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# Guatemalan Spanish As Act Of Identity: An Analysis Of Language And Minor Literature Within Modern Maya Literary Production

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GUATEMALAN SPANISH AS ACT OF IDENTITY: AN ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE AND  
MINOR LITERATURE WITHIN MODERN MAYA LITERARY PRODUCTION

by

KENNETH YANES

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2014

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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## Abstract

GUATEMALAN SPANISH AS ACT OF IDENTITY: AN ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE AND  
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Adviser: Professor Magdalena Perkowska

My study approaches the use of Guatemalan Spanish in modern Maya literary works through a theoretical framework drawn on theories of “purity” and *mestizaje*, the concept of minor literature, and “image” and ideology of language. I problematize the “major”/“minor” dichotomy of language based on a Eurocentric view of the dominance of national languages as the extremely diverse linguistic ecology of Latin American lends itself to the deterritorialization of hegemonic discourse, but without sustaining a neat categorization of language. Guatemalan Spanish is a heavily Maya-inflected interlanguage shared by *all* Guatemalans. Mayan writers chose purposefully to counter the ladino ethnocentrism of the time, including its ideologies of racial and linguistic “purity.” In spite of the racial caste system that stealthily thrives to this day, these literary works force readers to confront that not only ladino (*mestizo*) culture has infiltrated Maya society, but that all Guatemalans have been culturally and linguistically mayanized.

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## Introduction

The demand for language rights has been at the fore of the pan-Mayan movement ever since its first manifestations in the early 1970s, which occurred in tandem with the birth of modern Maya literary production. The pan-Maya movement ignited as a reaction against policies of *ladinization*, a campaign to render the Maya “more Hispanic” or ladino (the locally preferred term for *mestizo*) through linguistic and cultural reeducation at the end of the 1940s (Fischer and Brown 1996). It was then a movement that remained latent after the CIA-backed counterrevolution of June 1954, which banished President Jacobo Árbenz along with his progressive social and economic reforms that were auspicious to the landholding Maya peasants. After nearly two decades under reinstalled military regimes, Maya communities mobilized at the grassroots level to establish revolutionary parties, workers unions, and cultural associations (Bastos and Camus 19).

This was the sociopolitical landscape that broke the silence of founding modern Maya writers, such as novelists of Luis de Lión and Gaspar Pedro González and poets Humberto Ak’abal, Calixta Gabriel Xiquín, Maya Cú Choc, and Rosa Chávez. Luis de Lión was not only to be a leader within the *Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo*, but also to produce his unprecedented novel, *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá*, written in the early 1970s and published posthumously after nearly a decade in 1985. Gaspar Pedro González, a professor of Maya language and activist aligned directly with the pan-Maya movement, similarly began to write *La otra cara (La vida de un maya)* throughout the 1970s. Though published in 1993 before the Peace Accords of 1996, it was the first novel to be written in a Maya language, Q’anjob’al, and to be simultaneously translated into Spanish by the bilingual author. These two literary works

are to be considered the foundation of the modern Maya literary tradition and the trailblazers for the wave of literary production that accompanied the pan-Maya movement.

Context is very much a part of what shapes the language identity of a speaker, as much as a speaker shapes his/her own context and community. According to Robert Le Page and Andrée Tabouret-Keller's (1985) seminal study on West Indian creoles, every utterance should be taken as an "act of identity." Serving as the trailblazing work for an emerging Maya literary movement, Luis de Li3n's novel has been lauded and analyzed for nearly three decades. Yet his use of popular Guatemalan Spanish has only been noted as serving to link Mayan literary production to literate Guatemalan ladinos, Latin American, and international audiences (Palacios 579). The Maya novel's use of Guatemalan Spanish has been also analyzed, following Deleuze and Guattari's (1986) concept of minor literature, as a hybrid language "subverted from within by its invisible other, *kaqchikel*" (Arias 2008, 15). These explanations are valid and cogently presented, but there are still questions left unanswered regarding the sociology of Guatemalan Spanish and its manifestation as authentic, rather than constructed, Maya discourse. These questions stem from the ever-conflicted provenance of Guatemalan Spanish (i.e., lexical and morphosyntactic influence from Maya languages), its status among other varieties of Spanish, and its use within the highly heterogeneous and racialized population of Guatemala.

In this thesis, I examine the use of popular Guatemalan Spanish in modern Maya literary production as observed in Luis de Li3n's *El tiempo principia en Xibalb3*, Gaspar Pedro Gonz3lez's *La otra cara (La vida de un maya)*, and in the vast collections of poetry of Humberto Ak'abal, Calixta Gabriel Xiquin, Maya C3 Choc, and Rosa Ch3vez, which have reached a veritable boom by the turn of the twenty-first century, including the vocalizing of a modern-day, urban variety of Maya feminism. My study will approach the use of this variety of the Spanish



language through a triangulated theoretical framework drawing on theories of “purity” and *mestizaje*, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of minor literature, and “image” and ideology of language. Throughout my analysis, I problematize the “major”/“minor” dichotomy of language based on what I posit, following Spivak, is a Eurocentric view of the dominance of national languages over regional/autochthonous languages. The extremely diverse linguistic ecology of Latin American lends itself to the deterritorialization of hegemonic discourse, but it cannot sustain such a neat categorization of language. Rather than asking whether the Maya subaltern can “speak” or not, I follow previous studies supporting the legitimacy of a Mayan oral and literary tradition, spanning to over two millennia and culminating with its most celebrated text, the *Popol Vuh* (Book of Council), the genesis of the K’iche’ Maya people. Moreover, as the Spanish language and the Latin alphabet are not recent appropriations of the Maya, I would posit that Guatemalan Spanish is a heavily Maya-inflected interlanguage or *koiné* shared by *all* Guatemalans. Mayan writers chose purposefully to counter imminent ladino ethnocentrism of the time, including its ideologies of racial and linguistic “purity.” This would, then, force all Guatemalans to confront the fact that not only ladino culture has infiltrated Maya society, but, that since the conquest, all Guatemalans have been culturally and linguistically mayanized. This is in spite of the racial caste system that stealthily thrives to this day, as is manifested within the *entire* spectrum of variation of Guatemalan Spanish.

### The Pan-Maya Movement & Language Revitalization

In order to understand the current state of Maya literary production and grassroots publishing efforts it is vital to understand the history of language policymaking of Guatemala. The Maya of Guatemala have maintained their languages under a shroud of shame ever since their indoctrination by the Catholic Church through the Spanish conquest. Castilianization was the foremost policy in the assimilation of the Maya population since the Colonial period. After converting and, in some cases, even becoming clergymen in the Church, Guatemalan Maya kept their twenty-two languages alive by covertly practicing their new faith in their own languages (Fischer and Brown, 1996, p. 209). During the Republican period after Guatemala's independence from Spain in 1821, the Constituent Congress called for the eradication of all indigenous languages deeming them "so diverse, incomplete, and imperfect, [...] not sufficient to enlighten the people" (Fischer and Brown, 1996, p. 209). After the rewriting of the constitution in 1965, Article 4 proclaimed Spanish as the official language of Guatemala and Article 110 declared that state must play "a key role in facilitating the integration of indigenous groups into the 'national culture'" (Fischer and Brown, 1996, p. 210). Guatemala had shaped a new "national culture" for itself, one modeled by its Spanish vestiges, which had "benevolently" invited the Maya to join.

With the new constitution of 1965 came the *Ley Orgánica de Educación*, which declared education to be the instrument of community development and that the integration of Indian is of national interest. Article 9 of the *Ley* suggested the possibility of using native language for instruction (Fischer and Brown, 1996, p. 210). This could have possibly been suggested due to a UNESCO (1951) conference, which declared education in the mother tongue of indigenous people to be imperative for their gaining of literacy. The *Ley Orgánica de Educación*, however,

furtively used the “education in the mother tongue” for the state’s *Castellanización Bilingüe* program – created also in 1965 – in order to teach children to read and write in an alphabet, which included letters and sounds that do not exist in Maya languages. This was the same alphabet developed by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), a Protestant group based in Dallas, Texas, focused on the proselytization of the Maya (Helmberger, 2006, p. 70). This was an alphabet created to reflect the phonetics of Spanish and it was developed around the time the SIL officially joined the Guatemalan Ministry of Education in 1952. The use of the mother tongue was simply a transitional step towards the acculturation of Maya children (Fischer and Brown, 1996, p. 211).

By 1982, the civil war had commenced in Guatemala after General José Efraín Ríos Montt’s coup d’état at the time his opponent won the presidential elections on March 7. He commenced a terror campaign throughout the country by hunting down “insurgents” and “communists.” Many Maya in rural areas were rumored to be communists. An outright genocide against the Maya commenced under Ríos Montt’s dictatorship. The brutality continued during Mejía Victores’ dictatorship from 1983 to 1986. Ironically, Ríos Montt, a devout Evangelical Christian, received counsel from the SIL and created policies that allowed for “Maya cultural expression” and the use of indigenous language within the education section – all during his genocide (Helmberger, 2006, p. 73). The policies stood under Mejía Victores. Due to international pressure against the civil war, a new Constitution was written in 1985, which declared “the intention to recognize, respect, and promote the multicultural and plurilingual nature of Guatemalan society” (Helmberger, 2006, p. 74).

The *Programa Nacional de Educación Bilingüe* (PRONEBI) began the institutionalized bilingual education program throughout the country in 1984 – at the height of the war. The main

intention of the program was to “strengthen Maya ethnic identity” and to maintain “the cultural heritage of Guatemala, including indigenous languages” (Helmberger, 2006, p. 74). With funding from UNESCO and the UN Development Program, the PRONEBI program took on the mission of creating and implementing language policy, which included (1) a linguistic census of all varieties of Maya, (2) the development of a standard written version of Maya languages, (3) the teaching of Maya linguistics for native speakers, (4) the training of Maya participants involved in building bilingual programs, (5) the instruction for bilingual teachers to reach a level of literacy strong enough to teach, and (6) the work “to overcome serious, deep-seated mistrust of community members (both families and teachers) of instruction in the language of those who had held power for decades” (Helmberger, 2006, p. 75).

The pan-Maya Movement arose in the mid-1980s. Through this movement came the process of standardization, which could be said began during a meeting in June 1987 at the *Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica*. During this meeting a “unified alphabet” was proposed to be the first endeavor of the newly formed *Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala* (ALMG) (Fisher and Brown, 1996, p. 182-183). The pan-Maya movement found PRONEBI to be a simple apologetic tool from the state, which remained ineffective, and sent a call for state policy recognizing the cultural rights of the Maya (Helmberger, 2006, p. 75). Grassroots efforts to establish *Escuelas Mayas* commenced after the Maya community exclusively chose a new united alphabet. The alphabet recognized phonemes that are specific to Maya languages and not found in Spanish. These *Escuelas Mayas* are private and community-controlled and depend on foreign aid and private donations. For all the planning and policymaking that had taken place at the national level, implementation came down to the Maya communities (Fisher and Brown, 1996, p. 219; Helmberger, 2006, p. 78). Almost twenty years

after, these schools continue to thrive alongside the PRONEBI program, but there has been a lack of accurate reporting of statistics and data collections.

Maya languages have thrived in the midst of conquests, proselytization, colonialism, socioeconomic inequalities, and globalization, which have all threatened their vitality. Their cultures are at stake at this very moment. As much as the Guatemalan state has become involved with the linguistic rights and language and educational policies, it is up to the Maya to implement their own policies by grassroots efforts, exactly as Hornberger (1998) suggests, with a “bottom-up policymaking movement” (442). These national governments will only act once there is evidence of the implementation of policies – the same policies they fail to implement. The promotion of agency among the indigenous people aids the progress of linguistic rights. Western theories are not enough to examine the maintenance of indigenous cultures and languages. There need for theories and approaches that are born within non-Western theories of power-knowledge.

### **Bilingualism in Guatemala: State of the Sociolinguistic Field**

The scholarship dedicated to the sociolinguistic landscape of Guatemala spreads throughout different disciplines and fields such as educational policy, linguistics, sociology, and anthropology. Many Guatemalan, North American, and European scholars and journalists have studied the topic of bilingualism in Guatemala through different approaches, theories, and methods. They have addressed sundry questions on diverging forms of Guatemala nationalism (chiefly *ladino* vs. Mayan) and its influences on the creation and use of language education policies and curriculum in Guatemala through its Ministry of Education and the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (ALMG). Among these scholars are those who specifically focus

on language and educational policies, but I have also included scholars on language attitudes, ideology of language, glottopolitics and ethnography to inform the lens of my study.

The studies of Michael Richards and Julia Becker Richards date back to 1987, a year that marked the launch of educational linguistic policy studies in Guatemala, specifically on bilingual Maya-Spanish curriculum. The couple (he an anthropologist and she a specialist in educational policy studies from University of Wisconsin – Madison) was commissioned by the Guatemalan Ministry of Education during the inception of the PRONEBI program, the country's first attempt at designing and implementing a bilingual education curriculum. *A Historical, Cultural, Linguistic and Sociolinguistic Overview of the Four Major Language Regions of Guatemala* (1987) served to introduce those working in the educational sector to the four main language communities that would be served by the PRONEBI program: Kaqchikel, K'iche', Mam and Kekchi. The document legitimizes each as its own language descending from a Proto-K'ichean Maya language. The first section emphasizes the differences between languages and dialects, more than likely to apprise Guatemalans of the pejorative connotations of the latter term. The book continues to cover key historical developments in each language's grammar. Final section reviews the design and methodology of their sociolinguistic survey to justify the policies placed under PRONEBI.

Richards and Becker Richards's *Un Perfil de los Idiomas y Comunidades Atendidas por El Programa Nacional de Educación Bilingüe de Guatemala* (1988) provides a condensed version of their previous publication, which is designed for pedagogical support and perhaps even for a less specialized public in Guatemala. The book commences, again, with a detailed explanation of the differences between a language and dialect. The second part contains short histories and descriptions of each of the four languages, but with the addition of many more

charts and maps. These two texts could also be considered primary sources, as they were commissioned by the Ministry of Education.

Becker Richards's article "Mayan language planning for bilingual education in Guatemala" (1989) was published in the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* after she and her partner completed their initial work for the Ministry of Education's PRONEBI program. Becker Richards traces the stages of policy making after the revised Constitution of 1985, which called for more recognition of Guatemala's ethnic diversity. She confirms that much progress has been made since the time of policies of assimilation, but that there is still much need for more research throughout the implementation of the PRONEBI program. She legitimizes the work she and her partner have done thus far and will continue to do as commissions for foreign scholars continue throughout the lifespan of the program. Richards and Becker Richards's chapter "Mayan language literacy in Guatemala: A socio-historical overview" in *Indigenous Literacies in the Americas* (1997), edited by Nancy H. Hornberger, continues where Becker Richards left off in 1989: the development of an "alphabet war" regarding specific letters and diacritics that should be used for each phoneme to best address the issues of orthography in each language. They, moreover, emphasize a greater need for foreign involvement through organizations such as UNESCO, especially for the funding of copious amounts of textbooks and grammars that have been published since the founding of the ALMG.

The ALMG's *Ley de La Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala y su Reglamento* (1992) is a unique document in Guatemalan history that expounds on the purposes, legitimacy, organization, uses and funding of the ALMG. The *Ley* was written during the same time as the congress decrees that recognized the ALMG as the authoritative institution responsible for the standardization and maintenance of all Maya languages of Guatemala. This document is the

foundation of the ALMG's legitimacy as an *academy* that would go on to publish innumerable textbooks, grammars, and linguistic catalogues: the fruition of its objectives for language revitalization.

M. Paul Lewis's article "La Etnicidad, el Movimiento Etnico y el Nacionalismo Etnico: Observaciones en torno al Movimiento Maya" (1996) makes a claim for the legitimacy of the organization he represents: The Summer Institute of Linguistics. Nearly four years after the establishing of the ALMG, Lewis claims that the pan-Maya movement has been thwarted because of mere ethnic feuds that have not allowed equal standardization of all Maya languages. Squabbles over rudimentary questions such as spelling have divided the Kaqchikel community from that of the K'iche', the two largest Maya communities of Guatemala. There was a need for an outside organization to bolster with development of the ALMG and its projects throughout the country.

In *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala* (1996), Edward Fischer and R. McKenna Brown espouse that all significant strides towards indigenous rights, especially a place in language education and policymaking, start at the grassroots level. Fischer and Brown trace the formation of the pan-Maya movement of Guatemala, which has its roots during the *ladinization* (the adoption of non-Indian culture) of the late 1940s. As explained earlier, this movement was interrupted during the dictatorships and civil war of the 1970s and 1980s, a period during which an outright Maya genocide was attempted. The movement saw its renaissance in the early 1990s and thereafter has been championing equal rights for Mayas and fostering Maya arts, traditional dress, literature, language and educational policy. The last chapter in the book documents the policies of *Castilianization*, which began during the Spanish conquest of Guatemala. It also covers the birth of the USAID-funded PRONEBI in 1983 at the height of the civil war, and the



*Escuelas Mayas*, which were developed privately within Maya communities and funded by foreign aid and private donations (208-221).

Brown continues his studies on pan-Mayanism along with Susan Grazon, Julia Becker Richards, and Wuqu' Ajpub' in *The Life of Our Language: Kaqchikel Maya Maintenance, Shift, and Revitalization* (1998). The authors focus specifically on the case of Kaqchikel, which is one of the most commonly spoken Maya languages. The book offers a variety of case studies and even one chapter written by a native Kaqchikel speaker, who offers his insight on the relations between his native language and Spanish within Guatemalan society. At the end of the book, Brown offers a history of Maya language revitalization in Guatemala within all the varieties of Maya. She documents the growth of Kaqchikel nationalism and its efforts toward the implementation of bilingual education throughout its linguistic territories.

Janet Helmberger's article "Language and Ethnicity: Multiple Literacies in Context, Language Education in Guatemala" (2006) examines the evolution of bilingual education in Maya communities in Guatemala, looking at the effects of various groups and historical events on the development of literacy programs in indigenous communities. She continues where Fischer and Brown (1996) left off nearly two decades after the inception of the PRONEBI program. The development of policymaking for Maya bilingual education has improved in spite of the unstable sociopolitical climate of the country. The civil war proved to be one of the worst tragedies for the Maya people since colonization. Literacy in both Maya and Spanish is helping and supporting the pan-Maya movement, which has enlightened many young Mayas socially, culturally, economically, and politically – especially after the Peace Accords of 1996. Helmberger finds that Guatemala has a lack of accurate reporting of statistics and data collections after twenty years of educational reform. Quantitative studies on the implementation

of these policies will be difficult, yet necessary for the adequate monitoring of the implementation.

Nancy H. Hornberger's work focuses on language rights of indigenous and immigrant populations. In "Language policy, language education, language rights: Indigenous, immigrant, and international perspectives" (1998), she explains that language policy and education are the chief means of revitalizing indigenous languages by facilitating the intergenerational language transmission. After citing various examples of indigenous language programs throughout the world, she concludes that all policymaking has to occur "bottom-up" with "the involvement and initiative of the indigenous communities," which can "provide the impetus and sustenance for language planning efforts" (442). Through Hornberger, one of the founders of the new Educational Linguistics field, I gained approaches to indigenous language revitalization and the issues of *linguicism* – a form of prejudice based on choice and use of languages. Hornberger determines that it is essential to empower language minorities throughout the world in order to preserve their vitality since no government will help the cause (454).

Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil is one of Guatemala's most prominent Maya intellectuals. He was trained in both Guatemala and the United States during the early stages of bilingual education planning and linguistic and cultural revitalization through the pan-Maya movement during the late 1980s. Many of his essays, including "Identidad étnica / identidad nacional" (1996) and "El proceso de mayanización y el papel de la educación escolar (Análisis documental)" (2007) take an ethnically essentialist lens in critiquing educational policies in Guatemala. All that hinders *mayanización* of the curriculum originates from ethnic divides, which the ladino hegemony has structured and continues to dominate. Another essay (2002) has argued that there is no other

choice, but implementation of bilingual education through grassroots efforts as negotiations between indigenous civil society and the Guatemalan state have not been cooperative or fruitful.

In *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics: Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala* (1998), Kay B. Warren traces the history of public Maya intellectuals, such as Rigoberta Menchu Tum and Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil, who are shaping pan-Maya consciousness and politics. This book is a return to the field she discovered in the late 1960s as a doctoral student. She follows the developments of a small town near Lake Atitlan and observes a new discourse on Maya identity and rights. Warren's main concern is the employment of "strategic essentialism" causing a divide based on race rather than class. There are two main hindrances against the pan-Maya movement. The ladino reaction reflects a latent fear. They do not want to be replaced and are doubtful of their place in Guatemalan society if the Maya were to ascend to power. They, therefore, legitimize their hegemony for the "progress" of the country. On the other hand, Maya intellectuals should not draw dividing lines only based on race. They hinder the progress of communication when they blame even ladino peasants as much as they do the ladino elite. Warren suggest that strife is chiefly socioeconomic, yet still not evident in a country steeped in racist discourse.

Arturo Arias's essays in *Taking Their Word: Literature and the Signs of Central America* (2008) take a very similar stance to Warren's and label some discourses within the pan-Maya movement as "reverse racism" and mimicry of the ladino hegemony. He notes that the K'iche' have always been the merchant class and have developed considerable wealth especially in the Quetzaltenango region. The Kaqchikel, however, are well connected to foreign scholars and have produced the majority of public intellectuals. Arias gives the example of a squabble over the very spelling of "K'iche'": native speakers argued for an extra [e] before the glottal stop

during an ALMG meeting, the Kaqchikel vehemently disagreed and the extra [e] was never added. Thus, after declining relations between the two groups, the ALMG seldom publishes texts on the K'iche' language (531). This is the essence of what has kept the movement from triumphing and getting more national attention. Maya intellectuals have eschewed dealing with the Guatemalan state and go directly to the international fore. They have their form of international relations and use of linguistics studies and theories to benefit their cause, but it all remains null within the country as their strides and efforts are not made understood to the ladino population. Arias argues that it should be more a struggle of class than ethnicity.

Emilio del Valle Escalante's book *Maya Nationalisms and Postcolonial Challenges in Guatemala: Coloniality, Modernity, and Identity Politics* (2009) takes a postcolonial perspective to scrutinize the emergence of the pan-Maya movement in Guatemala. Even though he is of K'iche' Maya origin, he does not give his reader the "insider view." The crux of the study is a critical reading of the discourses found in literature, journalism, testimonial narratives and educational projects. The fifth chapter of his book deals closely with the bilingual educational policy, though with a focus on the concept of "intercultural citizenship." Much like Warren (1998) and Arias (2007; 2008), del Valle Escalante is quite critical of the idea of "biological cultural identity." He suggests that the movement should be "popular" rather than "cultural" to invite a more inclusive dialogue that should start with intercultural education and training.

### **A New Maya Language, Appropriated and Subversive**

Modern Maya writers did not have to actively appropriate the Spanish language in order to speak through their literature. The sixteenth-century Maya had already appropriated Spanish for their own prerogative and that of their progeny. Although many of the Maya throughout

Guatemala today have a limited command of the Spanish language or do not speak it at all, it is important to highlight that, the Kaqchikel (approximately 500,000 speakers) and K'iche' (approximately 1 million speakers)<sup>1</sup> peoples have had the most contact with the Guatemalan metropolis and ladino populations. Ever since the Maya gradually came in contact with the language of the conquistadors during the first half of the sixteenth century, they did not passively learn the language and alphabet to mediate with their oppressors. As Martin Lienhard explains, the Maya found it urgent to clandestinely maintain their literary inheritance:

Al contrario de los quechuas y de los aztecas, que lo [el alfabeto] usaban casi exclusivamente para pedir cuentas a la administración española y negociar con ella, los mayas lo dedicaron a sus propios fines historiográficos, mitográficos y otros [...] el alfabeto favoreció el surgimiento de una literatura clandestina, escrita –mediante el alfabeto– por indígenas y destinada a los mismos indígenas (268-269).

Literary legitimacy was never bestowed upon the Maya through Spanish literacy or through *indigenismo* writers such as Miguel Angel Asturias. They were the agents of their own literary maintenance and revival. Hence the *Popol Vuh* was transcribed phonetically using the Latin alphabet of the Spaniards in the mid-sixteenth century, as the knowledge of Maya scribes was swiftly lost after the mass exterminations during the conquest.

Using the resources of a different language did not faze the Maya, as they have always been a multilingual society and, as Arturo Arias (2007) explains, the need to preserve more than a literary legitimacy was paramount:

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<sup>1</sup> These figures are according to the latest Guatemalan census (2014). <http://www.ine.gob.gt/index.php/estadisticas>

In the *Popol Vuh* K'iché leaders declare that they have received the insignia and gifts of Quetzalcoatl or Kulkulkán, the feathered serpent, the highest deity in the cosmos, gods of arts and culture. In other words, they declare that they, too, were civilized peoples. Or, rather, that they were *the* civilized peoples. To them, the Spaniards were simply the barbarians who won the war (56).

Once that Maya were under Spanish rule, the act of writing went beyond the preservation and maintenance of their ancestors' word. It became an act of subversion and an act of identity. They had always been a literate society, in spite of the “new” debased identity allotted through the colonial caste system; an identity that has survived up until this day. In his thesis, *El problema social del indio* (1923), Miguel Ángel Asturias' stance is quite clearly in accordance with the caste system: “Una vez que haya elevado su nivel cultural, él [indio] mismo hará la transculturación y será un elemento provechoso para nuestra cultura” (139). According to Asturias, as other *indigenista* writers, the *indio* continues to mar all facets of Guatemalan “culture.” They are homely remnants of a “dead” culture, which should only be remembered as the nation's collective ancestry.

### **Guatemalan Spanish as Mongolian Spot**

No two languages in contact can thrive together without conflict. Throughout the history of the conquest, language played a central role in the exchange between Europeans and the indigenous nations. Clergymen first thought it best to proselytize the people of the new world in the indigenous languages. They applied themselves to learning indigenous languages for the propagation of the “Word of God,” though eventually forcing all subjects of the Spanish crown to learn the “true” language of the faith. Spanish was not only the language of the invaders, but

also the language of their one god. Once the already volatile and diverse variations of Peninsular Spanish made to the Americas, they immediately acquired words of a newfound land with distinct flora, fauna, foods, instruments, and images. As “holy” and “rational” a language Spanish was touted to be, it did not shun the appropriation of words, intonation, and many morphosyntactic traits of the various Maya languages. Nor were Maya languages left unaltered once they came in contact with Spanish; many Maya languages today are punctuated with Spanish discourse markers (Brody 1987).

Nearly six centuries of contact between Spanish and indigenous languages have rendered sundry variations of Latin American Spanish, which have shaped national identities albeit to the chagrin of the Real Academia Española. Nationalism and ethnocentrism during the nineteenth and twentieth century have fomented the policies of standardization of “major” and “national” languages throughout the world. José del Valle (2007) proposes that after the fall of the Franco’s dictatorship and the founding of the Spanish Constitution of 1978, the glottopolitics<sup>2</sup> of the time fomented linguistic policies that were implemented to unify the country (31). This movement led toward a pan-Hispanic ideology, which would unite Spain with its former colonies across the Atlantic. The campaign, steeped in neocolonial ambitions, aimed at conjuring the image of a community, “una patria común,” for the cultural, social, and economic benefit of all its linguistic “citizens” throughout the world (49-53). The middleclass and rich who trace racial and cultural heritage to Spanish, such as ladinos in Guatemala, buy into the idea of pan-Hispanic community. Such a stance is an act of identity that set them as racially and economically superior within their

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of glottopolitics is defined by Guespin and Marcellesi: “Il désigne les diverses approches qu'une société a de l'action sur le langage, qu'elle en soit ou non consciente : aussi bien la langue, quand la société légifère sur les statuts réciproques du français et des langues minoritaires par exemple ; la parole, quand elle réprime tel emploi chez tel ou tel ; le discours, quand l'école fait de la production de tel type de texte matière à examen : Glottopolitique est nécessaire pour englober tous les faits de langage où l'action de la société revêt la forme du politique.” (1986: 5).

countries and regions. One must ask, however, how a variety such as Guatemalan Spanish would fit into the pan-Hispanic mold of linguistic uniformity.

Guatemalan Spanish, as all other Latin American varieties, was born out of the fecundity of linguistic contact and conflicts. John Lipski (2008) suggests, however, that Guatemalan Spanish is a linguistic system that developed on the margins since its colonial onset. Pirates and the Spanish government often ignored Guatemala and other “drift territories” of Costa Rica due to its impassible terrain and lack of natural harbors. The Spanish of Guatemala, thus, developed in isolation and now shows many signs of “linguistic abandonment” and archaisms (180). To this day, there is a vast dearth of rigorous linguistic study of Guatemalan Spanish, aside from folk lexicography (Sandoval 1941; Armas 1971; Morales Pellecer 2001) and conflicting results regarding the Maya influence on certain morphology, such as the -al suffix (Predmore 1952), and the unique, endemic syntactic traits, especially the indefinite article + possessive + noun construction, i.e. *una mi amiga* (Martin 1979, 1985; Herrera Peña 1993; Tesoro García 2002, 2011). There are almost no studies on the prosody and intonation of Guatemalan Spanish, though Morales Pellecer (2002) admits, “Además, por ser mayoritaria la población indígena, la pronunciación del español presenta, [...] como en la entonación, influencia de la pronunciación de las lenguas indígenas” (xii).

Out of these studies, the two American scholars, Laura Martin and Richard Predmore, suggest direct influence of Maya languages on Guatemalan Spanish. Guatemalan linguists, such as Guillermina Herra Peña and Ana Isabel García Tesoro, found such an influence unlikely or difficult to ascertain. Some lexicographers, such as Daniel Armas, a once active member of la Academia Guatemalteca de la Lengua, admits in his preface that Guatemalan Spanish is spoken uniformly within all social spheres of the country: “El decir vulgar, grotesco y procaz, con



frecuencia ingenioso [... es] del dominio, tanto del campesino y del artesano, como del estudiante, del profesor y del banquero, si bien en el caso de la gente culta se reduzca más al seno de la intimidad de familiares y amigos” (11). Armas then goes on to enumerate an array of Nahautl loan words from Mexico, as if any form of indigenous lexical borrowing were the result of foreign contamination (13). Armas, nevertheless, refuses to make any mention of Maya influences in his dictionary, though he includes an abundance of entries that are unmistakably Maya loan words, especially those including with the [ʃ] phoneme. This at least is an improvement compared to Lisandro Sandoval’s (1941) sizable, two-tome dictionary that refused to include any *guatemaltequismo* with the [ʃ] phoneme.

I would posit that this is all due to the fact that lettered hegemonic class of Guatemalan ladinos do not want to uncover and admit that their variety of Spanish is “indigenized.” Within the context of pan-Hispanic community and its normative language, Guatemalan ladinos have a fear of admitting that they speak like *indios*. Guatemalan Spanish is filled with traits that are to be guarded in privacy, lest it appear to be “othered” by the linguistic and racial legacies of their indigenous heritage. I would link this complex of linguistic inferiority to the prevalent racial complex of the Mongolian Spot in Guatemala.<sup>3</sup> This complex goes hand-in-hand with what Mario Roberto Morales (1998), Guatemalan sociologist and novelist, calls *el síndrome de Maximón*, named after one of the chief folk saints of the Maya-Christian syncretic faith. It is an

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<sup>3</sup> Arias (2008) explains in note 6 of his article that, “Although Mayas, and other indigenous groups, recognize their origins –and their literary origins– [...] ladinos often regarded it more as kind of Mongolian Spot, inevitably marking an indigenous inheritance that they would prefer to hide and deny. Dr. Erwin Bälz (1849-1913) was a German internist, anthropologist, and personal physician of the Japanese Imperial family. In 1885 he published a paper in a German anthropological journal calling attention to an unrecorded feature among Japanese babies. They were often born with a dark blue stain, low down on the back that gradually fades and disappears after about a year. He called the stain *Mongolische Flecken*, Mongolian Spots, and associated it with all peoples he thought were of Mongolian origin. This label stuck with indigenous peoples, who indeed were born with a purplish spot in the small of the back. In Guatemala, this led to a widespread fear of being born with one. The Mongolian Spot has, thus, remained an invisible scar, a phantasm of an ethnic inferiority complex on the part of ladinos to this day, pointing to their difficulty in constituting themselves as a hegemonic class” (25).

identity neurosis among ladinos, as opposed to a fully realized act of identity, which produces an ambivalence of negation/affirmation and shame/pride within the *mestizo* self (332).

### Luis de Li3n Unmasks Guatemalan Spanish

Luis de Li3n purposefully makes use of Guatemalan Spanish in *El tiempo principia en Xibalb3* to force his ladino and international readers to face “la lengua mestiza,” which is a direct stance against pan-Hispanic or *novohispanic* language ideologies. Mauro Fern3ndez (2007) exposes a similar *mestizo* linguistic ideology of “lengua diversa, pero no con una diversidad tasada y definitivamente establecida, sino como una diversidad continuamente productiva” (67). Luis de Li3n, the writer’s pseudonym, is a play on his real name, Jos3 Luis de Le3n D3az, following a characteristic phonological shift in Guatemalan Spanish that palatalizes and breaks the [e] + vowel hiatus. Thus, pelear [pe.le.ar] is pronounced as [pel.jar] and Leon [le.on] as [ljon]. Luis de Li3n divulges the secret of a common *koin3* shared within all socioeconomic strata in Guatemala; an “illegitimate language” ladinos wish to keep in private and represent solely within the context of *indigenista* literature. This is no longer the “major” language of “la madre patria” or of the Church, and it is rendered disadvantaged within the hegemonic context of the pan-Hispanic “patria com3n.”

If Luis de Li3n’s novel is examined through Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of minor literature, one does find that language is deterritorialized through the Maya’s marginalized position and through traditional Maya rhetorical forms inspired by the *Popol Vuh* (Martin 2007). The very act of writing as a Maya in Guatemala is a political act of a collective and enunciative value, which clearly follows the central characteristics of minor literature. Guatemalan Spanish, however, is not a “major” standardized language, thus problematizing the “major”/“minor”

dichotomy that informs the concept of minor literature. Again, within the context of the pan-Hispanic community, Guatemalan Spanish is a disadvantaged language born out of “linguistic abandonment” and Maya inflection. Yet, Luis de Li3n deterritorializes Guatemalan Spanish from *within* itself, from its ineluctably ingrained Maya heritage – containing its own literary tradition and authority and fully reveals Guatemala’s collective “Mongolian Spot” to the world. He does not need to appropriate Guatemalan Spanish from this place on the margins of society. Guatemalan Spanish is Luis de Li3n’s act of identity within the context of the pan-Maya movement and its pursuit of agency and self-representation. Guatemalan Spanish *is* Luis de Li3n’s language just as it is the language of many Maya who are bilingual or who can no longer speak a Maya language<sup>4</sup>.

The rhetoric and symbolism of duality found throughout the story of the heroic twins of the *Popol Vuh*, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, inspired the circular and spiraling narrative within *El tiempo principia en Xibalb3*. The novel’s characters and narrator blur into one another within the tensions of Maya/ladino cultural dualities. Rita Palacios (2011) “perceive[s] this tension to be a site of negotiation in which De Li3n’s fictitious town articulates an Indigenous hybridity” (582). This negotiation of “Indigenous hybridity” exposes that even from within the misery of the margins of an already marginalized country, the Maya, unlike ladinos, are not in denial of their heterogeneous identity. Though they struggle to maintain their language and culture, they are not immune to *ladinization*:

Cuando Pascual regres3 al pueblo traía, adem3s de los a3os que lo habían llevado de ni3o a hombre, una cara como si ya fuera de otra parte: traía en los dientes, en lugar de algunos de ellos, pedazos de oro que trataba de mostrar con orgullo

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<sup>4</sup> Arias (2007) explains that Luis de Li3n never wrote or translated his work into Kaqchikel, the language of his family, because, most likely, was no longer fluent in it (67).

cuando reía o hablaba; traía en la boca palabras raras, desconocidas como de hombre que ha aprendido otros idiomas; traía en los pies zapatos en lugar de caites; traía en la cabeza sombrero de vicuña en lugar de la gracia del sombrero de petate y en el cuerpo ropa distinta de la que se usaba en la aldea. Ya no era de aquí. Así parecía.

Pascual returns to his village changed man after a failed attempt to live among urban ladino society. The above passage, written following the cyclical and nonlinear traditional Maya rhetorical style<sup>5</sup> (as I have underlined), juxtaposes physical traits, clothing, and language from both sides of margin in which Pascual inhabits. His strange words are those of urban life and of a failed military career, far from the reality of his village. He no longer wears his *caites* (leather sandals) or his *petate* (straw) hat. These are just a few examples of Maya borrowings found throughout the novel.<sup>6</sup> The 1985 Serviprensa, Guatemala edition of *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá* includes a minute glossary of only eleven *guatemaltequismos* that are commonly used throughout all strata of Guatemalan society, as Armas (1971) confirms. This glossary, however, hardly covers the extent of *guatemaltequismos* found in the novel. The 1996 Artemis-Edinter, Guatemala edition does not include a glossary. Luis de Lión and his editors were well aware that his Guatemalan ladino readers would understand every word of the novel.

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<sup>5</sup> Martin (2007) exposed a direct influence from the *Popol Vuh*: “[t]his non-linear narrative style is combined with a cyclic organization in which events recur with different characters. Small-scale repetitions of actions, words, events, props, and people combine with larger-scale ones – repeated creations, repeated ball games, repeated appearances of similarly named characters – to form an intricate and dense internal structure that mimics that found in the language of both ritual and ordinary conversation, even today” (49).

<sup>6</sup> Arias (2007) succinctly comments on the nature of Luis de Lión’s Guatemalan Spanish: “In it, Kaqchikel or Castilian linguistic fusion is indicated either by words that function much like tropes in the text itself, such as *patojos* (kids), *naguas* (skirts), *canillas* (legs), *aire más baboso* (air of stupidity), and la *trompa* (the mouth, but literally “snout”), or popular sayings associated with village-style life, as in *hacer una mi necesidá* (literally, “fulfill a need,” but the implication is that of bowel movements, with a grammatically incorrect possessive pronoun, and *necesidá* spelled as pronounced in rural Guatemala, not as the Castilian *necesidad*). These expressions are but a small sample” (67).

As a Maya writer, Luis de Li3n forces his ladino readers to confront the Maya typecasts construed during colonial times, which still remain to this day. Pascual's name is "typical" for Maya because it is antiquated and ugly according to the hegemonic ladino tastes<sup>7</sup>. When his mother announces her name of choice, Doña Chus, the midwife, replies, "Qu3 feo el nombre que se te ocurri3, vos Pied3" (38). Luis de Li3n also confronts his ladino readers with the infamous and prevalent stereotypes of *el indio machetero* (the violent, machete-brandishing Indian) and *el indio borracho* (the Indian drunkard) through Pascual's character (40-41; 45-47). Juan Caca personifies the stereotype of the subservient, cowardly, asexual *indio* throughout the novel. Luis de Li3n self-represents himself as a Maya living under the ladino hegemony, which, in turn, is under the hegemony of pan-Hispanism. Through Guatemalan Spanish, the cross-cultural *koin3*, Luis de Li3n challenges the ladino hegemony to face the social injustice it has forced upon the Maya.

The novel's play on these dualities is a plea for the recognition of the spectrum of cultural hybridity between Maya and ladinos; a hybridity ladinos fail to accept under the influences of pan-Hispanic imperialism. The ladino disregard for hybridity incites the fury and frustration Pascual embodies during his rape of the wooden Virgen Concepci3n, which gives way to the indigenous Virgin-whore. Palacios (2011) posits that the Virgen-whore's ascent to veneration is comparable to the role of Maya folk saints with human needs negotiating between the sacred and the profane: "Violence (murders, brawls, rapes) is rampant and all lines are blurred: what is sacred is profaned, what is profane is sacralized. As a result the constraints placed upon Indigenusness as a mark of difference are disrupted" (589). Following Palacios, I would posit

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<sup>7</sup> Luis de Li3n plays with what seems to be the "arbitrariness" of Maya names: "a veces con apodo cuando no se acordaba de los apellidos como por ejemplo Chico a quien le decían Pajpaj no porque ese fuera su apellido sino porque era el cuetero del pueblo y los cuetes al estallar en el cielo hacían Paj...paj, o como Oscar a quien le decían Chilío pero nadie sabía por qué, o como por ejemplo algùn otro etc3tera" (23).

that Guatemalan Spanish, born out of the “conflict” of linguistic contact, blurs lines of sacred and profane within Maya and Ladino ideologies respectively. Luis de Li3n’s Guatemalan Spanish descends from a time the Spanish language was adopted among the Maya after “barbarians won the war,” yet the lexicon and rhetoric of his Maya ancestors informed and enhanced it. Ladinos view their language as a continuation of that from “la madre patria,” whose “vices” and archaisms should remain conveniently hidden as they hope to find their place within the pan-Hispanic “patria com3n.”

### **Gaspar Pedro Gonz3lez’s Mirror of Maya Bilingualism**

Gaspar Pedro Gonz3lez’s novel, *La otra cara (La vida de un maya)*, a proclaimed *testinovela*<sup>8</sup>, traces the life, education, and activism of Luin, son of Mekel and Lotaxh of Jolomk’u, a village in the mountains of Huehuetenango. It uncovers a succession of injustice lived and suffered throughout any Maya’s life in Guatemala, all for the gain of the ladino hegemony and its tactics for social, political, and economic status quo. The novel expresses the same political authorial consciousness and will as *El tiempo principia en Xibalb3*, though the author decides to address his community in his own language, Q’anjob’al, while translating each chapter into Guatemalan Spanish immediately after. His capability to address his readers in both of his languages is his act of identity as a *bilingual* Maya. In interviews (Sitler 1996; Kahn 2008), Gaspar Pedro Gonz3lez explains that though he was able to simultaneously write his novel in Q’anjob’al and translate it in to Spanish, such a process did not come without its difficulties. Q’anjob’al and Spanish are extremely different languages in terms of their own

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<sup>8</sup> In his interview with Sitler (1996), Gaspar Pedro Gonz3lez affirms that he has not written a traditional testimonial novel, but rather a *testinovela*. The term is coined by Mario Roberto Morales (2005). He differentiates the *testinovela* genre from that of the testimonial novel by placing emphasis on artistic liberty over veracity: “[el] desbordamiento de t3cnicas narrativas por encima del elemento estructurado del texto: la testimonialidad” (3).

stylistics and expressions of abstract concepts such as love, God, and metaphysics. Gaspar Pedro González shares with Sitler (1996) that Maya languages are much pragmatic and concrete, thus having to take more liberties when translating from the Q'anjob'al (5). Such liberties would be questionable if the novel were to be considered a true testimony legitimized through its veracity (that which is at the crux of the Rigoberta Menchú controversy<sup>9</sup>). Thus it is best described as a *testinovela*; the omniscient narrator relates the communal testimony of the community of Jolomk'u through Luin, though they are to be symbols of the plights of *all* present-day Maya throughout Central America. Each experience of poverty, social marginalization, and ladino treachery is a unifying trait for all Maya. Gaspar Pedro González mentions that the novel, at times, is naturally autobiographical due to the common Maya experience throughout Guatemala (Sitler 1996, 22). In spite of all the linguistic challenges that came with writing, translating, and publishing his novel in languages other than Q'anjob'al, Gaspar Pedro González affirms that Maya literature must incorporate the Maya cosmovision in order to be considered authentic Maya representation no matter in what language it is written (Kahn 2008, 159).

*La otra cara (La vida de un maya)* has been a bestseller among Maya readers in spite of the challenges of low readership. Most of the novel's audience, however, has read either the Spanish or English<sup>10</sup> translations. As pertinent to this study, I will chose to focus on Gaspar Pedro González's own translation into the Spanish, which occurred simultaneously as he wrote the novel in Q'anjob'al. He, even more so than Luis de Lión, weaves Guatemalan Spanish strategically within the narration that is predominantly in standard Spanish. Though Guatemalan

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<sup>9</sup> David Stoll's book *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (1999) attempts to uncover inconsistencies between his fieldwork and Rigoberta Menchú's memoir, which she wrote with the assistance of anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos. Stoll criticizes many Western academics of romanticizing guerrillas in Latin America. Many contemporary scholars and activists contest Stoll's claims and accuse him of bias in support of the Guatemalan Military.

<sup>10</sup> The novel was translated from the Maya Q'anjob'al by Elaine Elliot and published by Yax Te' Foundation in 1995.

Spanish is a unifying *koiné* among all Guatemalans, Gaspar Pedro González employs it only when his Maya characters come in contact with ladinos. The use of standard, neutral Spanish is to be considered the performance of Maya Q'anjob'al, as we know that many of the characters from Jolomk'u barely speak or understand Spanish, including Lotaxh, Luin's mother. She has a disagreeable encounter away from Jolomk'u at the town market when a ladina, accompanied by her Maya *muchacha* (maid), rudely manipulates and forces her to haggle:

“Se le quedó viendo a Lotaxh y le dijo:

–¿Cuánto pedís para estos pollos secos, vos mija?

Ella movió la cabeza y le dijo a la muchacha que no entendía.

–Nía Amarilis, dice que no entiende la castilla.

–Preguntá, vos pué.

Al ser consultada por la intérprete, Lotaxh dijo en su castilla:

–Trez quetzal, nanita.

–¿Por estos animales que no pesan nada? ¿ve? ¿Cómo te atrevés? [...] No hay que robar mija, es pecado (62).

The language of this ladina, along with her lack of morals, is *constructed* to appear violent, vehemently sarcastic, and grotesque. Here one finds another ousting of Guatemalan Spanish as being outside of the realm of pan-Hispanic correctness and prestige.

In the glossary of the novel, Gaspar Pedro González explains *voseo* as “expresión vulgar para la segunda persona singular utilizada en Centroamérica” (256). This is to be juxtaposed with *tuteo*, which is employed during the dialogues throughout the novel that are to be understood as occurring in Q'anjob'al. Guatemalan Spanish employs three second-person-singular pronouns, which vary according to register and context. Most Maya languages only



have one way of expressing this pronoun and it is usually done through verb morphology. *Tuteo* is actually quite uncommon among Guatemalan Spanish speakers. It falls between the use of *usted*, for the most formal registers, and the *voseo*, the most informal and intimate of the second-person-singular pronouns. As Armas suggests, Guatemalan Spanish, along with the use of *voseo*, is to be used in intimate contexts, yet the example above portrays a ladina's use of Guatemalan Spanish as an act of disrespect disguised with an air of intimacy when she speaks to Lotaxh. Gaspar Pedro González unveils the violence of ladino language that is falsely polite and intimate through the use of the *koiné*. Instead of addressing an unknown woman as *usted*, she employs *voseo* as a signifier of intimacy that suggests her dominance and utter disrespect for Lotaxh. The ladina, moreover, uses the term of endearment *mija* (a contraction of *mi hija* "my daughter"), which is only fit for addressing children. Gaspar Pedro González makes frequent use of these infantilizing paternalistic signifiers throughout the novel along with the most prevalent racist term *indito* (little indian). The irony culminates when even a judge, the representation of impartiality and propriety, addresses Luin as "mijo" (227). It is not unlike the use of "boy" or "girl" to address African Americans, which was just as prevalent in the United States before the Civil Rights Movement as it is to this day in Guatemala.

The use of *tuteo* woven between passages of Guatemalan Spanish and uttered by the novel's Maya characters is off-putting to the ladino reader, who seldom employs it in his or her own daily speech. Gaspar Pedro González uses it strategically to portray a language, Q'anjob'al, that ladinos have historically othered and marginalized, to reverse the act of othering from the periphery back to the hegemonic center. *Tuteo* is the standard usage for the second-person-singular pronoun in Latin American and Spain, though the *voseo* is commonly heard throughout other Central American, Rioplatense, Chilean, Venezuelan, and Colombian varieties of Spanish.

Those who are alien to its usage fall outside and below pan-Hispanic hegemony and “la patria común.” Gaspar Pedro González is able to deterritorialize Guatemalan Spanish from the outside through his use of a variety that is “above” Guatemalan ladino hegemony.

Following the concept of minor literature, Gaspar Pedro González, like Luis de Lión, deterritorializes Guatemalan Spanish from within through his use of Maya words throughout the novel. In her dissertation “Modern Guatemalan Mayan Literature in Cultural Context: Bilinguaging in the Literary Work of Bilingual Mayan Authors” (2006), Hana Muzika Kahn describes such use of Maya words as code-switching,<sup>11</sup> which is indeed completely natural and usual the utterance of a fully bilingual individual, such as Gaspar Pedro González. Many of the words of Maya origin throughout the novel and its glossary, as in *El tiempo principia en Xibalbá*, are known to all Guatemalan Spanish-speaking readers, including ladinos. Maya words such as *comal* (large pan for cooking tortillas), *chirice* (child), *kuxha* (moonshine), *nia* (ma’am), *paxte* (loofah sponge), *pushito* (a little bit), *tanate* (sack), *xheka* (anise bread), and many more are prevalent even among urban ladino Guatemalans and the Guatemalan diaspora.

As a *testinovela*, *La otra cara (La vida de un maya)* makes use of a variety of novelistic genres including *costumbrismo*, protest novel, didactic novel, and novel of education – a *Bildungsroman* (Thurston-Griswold 2007, 682). As a *Bildungsroman*, it focuses on the bicultural and bilingual education of Luin. As a Q’anjob’al Maya, he learns of *Mam Tyoxh* (Lord God) and the Great Spirit during a spiritual retreat up a sacred mountain with his grandfather. Through his family and community he learns about the communal and service-

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<sup>11</sup> Kahn (2006) suggests that, “Code-switching throughout the text reminds the reader of the linguistic and cultural particularities of the Mayan people. The reader of the Spanish version of the text enters the Q’anjob’al-speaking world through words such as Mam Tyoxh (“Lord God”), all the day names and numbers of the Mayan calendar, (Trece Ajaw, Uno Imox, etc.), than *ajtz’ib* (“writer”) and *zahori* (“soothsayer”) who are repeatedly consulted before any significant action is taken, *nawal* (“spirit”), and the repeated use of Mam as a term of respect. The code-switching in González’s text is selective and emphasizes the lexicon of Mayan world vision and personal identity. The language is always self-reflective, emphasizing the difference between Q’anjob’al and Spanish, and the contrasting world they represent” (125-126).

oriented ways of Maya life. His education in Jolomk'u is bluntly juxtaposed with the education he received in a town four miles away, to and from which he must travel by foot daily. Aside from the physical toll, Luin suffers emotional abuse and racism as he docilely learns Spanish among peers and teachers who constantly humiliate him. Gaspar Pedro González exposes the Guatemalan educational policy of *ladinization* years before having any hope of bilingual instruction. Though Luin was sent to the ladino school during his primary education against his own will, he, like his Maya forefathers during colonization, appropriates the language and books of the ladino hegemony.

Although Luin has no desire to continue onto secondary school, he continues to read and maintain his mind occupied with more abstract issues beyond Jolomk'u's reality. Since his newfound knowledge has made him aware of the misery of his people, he can no longer feign ignorance. Luin becomes the symbol of the bicultural and bilingual Maya, who live *within* "the margins" of two social contexts. It is necessary to emphasize that this is not an issue of social marginalization (as it is the Maya "other" who is *actively* appropriating Guatemalan Spanish), but that of a linguistic and social *agility* that allows switching between Maya and ladino contexts on a quotidian basis. Gaspar Pedro González's act of identity – his having written a novel in Q'anjobal and translated simultaneously it into Spanish – is proof of such social and linguistic agility among many of the Maya in present-day Guatemala.

In her article "Purity, Impurity, and Separation," philosopher Maria Lugones also forms a theory of *mestizaje* and identity in which she juxtaposes the process of "separation" or "curdling" when two seemingly "pure" and distinct elements are mixed. Lugones challenges the concept of "impurity" of identity and gives agency to the *mestizo* or bicultural/bilingual individual to define him or herself:

Curdle-separation is not something that happens to us but something we do. As I have argued, it is something we do in resistance to the logic of control, to the logic of purity. Though transparent fail to see its sense, and thereby keep its sense from structuring our social life, that we curdle testifies to our being active subjects, not consumed by the logic of control. Curdling may be haphazard technique of survival as an active subject, or it can become an art of resistance, metamorphosis, transformation. (478)

Does biculturalism, therefore, mean that one has to give into a “dominant” culture, perhaps that of the hegemony, or does it simply mean that one has the agency to chose and amplify whatever aspects of the two cultures one seems to naturally assume? How do writers such as Luis de Lión and Gaspar Pedro González simultaneously address Maya and ladino readers without having one culture dominate over another within their writing? Lugones’ theories of cultural “purity” and bicultural “curdling” can offer an explanation as to how these writers are comfortable in mixing written and oral traditions (see Grimm 2006, Kahn 2006, and Martin 2007) as written acts of identity of Spanish-speaking and Western-educated Maya.

Michael T. Millar (2005) posits that *La otra cara (La vida de un maya)* is novel that holds up a mirror to Guatemalan society, but it is mirror that says more by “what it does not reflect” (82). Gaspar Pedro González’s discourse within minor literature is undoubtedly pan-Mayanist, but it does not aim to essentialize or “purify” Maya culture. It seeks to deterritorialize both monolithic identities that polarize Guatemalan society. As Luin finds after his years of schooling, it is too late to go back to the venerated past of their ancestors. Ladino and Maya have influenced each other’s cultures, yet without forming a unified *mestizo* Guatemalan culture. The novel lacks a plan for ideological solidarity between the Maya and ladinos because Gaspar

Pedro González simply *cannot* come up with one. At the end of the novel, Luin quotes the *Popol Vuh* on his deathbed, “Que... no... haya... un... grupo... ni... dos... que... se... quede... atrás... de... los... demás” (246). Luin, like his ancestors, appropriated the language of the conquerors to become an educator and activist for his people. He, however, cannot deny that ladinos must be included to form a hybridity that would allow social justice and progress in all of Guatemala. If Lugones’ theory of identity “purity” stands, then who is at odds with such hybridity? What maintains *el síndrome de Maximón*? Who is creating the tensions between the pan-Maya movement and hegemonic Guatemalan nationalism? Is it the bilingual and bicultural author, the Maya reader or the ladino reader? Following Lugones, I would posit that *La otra cara (La vida de un maya)*, as a *testinovela*, is the beginning of a cultural mediation that occurs in the presence of a bicultural--“curdled” in Lugones’ terms--individual, such as Gaspar Pedro González, who has the agency to define his identity through his two languages and forms of writing.

### **Self-Representation and Language Consciousnesses**

As Guatemalan Spanish cannot situate itself within the pan-Hispanic “major” language, it is deterritorialized from within, as seen through various interpretations of pan-Maya ideologies in the literature analyzed in this study. Yet, ladinos avoid the means of uncovering evidence of its Maya inflection. There can be a risk of essentializing ladino/pan-Hispanic identity against that of the pan-Maya movement, thus leaving the bicultural Maya without a space of representation. Hana Muzika Kahn (2006) reveals, moreover, a paradoxical situation within Maya attempts of self-representation:

[T]heir literary skills were developed in an educational system and literary environment, which has hitherto been exclusive Spanish-based in language and culture, but they seek to write with the voice of a Maya. They were exposed to the Mayan oral tradition in their everyday lives and to the western literary tradition in their education. González states that this makes it quite difficult for Maya writers to avoid western literary style in their work. (117)

Kahn here, like Lugones, proposes a “hybrid style” of narrative through the hybridity of identity (117). Tatiana Bubnova (2001) finds Luis de Lión’s Guatemalan Spanish to be an “artistic hybridization of language,” with which I do not agree, as his stark and authentic language cannot be considered as stylized (187). Bubnova, however, does suggest that the heteroglossia of Guatemala Spanish can be understood through Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of the “image of language” (187-188).

Bakhtin (1981), in his essay “Discourse in the Novel,” asserts that it is “impossible to reveal, through a character’s acts and through these acts alone, his ideological position and the ideological world at its heart, without representing his discourse” (335). The image of language within the modern Maya novel intentionally presents Guatemalan Spanish as a *koiné*, the spoken manifestation of Maya cultural hybridity. Such hybridity can be sustained following Bakhtin’s distinction between authorial and character consciousnesses in the novelistic discourse:

a mixture of two *individualized* language consciousnesses [...] and two individual language-intentions as well: the individual, representing authorial consciousness and will, on the one hand, and the individualized linguistic consciousness and will of the character represented, on the other. (359)

Modern Maya writers' authorial consciousness and will is decidedly political and follows the desire to self-represent according to the ideologies of the pan-Maya movement. They wish to write for themselves, about their idiosyncratic forms of hybridity, and on behalf of all Maya peoples of Guatemala, who are then represented as characters in their novels through their languages and through their plight on the margins of Guatemalan society.

### **Negotiating Mayaness and Universality in Contemporary Poetry**

Thus far, this study has considered two of the founding novels of modern Maya literature. Novels of any genre, however, remain few within the number of literary works that have been published since the beginning of the pan-Maya movement. Poetry has proven to be the most accessible form of literary production for many Maya writers throughout the twentieth century until now. For the modern Maya, the task of writing will always be a political act, an act of appropriating language, Maya or Guatemalan Spanish, to self-represent one's identity and hybridity in modern Guatemalan society. Literature is the bridge and point of nexus between the Maya and the globalized, Western-dominated world, as it is a space that is mutually recognizable. It is a space in which the Maya can be the agents of their own culture. In Emilio del Valle Escalante's introduction to his edition of contemporary Maya poetry (the first of its kind), *Uk'u'x kaj, uk'u'x ulew: Antología de poesía maya guatemalteca contemporánea* (2010), he rejects *indigenista* discourse, like that of Asturias, which proposes a form of *mestizaje* that comes at the cost of preserving Maya culture:

Se continúa transmitiendo la memoria colectiva, y en definitiva, el creciente deseo por recuperar la soberanía y autodeterminación política. La literatura en este terreno maniobra muchas veces “como medio para hablarles de igual a igual”

(Lienhard, *La voz y su huella* 59) a los opresores e interrumpir y desarticular el status quo (17).

The Maya poet will speak for her/himself, and many have done so in a bilingual context, which is the reality of the linguistic landscape of modern Guatemala. There is an urgency to speak, to be heard, and to be seen on the bookstands. Poetry is a more accessible medium in that it is faster to write, read, and translate. A poem can be as direct or arcane as any novel and it can be as lyrical and performative as the autochthonous oral traditions of the Maya: the source of the modern literary renaissance. All contemporary poets publish in Guatemalan Spanish and have either self-translated to or from their respective Maya languages. No collection of poems has been published in a Maya language only; many editions have been published in Spanish only and most editions are bilingual: in them the original and translated texts face each other as a literal and figurative act of mirroring. Several Maya literary texts have been translated into other languages, mostly in languages of the Western world, from the Spanish texts.

Perhaps the most prolific and certainly the most published of Maya poets is Humberto Ak'abal, who is known as a controversial and polarizing figure in Guatemala. In 2004, he rejected the highest literary honor that can be bestowed on a Guatemalan writer, el Premio Nacional de Literatura "Miguel Ángel Asturias." In an interview with Juan Carlos Lemus (2004), he explained that the prize has two names, with which he cannot come to terms. Humberto Ak'abal mentions that he is very offended and hurt by Asturias's assimilationist thesis and does not see any improvement in a divided nation in which racism and discrimination still thrive. He asks for more reflection from all people of Guatemala.

Humberto Ak'abal, like Gaspar Pedro González, translates his own works into K'iche', though most of his works are published in Spanish only. In his recent collection of poems, *Las*



*palabras crecen* (2009), he opens with “El canto viejo de la sangre,” which is his metalinguistic, open declaration of his appropriation of the Spanish language through his ancestors who have paid the price for his use of it. Language is visceral part of the poet’s being, a part of his essence and body. His native Maya language is mother’s milk:

Yo no mamé la lengua castellana  
 Cuando llegué al mundo.

Mi lengua nació entre árboles  
 y tiene sabor de tierra;  
 la lengua de mis abuelos es mi casa (9).

His maternal language, K’iche’, is of the trees, of the earth, of his ancestors. It is the language of his land. He did not feed off of Spanish, “la lengua castellana,” when he was born, yet he has no trouble using it as he already possesses it. He did not have to fight to appropriate it, as it has been *bought* with the sacrifice of his ancestors who faced the colonizing wave from Europe and who met the imposed language with stealth:

[...]  
 Esta lengua es el recuerdo de un dolor  
 y la hablo sin temor ni vergüenza  
 porque fue comprada con la sangre de mis ancestros.

En esta nueva lengua  
 te muestro las flores de mi canto,  
 te traigo el sabor de otras tristezas

y el color de otras alegrías...

Esta lengua es sólo una llave más

Para cantar el canto viejo de mi sangre (9).

He is a wordsmith in his “new” language and he is presenting it to his reader, “te muestro,” who could be a ladino or a Westerner. He will deterritorialize Guatemalan Spanish to introduce them to different reality with other kinds of sadness and joy. This language is not of his own, but is an instrument of his hybrid self to tap into the ancients songs that run through his blood. It is yet another literary manifestation of speaking in a Maya language through Guatemalan Spanish. Through such poetry, Humberto Ak’abal hopes to build the intercultural bridge that he is lacking in modern Guatemala. This bridge could break down monolithic view of ladino and Maya identity and understand the spectrum of hybridity in each of these identities.

In “Sabrosa lengua,” from *Las palabras crecen* (2009), he praises his native tongue in Guatemalan Spanish so that others can understand his hybrid, bilingual self when his is in complete comfort and pleasure:

En el mercado de mi pueblo,

desde temprana hora,

comienzan a llegar las palabras.

Es un lugar alegre

donde se puede saborear

la sabrosa lengua maya k’iche’ (16).

There is no doubt that however intercultural his message may be, he forms a language ideology for himself that gives preference to the beauty, comfort, and modesty that is inherent in Maya

languages. Like, Gaspar Pedro González's episode of the ladina woman in the market, Ak'abal's simple, haiku-like poem "Diferencia," from his collection *Hojas del árbol pajarero* (1995), is charged with accusatory comparison:

En nuestra lengua decimos:

“umaj unan”

(no tenés madre)

Los castizos dicen:

“hijo de la gran puta” (56).

The fact that he can translate for the reader gives him the poetic and *moral* authority to judge the Guatemalan Spanish language as being at times violent, discriminatory, and grotesque. Perhaps a ladino, or “castizo” as he mentions here, once insulted him and the vast difference in the literal meaning of the insult, when translated into K'iche', revealed just how different Maya languages are to Guatemala Spanish in terms of phonetics, syntax, metaphor, and world vision tied to the traditional cosmovision.

Humberto Ak'abal, however, does not restrain himself from assuming the slang and idioms of Guatemala Spanish. From the collection *Guardián de la caída de agua* (1993), which was named book of the year by the Asociación de Periodistas de Guatemala and received their *Quetzal de Oro* award in 1993, his poem “De que hay, hay” appropriates the vulgar and puerile registers and cadence of Guatemalan Spanish while broaching the topic of ghost stories, a common topos in the Guatemalan folklore, both for ladino and Maya:

Dejémonos de babosadas:

de que hay espantos,

¡los hay!

Un pueblo sin espantos  
no es un pueblo de a de veras.

Pero  
los espantos  
tienen que ser meros.

Ghost stories are a part of the pathos of Guatemalan culture, ladino and Maya. They are a cultural point of nexus between both populations through the fervent tradition of telling ghost stories that are directly tied with Guatemalan identity. Every Guatemalan family has a member who has been haunted by *la llorna*, *los duendes* (gnomes), or *el sombrero* (a guitar-playing demon). Humberto Ak'abal ironically touts that there is no true “pueblo” without its ghost; a fitting thought for Guatemala, a post-war nation grappling with its reconstruction for historical memory. Any ladino reader would immediately recognize register of the poem. It is the fitting opener for any late-night story among friends and family. This is a common feature of the hybridity of modern Guatemalan culture, just like folk medicinal remedies that all ladina and Maya mothers know; the traditions of storytelling are a cross-culturally unifying theme in the poem.

Humberto Ak'abal poetry is known for its lyrical and modest subject matter. Nicole Caso's (2010) chapter on “Healing and Revitalization through Poetry,” analyzes the poet's search of “a universal sense of humanity” and “familiar kernels of essential truths” (224). There is a search of commonality even as all people have gone through radically different experiences

in life. Caso highlights the nostalgia for a childhood toy Humberto Ak'abal remembers in the poem "Xul" from *Guardián de la caída de agua* (1993):

Un hoyito  
 en el pecho  
 y uno en la cola:  
 si lo soplás  
 canta.

Juguete de patojitos  
 Pobres.

Tiene forma de pollo,  
 es de barro;  
 se llama Xul.

Yo tuve uno.

This clay bird flute is a common toy among Guatemalan children "patojitos" (I had one growing up as a child, too). It is certainly a toy of humble production "patojitos / Pobres," which is easily found in a Maya-run stand at any *mercado* in Guatemala City or in a small town. It is childhood object to which many Guatemalans, ladino and Maya, can relate to and share in the nostalgia. For some it is a random folk toy and for others it could be the only toy they had as a child. In Humberto Ak'abal's poem, the clay toy is a synecdoche of the impoverished, marginalized life he had as a young Maya. One could posit that he had no childhood as he grew up during the first

decades of the Civil War in Guatemala<sup>12</sup>. Through his yearning for a childhood memory, he invites his reader to share a universal sense of recollection and earnest nostalgia, which is at the crux of rebuilding national historical memory.

### **Poetry as a Means of Redefining the Maya Woman**

There has yet to be a female Maya novelist in Guatemala. Literary production is already a feat for the many male Maya writers in Guatemala: a country with grave socioeconomic disparities that worsen by high illiteracy rates among the Maya. Women represent the greatest numbers in illiteracy rates, though 54.5% of Guatemalans who self-describe to be Maya are bilingual in Spanish and their respective Maya languages.<sup>13</sup> There are many reasons why Maya women are without proper schooling. As opposed to most of their ladino counterparts, they work hard days to make ends meet economically. The educational and literary grassroots movements in the Guatemalan Highlands, especially through las *Escuelas Mayas*, are empowering Maya youth to learn and preserve their languages (Fisher and Brown 1996; Helmberger 2006).

As mentioned before, the immediacy of poetry and its free range in aesthetics lends itself to rapid distribution of the Maya voice throughout their communities through local publication, such as pamphlets, weekly community newsletters<sup>14</sup>, and globally through privately and

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<sup>12</sup> Nicole Caso (2010) quotes Humberto Ak'abal as he reflected on “the poverty of his childhood: “No tuve niñez por la pobreza de mis padres, y la guerra interna del país me robó la juventud. La necesidad de la existencia despertó en mí la responsabilidad del trabajo y aplastó mi temprana edad” (226).

<sup>13</sup> This is according to the *UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning* (2012) web report.

<sup>14</sup> Marlen Calvo Oviedo (2000) offers a examples of these first youthful, grassroots efforts to publish Maya literature: “A partir de los setenta, surgen en Guatemala organizaciones en que se agrupan sobre todo jóvenes, para intercambiar ideas y experiencias sobre los valores de la cultura maya. Como producto de esta convivencia empieza a publicarse la revista “Ixim”. Esta revista representó un espacio para incentivar nuevos géneros literarios. Los poemas eran presentados en idiomas mayas, con traducción al castellano en algunos casos; otras veces se intercalaban los versos en uno u otro idioma. Aparecen también otros medios impresos como los mensuarios o diarios en que se publican artículos, cuentos, poesías y otros, en idiomas mayas. Podemos citar entre ellos a

internationally funded publishing houses, such as Yax Te', Cholsamaj, and Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquín (Peñalosa 2002). Gloria Chacón's (2007) article succinctly captures the essence of the task of the female Maya poet:

Por contraste con géneros literarios como el cuento –que en letras mayas contemporáneas de México y Guatemala se vincula con tradición y transmisión–, la poesía ofrece a las mujeres mayas un campo abierto para experimentar con subjetividades multidimensionales. Pero las posibilidades literarias y culturales que ofrece la creación de poesía por mujeres son a veces coartadas por la crítica que acusa esta poesía de no siempre representar lo maya, ya que, según ellas, algunos de los trabajos poéticos se desvinculan de lo social y cultural (97).

With just a cursory glance at Emilio del Valle Escalante's *Uk'u'x kaj, uk'u'x ulew*, one will notice that women wrote nearly half of the poems in the anthology. There is currently a boom in the production of poetry, both published and unpublished, through the grassroots organization of writing workshops and seminars (Skar and Cú Choc 2008). The position of the female Maya poet of the twenty-first century, therefore, is not static. As traditional or avant-garde as the poet would like to be, the act of writing allows her to finally express her unique condition and her individuality in the face of many stereotypes of Maya women that are not only prolonged by the male-dominated, ladino hegemony, but also by the gaze of the Maya man, which can be rather *machista*. Humberto Ak'abal's poem "Mañoso" from *Picoteando/Tzopotza'* (2001) is an example of the traditional, prudish Maya woman, who always refuses the advances of a prospective lover:

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"K'astajik de Quetzaltenango" y "Voz del Pueblo" de Comapala" (16). Moreover, Rodrigo Rey Rosa founded in 2005 the National Literary Prize *Premio Batz'* with the aim to encourage the writing and publication of texts in indigenous languages, as well as open spaces for the celebration of cultural and ethnic diversity.

Vos no me querés,  
lo veo en tu cara de mañoso.

Le dije que eso no es cierto  
que así es mi cara  
que así me trajo mi mamá.

Ella no me creyó (51).

Humberto Ak'abal depiction of his admired lady comes across as asexual and off-putting as she addresses him using the *voseo*, which is completely unromantic between two young people who are just getting to know each other. The *tuteo* or more formal use of *usted* would be more appropriate between the young and enamored. She accuses him of being a *mañoso* (womanizer; trickster) because she finds his advances to be untrue and ill intended. As flattering and humorous as the poet might have found the encounter, these verses perpetuate the stereotype of the demure Maya woman. She encompasses the folk representation of Guatemala's puritanical and "proper" identity. Guatemalan-American writer, David Unger, once responded when asked about finding passion in Guatemala, "For passion visit El Salvador, Honduras, or Nicaragua. Guatemala is much too proper. If you're talking about passion for murder, you've come to the right place!" (Handal 2014).

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the female poet begins to express her sense of agency as interpreted through Maya cosmivision. Chacón (2007) paraphrases Yucateca Maya poet, Isabel Juárez Espinosa, who finds women to be the source of language and bearer of the mother tongue:



[...] cuando el espíritu escupe en la mano de Ixquic y ella subsecuentemente queda embarazada, este otorga a la mujer el origen del idioma. La saliva, nos dice, simboliza el lenguaje, y de esa manera los ancestros adjudican el regalo del idioma directamente a la mujer. Por medio de esta redefinición de la relación entre mujer e idioma, las poetisas contribuyen a cambiar los discursos dominantes (99).

Through the Maya genesis of the *Popol Vuh*, Juárez Espinosa reclaims her right to self-representation as the word incarnate with an eloquence to bequeath to her progeny. The goddess Ixquic sets the course for all Maya women, as the word is the source of life. The goddess Ixchel, Mother Moon, moreover, bequeathed her art of weaving to all women. Throughout the history of colonized Guatemala, women spoke through the images and stories they wove onto the very clothes they would wear every day. The *güipil* or *huipil* (Maya woven blouse), a word known by every Guatemalan, is the material and symbolic representation of the Maya woman or, for ladinos, the *india* who is othered by her antiquated, yet quaint “folk” dress or *traje*. The *güipil*, moreover, is the materialization of an ancient poetry that is donned on the body of the Maya woman. Its mixes of colors, patterns, zoomorphic figures, and textures are the signifiers of a woman’s region within the Maya world. The *güipil* is then a literal signifier of which of Maya language she speaks.

In her poem simply entitled “Poema” from *Tejiendo los sucesos en el tiempo* (2002), Calixta Gabriel Xiquín (who has also written under the pen name Caly Domitila Kanek), a Kaqchikel Maya who has been widely published since the mid-1990s, wrote of the agency that is innate in all Maya women. They are weavers of words and latent with the poetry of hope:

En las manos de la mujer  
 brilla, brilla poesía  
 y su alma crea esperanza  
 con sus manos los colores  
 rojo, amarillo, azul, verde y negro.  
 Con estos colores tejes las poesías de angustia,  
 de dolor, de agonía y  
 de esperanza (88).

These heavily synesthetic verses are yet another example of the deterritorialization of the Spanish language. Calixta Gabriel Xiquín's poem is the manifestation of her hybrid, bicultural identity as a modern-day Maya writer. She appropriates a Western language and a Western literary genre to represent her story that is ultimately that of every Maya woman. Here, the act of weaving strings of colors is manifested as a weaving of the agency of expression of the woman who dons the *güipil*, no longer keeping her "word" and story within the confines of the patterns on the cloth (Palacios 2009, 166). She will use strings of different colors, the Guatemalan Spanish and Maya languages, to tell her story of pain, agony, and hope. Moreover, the colors in these verses are a direct reference to the Maya cosmovision, as explained by Chacón (2007): "cada color representa conceptos clave: la salida del sol (rojo), la puesta entrada del sol (negro), la vida, personificada por el maíz (el amarillo), el tiempo y el espacio sagrados (representados por el azul) y la madre tierra (simbolizada por el verde)" (101-102). These colors are the legitimization of a woman's word through literature; the ancient Maya were a literary society and their sacred texts and beliefs have survived through the Maya woman-weaver-writer-mother.

Q'eqchi Maya poet, Maya Cú Choc has been widely published, much like Calixta Gabriel Xiquín, since the mid-1990s. She was taken under the tutelage of the famed Guatemalan novelist, Marco Antonio Flores, since his first poetry workshops, which started in 1993 at the Universidad de San Carlos in Guatemala City. There she was introduced to the works of Luis de Lión and Otto René Castillo and to Paulo Freire's theories of social justice (Skar and Cú Choc 2008: 56). Maya Cú Choc was a teacher by training who left the failing public schools system to work in cultural and literary grassroots efforts. She is an active blogger and leads her own writing workshops for women in Guatemala City (Skar and Cú Choc 2008: 56-59). As a fervent activist, she is against the violence that has plagued the women of Guatemala since the times of the colonization. In her poem "Poemaya" from the *Novísimos* (1996) anthology, she proclaims her visceral reaction against consumption of the backward, desexualized, folklorized "indian" through Western academia and *indigenista* thought in Latin America: "No soy / La version femenina / De ícono alguno / Ni soy / El personaje mítico / Creado en la imaginación / De algún poeta" (59). She, like all Maya writers of her day, is taking the word to express the injustices that the Maya, especially Maya women, have endured after centuries of war, rape, racism, neglect, and symbolic socioeconomic violence. In her poem "Rabia" from *Uk'u'x kaj, uk'u'x ulew* (2010), she appropriates the Guatemalan Spanish language to speak to Guatemala, woman to woman:

Te da vergüenza saberte violada, saberte hija del

Dominio

y del ultraje, Guatemala.

Y caminás inconclusa, desgarrada.

Amándote Guate

odiándote mala (299).

She comes face-to-face with a society that has long rejected to deal with its sense of memory and its identity neurosis, *síndrome de Maximón*. Maya Cú Choc uses the *voseo* to establish a sense of kinship, familiarity, and equality. She is not looking up or speaking down to this battered nation. She is concerned, tired, and conflicted, as if speaking to an abusive family member who has hurt her as she suffers patiently. She speaks to “Guate,” as all Guatemalans endearingly refer to their country because she, too, loves her country. It is the root of the name, which is steeped in its pre-colonial past. “Guate” is as indigenous a name as Maya. Maya Cú Choc then breaks the name in two and places “hating you” before the suffix. The enjambment of the country’s name is a graphic representation of a nation divided. Its people are still reeling after wars and genocide that left the Maya and all other poor Guatemalans at the mercy of neoliberal establishment seated in an urban wasteland that is today one of the most violent and feared capitals of Latin America: Guatemala City.

After the civil war in Guatemala, many misplaced Maya were left with no homes to which to return. In search of jobs, schooling, and a home, many who stayed in the country settled in Guatemala City. Today, there are many unincorporated settlement communities throughout the outskirts of the city by treacherous *barrancos* (ravines) that fragment the mountaintop metropolis. The *capitalinos* live among the new realities of a globalized world: *maquilas* (mass sweatshop complexes), proselytizing among Protestants and Catholics, organized crime, drug cartels, all facets of American pop culture, English-inflected slang, and the city’s own brand of urban fashion, music, and art. Rosa Chávez represents a new generation of

Maya women writers. Also known by her Maya name, Roxox Chaws, she is the incarnation of the new hybrid Maya: she has a K'iche Maya mother and a Kaqchikel Maya father and was raised in the capital among other Maya and ladinos during the onslaught of overpopulation and the development of malls, highways, and gated communities throughout the city. The Maya have learned to adapt to and navigate in a harsh urban society in which they are victims of racial slurs, public ridicule, unfair wages, etc., as Rosa Chávez painfully stages in her poem from *Casa solitaria* (2005):

la señora dice que en mi pueblo  
todos somos shucos  
por eso me baño todos los días  
mi pelo largo lo cortaron  
dice que por los piojos  
no puedo hablar bien castilla  
y la gente se ríe de mi  
mi corazón  
se pone triste  
ayer fui a ver a mi prima  
el chofer no quería parar  
y cuando iba a bajar, rápido arrancó  
apurate india burra – me dijo  
yo me caí y me raspé la rodilla  
risa y risa estaba la gente  
mi corazón se puso triste

dice mi prima

que ya me voy a acostumbrar (5).

These short, fast-moving verses capture the life of a newly arrived young Maya woman, who is persistently accosted verbally, physically, mentally, symbolically by all facets of life in Guatemala City. She has the de facto job most Maya women have in the city; she is a *muchacha* (maid) in the home of a ladino family<sup>15</sup>. Not unlike the market scene in *La otra cara (La vida de un maya)*, during which Lotaxh is belittled and manipulated by the ladina women accompanied by her *muchacha*. She is forced to culturally cross-dress and to strip off of all that identifies her as a Maya woman: her *güüpil*, *traje*, and long hair. She is told that she lacks hygiene as she is *shuca*, the Guatemalan Spanish word for “dirty” – a loan word from the Maya. Her ladina employer accuses her of not speaking proper *castilla* (Spanish), which is utterly ironic in a poem written in perfectly functional Guatemalan Spanish vernacular by a Maya woman. Rosa Chávez’s tone, however, is infantilized and timid and portrays the resulting social retraction and marginalization that young Maya women go through when they arrive to the metropolis. She is portraying a modern-day, urban hell or *Xibalbá*: a gauntlet of ridicules and insults that slowly numb her into submission – “ya me voy a acostumbrar.”

Emilio del Valle Escalante (2012) posits, “al hablar de estos sujetos, se trata de colectivizar una experiencia marginal subalterna, de concebir no un yo/nosotros indígena, sino más bien un yo/nosotros subalterno colectivo intercultural en la lucha por trascender la casa solitaria de xib’alb’a” (207). Before the creation of man in the Maya genesis of the *Popo Vuh*,

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<sup>15</sup> J.T. Way’s new sociological study of modern Guatemala, accurately entitled *The Mayan in the Mall* (2012), offers a telling example of how blatantly domestic work is ascribed to the identity of Maya women: “At the beginning of her petition, Antonia, or the notary who wrote the document for her, listed her occupation as *oficios domesticos*. *Oficios domésticos* and the synonymous and more commonly used *oficios de su sexo* were phrases that appeared again and again to describe women and women’s work in twentieth-century Guatemalan bureaucratic paperwork” (72).

the underworld, *Xibalbá*, represented a constant cycle of death, failed attempts at the creation of life, wars, and obstacles among the gods until the time was right to make men out of corn. Rosa Chávez's puts pen to paper as testament of what she and many others have endured; the subaltern is speaking *and* in many tongues, native and appropriated, to be heard and understood by all. She writes in Guatemalan Spanish to express her hybridity as an urban-dwelling Maya with resilient hope for a better life, which starts with the act of self-representation through poetry.

Rosa Chávez's most recent poetry has embraced her identity as an urban Maya woman in a globalized society. As one of Maya Cú Choc's protégées, she has worked with her during various workshops that have helped launch her career in the burgeoning, grassroots literary circles in Guatemala City. Like Maya Cú Choc, she shatters the desexualized, puritanical stereotype that one can notice even within Humberto Ak'abal's poetry. In her poem "Con vos" from *Ri uk'u'x ri ab'aj/El corazón de la piedra* (2010), she takes the lead in pursuing her lover during a moment of transcendence of all cares and a promise for life-long love together:

Con vos, con vos quiero ver nacer de nuevo el sol, recibir agasajados el Oxlajun Baqtun, con vos quiero volver a moler el maíz en la piedra que es y ha sido mi vida, con vos quiero ser de nuevo una semilla, con vos, con vos, con vos quiero recibir al tiempo en mi piel, con vos quiero tapiscar, sembrar, sudar, trabajar, crear, con vos quiero escuchar música y bailar hasta que los músculos no aguanten, con vos quiero alucinar, con vos puedo, con vos, con vos, con vos quiero vivir, vivirlo todo, amarlo todo, con vos (126).

She addresses her lover using the *voseo*, which, in the context of an already established relationship, is intimate and unifying. Her way of loving is rooted in the Maya traditions and cosmovision of experiencing life through cycles of time ("el nuevo sol," "Oxlajun Baqtun"),

cycles of work and harvest (“ser de nuevo una semilla,” “tapiscar, sembrar, sudar, trabajar”). Her youthful desire is manifested in a frenetic, sensual, and arduous form of music and dance. These are visceral and ecstatic passions that leave her “hallucinating” and repeating her proclamation: “with you, with you.” Her Guatemalan Spanish is doubly deterritorialized; she continues to weave her interpretation of the Maya cosmovision into her language while simultaneously extricating the language from any trace of folk *india* puritanism.

Rosa Chávez follows the trailblazing works of Maya women poets who came a generation before her. Rita Palacios’s (2009) analysis of Maya Cú Choc’s work traces the source of such poetic liberation: “[t]his eroticism does away with the constraints placed upon the Indigenous woman as a guardian of culture and transmitter of customs and values, a view that is prevalent in male-dominated societies and for which the woman must show exemplary behaviour and adhere to strict moral codes that regulate female sexuality” (152). Rosa Chávez explores new territories of sexuality and identity as a young Maya woman in the metropolis. As a *capitalina*, she lives among ladinos, talks like them, and uses the same American imported slang. “Ut’z baby” from *Uk’u’x kaj, uk’u’x ulew* (2010) is a heteroglossic proclamation of love and desire on the dark streets of neoliberal, xibalba-esque metropolis, “Guatemala city”:

Ut’z baby  
 asi kaxlan  
 el amor en medio de la locura  
 aunque el mundo diga  
 que todo es frontera  
 lágrima rota  
 mala vida y mala muerte



besame en la calle más amarga  
 nojim baby nojim  
 besame en la calle más amarga  
 veamos juntos el atardecer  
 en Guatemala city (335).

The title of the poem is in Maya, *ut'z* (good, right), and English, and can be translated to “That’s right, baby.” She, again, addresses her lover using the intimate form of the *voseo*. The language is inflected with the influences of American pop culture (“baby” as a term of endearment) and she code-switches between Guatemalan Spanish and Maya. Her “baby” is a *kaxlan*, the Maya word for ladino (derived from the word *castellano*). Their interethnic love is seen as “craziness,” and even if the entire world is against them, it no longer matters; they are damned in life and damned in death on the margins of an ethnically divided society. She does away with the *machista* paradigm and takes charge of the moment. She instructs her lover how to kiss her “nojim baby nojim” (“softly, baby, softly”). Their tabooed love is the only source of pleasure and hope in the dark streets of the Guatemala “city,” which are the only fitting places to hide their *mestizo* love: a Mongolian Spot for the ladino hegemony. Rosa Chavez’s love story between an *india* and a *ladino* is her act of identity. She is a bicultural Maya with roots in the highlands and a life based in the city. More than a love poem, this is poem on the desire for the full expression of cultural, linguistic, and ethnic hybridity. It is a poem charged, at once, with desperation and hope and the poet can only wait for a new day to come as the sun sets on a Guatemala City, her own *Xibalbá*.

### Conclusion

An analysis of minor literature cannot be fully achieved without having considered the sociology of the languages at conflict within the writer's act of deterritorialization. Through the struggle and search for Guatemalan hybridity within two "language consciousnesses," novelists Luis de Li3n and Gaspar Pedro Gonz1lez and poets Humberto Ak'abal, Calixta Gabriel Xiqu3n, Maya C3 Choc, and Rosa Ch1vez deterritorialize Guatemalan Spanish from within itself, offering it as mirror to Guatemalan ladinos who are linguistically "othered," too, under pan-Hispanic ideology. Although they leave their readers without a plan for unifying the two distinct societies within the same country, they demonstrate that Guatemalan Spanish as a language, the most human of artifacts, could not withhold itself from having become a hybrid, a *mestizo*, in spite of its own speakers. These writers represent a new generation speaking out from the indigenous and gendered peripheries of an already peripheralized Latin America, and they weave their individual interpretations of the indigenous cosmovision with their stories of life and culture in or in contact with the globalized, neoliberal metropolis. The stratification of linguistic and ethnic "othering" is a *mise en ab3me* of power relations in today's globalized world: English others Spanish, Spanish others Guatemalan Spanish, Guatemalan Spanish others Maya, however, from within and from without.

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