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Desiring the End of Testimonio: Rigoberta Menchú Inside the Teaching Machine

Summary: This paper discusses the transition that occurs when the voice of the always silenced is heard – the transition from subaltern to organic intellectual. An analysis of the construction of testimonios as a literary genre foregrounds the problematic relationship between academic discourse on the "subaltern" and the work of organic intellectuals. By reading Gramsci through Gayatri Spivak, strategies for invoking the work performed by "organic" intellectuals become apparent. The circumstances that call for such strategies are analyzed in order to argue for their articulation onto a Latin American context. The recent collaborative effort of Gayatri Spivak and Mahasweta Devi in *Imaginary Maps* provides an approach that can be useful in discussing the placement of the work of "organic" intellectuals vis-á-vis that of traditional intellectuals. Their work is compared to that of Rigoberta Menchú and its reception and theoretical framing by academic discourses on "third-world" literature.
Zusammenfassung: Es wird der Wandel – vom Subalternen zum organischen Intellektuellen – beim Hören der sonst stets Schweigenden diskutiert. Die Analyse der Konstruktion (des Genres) der Testimonios bringt die problematische Beziehung des akademischen Diskurses über die Subalternen zum Werk organischer Intellektueller zutage. Aus Gramsci-Lektüre via Gayatri Spivak aber ergeben sich Strategien zur Würdigung letzterer. Die Umstände, die danach rufen, werden analysiert und sodann im lateinamerikanischen Kontext konkretisiert. Gayatri Spivak's und Mahasweta Devi's jüngste Zusammenarbeit (*Imaginary Maps*) liefert einen nützlichen Zugang zur Diskussion der Arbeit organischer (vs. traditioneller) Intellektueller. Zum Vergleich dient R. Menchú's Werk samt Rezeption und theoretischer Einbindung in den akademischen Diskurs über Literatur der Dritten Welt.

The entry of testimonio as a form of literature into the U.S. academy became the cause célèbre around which certain issues of multiculturalism and literary studies became entrenched. On the one hand, defenders of the literary canon were dismayed by the adoption of testimonios into Stanford University's core course readings. Not only was the canon in danger of denigration by a form of writing that lacked "the standard of merit by which other art and history and literature is judged" but there was also the danger that the "authentic" voice of the oppressed would become romanticized (D'Souza 1991: 87). On the other hand, those who saw themselves as progressives in a field that had seen much change since the "linguistic turn" rallied around the event (Jara/Vidal 1986, Beverley/Achugar 1992). It was an opportunity to expand the literary field by including writing not traditionally considered literature.

It now appears that the issue has been settled, or is at least no longer relevant. In his recent discussion on what remains of the desire to have testimonio enter the academy, John Beverley proclaims that

> the moment of the testimonio is over. Not [...] testimonio as such [...b]ut testimonio's moment, the originality and urgency or [...] the 'state of emergency' that drove our fascination and critical engagement with it, has undoubtedly passed. (1996: 280-281)

Although the strategy of territorializing North American academia by the introduction of testimonio into literary studies may be over, the desire of testimonio – to write the silenced histories – remains very much of the moment. Beverley's declaration is one that is poignantly aware of the danger of eliding the notion of theory with that of strategy. Gayatri Spivak emphasizes that "[s]trategy works through a persistent (de)constructive critique of the theoretical [...] A strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory" (Spivak 1993: 3-4).

In 1992, the year marking the quincentenary of Columbus's arrival in the Western hemisphere, a Maya-Quiché Indian was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Her name is Rigoberta Menchú. She describes the early struggles she endured on behalf of her people in *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y asi me nació la conciencia* (1983). Her organizing efforts during the last twenty years have made her a powerful figure in Guatemalan politics. Menchú has undergone such a transformation that "[f]or symbolic and ethical reasons, the majority of Guatemalans now

identify themselves with the system of knowledge articulated by her discourse, rather than with the one articulated by its national elites" (Arias 1996: 44). Her popularity cuts across racial, class, and gender divisions that strongly demarcate Guatemala's social structure. Arias concludes his brief history of Menchú meteoric rise to popularity by noting that "the great majority of Guatemalan peoples have begun to follow her and can actually visualize the ultimate revelation: a Mayan woman at the helm of the nation" (44). Although his vision may be extremely optimistic, it nevertheless points at possibilities that would not be considered elsewhere. In the U.S. most of Menchú's achievements are known through her testimonio, a text that is often invoked as an instance of the authentic voice of the subaltern.

I would like to investigate what happens when the subaltern, whose voice by definition is inaudible, is heard? When this mute subject speaks, does the entrance of this speech into the public sphere transform the speaker into an organic intellectual or does it merely hypostatize the subaltern? What is the role, if any, of the "traditional" intellectual in this transformation? I will begin my exploration of the ramifications of these questions for the investigation of Menchú's work by considering Spivak's attempts to re-define the "subaltern." I will then analyze her endeavor to foster the emergence of an organic intellectual in India, undertaken as part of her role as a "traditional" intellectual, in order to discuss the relevance of this project to a Latin American context.[1]

The seminal critique on the subjectivity of the subaltern is Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988=CSS)[2] The essay explores the histories of epistemic violence that have prevented the subaltern – a subject that in Spivak's example is multiply silenced as woman, as inhabitant of the "third-world," and a member of the peasant class – from speaking. The essay begins with an analysis of the effect of critiques advanced by Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, whom Spivak refers to as "those intellectuals who are our best prophets of heterogeneity and the Other," that result in the "reintroduc[tion of] the undivided subject into the discourse of power." (CSS 272, 274)[3] Spivak argues that by claiming that "the masses *know* perfectly well, clearly [...] they know far better than [the intellectual] and they certainly say it very well," by

depicting the subaltern as a homogenous, universal, self-representing subject, Foucault and Deleuze, as intellectuals, remain transparent. (CSS 274, 275) Spivak goes on to discuss two meanings of *representation*: a depiction or interpretation, *Darstellung* (the portrayal of the subaltern as "politically canny") and as a substitution or stand-in, *Vertretung* (Foucault and Deleuze speaking on behalf of the subaltern). Their representation of the subaltern ignores the specificity of conditions created by the international division of labor and one of its necessary hegemonic devices – epistemic violence. (CSS 289)

The role of representation in the international division of labor is an essential concern in Spivak's efforts to analyze the hegemonic discourse established by imperialism:

> Outside (though not completely so) the circuit of the *international* division of labor, there are people whose consciousness we cannot grasp if we close off our benevolence by constructing a homogenous Other referring only to our place in the seat of the Same as the Self. Here are subsistence farmers, unorganized peasant labor, the tribals, and the communities of zero workers on the street or in the countryside. (CSS 288)

Spivak develops her argument by looking at some of the epistemic constructs that have come to delineate "Indian" culture in general and specifically the place of women within it. She focuses on the construction of the history of the practice of *sati*, the rite of widow self-sacrifice, and the ways its discourse silences the voices of the widows themselves. By rigorously analyzing how patriarchal practices of history writing, both British and Indian, have placed the subaltern outside hegemonic discourse, Spivak argues that these practices gender the subaltern female.

I have drastically reduced what is an extremely complicated argument in order to provide a background for an analysis of Spivak's latest project, a translation of a selection of short stories by Mahasweta Devi (1995) titled *Imaginary Maps.* Devi is a West Bengali woman, who – as a fiction writer, journalist, and activist – attempts to address the plight of the postcolonial subject who is without access to means of self-representation. Spivak describes the space created by Devi's fiction as

> rather special [...] it is the space of the 'subaltern,' [...] the habitat of the *sub*proletariat [...] Mahasweta's fiction suggests that *this* is the space of the displacement of the colonization-decolonization reversal. (Spivak 1993: 48-49)

Spivak has not only translated the volume of Devi's work, she also

provides a preface and an afterword that place the stories within a theoretical framework. Spivak acknowledges that by providing this framework her contribution can be perceived as an instance of speaking for the subaltern. However, Spivak is also aware of the greater risk of not providing it:

> If these comments are seen as "too theoretical," I will remind the readers of this translation, with respect, that the migrant in the North, a species of "wild anthropologist," at least knows the points of rejection or contempt hidden behind the mask of untheorized solidarity, without liabilities. (Spivak, preface to Devi 1995: xxvi)

The risk taken by Spivak's act of supplementation strategically allows for the entry of Devi's work into a theoretical discourse that would otherwise be foreclosed. At first glance the result of taking such a risk may seem similar to that produced by Foucault and Deleuze's discourse – the positing of an undivided subjectivity. But Spivak elaborates that "the organic intellectual is not a concept of identity but rather of a focus on that part of the subject which focuses on the intellectual's *function.*" (Spivak, preface to Devi 1995: 209, n. 13, emphasis added) Although concentrating on the performative aspect of the production of intellectual work dislocates the position of the intellectual as an undivided subject, Spivak is here referring to a specific type of intellectual – the organic intellectual. Is there a difference in the type of intellectual work *performed* by an organic intellectual as opposed to that of a "traditional" intellectual? What would be the strategies required by the hierarchy implied by such a differentiation?

Gramsci and the Function of the Intellectual

The terms "traditional" and "organic" as modifiers that differentiate between two types of intellectuals were introduced by Antonio Gramsci. He makes a distinction between the category of intellectuals "*already in existence* and which seemed indeed to represent an historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical changes in political and social forms," that is the traditional intellectuals such as "scholars and scientists, theorists, non-ecclesiastical philosopher, etc.," and the category of intellectuals that "every social group, *coming into*

existence [...] creates together with itself, organically, [...giving] it homogeneity and an awareness of its own function not only in the economic but also in the social and political fields." (Gramsci 1971: 5-7, emphasis added) Therefore, the function of the organic intellectual is defined by a new or emerging social class while that of the traditional intellectual is part of the pre-existing, hegemonic classes.

Gramsci goes on to make a further distinction between urban and rural-type intellectuals: the former develop from and for industry and "have no autonomous initiative [...] their job is to articulate the relationship between the entrepreneur and the instrumental mass," while the latter tend to be traditional intellectuals who bring "into contact the peasant masses with the local and state administration (lawyers, notaries, etc.)" (Gramsci 1971: 14) The difference appears to be that the "urban organic" intellectual is a liaison from top management down to workers, a sort of middle-management function, while the "rural traditional" intellectual operates from the bottom up, more of a proxy function.

Although both types of intellectuals function as intermediaries, Gramsci notes that:

> The function of organising social hegemony and state domination [i.e. the work of the intellectual] certainly gives rise to a particular *division of labour* and therefore to a whole *hierarchy* of qualifications in some of which there is no apparent attribution of directive or organisational functions. (1971: 13, emphases added)

A hierarchy is therefore implied, which seems to be determined by the type of work an intellectual produces. What are the ramifications of such a hierarchy, of valuing "traditional" over "organic" intellectual work, particularly when the terms for such a valuation are set by the former?

Returning to Spivak's work, her gesture of ushering Devi's (1995) fiction into a forum which allows for a wider audience (*Imaginary Maps* was simultaneously published in India and the United States) is, according to Gramsci's formulation, a function of the traditional intellectual. How, then, could Devi's intellectual work be categorized? Is her work the product of an organic intellectual as defined by Gramsci? He did not believe that the peasants could develop their own organic intellectuals (cf. Gramsci 1971: 6). In his view the peasantry lives in an

economic situation that is devoid of class representation, becoming an intellectual would automatically advance that individual into another class (cf. Gramsci 1971: 14).

However, it must be kept in mind that Gramsci is specifically referring to his perspective within the historical conditions of Fascist Italy (cf. Spivak, preface to Devi 1995: 209, n. 13) It is on this aspect of the formation of an organic intellectual that Spivak claims that a different situation exists in India today – one which allows for the elaboration of an intellectual organically articulated to "the recently denotified Indian tribes [that] had been millennially separated from the mainstream peasant underclass." (Spivak, preface to Devi 1995: 209, n. 13) The formation of this new social group is defined through the efforts of organic intellectuals who, acting as intermediaries between the new group and other groups, develop new forms of intellectual work. Although Spivak's new formulation for an organic intellectual, as one who has emerged from but still remains part of the peasant class, the function is still much as Gramsci describes: "The mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist of eloquence [...] but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser, 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator" (Gramsci 1971: 10) Redefining intellectual work as including "active participation in practical life" allows for the categorization of Devi's work, and of others in similar subaltern positions, as that of organic intellectuals. Nevertheless, assessing that Spivak's "traditional intellectual" work is different in kind from that of the "organic intellectual" work of Devi does not yet address the issue of hierarchy.

Spivak's name, at least in certain academic circles, is world renowned while that of Devi's enjoys a much smaller audience. This provides a clue to how their intellectual work is valued, at least within hegemonic discourse. This is not surprising given that, by definition, the work of an organic intellectual involves the elaboration of a new position vis-à-vis that of the dominant structure. There is no doubt that within the academy Spivak's production is given greater value, but the work of Devi and Spivak is a collaborative effort, it is both an organic *and* traditional intellectual work and as such occupies a unique place. Unlike other efforts which may be said to be collaborative, such as ethnographies, where the anthropologist is subject and the native ob-

ject, or testimonios (which I will address in greater detail below), where the narrated life of the subject is processed by an interlocutor, the separation between the work of Devi and Spivak is clear: Spivak has written a preface and afterword, as well as translated the stories, which were originally written by Devi in Bengali. Both also participate in a conversation that acts as a foreword and contextualizes Devi's position in the struggle for the rights of tribals in India. The point I would like to stress is that this is not merely a translation but a joint intellectual production by two intellectuals working together in responding to issues affecting the subaltern in India. I describe this as a collaboration keeping in mind the distinction Judith Butler makes, in another context, between collaboration and coalition:

> Despite the clearly democratizing impulse that motivates coalition building, the coalitional theorist can inadvertently reinsert herself as sovereign of the process by trying to assert an ideal form for coalition structures *in advance*, one that will effectively guarantee unity as the outcome. (1990: 14)[4]

Even though the power relations involved in coalition building are more explicit, a mutually beneficial outcome being its goal, those involved in collaboration, whose outcome may not be known from the outset, are also present, albeit more implicitly.

Literature as Intervention

Although the collaborative work of Devi and Spivak may have entered academic discourse primarily based on the valuation of Spivak's previous work within (and by) that same discourse, and thus acknowledging an inherent hierarchy, it operates as a strategic intervention that locates specific sites of emerging resistance to hegemony.[5] The collaborative format of the project is a strategy that also offers the potential for its articulation elsewhere.

The collaborative strategy involves the use of literature to "straddle the gap between 'theory' and its setting-to-work outside the book." (Spivak 1993: 301) My specific interest in this strategy lies in attempting to investigate its postcolonial possibilities for the analysis of imperialist and neocolonial efforts whose site of deployment is "Latin

America," and, more specifically, instances of resistance generated from within, instances of organic intellectual work such as the testimonio of Rigoberta Menchú.[6] Before discussing Menchú's work, and how its categorization as "literature" within U.S. academia may be seen as complicit with neocolonial endeavors, I will investigate the unique and complex "postcolonial" conditions that operate in "Latin America," as opposed to say an Indian or African postcolonial situation.

Postcoloniality and "Latin America"

Steven Bell, in his analysis of the relation of critical theory to Latin American literature, asserts that "Latin America still risks being left out of serious critical study and scholarly discourse." (Bell et al. 1993: 3) Bell's concern is timely considering the impact of the theoretical work being done in postcolonial studies that addresses situations elsewhere. Bell elaborates that:

> With regard to the postcolonial, as with so many other critical/theoretical terms in current usage, the Latin American occupies an eccentric, a richly ambiguous, in-between position. These qualities, ironically, may make the Latin American case exemplary, even quintessentially postcolonial. The Latin American is not sufficiently white/European/imperial to be homogenized, nor sufficiently black/non-Western/colonial to be tokenized. It writes in Spanish, not in English – though this today is itself in question. Its formal independence came too long ago, and so it has not recently enough been "liberated," yet for this same reason, in many regards, it has always been "postcolonial," precocious rather than belated. (Bell et al. 1993: 25, n. 6)

Notwithstanding Bell's neglect in mentioning languages other than Spanish (and therefore other colonial histories involving European powers such as Portugual, Holland, France, and England), languages that include creole and the various indigenous languages, he does raise issues that address the difficulty of a simple projection of postcolonial theories, developed for different situations, onto a "Latin American" situation. The fact that Bell is obviously referring to non-indigenous people when he speaks of the "Latin American" makes a position often elided in colonial discourse on "Latin America" visible – that of the indegene. This is the position occupied by those who may not necessarily speak Spanish, are sufficiently "black/non-Western/colonial," have

not known independence since the conquest, and could be regarded as always already colonized.

A recent attempt to analyze the various colonial, imperialist, neocolonial, and postcolonial situations that have occurred in "Latin America" is J. Jorge Klor de Alva's "The Postcolonization of the (Latin) American Experience: A Reconsideration of 'Colonialism,' 'Postcolonialism,' and 'Mestizaje'" (1995). His analysis discloses the complexity that is obscured behind facile binary constructions such as colonizer/colonized, a complexity that in the Americas necessitates the consideration of various factors, such as the ideologies of slavery and Marxism as well as identities such as criollo, mestizo, mulatto, and white.[7]

An important factor in considering postcoloniality in Latin America is that struggles for independence in Spanish-America were not, strictly speaking, decolonization efforts. These struggles were more civil wars fought by the colonizer-identified mestizos and criollos against their European counterparts – wars pitting colonizer against colonizer.

> [I]t is misguided to present the preindependence, *non-Indian* sectors as colonized; it is inconsistent to explain the wars of independence as anticolonial struggles; and it is misleading to characterize the Americas, following the civil wars of separation, as composed of postcolonial states. (Klor de Alva 1995: 247)

The characterization of these wars as secessionist struggles leaves the place of the indigenous population as a site that is at all times colonized. How can this position, which has not yet undergone decolonization, claim a postcolonial perspective?

The term "post-colonial" has been used to discuss "all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonizaton to the present day." (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 2) It does not denote a linear temporality:

> [P]ostcoloniality is contained both within colonialism, as a Derridian supplement completing the meaning of this antecedent condition of dependent, asymmetrical relations, *and* outside of it, by its questioning of the very norms that establish the inside/outside, oppressor (colonizer)/oppressed (colonized) binaries that are assumed to characterize the colonial condition. (Klor de Alva 1995: 245)

Therefore, a struggle such as that of the Maya-Quiché, which is a struggle against colonization, can still be discussed as a postcolonial struggle. As soon as there is colonialism there is a concomitant resistance that can be given the name postcoloniality.

One of the strategies deployed in response to colonialism has been the adoption of postcolonial identities. The intellectual production of Rigoberta Menchú who, through lectures, organizing, and her testimonio, attempts to assume such a strategic postcolonial identity. What follows is a discussion of the function of testimonios as the product of that individual who Gramsci described as a "permanent persuader" – the organic intellectual.

Woman, Indegene, Other: Rigoberta Menchú and Liberation Struggles

Menchú's testimonio is part of a process of making personal and communal identities. These identities are created by a commerce that involves the exchange of histories between and within the indigenous and the local, the local and the national, and, ultimately, the national and international forums of representation. This vertical exchange is disrupted by the testimonio by simultaneously articulating indigenous history at all the levels of the system. I will specifically examine the negotiation between the sites of consumption and the sites of production of testimonios, including the role of the academy in the exchange of these histories. First I will summarize various definitions that have been used in attempts to fix the meaning of testimonios and then problematize these by discussing how the subject/object of testimonios is subsequently hypostatized by academic discourse as the authentic voice of the "other."

A testimonio is a difficult, if not impossible, thing to define. The word is Spanish for testimonial and therefore invokes legal connotations: it refers to a first-hand or an eyewitness account. The history of testimonios is brief and, although its mode of production owes much to US slave narratives, it begins as a Latin American form of self-writing with the accounts of revolutionary struggles written in the early 1960s. An early example is Ernesto (Ché) Guevara's *Pasajes de la guerra revolucionaria* (1963), which describes the liberation struggle of Cuba.[8] In North American literary studies the term is used to refer to a num-

ber of writings that, similarly, document a "true" experience that would otherwise fall under one, or a combination, of the following genres: autobiography, ethnography, oral history, and biography.[9]

Although testimonios are first-person accounts they are not autobiographies. Writing about the self is considered a Western invention and could be said to begin with Saint Augustine, but as a literary form it coincides with the rise of modernism. In "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," George Gusdorf observes that autobiography "expresses a concern peculiar to Western man, a concern that has been of good use in his systematic conquest of the universe and that he has communicated to men in other cultures." (Cited in Sommer 1991: 37) Testimonios attempt to complicate the genre of autobiography by substituting an individual, unified subject with a plural, divided one.

Fredric Jameson has discussed the relationship between autobiography and testimonio in "De la sustitución de importaciones literarias y culturales en el tercer mundo: El caso del testimonio." (1992)[10] He describes autobiography as a machine that produces a "centered subjectivity" formed out of an experience of fragmentation and atomization that is part of "bourgeois subjectivity." By contrast, he sees the testimonio as a sort of counter-autobiography that produces a "decentered subjectivity," a process that involves the multiplication of proper names:

> *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* by Elizabeth Burgos or *"Si me permiten hablar..." Testimonio de Domitilia* by Moema Viezzer: these adjunct names are not merely names of editors or transcribers, and we certainly do not yet have an appropriate category to name their specific work, which can be analogous to the creativity of the translator. (Jameson 1992: 128-129).[11]

In addition to being described as editor or transcriber, other names suggested for this intermediary figure include ethnobiographer, interviewer, patron, promoter, and agent (cf. Feal 1990: 102). This ambiguity can be seen in the case of Menchú's testimonio where the function of this intermediary figure is assigned different functions: Elizabeth Burgos is listed as the author in the original Spanish language edition, while she is listed as the editor in the English translation (cf. Feal 1990: 101). As editors and translators often do, the "compiler" of a testimonio frames the work by providing an introduction, and at times a glossary and appendices; otherwise this figure remains silent. This si-

lence makes it difficult to discern the extent of the compiler's contribution; it may entail the transcription of an oral account or it may be closer to a co-author's role. It is the ambiguity of the compiler's contribution to the text that helps create the effect Jameson describes as "decentered subjectivity."

Another dislocation of the author function is performed by the claim of the subject of the testimonio not only to self-representation but, concomitantly, the representation of a community. Doris Sommer suggests that the subject of the testimonio can be thought of as a "plural subject" (1991: 38). Menchú begins her account by announcing:

This is my testimony [...] I'd like to stress that it's not only *my* life, it's also the testimony of my people [...] The important thing is that what has happened to me has happened to many other people too: My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people. (Menchú 1994: 1)[12]

Menchú performs a double function: she speaks *as* and, at the same time, *for* the Maya-Quiché; one function does not supersede the other – they occur simultaneously. Sommer explains this metonymic relationship:

The singular represents the plural, not because it replaces or subsumes the group, but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of the whole [...]. [T]here is a fundamental difference here between the *metaphor* of autobiography and heroic narrative in general, which assumes an identity-by-substituting one (superior) signifier for another (I for we, leader for follower, Christ for the faithful), and *metonymy*, a lateral move of identification-through-relationship [...]. The phenomenon of a collective subject of the testimonial is [...] a translation of a hegemonic autobiographical prose into a colonized language that does not equate identity with individuality. (Sommer 1991: 39, second emphasis added)

The plural subject of the testimonio replaces the individual of autobiography, an individual who, as is characteristic of humanist sensibilities, has mostly been gendered male. (Sommer 1991: 37) In contrast, the authors of testimonios are generally women. Though, as I mentioned earlier, the history of testimonios includes accounts of revolutionary struggles by men, it is the struggles of women, particularly poor women, that make up the majority of recent testimonial writing.[13] And it is usually a woman who performs the task of compiling these histories.

In addition to the gender and the double function of the author, there is a third component common to testimonios – their place of ori-

gin is "Latin America." This means that the subject of the testimonio is multiply circumscribed by class, race, gender, and nationality (a category which necessarily implicates the others). These factors have enticed scholars, especially North American academics, to include this type of writing under the category of "Third-world Literature" or to discuss the problems raised by the protagonists as those shared by "Third-world Women," or, even more problematic, as instances when the "subaltern" speaks. Instead of allowing for a new space in which testimonios can be seen as simultaneously negotiating the colonial (indigenous/European), postcolonial (European and North American/ Latin American), and neo-colonial (World Bank, NAFTA, GATT/ Latin America), this form of writing is relegated to literary categories that lack positive political effectiveness. An analysis of these categories will help locate instances when their use in academia is complicit with the hegemonic discourse of capitalism.

Testimonios can be read as the "real narratives" that give "third-world" literature *specific* histories and locations. Yet, the tendency to group these writings under one encompassing term defeats this purpose. This tendency becomes more generalized when the writings are selected to represent not just "third-world literature" but "third-world women."

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (1984) is a critique of the kind of Western feminists' scholarship that is complicit in "producing/re-presenting a composite, singular 'Third World Woman' – an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but nevertheless carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse."[14] Mohanty begins her discussion by observing that

> terms like "third" and "first" world are very problematical both in suggesting oversimplified similarities between and amongst countries labelled "third" or "first" world, as well as implicitly reinforcing existing economic, cultural and ideological hierarchies which are conjured up in using such terminology. (1984: 354, fn. 3)

Mohanty goes on to analyze how the assumption that a shared gender, regardless of factors such as class and culture, constitutes a homogeneous group under the name "woman." (1984: 337) This assumption leads to the facile explanation that oppression originates in gender difference

(340). This mistake is further clarified by Spivak's consideration of gender difference as a "graphematic structure."

Spivak uses the term "graphematic structure" to refer to a "structure that is supposed *necessarily* to operate in the presumed absence of its origin." (Spivak 1993: 130, emphasis added) An example is positing gender difference as an ontological given, a process that obscures the constructedness of this difference. Spivak further suggests that it is not enough to reveal the workings of the graphematic structure, it is also necessary to obliterate the structure itself. (Spivak 1993: 132) Part of this project involves the investigation of the production, or even the possibility, of difference itself. The possibility of/for difference is given the name *différance* by Jacques Derrida. *Différance*, while simultaneously alluding to difference and deference, does not literally refer to these concepts but instead "indicate[s] [...] the spacing/time structure of the inevitable break between, among other things, theory and method." (Spivak 1993: 307, fn. 31) Spivak describes Derrida's *différance* as a concept-metaphor, a name for a concept that, like the name "woman" or "writing," exists only as metaphor and does not have "an adequate literal referent." (Spivak 1993: 126) The name *différance* does not itself denote difference, just as the name "woman" does not denote an essence, nor the name "writing" a particular mode of writing. Another concept-metaphor that can be added to Spivak's list is the term "third world," which does not refer to a certain place, as well as the terms produced when it is used as a modifier, such as "third-world literature" and "third-world woman."

Spivak warns of the danger of a concept-metaphor becoming a literal referent. Specifically, she fears the naturalization of the name "woman."[15] Derrida suggests that "woman" be one name that can stand for *différance*. Spivak realizes that "each of these names is determined by their historical burden in the most empirical way" and that "Derrida himself is also bound [...] by a certain set of historical presuppositions." (Spivak 1993: 133-134) She therefore suggests (re)placing "woman" as another name for the "subaltern." (Spivak 1993: 139) Attempting to avoid a naturalization and a neutralization of the name "woman," Spivak proposes the use of one concept-metaphor for another. Unlike Derrida's substitution, however, Spivak's has an overtly feminist

agenda. Spivak quips that the place occupied by the "subaltern" is such a heterogenous position that "the subaltern [becomes] the name of the place which is so displaced [...] that to have it speak is like Godot arriving on a bus." (Spivak 1990: 91) To illustrate the impossibility of this subjectivity, Spivak recounts an attempt by a subaltern (without quotations to assign a specific subject) to speak:

> A young woman of sixteen or seventeen, Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, hanged herself in her father's modern apartment in North Calcutta in 1926. The suicide was a puzzle since, as Bhuvaneswari was menstruating at the time, it was clearly not a case of illicit pregnancy. Nearly a decade later, it was discovered that she was a member of one of the many groups involved in the armed struggle for Indian independence. She had finally been entrusted with a political assassination. Unable to confront the task and yet aware of the practical need for trust, she killed herself. (CSS 307).

Despite her attempts to communicate (in addition to using her menstruating body to negate the possibility of her death being interpreted as the result of an illicit love affair she left a letter, to be opened fifteen years later, explaining her decision) her family rewrites the history of her death as a story of forbidden love. The denial of history is the "subaltern" condition.

Similarly, testimonios, as histories written by subalterns are multiply rewritten: first they are rewritten by the compiler of what is often an oral account; they are then rewritten by a translator who prepares this history for consumption in foreign markets; finally they are rewritten by academic discourse. The trade in testimonios is an uneven exchange; the indigenous people who are the subjects of these histories are seldom their consumers.[16]

Although the commerce of testimonios appears to be a dubious construction, there nevertheless can be a strategic usefulness in their trade if value is re-placed, if testimonios are treated as opportunities to engage the postcolonial historical work they do as the product of organic intellectuals rather than as instances of "authentic" speaking subalterns. The "responsible resistance" of the organic intellectual is what is lost in the discourse on testimonios; when the subaltern speaks, her specific historical and geographic location is homogenized by this discourse. This is most apparent when critics, no matter how sympathetic, invariably refer to authors of testimonios by their first name.[17] It is this sort engagement that Kwame Anthony Appiah describes as a post-

coloniality that is "the condition of what we might ungenerously call a *comprador* intelligentsia: a relatively small, Western-style, Western-trained group of writers and thinkers, who mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery." (Appiah 1991: 348) This vision of a postcolonial practice that is complicit with hegemonic capitalist discourse is a strong warning against a type of scholarship that is irresponsive and irresponsible. A recent attempt at a responsible response has been the formation of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group (see the Founding Statement in Beverley/Oviedo/Aronna 1995: 135-146).

Conclusion

In my analysis of the place occupied by Rigoberta Menchú's testimonio, I call for the re-(e)valution of the testimonio as a literary category that should continue to be analyzed within the historical specificities of its production and not simply as generic tales of the destitute.

I began my discussion by claiming that the space needed for the production of organic intellectual work, which in a postcolonial situation is the space denied the subaltern, can be opened by a collaborative effort such as that being produced by Devi and Spivak. I then posited the possibility for the articulation of such a project, as well as postcolonial strategies in general, to the context of "Latin America." In this discussion I have not attempted yet another interpretation of Menchú's work, instead I have tried to analyze the function of the academic in the contextualization of its reception. I do not pretend that my analysis is in any way a collaboration with Menchú – if anything it is once again an appropriation of it. Nonetheless, a responsible response to situations involving United States colonialism, whether its neocolonialist relation to "Latin America" or its "internal colonialism," – such as the situations of indigenous, migrant, homeless, and "illegal" populations – necessitates listening to, in order to speak with, the subaltern. I have specifically discussed testimonios and some of the terms invoked in their discussion ("third world," "third-world literature," "third-world woman," "woman," and "subaltern") in order to emphasize the danger of

naturalization/neutralization that occurs when singular entities are made to occupy these concept-metaphors.

Beverley ends his article on the bygone strategy of introducing testimonio as literature into the academy by asking "What is left today of the desire called Testimonio?"(1996: 282) He suggests that of the "many ways one could answer this question [...] it might be enough to say simply [...] Chiapas." (282) But there are, of course, many other answers, those that will be demanded by their specific situations. In the academy, however, the approach to continually reconsider the place of testimonio, to keep the "desire called Testimonio" unfulfilled, is still a viable strategy. A recent collection of essays, *Teaching Testimony: Rigoberta Menchú and the North American Classroom* (Carey-Webb/Benz 1996), works as a guidebook on pedagogical approaches that consider the situatedness of testimonio – testimonio not as theory but as a strategy.

Notes

1 I would like to thank Professor Inge Boer for her comments on an earlier draft of this paper. – The terms "organic" and "traditional" intellectual are defined below.

2 Hereafter cited as "CSS." This essay, delivered at a conference on Marxism in 1983, sets forth much of the groundwork for Spivak's work on postcoloniality, a project which combines feminist theory, Marxism, and deconstruction to analyze the dynamics of colonialism. According to the editors of *The Spivak Reader* a revised version of this essay is forthcoming (Landry/MacLean 1996: 8).

3 Spivak specifically refers to Foucault 1977.

4 Butler continues her analysis by discussing the notion of "dialogue" as "culturally specific and historically bound, and while one speaker may feel secure that a conversation is happening, another maybe sure it is not. The power relations that condition and limit dialogic possibilities need to be interrogated." (1990: 15)

5 This project, therefore, avoids the criticism that theorists, such as Banita Parry, have voiced against theories of colonialism that assign "absolute

power to the hegemonic discourse in constituting and disarticulating the native [...]. Spivak in her project gives no speaking part to the colonized" (1987: 34-35).

6 I will use the term "Latin America" within quotes to emphasize the problematic of disavowing the difference that exists within the region circumscribed by this term. This problematic is similar to that posed by the term "Third World" discussed below.

7 On other approaches to theorizing a postcoloniality in "Latin America" see Beverley et al. 1995.

8 For an analysis of guerrilla testimonios see Rojas 1986a, b.

9 Testimonio was first used as a literary term by Miguel Barnet to describe his ethnographic novel *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1968), which described the struggles of Esteban Montejo, a Cuban ex-slave (cf. Yúdice 1992: 207).

10 A translation of this essay appears as "On Literary and Cultural Import-Substitution in the Third World: The Case of Testimonio" in *The Real Thing* (Gugelberger 1996). I have chosen to translate from the earlier version of this essay.

11 The second testimonio Jameson refers to is that of a Bolivian woman, Domitila Barrios de Chungara, co-written with Moema Viezzer (1977). It is curious that in the version of Jameson's article that appears in *The Real Thing* (Gugelberger 1996) her testimonio is substituted by that of Esteban Montejo.

12 Similarly, Barrios' account begins: "I don't want anyone at any moment to interpret the story I'm about to tell as something that is only personal [...] What happened to me could have happened to hundreds of people in my country." (Barrios de Chungara 1977: 15) Yet another example is that of Claribel Alegría's (1983) testimonial of a martyred heroine, Eugenia, an "exemplary model of self-denial, sacrifice and revolutionary heroism, is a typical case rather than an exception of so many Salvadoran women who have dedicated their efforts and even their lives to the struggle for the people's liberation." (Sommer 1991: 38)

13 In addition to the testimonios by Rigoberta Menchú and Domitila Barrios de Chungara and Clariel Alegría's, cited above, others that have recently received attention in the academy are: María Teresa Tula, *Hear My Testimony: María Teresa Tula, Human Rights Activist of El Salvador* (1994); Ana Guadalupe Martínez, *Las cárceles clandestinas de El Salvador* (1979); and the testimonial novel by Elen Paniatowska (1969) based on the life of Josefina Bórquez, *Hasta no verte Jesús mío*.

14 The debate between Fredric Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad is relevant in discussions of rubrics, such as "third world," that are taken from discourses on economics and are superimposed, under the guise of Marxist analysis,

onto literary productions and obfuscate any function the literature may perform (as counter-histories, calls for coalition building, making the private public, etc.) other than as "national allegory." See Jameson 1986 and Ahmad 1987.

15 Spivak cites as an example of this naturalization Foucault's use of the term "power" in *History of Sexuality* where "the *name* 'power' is systematically sold short for the 'thing' power." (Spivak 1993: 138)

16 Academic discourse on this literature is itself complicated by the fact that much of the work done on testimonios is written in Spanish by North American scholars, their ultimate audience apparently being "Latin American" scholars.

17 Beverley makes attempts a self-critique on this point in "The Real Thing" (1996: 267-268).

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