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To cite this article: Gordon Brotherston (1997) Debate: Regarding the evidence in *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*, *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 6:1, 93-103, DOI: [10.1080/13569329709361902](https://doi.org/10.1080/13569329709361902)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569329709361902>



Published online: 27 Feb 2009.



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Debate: Regarding the Evidence in *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú*

GORDON BROTHERSTON

Globalization, currently synonymous with the spread of neoliberalism's flawed economics, is a term that needs to be applied with especial care to culture and literature. Counter theories may appear to be in disarray or retreat, while local versions of postcolonialism struggle to evade the matching universals of post-modernism. Yet the story is not over, as is clear from strong literary responses to continuing genocide and oppression in Latin America and other arenas over the last two or three decades. Indigenous proclamations, *testimonio* narratives, novels and poetry alike respond to the horrors of the Southern Cone dictatorships, counterinsurgency in the Andes and Central America, and the ever more rapid deprecation of the American continent's remaining resources, its exquisitely populated seas and forests and its mountain water-tables.

Among these testimonies, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (Menchú, 1983) stands prominent and raises key issues of interpretation; like other contemporary accounts of the extreme in Latin America, it challenges root assumptions of western literary criticism. This much is clear from the responses it has provoked which, on the one hand, make political commitment the priority or, on the other, stray so far into the supposed sophistication of post-modernism as to render quite null the very concept of *testimonio*. Menchú's text asks us to consider how certain definitions of 'reason' itself may reflect the universalist aspirations of late capitalism and thereby may remove even the possibility of our learning to share the perspective of the planet's last resistance fighters.

A convenient prompt to a reconsideration of these matters comes in Brett Levinson's recent article 'Neopatriarchy and after: *I, Rigoberta Menchú* as allegory of death' (1996). Convenient because Levinson takes into account a wide sample of readings that are currently being made of Menchú's text, noting the divide between the politically committed who require 'empathy' and those who intellectualize. He broadens his own scope to include Sharabi's Middle Eastern models of (neo)patriarchy, Freud's diagnoses of mourning and Jameson's notions of the end of the Third World.

In outline, Levinson's argument goes like this: Menchú records an experience of extreme suffering, in a narrative which reflects first on tradition within her Quiché-Maya community and then on her own struggle to resist and survive. The community has a patriarchal foundation, whose custom and law are guaranteed by the ancestors; her authority to testify derives from her place in this community, and from the apprenticeship of suffering. Yet she transgresses custom and law by learning Spanish, refusing to have a child, travelling, allying herself with poor *ladinos* and, finally, betraying at least in part the 'secrets' of the community by publishing her text as a book edited and possibly co-authored by

a French anthropologist, Elizabeth Burgos. By breaking with this tradition Menchú 'gives hope for an urgent, communal, revolutionary political praxis', yet in the process invalidates the source of her authority and its secrets. From here on, Levinson's case gets harder to follow but surely suggests that anyway the body of the ancestors was so remote from the start as to have been illusory, or a corpse, and that it therefore must today be considered to belong, like the notion of the Third World itself, to 'nothing and nowhere'. The conclusion: 'Menchú's *testimonio* does not supply a voice for the voiceless; it supplies this voicelessness with something else entirely: a grave-site, a name, a stone and a burial, however belated and improper'.

The least contentious moments here are first the acknowledgement of Maya suffering, well caught in references to the 'state terrorism' and the 'genocide, the violence of prejudice and capitalism, and the powers of a relentless Westernization' that these people undergo, and in the acknowledgement that the Guatemalan legal system 'both permits repressive atrocities to occur, and makes it impossible for the victims to testify, to appeal to justice, and thus to receive restitution'. Were it not for the patient documentation undertaken by Noam Chomsky (*Turning the Tide*, 1982) and a few others, it can indeed be hard to believe the sheer bestial ferocity of the Guatemalan dictators Lucas García and Ríos Montt in the early 1980s, behaviour which were it denounced in other parts of the world could be expected to attract loud and massive condemnation. In their extremity, these assaults threaten social coherence and literary expression itself.

Then, in formal terms it is true that Menchú's text is in some way dual, moving as it does from the community, as this traditionally operates, to her particular role as an activist, and that this duality impinges directly on the nature of the authorial 'I'. A parallel difficulty is indicated by the discrepancy between the titles of the work in Spanish, French and English. While *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* (1983) points reflexively to the growth of authorial consciousness on the part of the speaker, *Moi, Rigoberta Menchú. Une vie et une voix, la révolution au Guatemala* (1983) immerses it in a larger idea of revolution. By contrast, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1984)—the title exclusively employed by Levinson—does neither and intimates rather the need for editorial intervention on the part of Burgos. It is right to highlight tensions at work within this 'I', the different loyalties and priorities to which it attaches, and the secrets it wishes still to defend. The necessary deconstruction of the 'author' carried out by Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault and their followers can in this sense positively help to 'release' the Menchú text.

It is also the case that in so far as it may be identified as 'Third World', the locus from which Menchú's text emerges is becoming the object of increasing disbelief, not least among those who were once champions of Giap, Fanon and Guevara. In this respect, although received socialism may not be so dead as Octavio Paz says he would like it to be, it certainly has become pretty numb. The critical consequences of this shift are registered in the basic work by Jameson cited by Levinson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991).

These points of accord are few, however, beside the main line of Levinson's argument, and all that might be disputed in it, primarily the actual space and time of Menchú's text, and the nature of its ideology. For in the first instance, *Me*

Illmo Rigoberta Menchú demands to be understood as a defence of territory, land successfully inhabited and worked for many centuries by the Maya, whose guardian peaks and valleys are synonymous with the larger story of creation. Not to recognize this fact is to ignore the first and greatest threat to Maya coherence, the US dispossession whose dismal and disgraceful tale begins with Columbus. What to make then of the fact that land is never even mentioned by Levinson, that the word territory when used is allegorical and refers instead and immaterially to pain? That the Maya are said to live 'nowhere', a term which translates directly into the Greek 'utopia'. Exactly in line with much-publicized right-wing enemies of America's indigenous peoples, Levinson grants the Maya a spot only on condition it cannot really be found on the map and that, like Vargas Llosa's 'utopia arcaica', it may never have existed. As a matter of historical fact, the Quichés' purchase of their territory has been such that over time its western edge has become the international border with Mexico, just as their name, translated into Nahuatl, anticipates that of Guatemala itself, a state in which non-Indians still constitute a minority.

The territorial factor, with its attendant notions of land use, inherited economic practice and ecology, is what absolutely distinguishes Native Americans from other groups in the continent with whom they are often lumped together sociologically, as 'ethnic', 'marginal' or 'minority'. For, sociologically, native Americans have from the first always occupied a quite different position *vis-à-vis* the economic systems imported from Europe. The writing out of native territory in the interests of blurring this difference proves to have a long pedigree and its own racial twist. For example, the lexicon and rhetorical strategies adopted by the Puritans that are analysed by Francis Jennings in *The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism and the Cant of Conquest* (1975) directly anticipate those of certain modern Latin American novels, notably Mario Vargas Llosa's perverse restructuring of Machiguenga cosmogony and history in *El hablador*; and in both conjunctures there is a common appeal to the idea of 'vacuum domicilium' and native 'nomadism'.¹ Going further, in *Oak Openings* (1848), James Fenimore Cooper openly celebrates the US ability to 'atone' for their bad treatment of blacks by awarding them land bloodily wrested from the Indians. At the same time in Brazil (1850), as is shown in studies by David Treece (quoted by Doris Sommer, 1991, p. 160), the territorial dispossession and enslaving of Indians to replace recently freed blacks lay behind the differences between Nabuco and Alencar, and therefore behind the archetypal twentieth century divide between Afro-centred Gilberto Freyre and indigenist Mário de Andrade.

Intimately linked with this faulty geography is the faulty chronology which would entirely divorce Rigoberta's people of today from the ancestors who lived more than 400 years ago. After such a time span, Levinson says, these pre-Columbian forefathers, archaic, 'pure' and remote, can no longer be effectively reached by a modern Indian population that is unavoidably and profoundly affected by *mestizaje* in language, custom and blood. It is telling that the evidence adduced for the alleged break in Maya history and the unbridgeable chasm between ancient and modern comes not at all from the area itself but from statements made (in Prakash, 1995) by Klor de Alva, whose work has centred on the Spanish colonial phenomenon in the Basin of Mexico and who is not noted for deep involvement in either the deeper past or the political present of indigenous peoples in America.

In all events, such a version of Maya history errs in at least two respects. First, it overdetermines the European invasion, narrowing it into a single moment of conquest after which the whole world was different. Secondly, it grossly underestimates the indigenous capacity to adapt over these centuries and hence the consciously tended continuity of their story. As Peter Gerhard's maps show us, the effective area of European control in Middle and North America during much of the colony was not that large and certainly excluded the greater part of the territory of the Maya and their neighbours. Priests in Huehuetlan, Soconusco, chose to surrender their screenfold books as late as 1692, 5 years before the Itza did the same in Peten, and in neither case, even at this late stage, did this act signify or lead to irremediable loss of political control. Over this whole time, Quiché-speakers repeatedly resisted invasion of their territory and way of life, successfully enough for an incursion of 1900 to be commemorated in Miguel Angel Asturias's 'Gaspar Ilóm', later the opening chapter of *Hombres de maíz* (1949).² The same story is truer still in South America. There, large areas of the Southern Cone were wrested from the Mapuche at the very end of the nineteenth century, while the territory of Amazonia was only seriously invaded within recent decades (Hemming, 1987). For this reason, in so far as they imply a time four or more centuries ago that preceded instant and total appropriation, the very terms pre-Columbian, pre-Cortesian, pre-Hispanic and so on should be used with care (the insidious pre-historic, favoured by a certain school of US archaeologists, should surely be eschewed altogether).

Not only the actual process of military conquest, but also the corresponding native reaction to it, have been long and intricate and, according to the Quiché chronicles, go back even to the Olmec, and then the Nahuatl speakers who moved through the highlands long before Alvarado did. Studies by Carmack, Bricker, Farriss and others make clear how the Maya have continuously reflected this experience from ancient times up to the present day. Indeed, several accounts given by the Maya and their neighbours themselves are so constructed as to expose the ethnocentricity of Hegelian and Marxist philosophy and to raise the question: who in 1492 entered whose history?³ So that at no point is it fair to speak of a break or hiatus in the Maya tradition or consciousness. Just as assigning them to utopia robs them of their territory, so positing discontinuity between them and an inaccessible and 'pure' past robs them of their history.

Worse still, when the Maya utopia is characterized it is as 'Christian-Marxist'. It is true that along with many Quiché, Menchú felt the effects of Christian missionering in highland Guatemala and that she came to know her Bible well. Yet it is no less true that her Christianity was something considered and only where appropriate incorporated into her prior belief system. This process has long been documented for the highland Maya, notably by Huxley and in Mendelsohn's classical account of Maximon (Martin, 1992). In Levinson's reading of Rigoberta's account, however, the whole Quiché Maya community is represented as somehow Christian 'avant la lettre', no more therefore than an extension or outpost of Old World religion with nothing special to call its own in the larger terms of ideology and belief. In a footnote, Levinson goes to some length to emphasize the coincidences between Christian and native belief, in matters of cosmogony, attitude to nature, ritual and morality, suppressing thereby even the notion of prior or independent native philosophy. This has to be ignorant or perverse. Where in the Judeo Christian tradition, even in its most

heterodox Liberation Theology version, may we discover an inkling of the set of catastrophes that ended previous worlds, or of the cult of the nahual which, far from separating humans off as a god's look-a-likes, through metamorphosis links us intimately with vertebrate and other species? Where is the Adam commanded to use the earth and nature put there for his benefit? (As Carpentier noted, native American cosmogony warns precisely against this kind of use and exploitation.) Where is the Eve whose disobedience led to human misery? (In taking the fruit from the tree of knowledge, the Maya Eve, Ixquic, announces rather human triumph, our capacity to feed ourselves.) Where are we supposed to find the maize doctrine, which tells us the people of this era, superior to predecessors made from the clay of Adam, were formed from this cereal, the staple of Mesoamerica? Where do we find talk of ancestors who are precisely not the 'forefathers' of patriarchy but mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers liable to exchange sex? Where are the midwives revered for the knowledge implicit in the count of 260 nights still used by the Quiché?

These and many other features of Maya and native American religion, coherent in themselves, owe nothing whatsoever to imported dogma, quite the reverse, and what is more, as Rigoberta makes clear, they have been critical to the capacity to resist. They are set out at length in the *Popol vuh*, the text written by Maya Quiché authors in their language in the 1550s and aptly known as the 'Bible of America', whose purpose was to defend Quiché territory and ways of life 'within Christendom'. Menchú works this source—unmentioned by Levinson—into her text to similar literary and political ends: 'Our culture is maize ... It is thought, according to the ancestors, that we Indians are made of maize. We are made of white and yellow maize, according to our ancestors. This, then, is to be taken into account'. How much this intertextuality reflects modern social circumstance is brought out, for instance, by Barbara Tedlock, who has written about the maize doctrine, the current use of the traditional calendar and the philosophy inherent in the *Popol vuh* (1982); and by Dennis Tedlock, who tells how he was helped by contemporary Quiche speakers in preparing his English translation of this classic work (1985).

Recalling these substantive differences from received western belief necessarily affects our assessment of Rigoberta's secrets and their political potential. For Doris Sommer, according to Levinson, these secrets were probably 'not particularly important': in fact Sommer's statement of Rigoberta's 'feminine distance' seems more hedged than that and does not rely on Maya, meaning Christian (1991, pp. 319–320). For Levinson himself, the secrets do not exist at all, being no more than an empty box, a device by which Rigoberta strives to retain her authority as an indigenous spokesperson. Such a view disparages Maya culture and philosophy, in addition to land and history.

In the closing stages of his article, as we have seen, Levinson posits that Rigoberta's text, so cruelly reduced by the argument so far, can at best serve as an epitaph to unreachable ancestors and that it cannot signify at all in its announced role of testifying to particular forms and agencies of oppression. It is an 'allegory' of death, in Paul de Man's special sense of the term, that has no other validity: hence, the postmodernizing process is complete. Much of the evidence Rigoberta in fact gives and substantiates with such precision and dignity, will no doubt be unwelcome to many ears but at a first and indispensable level it appeals to what is missing in postmodernist morality and manners.

The trauma she and her people suffer is discontinuous with the 'psychological problems' of individuals, so that it is surely obscene to devalue the evidence her text actually supplies by appealing to Freudian ideas of bereavement (in Beverley's case, the Electra complex), within the equally extraneous model of patriarchy and male ancestry. On technical grounds alone, explanations of this order fail to heed how in such extremity—the sadistic rape, mutilation and dismemberment of her mother makes gruelling reading (Chapter 26)—Menchú's capacity to witness at all is nourished not by some lone Cartesian head but by the philosophy of co-operative endurance set out in the *Popol vuh*.

Since Levinson's attempt to reduce Rigoberta's text must seem so successful in its own terms, how curious to find the need to go on and disqualify it yet further, as the product of a space that no longer exists: the Third World. The paragraph in question is trenchant (and offensive) enough to merit quoting in full:

Various ideas concerning the 'secret' (or a tomb) of I, *Rigoberta Menchú* surface here. The first is related to Alberto Moreiras' reading of Frederic Jameson. Jameson famously argues that within the globalized economy of late capitalism, peripheral cultures such as Latin America can no longer be set off from the First World as Same is to Other, capitalism is to underdevelopment, reason is to instinct, Western culture is to primitivism, and so forth. The breakdown of the First World/Third World dichotomy, Jameson further suggests, signals the end of the Third World as such—the Third World becomes a part, even if a marginated or exploited part, of the globalization process—since the 'Third World' exists only due to this very dichotomy. If Jameson is correct, Moreiras suggests, then to speak from the Third World today is to speak from a place that no longer exists. (p. 44)

Put another way, this reads: thanks to globalization, all is now the same, the struggle, like history is over, and the last niche of the irrational 'primitives' is thoroughly lit by an imperialist, postmodernist glare. What arrogance and what bad faith. Atrocities in Central America have been repeatedly condoned by the US, which economically and politically continues to treat the area as something much less than itself, ever fostering brutal oppression and lying about its consequences. Referring to the same military system that horrifically murdered Rigoberta's mother, Ronald Reagan, the duly elected president of the US, proclaimed that there was no human rights problem in Guatemala. To claim, then, that Menchú's text is unable to 'witness', when it does just that with such clarity, is tantamount to removing direct evidence of difference between the spaces respectively inhabited by Menchú's people and most postmodernist critics, whether or not these are actually named as Third and First World.

Finally, this recent elision of worlds of itself suggests the need for some reconsideration of boundaries and sources of discourse, one that would identify the shape and power not just of late capitalism but of the various spaces capitalism threatens. As is well known, the term Third World arose a half a century ago in response to a concern, mainly French, with Africa, the original third world of Babylonian and Roman geography; and as is clear say in Frantz Fanon or Wole Soyinka, much of its energy was sparked by black-white opposition and antinomial rejection of the value system imposed by nineteenth

century Europe. With the insertion into this discourse of Asia, the original first world of ancient geography, accommodation had to be made for such other phenomena as Semitism that is no less Arab than Hebrew, precedence and caste in the British Raj, Mao's readings of Confucius and Marx, and the millennial diet and strategies of Giap's Indochina. The consequent strains are now being explicitly voiced through and by reference to the writings of Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhabha and others. It is not a question of celebrating, still less of provoking dissent between forces that clearly have to ally to survive, but rather of recognizing that even as they participate in the common postcolonial debate, these forces may feed on separable intellectual traditions, political memories and cultural roots.

Then what of that remaining chunk of the 'Third World', Rigoberta's America? Named the fourth world by Renaissance geographers, it is the most thoroughly dispossessed continent of planetary history. Though settled there for many millennia and countable in many millions, its original inhabitants have swiftly come to be perceived as marginal if not entirely dispensable. Education systems in its modern nation-states seldom relate surviving peoples to their deeper past, and history, like literature, law and philosophy, is most often said to have begun with Columbus. In 1927, César Vallejo noted how western imperialism had robbed China of all but its land and its people and wondered whether even those *minima* would survive in his native Peru.⁴

Hence, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú* may conform to the familiar Third World discourse of dependency, oppression and economic (under) development; yet it absolutely does not with respect to other such attendant factors as the role of indigenous peoples *vis-à-vis* the nation-state, or their robust grounding of political resistance in non-western cosmogony. On these counts Menchú's text foregrounds a dimension of American culture which rightly distinguishes it at this conjuncture and which is powerfully evident in many of the most achieved literary statements to have been made there in recent decades, in native languages as well as Spanish, Portuguese and English.

The rejection of crop-enhancing but life-endangering chemical fertilizers, caution before the machine of mass production, the readiness to listen to and learn from species which have inhabited this planet longer than we have, pride in the unrivalled story of US agriculture and its culmination in the genetic invention of maize, the certain knowledge of how political resistance depends on cultural coherence: these are the fourth world concepts advanced and elaborated in Menchú's text. They also surface in such contemporary indigenous statements as the letters written to Mexican newspapers by the Maya in Chiapas who, on seeing their forests invaded, speak of damage not just to themselves but to the other species, to a whole living system of which they have for so long been the guardians; and, still within Mesoamerica, in poems in Nahuatl, Otomi and Zapotec which find a common reference in today's environment.⁵ Rigoberta specifically identifies this heritage, above all the maize doctrine, as the common culture which bridges the gap between local languages and customs, providing a way through the conundrum posed by current pan-Indian and pan-Maya movements (on which see Watanabe, 1995).

Provoked by the 1981 Mozote massacre in neighbouring Salvador (likewise deemed no evidence of a human rights problem by Reagan), Manlio Argueta's novel *Cuzcatlan* (1987) embraces the peasantry of that country, revealing their

cosmic attachment to their volcanoes and their sea, and a history that consciously recalls the arrival of Spanish galleons and US Cherokee helicopters alike. Underpinning for all this is provided by a modern reading of *Popol vuh* cosmogony highly reminiscent of Menchú's: maize is the food of resilience, in a story that goes back through volcanic catastrophe to the iridescent snake of the primal ocean. We are told of 'tortillera' midwives, cultural 'secrets' and belief that absorbs 'Adaneva', knows maize to be 'el cuerpo del Señor', and that prefers the known earthly paradise of Cuzcatlan (Salvador's ancient name) to the imposed need for redemption through the saviour—Salvador. In the long line of literature that stems from the *Popol vuh*, Cuzcatlan specifically builds on Asturias's foundational *Hombres de maíz* (Amaya, 1994; cf. Argueta, 1982).

This 'fourth world' perspective on America is powerfully synthesized in a poem on the continental scale that appeared the same year as *Cuzcatlan*: Raúl Zurita's *Canto a su amor desaparecido*. It issues from the extremes of torture practised by the dictators of the Southern Cone, specifically Pinochet, who with US help took the art of human destruction to new heights; and in this catastrophe, native Americans, their cordillera and sea, are posited as the only effective reference for those victims whose selves have been abused. Echoing by turns the continental epics of Neruda and Cardenal, Zurita's *Canto* transcends both, in mapping anew the continent's territory as the 'unwilling site of violation and abuse' (Rowe, 1993). By invoking indigenous names from all America as its only sentient co-ordinates—*cheyenne, shuar, maya, aymará, quechua, guaraní, arauco, siboney, charrúa*—the *Canto* goes beyond the Marxist and Christian schemes which still operate respectively in Neruda's *Canto general* and Cardenal's *Homenaje a los indios americanos*, and shows how disregard for the brilliance of the maize philosophy and the deep time of the Maya calendar is linked to the radical disease of the conqueror—exterminator, the dictator who silences and causes love to disappear ('no hubo necesidad de tanto exterminio ... en maya quedó la fecha y nunca se supo del fulgor de esos maizales'). Present in Menchú and Argueta, as in Abel Posse's *Daimón* (1978), this understanding of indigenous America has also been elaborated by Zurita in his preface to the remarkable collection of Mapuche poems by Leonel Lienlaf, *Se ha despertado el ave de mi corazón* (1987), a token of the current literary renaissance in several native languages. Zurita's particular understanding of the 'tomb' of the tortured and dispossessed—the inscribed niches of his poem—reverses exemplarily Levinson's own narrow and aseptic definitions of Menchú's 'tomb' and 'epitaph'.

Granting Menchú's and these other texts the resonance due to them is an act of critical significance, in a long line of argument begun by Mário de Andrade, César Vallejo and Juan Carlos Mariátegui (this last is mentioned only to be misrepresented by Levinson), elaborated by Angel Rama and carried forward today by such critics as William Rowe, in his commentaries on Vallejo, Arguedas and Zurita, and Diana Palaversich. For Palaversich, *Me llamo*, belongs, like *Cuzcatlan* and Galeano's *Memoria del fuego* (1982), to a body of texts definitive of new Latin American writing which for that very reason can be adequately approached only if received critical positions are reappraised (see her 'Postmodernismo, postcolonialismo y la recuperación de la historia subalterna'). Hence she notes the relevance and limits of Said and Spivak's variety of postcolonialism; and of Yúdice's claim that since the 1960s Latin America already had its

own brand of postmodernism. For Palaversich, Yúdice's account of *Me llamo* errs since in the last instance it does not resist 'la inclusión de la narrativa testimonial dentro del marco del todo englobador del postmodernismo'. Closer to her purpose is the school of theorists who have charted the defence and recovery of aboriginal culture in Australasia, e.g. Helen Tiffin's critique of the 'neo-universalism' that hegemonically labels texts postmodern regardless of their authors' particular cultural base or formative colonial experience.

From this position it is easier to gauge the full intent of the neoliberal onslaught led in Latin America by Vargas Llosa, who in his notorious piece in *Harper's Magazine* (1990) opined that as an obstacle to 'progress' and 'modernization' remaining native Americans should give up their cultures, languages and beliefs altogether. In his day the liberal Sarmiento, admirer of Cooper, had railed at Ercilla for having dignified the Mapuche in his Araucanian epic, thus complicating the progress and racial cleansing he was planning for the emergent nation-state of Argentina; for him, Ercilla's heroes Colocolo, Lautaro and Cautopolcan were 'just a bunch of disgusting Indians whom we'd have hanged today'.⁶ Nothing if not direct in its turn, Vargas Llosa's exclusion informs his novel *El hablador* (1987) and is visible in his criticism, in his obsessive attempts to assign the Andean José María Arguedas's work to the realm of 'fantasy and myth', along with that of Arguedas's meso-american counterpart Asturias, whose engagement with the *Popol vuh* is deemed at best folkloric and at worst a symptom of intellectual incoherence.

There has long been a cavil within Marxism whereby its scheme could at best hope to correct the excesses of capitalism only through mirroring them, through antithesis rather than thesis; and that its taking the industrial proletariat as social prerequisite exposes a certain tuck in the cultural imagination of the west. Explicit in critiques by Mao and Giap, this thought has been echoed in America by Che Guevara, Eduardo Galeano, the Sioux and other contributors to *Marxism and Native Americans* (Churchill, 1982), and, in her way, Rigoberta Menchú. For their part, sociological theories of 'dependency', and even more so, of globalization, assert capitalism's primacy without even the illusion of another path. In these circumstances, it is surely ill-advised to apply western theories to non-western cultures if the result, as in Levinson's reading of Menchú, is the stifling, to put it mildly, of remaining sources of resistance to what all agree is malignant practice. On the literary plane, this means taking the trouble to read and ponder texts like the *Popol vuh*, the Machiguenga genesis, or Lienlaf's poetry, and hence perceive another history (if not 'master narrative'), in which the west is a late arrival, and another cosmogony, which has its own recipes for human survival.

Notes

1. Sá (1997) details the key modifications made by Vargas Llosa to Machiguenga originals; cf. Franco, 1991.
2. See Wright, 1992; Brotherston, 1992. At the 'III Simposio Códices y Documentos sobre México' (Puebla, August 1996), Lauro Caso Barrera revealed the strength of the Maya tradition in Peten over centuries ('Localización y análisis de documentos maya itaes').
3. This question is a major focus in Brotherston, 1997 (a revised and expanded version of *Book of the Fourth World: Reading the Native Americas through their Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 1992), and was put forward earlier in articles gathered in *Image of the New World* (Thames & Hudson, 1979); see also Klein's forceful statement (1995).

4. See Brotherston and Gómez, 1996; Brotherston, 1997, gives fourth world references not otherwise noted here.
5. Montemayor, 1992; Brotherston, 1996. In 'The encounter of two worlds: E. Burgos and R. Menchú in *Me llamo ...*' (XXVIII Annual Congress of the Canadian Association for Latin American and Caribbean Studies', York University, Toronto, November 1996), Natalia Gómez notes how for the Maya the problem has become not so much 'underdevelopment' as the application to them of theories of underdevelopment.
6. Para nosotros, Colocolo, Lautaro y Caupolican, no obstante los ropajes nobles y civilizados con que los revistiera Ercilla, no son más que unos indios asquerosos, a quienes habríamos hecho colgar ahora; quoted in Viñas, 1982; p. 53. Vargas Llosa's stance here (1990, 1992, 1996) differs from that adopted in his first engagement with Arguedas (1964).

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