern literary theory, there is a shift in the narrow forms through which literature has been previously analyzed, as well as a large theoretical debate as to what can official be classified as "literature." The Western literary canon, which has been developing over the past centuries, has historically left little space for writers and theorists that do not belong to the First World.⁴ The development of movements that fight for minorities and unrepresented populations, such as the civil rights movement, feminism, and queer theory, for example, serve to really question the fundamentals of the Western literary tradition. These movements come out of a specific set of social conditions, and it becomes a task for literary theory to understand these conditions by exploring the cultural output of these populations. With Jacques Derrida's articulation of "difference" as essential to the postmodern condition, meaning that issues previously considered as deviant now deserved exploration, new critics and authors finally commence to consider the work of previously excluded groups (Leitch 27).

The development of postcolonial literature truly connects the ideas of Third World politics with literature, and reflects the important relationship between the two. Literary theorists begin to conceptualize particular groups' literary output as reflective of their struggles against

⁴ Terms such as "First World" and "Third World" are often considered discriminatory, and politically correct terms such as "developed world" or "developing world" have come to replace them. However, as the former are the terms used in the discourse of postcolonial theory in the 1980's, I have used them here as well.

the hegemonic forces that have suppressed them. This type of thinking becomes particularly relevant in Africa, as there is a rise of black intellectuals striving to fight for African independence. This struggle is evident in the work of psychologist Franz Fanon, especially in *The Wretched of the Earth*, published in 1961. This work deals with the mechanics of colonialism and its effects on those it subjugates. He argues for a form of “national consciousness” to be developed through a nation’s unified cultural and literary output, even if these are not accepted by the Western literary canon (Fanon 97). Furthermore, Fanon sees this consciousness as the ultimate manner of achieving national liberation from colonial forces, and establishes the important role of the native intellectual in determining this possibility (Fanon 158). These issues are later revisited and explored by Edward Said, with the publishing of his influential work, *Orientalism*, in 1978. He also explores the extent to which colonialism creates a specific way of seeing the world, but focuses more on the role of the colonizers than the colonized. Drawing upon Marxist theories of power, Said examines the way in which Western imperial powers were able to continually justify the subjugation of the people they colonized, usually viewing them based on assumptions about the Orient, which is stereotyped as a place of exoticism and moral laxity (McLeod 22). Fanon and Said then inspire literary critics to apply their theories to the reading of literary texts, and their works serve as a foundation for understanding the literature of colonized societies.

Along these lines, it becomes crucial to understand literature as inextricable from its historical context, as it becomes a valuable tool in developing a deeper comprehension of the specific context it is written in. Barbara Harlow’s *Resistance Literature* (1987) breaks new ground in Western literary studies by not only calling for a wider, more serious consideration of previously ignored Third World texts, but also by demanding that critics abandon their mantle of

neutrality and objectivity in favor of a methodology that takes the social, political, and historical circumstances of these works into account (Harlow 12). These texts then require an abandoning the Western model of criticism, which typically renders art as apolitical. Resistance literature loses any objectivity towards the political reality, as these works are fully part of the historical situations within which they are forged. Resistance movements rely on political and guerilla elements to force governmental and civil change, but only via literary elements will they be able to liberate themselves from cultural hegemony and domination (Harlow 135). This type of analysis is visible also in the work of Fredric Jameson, who conceives literature as a politically symbolic act. He argues that the literary text be seen as a symbolic solution to a real, but unconsciously felt social problem (Jameson 126). By performing an in-depth exegesis of a text, which includes pervasive analysis of its socio-historical context, it is possible to deconstruct exactly what question it is that the text hopes to answer. Literature can then serve to pose solutions to these problems, and deconstructive analysis can aid theorists in understanding these solutions (Jameson 225). These critical theories show the importance of literature in social and political contexts, and understanding them is crucial to examining the manner in which literary output can create social change.

In Guatemala, the main manner in which literature begins to morph around this time is in the growing literary output by indigenous authors, who had before been artistically confined to the margins of society (del Valle Escalante, *Nacionalismos mayas y desafíos postcoloniales en Guatemala* 16-17). Before the mid-twentieth century indigenous peoples had been written about mainly by Criollo⁵ and Mestizo/Ladino authors. This occurred either through the writings of ethnographers (Montejo, *Maya Intellectual Renaissance* 70) or through the pervasive literary

⁵ The term Criollo is a colonial legacy, and is used to identify the individual that is fully European in descent, and has no admixture of indigenous or mestizo blood. In Guatemala, this ethnic label is closely tied to the country's oligarchy (Bastos and Cumes 15).

style that became known as *indigenismo*, and was popular for centuries (Prieto 140). In the early twentieth century, Guatemalan Ladino authors, such as Miguel Ángel Asturias, were increasingly concerned with writing about the nation's "indio," or indigenous subject, but usually stripped these subjects of any agency or free will in the process. *Indigenismo* and Ladino authors' perspectives on the indigenous subject will be analyzed in more depth in the following chapter. It is therefore not until the middle of the twentieth century that indigenous authors begin to write about themselves. This phenomenon is a product of a complex history and rapidly changing present—it is a response to reality of oppression that has characterized most of Guatemala's history.

Postcolonial studies are therefore helpful in understanding this change in the Guatemalan literary tradition, due to Guatemala's long history of colonialism, its legacy of internal colonialism, and the changing political and cultural climate due to a rapidly emerging Maya movement. These issues all define the Maya literary output that begins to develop at this time, written *by* and *for* indigenous peoples in an effort to rearticulate their ethnicity and rewrite history. This literature can be theorized as resistance literature due to the socio-historical context it emerges from, as well as the fact that the act of writing by a marginalized population is an act of resistance in itself (Quayson 77). Indigenous people start to use literature to rearticulate their ethnic identity and contest their place in society, and this act in itself is therefore intensely political. This situation is intensified by the fact that the Guatemalan ethnic conflict is coming to an end, and this shapes the way ethnic perspectives in literature change, as well as incites the possibility for Maya academics to denounce the crimes committed against them, and simultaneously reinforce their authorial strength and write themselves into the country's history. This is reminiscent of critic Henry Louis Gates' essay "Talking Black," where he theorizes how

African-Americans are developing a style of literature of their own independent to the Western literary canon, namely by “dominating the language of the master” (Gates 242). Similarly, Maya authors begin to publish works in Spanish as well as in Maya languages, which gives them agency and autonomy from traditional Guatemalan literature. These authors redefine indigenous identity by reinstating indigenous agency and self-determination, as well as deconstructing and rearticulating ideas of ethnicity, class and gender.

In Guatemala, one of the main milestones of contemporary indigenous expression comes in the form of Rigoberta Menchú’s 1983 testimony, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, which will be further analyzed in Chapter 4. Her testimony was recorded and mediated by Elizabeth Burgos, a Venezuelan author and anthropologist, who logged Menchú’s oral history regarding her experience as an indigenous woman surviving the Guatemalan civil war. It also provides insight into the Maya K’iche traditions and lifestyle, which had previously been examined mainly by Ladino and foreign critics or anthropologists. The testimony brought much international attention to the ethnic violence in Guatemala, mainly on the premise of the human rights violations that were being perpetuated by the government and the counterinsurgency. It is a prominent example of the first moments when indigenous Guatemalans begin to put forward a literary corpus that would heavily shape and support their goals for cultural rights and recognition.

History of the Pan-Maya Movement

The surge of the Pan-Maya movement in Guatemala is closely intertwined with the multifaceted political struggle that permeates the nation in the second half of the twentieth century, namely the armed conflict that lasts from 1960 to 1996. There is a great deal of indigenous participation in the Guatemalan revolutionary armed forces, specifically in the

Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). At this point many Maya individuals see in guerrilla warfare the only manner to question the hegemonic state forces, or even as their only option for survival (Bastos and Cumes 57). This conflict reaches its apex between 1978 and 1984, especially in rural areas where peasants, most of whom are indigenous, experience a period of violence that comes to be known as the nation's darkest period, and is now referred to as *la violencia*. This is due to the fact that at this point, the country enters a whirlwind of unmeasured violence toward the indigenous community, and during this period 200,000 individuals are killed or "disappeared" by the army (Bastos and Cumes 57). This systematic brutality toward a specific ethnic group results in a genocide of indigenous peoples perpetrated by the government and counterinsurgent groups. Although both groups did damage to indigenous communities, it is necessary to clarify that the army committed 93 percent of the massacres, while the URNG committed 3 percent (Montejo, "Truth, Human Rights and Representation" 376). This context of oppression by the Guatemalan state is what sets the scene for the political awakening and mobilization of many Maya individuals, as can be exemplified in Menchú's testimony.

Contemporary Maya activism results from the chronic state of violence that has characterized Maya life and history for centuries (Montejo, *Maya Intellectual Renaissance* 66). As the war intensifies, many Maya activists begin to think more of the revitalization of Maya culture as a peaceful alternative to conflict (Warren 22). In the late 1980's and early 1990's there is then an attempt from these Maya individuals to develop a cohesive social movement that focuses on cultural revitalization and unification, namely across the language divides of indigenous Guatemalans. They are also fighting for changes to the nation-state, as a way of responding to a colonial situation based on oppression, racism, exploitation and marginalization (del Valle Escalante, *Uk'u'x Kaj, Uk'u'x Ulew* 30). This social movement has been termed the

Maya movement, more specifically the Pan-Maya movement, where Pan-Mayanism is defined as “the process of building a coordinated effort for subsistence and cultural reaffirmation among Maya linguistic communities” (Montejo, *Maya Intellectual Renaissance* 80). Since its inception, the movement has articulated various demands, the main ones being: recognition of cultural diversity within the nation state, a greater role for indigenous politics in the nation’s political sphere, addressing the nation’s social inequalities and a more widespread distribution of cultural resources such as education and literacy in indigenous languages (Warren 36).

The movement has situated various Mayas as public intellectuals, a combination of cultural identity and profession that would have been rare before the 1970’s, a time when being indigenous in Guatemala usually meant working low wage agriculture jobs. It has also fostered the development of Maya studies, an interdisciplinary academic field, through which these intellectuals have formulated “counter-histories” that denounce the racism in the country’s official history (Warren 37). They condemn colonialism and the racism it instated, categorizing it as an ongoing process in the nation rather than a specific moment in time that occurred 500 years ago. Members of the Pan-Maya movement assert that there is a “culturally specific way of knowing: a subject position no one else can occupy and political interests no one else has to defend” (Warren 37). They utilize this essentialism strategically in order to claim their unique authority and position as social critics and intellectuals. This serves to undermine the manner in which Ladinos and foreigners have monopolized representation of Maya culture, history and literature.

Demetrio Cojtí, a prominent leader in the Pan-Maya movement, argues that the movement fights against the internal colonialism that is still present in Guatemala. He describes this term as the unequal political and economic relationship between a Western group and a

subaltern Non-Western group that inhabit the same geographical area, using Michael Hechter's definition of the term⁶. Cojtí applies this term to Guatemala, asserting the relationship between the Mayas and Ladinos is a relationship of subordination and hegemony, where the Ladino cultural community enjoys many rights, while subordinate groups, namely indigenous peoples, have almost no rights. Furthermore, the dominant group monopolizes the executive, legislative and judicial branches of the state and utilizes these branches to "oppress and dismantle the Maya nations" (Cojtí, "The Politics of Maya Revindication" 21). Cojtí argues that racist and discriminatory public policies are the main way through which this internal colonialism is upheld, and these policies are directly derived from the original state of external colonialism that existed from the conquest to independence (Cojtí, "The Politics of Maya Revindication" 21).

In its early years, the movement focused mainly on issues of class, cultural origin and self-definition and by the 1990's there was a growing output of publications by Maya authors that problematized these issues critically⁷. Since these years however, the movement has narrowed its focus on more long term goals, such as pushing for national and constitutional reforms. It has elaborated explicit demands to the state for major reforms in administration, language policy, the military, economics, education and respect for Maya ceremonial centers (Warren 38). There has also been a dispersal of the Pan-Maya movement into a greater realm of spaces and spheres. Maya politics can now be observed in political parties and other areas of civil society, women's groups, human rights groups, environmental groups and peasant groups,

⁶ Michael Hechter defines internal colonialism as the economic exploitation and cultural discrimination of one people over another within a single state in his book *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development* (1998). This term has also been primarily used by Mexican anthropologist Rodolfo Stavenhagen to describe social dynamics between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in Latin America.

⁷ See Demetrio Cojtí (*La Configuración Del Pensamiento Político Del Pueblo Maya* 1991) and Enrique Sam Colop (*Jub'aqtun Omay Kuchum K'aslemal; Colop Cincio Siglos de Encubrimiento* 1991)

as well as academic institutions and institutions for international development, among others (Bastos and Cumes 64).

Fragmentation within the Pan-Maya Movement

In its development, the Pan-Maya movement has encompassed two diverging tendencies within its members, the “cultural Mayas” and the “popular Mayas” (Arias, “The Maya Movement” 528). The former comprises mainly of intellectuals, who call for a revitalization of Maya identity on cultural grounds, as well as attempting to dissuade and question the traditional racist attitudes in Guatemalan society. There is a desire to invigorate Maya religious ceremonies, promote use of traditional costume, and foster education in Maya languages, namely through the Academy of Maya Languages of Guatemala (del Valle Escalante, *Nacionalismos mayas y desafíos postcoloniales en Guatemala* 30). The popular Mayas, on the other hand, are mainly still affiliated to the URNG and focus on questions of class struggle, taking a Marxist perspective that focuses on social rights and improving the material conditions of Guatemala’s indigenous population, giving less emphasis to the actual question of ethnicity (Warren 35). Furthermore, they attempt to find justice for atrocities committed during the ethnic genocide that permeated the twentieth century and denounce the violence that occurred, and still occurs, to the Guatemalan peasants (Bastos and Cumes 59). These groups are coordinated informally within the Council of Mayan Organizations of Guatemala (COMG), but conflicts still exist between the groups, mainly because the popular Mayas tend to prioritize the URNG’s interests as a political party over ethnic and cultural interests (Arias, “The Maya Movement” 528).

Another split within the Maya movement has to do with gender politics, and focuses on the exclusion of indigenous women from participation in Guatemalan society. The situation that Maya women have faced in Guatemala since the time of the colony is tied to the Guatemalan

nationalist project, which many women believe favors a male-dominated society and marginalizes the participation of both Mayas and women. Maya activists and public intellectuals such as Aura Cumes, Emma Chirix and Aura Yoc have consequently come to question not only the Ladino hegemony of the nation state, but also the patriarchal structure that has oppressed women in Guatemala for centuries. These women are draw inspiration from African-American feminists like bell hooks, as well as ideas of postcolonial feminism (Bastos and Cumes 162). They fight against the social constructions of both gender and ethnicity that serve to place them at the very bottom of the social hierarchical structure. Furthermore, they argue that liberation movements led by, for example, African-American men or white feminist women, favor legitimate interests but their particularity also unconsciously continues the oppression of other groups, such as indigenous women (Bastos and Cumes 156). Along this vein, Rosa Pu Tzunux argues that white and Ladino feminist movements victimize indigenous women, as they are cast in a fatalistic role and viewed as trapped by their environment and circumstances (Pu Tzunux 56). Like their male counterparts, indigenous women writers and intellectuals rearticulate an indigenous identity, but they do so from a woman's perspective.

The Ethnic Debate in Guatemala: Diverging Views on Maya Activism and Authority

Despite great advances on behalf of the Pan-Maya movement, Guatemala is still fractured in regards to the way ethnicity is understood. Although Pan-Mayanists have tried to reaffirm their ethnic identities and fight for cultural recognition and rights, many groups and individuals on both the Left and the Right disagree with their position. Among these detractors are conservative Guatemalan business elites and wealthy Ladinos, as the movement stresses collective rights to many of the nation's resources (Warren 40). Leftist Ladinos have also issued a critique of the Pan-Maya movement, targeting what they believe to be the essentialist rhetoric

the movement uses, which they consider anti-Ladino (Arias, “The Maya Movement” 522). Even people who are not a part of the public sphere have criticized the Pan-Maya movement, as many local Ladinos have argued that it promotes “reverse-racism” and could lead to indigenous rebellion and violence (Warren 40). The movement has also had disputes with international groups and organizations, such as various US-based missionary organizations as well as international development agencies (Warren 40).

Today, the interethnic debate in Guatemala seems to be leading towards a new understanding of cultural and national identity under the process of globalization. The debate is rooted in what used to be thought of as the *problema indígena*, or indigenous problem, of the nation (del Valle Escalante, *Nacionalismos mayas y desafíos postcoloniales en Guatemala* 129). In the past decades, this debate has been changing and morphing, especially with the social and cultural transformations caused by globalization and the end of the civil war. Within this debate, there are various public intellectuals in Guatemala and abroad who criticize the Pan-Maya movement and its supporters, for a myriad of reasons and ideological concerns, and some examples are mentioned in the previous paragraph. While the Pan-Maya movement proposes the rethinking of the nation as multicultural, plurinational and plurilingual in order to promote civil rights, economic opportunities and cultural self-determination for Maya and non-Maya peoples, various social actors do not agree with these ideas. Instead, they seek to maintain the status quo. I will trace some of the main criticisms of the cultural project espoused by the Pan-Maya movement, in order to explore a few of the various positions regarding ethnicity in Guatemala today.

One of the main critics of the Pan-Maya movement and its current goals is Mario Roberto Morales, a Ladino journalist, novelist and literary critic who proposes *mestizaje*⁸ as a possible way to reconcile ethnic differences in Guatemala. His 1998 book *La articulación de las diferencias, o, El síndrome de Maximón* [*The Articulation of Differences*] is a response to the political role that indigenous organization in Guatemala has taken after the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996 (del Valle Escalante, *Nacionalismos mayas y desafíos postcoloniales en Guatemala* 132). Morales has used various strategies from the canon of cultural studies and postmodern theory to deconstruct and delegitimize Pan-Mayanism (Warren 40). Moreover, Morales claims he does not oppose to the granting of various rights to indigenous peoples, but rather the manner in which the movement has been organizing and its official rhetoric. He criticizes the movement for being elitist, suggesting it does not represent the rural masses as it is removed from real Maya community leaders (Warren 40). He also argues that cultural resurgence in Guatemala is a form of “playacting” created to attract funding from international organizations (Morales 63). He believes the construction of the word “Maya” itself is based on a manipulation of a historic past (Morales 65) and serves to create a profound division between the two main ethnic groups in Guatemala, as it is based on ideals of cultural purity. He wants Guatemala to reach a national consciousness based on *mestizaje*, not as it was understood in the past but rather as a way to break down notions of race and ethnicity, resulting in a democratic coexistence of both ethnic groups in a shared space (Morales 75). Morales has received much criticism in response, especially from Maya intellectuals and scholars, many who claim that his ideals of *mestizaje* show a desire to reaffirm the status quo of Ladino hegemony, promoting an

⁸ Mestizaje: Simplistically, the ideology that believes the fusion of various cultural traditions to create a new culture, but this phenomenon will be defined in detail in Chapter 3.

ideology that denies the possibility of self-determination to indigenous peoples (del Valle Escalante, *Nacionalismos mayas y desafíos postcoloniales en Guatemala* 133).

On the opposite side of this debate, there are Maya intellectuals like Estuardo Zapeta, who detaches himself from other Maya activists, such as Menchú, in that he wants to distance the indigenous peoples from leftist ideologies and economics (del Valle Escalante, *Nacionalismos mayas y desafíos postcoloniales en Guatemala* 149). Zapeta and Morales engaged in a debate in 1997 on the topic of “Ethnicity and identity,” which is significant as it was the first post-civil war Ladino sponsored attempt at dialogue with a Maya leader on these issues, which underlay many of the country’s social problems (Fischer 474). Zapeta identifies as Maya and is closely related to the Pan-Maya movement, however believes that in order to further their main goals it is necessary to avoid a leftist politics. Instead, he argues it is necessary to negotiate these goals with current neoliberal traditions, in order to create better economic conditions for indigenous peoples (del Valle Escalante, *Nacionalismos mayas y desafíos postcoloniales en Guatemala* 149). He believes that the material condition of indigenous peoples is such not because of internal colonialism or centuries of oppression, but rather the underdevelopment of the country which was caused by the armed conflict. He has been criticized by other Maya intellectuals within the movement for his neoliberal ideals, such as Demetrio Cojtí, who claims capitalist neoliberal processes in Guatemala have only benefitted wealthy Ladinos. He argues these processes have also caused a plethora of negative consequences, especially for Maya peoples, such as acute social stratification, destruction of the environment and commodification of indigenous labor (Cojtí, "The Politics of Maya Revindication" 47). Like other actors in the Pan-Maya movement, Zapeta wishes to reach a state of multiculturalism in Guatemala, however, he believes it should be rooted in free market economics.

Indigenous organization and the Pan-Maya movement have not only been challenged by critics in Guatemala, however, but have also found its detractors abroad. A main example of this is David Stoll's book *Rigoberta Menchú and the story of all poor Guatemalans*, first published in 1999, in which he contests the veracity of Menchú's testimony, and compares the life story she presents to local testimonies and documentary sources that Stoll himself collects (Stoll xxi). The author accepts that his premise is controversial, but in fact continues to delegitimize the testimony written by Burgos, by attempting to prove that Menchú fictionalized many aspects of her story, mainly that she understated the amount of education she received, and exaggerated the depictions of how her family members were murdered. He believes that she is a spokesperson not for the Maya people but for Guatemala's revolutionary left, namely the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP). Although Stoll claims his intention was never to delegitimize Menchú's testimony, or to contest her role as a Nobel Laureate (Stoll xx), his book has been appropriated by the Guatemalan right to devalue Menchú's narrative (del Valle Escalante *Nacionalismos mayas y desafíos postcoloniales en Guatemala* 87). Furthermore, critics such as Arturo Arias have argued that Stoll's work devalues Menchú's agency in conceiving her own testimony, and is a result of the anxiety he feels at the emergence of a subaltern subject as equal to his status as a Western anthropologist. Arias also claims that Stoll's text shows a lack of understanding of cultural differences, especially in regards to Mayan ideas of time, history and community (Arias, "Authoring Ethnicized Subjects" 83). This controversy has been spurred further in recent years, as in 2008, Stoll's book was republished including a foreword written by the anthropologist that collected Menchú's testimony, Elizabeth Burgos, which she titles "How I Became Persona Non Grata." Here, she distances herself from Menchú, and even calls the book she produced a "political embarrassment" (Stoll xi). Burgos claims that the book was written as a political

campaign, and was never meant to be read as anthropology or literature, further disputing the legitimacy of Menchú's narrative.

Despite the contradictions within the Pan-Maya movement and the criticisms it has received, Maya activism and organizing in Guatemala has marked a shift in the nation's perspectives regarding ethnic identities. It has served to strengthen indigenous presence in the country's public sphere. In addition, it has fueled a growing output of indigenous literature, which had been previously been repressed, or at the very least, ignored. This history of the Pan-Maya movement serves to explain how indigenous authors begin to write about their own experiences, which had previously been told only by outsiders to their communities. This shift clearly does not only occur in Guatemala, as is made clear by the rapid development of postcolonial studies, and the acceptance of Third World literature into the literary canon, which occurs across the globe. In the next chapters, I will convey my own analysis of four major works of Guatemalan literature, which portray some of the concerns I have been discussing about interethnic politics in Guatemala. I conduct this analysis in order to highlight the way the Maya world is depicted by Ladino authors and compare these representations to the manner in which it is portrayed by indigenous authors.

Chapter 3

Leyendas de Guatemala and *Entre la piedra y la cruz*: Ladino Representations of the Indigenous Subject in Literature

Homi Bhabha has stressed the important nexus between the novel and the nation, which “creates a space through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated” (Bhabha 4). In this chapter I will explore the meaning of these connections in two works of twentieth century Guatemalan literature written by Ladino authors by engaging in an analysis of the way these authors depict the indigenous cultures that they coexist with, but are not a direct part of. Furthermore, I will analyze how these works reflect each author’s perspectives regarding ethnic identities, and how these perspectives are a product of the socio-historic context within which both authors are writing. The goal of this analysis is to provide insight into these works of contemporary Guatemalan literature, and attempt to understand the reasons why these authors choose to give a voice to a silenced and marginalized part of their population, as well as how they find the literary authority to engage this task.

I use Miguel Ángel Asturias’ *Leyendas de Guatemala* published in 1930, and Mario Monteforte Toledo’s *Entre la piedra y la cruz* published in 1948, as my primary sources for this analysis, as these authors have been considered two of the main Guatemalan novelists of the twentieth century (Arias, *Ideologías, literatura y sociedad durante la revolución guatemalteca, 1944-1954* 12). Additionally, both authors choose to extensively portray the nation’s indigenous Maya world in their literature. Their works of fiction are therefore helpful in understanding each author’s ideology in regards to correcting social imbalances and bridging the gap between ethnic groups in Guatemala, topics that have been discussed the nation for centuries. Both authors have the goal of developing a hybrid national consciousness through their literary works, which they

use to expose their views on national and ethnic identity in Guatemala. These works also allow insight into the Guatemalan psyche, as well as the manner in which the indigenous subject has been viewed in literature and society over time. Although both novels are written in the middle of the twentieth century, reading them today reflects how the ethnic debate in the nation has changed, and reveals how ethnic attitudes have shifted over time. I attempt to find what these attitudes were at the time these authors are writing, and find how these works of literature written *about* indigenous peoples pave the way for a moment when indigenous peoples can write *for themselves*, a more contemporary phenomenon that will be explored in the next chapter.

For most of Guatemala's literary history, beginning with early periods of colonization, any form of literature that dealt with indigenous subjects was primarily written by non-indigenous individuals. This begins in the sixteenth century, at the time of the conquest, as various Spanish authors take an interest in writing chronicles of the discovery of America, such as Bernal Diaz del Castillo's *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*. Around this time, Francisco Ximénez also attempts to transcribe and translate the *Popol Wuj*, an important Maya K'iche⁹ sacred text, which reflects the growing interest in indigenous cultures. These Spanish authors are mainly interested in documenting the geography of the new areas and exposing the way of life of the native populations they encounter (Prieto 138). From then forward, the "indio," as the indigenous subject is called for centuries, would in literature be predominantly written into history by white and mestizo authors, a literary and social phenomenon that still exists today. This does not mean of course, that native and indigenous populations are not producing any literary output of their own. On the contrary, Spanish settlers, mainly under the justification of converting natives to Catholicism, find and destroy any mystical works they consider a threat to

⁹ Maya K'iche: ethno-linguistic Maya group that is mainly located in the Guatemalan highlands (Bastos and Cumes 14)

the Church, and force the native populations to learn Spanish, urging them to forget their native languages and customs (del Valle Escalante, *Uk'u'x Kaj, Uk'u'x Ulew* 11). This early form of colonial repression sets in place hegemonic forces that would rule the nation for centuries to come, as well as inhibit the possibility of a more extensive indigenous literary corpus.

Furthermore, the burning of Maya codices would later prevent anthropologists and archaeologists from ever being able to truly understand the enigmatic hieroglyphics this civilization left behind, creating an unbridgeable gap between the ancient Maya civilization and the indigenous populations that inhabit Central America today (del Valle Escalante, *Uk'u'x Kaj, Uk'u'x Ulew* 11).

Exporting the Millenary Culture of the Mayas: Miguel Ángel Asturias

Centuries later, a sacred Maya K'iche text—a narrative of the origins traditions and history of the Maya K'iche people titled the *Popol Wuj*, or Book of the Community, which was originally transcribed by Ximénez—would finally be published. Interestingly, it is published into French rather than Spanish, and one of these first publications is based on the translations of French scholar Georges Raynaud (Barahona 25). It is here, in Paris, that Guatemalan author Miguel Ángel Asturias discovers a passion for the pre-Columbian civilizations of his nation, while studying anthropology and indigenous mythology with Raynaud in Paris (Castelpoggi 16). Furthermore, the author begins to develop a Spanish translation of the *Popol Wuj*, working from Raynaud's version in French and under his advisory (Barahona 25). Influenced by his studies with Raynaud, as well as French Surrealism, Asturias composes his first book, *Leyendas de Guatemala*, which is originally published in 1930.

I have chosen to begin my study with this work, as it places Guatemala on the international literary map for the first time due to the innovative qualities of the fiction as well as

its inclusion of indigenous Maya elements. These elements are culturally and globally relevant at the time, especially with the recent French translation of the *Popol Wuj. Leyendas de Guatemala* was internationally recognized and praised, and Asturias even received a letter from Paul Valery, a noted French author and philosopher, which extolled the work, calling it a string of “stories-dreams-poems” (Asturias, *Leyendas de Guatemala* 9). There is no argument that the work is of immense literary merit, but in order to explore the manner in which it reflects the social ideologies of the time, it is necessary to understand the author’s agenda in composing the text. This is important in trying to grasp why the author chooses to incorporate elements of a Maya culture that he does not necessarily belong to, as well as how he finds the authority to write about this topic.

Before analyzing this particular work and the way it depicts the Maya universe, it is therefore essential to have knowledge of Asturias’ past, and how his interest in Guatemala’s indigenous culture begins. The main manner through which this interest in indigenous peoples – and his subsequent decision to write *about* them – germinates is through the fact that as a child, due to economic difficulties and the oppressive dictatorship of Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920), Asturias’ family moves to the rural town of Salamá. Here he experiences firsthand the miserable conditions of poverty that indigenous people are living in (Bellini 13). What interests him most, however, is how indigenous communities are uncontaminated by modern society, and he finds a breadth of rich spirituality in this lifestyle. Asturias would later yearn to defend this world, which he sees as the legacy of a millenary past that is inscribed in the archeological remains scattered throughout the country, as well as the great books of Mayan sacred literature (Bellini 13).

It is also essential to comprehend the author's own sociopolitical ideology regarding the actual issue of indigenous groups in Guatemala at the time he was writing, and how his views on these topics developed. In 1923, he publishes a thesis upon graduating from law school in Guatemala, titled *El problema social del indio* [*The Social Problem of the Indian*], which is very well received by his peers and professors. In this thesis, he discusses his tangible thoughts regarding what he views as this "problem," namely the large native population, the harsh realities of village life, and the obstacles to the formation of a modern nation-state presented by the continued indigenous presence. He conceives this problem in terms of social pathology, describing the indigenous population as a race that had been weakened by exploitation, and can be saved only by scientific treatment. He believes the indigenous peoples of Guatemala are ridden by a disease he defines as a form of "social anemia" (Asturias, *El Problema Social del Indio* 68). The plan he proposes is reflective of liberal Positivist views of the time (Henighan 207), and calls for assimilationist policies that would progressively acclimate the indigenous populations into the country's Ladino population, as well as encourage and facilitate European immigration. In his thesis, the young Asturias writes, "El indio representa una civilización pasada y el mestizo, o ladino que le llamamos, una civilización que viene" (*El problema social del indio* 36).¹⁰

Asturias' thesis is particularly representative of various assimilationist attitudes throughout Latin America at the time, which presupposed the notion that indigenous cultures could not maintain any form of autonomous language, religion and customs if the region's nations were to prosper. Instead, many nations officially proposed *mestizaje*, or the assimilation of indigenous cultures into mainstream mestizo culture, as the only solution (Martinez-Echazabal 21). Asturias is directly influenced by Mexican author José Vasconcelos' notorious work, *The*

¹⁰ "The Indian represents a past civilization and the mestizo, or as we call the Ladino, represents the civilization to come," my translation.

Cosmic Race, which espouses this ideology of mestizaje as the only hope for the Americas (Henighan 207). Throughout his life, Asturias' outlook regarding this issue changes moderately, but his solution to his posed problem is always one of *mestizaje* and assimilation.

Correspondingly, it is important to know how he views social divisions at the time he is writing *Leyendas de Guatemala*, at least for the purpose of this analysis, which relies mainly on this particular work. His views on the Guatemalan "indio" clearly shape his writing in Europe, and are visible in various aspects of this work.

***Leyendas de Guatemala* and Asturias' View of the Maya World**

Understanding Asturias' historical past, as well as his later political and social ideology as he ages and receives his law degree in his home country, it is possible to search for glimpses of this ideology in his 1930 text, *Leyendas de Guatemala*. To begin with, the work is a mestizo text in itself, a product of artificial transculturation¹¹, where two cultures are literarily merged to create a new culture that is hybrid and dynamic. To accomplish this work of art, Asturias borrows elements of the mystical and magical from the Mayan cosmology, and interweaves them with fictional legends that he invents himself, all in a Surrealist and dream-like literary style. This work can be classified into the literary movement of *Vanguardia*, which is the Latin American counterpart to the Avant-garde movement in Europe (Verani 114). Spending time in Europe, especially Paris, Asturias develops personal contacts with some of the key French intellectuals of the 1920's and 1930's, becoming particularly fascinated with the Surrealists and their literary style, which directly influences *Leyendas de Guatemala* (Prieto 155). This work can be classified as a work of the *Vanguardia* as it is experimental, of an innovative character, and it

¹¹ The term transculturation was coined in 1940 in regards to anthropology by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz. It is later applied to Latin American literature by Uruguayan author Ángel Rama, where transculturation is a selective process that transforms literature over time, combining the cultures of the Latin American past and universal modernism (Rama 1982). The latter is the definition I use throughout this thesis.

reflects conscious opposition to the outmoded literary codes of the previous decades, all characteristics of *Vanguardismo* and the Avant-garde. Furthermore, it discards the notion of a harmony of individual parts, organic and stylistic unity in favor of an absolute freedom of invention, where the act of creation is free from the controls imposed by traditional forms, resulting in a “cult of the new” (Verani 127). All of these characteristics are visible in this text, and this was a deliberate attempt on Asturias’ part to bring something new and innovative to the Western literary canon, both in style and thematic.

Literary critic Francis Jaeger aptly ascribes the concept of origin anxiety¹² to Asturias’ role in writing *Leyendas de Guatemala*. This term expresses a moment when the destruction of the indigenous literature of a nation’s past, caused by the imposition of a different culture and language, makes the contemporary author write to fill this void (Jaeger 160). This theorization is appropriate as it is clear that to some degree, Asturias is attempting to fill this empty literary space through his project of bringing recognition to the Guatemalan culture and nation. By adding elements of the Maya cosmology and traditions to his work, Asturias furthers this project and internationally gains acknowledgment. His work is particularly well received as there are many archeological and anthropological developments regarding the ancient Maya civilization at this time, especially in Europe, such as the aforementioned French translation of the *Popol Wuj*. Asturias’ book is even awarded the French Sylla Monsegur Prize as the best book of the year by a Latin American author (Leal 239). Asturias therefore manages to liberate his small Guatemalan nation from international marginalization; he makes this nation visible to European attention through an artificial, although still personal, connection with a pre-Columbian past intermingled with a more recent, colonial experience (Bellini 19).

¹² This term is coined by Lois Parker Zamora in *The Usable Past: The Imagination of History in Recent Fiction of the Americas*

And this syncretism is exactly what Asturias achieves in *Leyendas de Guatemala*, mainly by using a poetic narrative that romanticizes and fictionalizes the millenary past of his nation. He takes on a nostalgic tone throughout the work, where the Central American rainforests and colonial cities appear as a place of wonder, even a kind of paradise. It is a world that is deeply in touch with the gods of its ancient belief system, upon which Catholic elements have been forcefully inserted, and this has morphed the region in many ways. Through this process, Asturias develops a literary style of transculturation that is compatible with the European Avant-garde through his incorporation of mystical Maya elements, which coalesce with the dream-like narrative that the Surrealists idealized. The reader becomes accustomed to shifting between reality and myth, in a rhythmic and fluid process. This duality between reality and dream-like legends parallels the duality between indigenous and Spanish elements that the author portrays, and he therefore attempts to synthesize both of these binary oppositions. Asturias' literary agenda of creating a new style and genre of literature then comes alongside the political agenda of inscribing the indigenous world, and namely Guatemala itself, into the global cultural map. He accomplishes this by expressing the idea that the country has an incredibly rich and ancient culture and history. His real goal is to give the country international recognition by incorporating the elements of indigenous culture that he finds attractive or useful, and combining them with a picturesque image of the colonial Latin American city, as well as completely fictional aspects.

The book is divided into two introductory chapters, which serve to situate the reader into the Guatemalan geography and ecology, as well as set up a narrator for the rest of the story. These chapters are followed by five sections that are titled as "legends" and written in poetic prose, and one final episode that is presented as a drama. The structure of the work itself reveals Asturias' interest in experimental forms of writing, which reflected in the work's amalgamation

of prose, poetry and drama. Each of the chapters tells mystical stories, which are combinations of Guatemalan folk tales, Mayan legends and the author's own fabrications. Guatemalan readers would recognize several of the myths, which are examples of transculturation in themselves, as they combine the Spanish, mestizo and indigenous cultures to create a synthesis that the author hopes to equate with a forged Guatemalan national consciousness. As Asturias expresses in his thesis, he believes the only way Guatemala can progress is to achieve this shared national consciousness, which to him can only occur through a homogenization of the country's culture. It is interesting, however, that although in his thesis he advocates for the "indio" to leave his culture behind and adapt to a mainstream Ladino way of life, in this work of literature it is the author who takes the indigenous Maya culture and incorporates it into a Ladino work of art meant for a Western audience.

Asturias begins his work with the chapter "Guatemala", where he describes the buried cities that form the nation of Guatemala; he situates the reader into the complex geography and archeological remains that permeate the natural landscape of the country. Immediately, there is a connection to a millenary past, as he depicts the ruins of the Maya civilization, which existed for thousands of years before any kind of contact with the European world was established. In the next chapter, "Ahora que me acuerdo," or "I Remember Now," the author sets up a parabolic narrator that emphasizes the timelessness of the work, as he has been lost in the jungle for what seems like centuries and now an old man, returns and wants to hear the stories of his town (Castelpoggi 31). This is how Asturias situates the "legends" that he will proceed to narrate, which are a combination of a lost Maya culture and the Spanish legacy that has forcefully injected itself into the society.

The depiction of the Maya world and its interactions with European civilization are especially present in “Leyenda del tesoro florido,” or the “The Legend of the Treasure from the Flowering Place.” Here, Asturias recreates the popular myth that there is a treasure buried beneath Lake Atitlán, hidden by the Mayas before the arrival of Pedro de Alvarado, the Spanish conquistador to Guatemala. This myth is common in this area of Guatemala, as it has been transmitted orally through generations, as it is often still told by people who inhabit the villages surrounding Lake Atitlán (León Hill 56). Asturias’ legend then tells a fictionalized story that recounts how this treasure is buried and concealed by a volcanic eruption during a mystical war between the Mayas and the Alvarado’s troops, “los hombres blancos” (Asturias, *Leyendas de Guatemala* 47) meaning the white men. This legend is essential to the manner in which Asturias understands the indigenous culture of Guatemala, as it explicitly mentions the conquest and the first encounter between the Guatemalan native populations and the Spanish. The legend recognizes that the conquest divided Guatemala into two worlds: the indigenous world and the Spanish world, which Asturias’ yearns to reconcile.

In this story, the author describes how, when being attacked by the Spanish forces, some of the natives attempted to hide the treasure as to keep the foreigners from obtaining this wealth of gold and precious stones, which Asturias describes in rich detail (*Leyendas de Guatemala* 48). However, they are seen by the Spanish armies, who in turn chase them, and the soldiers greedily attempt to secure parts of this treasure for themselves. However, at this moment, the volcano explodes, scorching a great part of the Spanish troops and burying the treasure forever. Here, it is the natural elements of this Guatemalan landscape that ultimately save the armies of indigenous soldiers, as well as their treasure. Nature itself then serves as a supernatural element capable of imparting justice, as well as protecting the natural patrimony from avaricious Spanish hands.

This natural outburst also allows the story to remain inconclusive; there is no final victory on behalf of either of the groups. Instead, the dynamic between the Spanish invasion and indigenous resistance cause this volcano to erupt, which in turn produces a new volcano, where the treasure is now hidden, and this is a symbol of the forging of the new Guatemalan nation (Jaeger 68). Here, it is possible to further understand the syncretism that permeates Asturias' narrative, as he marks how Guatemala is a nation that is morphed and defined by this significant cultural clash.

Throughout the entire work, there are various other examples of how Guatemala is the result of the mixture of Spanish and indigenous elements. The most prevalent instance of this transculturation is the aspect of religion, which pervades the text and is represented as a mixture of Catholicism and elements of Maya religions. This hybrid religiosity permeates the first five legends, and reflects a cultural syncretism that does in fact exist in Guatemala even today. When describing Catholic elements, Asturias portrays them with a variety of negative undertones and fuses them with appearances of demonic and evil forces. This is especially visible in the legend of the "Cadejo," a malicious creature of Guatemalan folklore that targets young women. This legend is filled with religious allusions, as it tells the story of a young novice who would eventually become Mother Elvira of San Francisco, one of the nuns that found the Convent of Santa Catalina in Guatemala during the seventeenth century (León Hill 52). Here, Asturias fuses a real historical figure with a folkloric myth. This story truly emphasizes ideas of temptation that exist in the Catholic tradition, as it portrays the novice's beautiful braid as a source of temptation to men around her. Her braid is bewitched, and incites men to act demonically, not being able to resist its spell. In this way, Asturias highlights the contamination of indigenous animism, and shows the manner through which the Spanish conquistadores instilled the native populations with an earthly fear and guilt they had never known (Bellini 20). Through the concept of religion,

Asturias further emphasizes that the Spanish conquest did in fact divide the nation into two worlds, and he attempts synthesize both worlds through his work, which is in itself a reflection of his desire for Guatemala to develop a unified nationality.

Although he directly references the conquest, as well as other historical events and figures, Asturias' narrative is permeated by an element of timelessness, which shows he is not particularly interested in depicting a social reality. Instead, he wants to create a work of art that fuses Guatemala's social conditions with its millenary past, and in order to maintain this balance he focuses on depicting this sense of eternity. In order to attain this, he delivers many stories of origin and creation, adding an intensely metaphysical atmosphere to the work. In his work, chronological time does not exist, but instead there is a feeling of timelessness that derives from explaining the origins of the world. He takes this inspiration in great part from the *Popol Wuj*, a sacred text that can be compared to the Bible as it also includes a chapter of genesis, and explains the creation of life according to Maya K'iche religion. In fact, Asturias transcribes various passages from the *Popol Wuj* itself and directly places them into *Leyendas de Guatemala* (León Hill 44). He also uses various characters from the *Popol Wuj* in his legends, and recreates many of the sacred text's myths, especially in the final chapters of the book.

In the last legend in prose, "Los brujos de la tormenta primaveral," or "The Sorcerers of the Spring Storm," the author portrays a myth of creation, and makes many references to characters from the *Popol Wuj*. The legend explains how Guatemala's geography is formed and then filled with flora and fauna, amalgamating all of these happenings into one single day. He also describes the mythological battles between humans and nature, in which humans are eventually overpowered, and nothing is left but vegetation. The story ends with the words, "y así fue como perdieron los pueblos su contacto íntimo con los dioses, la tierra y la mujer" (Asturias,

Leyendas de Guatemala 63). This nostalgic final passage reflects a world that has been lost, and that Asturias is therefore attempting to recapture and recreate. In this story, Asturias therefore invents a magical Maya language, combining not only pre-Columbian influences but also images from the Judeo-Christian tradition, namely the Genesis and Apocalypse chapters of the Bible (Morales, *La articulación de las diferencias* 121). These elements are written in an intensely poetic language, more so than any of the previous legends, and epitomize the experimental nature of the *Vanguardia*. There is a clear mixture of various historical and literary elements at play in this final legend, as it synthesizes the author's overall desire to create a work of art that is completely new and serves to develop a Guatemalan national consciousness.

Asturias is unique in his experimental treatment of these subjects at the time, as well as his contributions to the Latin American *Vanguardia*. He also develops a work of literature that renews the nexus between literature and the nation through an exploration and glorification of the nation's past (Jaeger 159), which the author is clearly nostalgic towards. However, his concerns would inspire writers across Guatemala to take part in the exploration of this shared and millenary past, by following Asturias' footsteps in attempting to grasp the consciousness of the Maya world, although many have writers have focuses instead on the present day indigenous cultures that embody the Guatemala's idealized past (Prieto 140).

Indigenismo: The Indigenous Subject as Conceived by Mestizo/Ladino Authors

At the time when Asturias is writing, various Latin American authors are less concerned with experimentalism and the *Vanguardia*, and more concerned with depicting the present material conditions of the indigenous populations of their countries, by writing *about* them. As critic René Prieto explains this process,

[t]he history of colonial and republican America is also-in its margins, footnotes and backpages-the history of the Indian. Not of the Indian as he is but as white and mestizo writers...have chosen to typecast, vilify and idealize him. (Prieto 138)

In the 1930's, *Indigenismo*, a literary current that was immensely popular in the 1840's in Central and South America, resurfaces throughout the continent.¹³ The main nations to engage this literary movement are Peru, Guatemala and Mexico, namely due to their large indigenous populations and the fact that these were the centers of large ancient civilizations (Prieto 140). This literary movement germinates mainly from Fray Bartolomé de las Casas' sympathetic chronicles of the native populations of Central America and Rousseau's concept of the native savage, and progresses through many stages and developments (Prieto 142). For the purpose of my research, I will address the form of *Indigenismo* that grew in popularity in the 1930's, and is concerned with the current social and political issues of the "indio" and seeks to address this social imbalance. This is the most mature phase of indigenist literature, which at this time is still being written predominantly by mestizo authors. These authors seek to expose and understand the indigenous world, as well as find solutions to social and class divisions that exist, by placing value on a shared mestizo culture and envisioning a developing national identity that would stem from a congress of cultures (Prieto 152).

In Guatemala, this type of literature gains much popularity, and is characterized by the sympathetic portrayal of the indigenous peoples and the decrying of the deleterious effects of migration on laborers who end up losing their culture and identity after moving to the coast, a migratory process that is particularly exposed in the works of Carlos Wyld Ospina. Author Flavio Herrera takes a slightly different perspective, as he criticizes the exploitation of native

¹³ This resurfacing is also sometimes referred to as *Neoindigenismo*, as it is referred to in *The Cambridge History of Latin American Literature*

populations, but finds them riddled with insurmountable defects and cultural insufficiencies, and is therefore unable to find a satisfactory solution to the problem of integrating the indigenous inhabitants to mainstream society. The main issue with this ideology is the fact that if, assimilationist policies are beneficial to mainstream society, where do they leave the linguistic, religious and cultural demands of the indigenous groups themselves? The idea of *mestizaje* does not consider it a possibility to consider indigenous cultures as autonomous entities, with their own set of values, logic, histories and political and cultural demands (del Valle Escalante, *Uk'u'x Kaj, Uk'u'x Ulew* 16).

Indigenismo is therefore, a truly mestizo form of literature, as mestizo and Ladino authors see indigenous groups as subjects to be written *about*, as they do not have enough power to write about themselves. Although several of these authors are sympathetic to the material conditions these populations live in, they still allow themselves the authority to write about them and use the “indio” voice as their own. The subjects that they believe to be marginalized are not allowed their input into these works, which are written primarily with a Ladino audience in mind. The indigenous populations are still a “problem” that needs a “solution”, which ultimately tends to be assimilation to the mainstream culture to allow for national progress and the formation of a more homogeneous national consciousness.

Mario Monteforte Toledo: *Indigenismo* and Social Realism

Mario Monteforte Toledo, the author of the next work I have chosen to analyze in this chapter, writes along this vein, using the literary movement of *Indigenismo* to denounce the crude nature of discrimination and racism, as well as expose the horrifying manner in which the indigenous populations in Guatemala lived at the time. He is directly influenced by Asturias, and the two men even share similar historical backgrounds and grow up in similar material

conditions. Like Asturias, Monteforte is Ladino, but develops an interest in indigenous culture; the 1917 earthquake in Guatemala displaces his family to a rural, peasant area, where as a child he interacts mostly with indigenous children (Monteforte Toledo 231).

In 1938, he moves to a Tzutuhil¹⁴ village near Lake Atitlán as an adult, where he uses his law degree to defend villagers in minor legal cases, and as he expresses it, is paid in “little animals, fruits and blessings”(Monteforte Toledo 231). He moves in with a tzutuhil woman, with whom he has a daughter, and he believes this child to be a “legend of Guatemala” (Monteforte Toledo 231), showing his explicit admiration for Asturias’s work. At this time, Guatemala is under a despotic military dictatorship, and his interracial union causes his arrest, as he is accused of “attempt against the social institutions” (Monteforte Toledo 231). Previous to his arrest, his life in Lake Atitlán shapes the material for what would become *Entre la piedra y la cruz*, and after the dictatorship falls he is finally able to publish this novel in 1948. Monteforte’s close relationship with this indigenous community provides him the inspiration for his work, but the question of whether he has the authority to use the voice of these people based on second-hand experiences is not fully resolved.

In *Entre la piedra y la cruz*, Monteforte presents the life of Lu Matzar, a young Tzutuhil boy who grows up in the town of San Pedro la Laguna. The coming of age story reflects Lu’s migratory process as he leaves his rural hometown for the nation’s capital, which leads to his subsequent *ladinización*. This term refers to the process through which an indigenous individual moves to an urban setting and must acclimate to society by learning Spanish, adopting Catholicism or other mainstream traditions and customs, to the point where he or she no longer

¹⁴ Tzutuhil: ethno-linguistic Maya group that live mainly near Lake Atitlan, and are known for adherence to traditional cultural values (Bastos y Cumes 14).

identifies as indigenous.¹⁵ The process implies an evolution from a state of barbarity to a more “civilized” state (Cojtí, *La configuración del pensamiento político del pueblo maya* 31). Critic Arturo Arias applies this term to Lu, as the protagonist crosses over from the village of his ancestors into Guatemala City, where he leaves his traditions and customs behind and changes completely to fit into the mainstream culture (Arias, *Ideologías, literatura y sociedad durante la revolución guatemalteca, 1944-1954* 177). Monteforte depicts the psychological problem that results from these split identities, mainly the fact that once the indigenous subject adapts to and identifies with Western culture he is neither accepted by the dominant society nor fully satisfied with his native community.

The style of this novel diverges greatly from the experimental nature of Asturias’ work and the timeless feeling of his prose. Monteforte is instead highly focused on delineating a specific time frame of fictional events that occur with the backdrop of real historical events. He depicts a real chronology in Guatemalan and world history, commencing with the fall of dictator Estrada Cabrera in 1920, moving through the Great Depression and WWII, and ending in the revolution that topples the repressive Jorge Ubico regime in 1944. This revolution seems to indicate a possible point of beginning for the project of *mestizaje* and *ladinización* that the author wishes to put forward. To enhance this feeling of social realism, he uses a dry, straightforward prose that highlights the realistic nature of his story.

He departs from Asturias in style because he has a different agenda; he does not wish to gain international recognition, but nationally expose to a Ladino audience the grievances of the nation’s indigenous people. He wishes to accomplish this in the most accurate way possible, in order to prove that this is the reality of the country’s social divisions. Monteforte makes this

¹⁵ The term *ladinización* has been examined by various Guatemalan scholars. See Tacarena (2006) for in-depth definition and historical background.

clear as he famously says that, “[l]a Guatemala de Miguel Ángel Asturias es inventada, mientras que la mía es una Guatemala vivida”¹⁶ (Arias, *La identidad de la palabra* ch. 3; para. 7). This distances his approach from Asturias’, and reflects the differences not only in their style, but in what they are trying to achieve with their works. There is also an interesting dynamic between both authors, as Monteforte seems to assert that he has the appropriate authority to be the voice of an indigenous community—whether they agree with this or not—while he believes that Asturias cannot lay claim to this authority. He believes that the fact that he has seen the plight of these communities first-hand, means he has similarly lived it himself. He is however, still a Ladino author, and although he has *seen* the conditions the Guatemalan indigenous peoples experience, he has not really *lived* them personally.

Monteforte situates himself in this position of authority to write *Entre la piedra y la cruz*, and by using free indirect discourse as his narrative method he enters the mind of indigenous and non-indigenous characters alike. He also uses a narratorial voice that speaks in an educated and academic Spanish, which comes in contrast to the colloquialisms and informal language used by most the characters. This distances the narrator from the characters, and reflects Monteforte’s own voice, as well as the fact that he is telling a story about other people rather than about himself. This is the main reason I chose this novel to complement *Leyendas de Guatemala*, as by analyzing how Monteforte treats characters of different ethnicities and the manner in which the characters interact, it is possible to gauge more information regarding ethnic attitudes in Guatemala at the time. Monteforte creates a vast array of characters of different ethnicities, and this inherent trait seems to greatly shape the characters’ personalities and actions.

There are three ethnic dimensions to this novel: the “indio,” the “ladino,” and the “extranjero,” or foreigner. These groups cohabit a nation permeated by racism and ethnic

¹⁶ “The Guatemala of Miguel Ángel Asturias is invented, while my Guatemala is a lived one,” my translation.

fragmentation, but are also expressions of Guatemala's politics in the early 1900's. During this time various American and German settlers arrived in the nation and owned large haciendas, and where known for their cruelty towards the laborers who worked their lands (Arias, *Ideologías, literatura y sociedad durante la revolución guatemalteca, 1944-1954* 46). This serves to emphasize the fact that hegemonic powers of colonialism in Guatemala are perpetually reinforced, not only internally, but by external actors as well. The foreigners in the novel are depicted as caricatures and they espouse Eurocentric and extremely racist ideologies. This is exemplified mainly in the landowner Don Herman, who abuses his power and is cruel to most of the characters he interacts with. His son Franz acts in similar manners and even rapes Lu's sister, a young indigenous girl, and this crime goes unpunished due to his socioeconomic status. The Ladinos or mestizos in the novel are more multi-faceted, and are not portrayed as fully inherently good or evil. However, even though some of these characters are extremely negative, Ladinos are more likely to have chances for redemption, such as the Ladino landowner Don José, who is kind to his workers, and Don Teófilo, who takes Lu into his family so he can receive an education. There is then, an emphasis on the importance of nationality outside of race itself, as characters that are fully Guatemalan have more opportunities for redemption in this novel. Another distinguishing factor between characters is class, as there is a pronounced divide between characters that are rich and poor. Ethnicity and class are major determining factors in the lives of characters, as they are in fact in Guatemalan society.

Within Guatemalan characters, ethnicity creates an unbridgeable gap, and although it might not define the character's personalities or values, it defines their fates and possibilities for success. The indigenous people of San Pedro la Laguna, Lu's community in the novel, are shown as hard-working and passionate about their land and cultures, traditionalists who want to

maintain their autonomy and do not wish to see changes in the way they live. Similarly, the Ladino characters are also relatively stable, and represent the world of Ladino culture and Catholic religion that is the mainstream and believed to be superior. They are usually either sympathetic towards the “indios” and wish for them to acclimate into society, or like the foreign characters, cruel and vicious towards them, viewing them even as subhuman. What is interesting is the response indigenous characters have toward this hegemonic power structure, which they seem to accept as their fate, despite understanding the injustices they suffer. They are not portrayed as inherently racist, as the Germans or some Ladino characters who hate the “indios” purely in terms of race and class. Instead, they only respond with hatred because they have been oppressed for so long. This is made clear as Lu changes greatly as he ages; he begins his life as an idealistic child who wants to be accepted by Ladino society, but towards the end of the novel he is incredibly bitter and resentful towards Ladinos due to the abuses he has suffered at their hands. Monteforte establishes a clear difference between innate racism, such as is common in the foreign characters, and vengeful feelings toward an oppressor that is violent and cruel, as are exhibited in Lu’s character.

Furthermore, indigenous characters do not differentiate internal power sources from external ones; it is all the same for their *patrón* to be German or Guatemalan. Similarly, they do not know what is happening in politics, and life for them does not change, be it under a tyrannical military government or a free post-revolution society. The novel moves through the Great Depression and WWII, important world events that highly impact the urban and wealthy characters, but have not effect or importance over the lives of impoverished indigenous characters. They are so disconnected from society and live in such a high degree of isolation and poverty that life to them is stable amongst a modernizing and changing nation. Monteforte

portrays this secluded and autonomous world to represent the disconnect between both cultures, and how the indigenous populations, focused only on surviving, cannot manage to care about politics or power structures. Here, there is a reductionist view of these groups, as they are pigeonholed into a role of powerlessness; they all lack of ambition or desire for change.

The main character of the novel, Lu Matzar, then becomes the main vehicle through which Monteforte expresses his overall ideology, which is clearly one of *ladinización* as the only form of redemption for the “indio”. Throughout the novel, Lu, who is born to indigenous parents in a traditional village and grows up working his father’s land, slowly undergoes a migratory process that leads him to the urban capital and causes his acclimation to society. From the beginning of the story, the narrator tells that Lu is not a normal child within his community, as the Maya shaman at his birth ceremony pronounces that Lu “va a pelear contra los fuertes y a creer en lo que nadie cree”¹⁷ (Monteforte Toledo 16). This foreshadows his eventual separation from his culture, and the revolutionary ideas that will form in his mind as he becomes an adult. Another aspect that characterizes Lu’s life is fortuity and coincidence; he achieves a process of acclimation to a new culture because he has the chance to do so, meaning that various fortuitous actions coalesce that allow him to move upward in society. This reflects how Monteforte believes that Lu’s life could not be the life of any indigenous man, as he needs this fortuity and these good omens to undergo a process of *ladinización* that is not granted to most people in his situation. By creating these artificial conditions, Monteforte then makes his story believable and even possible, even in the most fragmented and discriminatory of societies. Lu is then able to attend schooling in the city and is adopted by a Ladino man, and in his new home he is taught to embrace religion, speak Spanish and wear shoes.

¹⁷ “will fight against the strong ones and believe in what no one believes,” my translation.

This experience allows him to receive an education, but it also forces him to grow up in a society that does not truly accept him. This becomes the main internal conflict of the novel, where Lu becomes a bi-cultural hybrid. He is no longer accepted, and is barely recognized, in his indigenous village, but he is also not fully accepted by the Ladinos around him. Even though he has acclimated in every sense possible, he is still phenotypically an “indio” and there is no way for him to overcome that. He is then caught between two worlds that are harsh to him, as is evidenced when he thinks, “¿Cómo sería el largo viaje, especialmente el suyo? Él debía tener el alma entre la piedra del aborígen y la cruz del blanco. Por eso era doblemente malo y doblemente bueno. Había pecado contra la cruz y había enojado a los Señores de la piedra”¹⁸ (Monteforte Toledo 219). The title of the novel derives from this quote, the stone representing the indigenous culture and gods and the cross representing the Catholicism that the Spanish brought to the New World. Upon this realization, Lu no longer has a strong will to live and his life begins to decay, and he is even imprisoned for drunken loitering.

As the novel comes to its end, Lu fortuitously escapes from prison just as the 1944 revolution erupts, creating such chaos in the city that he is able to run away from his cell. He is wounded and ends up in the hospital, where his nurse is Margarita, the daughter of the Ladino man who took Lu in as a child and provided him with an education. This reunion is quite coincidental, and the author implies that they will become romantically involved and will most likely marry after the revolution takes place, which provides new hope for Guatemalan society, striking a chord of optimism. Monteforte makes it clear however, that Lu’s only possibility for success is to marry this woman in order to fully adapt into society and commence the cycle of

¹⁸ “How would the long journey be, especially his own? He must have had his soul between the aboriginal stone and the cross of the white man. For that is why he was twice as evil and twice as good. He had sinned against the cross and had angered the Gods of the stone,” my translation.

mestizaje; although he can never truly be a Ladino his children will be able to take on this label. *Ladinización*, therefore, is his only possibility for redemption.

Monteforte's ideology of *mestizaje* as the only form of developing a national consciousness clearly shines through in this novel. More explicitly, the author later says, in a non-fiction work, that this is in fact the main point of this novel, and *mestizaje* is his real solution to the problem of social divisions in Guatemala. He explains that:

Desde el punto de vista social el hecho más importante para la integración de la población guatemalteca ha sido que dos grupos étnicos estén en contacto, coexistan y se mezclen entre si en un proceso que se inicia en la conquista y continúa hasta nuestros días. Este contacto implica una interacción como resultado de la cual se logran no solo una mezcla biológica sino la formación y la conciencia de la nacionalidad¹⁹ (Monteforte Toledo, *Guatemala, monografía sociológica* 388)

His goal throughout this novel, then, is to provide a voice for the indigenous communities of Guatemala by exposing the tragic world they live in. However he also wants to express that the solution to their suffering is for indigenous peoples to acclimate to Guatemalan society, to the point where *mestizaje* is the norm and society is not divided into clear ethnic groups.

Furthermore, the author directs his work to a Ladino audience, whom he wishes to educate, but also urges this audience to accept the *mestizaje* he supports. He believes both cultures have important roles in this national project, meaning that if the “indio” is to undergo the migratory and cultural process of becoming a Ladino, then the Ladino must accept him as such.

¹⁹ “From the social point of view the most important event toward the integration of the Guatemalan population has been that two ethnic groups are in contact, coexist and mix among themselves in a process that begins with the conquer and continues until our days. This contact implies an interaction as a result of which there is not only a biological mixture but also the formation and the conscience of a nationality,” my translation.

This work, both inside the novel's chronology as well as the historical moment in which it is published, comes to be in a recently revolutionized Guatemala, as the country's student movement topples the despotic military government of Jorge Ubico. Elections then bring socialist candidate Juan Jose Arévalo to power, bringing to Guatemala one of its first left wing governments. In attempts to improve the social conditions of the nation, Arévalo sets up farming cooperatives, and widespread national education programs geared to integrating indigenous populations into mainstream national life (Arias, *Ideologías, literatura y sociedad durante la revolución guatemalteca, 1944-1954* 198), the programs Asturias and Monteforte believed to be the solution to the ethnic debates in the nation. He also sets up a plan for agrarian reform, which Monteforte considers to be Guatemala's main problem. Monteforte becomes a great supporter of this president, mainly in regards to his anti-imperialist views and policies, which are emphasized in *Entre la piedra y la cruz* (Prieto 162).

Arévalo's government gains continuity in the following president, Jacobo Arbenz, who attempts to push forward the agrarian reform introduced by his predecessor, with great opposition from landholding elites (Prieto 153). Furthermore, due to his leftist government, Arbenz becomes a target of the American anti-communist ideology at the time, resulting in the 1954 CIA backed coup that ends his democratically elected presidency (Brockett 91). This military coup, alongside the political climate created by the Cold War, as well as other factors, coalesce into the ethnic conflict that would permeate Guatemala from 1960-1996. This conflict, which is often termed the *Maya holocaust* (del Valle Escalante, *Uk'u'x Kaj, Uk'u'x Ulew* 23), would escalate the social divisions and discriminatory attitudes that are reflected in Monteforte's novel, and the intensity of this conflict would bring international attention to the human rights

violations that had been occurring in Guatemala for centuries. This brings to the nation a decisive and collective need for change, mainly through national reforms.

It is at this moment where Maya intellectuals find the opportunity to take authority and commence to write about themselves and provide a genuine expression of indigenous literature and art, in contrast to what has existed in the past. There is no argument that it is in the 1980's and 90's that Maya literature truly begins to gain recognition. However, it is important to note that this literature has existed for centuries, but has merely been repressed by the hegemonic forces of the nation, and flourished only at the margins of society, as well as through the oral transmission of collective memory (del Valle Escalante, *Uk'u'x Kaj, Uk'u'x Ulew* 17). This point in Guatemala's brutal history allows Maya intellectuals to seek support both nationally and internationally, in order to finally have their voices heard by telling their stories. These intellectuals want to emphasize the fact that they are indigenous individuals with autonomous demands who have no wish to partake in any form of *ladinización* or *mestizaje*. In 1923, Jose Carlos Mariátegui, a noted Peruvian journalist and philosopher, states:

Indigenist literature cannot give us a strictly authentic version of the Indian, for it must idealize and stylize him. Nor can it give us his soul. It is still a mestizo literature and as such is called indigenist rather than indigenous. If an indigenous literature finally appears, it will be when the Indians themselves are able to produce it. (Mariátegui 274).

This makes it clear that he views Indigenism as a temporary manner of dealing with the social issue of ethnicity in nations with large indigenous populations. It seems then, that in Guatemala, due to the immense amount of repression, combined with the atrocities of the ethnic conflict that ravished the nation, the late twentieth century became the moment Mariátegui spoke of.

However, it is not a moment when indigenous people develop the capacity to speak for themselves, but the moment when the Ladino population finally accepts to listen.

Chapter 4

Rigoberta Menchú and Gaspar Pedro González: the Development of Indigenous Literature in Guatemala

In the second half of the twentieth century, Third World literature²⁰ commences to gain notoriety worldwide, and postmodern and postcolonial studies seek to explain the importance of this literature, and its connection to society and politics within communities and nations, as it actively engages in a process of questioning and examining colonial discourses in their work (McLeod 25). In Guatemala, this phenomenon commences to proliferate when indigenous authors, through a strengthening Pan-Maya movement, commence to find authority and opportunities to write about their own experiences, which had previously been written about only by outsiders to their communities. In the previous chapter, I discuss the fact that Guatemalan literature dealing with indigenous subjects has, for the most of the country's history, been written only by Ladino authors for Ladino audiences. I therefore analyze two works by Ladino authors Miguel Ángel Asturias and Mario Monteforte Toledo, in order to observe the manner in which they represent the Maya world and subject.

The fact that the nation's literature is mainly written by Ladino authors exemplifies the fact that indigenous Maya people of Guatemala have been marginalized and kept from developing literature of their own. However, in the 1980's, with the intensification of the Guatemalan civil war and the rapid growth of the Pan-Maya movement, new works of literature begin to appear that show an internal side of the Maya world, and are narrated or written by indigenous subjects themselves. In this chapter I will analyze this phenomenon, focusing on Rigoberta Menchú's 1983 testimony, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*

²⁰ The term "Third World Literature" is popularized by Fredric Jameson in "Third World Literature in an era of Multinational Capitalism" (1986) where he argues this literature is necessarily form of national allegory that represents the difficult situation of third world culture and society.

and Gaspar Pedro González' 1992 novel *La otra cara: la vida de un Maya* as these are two of the first contemporary works by indigenous authors in Guatemala²¹. I attempt to highlight how these texts reveal internal explorations of indigenous communities by their own members, and then differentiate these visions from the manner in which Ladino authors chose to depict their own external understandings of these same communities.

The Latin American *Testimonio*: an Intersection of Politics and Literature

Towards the end of the twentieth century, in Latin America, the literary genre of *testimonio* is gaining predominance and being used in a widespread manner. It is often namely as a way to denounce various human rights abuses occurring in the region and usually expresses the ideas of national minorities or subcultures (Beverley 9). This genre is truly inaugurated in the 1960's, as the first example of the Latin American *testimonio* is Miguel Barnet's *Biography of a Runaway Slave* published in 1966 in Cuba, in which the author transcribes the life story of an old Cuban man of African descent who lives as a slave for most of his life (Yúdice 211). The genre is further consolidated into the Latin American literary canon as Casa de las Américas, a Cuban organization that promotes literature and the arts in the continent, establishes a prize for *testimonio* alongside their other literary genres, specifically the novel, short story, poetry, theater and essay (Beverley 9).

There are various factors that contribute to the development of testimonial literature, the main factor being the sociopolitical climate in Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century. First of all, testimonial literature comes as a next step from Latin American interest in nationalist novels and novels of *indigenismo*, which has been defined and explored in the previous chapter. There is also a close relationship between the genre of *testimonio* and the

²¹Although I have chosen these particular works for my analysis, several other Guatemalan Maya authors are writing at this time, which can be exemplified in the novels of Luis de Lion and Victor Montejo, as well as the poetry of Humberto Ak'abal and Maya Cu Choc.

armed revolutionary conflicts in Latin America, that are developing in parallel to this literary timeframe, and which will be further explored in the analysis of Menchú's narrative. The relationship between *testimonio* and armed struggle is intensified with the publishing of Che Guevara's 1963 work, *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War* and its political and literary reception. Finally, the main root of interest in *testimonio* is the massive counterculture that is taking place at this same time in Latin America, which is inspired greatly by the decolonization theories of Fanon, the feminist movement, and the movement of liberation theology, among others movements for equality and social justice (Beverley 10). Because of these political and social narratives, the development of testimonial literature in Latin America reflects a moment in history where literature and politics become closely interweaved, and highly reflective of each other.

However, from this point onward, theorizing the genre becomes more complex, and various critics provide different definitions and considerations. Georg Gugelberger calls *testimonio* a "desire called Third World Literature" (Gugelberger 1), accepting that the term is abstract and difficult to define, and has therefore caused many polemical debates. The exact definition of *testimonio* is then still disputed, due to the fact that the genre seeks to expose a form of truth through a subaltern voice, and this truth can easily be contested. As a working definition, *testimonio* is an ideological document and at the same time an artistic rendering, which represents the experiences of a marginal subject with the purpose of denouncing a present or past exploitation so this will not be repeated (Garcia 426). According to John Beverley, the *testimonio* is an "authentic narrative" that takes on the length of a short novel, is written in the first person, and is often mediated through an intellectual that can take the subaltern's testimony, transcribe and shape it (Beverley 9). *Testimonio* creates a "truth effect", but this does not mean it

necessarily reflects exact historical data, but rather reflects a collective history and questions the privileging of literature as an institution, by becoming a new literary genre that belongs to the subaltern sector of society (Arias, “Authoring Ethnicized Subjects” 76). It enhances this truth effect as it is a narration of urgency, and reflects the need to communicate an experience that surges from exploitation, poverty, marginalization, crime and fight (Beverley 9).

As a new form of literature, however, the main development that comes from the surge of *testimonio* as an accepted genre is the fact that it revises the literary canon and its visions of the subaltern subject. The method through which this occurs is that it allows for the affirmation of an identity alternative to the dominant one, transforming the experience of a witness, usually illiterate and/or marginalized, into a collective history of resistance (Garcia 426). This is due to the fact that although there are some cases where *testimonios* are written by the witness themselves, they mainly call for an intermediate, usually an academic, who has access to literary institutions and modes of publishing. Despite this mediation, the genre ultimately serves to empower ethnicized subjects and make their voices heard, and this often makes it a tool for political agency (Arias, “Authoring Ethnicized Subjects” 76).

Rigoberta Menchú and New Indigenous Narratives

One of the main expressions of this genre is Rigoberta Menchú's testimony *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, as transcribed and edited by anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos and published in 1983. Menchú is a young Maya K'iche woman at this time, and flees to Mexico to escape the violence caused by the armed conflict in Guatemala in the early 1980's. The publishing of her work is an important milestone for literature at this period, as it is one of the first examples of the Latin American *testimonio*, and it is at this point that the genre commences to receive much of the aforementioned theoretical attention. The definitions of

testimonio are provided due to the fact that Menchú's testimony is one of the foremost representations of the genre, and understanding the way it is theorized is crucial before delving into a literary analysis of this work.

Understanding the genre of *testimonio*, it is then possible to understand the importance of Menchú's work on a global scale, and the groundbreaking nature of this work in both its content and form. The publishing of this work is incredibly significant, as it brings international attention and solidarity to the indigenous Maya populations of Guatemala and the terrifying violence that the government is perpetuating against them during this time period.²² Right after it is published in 1983 the book receives the Casa de las Américas prize, and Menchú quickly becomes a renowned activist for human and indigenous rights in the Americas. Throughout the Guatemalan civil war, as she tells in her story, most of her family members and friends are brutally tortured or murdered by the Guatemalan army, and her only solution is consequently to escape from her country. This is how she reaches a position where she becomes an advocate for human rights, as well as decidedly begins to expose the violations to human rights that are occurring in Guatemala at the time, and which the international community is not truly aware of. At a conference in Paris, she is introduced to Burgos a French-Venezuelan, and subsequently spends eight days in her house anthropologist (Arias, "Authoring Ethnicized Subjects" 77). Here, a series of interviews are conducted by Burgos, and these materials result in the published testimony²³.

Burgos transcribes Menchú's narrative into a more coherent and organized format, by organizing it both thematically and chronologically. Burgos also includes epigraphs and chapters, as well as changes verb tenses and grammatical mistakes made by Menchú during the

²² As is mentioned in Chapter 2, this is the most violent phase of the Guatemalan civil war, and indigenous people are the main targets of this violence.

²³ This process is further explained by Burgos in her introduction to Menchú's testimony.

interviews. In the first editions of the book, Burgos is credited as the author, although she later withdraws her name as the author under pressure from Menchú. However, she has retained the copyright and the title of “official compiler” of the text (Arias, “Authoring Ethnicized Subjects” 87). Despite the fact that Burgos clearly mediated Menchú's account, the book is still a cornerstone for indigenous peoples in Guatemala, and its words truly shed more light on the complex racial relations of Guatemala, and the role the government and the military had in perpetuating hegemonic acts of racism and discrimination.

Keeping in mind the definition of *testimonio*, it is possible to gage that the Maya woman's goal is in fact to expose the atrocities of the Guatemalan civil war, which affects mainly indigenous peoples in the rural areas of the country. There is in fact an agenda to her words, which she states herself when she claims that she wants to share the story of "todos los guatemaltecos pobres"²⁴, as her "historia personal engloba toda la realidad de un pueblo"²⁵ (Burgos 21). This then fits perfectly into the idea of a *testimonio* that, while giving a voice to the marginalized subaltern subject, it simultaneously serves to give a voice to an entire people. Menchú finds enough authority to tell her story, even though she has been marginalized her entire life, and this shows an immense strengthening of indigenous identity in Guatemala, as well as possibilities for improvement. Her text is an essential reading when attempting to understand ethnic dimensions in Guatemala, and is of utmost importance as it is the first work that shows these dimensions from the firsthand perspective of a Maya woman.

Although her work has been the subject of controversies²⁶ regarding the veracity of her narrative, it is important to note that a *testimonio* is never meant to be an autobiography or sworn testimony in a juridical sense. Rather, its intentionality is to communicate and urgent matter

²⁴ “all poor Guatemalans,” my translation.

²⁵ “personal history encompasses the whole reality of a people,” my translation.

²⁶ This controversy is discussed briefly in Chapter 2.

affecting an individual or entire community (Arias, “Authoring Ethnicized Subjects” 76). It is a communal, collective account of a person’s life, and this is clear in her desire to tell the story of her people and expose the conditions they live in. Her work marks the beginning of a moment when people become interested in the indigenous life and struggle as portrayed by indigenous people themselves, which is an important social development of global scale. Because of this, I choose to focus on Menchú’s text itself, as it provides insight into the Maya psyche in the late twentieth century. Because Menchú’s concerns are not truly literary or artistic, I focus on the content of her narration to Burgos in order to understand the way she views her own community, and how she deliberately chooses to present their views to the outside world.

Menchú, as a young Maya K’iche woman with little access to education and limited social mobility due to her poverty and ethnic status, conveys her own opinions about the manner in which ethnicity shapes Guatemalan society. Her visions serve to denounce an oppression that has happened for centuries. She expresses her thoughts in a simple language, filled with colloquialisms that reflect her life as a Maya woman in Guatemala. Menchú’s text highlights the existence of internal colonialism in Guatemala, as she shows that the hegemonic Criollo-Ladino cultural community and its ruling class enjoy various political and economic privileges, which as a Maya woman she is not allowed²⁷. In Menchú’s text, this oppression becomes very clear, as she often grapples with essentialism, wondering if all Ladinos are bad due the degree to which the ones she has encountered have treated her with disdain, and perpetuated a cycle of oppression against her people. Her text questions this oppression as she presents her own views of the world, providing an internal look into indigenous communities that have traditionally only been depicted by Ladino authors.

²⁷ I base this on Demetrio Cojtí’s usage of the term internal colonialism in Guatemala that is outlined in Chapter 2.

Throughout the text, she comes to an understanding that the issue is not merely one of race, and it is not necessarily all Ladinos that are bad. Rather, it is the wealthy Ladino elites that are the source of the oppression of her people. She comes to believe this as she sees other Ladinos that live in the same poverty and malnourishment as the indigenous people in her village. However, here issues of ethnicity resurface. Menchú recalls attempting to connect with other impoverished Ladinos with her broken Spanish, and they quickly look down on her because of her status as indigenous, calling her "india" in a derogatory manner (Burgos 145). A young child even tells her that, "somos pobres pero no somos indios"²⁸ (Burgos 145). This is an extremely revelatory point of the *testimonio*, as it reflects an ingrained internal colonialism, where the hegemonic system is perpetuated even by people at the bottom of the social hierarchy who do not benefit from it in any way. Although poverty does somehow equalize individuals in a material sense, ideologically, being Ladino is still a sign of social privilege and superiority. This passage makes it clear that race and ethnicity play a major role in shaping Guatemalan society and identity.

Because of the clear racial self-distinction that occurs in Guatemala regardless of class, Menchú shows herself and her community as clearly differentiated from the Ladino society. This does not mean that she finds it impossible to coexist or build a unified society, but she acknowledges the deep societal and cultural distinctions between the ways that Ladinos and Mayas live, act and think. She wants to denounce and expose the horrifying effects of internal colonialism, but at the same time it is her goal to show the manner in which her people live; their traditions, rituals and ceremonies. She clearly believes that in order to understand her people's struggle, the audience must also understand her people and their culture, in order to establish a mutual trust between herself and the audience. This is reflected in the manner in which Menchú

²⁸ "We are poor, but we are not Indians," my translation.

warms up to Burgos when she discovers that the editor has corn flour in her house, which she can make tortillas from. Menchú tells Burgos that "nosotros no confiamos más en los que comen lo mismo que nosotros"²⁹ (Burgos 13).

Menchú therefore creates a narrative that highlights the importance of her culture by explaining its millenary traditions, but she also wants to assert what Mayas value and want for themselves at present, independently of what Ladinos think is the way to better help their populations. She avows that she is not telling everything, and there are many secrets that her people must keep from outsiders in order to preserve their own culture and traditions, and that these secrets cannot be shared. This is important, as it evidences that despite her desire to inform the reader of her people's way of life and expose the injustices they are subjected to, there are still parts of this culture that can be understood only by the Mayas themselves, and that is why it is up to them to fight for their rights and future.

Throughout Menchú's narrative, the reader learns an invaluable amount about K'iche culture, and various chapters focus on important rituals such as birth, marriage or the important harvesting ceremony that must be celebrated for the corn before it is reaped, as a sign of respect to nature. The main way through which Menchú connects with her ancient culture is through the constant mention and remembrance of the *antepasados*, or ancestors, who have passed down this culture in oral form. There is a great focus on maintaining and preserving the culture of her people's past, and keeping the secrets of the ancestors only in the hands on the Maya people themselves. This reflects a desire to maintain cultures intact and not corrupted by what she views as negative influences that are rooted in poverty, such as alcoholism or prostitution. She believes these constructs to come from Ladino influences that have been infiltrating the indigenous

²⁹ We only trust those who eat the same as we do," my translation.

culture, and yearns to explain that these did not happen until poverty became so rampant across peasant villages (Burgos 84-104). However, this does not ultimately mean that the Maya culture is not compatible with modernity and progress, as she also indicates that some of these aspects are necessary for the improvement in the quality of life of indigenous people.

One of the main reasons she believes that poverty is such a problem in peasant communities is because of the issue of land, which is reflective of a larger political problem in Guatemala, a country where even today the majority of the land is held by the elite minority. This struggle is clear in Menchú's father's land dispute with wealthy Ladino landowners, and the importance that he gives to maintaining the family's land. However, he is met with repression from the landowners, as well as constant deceit by Ladino lawyers and administrators. These individuals take advantage of the peasants' illiteracy to force them into signing agreements they do not understand in order to expropriate their lands. Their limited education is what causes the loss of land for many Mayas in this narrative, as the government agencies use this to their advantage. This is evidenced, for example, when Menchú claims that landowners would force all of their peasants to vote for specific presidential candidates, and the illiterate workers did not even know what they were signing. Understanding the significance of land in the Maya culture, which is evidenced in Chapter nine, titled, "Ceremonies for sowing time and harvest. Relationship with the earth." In this chapter, Menchú clearly delineates the spiritual connection between people and the land, which is essential to grasping what the loss of their land really means to her family. Furthermore, their loss is only exacerbated the family's poverty, which limits Menchú's possibilities for education and strengthens her feelings of pain and oppression caused by Ladinos. These factors ultimately incite in her a desire to organize politically.

As the conflict over the land intensifies, there is a crucial shift in the narrative, which marks an important life moment for Menchú, this being her politicization as a marginalized subject. Upon working as a maid in Guatemala City, she can no longer take the mistreatment and racial discrimination that she is exposed to, and Menchú returns to her village. At the same time, in 1977, the Committee of Peasant Unity (CUC) is created, which she conceives as an important political moment for her nation, and her father becomes an underground political organizer for this group. Historically, this is a moment where indigenous inconformity with the current situation reaches its apex, and political organizing against the army intensifies. Menchú's narrative reflects this, as her community chooses to start using of violence as a method for pushing back against the atrocities committed upon them.

From this point on, Menchú's views on life expand, and she starts learning about life beyond the village and understanding the Guatemalan civil war on a larger scale, as well as the role not only of the army but of the landowning elites and Ladino run government as well. From here on, Menchú's life becomes one of revolutionary strife and political organizing, as she commences to visit other villages to help them organize as her own village did. She also uses methods of Ladino organization such as political instruments of action, in order to reinforce their own techniques and better defend herself from their attacks, as is particularly clear in chapter 17, "Self-defense in the village." They learn from guerrilla warfare and use various forms of violence, such as Molotov cocktails, to suppress the army's attacks against the peasants, and even fight back (Burgos 162).

By visiting other villages, Menchú becomes aware of the intense importance of language for the indigenous groups of Guatemala, who are divided by the fact that they do not speak the same language. She believes this fragmentation to be a direct result of Spanish colonization,

which fragmented the Maya culture into various linguistic groups who are now divided and cannot communicate. She sees this as one of the main barriers to indigenous cooperation, and the main reason why the indigenous communities have been so easily repressed by the Ladino government, as it is so difficult for them to unite. For this reason, she decides to learn Spanish in order to be able to communicate with and recruit more people, but also as an important way of using the language of the colonizers against them. Another Ladino element she uses to unify communities is the Bible, studying it profoundly and using it as a way to inspire others into action, focusing mainly on biblical ideas of brotherhood and social justice (Burgos 160).

In her life story, Menchú shifts within ideological boundaries, as she becomes politicized and accepts a form of transculturation. She learns Spanish and adopts non-indigenous forms of political organization in order to take these elements of Ladino culture and use them against the army's attacks on indigenous peasants. She also learns to work with Ladinos on a regular basis, voice her opinions and stand up for her beliefs. She sees that the material conditions of impoverished Ladinos are the same as her own, but they still find superiority in themselves because of their ethnicity. She notes that this causes indigenous peoples to feel inferior and worthless and she believes the system feeds this dynamic to keep the masses separate and under control. She admits that she has felt this, as discrimination has made her isolate herself from all Ladinos. She even mentions that when she first starts working with a Ladino comrade, she is shocked, as for her "era increíble caminar junto con un ladino"³⁰ (Burgos 195). However, the solution she finds to this problem seems to encapsulate her overall message, which is the concept of dialogue, as it can help bridge the ethnic gap within in the population. She says that

³⁰ "it was incredible to walk next to a Ladino," my translation.

when speaking to Ladino comrades, "a través de las pláticas que hacíamos con los compañeros, nos entendimos"³¹ (Burgos 195).

Menchú sees a need for synthesis, in which different cultures are maintained and preserved, but individuals can still work together across the boundaries of ethnicity and language. What unites her and the Ladinos she works with this point in history, is the fight against the military right-wing dictatorship, as she realizes that "para hacer el cambio, teníamos que unirnos, indios y ladinos"³² (Burgos 195). This reflects the perspective of various Mayas at the time, as they fought in the 1970's against the oppressive dictatorship in Guatemala as allies of the left, although with their own agenda for ethnic empowerment and cultural signification (Arias, "Authoring Ethnicized Subjects" 77). Here, Menchú overcomes the essentialism she uses in the first chapters of the book and develops a new understanding of relations between Mayas and Ladinos. There is a unification of indigenous people and Ladinos for a common goal, which she sees as the only way to push for social change in a country that is as ethnically fragmented as Guatemala.

Upon her political organization and understanding of common goals, however, Menchú experiences the intensified backlash and repression that comes from the military government, to the point where most of her family members are imprisoned, tortured or killed by the army. They are all persecuted and attacked for political treason, and facing a similar fate, Menchú manages to escape and flees to Mexico with the help of various international actors. The fact that she denounces these atrocities is one of the main reasons why the book incites a great deal of turmoil, as international and national actors are appalled and shocked at the manner in which human rights are being rampantly disregarded in Guatemala at this time (Pratt 29). This

³¹ "by talking to the comrades, we understood each other," my translation.

³² "to make a change, we had to unite, Indians and Ladinos," my translation.

international attention paves the way for a democratic transition, and civilian Vinicio Cerezo is elected president in 1986, and this year becomes an important moment of political opening in Guatemala.

After the instatement of a democratic regime, Menchú's text becomes more widely read within Guatemala, and she is even asked by the new president to return to the country. The work is socially relevant within the nation as it serves to open a public debate regarding ethnicity and racism, issues that had previously been ignored. It also fosters the creation of many nongovernmental organizations that deal with airing out these controversial topics, and are mainly created by Ladino intellectuals and activists returning from exile (Arias, *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* 8). Her text also forges recognition of a Maya subjectivity, as well as the acceptance of the growing social, cultural and political importance of Maya people (Arias, "Authoring Ethnicized Subjects" 87). Menchú's work is published just as the Pan-Maya movement is beginning its struggle for recognition of Maya rights, and her prominent international role makes her a useful icon for the Pan-Maya movement to articulate Maya demands, and even serves to unite various factions of the movement (Arias, *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* 10). She therefore comes to embody the Mayas in Guatemala and the injustices they are suffering; as Arturo Arias puts it, "she had become a de facto spokesperson for all Maya peoples because she could speak out and utter discourse in which most Mayas recognized themselves yet could not utter themselves for fear of reprisals"(Arias *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* 17). Maya author Victor Montejo, although he criticizes the manner in which the political and academic left made Menchú the main voice for the Maya movement, accepts that in great part because of her narrative, today "more Maya are writing for themselves,

being in control of their own ideas and what they write” (Montejo “Truth, Human Rights and Representation” 388).

Her testimony therefore gives way to other indigenous activists and writers to follow in her suit, and many find the inspiration to similarly voice their opinions and denounce the injustices they suffer through the written word. This is possible as upon the aforementioned political opening, there is less repression and censorship in the nation and the unmeasured violence against indigenous peoples is slowly decreasing. In *La configuración del pensamiento político del pueblo maya* [*The Configuration of the Political Thought of the Maya People*, 1991], Demetrio Cojtí writes “[e]l tiempo en que escritores no indígenas hablaron por ‘los que no tienen voz’ está finalizando, empezamos a asumir la responsabilidad de nuestros propios proyectos socio-políticos”³³ (Cojtí 1). This point in Guatemala’s history therefore marks the beginnings of a growing indigenous literary output as there is an increase in the amount of Maya novels and poetry actually written by Maya authors, as can be seen in the works of Gaspar Pedro González, Victor Montejo, and Humberto Ak’abal.³⁴

First Maya Works of Literature: Gaspar Pedro González

Into the 1990’s, the genre of *testimonio* is still being used in a widespread manner in Latin America to condemn the social injustices that continue to plague the region. At this time, there are also many victories for the Pan-Maya movement. 1992 is a remarkable year as it marks the five hundredth year of indigenous resistance to Western occupation in the Americas and is commemorated as the International Year of Indigenous Peoples. Rigoberta Menchú is also awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, being the second Guatemalan ever to receive the prize—the first

³³ “The time in which non-indigenous writers have spoken for “those who do not have a voice” is ending, we are beginning to assume the responsibility of our own socio-political projects,” my translation.

³⁴ There are a few Maya authors writing literature before this point, one prominent example is Maya Kakchiquel author Luis de Lion. He is victim to the state’s repression of indigenous voices, as he is “disappeared” by the military in 1984.

is author Miguel Ángel Asturias. Her reception of the award becomes heavily symbolic in Guatemala, as it comes to represent a possible dawning for peace after decades of war, as well as an affirmation of the Pan-Maya movement and its successes (Arias, *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy* 18)

This same year, a Maya author of Q'anjob'al³⁵ origin named Gaspar Pedro González publishes his novel *La otra cara*. Four years later the novel is published in a bilingual edition; both in Spanish and in Q'anjob'al. The work is one of the first Maya novels written in Spanish, and the first Maya novel in Guatemala ever to be published both in Spanish and in an indigenous language, as the author himself claims in an interview with Robert Sitler.³⁶ In the same interview, the author explains that his work does not fall into the genre of *testimonio* as it is a novel, but instead into a new genre called the *testinovela*. According to Mario Roberto Morales, one of the first critics to use the term, "la testinovela es un tipo específico de novela que se estructura a base de testimonios y que constituye una creación colectiva en la que el escritor profesional actúa como facilitador y organizador—deliberado e interesado—de las voces y sus verdades"³⁷ (Morales, *Señores bajo los árboles* 2).

Reflecting upon Morales' definition, González himself situates his novel under this genre, as he claims, in the same interview, that:

Los que estudian la literatura en la actualidad, al menos en Guatemala y en Centroamérica, creen que hay una nueva tendencia en nuestra literatura que es la testinovela. Cae La otra

³⁵ Q'anjob'al: Maya ethno-linguistic group that mainly inhabits the department of Huehuetenango in Guatemala (Bastos and Cumes 14).

³⁶ See "Entrevista con Gaspar Pedro González" in Works Cited.

³⁷ "the testinovela is a specific kind of novel that is structured on testimonies and constitutes a collective creation in which the professional writer acts as a facilitator and organizer-of voices and truths," my translation.

cara dentro del género de *testinovela* porque es un testimonio de explotación y marginación que se da para la sociedad maya en general³⁸ (“Entrevista con Gaspar Pedro González”).

This new form of Latin American literature has not been as widely theorized as the genre of *testimonio*, although it has been receiving critical attention in recent years.³⁹ This genre is clearly important in the progression through which indigenous writers have been reaffirming their voice using the written word over the past decades. The *testinovela* is able to mesh fictional literature with the political and social goal of exposing the reality of a subaltern and marginalized voice. However, here the importance of witness authenticity and absolute notions of truth do not have to come into play, as the *testinovela* is primarily a work of fiction, although rooted in reality. It is essential to note that the *testinovela* does in fact develop directly from the *testimonio* genre, which had an important impact on shaping the form of this literary amalgamation of novel and testimony (Slodowska 85).

Having discussed the roots, characteristics and importance of *testimonio*, it is then possible to discern that *La otra cara* does in fact fall under the genre of *testinovela*. The novel uses many elements of *testimonio* and has the main goal of exposing the marginalization, exploitation and repression that the Mayas have suffered at the hands of the Ladino world, but it also departs from the genre in many ways. The novel does not use the first person narrative of the protagonist, which Beverley cites as a main characteristic of the *testimonio*, but rather uses an omniscient narrator. The work is also more literary and the author employs a deliberate manipulation of language and style. For example, González uses the artistic freedom granted by fiction to encapsulate the narrative, in order to reflect the visions of world and life according to

³⁸ “Because of that, those who study literature today, at least in Guatemala and Central America, believe that there is a new tendency in our literature that is the *testinovela*. A *Mayan Life* falls into this category because it is a testimony of exploitation and marginalization that happens to the Maya population in general,” my translation.

³⁹ Although not as theorized as the genre of *testimonio*, there are recent studies regarding novels of testimony in Latin America, such as Linda Craft’s *Novels of Testimony and Resistance from Central America* (2007).

the Maya Q'anjob'als. This freedom allows him to use fabulous and mythical elements throughout his narrative, which serve an artistic purpose that subordinates the historic truth of the testimony (Thurston-Griswold 682). Unlike Menchú's narration, there is a focus on creating a text that is deliberately literary, and the use of literary tropes and stylistic devices is extensive. Although his writing does reflect the real situation of the Maya q'anjob'al ethnic group in Guatemala, he is also artistically constructing a work of literature.

Because *La otra cara* is a *testinovela*, I will engage a literary analysis of this work, in order to better understand the manner in which González uses literature to depict the Maya Q'anjob'al world. His novel consists of the life story of a Maya Q'anjob'al man, and similarly to Menchú's text, is interspersed with elements that reveal the traditions, rituals, and spiritual beliefs of the Mayas of the area. From the first chapter, which shows the birth of Luin on the day Thirteen Ajaw of the Maya calendar, there is a deep sense of Maya spirituality that permeates the work, as the date of his birth is very meaningful to his parents and community. The representation of these traditions and everyday Maya life occurs without the use of temporal references, which gives the impression that they occur outside of time. There are also not many topographical details, which also serves to generalize this portrayal to other Maya peoples and communities. This differentiates the novel from Menchú's text, which gives exact dates, locations and names in relation to most of the events she depicts, and this contributes to the "truth effect" of her testimony.

The novel also focuses on denouncing the injustices committed by Ladinos, not just on portraying and diffusing the Maya culture, and these are the same goals Menchú has in her own narrative. González' novel then shows Luin's life as he grows in his parents' village, namely focusing on the long trips his father must make to the plantations of the coast to sell his labor to

Ladino landowners, all to be able to ensure the survival of his family. Luin therefore grows up mainly with his mother, and due to his father's diligent work ethic they are able to send him to school in a nearby town. However, in this setting, Luin is constantly teased and mistreated by peers and teachers for being an "indio," which torments him incessantly. The protagonist develops a quasi-obsession with the ethnic labels used in his country, and he tries to understand why such racism and prejudices exist against his people. When he has completed his primary education, he deeply ponders his situation, thinking about how he can improve his condition in a world that is so fragmented and when he is subject to such oppression. This is clear when the narrator explores Luin's thoughts:

Las experiencias y las vivencias formaban la base de su adolescencia que crecía entre dos mundos y dos enfoques contrapuestos. Procuraba e intentaba descifrar las actitudes y los comportamientos del ladino; hacia esfuerzos por analizar su propia vida y hasta habían ráfagas de esperanzas que surcaban su cielo solitario, para soñar con una cohesión de aquellas dos culturas y trabajar juntos para sentar las bases de una verdadera hermandad y un nacionalismo construidos sobre piedras solidas como los templos de los ancestros.⁴⁰

(González 119)

Luin yearns for a synthesis of cultures, where each can coexist without oppression and racism, and he believes a new national identity could then be forged through this method.

Towards the end of the narrative, however, González is also able to use the freedom of fiction to create an ending that reflects this synthesis and desire for a shared identity. The author shows Luin taking control of his destiny and bettering the future of his village, after many failed

⁴⁰ “The experiences and livings made a part of the base of his adolescence that grew between two worlds and two opposing focuses. He tried to decipher the attitudes and the behaviors of the Ladino, made efforts to analyze his own life and even felt strokes of hope that filled his lonely sky, to dream of a cohesion of those two cultures and work together to create the base for a really fraternity and nationalism constructed over solid stones like the temples of the ancestors,” my translation.

encounters with the Ladino world. The ending is somewhat idealistic, reflecting a world where Mayas are able to live within their own communities with dignity and can become free of poverty and repression. In the text, this goal is accomplished, and Luin's desire for synthesis and coexistence is reflected in his last words, when as a dying old man, he utters, "Que... no... haya... un... grupo... ni... dos... que... se... quede... atras... de... los... demas"⁴¹ (González 246). He desires for no ethnic group to be better than the other, but for them to live peacefully in equality while respecting their traditions and cultures. In Menchú's work, it is clear that she has a similar goal, and also wishes to put forward these ideals of coexistence, although she focuses more on the necessity of both ethnic groups working together.

González' novel ends by highlighting the importance of education, as this is what enables the Mayas in Luin's community to move forward and work together to push their community to prosperity. However, the education he speaks of is not like the one he received, which only served to make him fear Ladinos, but rather one that is inclusive and gives Maya children adequate time and support for them to become accustomed to the Western education system. He also calls for base organization and community activism, which can finally occur when the ingrained notion of internal colonialism is abolished. Luin accomplishes this within his village, as is evident when he is organizing assemblies with community members to decide how to improve their lives, and he asks why they believe their children are dying and they live in such poverty. The answers provided are that it is God's will, that is their bad luck, and that they consider themselves to be stupid (González 237). Luin uses this opportunity to break down these preconceived notions that the Mayas have about themselves, as they reflect the nation's pervasive internal colonialism. Then, as a group the community comes to the understanding that all of these reasons are fatalistic and false; they are poor because they have not had "la

⁴¹ "For...no...group...or...two...to...stay...behind...the...rest," my translation.

oportunidad de desarrollar nuestras facultades y nuestras potencialidades, por eso desconocemos muchas cosas y ese desconocimiento nos mantiene en el estado que nos encontramos”⁴²

(González 238). Education is the solution to his problem and in González’ fictional narrative, Luin’s plan works and drives his village to success and prosperity.

Representations of the Maya World: Comparing Ladino and Indigenous Authors

Both works reviewed in this chapter develop in Guatemala as a response to the indigenist works of the nation’s past, such as those of Asturias and Monteforte that are analyzed in the previous chapter. Although the four works I have examined strive to depict indigenous communities and Maya culture in Guatemala, it is clear that the manner in which this culture is represented is different in each of these works. It is clear that the works of Asturias and Monteforte are not as accessible or easy to read, and this is mainly due to the fact that they are specifically created for a more educated Ladino population. Furthermore, both Ladino authors seek to use Maya culture to develop their own literary aesthetics. For Asturias, this leads to a romanticizing of the ancient Maya world, focusing on its spirituality and mythology, and his work is written in a complex and poetic language. Monteforte, on the other hand, chooses to use social realism to depict the manner in which indigenous people in Guatemala live. For this reason, Monteforte’s work is more comparable to the texts written by indigenous authors, as they have similar goals. However, it is clear that both Asturias and Monteforte’s solution to the ethnic debate lie in ideas of *mestizaje*, rather than the ideals of peaceful coexistence espoused by both Menchú and González.

It is possible to draw direct connections between Menchú, González and Monteforte Toledo’s works. Each author’s work depicts the coming of age story of an indigenous subject,

⁴² “The opportunity to develop our faculties and our potentialities, that is why we ignore so many things and this ignorance keeps us in this state we are in,” my translation.

focusing on the protagonist's interactions with Ladinos and the oppression of indigenous people. However, despite these similarities in plot, these works are very different ideologically. The style and goal of the narratives differ crucially, and this is important in my examination of the different product that results from a Ladino author writing about an indigenous population, or indigenous subjects speaking for themselves.

One of the main differences between the works is the voice of the narrator and the language used throughout the works. In Monteforte's work, the narrator is clearly a learned individual who speaks in academic Spanish, while the dialogues of the indigenous people occur in informal Spanish that would be common among an illiterate population that knows Spanish only as a second language. Menchú's text is narrated in a simple and concise style filled with colloquialisms, sometimes similar to the manner Monteforte writes his dialogues between indigenous characters. Menchú herself has received little education and has only recently learned Spanish, which defines the way she speaks and the language she uses. For this reason, Burgos mediates her text, sometimes correcting grammatical mistakes or verb tenses.

In González' work, however, the narrator's voice permeates the entire text, and he also speaks in a learned, academic and much more poetic Spanish, constantly using figurative language and personification to represent the Maya world. However, the dialogues between the Maya subjects in the text occur mainly in the voice and language of the narrator, and are void of slang, colloquialisms or any misuse of the Spanish language. In this way, he is the mediator for his own text, and proves he does not need the help of a lettered intellectual to complete or supplement his work, as is the case with Menchú and Burgos. González is capable of doing this on his own, and taking on both the role of marginalized subaltern subject that has this "urgency" to narrate his position, but also of the editor and writer who can translate this into a work of

literature that is readable. What is unique about his work is that most of the characters are not educated and are said to be illiterate, making it clear that this elevated language is not the language they would necessarily use. However, characters speak in this fashion and in González' world, interactions between characters occur in the same poetic language he writes in. The only moment González deviates from this is in a specific scene when coastal migrant workers are depicted, in Mekel's dialogue with the workers, and they use common Spanish that would be normal for individuals in these specific societal conditions (González 46-49). This serves to highlight the manner in which the rest of the dialogues are not consistent with the popular lexicon, and the reader is to understand that all characters and the narrator from then on speak with the voice of the author. This also serves to show that indigenous individuals are capable of dynamic and intelligent thought processes, a portrayal that would have never been present in Monteforte's novel, as it would have been deemed socially unrealistic.

Another main difference between Monteforte's and González' works is the fact that, despite their similar structure and theme of an indigenous boy coming of age and receiving a Ladino education, the endings to the novels are crucially different, and symbolize different ethnic perspectives. In *Entre la piedra y la cruz*, the ending is ambiguous; the main character is hospitalized and his nurse happens to be a Ladina childhood friend, but there are hints that they will end up together. This shows how his only hope, as an indigenous man, to be accepted into society is through assimilation and finding a Ladina partner, so that his children can fully assimilate as well. This is reflective of Monteforte's own views of mestizaje, and his belief in the need to perpetuate this process to create a more homogenous society that is socially equal.

González' ending shows nothing of the sort; the novel's main character instead returns to his indigenous community as an educated man, and strives to build it up through education and

organization, eventually becoming a respected elder in the community. Ladino intermediaries are not necessary to make this happen, as the community is able to thrive and prosper on its own. There is therefore a possibility of maintaining an autonomous culture while still interacting positively with Ladinos and acquiring some of their knowledge and resources, mainly in education and farming methods. The goal is a peaceful coexistence, in which Mayas are able to preserve their culture but still be a part of civil society in order to build a nation that is multicultural and tolerant of difference. This ideology is also espoused by Menchú, as she reaches similar conclusions to González' protagonist. Like González, she believes indigenous people and Ladinos can coexist, but they must both overcome their cultural differences and work together for this to happen. In both of the works by indigenous authors, *mestizaje* and *ladinización* are nowhere to be seen, and are not deemed necessary for the indigenous subject to succeed.

The works of Menchú and González therefore directly oppose the indigenist novels of the early twentieth century, which is exemplified in the different solutions these texts propose to the issue of ethnic fragmentation in Guatemala. It is clear that the authors' own ethnicities therefore shape their narratives and the manner in which they view ethnic relations. González is aware of this phenomenon, and wishes to reflect the Maya world internally. He makes this clear in his interview with Sitler, where he discusses Miguel Ángel Asturias' role in writing about Maya culture. He argues that it is these depictions that led to Asturias' reception of the Nobel Prize, and have situated him as one of Latin America's most distinguished authors. However, González views these representations as artificial, and believes that he used the indigenous peoples of Guatemala to further his own literary agenda. This is evident in González' claim regarding Asturias' novels:

Obviamente tiene, desde un punto de vista artístico, valor literario. Es un literato que utiliza un material que es el maya como lo hacen los pintores, escultores y artistas ladinos en la actualidad. Pero desde un punto de vista de su identificación con los mayas es otra cosa totalmente diferente. [Asturias] ve en la situación del "indio" una oportunidad para poder sobresalir él. Pero de ninguna manera valora aquella persona humana⁴³ (“Entrevista con Gaspar Pedro González”).

In this quote, it is clear that although Asturias is an important Guatemalan symbol, he is a Ladino symbol, and his depiction of the Maya world, although innovative and literary significant, was never authentic. As González explains, "su visión es una visión ladina sobre los mayas"⁴⁴ (“Entrevista con Gaspar Pedro González”). González’ understanding of this situation reflects the groundbreaking nature of his own novel. He creates a literary text that is not only a depiction of a true Maya experience and condemnation of indigenous suffering at the hands of Ladino elites, but also his own artistic expression and literary creation.

It becomes evident, then, that toward the twenty-first century, Maya activists and authors begin to emerge from the marginalized sidelines of Guatemalan society. It is important to understand that although the consideration of Third World and indigenous literature as an established genre is relatively new, this is only because it is only now that it has received institutional legitimation. The presence of testimonial qualities is a long tradition in Spanish American writing since its inception (Skłodowska 84). Indigenous literary output in most recent decades is essential to the nation as it has promoted the development of new literary forms and genres in Latin America. It has also strengthened Homi Bhabha's idea of the nexus between the

⁴³ “Obviously [Asturias’ work] has, from an artistic point of view, literary value. It is a literature that uses the Maya material as Ladino painters, sculptors and artists do today. But from a point of view of his identification with the Mayas it is a totally different thing...He sees in the situation of the Indian an opportunity to further his own goals. But in no way does he value that human being,” my translation.

⁴⁴ “his vision is a Ladino vision about the Mayas,” my translation.

novel and the nation, as indigenous authors politicize the art they create. It is now literature of resistance that exists not only for itself, but also for a larger and more global overarching goal of revitalizing a historically oppressed culture and defeating the hegemonic social order.

The testimonial quality of literature that has developed massively in Latin America is a direct result of the oppressive relationship between nation states and subjugated indigenous populations. As Victor Montejo puts it, "el *testimonio* no es un género literario que queremos escribir por gusto, sino por necesidad y por compromiso con nuestros pueblos marginados"⁴⁵ (*Brevísima relación testimonial de la continua destrucción del mayab'* 1). The political nature of these texts shows the inextricable links between literature and resistance, as the act of writing allows Mayas to reclaim their voices, which have been obscured for centuries. This empowerment has also furthered Maya activists' goal of working toward the conservation and resurrection of Maya culture and languages, while promoting governmental reform for indigenous rights within the Guatemalan constitution and international law (Fischer and Brown 13).

⁴⁵ "the testimony is not a literary genre that we want to write for pleasure, it is because of necessity and our commitment with our marginalized peoples", my translation.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

It is clear that the Pan-Maya movement in Guatemala has had important victories and successes, and one of the main manners in which these are visible is through the growing output of literature by indigenous authors in the nation. This is significant because for most of history, the indigenous subject in Guatemala was written about only by Ladino authors, and understood only through these outside perspectives. The moment when Mayas are therefore able to write about themselves, and depict their own experiences and thoughts is meaningful, as it marks an important shift in the country's literary history. In this thesis I have attempted to highlight how and why this development takes place, as well the effect it has had on Guatemalan society. In order to do this, I have compared works by Ladino authors to those of Maya authors, and highlighted the different ways in which these authors understand and perceive indigenous ethnic identities in Guatemala.

In order to comprehend the way literature in Guatemala has changed, I have traced the progression that occurs in works of Guatemalan literature that deal with representations of the Maya world. I begin by exploring works by some of the nation's most renowned authors. The first work I analyze is Miguel Ángel Asturias' *Leyendas de Guatemala*. Asturias is probably Guatemala's most well-known author and was the first Guatemalan ever to win a Nobel Prize. In *Leyendas de Guatemala*, he appropriates elements of indigenous Maya culture and combines them with elements of Ladino culture, in order to create a hybrid work that meshes both of these cultures to create a new one. His goal is to fuse these elements into a new national consciousness and Guatemalan identity, but for this to occur he believes that some form of assimilation and homogenization must occur. From here, I move on to a later work by Mario Monteforte Toledo,

Entre la piedra y la cruz. This work is already a development from Asturias's work in regards to depicting the indigenous communities of Guatemala, as this is Monteforte's main focus. His goal is not as artistic as Asturias', instead he chooses to engage a more realistic portrayal of the difficult lives of indigenous people in Guatemala, focusing on the way they are treated by Ladinos and foreigners. After close interactions and experiences with a Tzutuhil community, he draws on this to write his novel. However, there is still a clear distance between the author and the work's indigenous characters, and his ultimate goal for fixing this problem is one of *mestizaje*, where indigenous individuals must assimilate into Ladino culture in order for the country to develop and prosper.

I then move on to discuss one of the most important moments in Guatemalan history, namely the publishing of Rigoberta Menchú's testimony, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*. This text is significant as it draws great amounts of international attention to the conditions of indigenous Guatemalans, mainly the atrocities committed toward them by the Guatemalan military and government during the civil war. Her testimony exposes these conditions and depicts the Maya K'iche world internally. Menchú's descriptions of her community, customs and traditions are therefore relevant as they come directly from her own narrative, giving her an authority that not many indigenous people in Guatemala have had at this point. The next work I analyze is *La otra cara* by Gaspar Pedro González, a novel that deals with similar material to Menchú's work, as it focuses on internally depicting the Maya culture as well as denouncing the way indigenous peoples are oppressed and mistreated. However, his work marks another important development in the country's literary history, as it is one of the first contemporary works of fiction written by a Maya individual, as well as to be published in both Spanish and an indigenous language, in this case the Maya Q'anjob'al dialect. González' text is

therefore different from Menchú's in this respect, as he does not need any mediation by a lettered intellectual, as was the case of Elizabeth Burgos' role in transcribing and editing Menchú's testimony. González takes on both of these roles; he is the informant of his narrative as has actually experienced what he is writing about, but he also has the necessary cultural and literary education to write his novel on his own. His work reflects the desire to not only narrate an experience, but the ability to shape this experience into a work of literature. This signals the increased visibility of a Guatemalan indigenous literature, and how Maya authors are establishing a place for their works within the dominant Ladino culture.

My analysis has served to shed some light on the manner in which the fabric of Guatemalan society is being transformed by indigenous social actors, who have succeeded in changing the way literature in Guatemala has been written for centuries. Indigenous Maya authors and intellectuals are now using literature to carve out a space for their own cultural production in society. The growth of indigenous literary output is important for both Mayas and Ladinos, as Guatemala is at a point where it is developing a truly multicultural model of citizenship. The fact that indigenous literature is now written, read and studied by a growing part of the population also reveals that fact that views on ethnicity are shifting in Guatemala.

These changes are a direct result of indigenous organization, which contributed to the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords between the URNG and the Guatemalan government, ending the civil war after 36 brutal years. The most significant article of these accords is the Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples (AIDPI) which recognizes Guatemala as a "pluri-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual" state and proposes a series of constitutional reforms to legally enable this recognition. This agreement focuses on cultural rights for indigenous peoples, and the Maya people become an official part of Guatemalan politics and rhetoric for the first

time. This is a major breakthrough in changing the nationalist and racist ideology that has pervaded Guatemala's history. However, this agreement has been more of a symbolic development, as many of its stipulations have still not been enacted (Bastos and Cumes 61). Building upon this, the Pan-Maya movement has also made great progress in the cultural arena with its program of revitalization of Maya cultures. An example of this is the development of the Academy of Mayan Languages of Guatemala (ALMG), which has become a strong vehicle for promoting the recovery and maintenance of Maya languages. There has also been a growth in Maya media sources, such the publishing company Cholsamaj, that publishes books on Maya issues, and the weekly multi-lingual newspaper *El Regional* (Montejo, *Maya Intellectual Renaissance* 32).

However, it is important to note that despite the fact that a Maya intellectual elite today enjoys greater presence and participation in society than it did twenty years ago, this unfortunately cannot be said for the majority of the nation's indigenous population. Most of the reforms included in the AIDPI have not been enacted, and the Pan-Maya movement's successes in the cultural arena are often not felt by the Maya population as a whole. In 2011, for example, 73 percent of the country's indigenous population lived below the poverty line, according to the latest survey on life conditions in Guatemala, recorded by the National Institute of Statistics (Santos, "73% de indígenas vive en la pobreza"). Furthermore, racism is still a prevalent ideology in everyday life. An example of this is the fact that Ladinos who live in the same material conditions of poverty as the majority of indigenous peoples often still consider themselves superior on biological and cultural grounds. Conversely, racist practices against indigenous people that are educated or economically well off show how symmetrical economic conditions are often not enough for Mayas to be seen as equals to Ladinos (Bastos y Cumes 143).

Racist ideologies are even visible in the nation's current president, Otto Pérez Molina, who in 2012 affirmed that there was never a genocide in Guatemala, but merely an "internal conflict" (Castillo, "'En Guatemala no hubo genocidio'"). Clearly, problems of ethnicity and race still permeate the nation, and must be addressed and discussed openly by both the Pan-Maya movement and Guatemalan government in order to find solutions that reach the wider indigenous population.

The Guatemalan government must still address this rampant social inequality and there is evidently much to be done in fulfilling the procedures for indigenous rights outlined in the 1996 Peace Accords. However, the fact that the Pan-Maya movement is still in existence, and is still pushing for these demands to be met is a sign of hope for the future. Even though the Pan-Maya movement does not always fully articulate the immediate material needs of the general Maya population in, the movement's successes have had an incredibly positive and lasting social, political and cultural impact on the nation. The manner in which these authors and intellectuals have written themselves into history—mainly by creating works that denounce the harsh conditions indigenous Guatemalans face—has brought national and international attention to these conditions, and has pushed the government to address the fact that they exist. This has improved the visibility of indigenous people in the country, as they are slowly gaining inclusion into civil society and the public sphere. Hopefully, continuous Maya organizing will be sustained in order to continue to create meaningful social change in the nation.

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