

**REPRESENTATIONS OF TRAUMA AND CULTURE IN THE GUATEMALAN
REFUGEE EXPERIENCE IN JUVENILE FICTION**

by

Megan Harrison

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Abstract

This thesis examines the ways in which trauma, language, culture, and displacement are represented in *Journey of Dreams*, by Marge Pellegrino, and *Tree Girl*, by Ben Mikaelson, two pieces of refugee juvenile fiction portraying Guatemalan Maya children as protagonists. Using trauma theory and a combination of neocolonial and dominant discourse theories as my lenses, as well as Rigoberta Menchú's memoir as a framing text, I examined passages containing traumatic events as well as descriptions of Maya language and culture, and protagonists' responses to displacement to determine how these aspects were represented in the two novels. I found that both books contained neocolonial dominant discourses and simplified healing processes embedded in the texts, but to varying degrees.

Preface

This thesis is an original and unpublished work by the author, Megan Harrison.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis examines the way that trauma, language, culture, and displacement are represented in two narratives of refugee juvenile literature featuring Guatemalan Maya child protagonists. I use Rigoberta Menchú's memoir as a framing text, comparing her descriptions of her experiences to the representations found in the novels. I use trauma theory and neocolonial and dominant discourse theories, as well as historical information about Maya refugee experiences during the Guatemalan Civil War, to analyze the two novels.

1.2 Origins of My Interest

My interest in refugee narratives and literature was first sparked while working with refugee communities in Cleveland, Ohio, from August 2009 through July 2010. After college I joined the Jesuit Volunteer Corps, a one year volunteer program that placed me in a refugee resettlement agency in Cleveland. I was the Housing Coordinator, in charge of setting up apartments and houses for families that were moving from refugee camps around the world to Cleveland. During that year I met many wonderful people and heard unbelievable stories of war, trauma, and survival. I also had the opportunity to run field trip programs and assist with an early ESL class, and it was these programs that I loved the most.

I had secretly hoped that, in addition to gaining valuable experience and growing personally, I would also discover my “calling” during my year in Cleveland, but at the end of the year I felt no closer to finding my vocation. I moved back to California, but the people I had met and the lessons I learned from them during my time in Cleveland stayed with me. I kept trying to find work with children, first at the Boy’s and Girl’s Club, then at an emergency shelter and

group home for children, and finally as a substitute preschool aide for the local school district. Throughout those years, I often reflected on my work in Cleveland, wondering how the children were, what new programs were being used, and questioning how families that had been through so much horrific trauma could possibly find healing.

It was as I began my work as a substitute aide, often encountering children in the classroom who spoke little to no English, that I decided to return to school for my masters. I had recently heard about programs in children's literature, a hitherto unknown field to me, and I began to hope that I could unite my love for literature with my work with children. I reflected once more on the early ESL program I had assisted with in Cleveland, and I wondered what a more structured program, integrating children's literature, would have looked like. Was there a way to use children's literature to make a difference in the lives of refugee children? Was there any literature on the refugee experience out there for children to read? I had never read any, but I wanted to find out.

Now, at the end of my tenure in the Master of Arts in Children's Literature Program at the University of British Columbia, I know there is large collection of refugee children's literature. Over the last year and a half I have read a great deal, and I have slowly funneled my focus from all refugee stories, to post-World War II narratives, to examining how trauma and culture are represented in memoirs and fiction. However, even this was far too wide a range, and necessitated the selection of a region and age-range. I decided that I wanted to find books for older children and young adults that were historically specific—that is, that represented a particular historical event. Finally, I narrowed my focus to juvenile fiction depicting the refugee experience in Guatemala. I chose Guatemala in part because of my familiarity with Spanish and some Latin American traditions, but also because of the dearth of material on this area. Of the

few books that have been written on that geographical area, several simply write about “Central America” as though it were one homogeneous place, rather than many countries and cultures with differing traditions and political situations. I could only find two books that directly deal with the Guatemalan Civil War and genocide. In order to engage with cultural and historical specificity, I chose to study literature for children with Guatemalan refugee protagonists.

1.3 Rationale for Selection of My Primary Texts

The two texts that depict these Guatemalan refugee experiences are *Journey of Dreams* by Marge Pellegrino and *Tree Girl* by Ben Mikaelson. Both portray teenage Maya girls escaping the genocide and journeying north, and are the only juvenile fiction depictions I could find concerning the genocide. In *Journey of Dreams* Tomasa travels with her father, brother, and little sister to be reunited with their mother and brother in the United States after military forces have destroyed their village and killed their neighbors. Gabi, the protagonist of *Tree Girl*, travels with her sister and others to a refugee camp in Mexico after her village is attacked and razed and her family and friends are killed. In addition to these two texts, I use *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, a memoir for adults by Rigoberta Menchú, as transcribed and edited by Venezuelan ethnographer Elizabeth Burgos-Debray, as a framing text for studying the novels. Menchú is an indigenous K’iche’ Maya woman from Guatemala who, after fleeing the Guatemalan genocide in her early twenties, became an activist for justice. She dictated her memory of the horrors she witnessed, as well as her cultural practices and experiences, to Burgos-Debray, who published the memoir and helped to bring awareness to the oppression and genocide of Maya peoples in Guatemala. Like the memoir, *Journey of Dreams* and *Tree Girl* were written from the first person perspective of an indigenous K’iche’ Maya child fleeing for her life. However, both works of

fiction are written by white writers from the United States, with no cultural or ethnic connection to the people and situations depicted in the novels. I am, therefore, using the memoir against which to gauge the relative authenticity of the fictional works.

I chose these two novels after reading dozens of other refugee juvenile novels about conflicts from around the globe, and I discuss several of those books in Section 2.2 of my Literature Review. Once I had narrowed my focus to Spanish speaking countries in Latin America, though, there were much fewer refugee juvenile novels available. In particular, I could find very few other novels about refugees from other Central American countries. There were two books about Salvadoran refugees, but other countries with refugee populations currently living in the United States, like Nicaragua, are not represented at all. The two Salvadoran books, too, are marketed for younger audiences: one for ages 8 and up, and one for ages 10 and up, while the two books about Guatemalan refugees are listed on the publishers' websites as 12 and up. This was one reason for choosing to focus on the Guatemalan novels; I have noticed that the lower the age group, the more editing often occurs in refugee narratives, moving away from the historical specificity I am interested in examining. Another novel I found was historically ambiguous, writing about a "Central American" refugee with no reference to the country or political situation which led the protagonist to flee. It was important to me to look at texts that are all historically situated. In addition to creating more accurate depictions of countries and people groups, this historical accuracy enables the use of Menchú's memoir as a framing text. This was another aspect in choosing the Guatemalan novels. At first I had hoped to examine both Guatemalan and Salvadoran experiences, but my desire to frame my analysis historically and culturally through the use of Menchú's memoir necessitated my focus on the Guatemalan Maya experience. Although controversy has arisen concerning Menchú's memoir—critics have

accused her of adding other peoples' experiences to her account, as when she describes the details of her brother's death even though she was not actually present—her account of that event and the other experiences she had is still accurate. Menchú's text offers a rare look into what life was like before and during the Guatemalan genocide. This first-hand account is essential to understanding the violence and horrors faced by the K'iche' people in Guatemala at this time, and what many experienced during the genocide.

1.4 Research Topic and Focus

The focus of my thesis is on depictions of the Guatemalan refugee experience in two works of juvenile fiction, with the use of trauma theory and neocolonial dominant discourse theories as lenses through which to view those depictions. I frame my analyses by examining Rigoberta Menchú's memoir about her childhood experiences in the K'iche' Maya community, and later in the war. I have two key research questions:

1. How is the experience of trauma represented in these novels? In particular, to what degree do protagonists act as witnesses, how do protagonists experience the reoccurrence or cycle of trauma, and how is the process of healing depicted in these novels?
2. What are the neocolonial dominant discourses evident in these novels? In particular, how are Maya and Guatemalan cultures represented in these novels? How accurate are representations of Maya and Hispanic traditions? How are native and foreign languages—Mayan (K'iche'), Spanish, and English—used by the protagonists? In what ways are Western (particularly U.S. and Canadian) discourses embraced by the protagonists?

1.5 Review of Where My Research Will Fit in the Existing Research

Although articles and monographs have been written on trauma in children’s literature, and articles and monographs have been written on issues of postcolonialism, neocolonialism, and dominant discourses in children’s literature, I believe that combining these areas is a less common approach. In addition, the use of Rigoberta Menchú’s memoir as a framing text, and the focus on Guatemalan refugee fiction, rather than other areas, are all aspects of my thesis that add something new to the current research.

1.5.1 Testimonies in Children’s Literature

Two seminal texts on trauma theory are Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, and Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub’s *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. Both of these texts talk in great detail about the process of testimony and of being a witness to a traumatic event. All three of the primary texts I use in my thesis have narrators that have witnessed genocide. In the case of *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, Menchú is truly giving her own testimony of her life and the trauma she has witnessed. The other two are fictional accounts of fictional characters, and yet they are also participating in an act of witnessing. Although they are fictional, both books attempt to shed light on the traumatic experience of the genocide and of being refugees. As Leigh Gilmore discusses in her article “‘What Was I?’: Literary Witness and the Testimonial Archive,” fictional witnessing accounts can bring new and different understandings to a traumatic event. She writes, “Nonfictional witness narratives and literary testimony travel together and influence how various audiences understand the claims such accounts make on them and in what ways and on what

bases they will respond” (77). Thus, even fictional accounts of an event like the Guatemalan genocide can inspire action and reflection.

However, Gilmore’s article and Felman and Laub’s groundbreaking book *Testimony* only discuss witnessing and testimony in adult literature and adult lives. The two novels, on the other hand, are from the perspective of children. Here *I, Rigoberta Menchú* works as a bridge between adult and child testimonies, as Menchú dictated her testimony at age 23 and her testimony centers on her childhood and youth. As the protagonists of *Journey of Dreams* and *Tree Girl* are both children, they are in a position to be doubly colonized. For this reason I touch on the neocolonial forces which are enacted on the narrators as both children and as Maya, looking at Nancy Ellen Batty’s critique of how children are used to encourage empathy for international crises (“‘We Are the World, We Are the Children’: The Semiotics of Seduction in International Children’s Relief Efforts”). However, I do not have the time or space to discuss the complicated issue of adult writers as colonizers, particularly as it has already been so deftly discussed by scholars like Jacqueline Rose and Perry Nodelman. Instead I mainly address the influence of neocolonial dominant discourses on the narrators as young Mayas.

1.5.2 Refugee Fiction in Children’s Literature

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’ website, “...a refugee is someone who ‘owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country’” (“Refugees: Flowing Across Borders”). In Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Africa, once out of that first country

refugees often live in refugee camps in secondary countries that cannot, or do not wish to offer them permanent residence. In picture books like *Four Feet, Two Sandals*, by Karen Williams, Khadra Mohammed, and Doug Chayka and *The Roses in My Carpets*, by Rukhsana Khan, protagonists face certain struggles in those camps, but for the most part camps are either briefly mentioned in a sentence or two or absent entirely, despite many refugees spending several years there. As I discuss in a paper I presented at a Society for the History of Children and Youth conference, even in Anh Do's picture book *The Little Refugee*, based on the author's own experiences as a refugee, time spent in a refugee camp is completely erased. However, Latin American refugee narratives can be quite different. Perhaps because Spanish is a common language throughout most of Latin America, narrators traveling through Latin America try to remain inconspicuous in other Spanish-speaking countries. Although in *Tree Girl* the narrator does stay in a refugee camp in Mexico, other protagonists live on the streets, find shelter in churches, or rent houses in other countries until they are able to seek asylum in the United States or Canada. While *Tree Girl* does not shy away from depicting harsh camp conditions, *Journey of Dreams* depicts the more common Latin American refugee experience of blending in while traveling through Mexico (the experience is common, at least, in terms of the available Latin American refugee children's literature). A *Los Angeles Times* editorial from 1986 describes the situation of refugees in Mexico as complicated, writing:

Not being signatory to the 1951 U.N. Convention or 1967 Protocol on refugees, Mexico gives no recognition to refugee status. Its de facto policy is rather to discourage entry. Highway checkpoints have been extended, visa requirements tightened, and Central Americans are summarily expelled without judicial

process. The best most can hope for is to remain hidden or to not get robbed or beaten during expulsion. (Loucky)

This, and other factors, like that fact that the Maya empire crossed what is now the Mexico-Guatemala border and Maya communities can be found on both sides today, creates a highly complex and variable refugee experience within one region. This, in turn, results in a diversity of refugee experiences in literature about Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

1.5.3 Limitations

I believe the key limitation in my project is the fact that I am studying children's literature about Guatemala from an outsider's perspective. Although Menchú's text is a valuable resource for this project, I have been unable to find any Central American—much less Guatemalan—refugee children's literature in Spanish. I have been in contact with a Guatemalan editor and a Guatemalan children's literature doctoral student and both report that Guatemalan books about the genocide do not exist. Rigoberta Menchú has collaborated with other Guatemalan artists and writers to create two children's books: *The Girl from Chimel* and *The Honey Jar*, but neither discusses refugees. They are instead a look at Maya culture and traditions for children. Thus far I have only found Spanish language children's fiction on refugees from Cuba. However, even if a book in Spanish about the Guatemalan genocide had existed, it would have been difficult to include due to my own Spanish-speaking constraints and those of my supervisors. While I would be facing the issues of language and cultural gaps no matter which area of the world I selected for my thesis, I am still aware of the distance between myself and the Guatemalan refugee experience. As I have never been a refugee, nor am I Hispanic—much less

Guatemalan or Maya—and as I have only read Maya-authored texts in translation, I believe that there is a large gap that I must be careful to respect and acknowledge throughout my thesis.

Furthermore, in my thesis I unite both trauma theory and postcolonial discourse theories. While this fills a current gap in academic examinations of refugee children’s literature, it also creates a new theoretical area with which I needed to familiarize myself. In this way it is both a knowledge gap in current scholarship, and a potential for gaps in my own project. For this reason, I focus particularly on neocolonial dominant discourse, rather than the larger umbrella of postcolonialism. With this focus I hope to narrow the potential for gaps in my own research while increasing the depth and detail of my thesis.

1.6 Analysis

Using Cathy Caruth and Felman and Laub’s theories of trauma, witnessing, and testimony I examine the two novels to see how traumatic events are portrayed. I analyze how trauma is internalized by the protagonists and how healing is portrayed. I consider the novels in light of Laub’s three levels of witnessing, as by writing about the refugee experience each author has chosen to become something of a witness to that event. Here I also tie in neocolonial dominant discourse theories to examine how each protagonist in the novels witnesses, and what discourses are present in the novel. For example, Tomasa’s family’s desire to flee Guatemala for the United States in *Journey of Dreams* contrasts strongly with Gabi’s desire to return to Guatemala, the home she loves, and make it a better place rather than abandon it. Menchú, too, has remained active in striving for peace and justice in Guatemala. I use her narrative to bridge both trauma theory and neocolonial dominant discourse theories, as her book tackles the trauma she experienced while also writing back to dominant discourse and raising her voice against the

atrocities enacted on herself and the Maya peoples. In addition, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* provides a solid factual grounding for my examination of the three novels. Others, including Caruth and Felman and Laub, have used texts such as Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* and Camus' *The Plague* to apply, examine, and explain their theories. I follow their example by also using Menchú's text as a lens through which to examine trauma and neocolonial dominant discourse in the novels.

1.7 Significant Terms

1.7.1 Refugee Terms

Refugee – According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) website, "...a refugee is someone who 'owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country'" ("Refugees: Flowing Across Borders").

Internally Displaced Person (IDPs) – UNHCR describes Internally Displaced Persons as follows: "Unlike refugees, IDPs have not crossed an international border to find sanctuary but have remained inside their home countries. Even if they have fled for similar reasons as refugees (armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations), IDPs legally remain under the protection of their own government – even though that government might be the cause of their flight" ("On the Run in Their Own Land").

Genocide – "The deliberate killing of people who belong to a particular racial, political, or cultural group" (Merriam-Webster).

1.7.2 Theoretical Lens Terms

Trauma – “A very difficult or unpleasant experience that causes someone to have mental or emotional problems usually for a long time” (Merriam-Webster). Also described by Caruth as, “...an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (11).

Counter-Discourse – Also sometimes called Counter-Hegemony, occurring in texts “...which challenge imperial knowledge about other cultures” (Mills 119).

Dominant Discourse – Sara Mills describes dominant discourse as constructing a place with a completely different social and economic history “...into a grid of Western history and values...” (112).

Neocolonialism – “Neocolonialism is simply a renewed drive on the part of the dominant social and cultural forces to maintain their positions of privilege.... Popular culture is an important site for neocolonial activity. Whereas earlier colonialist activity had a political and territorial bias, neocolonialism is more deeply economic and cultural” (McGillis, “Introduction” xxiv).

Postcolonialism – “Postcolonialism as an activity of the mind is quite simply intent on both acknowledging the history of oppression and liberating the study of literature from traditional and Eurocentric ways of seeing” (McGillis, “Introduction” xxii).

Testimony – Shoshana Felman describes testimony as, “...a mode of *truth's realization* beyond what is available as statement, beyond what is available, that is, as a truth transparent to

itself and entirely known.... The testimony will thereby be understood, in other words, not as a mode of *statement of*, but rather as a mode of *access to*, that truth” (15-16).

Witnessing – Similar to testimony, “The victim’s narrative—the very process of bearing witness to massive trauma—does indeed begin with someone who testifies to an absence, to an event that has not yet come into existence...” (Laub 57). However, “Bearing witness to trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener” (70). While someone may write their testimony (and indeed, Felman focuses on several written testimonies), witnessing implies both a speaker and a listener. In fact, Laub describes “...three separate, distinct levels of witnessing... the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience; the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others; and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself” (75).

1.7.3 Cultural Terms

Maya/Mayan – Maya is the term for the Mesoamerican people groups and culture, while Mayan is the large family of languages spoken in Central America and Mexico by the Maya people (Merriam-Webster).

K'iche'/Quiché/El Quiché – The K’iche’ people are one of the Maya ethnic groups living in the Guatemalan highlands. K’iche’ also refers to their language. The Spanish spelling of this name is Quiché. El Quiché is a department, or region, in the north of Guatemala where the K’iche’ people primarily live. The K’iche’ people are the largest indigenous people group in Guatemala, and the K’iche’ language is the most spoken Mayan language in Guatemala (“People and Society: Guatemala”, “The Guatemalan Maya-Quiche Population”).

1.8 Outline of the Chapters

Following this introduction, I use chapter two to discuss my Literature Review, including children's refugee literature as well as trauma theory, neocolonial and dominant discourse theories, and historical grounding texts. My third chapter, Methodology, consists of three parts: the first, the use of trauma theory as a lens in reading the three books. The second focuses on neocolonial dominant discourse as a lens, and the third section looks at the use of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* as my framing text. My fourth chapter focuses on Menchú's text and examines the aspects of trauma and culture that Menchú describes, in order to better examine these aspects in the next two chapters. In particular, I look briefly at Menchú's description of life before the war came to their part of Guatemala, the traumatic events Menchú witnessed, and the controversy surrounding her memoir.

Next I examine *Journey of Dreams*. *Journey of Dreams*, by Marge Pellegrino, follows Tomasa and her brother, sister, and father as they flee their Guatemalan village and try to reunite with Tomasa's mother and older brother. I look at the importance of K'iche', Spanish, and English in terms of neocolonial dominant discourse and language-power dynamics, as well as the trauma of witnessing a massacre. Chapter six focuses on *Tree Girl*. Ben Mikaelson's *Tree Girl* follows Gabi and her little sister, the only survivors of their family, as they escape Guatemala. By far the most openly traumatic novel, I look at how Gabi internalizes the repeated traumas she encounters, as well as the strong presence of counter-discourses alongside neocolonial dominant discourses, including her decision to stay with her people rather than seek refuge in the United States.

In my seventh and final chapter, the Conclusion, I summarize and wrap up my arguments, returning to my original research questions. I also discuss further aspects of the

novels I was unable to cover in the study, and well as my limitations and areas for further study—the possibilities that my project opens up and/or only partly addresses.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In my thesis-related readings over the last year, three different areas of reading stand out as integral to my thesis and the larger field. The first, of course, is the refugee literature I encountered. I limited my look at refugee memoirs and fiction to those written about the Holocaust and since the Holocaust. This includes refugee literature about the Cuban Revolution, the Vietnam War and other affected areas of Southeast Asia, and more recently Middle Eastern and African refugee literature. In addition to these larger groupings are smaller groupings, like the few texts I discovered from Central American conflicts, but the majority of refugee literature I encountered focused on those five areas (that is: Holocaust, Cuba, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and various parts of Africa). I would like to stress, though, that within these areas, experiences even of the same war are very different. Although I have grouped the literature by geographic area, I in no way wish to imply that these areas represent a homogeneous refugee experience. For example, African refugee narratives are enormously diverse across African countries and regions, despite being grouped here as “African.”

In addition to this literature, I also read theory focused mainly on two areas: trauma and neocolonial dominant discourses. The trauma theory I read addresses two separate issues of trauma. The first centers on the debilitating, overwhelming traumatic experience and the resulting struggle to testify to that experience. The second contains theories of trauma and innocence in literature for children, written by children’s literature scholars and historians. Lastly, I read postcolonial (including neocolonial) and dominant discourse theories by Homi Bhabha, Sara Mills, Roderick McGillis, and Jean-Paul Sartre, as well as interpretations of those theories in children’s literature by scholars like Clare Bradford and Louise Saldanha. These

theories, heavily influenced by Edward Said and Michel Foucault, question power dynamics, language, and the “truth” behind the dominant discourses active today. While some texts focus more on dominant discourse, and others focus on neocolonial messages, I believe these theories complement and augment each other. In particular, as dominant discourse in children’s literature establishes white middle-class Western hegemonic power and practices as the norm, and as neocolonialism in children’s literature rewrites other cultures into a grid of Western desires and values, I find it best to group them together. For that reason, I combine both theories into one lens—called neocolonial dominant discourse—to better examine the dominant Western discourses applied to Maya communities and characters in the two novels.

Lastly, although not theory or children’s literature, I also read historical works on the Guatemalan genocide and on aspects of life for the Maya peoples in Guatemala before, during, and after the civil war. I included these texts in this study to contribute to my growing knowledge of the events and people that are represented in *Journey of Dreams* and *Tree Girl*.

2.2 Refugee Children’s Literature: From the Holocaust to Today

The largest amount of refugee literature for children that I encountered centers on the Holocaust. With more Holocaust narratives being published every year, the collection of Holocaust children’s literature continues to grow. Memoirs such as Mary Berg’s Diary, published in 1945, and Anne Frank’s Diary, first published in 1947, and in English in 1952, are two of the earliest published Holocaust narratives (“Holocaust History: Children’s Diaries During the Holocaust”). More recently, fictional books like Markus Zusak’s *The Book Thief* have gained international attention, while others, such as John Boyne’s *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* have been made into major motion pictures (and, in fact, *The Book Thief* has just been released as a

movie as well). A quick internet search reveals a plethora of websites and pamphlets on teaching Holocaust literature in Canadian and U.S. schools, suggesting a large presence of Holocaust literature—both memoirs and fictional works—in primary and secondary classrooms.

Less widespread, but still available, are books about Cuban refugees. Memoirs for children, such as *Leaving Glorytown* by Eduardo Calcines and *Waiting for Snow in Havana: Confessions of a Cuban Boy* by Carlos Eire, and juvenile fiction accounts such as *The Red Umbrella* by Christina Gonzales all tell of what life was like in Cuba in the early 1960s, and some describe the transition to life in the United States. Often these books are polarized, depicting Cuba under Castro as debased and criminal, while the United States is depicted as warm and welcoming.

More widely available than Cuban refugee books are children's books about the Vietnam War and its effect on people from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. Although not as popular as Holocaust literature, there are picture books, middle grade novels, and young adult fiction about this time in South East Asia. The picture books *The Little Refugee* by Anh Do, *Dia's Story Cloth* by Dia Cha, and *The Little Weaver of Thái-Yên Village* by Trần Khánh Tuyết and the more recent verse novel *Inside Out and Back Again* by Thanhha Lai, which received a Newbery Honor in 2012, are all written by Vietnamese and Laotian immigrants and refugees. Patricia McCormick's novel, *Never Fall Down*, is based on the real-life experiences of refugee Arn Chorn-Pond and his time living under the Khmer Rouge. McCormick interviewed Chorn-Pond and traveled to Cambodia to do research and interview people from Chorn-Pond's past. However, many of the juvenile fiction books I encountered, such as *Little Cricket* by Jackie Brown, *Children of the River*, by Linda Crew, and *Onion Tears*, by Diana Kidd and Lucy Montgomery, are all written by authors with little or no connection to Southeast Asia, and little

to no research cited. In these books, many of the struggles depicted are not, as one would expect, the struggles of war, loss, and displacement, but rather these books focus on the struggle to fit in at school and in society in the United States and Australia. Although the transition is certainly a struggle, it is disproportionately foregrounded in these books, compared to books written by or with refugees. While the last three titles mentioned were all published ten or more years ago, this tendency to focus on school struggles is not unusual even in some of the more recently published refugee-authored novels, either.

Many refugee children's books have been published about Middle Eastern conflicts since 2000. For example, Deborah Ellis' popular *Breadwinner Quartet* depicts the lives of two girls, Parvana and Shauzia, as they flee from fighting in Afghanistan. Picture books like Karen Williams, Khadra Mohammed, and Doug Chayka's *Four Feet, Two Sandals*, and Sarah Garland's *Azzi in Between* also depict the lives of girls fleeing from wars in the Middle East. Memoirs and diaries are also available, such as Marjane Satrapi's crossover graphic novel *Persepolis* and certain selections from *Stolen Voices: Young People's War Diaries from World War I to Iraq*, edited by war diarist Zlata Filipović and Melanie Challenger. Like the Cuban refugee children's literature, many of these books can contain neocolonial dominant discourses—that is, Western (particularly U.S.) values and ideals are inserted into Middle Eastern contexts; female protagonists such as Shauzia only want what all American girls want, including, of course, freedom from the veil. In “Save the Muslim Girl!” Özlem Sensoy and Elizabeth Marshall write, “Young adult literature about the Middle East cannot be separated from the post-9/11 context in which these books are marketed and increasingly published... ‘Save the Muslim girl’ stories emerge alongside a preoccupation with Islam in mainstream news media and a surge in U.S. and Canadian military, political, and economic activities in the Middle

East and West Asia.” Few books question that discourse. *Stolen Voices* does, including diaries from Iraq, Israel, and Palestine, and giving respect and attention to the voices of each child.

Books about refugees from different countries in Africa have continued to grow as increased immigration and more awareness of African conflicts, such as the genocides in Sudan and Rwanda, have emerged. From picture books like *My Name is Sangoel* by Karen Williams, Khadra Mohammed, and Catherine Stock, to verse novels like *The Good Braider* by Terry Farish, to mystery-thrillers like *Diamonds in the Shadow* by Caroline Cooney, fictional accounts of African refugees abound. At the same time there are also powerful memoirs for young adults, such as *The Bite of Mango* by Mariatu Kamara and *A Long Way Gone* by Ishmael Beah. Moreover, earlier this year *Out of Nowhere* by Maria Padian was published; the young adult novel focuses on the life of Tom Bouchard, a white jock in a school with many Somali refugees. The author creates a vivid picture of the struggles that refugees and communities face, including issues of racism, religious intolerance, and immigration arguments. Padian worked closely with Shobow Saban, a Somali refugee in her community, to write the novel, offering an example of how collaboration and respect for differing cultures can question and disrupt dominant discourses (Honda).

Lastly, books about Central American refugees are difficult to find. I only found two picture books, *The Long Road* by Luis Garay and *Marisol and the Yellow Messenger* by Emilie Smith-Ayala and Sami Suomalainen, and both were about refugees from “Central/Latin America,” rather than from specific countries. Many books exist that either depict the immigrant experience or could possibly portray the lives of refugees in a new country, but do not directly reference the refugee experience. For example, several picture books by Jorge Argueta, such as *Xochitl and the Flowers*, depict families from El Salvador currently living in the United States,

however their reasons for immigrating are not given. Beyond the books already mentioned above, I also found *Journey of Sparrows* by Fran Leeper Buss, a novel about Salvadoran refugees for ages 8 and up, *Grab Hands and Run* by Frances Temple, a novel about Salvadoran refugees for ages 10 and up, and *The Night Voyagers* by Donn Kushner, a novel about refugees fleeing from Central America for ages 12 and up. While I was originally interested in including Salvadoran novels in this study, the differences between the conflicts in Guatemala and El Salvador, as well as my desire to use Rigoberta Menchú's memoir as a framing text, rendered it impractical. In addition, the three titles mentioned above would be difficult to include due to age constraints and lack of historical specificity, respectively. The few other texts that I found are also unsuitable for my current study, despite the interesting issues they raise. *Libertad*, by Alma Fullerton, is a verse-novel describing the journey of two Guatemalan boys who leave the Guatemala City Dump to find their father in the United States; however, they do not leave due to persecution or war, and therefore are not refugees. Books such as *After Peaches* by Michelle Mulder, a book about Mexican refugees in Canada, and *The Dispossessed: Chronicles of the Desterrados of Columbia* by Alfredo Molano, a nonfiction collection of interviews with displaced Columbia children, take place outside of Central America and were therefore excluded from consideration.

2.3 Trauma Theory, Witnessing, and Trauma Narratives for Children

The two main texts on trauma theory in my research were *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* by Cathy Caruth, and *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub. Caruth looks at works by Freud, Lacan, Duras, Resnais, de Man, Kant, and Kleist and applies trauma theory to

those works, often focusing on the paradox of telling the untellable and the equal necessity and inability of those suffering from traumatic experiences to fully tell of those experiences.

Felman and Laub contribute different chapters to their book; Felman focuses on the experience of a class she taught on trauma and witnessing, as well as on works by Camus, de Man, and Claude Lanzmann. Laub's chapters focus on his experiences working with survivors of the Holocaust and in particular, his project to video record those Holocaust witnesses for a database. Like Caruth, both Felman and Laub also discuss the simultaneous impossibility and necessity of witnessing, and of the importance of sharing traumatic experiences to facilitate healing. While both books focus primarily on trauma, witnessing, and testimony concerning the Holocaust, their theories and readings may easily be applied to other traumatic events such as the Rwandan, Sudanese, or Guatemalan genocides, or other refugee situations.

In addition, Felman in particular discusses the use of novels as a form of testimony to traumatic events. In reference to Camus' *The Plague* she writes, "...the act of writing—the act of making the artistic statement of the novel—is itself presented as an act of bearing witness to the trauma of survival, the *event* to which the testimony points and which it attempts to comprehend and grasp..." (8). Leigh Gilmore, in her article "What Was I? Literary Witness in the Testimonial Archive," also discusses the importance of including fictional accounts, or "literary witness" in trauma testimony. She writes, "Literary witness belongs to the complicated terrain of truth telling, justice, injury, and resistant agency. It can escape the narrower protocols of testimony yet, like the practice of testimonio, still assert its authority in the messy world where truth is often violently contested" (83). Thus, literature about genocide is understood to have the power to speak truth and raise awareness about the experience of that genocide, despite

being fiction. In fact, Gilmore urges readers to “...read across genres of witness narrative as part of the ethical project such accounts demand” (78).

Lastly, although Felman and Laub do discuss interviews with Holocaust survivors who were children at the time, neither *Unclaimed Experience* nor *Testimony* directly address the issue of children’s experience of trauma, either as survivors of a traumatic event or as onlookers. For this reason, I also read academic chapters and articles on trauma in children’s literature, as well as studies on trauma in refugee children. In the first category, I found three chapters from the anthology *Under Fire: Childhood in the Shadow of War*, edited by Elizabeth Goodenough and Andrea Immel, to be particularly useful. The first, Lore Segal’s chapter “Baby Terrors” is a short description of her intention to write a book for her children about the death of their father. However, as she so aptly describes, “I was trying to be harmless, guaranteeing that I was also going to be useless” (94). Her attempt to protect her children from any sadness or trauma in the book would have separated them entirely from the actual experience of their father’s death, which was both traumatic and sad. Kenneth Kidd’s chapter, “A is for Auschwitz: Psychoanalysis, Trauma Theory, and the ‘Children’s Literature of Atrocity’” and Adrienne Kertzer’s chapter “The Anxiety of Trauma in Children’s War Fiction” both deal with the questions: What is appropriate for children to read and How much trauma can children take before they are traumatized? They also discuss the way history and events are portrayed in children’s literature, and the importance of historical accuracy in war and refugee fiction. While Kidd and Kertzer disagree over how traumatic modern war fiction has become, they both believe that more attention needs to be given to war and refugee fiction for children. Kertzer has continued to do just that in other publications, most notably in her book *My Mother’s Voice: Children,*

Literature, and the Holocaust, which tackles the issue of representing the horrors of the Holocaust for children in a way they can understand, but which does not then traumatize them.

2.3.1 Child Refugee Trauma Studies

Finally, I also read studies on actual refugee children. Most helpful to me was Israel Bronstein and Paul Montgomery's review of several studies entitled "Psychological Distress in Refugee Children: A Systematic Review." In this study Bronstein and Montgomery establish that children who had the highest occurrences and levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were refugees from war zones and refugees who had lost family members in the migration process; refugee children fitting those parameters had up to a 93.8% prevalence for PTSD (48). Also interesting were smaller studies, like Sophie Yohani's study entitled "Nurturing Hope in Refugee Children During Early Years of Post-War Adjustment" and Julia Hope's two studies on refugee children's literature in the classroom ("'One Day We Had to Run': The Development of the Refugee Identity in Children's Literature and its Function in Education" and "Flightlines: Exploring Early Readers for Children About the Refugee Experience"). These studies confirmed my belief that refugee children really do experience and internalize trauma, something that is often missing from the refugee fiction I have read.

2.4 Neocolonial Dominant Discourse

The two novels I examine display neocolonial dominant discourses to differing extents. For example, one narrator seems more aware than the other of the role the United States played in supporting, financing, and training the Guatemalan soldiers that enacted the genocide ("Truth Commission: Guatemala"). One way to examine discourses in these texts is through the use of *I*,

Rigoberta Menchú as a framing text. The memoir goes into great detail on Maya culture, people, and traditions, and provides a valuable lens through which to view the representations of the Maya narrators and their communities. As explained above, I also look closely at postcolonial, neocolonial, and dominant discourse theories by Homi Bhabha, Roderick McGillis, Sara Mills, and Jean-Paul Sartre. In the *Keywords for Children's Literature*'s entry on "Postcolonialism," Clare Bradford writes that although scholars continue to debate whether the United States is a postcolonial nation, academics agree that the United States is now a neo-colonizer (178).

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the term "neocolonialism" was first used in the 1960s and is defined as: "The economic and political policies by which a great power indirectly maintains or extends its influence over other areas or people." Roderick McGillis points out that "Popular culture is an important site for neocolonial activity... [and] neocolonialism is more deeply economic and cultural [than colonialism]" ("Introduction" xxiv). Sartre, in his book *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, draws on examples of what he terms "neocolonial mystification" to show how dominant discourses rearrange truth to fit neocolonialist agendas (9).

On the other hand, the idea of "knowing" other people and cultures is a key tool of neocolonialism and dominant discourse. Sara Mills, in her book *Discourse*, writes, "The fact that sweeping generalisations were made about particular cultures made them less communities of individuals than an indistinguishable mass, about whom one could amass 'knowledge' or which could be stereotyped..." (109). Homi Bhabha focuses on the use of stereotypes as well, writing, "...the stereotype, which is [colonialism's] major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification... For it is the force of ambivalence that gives the colonial stereotype its currency" (94-95). This also relates to Roderick McGillis' look in "'And the Celt Knew the Indian': Knowingness, Postcolonialism, and Children's Literature" at how the desire

for knowledge about a people can undercut understanding and encourage objectification.

McGillis writes, “Much of the literature for children these days attempts to introduce young readers to a range of cultural experiences in the hope that knowing about other cultures will lead to tolerance... Knowing, in this sense means bringing under control, getting inside, and thereby using” (224). He continues, “To know is to enter into, but in a manner that appropriates,” (225) and draws attention to the damage wrought by the appropriation of “...cultures for the purpose of teaching young readers not understanding of another culture or cultures, but rather to allow these readers the illusion of mastery” (227). Thus, many children’s books represent a different culture in manageable, knowable ways that undercut difference and understanding.

Both McGillis’ “Introduction” and article above were published in a book he edited on postcolonialism, entitled *Voices of the Other: Children’s Literature and the Postcolonial Context*. This book is full of rich articles on postcolonialism and children’s literature; Shaobo Xie’s article “Rethinking the Identity of Cultural Otherness...” discusses the importance of postcolonial writings in the face of continuing hegemonic attempts to overcome racial and cultural “others.” She writes, “...there still remains attempts to subjugate otherness to the imperialism of sameness, and the hegemonic West still tries to reduce radical cultural/racial difference to manageable proportions” (3), and suggests that this imperialism of sameness is often “...the uniform logic of capitalism” (8). Nancy Ellen Batty’s article “We Are the World, We Are the Children” discusses the use of the starving child in humanitarian songs, pictures, and stories as an invitation to benevolently colonize “developing” nations: “...the Third World child comes to symbolize for the West the very possibility that, with the right guidance and assistance, the ‘developing’ world will come to more closely resemble the world... that has reached out to assist it” (24). In “Bedtime Stories: Canadian Multiculturalism and Children’s Literature,”

Louise Saldanha shows how even in a country determined to encourage multiculturalism, “...textual representations of race and ethnicity are managed through Eurocentric normative ideals,” (165) and “...(mostly nonwhite) culture is performed through dress, art, food, and music...” (167). Dieter Petzold’s article “Multiculturalism in Canadian Children’s Books: The Embarrassments of History” discusses truth and ideology in children’s historical fiction, and the issues of representing historical injustices enacted by the hegemonic power in literature.

All of these readings directly tie in to the two novels I examine. With these diverse readings in mind, I look at how truth, history, individuals, and Maya communities are represented through a neocolonial dominant discourse lens in the two novels compared to how they appear in Menchú’s memoir and historical documents like the UN’s truth commission results.

2.5 Non-fiction Texts on the Guatemalan Civil War

Finally, in addition to the theory texts and children’s literature described above, I have also read non-fiction texts concerning the Guatemalan Civil War, the genocide, and the history of oppression faced by the Maya communities in Guatemala. *I, Rigoberta Menchú* is my primary non-fiction text, describing Maya customs and traditions, Maya living conditions before and during the war, and Menchú’s personal experiences during the war. However, I wanted to augment my understanding of the genocide, including the political and socioeconomic factors that led up to the war and the recorded experiences of refugees during that time. Victor Montejo’s books *Testimony: Death of Guatemalan Village* and *Voices from Exile: Violence and Survival in Modern Maya History* are both helpful in understanding the Guatemalan refugee experience. Montejo, a Maya Guatemalan schoolteacher and refugee who is now a cultural

anthropologist in the United States, recorded his experience of witnessing the violence against his community in *Testimony*. He later published *Voices in Exile*, about his research on Maya communities in Mexican refugee camps. At the start of this book, however, he also succinctly describes the history of Maya peoples' suffering at the hands of the Spanish colonizers and later the Guatemalan government. *State of Darkness: US Complicity in Genocides Since 1945*, by David Model, offers a dramatic yet fact-based look at the politics surrounding the Guatemalan genocide and the US's documented knowledge of and involvement in the war. The Commission for Historical Clarification, Guatemala's UN led truth and reconciliation committee, took place between 1997 and 1999, and concluded that 200,000 Guatemalans had been killed, 83% of which were Maya ("Truth Commission: Guatemala"). These and other facts on the human rights violations are important for understanding the veracity with which the genocide is represented in the two novels I examine.

Although the true number of people killed can never be known for certain, as mass graves are still being found today, in 1999 The Commission for Historical Clarification estimated that 200,000 people had been killed. Until that time estimates for the number killed were uncertain. Montejo, whose book *Voices from Exile* was also published in 1999, had previously estimated that the army had "killed tens of thousands of civilians," based on the army's own count of 440 Maya communities destroyed (4). Of the 200,000 killed, the army was found responsible for 93% of the human rights violations, while the guerillas forces were found to be responsible for only 3%; although the war spanned from 1960-1996, the truth commission found that "Social mobilization was at its peak from 1978 to 1982 and so too was the rate of killings and human rights abuses" ("Truth Commission: Guatemala"). General Efrain Rios Montt, who was in power for seventeen months in 1982-1983, is said to have instigated "one of the most violent

periods of the war” (“Guatemala Rios Montt”). He was tried in Guatemala in 2013 for genocide and war crimes and found guilty, however that finding was overturned by the constitutional court, and the retrial set for 2015 (“Guatemala Rios Montt”). During his time in power, death squads were sent to wipe out entire communities, although Montejo writes that death squads had been active for some time already. He writes, “In the late 1960s death squads with names like Mano Blanca (White Hand) and Ojo por Ojo (Eye for Eye) appeared as extrajudicial arms of military action.... By 1970 it was clear that electoral policies could not solve the problems facing Guatemala, and from 1970 to 1985 Guatemala was ruled by a succession of military officers...” (61). It was during this time that Menchú and her family became active in organizing against the Guatemalan government, and therefore I explore the war further in Chapter 4, as I discuss *I, Rigoberta Menchú*.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

I use aspects of trauma theory, neocolonial dominant discourse, and Rigoberta Menchú's memoir as lenses through which I read *Journey of Dreams* and *Tree Girl*. I examine both texts for how trauma, witnessing, and healing are depicted, primarily using trauma theories from Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Dori Laub. At the same time, I also analyze how K'iche' culture, as well as languages and displacement, are represented in the two novels through the use of neocolonial dominant discourse theories; of particular interest to me are works by Roderick McGillis, Nancy Ellen Batty, Dieter Petzold, and Clare Bradford, which have taken already established theories and applied them to the world of children's literature. Lastly, I use *I, Rigoberta Menchú* as a framing text for the two novels and as a bridge between trauma theory and neocolonial dominant discourses. As Menchú discusses the trauma she experienced and deals with misrepresentations and repression of her people, her memoir provides a meeting ground for both theoretical lenses.

3.2 Caruth and Felman and Laub: Testimony, Witnessing, and Trauma Theory

In her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth defines trauma as "...an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (11). She refers to the heart of stories born out of traumatic events as "...a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of survival" (7). Thus, sharing one's story becomes problematic as the

story itself is a reminder of death escaped and death still experienced through intrusive phenomena such as nightmares. Furthermore, Caruth points out that in this confusion between the crisis of life and the crises of death, “history is no longer straightforwardly referential” (11). In a similar vein, Adrienne Kertzer writes, “...the tendency to value ‘objective’ eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust... betrays a naïve faith that the eyewitness makes no choices in what she sees and what she is willing and able to put into language...” (*My Mother’s Voice* 21-22). One question that arises from these theories is: if historical accuracy is not the main issue at stake in testimonies and witnessing, how can “accuracy” be measured?

Felman and Laub also discuss witnessing in their text, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*; like Caruth, they discuss “...the shock of the unintelligible in the face of the attempt of its interpretation...” (xx). They also assert that historical accuracy is less important than the truth felt and interpreted by the survivor of the trauma. Felman describes testimony, “...not as a mode of *statement of*, but rather as a mode of *access to*, that truth” (16). Laub, while discussing the effect of trauma on the lives of survivors, writes, “The trauma is thus an event that has no beginning, no ending, no before, no during and no after... as far as survivors are concerned, [the event] continues into the present and is current in every respect” (69). For this reason, “...the testimonial enterprise is yet another mode of struggle against the victims’ entrapment in trauma repetition, against their enslavement to the fate of their victimization” (70). In both Caruth’s work and Felman and Laub’s text, the focus is on the cycle of trauma, experienced through nightmares, psychoses, and even through difficult events that occur after the primary traumatic event. For this reason, I analyze the texts for trauma cycles and for intrusive phenomena such as nightmares.

Another area of importance is that of witnessing. Rigoberta Menchú is a witness to the Guatemalan genocide through her testimony, but the protagonists of *Journey of Dreams* and *Tree Girl* are also fictional witnesses. As part of his definition of witnessing, Laub mentions “three separate, distinct levels of witnessing...: the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience; the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others; and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself” (75). I use this description of witnessing, and the theories discussed above, as a lens through which to examine the way in which Tomasa and Gabi bear witness to the genocide through their stories. I look at how the narrators act as witnesses and as trauma survivors as they describe their journeys. Specifically, I examine the passages of trauma infliction—that is, the trauma of the attack in which the protagonists lose their homes and often family members, as well as the trauma of the journey, with little food, no safety, and constant fear—to see how trauma is represented in those passages.

In addition, I also reference other firsthand accounts and scholarly articles on the power of testimony as healing. As Elisabeth Burgos-Debray writes in her introduction to *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, until Menchú shared her testimony with Burgos-Debray, “...she had never been able to sleep all night without waking up in a panic...” (xvi). The child war diarist Zlata Filipović, in the introduction to *Stolen Voices*, writes of a need, “... to communicate, to believe that someone, even if it is a blank piece of paper, is listening, that someone can hear and understand” (xiv). Caruth and Felman and Laub all agree that despite the problems with telling the untellable, telling is better than remaining silent. I apply these theories to the representations of the narrators’ desire to speak, and what they do with their ability to tell, or hide, their experiences. I examine protagonists’ verbal interactions with others, and how they chose to share or conceal their trauma, as well as how this affects their healing or continued victimization from trauma.

3.3 Neocolonial Dominant Discourse and Children’s Literature

I also apply neocolonial dominant discourse theories to the two novels. As defined in the significant terms in Chapter 1, both theories of dominant discourse and neocolonialism are concerned with privileging a Western social and economic perspective above other perspectives, and both are used in postcolonial studies. In her “Postcolonial” entry in *Keywords for Children’s Literature*, Clare Bradford writes, “By the late 1970s ‘postcolonial’ was used by literary critics to refer to the effects of colonization, and to reading strategies capable of interrogating the (often naturalized) manifestations of colonial discourse that appear in texts of all kinds and times” (177). It is this discourse that I also interrogate in the two novels I examine, although I narrow my focus to particularly examine neocolonial dominant discourses. As mentioned above, neocolonialism is a branch, or part, of postcolonialism, and neocolonial criticism looks at why colonization and dominant discourse occur today, in a supposedly “postcolonial” world. Despite many countries being free from colonial rule for many decades, colonial powers continue to have strong influences. This is due, according to theorists like Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, and Michel Foucault, to the power of discourses. Drawing on Foucault’s work with power and discourse, Bradford writes, “Michel Foucault characterizes discourse as incorporating ‘relations of power, not relations of meaning,’ and the implication of this view of discourse is that language does not merely represent and embody opposing meanings, but that the struggle for power is a struggle *over language*” (23).

Bradford’s work is particularly useful in applying these theories of power, dominant discourse, and colonialism to children’s literature. She writes, “...children’s texts are caught between discursive pressures: the socializing agendas that influence the production of books for

children; the dominant discourses that constitute cultural givens; and the counter-discourses that seek to undermine them” (24). Bradford also draws attention to the trope of journeying in children’s literature, which is, “...prominent in postcolonial texts, many of which rehearse, reexamine, and parody the historical journeys of colonialism” (“The End of Empire?” 198). Both of the novels I examine grapple with this problematic view of traveling to the neocolonial center—in this case, the United States. The refugee experience is, by definition, the experience of someone without a home, so a journey of some kind is inevitable; however, the ease with which refugees in the two novels leave behind their beloved homelands for a land where “even the poor have cars and live in buildings with windows and doors” (Mikaelsen 175) suggests that neocolonial dominant discourses are at work. The way in which displacement is represented and resolved is therefore an important area to analyze in this study.

Similarly, I use dominant discourses lenses to look at how language is used and struggled over—especially the interaction between Mayan languages, Spanish, and English. I examine the general use of Spanish and Mayan in the text to see what words are “othered,” as well as passages of translation and struggle. For example, in Guatemala there are many Mayan languages that are hard, or impossible, for other Maya groups to understand. As the protagonists journey north and cross cultural and political borders, they encounter new languages as well as new dialects of familiar languages (for example, there are at least twenty-three different ways to say “bus” in Spanish in Latin America). I examine the passages in which the protagonists come face to face with new languages or dialects, closely analyzing how protagonists make meaning and either assimilate or reject new ways of speaking. I analyze how the protagonists internalize Western ideals, especially as they leave their homes and travel north, examining where protagonists choose to make new homes as an example of neocolonial discourses at work. The

decision to remain Guatemalan or to become American takes on significant meaning as the protagonists either accept or reject the belief that life in the north is better than life in their home country.

3.4 Rigoberta Menchú and Framing Texts

I also use *I, Rigoberta Menchú* as a framework for discussing the two novels—as with trauma theory and postcolonial theory, this text is a lens through which I examine the novels. Interwoven throughout the book are stories of Menchú’s childhood along with descriptions of Maya, and particularly K’iche’, traditions. She describes life before the genocide, as well as her experience of the war and massacres that ravaged the Guatemalan Maya population. Both novels similarly begin with the lives of the narrators at home with friends and family, and expand to deal with the war, death, and trauma the children face from there. As with a critical lens, I use Menchú’s descriptions of Maya life and traditions to examine the descriptions of Maya life and traditions in the novels. Both Tomasa and Gabi are also K’iche’, the same Maya group as Menchú, and all live in highland villages. This enables the use of Menchú’s experience as a direct comparison/contrast to the two fictional protagonists. Also, as Menchú was politically involved in consciousness-raising among the Maya peoples leading up to her exile, I use the details she provides of the war and genocide in comparison/contrast to the political awareness and activity of the protagonists. Menchú began speaking out against the treatment of her people in her teens, at about the same age as Gabi and Tomasa experience the genocide. In conjunction with Menchú’s text, I also use other books, particularly the works of Victor Montejo, another Maya witness to the genocide, to further establish Guatemalan Maya peoples’ understanding of the civil war and their sociocultural and economic situation.

Thus I am using a three-part analysis system: first, I look at the representations of major traumatic events and the interiorizing of that trauma through the lens of trauma theory. Second, I analyze the representations of culture, language, and home through a neocolonial dominant discourse lens. Lastly, I use Menchú's memoir as a framing text through which to view the representations of trauma, culture, language, and displacement within the novels.

Chapter 4: Analysis of *I, Rigoberta Menchú*

4.1 Introduction

Rigoberta Menchú dictated her testimony to Venezuelan ethnographer Elizabeth Burgos-Debray in January, 1982, at the age of twenty-three. She spent a week with Burgos-Debray in Paris, recording hours of testimony. The book was published in Spanish in 1983, and in English in 1984. In it, Menchú speaks of her youth, her family, Maya traditions, the struggles of Maya peoples in Guatemala at the time, and her active involvement in the Guatemalan Civil War. Menchú worked as an organizer and consciousness-raiser during the late 70s and early 80s, and continued to do so through her published testimony and her travels. Eventually she became a UN Goodwill Ambassador, and won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992. Now she lives in Guatemala, and has run for president in two prior elections. Her testimony, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, is taught in universities and secondary schools in the United States; in fact, it was in a Literature of Trauma class in college that I first encountered this text.

Despite receiving a great deal of recognition, Menchú and her testimony have also received a great deal of criticism. David Stoll published a book entitled *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*, in which he claims that Menchú fabricated a great deal of her book for the purpose of spreading her own leftist political views and those of the organizations she worked with in Guatemala. This received widespread attention, especially among conservative academics and writers who wished to see the testimony removed from high school and university curriculums. However, even these detractors are willing to admit "...that whether or not Rigoberta's autobiography was faked, the native Indians of Guatemala have endured unimaginable hardships, the death squads of Latin America were a reality of the 1970s and 1980s, and so... the general message of *I, Rigoberta Menchu* is essentially true" (D'Souza, "I,

Rigoberta Menchú... NOT!”). This is also confirmed by other accounts of Maya communities in Guatemala during this time, including Maya anthropologist Victor Montejo’s two books on his experiences during the genocide and his work with Guatemalan refugees.

Regardless of Stoll’s claims, those interviewed by Stoll as well as Maya voices from other publications, such as Montejo’s *Voices from Exile*, confirm that the events in Menchú’s memoir were happening in Maya communities in Guatemala. As Menchú states in her memoir, her whole reason for speaking is for her people; she writes, “I’d like to stress that it’s not only *my* life, it’s also the testimony of my people” (1). Her interviewer describes her as, “...a privileged witness: she has survived the genocide that destroyed her family and community and is stubbornly determined to break the silence and to confront the systematic extermination of her people... Words are her only weapons” (xi). In this way—as a testimony to both genocide and daily oppression—Menchú’s testimony directly relates to the theories of trauma and neocolonial dominant discourse discussed by Caruth, Felman, Laub, Said, Bhabha, and so many others. This chapter looks at Menchú’s life and testimony, the controversy surrounding her testimony and the accusations of politicization, and the ways her testimony ties in to the theoretical lenses of trauma and neocolonial dominant discourse.

4.2 Menchú’s Early Life and Testimony

Rigoberta Menchú was born on January 9th, 1959, a year before the start of the Guatemalan Civil War—a war which did not end until 1996. Five years before her birth, the CIA had collaborated with a small group of Guatemalan forces to overthrow the democratically elected President Árbenz Guzmán (Model 12). The president had planned to buy unused land from fruit corporations, particularly from the United Fruit Company, which owned 42% of the

arable land in Guatemala, and give that land to impoverished peasants (Gordon). The United Fruit Company informed the United States government of the “Communist” plot, and the CIA sent troops in to depose Árbenz, ushering in 37 years of military dictatorships (Gordon). It was under these dictatorships that the death squads began—supposedly due to the fear that communism was taking root in Maya communities—and from 1981-1983 the worst of the genocide took place (“Genocide in Guatemala”). Although Menchú was forced to flee Guatemala in 1981, at the beginning of the full-fledged military action against the Maya groups in Guatemala, she still saw a great deal of torture and death. She fled to Mexico to give her testimony of the atrocities she had witnessed, and eventually was invited to Paris to give her testimony there (Menchú 242). It was in Paris that she recorded her testimony with Elizabeth Burgos-Debray.

Although Burgos-Debray transcribed and rearranged all twenty-four hours of tapes she and Menchú had created, she writes in her introduction that she, “...eventually went back to my original transcript and followed the order of Rigoberta’s spontaneous associations” (xx). Menchú’s memoir begins with her early memories and Maya customs surrounding birth. According to her narrative, Menchú was born in the small town of Chimal in the Department of El Quiché (2). Her family farmed their land in the small village of Chimal, and also worked on the fincas, or plantations, on the coast (2-3). They had little money, and life was hard. The actual minute details of her life, of where she was and what she did at specific times are difficult to pinpoint because her testimony is disjointed and fractured at times. Her detractors have latched on to the fractures in her testimony as proof of her duplicity, despite the fact that trauma theorists often discuss the fractured nature of survivors’ memories. Laub explains: “The traumatic experience has normally long been submerged and has become distorted in its

submersion... The horror is, indeed, compelling not only in its reality, but even more so, in its flagrant distortion and subversion of reality” (76). However, this “distortion and subversion of reality” is not the only reason for gaps in the text. In addition to reasons of trauma, Menchú has also responded to some of Stoll’s accusations with creditable reasons for her silence on some issues. For example, concerning the accusation that she had actually gone to a junior high boarding school for three years, “Menchú responds that she did not speak about the school in 1982 to protect it from reprisals by the army... Menchú also explains that she was on a charity scholarship at the school that only allowed her three hours of classes per day and the rest of her time was spent cleaning the school as a servant” (Carey-Webb). Thus, due to Menchú’s desire to protect members of her community and to focus on issues of violence and oppression, there are admittedly aspects of Menchú’s life that are missing from her testimony, and in turn these missing details have caused several academics to question her authenticity.

4.3 Controversy Surrounding Her Testimony

David Stoll’s 1999 exposé garnered the most attention, perhaps due to the number of interviews Stoll conducted in Guatemala, but he was not the first to publish work condemning Menchú’s text. Dinesh D’Souza published a book entitled *Illiberal Education: The Politics of Race and Sex on Campus* in 1991, the year before Menchú won the Nobel Peace Prize. D’Souza, a former policy advisor to Ronald Regan, attacks Menchú for her Marxist agenda and celebrates Regan’s policies—one of which was giving military aid to Efraín Ríos Montt, the dictator recently tried for the genocide he ordered on the Maya peoples of Guatemala. However, according to D’Souza’s later article, published in 1999, “The issue is whether *I, Rigoberta Menchu* deserves a central place in the liberal arts curriculum... Rigoberta... does not run the

risk of being confused with Hemingway. Rather, the argument for teaching *I, Rigoberta Menchu* is based on the claim that, for all its literary flaws, the book is an accurate and authentic representation of the sufferings of a people...” (“I, Rigoberta Menchú... NOT!”). D’Souza believes this to be a weak claim, and that universities such as Stanford, his own alma mater, should expunge the text from their curriculum. He finishes his article by denouncing her claim to society’s sympathy, writing:

With extraordinary canniness, she presented herself in her autobiography as the consummate victim, a *quadruple* victim of oppression. She is a person of color, and thus a victim of racism. She is a woman, and thus a victim of sexism. She is a Latin American, and thus a victim of European and North American colonialism. She is an Indian, and thus victimized by the Latino ruling class of Latin America. For such ingenuity in seizing the bottom rung of the ladder, who can doubt that Rigoberta Menchu deserved a prize?

However, the fact that Menchú is a victim of sexism, racism, colonialism, and genocide does seem to merit attention, as other critics of Menchú, such as Stoll, admit.

David Stoll’s book, summarized in *The New York Times* journalist Larry Rohter’s article “Tarnished Laureate: A special report; Nobel Winner Finds Her Story Challenged,” sifts through each of Menchú’s facts with a fine-tooth comb. Rohter writes that he has also done research in Guatemala and confirms Stoll’s findings. The three main areas of dispute are:

1. That the struggle over land with the Guatemalan government was actually an inter-family dispute between her mother’s side of the family and her father’s.

2. That in her testimony she claims to see a brother die of starvation, and another brother die of torture, when in fact the first brother may be alive, and she was not actually present for her other brother's torture and death.
3. She claims to have never been to school, when in fact others claim she had an education through grade six, and could not have possibly been working on the fincas, or plantations, at all the times she claimed, as she would have been in school for some of that time.

As his sources, Stoll cites many people whom he interviewed, some of whom are *ladino* officials Menchú had already claimed were corrupt and interested in harming Maya rights and causes. It turns out, as mentioned above, that Menchú's education was not "through grade six," as Rohter asserts, but just three years of school, during which Menchú spent most of her time working for her scholarship. Menchú eventually responded to all of Stoll's claims, summarized succinctly in Carey-Webb's article "The Truth of Rigoberta Menchú's Testimonial," and although Stoll has not been able to disprove her a second time, he continues to publish articles accusing Menchú of having a political agenda.

4.4 “Truth” or Historical Accuracy and Political Discourse

Of course, the assertion that Rigoberta Menchú dictated her memoir with an agenda is certainly true. Menchú herself admits that she wants to bring awareness to the plight of "all poor Guatemalans" in *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (1). Burgos-Debray acknowledges that fact in the introduction, writing, "As a popular leader, her one ambition is to devote her life to overthrowing the relations of domination and exclusion which characterize internal colonialism... She is fighting for the recognition of her culture, for acceptance of the fact that it is different and for her people's rightful share of power" (xiii). Nor is she secretive about her connections to grassroots

political groups in Guatemala, as she discusses her work with the United Peasant Committee (CUC, or Comité de Unidad Campesina), the Vincente Menchu Revolutionary Christians, and the 31st of January Popular Front, as well as her connection to the guerrilla forces.

This is one of the main differing factors between Menchú's testimony and those of the two protagonists in *Journey of Dreams* and *Tree Girl*. While their villages are attacked simply for being Maya, Menchú and her family were targeted for raising awareness of Maya suffering and attempting to create a national consciousness amongst the many Maya people groups in Guatemala. However, Menchú's political activism began in her late teens, and her life up until she chose to join the CUC would have been very similar to the lives of the two K'iche' protagonists; all were living in villages in the Altiplano, or highlands, of El Quiché. Furthermore, due to Menchú's involvement in organizing Maya communities, she is able to provide descriptions of what happened in different villages she visited, and thereby give several accounts of attacks on Maya individuals and communities. These accounts are corroborated, as mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, by other Maya accounts of the genocide, including Victor Mentejo's two books *Testimony: The Death of a Guatemalan Village*, based on his own eyewitness account, and *Voices from Exile: Violence and Survival in Modern Maya History*, based on his anthropological research with Maya refugees living in camps in Mexico. For this reason, and for the Maya traditions and many years of day-to-day life Menchú describes prior to her political involvement, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* largely offers an accurate glimpse of what K'iche' life was like before and during the genocide.

4.5 Trauma in Menchú’s Testimony

In addition to Menchú’s stated desire to protect others from reprisals and her desire to focus on issues related to the genocide in Guatemala, further explanation for the sometimes fractured nature of her memoir can be found in trauma theory; trauma theory asserts that survivors of trauma often do not remember historical events “accurately.” For example, Laub discusses the testimony he took of a survivor from Auschwitz, in which the woman recalled seeing four chimneys explode during an uprising. When he showed the tape at a conference, he received a great deal of protest: “The testimony was not accurate, historians claimed. The number of chimneys was misrepresented. Historically, only one chimney was blown up, not all four. Since the memory of the testifying woman turned out to be, in this way, fallible, one could not accept—nor give credence to—her whole account of events” (59-60). Laub replies, “The woman was testifying… not to the number of chimneys blown up, but to something else, more radical, more crucial: the reality of an unimaginable occurrence… She testified to the breakage of a framework. That was historical truth” (60). For Laub, the truth behind trauma lies not the historical facts, but in the way that trauma was internalized and interpreted. He goes so far as to suggest that “...the trauma survivor who is bearing witness has no prior knowledge, no comprehension, and no memory of what happened… such knowledge dissolves all barriers, breaks all boundaries of time and place, of self and subjectivity” (58). This rupture of time, place, and self would certainly apply to Menchú’s testimony, as she was, and is still, a survivor of unimaginable trauma. This is directly related to the theory, espoused by Felman, Laub, and Caruth, that the survivor is incapable of completely processing a traumatic event. Caruth writes, “...trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the

first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4). In addition to the commonality of disrupted memories in survivor testimonies, Menchú was also giving the testimony of her entire life in a short period of time. As Carey-Webb points out, “Menchú gave her testimony without notes in twenty-four hours of taped conversation over an eight-day period when she was twenty-three years old, not long after the murder of her father, mother, and brother and her escape to Mexico.” Thus, from the perspective of trauma theory, inconsistencies within Menchú’s narrative are to be expected.

The fact that Menchú experienced a great deal of trauma in her first twenty-three years is impossible to deny. While growing up, Menchú heard stories of Maya oppression, and of events like the death of her brother. Before she was born, finca landowners “...sprayed the coffee with pesticide by plane while we were working, as they usually did, and my brother couldn’t stand the fumes and died of intoxication” (38). Although she did not witness this event first-hand, it is woven into the story of her family, and she becomes Laub’s second level of witness, the “witness to the testimonies of others” (75). She speaks of women in her community having children, knowing that “...most of them have bellies swollen from malnutrition and the mother knows that four or five of her children could die... Suffering is everywhere” (37). Her parents prepared her for life by telling her of their powerlessness in the face of that suffering: “They tried to tell me that, whatever my ambitions, I’d no way of achieving them. That’s how life is” (59). Thus, Menchú was brought up in an environment of suffering, hearing stories of death and preparing herself for sorrow even before she witnessed it herself. From a young age, she already acted as a witness to the suffering of her people, in addition to the hardships she faced personally. After watching her brother die of starvation and experiencing extreme hunger and poverty, she admits, “...I was both angry with life and afraid of it...” (41). While reflecting on her youth, Menchú

explains, “I came to the conclusion that I hadn’t had a childhood at all. I was never a child” (117). Life itself for her was traumatic, a cause for anger and fear, and it stripped Menchú of her childhood. However, when speaking to other women about her youth she realizes, “...that it wasn’t just my problem; that I wasn’t the only little girl to have worried about not wanting to grow up. We were all worried about the harsh life awaiting us” (118). She discovers that her experience of life as a Maya in Guatemala was similar to that of other Maya women. This joint experience, the ability to share the witnessing of trauma within her community, is an important act of resistance to that trauma. Menchú was not alone in losing siblings and facing discrimination and oppression. However, as the Guatemalan Civil War continued, Menchú describes how she began to experience death and oppression on an even greater scale.

As “the repression,” Menchú’s term for the murder of large numbers of Maya individuals and communities, grew, Menchú became more and more aware of the mistreatment and murder of Maya peoples by ladino landowners and the military. Villages near her own village of Chimal began to suffer; even before 1981, the start of the genocide, she notes, “It wasn’t only the villages nearest to us which had been attacked, there’d been massacres in other communities too. Chajul, Bebjaj, Cotzal, were the first to suffer the repression” (126). She describes witnessing the murder of her friend at the hands of a landowner on the *finca* as the beginning of her experiences with death. After refusing to sleep with the son of a landowner, her friend was killed. Menchú recalls, “It was the first dead body I’d ever seen, and that’s why I was saying that I’ll have to talk about a lot more corpses, but this is the first one I ever touched... He took the baby off her back, put her on one side and hacked her into twenty-five pieces, if I’m not mistaken. She lay there in pieces” (151). As she continues to describe the experience of witnessing her friend’s death, her narrative becomes more disjointed. After Menchú discusses helping her father pick up each

piece of her body and put it into baskets to bury, she begins to speak in fragments. She remembers, “The first time I picked up a dead body. All in pieces. For about six years afterwards perhaps, I dreamed about Doña Petrona. There wasn’t a single night I didn’t feel I’d dreamed about Doña Petrona. For a long time I couldn’t go to sleep for thinking about her” (152). As defined by Caruth, the experience of trauma includes both the initial moment of trauma, and the reoccurrence of that trauma, as Menchú experienced it, in phenomena like nightmares. Menchú’s traumatic witnessing of her friend’s body continued to haunt her for years in her dreams, and even in her testimony the traumatic remembrance ruptures her sentence structure.

After the death of her friend, Menchú became more and more aware of traumatic events occurring in other Maya communities, and began to be active in organizing and awareness-raising about the violence. Over the next few years, her father, brother, and mother were all killed; she recalls, “It was in 1979, I remember, that my younger brother died, the first person in my family to be tortured. He was sixteen” (172). Her brother’s death, challenged by Stoll, remains unclear to this day. The situation, as summarized by Carey-Webb, is as follows:

Testimonies from other Guatemalan's [sic] indicate that Rigoberta Menchú's brother was not burned alive (after being tortured and before being killed) and that Menchú herself was not present when his body was dumped in the street outside Chajul. Menchú responds that her testimony repeats the first-hand account her mother gave her and that, until she is presented with the evidence of her brother's body itself, she will continue to believe her mother. Independent human rights records do record the public burning of indigenous people by the army in

Chajul at roughly the same period. (“The Truth of Rigoberta Menchú’s Testimonial”)

Regardless of whether Menchú’s brother was burned alive or not, the version of events told to her by her mother is very real to Menchú, and continues to haunt her. She describes the tortured men as almost unrecognizable, saying, “Each of the tortured had different wounds on their face... Some of them were very nearly, half dead, or they were near their last agony, and others, you could see that they were; you could see that very well indeed... Everyone was weeping. I, I don’t know, every time I tell this story, I can’t hold back my tears, for me it’s a reality I can’t forget, even though it’s not easy to tell of it” (177). Despite only hearing her mother’s testimony of the event, her brother’s violent death has become a reality for Menchú, and is therefore a reality of her traumatic experience. Like her description of her friend’s death, her description of her brother’s murder is fractured and disjointed. Afterwards, Menchú describes the shock and bewilderment of herself and her family: “It was as though we were drunk, or struck dumb; none of us uttered a word” (181). These overwhelming feelings continued to grow in Menchú until, after the death of her father, she admits, “I couldn’t bear it. I couldn’t bear to be the only one left. I actually wanted to die” (186). The death of her father is her breaking point, and Menchú is overwhelmed by the trauma she has experienced. Despite her lack of hope in the face of repetitive and intrusive trauma, she survived and continued working. With the death of her mother, Menchú and her brother turned their grief into strength, encouraging one another to, “... keep this grief as a testimony to [their family] because they never exposed their lives even when their grief was great too” (199). The example of their family members’ lives and deaths gave strength to Menchú. However, the circumstances of her mother’s death were just as horrifying as those of her brothers, if not more so.

Menchú discusses the horrific way her mother died in her memoir, but admits later, in *Crossing Borders*, that even then she had not fully processed the trauma surrounding her mother's death. After days of rape and torture, Menchú's mother was brought out to die in public, with guards standing by to make sure no one interfered (*I, Rigoberta Menchú* 198-199). Menchú, and others interviewed by Stoll, all confirm the way in which her mother died: "Since all my mother's wounds were open, there were worms in all of them. She was still alive. My mother died in terrible agony. When my mother died, the soldiers stood over her and urinated in her mouth; even after she was dead!" (199). The trauma of this death remains vivid as Menchú describes what happened. In her book Caruth explains, "...What returns to haunt the victim, these stories tell us, is not only the reality of the event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known" (6). Menchú, who was forced to go into hiding after her mother's murder, describes exactly that. She states, "...my mind was focussed on the whole panorama of my past. There was no-one to tell, no-one in whom I could find some comfort... Everything was piling up together: it was all on top of me" (239). Laub describes this experience in another way, once more referring to the inability of survivors to place their experience in a straightforward history; "While historical evidence to the event which constitutes the trauma may be abundant and documents in vast supply, the trauma—as a known event and not simply as an overwhelming shock—has not been truly witnessed yet, not been taken cognizance of" (57). This overwhelming shock, as experienced by Laub's Holocaust surviving patients and by Menchú as a survivor of years of trauma and oppression, is a central part of the response to trauma, and can remain for the rest of the survivor's life. Menchú experiences that reoccurring trauma as she describes her mother's death in her memoir, and later writes about it again in her second book, *Crossing Borders*, unable to find closure or answers even after several years have

passed. Still, Rigoberta Menchú, in spite of this overwhelming trauma, also describes her own determination, and that of many Maya peoples in Guatemala, to resist oppression and gain recognition and respect in Guatemalan society.

4.6 Colonialism and Resistance

In her testimony, Menchú is very well aware of how her life, and the lives of all Maya peoples, has been shaped by colonialism. Burgos-Debray describes the situation as “...an internal colonialism which works to the detriment of the indigenous population. The ease with which North America dominates so-called ‘Latin’ America is to a large extent a result of the collusion afforded it by this internal colonialism” (xii). Nonetheless, colonialism, whether in its original form or in neocolonial guises, requires an interaction between the colonizer and the colonized. While this leads to the suppression and subjugation of the colonized, postcolonial scholars such as Mary Louise Pratt point out that the group being colonized rarely absorbs the colonial mindset without resistance. Clare Bradford writes, “...if indigenous peoples were obliged to speak the language of the oppressor, they did not necessarily speak as the oppressor spoke but developed strategies of resistance and self-representation...” (“Language, Resistance, and Subjectivity” 20). In addition, she cites Homi Bhabha’s explanation of how these strategies of resistance are “...capable of undermining colonial authority through [their] very ambivalence, which defies hegemonic control” (“Language, Reisistance, and Subjectivity” 20). Menchú is aware of this, documenting both instances of colonial or neocolonial coercion as well as instances of resistance in her community.

From the start, Menchú describes the life of her family and community as one shaped entirely by non-Maya forces. She writes of her childhood, “...we’d work in the *fincas* for eight

months and in January we'd go back up to the *Altiplano* to sow our crops. Where we live in the mountains... you can barely grow maize and beans... But on the coast the land is rich... After we'd sown our crops, we'd go down to the coast again until it was time to harvest them, and then we'd make the journey back again..." (5-6). The rich coastal land, originally Maya land, was taken by Spanish colonial forces, which in turn became the wealthy ruling class, the landowners who owned the arable land during Menchú's youth (including U.S. companies like the United Fruit Company, now known as Chiquita); as the Spanish appropriated the farmable land, Maya communities were forced to become slaves, or move to inhospitable mountainous areas (Montejo 31). That system still remains, with Menchú's family forced to farm barren land in the mountains, then return for a large part of the year to work for little to no money on the fincas. In addition, Menchú describes many ways in which wealthy landowners and their subordinates cheated workers with high-priced cantinas, fixed weight scales, and sudden evictions. She writes, "That is why society rejects us. Me, I felt this rejection very personally, deep inside me. They say we Indians are dirty, but it's our circumstances which force us to be like that" (48). Menchú faced marginalization and oppression both socially and economically. Besides the stark inequalities found on the fincas, Catholic missionaries and government officials attempted to coerce Maya communities to abandon their traditions and adapt to Western ways through adoption of technology and new religious practices. In spite of that, Menchú also describes ways in which she and her community resisted changes pushed upon them by outsiders.

There are many ways in which Maya and ladino cultures collide in *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, including issues of government, voting, and technology, yet Menchú describes times of resistance and self-empowerment, in both thought and action. Roderick McGillis writes, "The colonial mentality assumes that the colonizer represents a more advanced state of civilization

than the colonized does, and therefore that the colonizer has a right to assume a position of dominance” (“Introduction” xxii). However, Menchú and her siblings were raised to reject the technology of ladinos in favor of their own traditions. She explains, “They talk about cars, about the *ladinos*’ bathrooms, about the rich... they also insist that we don’t desire what the rich have... Our village does not have a grinder for our maize. This is not because we could not get one... The *ladinos* bring their machines in little by little and very soon they own everything” (72). Her community rejected technology, not because they believed it to be bad, but as a way of resisting ladino culture and remaining true to their own traditions. As Burgos-Debray writes, “By resisting *Ladina* culture, [Menchú] is simply asserting her desire for ethnic individuality and cultural autonomy” (xvii). On the other hand, many Maya communities have accepted Catholicism, without abandoning their own Maya religious practices. Menchú describes that, “By accepting the Catholic religion, we didn’t accept a condition, or abandon our culture... We drew a parallel with our king, Tecún Umán, who was defeated and persecuted by the Spaniards, and we take that as our own reality. In this way we adjusted to the Catholic religion, and our duties as Christians, and made it part of our culture” (81). Her community incorporated Catholic and Maya celebrations, changing a potential “weapon of the system” (134) into something Maya. Later, as Menchú and her community are preparing to fight back by protecting their village from the soldiers, Menchú declares, “Our main weapon, however, is the Bible” (130). What once belonged to the colonizers became a weapon of resistance for the colonized. Menchú and her community used the religious text as inspiration and encouragement in their fight against the very culture that introduced it, taking passages and books from the Old Testament, such as Judith’s beheading of her enemy, as divine approval of violence against oppressors. Lastly, Maya communities also resisted being forced to vote for dictatorships. Knowing full well that

the new general would come into power anyway, “...no-one wanted to vote. But behind the promises were threats, they said that if we didn’t vote, our villages would be repressed. The people were forced to vote. All the same, most people spoiled their votes, that is, they put in blank votes or voted for everyone” (160). Even when forced and threatened with violence, Menchú’s community resisted oppression in any way they could—here, by ruining the votes they were forced to make. In addition to these modes of resistance, Menchú cites moments of personal resistance as well, making it clear that she and her friends and neighbors refused to sit passively by in the face of colonial and neocolonial pressures.

Menchú expresses many similar desires to those of postcolonial critics as she discusses the oppression and exploitation she faced. Shaobo Xie writes, “The postcolonial project celebrates radical difference as an undeniable social or cultural existence, turning its marginalization into situational knowledge” (8). Menchú struggles with this, recognizing that she has been exploited and marginalized all her life, without ever coming to terms with what that meant in her own experience. She asks, “What did exploitation mean to me? I began to see why conditions are so different... I finally began to see all this clearly. And that’s when I started working as an organiser” (122). Turning that experience into a way of connecting with other Maya women and communities and using it to bring awareness and change is part of the postcolonial project—a project Menchú contributes to with her testimony. Furthermore, Menchú claims, “...the justification for our struggle was to erase all the images imposed on us, all the cultural differences, and the ethnic barriers, so that we Indians might understand each other in spite of different ways of expressing our religion and beliefs” (169). Menchú desires understanding in the midst of difference, and the erasure of social, cultural, and ethnic barriers. As Xie writes, “What Western imperialism deals with is its own projections and fantasies about

the indigenes instead of the indigenous truth” (6). By erasing those images and uniting with other Maya peoples often separated due to the use of different Mayan languages, Menchú is participating in a counterhegemonic strategy of unity and resistance. In order to gain equality in Guatemala, those colonial stereotypes must be erased.

4.7 Conclusion

Menchú’s testimony is a powerful book, and Menchú serves as a witness to the injustices in everyday Maya life, the trauma of oppression and the genocide, and the resistance of her people. Despite the controversy that arose in the late 1990s, her testimony has continued to be read, discussed, and celebrated as a powerful indictment of the oppression, exploitation, and murder of Maya peoples in Guatemala. Just a few years older than the protagonists of *Journey of Dreams* and *Tree Girl* at the start of the genocide, Menchú’s experience also offers a historically-situated, accurate depiction of Maya life as a lens through which to read the two novels. In addition, Menchú’s decision to tell her story and bring the oppression of her people to light is just one of the ways in which she fights back against dominant discourses and colonial and neocolonial powers that have sought to shape her life. Her decision to learn Spanish as a way to speak back, as well as her celebration of the resistance tactics she and her community used—such as when they purposefully spoiled the forced vote—are all important aspects of how marginalized voices like Menchú’s can create counter- and transcultural-discourses.

Chapter 5: Analysis of *Journey of Dreams*

5.1 Introduction

Marge Pellegrino's novel *Journey of Dreams* was published in 2009 and follows thirteen-year-old Tomasa and her brother, sister, and father as they flee their village in El Quiché and go north to find and reunite with Tomasa's mother and oldest brother. On the way, Tomasa witnesses the massacre of her village as well as several other traumatic experiences. The novel is based on the refugee stories Pellegrino heard from her friends and through a writing workshop in Arizona she conducted for families affected by torture (Pellegrino 4). In her introduction to the book she writes, "I read the case of a young Central American girl who was wounded and hid in a field all night. I saw the drawings she used to describe her experience. Later she came to Tucson for reconstructive surgery and stayed with my friends who talked to me about her story" (4). Beyond these experiences with refugees in Arizona, Pellegrino does not cite any further research, although she does assert that she, "...tasted Tomasa's experience in the food we shared" (245), in reference to eating Guatemalan food. While food can be an important place of connection—and Menchú states that sharing the same food is an important basis for trust (Burgos-Debray xvii)—as an explanation of the origin of the story, this statement seems to support neocolonial constructions of "Central America," rather than deeper cultural understanding. Louise Saldanha writes that often, "Within this multicultural atmosphere, (mostly nonwhite) culture is performed through dress, art, food, and music..." (167). This propensity to boil down cultural differences into food and clothing is borne out in the novel itself, as little beyond traditional modes of Maya dress play a role in the narrative. In addition, the representation of trauma and healing within the novel is simplified, rather than more deeply explored, although this could be due to the protagonist's young age and the novel's twelve and

up rating. Thus, while *Journey of Dreams* does raise awareness about the Guatemalan genocide and, I believe, seeks to treat the subject respectfully, it does not always succeed.

In this chapter I first look at how trauma is depicted, beginning with Tomasa's life before the attack on her village, followed by the trauma of the attack, and then I look at the trauma she faces on the journey north. I also explore the use of dreams, drawing, and weaving to both reveal and compartmentalize her trauma, and the healing process Tomasa goes through toward the end of her journey. Following the section on trauma, I look at the neocolonial dominant discourses operating in the novel. I first examine how languages are used in the novel, followed by how Maya culture is portrayed through the use of clothing, customs, and religion. Finally, I examine how Western norms are idealized, displacing Tomasa's original home through her resettlement in the U.S. I analyze both sections through my theoretical lenses as well as with *I, Rigoberta Menchú* as a framing text.

5.2 Representations of Trauma

In *Journey of Dreams*, Tomasa witnesses traumatic events in her childhood, in her village, and on her journey to reunite with her mother and brother. Before her village is attacked, Tomasa already lives the harsh life similar to that described by Menchú, although the novel's descriptions are much less severe, perhaps in consideration of the novel's young audience. Tomasa acknowledges events like the death of siblings without revealing her emotional response to those events, or the effects those deaths had on her. When soldiers attack and massacre her village, Tomasa witnesses firsthand the deaths of her friends, her neighbors, and her grandmother, and experiences shock. However, afterwards Tomasa compartmentalizes that shock and the trauma she witnessed, rarely thinking or speaking of it as she and her family

journey north to be reunited with her mother and older brother. Along this journey, Tomasa continues to witness traumatic events and she continues to suppress the effects of those traumas, focusing instead on surviving the journey. According to Laub, this can ultimately be a problem as, “The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their story; they also needed to tell their story in order to survive” (78). Caruth, too, discusses the struggle, the impossibility, of speaking of trauma, while also admitting that it is necessary: “And it is precisely because he speaks from this impossible place, and asks a question that he himself does not fully own, that he can also enter her story, that he makes the answer to her story speak more than it can possibly tell” (40). For Caruth, the connection that arises between the listener and the survivor is one that encourages and deepens the survivor’s understanding of the traumatic event, and is able to ease the crisis of life and death that the survivor faces. On the other hand, for Tomasa, emotions such as fear or sadness, except at the moment of crisis, only come out in her dreams or her art—her drawing or weaving—but are not integrated into Tomasa’s thoughts. It is not until she arrives in a safe place that she allows herself to purposefully cry and remember, but after this moment she returns to focusing on her journey, and trauma returns to her dreams. It is not until she finds her mother and hugs her that her healing is complete. Thus, although Tomasa certainly experiences repeated trauma, and her choice to suppress it is not unusual, the absence of continued mental and emotional consequences, as described by Laub and Caruth, in the novel raises interesting questions about its limited representation of trauma.

5.2.1 Trauma in Daily Life

Like Menchú, Tomasa also describes the harsh life she and her community face, but, unlike Menchú, Tomasa distances herself from that everyday trauma. Where Menchú describes

watching her little brother starve to death, Tomasa's description of her siblings' early deaths avoids her own emotions and only focuses on the sadness of her mother. She explains, "She bore other children between me and Manuelito, but I do not remember them. Another one came between Manuelito and Maria. When we put the baby in the earth with the others, Mama's face looked as it does now" (25). Rather than serving as witness to the deaths in her community, as Menchú does, Tomasa distances herself from those that died when she was a young child, and passes over the last death to focus on her mother. Although the sorrow in her mother's face is implied, Tomasa does not directly address it in the novel. Tomasa is not the only one to distance the trauma of these children's deaths, however. When her father tells the story of their family and the birth order, he also ignores the children who have died, only mentioning Tomasa and her living siblings.

In addition to the death of siblings, Tomasa also hears about suffering happening in other communities, and yet does not seem to connect it to her own circumstances. When her grandmother, called Abuela, mentions the model villages that were set up in Guatemala to "re-educate" the Maya peoples, Tomasa explains that it is, "...the place where guards force people to live between barbed wire away from their villages. Soldiers have emptied families out of their real villages and scattered them among different model villages... So now all those people have to speak Spanish to understand each other... Those model villages are full of suspicion and mistrust" (47). Tomasa reveals that she is aware of some of the oppression that is happening in other parts of Guatemala, without revealing her own emotions on the situation in her village. Perhaps due to her young age, or a desire to simplify political struggles for young readers, Tomasa appears unaware of the mistrust in her own village. Her mother and brother are forced to flee because someone in the civil patrol from the village has told the soldiers that they are a

subversive family; in a village as small as Tomasa's, the civil patrol, made up of all the men in the community, would consist of friends, family, and neighbors, including her own father.

Victor Montejo explains that, in 1982, "The formation of the civil patrols was a major blow to the unity of Maya communities... Among men mistrust was almost absolute... Communal ways of life disappeared..." (Montejo 78). In 1984, two years after the civil patrol was formed, children such as Tomasa would have been aware of some of the mistrust in the highland villages. However, explanations of the civil patrol and the war's effect on her village are passed over within the novel. Furthermore, Tomasa does not directly address her own emotions at the departure of her mother and brother, focusing instead on her sister Maria: "Maria seems content with Abuela, but she cries more easily. Even though she cannot tell us, she must feel Mama and Carlos's absence just as the rest of us do. But the rest of us, who can use words to talk about the emptiness, do not speak of it" (50). Even before the massacre, Tomasa avoids speaking of the "emptiness." The lack of feeling or emotion continues when she admits, "The hope that things will get better evaporates" (54), and yet she does not appear to know what that means for her family and for her future. She accepts the bleakness of her situation without expressing her emotions, even though her life has been severely disrupted by the departure of her mother and older brother. This could be due to her young age, but as Menchú refers to children in Maya communities older than twelve as adults with full access to their parents insights, I believe this may be Tomasa distancing herself from the trauma of her mother's departure. Laub's suggestion that, "We are profoundly terrified to truly face the traumas in our history" (74) may in fact apply to Tomasa's avoidance of speaking of the emptiness.

5.2.2 The Village Massacre

On the evening of the village's fiesta in honor of San Jose, Tomasa first hears an attack on the neighboring village, and then witnesses the attack on her own village; throughout these attacks she appears unable to understand what is happening around her, as well as disrupts and distances herself from the shock, fear, and sorrow she feels. 1984, the year the novel begins, was the last year of the most intense anti-Maya military action—though murders and kidnappings certainly continued long afterward. Tomasa and her family are from a small mountain village in the department of El Quiché, where the violence against Maya communities has been going on the longest (Montejo 42, 46). Despite living in the area with the most military repression, Tomasa claims to not understand the events occurring around her. While she is dancing at the fiesta, the attack on the neighboring village begins: “*Ba boom!* My heart jumps. I look up from the village square expecting to see fireworks explore... but the sky is dark. Another loud *boom* silences the round sound of the *marimba*. Voices fade, laughter falls, and dancers pause. A third explosion cracks the air... I pull Maria to the earth with me” (73). Here Tomasa reveals that she knows enough about the situation to stay low and keep Maria with her, as she would after four years of military violence in her region. As she lies on the ground, she tries to ignore the violence, saying, “I try to slow my heart by thinking about the colours of the fiesta... I do not want to think about what is happening in the next village as the small pops continue” (73). Once again she appears to focus on the colors around her instead of being present to her fear. The trauma of the moment is too strong and she says, “I want Abuela to explain what is happening” (74). As the attack occurs, Tomasa appears to feel shock and confusion. After years of fighting and three years of military-oppression and massacres in her area, in addition to the way Tomasa pulls her sister to the ground at the start of the attack, the traumatic moment seems to fracture

Tomasa's understanding. Tomasa's distancing of herself from the trauma around her serves to interrupt the representation of trauma in the moment and in her understanding. Eventually the attack ends and, "The glow in the sky fades. The quiet in our village relaxes like a taut thread which has been cut. Mama and Carlos would have liked the fiesta" (75). Tomasa tries to return to normalcy, thinking about the party rather than the traumatic event in the neighboring village. Later, after the elders tell everyone to go home, Tomasa admits she was afraid, saying "This horror of glowing skies is no longer just a whisper that passes from mouth to mouth, from village to village. I try to quieten myself with thoughts of a blanket whose design I will weave on my heart" (76). While by 1984 many villages nearby Tomasa's village would already have been raised, perhaps due to the age of the readers, or perhaps due to the representation of her experience of trauma, Tomasa seems unaware of that knowledge. She turns instead to one of her coping techniques, that of weaving, which helps her deal with her fears.

After the village next to theirs is destroyed, Tomasa and her family attempt to leave their village right as it is attacked and massacred, causing Tomasa to witness the death and destruction firsthand. As they are escaping the village they, "...hear a helicopter come closer and hover over our village. We hear shots and an explosion. When the first thread of smoke finds us, the smell stings and seeps inside to cloud my brain and jumble my thoughts... I feel as though a fist has grabbed my heart and is plucking it from my chest" (78). This time, Tomasa immediately recognizes the sound of shots as gunfire and understands the consequences. She locates her feelings physically and directly expresses the fear she feels as a squeeze around her heart. Overwhelmed, Tomasa runs back to the village, saying, "My eyes go from one thing to the next, unable to understand the still bundles lying on the ground shadowed by flames that eat at the church and the houses on either side" (78). In this moment, Tomasa cannot process the friends

and neighbors she sees as anything more than bundles. She admits to her own inability to understand, aware of her confusion in the midst of severe trauma. Only one bundle becomes a person, when she finds her grandmother: “As I enter the undergrowth, I trip and fall over a still bundle. I have fallen over Abuela. I hold her now, between the rows of corn where she sought safety... I search Abuela’s face for some signal, some small sign. And then I realize that she has left us. I hold her tightly and hide my face in her hair, the way Maria does to me when she is frightened” (79). Although she searches Abuela’s face, Tomasa does not reveal what she sees there, nor does she reveal her own emotional response, once more implying sorrow while staying slightly distanced from it. As with her mother’s departure, she describes her actions in terms of her sister’s actions and emotion. When her father finds her she displays signs of trauma as she admits, “My body shakes so hard that at first I cannot move my feet. He holds me. I cover my face with my hands, as though that could wipe out the things I have just seen” (80). Her trauma manifests itself physically as she is overwhelmed by what she has just witnessed. However, her first instinct is to try to “wipe out” the trauma she has just witnessed. Rather than serving as a witness to the death of her grandmother and her village, Tomasa expresses a desire to repress it.

As they flee the village, Tomasa continues to struggle silently with what she has witnessed. As they reach the trees outside their village, Tomasa explains, “We hear a splatter of gunshots, then the helicopter pulls away. I turn for a last look at our field as dawn lightens the shadows. Green stretches below us. The machine that dug the trench at the edge of the village is now crushing our cornfield” (83). Although the gunshots have just finished, and a machine is now razing her village, Tomasa focuses on the light that dawn brings. Instead of describing the village, Tomasa describes the green of the fields. While the image of the machine crushing the cornfield is symbolic, representative of the machines of the ladinos destroying the people of the

corn, the Maya, the trauma and reality of human death is eased through her description. She is distanced from the massacre, just as she is physically distant from the cornfields below. Tomasa chooses not to think about the trauma she has witnessed, admitting that, “As we walk, I tuck my feelings into my heart... Papa does not tell Manuelito about Abuela or about the human bundles lying in the village. I understand. I will not talk of them either... I will tuck everything else away, wrap memories with hope, bury them until later, when it will be safe” (85). She decides to hide away her experience for the time being, reading her father’s silence not as sorrowful or traumatized, but instead as an encouragement to repress what they have seen. Her decision to bury her memories is not represented as negative, but instead Tomasa uses positive imagery: “wrapping her memories in hope.” As Caruth describes, Tomasa experiences, “...a central problem of listening, of knowing, and of representing that emerges from the actual experience of the crisis” (5). Similarly, Caruth writes, “...trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4). Tomasa, too, seems to experience this un-assimilation of her traumatic experience.

5.2.3 Trauma on the Journey

As Tomasa journeys north she faces more traumatic events, responding to each with the same distancing as before. After leaving their village, Tomasa and her family encounter two more destroyed villages, although Tomasa does not describe them as such. The first one is a village in which they hoped to find help, but when they “...come to the place on the path that leads down, we see the smoke. Too much smoke. More than cooking fires” (94). Tomasa is able to recognize that it is “too much smoke,” without addressing what that means. She avoids

thinking about the ramifications, instead focusing on the journey. Several hours later Tomasa sees that, “Through the trees lies a great long mound of freshly-turned-over earth. A large yellow machine like the one that they brought to our village stands off to the side, silent” (95). Here the fate of her own village is revealed, along with that of another village. Tomasa faces the silence of the destroyed village without directly thinking about what must have happened, and in this way her trauma continues to be, as Caruth writes, not known. As they continue traveling, Tomasa continues to notice traumatic events without acknowledging her emotional responses. As they walk through a village, Tomasa notices a man being questioned. Before she turns a corner, she says, “...I see the man who has been questioned. His face wears blood. He is thrown into the back of the truck” (102). She then continues on through the village, never mentioning that man again. As with her village, she witnesses violence but does not speak of it. Her silence is encouraged by the adults around her; a kind couple who takes the family in give, “...words about road-blocks and kidnappings, instructions on how to travel on buses, and a warning never to speak about what happened in our village or the freshly-covered mound we saw in the village with all the soldiers” (107). Her silence, already self-inflicted, is reinforced by the adults around her—even those who do not explicitly encourage her to remain silent never speak to her about her experience. In his own work with survivors Dori Laub explains that, “...while silence is defeat, it serves them both as sanctuary and as a place of bondage... To *not* return from this silence is a rule rather than exception” (58). Tomasa follows this rule, refusing to be drawn in to conversations with the other refugees they meet. Throughout the rest of her journey in Guatemala, when Tomasa notices violence she does not dwell on it or “know” it, but turns her thoughts elsewhere immediately. As they travel she explains, “Sometimes, after a night when we hear shooting, we hide all day” (123). After these short moments of witnessing, Tomasa returns

to thinking about her brother Manuel, or of the next step in their travels. She remains in places of silence, distancing herself from the violence she encounters.

The border crossing into Mexico proves to be a place of repeated trauma for Tomasa and her family, and Tomasa almost loses her ability to compartmentalize that trauma. As they try to cross the bridge into Mexico, Tomasa admits, “I keep my fear of going back cross the bridge tucked inside my backpack... I hide my terror of the jagged, threatening letters and of the soldiers who eat at my country as squirming maggots eat the carcass of a dead deer” (125). In this rare moment of reflection Tomasa expresses her fear of returning to Guatemala, but even as she does so she speaks of keeping it “tucked inside [her] backpack.” Once she has expressed her fear, she once more reburies it in her subconscious. After three traumatic attempts at crossing a river at the border Tomasa, Manuel, Maria, and their father finally make it to Mexico. From there they quickly arrive in Mexico City and their father finds them shelter in a convent. Tomasa finally feels able to relax slightly, and she realizes that, “Being on guard on our journey and in the park has made me strong. But now that I am inside a walled compound, protected by lock and key, I feel as though all that strength has broken off and shattered on to the hard tiles of the hallway where we walk” (173). As she loosens her hold on her trauma and memories, those memories break free and she is able to reflect on, for the first time, the fractured nature of her experience. Finally, near the end of her journey, Tomasa begins to come to terms with the trauma she has witnessed.

5.2.4 Dreams

While Tomasa was unable to understand her fractured memories and her trauma, that trauma and fractured-ness emerged in her dreams. The inclusion and importance of dreams in

Journey of Dreams is notable, as “Dreams are as important to modern Mayas as they were during pre-Hispanic times... modern Mayas use dreams to understand and prepare for future events” (Montejo 6). Tomasa’s dreams never quiet foretell the future, although she does dream of disaster before her village is attacked (though in the dream she loses Maria, rather than her Abuela). Instead of foretelling, her dreams reflect the trauma and fear that Tomasa rarely acknowledges in her waking moments. For example, when her older brother is almost taken by soldiers she dreams that, “*A large green truck roars through the market, scattering people’s work. It stops and the back yawns open like the mouth of a monster. It transforms itself into a cave with a beast living inside, gobbling up anyone who tries to pass*” (30). When she awakens, Tomasa goes to school as though everything were normal, without thinking again of her brother’s capture. All the negative feelings of fear and sadness remain in her dreams. When she is told a story about a young boy who was killed for writing “Libertad” on a wall, she does not seem to reflect on it, but then dreams that “*He hits the wall where the letters are still wet, and the word ‘freedom’ smears as she slides down silently on the flowery pavement. He lies in a puddle of black that has stained the white flowers... The crowd says nothing, because none of them have any lips. People scatter to avoid the next bullet*” (107-108). Here the nightmare goes further than the story itself, reflecting Tomasa’s unconscious mental state of fear as she flees the massacre in her own village. However, she does not reflect on the boy again—once awake she buries that fear within herself and continues on.

As Tomasa continues to experience more trauma, the emotions from her dreams seep out into her first waking moments, but Tomasa quickly represses them. After her family tries to cross the border river for the first time, Tomasa dreams that hands, “*...reach up out of the water to snag my hair and pull me under. The river wants to swallow me.* I wake gasping for air. My

head is stuffed with fog as I wait, afraid to fall asleep again, until we leave my dangerous country” (144). Even in the moment between wakefulness and sleep, her fear is tempered by fog. She waits, awake, refusing to sleep and experience that fear even unconsciously. Her trauma remains unassimilated from her unconscious dream state and her waking moments. After reaching Mexico City, she dreams of a friend and her mother searching for her: “*Together they walk down the fog-blanketed street, singing out names in a mournful way. They slow down and turn into a dark alley. I cannot see them any more.* I wake with tears on my cheek” (171). This is one of the first times that Tomasa cries, but she is only able to cry while asleep. She does not wake crying, but instead wakes up after the tears have been shed. Thus, she remains in control of her emotions during her waking moments. However, the traumas of her past continue to haunt her as she nears the end of her journey, when she falls “...in and out of dreams where shots ring out, black blood flows, a spray can paints words on walls and stained flowers run” (217). She is unable to completely “not know” the trauma she has experienced, as it continues to appear in her dreams.

Thus dreams reveal Tomasa’s unconscious trauma, even as it remains unassimilated. Dreams are important in both Maya tradition and trauma theory. While Montejo discusses making meaning from dreams, Felman and Laub and Caruth talk about the repeated experience of the initial trauma, and the “uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” such as nightmares. Interestingly, these nightmares are often continuous repetitions of the same event, while all Tomasa’s nightmares are different. Also, the actual event of the massacre is the one traumatic event that is never dreamed about. Thus, while dreams are used to show Tomasa’s fear and the traumatic experiences she has witnessed, they also enable her to keep that trauma unassimilated.

5.2.5 Drawing

As with dreams, art can be an area of un-assimilation of Tomasa's trauma, but also represents coping techniques. Like with her dreams, sometimes Tomasa's artwork becomes a place where she can draw out her trauma without directly thinking about it. When she discovers that her mother is gone, Tomasa considers it calmly before drawing an emotion-filled drawing:

I am not glad Mama had to go, but it makes me feel better to know that she has something with her that I have made. I hope my work brings money to help them on their journey... After Papa and Manuelito come back and we have finished dinner, Papa tells the story about the wasp who conquered the jaguars... The picture I draw as he talks does not show a wasp with wings... Instead, I draw a jagged black hole in the middle of our home and a father whose face has changed.

(41)

Here her calm description of feeling better is undermined by the dark drawing she makes of the black hole where her mother used to be. The emotions she expresses and the emotions that she draws are different and separate. Like her dreams, drawing becomes a subconscious area in which Tomasa's repressed emotions emerge. After drawing people standing in line at the capitol, Tomasa erases everyone, explaining, "I scratch back and forth over my drawing... Starting with the one who stands behind the other, I wipe out each person in my dirt line standing straight and stick thin—the line waiter, the car-maker, the teacher reading a book, Felipe, the woman's husband, Mama and Carlos... I wipe at the tears that escape without my knowing"

(133). The tears she cries only escape when she is not thinking about them, and she describes

them without emotion—the tears fall and she wipes them away, unable to fully face the terrifying trauma she has witnessed outside of her artwork.

Once she finds rest in the convent and relaxes her guard, she begins to face these emotions, and drawing finally provides her an outlet for healing rather than suppression. When asked to draw a picture of her village—to break her silence—she says, “Even though there is a blue and a green, a yellow and an orange, I pick up the black... I draw the helicopter and the dead people lying like bundles on the ground. I put down the black stick and pick up the red. I show her the fire that ate our house. I draw red puddles around the bundles... Tears spill on to my paper” (194). She finally admits to herself that the bundles she saw were dead people, and as she thinks about what happened in her village she allows herself to cry. The interest and encouragement of an adult, combined with her love for art, enables her to finally face the fractured pieces of herself, if not verbally than at least artistically.

5.2.6 Healing

The chance to draw her experience is one of a handful of healing moments in *Journey of Dreams*, but despite remaining silent for so long, healing appears to be a quick and simple process for Tomasa. During her journey, Tomasa only has two moments of rest that ease her struggle. The first moment comes when Tomasa takes a bath after she has seen her village destroyed. She says, “I feel lighter as I move the soap over my shoulders. I imagine my worries sliding off my skin and dissolving in the now-grey water” (105). She transforms the physical bath experience into a psychological moment of distancing and of “washing away” the events she has seen. She uses the bath to pretend that she can easily wipe away the trauma she has witnessed. She does not have a moment of rest again until she reaches Mexico City and her

friend brushes her hair; she explains, “The feel of the comb against my head, the gentle touch of someone pulling through to the ends of my hair, melts my worry” (162). This moment of personal care, in addition to being out of Guatemala, eases Tomasa’s post-traumatic stress. After this moment, hope enters Tomasa’s dreams and she is empowered to find healing there. She dreams that, *“My kite tears and drops from the sky. Juana appears... She hands the wet paper to me. I cover the hole”* (163). The hole, signifying her pain and trauma, is covered with the help of her friend. This is the first positive dream that Tomasa has, and is the first sign that Tomasa is moving towards healing. However, her dreams remain troubled until she is united with her mother at the end of the novel.

Although Tomasa is able to face her trauma at the convent, fear and bad dreams continue to haunt her until she finds her mother. In the moment she hugs her mother, “All the sadness of Abuela and our village fall away in the warmth of Mama’s arms” (236-237). Suddenly she is healed from her unexpressed sorrow, without ever having to talk about it or face it. When she goes to sleep that night, she dreams that, *“...my fingertips release the green of thick jungle, the deep blue of mountain sky, and the red of puddles spreading under the bundles on the ground... I weave all these colours into a kite for Abuela... As I release her from my arms, I whisper ‘Que te vaya bien’”* (241). Tomasa’s dreams are suddenly bright and empowering, and Tomasa is able to find healing in them. She says farewell to her grandmother, her village, and, it seems, to Guatemala in her final dream, after only a hug from her mother. The process of healing here is not so much a process, but a tying up of the narrative in happiness and wholeness, despite the shattering things she has witnessed. Adrienne Kertzer, in her article “‘Do You Know What ‘Auschwitz’ Means?’: Children’s Literature and the Holocaust,” writes about the desire in Holocaust literature to give children an ending that centers on “...the triumph of the human

spirit, [and] the heroic rhetoric that reassures us..." (241), despite many survivors giving testimonies that are just the opposite. Similarly, Tomasa's story ends in an uplifting moment of complete recovery. While the restoration of her mother was undoubtedly powerful, the quickness of her recovery seems simplified. Many child and adult survivors struggle for their whole lives to find healing from the trauma they've witnessed, and trauma theorists such as Felman and Laub and Caruth believe that speaking of that trauma is imperative to healing. However, the restoration of her mother and her arrival in a safe place would certainly be a powerful step on the road to healing.

In addition to the disappearance of trauma, at the end of the narrative she chooses to speak in Spanish and English, rather than in K'iche'. "Que te vaya bien," she explains at the beginning of the novel, is the Spanish way of saying "K'awilawib" in K'iche', her native language. The decision to stop speaking her first language is never discussed and is one of the many ways in which Maya culture, like trauma, is distanced from Tomasa's experience.

5.3 Neocolonial Dominant Discourse

In *Journey of Dreams*, Maya difference—in language, clothing, traditions, and beliefs—is reduced and enfolded into more dominant, Western discourses. Despite best intentions, Louise Saldanha points out that "...even those children's books that potentially trouble multicultural clichés... are overlaid and read within naturalized codes of racial hegemony" (165). Close attention to the representations of Maya peoples in the novel reveals just such a struggle—Mayas seem to speak mostly Spanish, even in their own homes, and practice little to no Maya traditions. On her journey north Tomasa loses her language, traditional style of dress, and connection to her homeland. Pellegrino states in her Introduction, "I wrote this book in the hope of bringing a

better understanding of unfamiliar people and situations” (5). The focus on understanding, rather than the knowingness condemned by Homi Bhabha and Roderick McGillis, is imperative to creating more respectful and accurate literature involving other cultures. However, it is not enough to erase the neocolonial dominant discourses that run throughout the novel.

One problematic area of representation is the undeniable difference between cultures. Pellegrino admits that when she asked her Guatemalan friend about the book, her friend responded, “‘You can’t know how we feel’.... I agreed. There are many reasons why I can never know how Tomasa, my character, and this flesh-and-blood Herminia before me would feel” (4). Menchú, in her testimony, is frustrated by just such an attempt to “speak for” the Maya peoples. She writes, “Our experience in Guatemala has always been to be told: ‘Ah, poor Indians, they can’t speak.’ And many people have said, ‘*I’ll* speak for them.’ This hurt us very much. This is a kind of discrimination” (228). Thus, although discussion and awareness of refugee situations are important, they alone are not enough. As mentioned at the start of this chapter, differences can be boiled down to food and clothing, or they can be romanticized. For example, Pellegrino refers to Tomasa and her community throughout the book as “Mayan,” rather than “Maya,” a mistake that anthropologists and Maya writers have been trying to correct for many years. The use of Mayan reflects a romanticism about the ancient Maya civilization—a romanticism which is seen in the way Maya identity is established. For example, one of the older women is described as a “Mayan queen” (33), and one of the few references to Maya history and culture involves the Maya pyramids. While looking through a book about Egyptians and Mayas, Tomasa asks, “...If one side did travel, which side was it, the Egyptians or Mayans? Or did something inside their hearts travel that thin blue line across the ocean and inspire both people to build their pyramids?” (45). The connection between ancient civilizations and present

day Mayas is made without addressing the changes that have occurred over time, or the differences between ancient Maya culture and current Maya practices. This romanticized depiction of Maya peoples is othering, a “noble Indian” image found in colonial and, more subtly, in neocolonial dominant discourses. The images of pyramids and “Mayan queens,” while a part of Maya history, here constitute a full representation of Maya past and present, and reduce Tomasa and her community into stereotypical Western discourses about ancient civilizations and indigenous communities. Rather than challenging these stereotypes, the novel continues them. Other representations of Tomasa’s life, culture, language, and her journey only further these neocolonial dominant discourses, erasing or devaluing difference.

5.3.1 Representations of Language

One of the most prevalent ways in which Tomasa’s Maya identity is undermined is through the use of language. At the start of the novel, Pellegrino acknowledges that, “*The family in this story lives in the Guatemalan highlands where they speak their native language K’iche’ (Quiché) and some Spanish*” (6). In reality, the novel depicts the reverse: Tomasa and her family use seven K’iche’ words throughout the story, and they use 78 Spanish words. Tomasa refers to her own grandmother as “Abuela,” the Spanish word for grandmother, rather than the K’iche’ word. As Tomasa did not learn Spanish until she went to school, and would use K’iche’ in the home and the village, the use of “Abuela” is unrealistic. This also plays out in other repeated words used throughout the story, such as the Spanish word “Alto,” the word for stop, and “dibujo,” the word for drawing. She is often drawing “dibujos,” as mentioned above, ignoring the corresponding K’iche’ word for the same activity. In fact, towards the end of the novel Tomasa notes that, “The shadows lengthen and the sun begins to set, turning the remaining

clouds into a *dibujo* so breathtaking that I pause” (226). Here, even the landscape is described using Spanish, taking over both her thoughts and the world around her. Tomasa’s Maya identity, represented here through the language of her village and family, is noticeably absent in the novel, replaced by a language more familiar to Western (particularly U.S.) readers. For those who are not familiar with the words, a glossary is provided that includes the K’iche’ and Spanish terms used, and some English words, such as “catechist,” and “indigenous.” While the glossary can be an important part of learning and understanding, its use may also contribute to Homi Bhabha and Roderick McGillis’ warnings against knowingness. For example, “tortilla” is defined as “flat bread cooked on a *comal*, eaten alone or wrapped around a filling to make a *burrito*” (250). While *comales* are found in Guatemala, burritos are from northern Mexico, not Guatemala, (Morales and Carrillo, 179) and so the definition reflects the Mexican and U.S. use for tortillas, rather than Guatemalan, or even Central American terms or uses.

Despite a note at the beginning of the novel referring to K’iche’, Tomasa herself only speaks of it vaguely. In Mexico, Tomasa and her father both refer to “the language of the highlands” (167) as though this were one language, and without specifically stating what that language would be. Her father also says, “He called to me in the way of our mountains” (171) in a similarly vague and obscure fashion. There are many highlands in Guatemala, and not all of them are made up of K’iche’ speaking communities. This simplistic representation of the highlands, rather than a more accurate and diverse description of different regions or even a specific reference to K’iche’ once more represents Maya identity and language inaccurately. Rather than counter-discourses of transculturation or difference, neocolonial dominant discourses of similarity and simplicity overshadow accurate representations.

The most disturbing use of language, or rather loss of language, centers around the way Tomasa says goodbye. At first, she uses the K'iche' word "K'awilawib." When her mother and brother disappear, she says, "*Take care, Mama and Carlos, I pray. K'awilawib*" (42). Her mother has previously used K'awilawib repeatedly within their own village. However, once Tomasa and her family leave, they begin to use the Spanish "Que te vaya bien," even when they are safely among K'iche' friends and free to speak K'iche'. When saying goodbye to a woman at the convent, a place of safety, Tomasa says her goodbye in Spanish, "'*Que te vaya bien*,' I say before she slips out of the door. *May it go well for you*" (202). As mentioned above, her final goodbye to her grandmother is also in Spanish, a language her grandmother did not actually speak. By the end of the novel, what little K'iche' there was has been completely replaced by Spanish; Tomasa has been completely colonized by language. Although Pratt and Bradford have discussed the ways in which colonized cultures change and appropriate the colonizer's language, here Tomasa speaks Spanish at the cost of her Maya heritage—the use of Spanish eclipses the use of K'iche'. K'iche' is not the only part of her Maya identity that Tomasa either ignores or abandons, though. Neocolonial dominant discourses are also widespread in representations of Maya culture.

5.3.2 Representations of Culture in Clothing, Customs, and Religion

Representations of Maya culture in *Journey of Dreams* are problematic for several reasons. To start, very little of Maya culture is actually discussed. Cultural aspects that are introduced, such as clothing—and as Saldhana notes, clothing is one of the most common ways neocolonial dominant discourses construct difference in other cultures—are quickly abandoned or undermined. Some references appear to represent Maya culture, but are in fact completely

unrelated to Maya beliefs. Finally, Maya characters are represented as ignorant of what are implied to be Western tools and practices.

In terms of clothing, the inclusion of the huipil and corte, or blouse and skirt, in the narrative is a simple way to establish Maya identity, and is in fact something that is highly important, according to both Menchú and Montejo. Menchú mentions of the importance of the traditional costume in gaining respect, saying, “...an Indian woman is only respected if she is wearing her full costume” (210). She also describes the pieces of the *traje*, or traditional Maya outfit in detail, explaining its personal significance in her life. However, on her journey Tomasa quickly abandons the traditional huipil and corte for ladino clothing. A ladino woman explains to her, ““When you get closer to the border, it will be safer for you to leave these clothes behind and wear more ordinary clothes bought from a shop.’ ...Wearing Mama’s work makes me feel her close to me. But I must resist such childish thoughts. I must give up the clothes” (112). Although it is true that wearing ladino clothes may offer protection on the journey, Tomasa’s quick decision to give up the clothing she has worn all her life is surprising. She does not struggle with the decision, and her only qualm does not have to do with its importance in her cultural identity, but rather the clothing’s tie to her mother. Victor Monetjo describes the decision in some refugee camps to give up the Maya huipil and corte as very difficult, although he also points out that this decision often did not happen until Maya women were trying to fit into Mexican culture, rather than Guatemalan. He writes, “Many Maya women rid themselves of their traditional dress and borrowed clothing from the ladinos so they could hide among the Mexican women... It was not easy for traditional Maya women to suddenly change their way of dressing. The old women resisted and argued that it showed a lack of respect for their own culture...” (Montejo 111-112). Tomasa, on the other hand, quickly and easily abandons her

huipil and corte. The ease of her decision and the lack of cultural importance for Tomasa is called into question by Menchú and Montejo's descriptions. While alone the instance might only signify Tomasa's desire to hide from military forces, when read in terms of the rest of the novel—in which Tomasa's Maya identity goes from tenuous to non-existent—the decision to abandon one of the few connections she has to her traditions represents the eventual erasure of Tomasa's Maya identity and the domination of Western discourses.

In addition to abandoning her clothing, Tomasa also gladly gives her outfit to a ladino woman, further representing the use of clothing as a neocolonial way to absorb simplified Maya culture into the dominant culture. The ladino woman asks, "But why not let me buy Maria's skirt and the beautiful huipiles you wear for my grandchildren?" (Pellegrino 113). Although this question seems innocent enough, it represents the appropriation of clothing by people of the dominant culture. This is an issue for Menchú, who writes that, "We also find a *ladino* using Indian clothes very offensive" (9), and later explains, "It means that, yes, they think our costumes are beautiful... but it is as if the [Maya] person wearing it doesn't exist" (209). She later explains the way in which she has witnessed rich ladinos complimenting the traditional clothing while simultaneously treating the Maya wearing that clothing with disdain. For Menchú, the appropriation of that clothing represents the domination of the ladino culture. Tomasa is an example of that domination, as she admits, "Even though Tía said we still face danger, I feel as though we are safer dressed in *ladino* clothes with shoes on our feet" (117). The colonization of Tomasa is not only seen through her use of language, but also here, as she gladly gives up her Maya clothing for ladino clothing, and feels better for it. Western-style clothing is preferred to her own clothing, revealing neocolonial dominant discourse at work. However, the replacement of Maya identity with more Western modes of being, as with language and clothing,

is not the only way that neocolonial dominant discourses function in the novel; they also serve to obscure Maya traditions and beliefs.

Interwoven throughout the novel are descriptions of Maya traditions and beliefs, but mixed within poetic language and distanced versions of those traditions, so that true Maya traditions become hard to distinguish. For example, at the start of the novel Tomasa and her father see two owls and Tomasa explains, "...we know that when the owl comes, death and sadness follow" (11). According to Menchú's text, this is a true example of Maya beliefs, as is Tomasa's father's prayer to the tree he cuts down (142), as well as the many references to weaving and the importance of corn to Mayas. However, mixed with these are Tomasa's poetic descriptions of the rain and moon, among others, implying Maya beliefs that do not exist. When traveling north, Tomasa notices the moon one night and says, "The moon wears her shawl over the right side of her face, covering her eye. Each night for the next few days she will grow shyer. We must wait for her to feel brave again, on the other side of her shyness" (118). This, however, does not reflect a Maya belief. On the contrary, in Maya, and specifically K'iche' Maya tradition, the moon is at times female, at times male, and at times a third gender. According to Caroline Seawright, "Depending on the phase of the moon, the Classic Maya believed that the moon could be conceptualised as a female or male lunar deity.... The Postclassic Quiché text, the Popol Vuh, states that the Hero Twins, Hunahpu and Xbalanque, were transformed into the sun and the moon..." (7). Thus, Tomasa's description of the moon is not a true Maya belief, but as it is introduced naturally in the same way the description of owls and corn are, it comes across as Maya. In addition, when Tomasa is stuck in a storm she says, "I hope the rainmaker takes off his drenching storm coat and puts on a softer, mistier rain instead" (224). However, the Maya god of rain, Chaac, hits clouds with his ax to produce rain, or

alternatively uses snakes (Maestri). This description of a rainmaker and his coats is not related to Maya culture, but comes across as one of Tomasa's Maya beliefs. These murky depictions create false ideas about Maya customs and beliefs, and the lack of accuracy reveals neocolonial dominant discourses that equalize, trade, and trivialize indigenous belief systems.

Even more troubling than the muddled depictions is the direct reference in *Journey of Dreams* to Tecún Umán, the last of the K'iche' kings. Although he is never actually named in the novel, Tomasa's father tells her and her brother about a "Mayan king" who made a grave mistake:

...our people had never seen a horse before. The Mayan king was brave and did battle with this strange man with four legs and two heads... The king fought fearlessly. He stabbed the horse, thinking the conquistador and the horse were one... 'What kind of creature is this?' the king wondered... But before the king understood what was happening, the top part pulled away from the dead part and moved towards him. The conquistador's sword found the king's heart... The king's mistake cost him his life... We must remember not to make a mistake as the king did. (87)

Menchú references this same story several times in *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, explaining, "They said that the arrival of the Spaniards was a conquest, a victory, while we knew that in practice it was just the opposite. They said the Indians didn't know how to fight and that many of them died because they killed the horses and not the people. So they said. This made me furious..." (170). For Menchú, the idea that Maya people, who knew the difference between humans and animals, would have mistaken the two for one is infuriating, and is a story perpetuated by ladinos and colonizers, not believed by Mayas. In addition, she explains that ladinos "...commemorate the

day of Tecún Umán as the national hero of the Quichés. But we don't celebrate it, primarily because our parents say that this hero is not dead... His birthday is commemorated as something which represented the struggle of those times. But for us the struggle still goes on today... The story we tell about Tecún Umán is different to the one the *ladinos* tell" (204-205). In another book, *Crossing Borders*, Menchú explains that Tecún Umán's spirit is carried by the quetzal now and his spirit "can never be captured or imprisoned" (18). The fact that Tomasa's father tells the ladino version of the story, in which the king is foolish and dies, rather than the Maya version, exposes the presence of neocolonial dominant discourses in the text, rather than the voice of the Maya peoples. Maya characters, like Tomasa's father, Tecún Umán, and Tomasa herself, are all colonized by these discourses to the point that they accept and internalize neocolonial dominant discourses as their own. Additionally, Tecún Umán's ignorance of Western ways is also reflected in Tomasa's ignorance of items like spray-paint and crayons. For example, after listening to a man talking about spray-painting and seeming to understand, Tomasa thinks, "*I want to know how he makes this magic from a tin of paint*" (107). She believes that her hair will fall out now that she has left her village (117), and needs someone to teach her how to use crayons, or "sticks of color" (193) despite using colors to draw in her village. This construction of Tomasa as ignorant of common items in the Western world is often at odds with previous experiences from the novel itself. Tomasa's ignorance, like Tecún Umán's in this depiction, represents neocolonial dominant discourses that frame Maya characters as simplistic and disconnected with the rest of the world—both romanticized and simplified.

Another area that reflects the dominance of neocolonial dominant discourse is the depiction of religion in *Journey of Dreams*. While Menchú describes the mixture of Maya and Catholic practices in Maya communities, within Tomasa's community only Catholic practices

are present. Menchú writes a great deal about respecting, honoring, and speaking to the earth, trees, and animals, but Tomasa only prays to the Catholic God, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and in one instance, San Jose. She says, “In church I pray: ‘Thank you, Blessed Mother, *Gracias Nuestra Madre...*’” (38), notably also only praying in Spanish. Her family has a statue of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a Mexican iteration of Mary, in their home. While this version of Mary is celebrated in parts of Guatemala, she still represents a foreign religion on multiple levels: Catholicism was originally brought by the Spanish, but Our Lady of Guadalupe represents Mexican influences as well. Additionally, when in danger or distressed, Tomasa never turns to Maya practices or beliefs, but always prays to Catholic figures. When Maria gets over an illness due to her brother’s knowledge of highland herbs, Tomasa says, “...I realise I have not taken a full, deep breath in many days. I do so now, thanking God, Our Lady, and Abuela” (98). Although it is the Maya medical tradition that saves Maria, Tomasa remains completely focused on Catholicism. The complete absence of Maya beliefs and Tomasa’s decision to ignore Maya traditions, such as the use of medicinal herbs in healing, once again point to neocolonial dominant discourse at work. Maya beliefs and traditions have been completely superseded by a Western belief system, just as Tomasa herself has been physically and mentally colonized by Western discourses.

5.3.3 Internalization of the Western Ideal through Displacement

Finally, in addition to language and culture, the portrayal of the neocolonial center as the ideal, easily displacing her original home, is a third area in which neocolonial dominant discourse is present. Clare Bradford, in her article “The End of Empire? Colonial and Postcolonial Journeys in Children’s Books,” discusses the way children in colonial and

neocolonial books often travel to the (neo)colonial center, revealing the hegemonic discourses about the importance of that center to diverse people groups. Reflecting this discourse, Tomasa and her family all travel to the United States, growing more and more eager to arrive there during the course of the journey. At the beginning, Tomasa struggles to leave her village, thinking, “As we set up a shelter, I wonder: how can you run from a place you love?” (98). Nevertheless, she quickly detaches herself from her former home. As she travels into Chiapas, Mexico, she notes, “The green shelter reminds me of our highlands. I yearn to be there, even as our steps take us further away from her. No. That is not right. The place I miss does not exist anymore” (151). As soon as she leaves Guatemala, Tomasa gives up her homeland, going quickly from confusion over how to leave her village to giving up on it completely. Instead of wondering about her friends or other family, Tomasa turns her eyes ahead, to the north. Eventually, as she prepared to cross into the United States, she declares, “*Otro lado*. How long we have waited for the Other Side” (220). Though stated here, this longing has not actually ever been mentioned by her—she has longed to see her mother again, but that has nothing to do with the “otro lado” idealized here. Furthermore, once she does meet her mother, as quoted above, she lets go of her forests, rivers, friends, and her grandmother in her final dream, quickly and immediately embracing life in the United States instead. This depiction of life in the United States being her secret desire, and of easily displacing her home, is a clear example of neocolonial dominant discourse which structures the United States as the ideal place.

5.4 Conclusion

Thus, Tomasa’s journey to the United States contains problematic depictions of healing and culture. Although Tomasa’s silence, according to Laub, is not unusual, her quick recovery

from both the trauma she has witnessed and the stress of her long silence may not be credible. The depiction of trauma creates a problematic discourse in which silence is at times depicted positively, while healing occurs quickly rather than over time—in contrast to trauma theory findings. Meanwhile, depictions of Maya culture are somewhat limited, and what little connection Tomasa has to her Maya heritage at the start of the novel is all but lost by the end. Neocolonial dominant discourses that frame Maya culture in terms of ignorance and simplicity are present, and Tomasa's identity as a K'iche' Maya girl is replaced by more Western language, clothing, religion, and even location. Comparison to Menchú's text reveals several instances in which Tomasa, as well as other protagonists, think and behave in terms of ladino and even U.S. norms, rather than Maya ways. This overriding of Maya culture creates an inaccurate picture of Maya identity. While Pellegrino's desire to promote understanding is admirable, only a fairly limited understanding can arise in the face of misrepresentations.

Chapter 6: Analysis of *Tree Girl*

6.1 Introduction

Tree Girl, by Ben Mikaelson, follows Gabriela (Gabi), a fifteen-year-old K'iche' girl who survives the massacre of her village as well as the massacre of another town and the harrowing journey north to a refugee camp in Mexico. By far one of the most graphic depictions of refugee life, *Tree Girl* does not shy away from representations of difficult traumatic events. Like Pellegrino, Mikaelson does not cite any research, but he does discuss visiting Guatemala and interviewing a Guatemalan survivor. His dedicates the book, "...to the real Tree Girl, who courageously shared her difficult story with me. She did so through many tears, from the protection of a safe house, during a long Guatemala night. Her true experiences inspired this story" (i). In the Afterward, he continues, "This book is part of my promise to her, that the rivers of tears she wept when telling me her story would not be wasted" (227). In this way, Mikaelson himself becomes a witness, and *Tree Girl* becomes his response to that witnessing. He also situates himself as a redeemer of the real Tree Girl's story, implying that her tears are not wasted solely because he took them and made them into this book. Perhaps more troubling, Mikaelson admits to "fixing" the main problem of the woman's experience, writing, "The real Tree Girl vowed never to climb a tree again, but I realized that climbing a tree is a metaphor for life. We cannot live life to the fullest, breathing the clouds, without risking the climb. That is why I knew that Gabriela, the Tree Girl in my story, needed to find the strength to climb again" (228). By stating that his character needed to find strength to climb again in order to live life to its fullest, he implies that the survivor's inability to climb is wrong or weak. He prescribes the "right" response to the situation, refusing to tackle the complex psychological reasons why the real Tree Girl may be unable to climb. By doing so, he suggests that he understands the situation better

than the survivor, reflecting a Western parent-“Third World” child neocolonial dominant discourse mentality that Nancy Ellen Batty discusses in her article “We Are the World, We Are the Children...”. However, he finishes his author’s note with the hope that, “...talking about the mistakes of our past will remind our great country that no human need fear indiscriminate killing supported and condoned by the United States ever again” (229). This desire to speak critically of the United States and bring about awareness of the political realities of the Guatemalan genocide, as well as change in future policy, is certainly a challenge to neocolonial dominant discourses idealizing the United States. Thus, *Tree Girl* becomes a mixture of neocolonial dominant discourses and counter-discourses, although representations of both trauma and Maya culture are more respectful and accurate here than in *Journey of Dreams*.

In this chapter, I look at how trauma is represented in Gabi’s life before the massacre, in the massacre of her village, in the massacre of a town she travels through, in the journey to Mexico, and in the refugee camp. Unlike *Journey of Dreams*, Gabi experiences the effects of overwhelming repeated trauma physically and mentally, exhibiting common survivor mentalities such as Caruth’s crisis of life. I also examine her healing process and how she finds dignity, hope, and strength through relationships and meaningful employment in the camp. In the second half of the chapter I look at neocolonial dominant discourses in the novel, examining language, Maya culture—expressed through depictions of daily life, religion and customs—and Gabi’s ultimate refusal to internalize neocolonial dominant discourses during her displacement.

6.2 Representations of Trauma

The depiction of trauma in *Tree Girl* is both more traumatic and more realistic than in *Journey of Dreams*. Gabi internalizes the trauma she experiences, and her psychological distress

builds as she continues to encounter trauma; she displays depression, withdrawal from others, and overpowering guilt at having survived. All of these are psychological phenomena that trauma theorists such as Caruth, Felman, and Laub describe. While Gabi's healing process, like Tomasa's, is relatively quick, it is certainly more complicated and involves important concepts like sharing her story within positive relationships as well as personal empowerment. Interestingly, while trauma is more realistic in *Tree Girl*, naturally arising trauma, such as the death of her mother from illness, is much more manageable than military violence, and the most traumatic events are often linked back to Maya rights, as well as the United States' involvement in the war.

6.2.1 Daily Trauma before the Massacre

Although Gabi lives the harsh conditions described by Menchú, traumatic events in Gabi's life are primarily related to the Guatemalan military rather than economic struggles. While at first Gabi is able to face this daily trauma and overcome it on a regular basis, she begins to experience daily fear and worry as traumatic events repeatedly occur. Personal, natural traumas, such as the death of her mother, are more easily overcome than politicized traumas, which are overwhelming in their cruelty and generally relate directly to racial military oppression or U.S. maneuvering.

At the start of the novel, Gabi is represented as both youthfully innocent and politically aware. Although both she and her parents are surprisingly unaware of the war going on in Guatemala since 1960, Gabi acknowledges, "I think my youth allowed me to ignore the possibility of war, although I, too, had seen more military trucks passing by me on the highway... Patrols of soldiers had begun crossing the hillsides, sometimes stopping in our canton

to ask questions. Guerrillas without uniforms also questioned us" (15). While she states that she may be blind to the possibility of war, her awareness of military movements in her area reveals that she is not as oblivious as she says. In fact, she seems to be about as informed as her parents, who fear a war but know little else. Gabi explains, "I saw all the same things my parents saw, but I doubted that the changes they feared would lead to war... Always in our country there were political problems. Political parties in Guatemala were never above using threats, abductions, and assassinations. But that didn't mean war" (16-17). Unlike in *Journey of Dreams*, innocence here does not equal ignorance or blindness, but rather a choice to believe that things will change. Even as Gabi notices more military involvement, she does not understand that her life may be affected because of it. She is unable to imagine what change increased militarization in her community will bring until she experiences several traumatic events at the hands of the military.

The first traumatic event Gabi undergoes is the loss of her brother, Jorge, who is taken by the military during her quinceañera. His loss begins the string of events that causes Gabi to question herself and to experience daily fear of the future. During her fiesta, soldiers arrive and insult Gabi; when Jorge, who is drunk, tries to punch the comandante for the insult, "...instantly all the soldiers surrounded Jorge and clubbed him to the ground with their rifles. His mouth bled as he looked up at the soldiers and the rifles aimed in his face... We all stood there stunned as Jorge was led away into the darkness... The happiness and merriment of the moment before has been replaced by a sudden quiet fear" (33). This, Gabi's first direct contact with the military, startles and confuses her. Although fearful for her brother, Gabi does not immediately understand that such random violence may occur again. After a few weeks Gabi watches her brothers and sisters get back to playing and laughing, but she explains, "I couldn't avoid my fears with simple games. I blamed myself for what happened. My quinceañera celebration had

attracted the soldiers" (37). Her fears center not on her and her family's safety, but on Jorge and her own culpability for his disappearance. She blames herself, rather than facing the truth of the uncontrollable violence that the military brings, unable or unwilling to accept that the events unfolding are out of her control.

On the other hand, the natural death of Mamí, Gabi's mother, is neither overly traumatic nor debilitating. The very night Mamí dies from illness is also the night Gabi and her family experience healing: "'Let's tell stories of Mamí,' I said. 'Not sad ones, but happy and funny ones...' Before the night ended, each of us had told stories of Mamí, laying her to rest in our minds as carefully as we had buried her ashes, sharing memories of happiness and not of grief... Jorge was gone, and now so was Mamí, but still our family sat around the fire, unbroken" (66-67). Gabi and her family are able to say goodbye to their mother quickly and joyfully, and although Gabi misses her mother later in the novel, she does not mourn or revisit her death again. Mamí's death, in this way, is made natural and acceptable, in direct contrast to the military-instigated deaths. In this way the daily trauma of illness and death is de-emphasized while more political traumas are foregrounded.

The first major traumatic event of the novel occurs when Gabi and her classmates are at school, and this experience begins the overwhelming and debilitating cycle of trauma that haunts Gabi for the rest of the novel. Soldiers find the children while they are eating lunch and attack their teacher: "The soldiers had forced Manuel back to his feet and tied his hands behind his back. One by one they started taking turns hitting him in the stomach and face... All of us stood whimpering and shaking, terrified. I tried to look away, but a soldier grabbed me and twisted my face to watch. All of us were forced to watch what happened that day..." (77-78). Gabi is forced to be a witness to the violence that unfolds, despite her desire to turn her head away. She

describes her terror, and also witnesses to the terror of the other children, in addition to witnessing Manuel's torture. Gabi feels the witnessed violence physically, admitting, "I wanted to throw up from all the anger and fear inside of me. Manuel's face swelled and became puffy. Blood leaked from his nose and from the sides of his mouth. His eyes bulged, and his skin changed from white to red and back again" (78). The horror of the experience comes off of the page, made real through Gabi's eyes, as she both witnesses and testifies to the brutality. Unlike Tomasa, Gabi remains present to the violence and to her responding emotions, recognizing and thereby validating her fear and anger. She continues to track her emotions in the midst of the trauma, expressing relief when Manuel finally dies (79), and horror when the soldiers turn their attention to the children (80).

Throughout the experience, Gabi remains fully present, not only to her own suffering, but to the suffering of others. As the children run, Gabi describes their flight: "...before we reached the trees, shots rang out. Beside me, young Pablo stumbled and went down, smearing blood on the rocks where he landed. I looked back and saw Victoria also collapse in a heap, shot dead. I gasped for air and screamed in terror as Rubén fell next. He fell hard, and his head made a dull thud as it hit a rock" (80). Despite running for her own life, Gabi heeds the details of each child's death, choosing to remain a witness in the midst of her terror. The graphic details—the smeared blood and the sounds of their deaths—are important to Gabi, and are all recorded in her memory. She also remains aware of her own experience, saying, "The sound of each shot felt like a jolt of lightning hitting me, numbing me, making me feel as if everything was happening very slowly. I had never known such fear" (81). This is the first in a string of terrifying, numbing traumatic experiences that Gabi faces. She describes herself distantly, noting the deaths of her friends and her own fear from within her numbness. However, despite the

numbness, Gabi cannot separate herself from the deaths: “The dull *thud* of bullets hitting small bodies echoed in my memory as I ran and ran” (82). Even before the event has fully come to an end, Gabi is already replaying it in her mind. After the experience of trauma, she causes herself to re-experience it through her memory. After the school massacre, Gabi takes on more responsibility among her siblings and begins to find strength to move on. However, the deaths of her family, friends, and neighbors follow soon after and disrupt her attempts to heal.

6.2.2 The Cantón Massacre

The sudden death of almost all of her family in her village’s massacre continues the cycle of trauma and strips Gabi of many of her coping abilities. Gabi returns home from the market one evening to find her cantón massacred: “At first I spotted only a single body lying in front of a burning home, but then I saw another and another. Scattered everywhere among the ashes of our cantón were corpses... In the late-afternoon light, the fallen bodies looked like scattered branches from a tree. But they weren’t branches. They were people I knew—aunts, uncles, grandparents, and neighbors” (88). Unlike in *Journey of Dreams*, Gabi knows and explicitly states what the bundles—or in this case, branches—on the ground are: not just dead bodies, but family and friends. The bodies are all recognizable and she acts as a witness, once more, to the death around her. As before, she describes her physical awareness of the trauma, stating, “I stared in shock, convulsing as tears burned my cheeks like water. Again and again I swallowed at the bitter taste building in my throat, trying to make me throw up” (88). Gabi ties her experience of trauma to a physical desire to purge her body and she describes her sorrow physically—as tears and convulsing rather than sorrow, and yet her sorrow is apparent. Unlike Tomasa, she does not shy away from being present to her suffering and her emotions. She

continues to describe her experience, saying, “I walked now as if in a stupor, my mind drunk from shock... As I stumbled around in my horror, my eyes burned from smoke and tears. I had betrayed my promise to Papí that I would care for my brothers and sisters if he dies. I hadn’t even been there for him” (89). As the deaths of her family sink in, she enters into, as Caruth describes, the simultaneous crisis of life and death. She blames herself for their deaths, as she blamed herself for Jorge’s disappearance, and feels ashamed of her inability to be present with her family in their deaths. Moreover, because she does not witness their deaths, she is plagued by thoughts of their last moments: “As I dug shallow graves with a stick and bleeding hands, terrible thoughts haunted me. I imagined the children’s terror in their last desperate moments before death, everybody screaming and running, the soldiers shouting, and guns echoing like thunder. I couldn’t stop weeping and hiccupping with grief” (89-90). As with the school massacre, Gabi immediately begins to replay the deaths, this time imagining them. This moment of trauma has become a moment of complete crisis—with the brutal murder of her cantón she is left in sorrow, torturing imaginings, and self-blame. It is not until she finds her sister and wounded brother in the forest that her “...heart exploded with happiness” (92), and she once more finds strength to keep going.

Gabi’s happiness is short lived as both her brother and her sister have been severely affected by the massacre, and Gabi is soon overwhelmed by further trauma and her own powerlessness in the face of it. Gabi’s brother has been shot in the attack, and Gabi is faced with his wound, saying, “Antonio turned as I lifted his shirt still farther, and my heart stopped. The bullet’s exit had left a ragged and ugly opening the size of my fist” (98). Uncertain of what to do, she turns to her sister, only to realize that she is withdrawn and refuses to speak (100). Antonio’s injury and Alicia’s silence are both overwhelming for Gabi, who is unsure of what to

do. The joy she felt upon finding them is driven out by Antonio's serious wound, and Gabi is once again placed in a position of fear and powerlessness. She describes Antonio's struggle, saying, "I tried to stay awake in case Antonio needed comforting. A foul smell came now from his body as he fell in and out of consciousness... Sometime before dawn I dozed off once again. When I awoke next... Antonio's struggle had ended. I knelt beside his lifeless body, tears wetting my cheeks" (103). Gabi is continuously traumatized, this time by the witnessed death of her brother, as well as her inability to do anything for him. She remains a witness to everything she sees and experiences, and they begin to build up inside of her. She admits, "Inside of me I longed to weep and wake up in Mamí's arms and hear her tell me that this was only a bad dream, but for Alicia's sake I forced myself to be strong" (105-106). Like Tomasa, Gabi also forces herself to be strong, but her strength is for her youngest sister, and it does not necessarily eclipse her own sorrow. She is still aware of her own despair, but she forces it aside for her sister's sake, rather than her own. She continues to fight with her desire to be free of her guilt and her memoires as they travel, and when they come to a village she confesses, "For a moment I wanted to forget everything that had happened. I wanted to begin life over as if no one had died. But even as I daydreamed, I knew Alicia held the sick baby and waited for me" (119). She is tied to her sister, and she continues to be responsible to her, keeping herself together for Alicia, as well as for a baby they discovered in the forest. Her strength remains but it is no longer hopeful—it is harsher and more desperate than before.

6.2.3 The Village Massacre

Once inside the village, soldiers massacre the entire population while Gabi watches from a tree; as she witnesses the torture and death of so many people Gabi begins to doubt her own

sanity, as well as her desire to live. From her tree she sees and hears everything happening in the square below her. She describes the deaths of the men first, saying, "...before long, terrible screams of pain echoed from inside the church. I covered my ears, but nothing could mute the sounds of torture. I imagined these same sounds echoing through my own cantón when my family was killed" (128). Forced to watch this village massacre, she also connects it to her own family, imagining once again the deaths her family might have faced. She merges the many traumas she has witnessed, integrating one within the other through her imagination. Unable to move or escape, Gabi can only watch and listen as, "The screams would grow louder and louder, then suddenly fall quiet. Then the door of the church opened again and soldiers dragged another body out across the plaza and dumped it onto the flames. The corpses were bloody, with ears and noses and fingers missing" (130). She is forced, from her spot in the center of the village, to be a witness to the atrocities committed by the soldiers. Unlike in her own village, where she only saw the aftermath, Gabi witnesses the death of each person. Here, though, her descriptions become broad, only focusing on one or two individuals, and her account lacks the same emotional intensity as the school or cantón massacre. Instead, Gabi is overwhelmed by the endless repetition of torture and death. After hours in the tree she describes, "My body trembled as if the tree were shaking. Tears blurred my vision, and I swallowed back desperate screams. I needed to throw up but I didn't dare... For hours I watched from the machichi tree as bodies were thrown into the flames" (130). The trauma of the event overwhelms Gabi physically as well as emotionally, but she cannot release it. She holds on to her horror and her screams, silencing herself to stay alive. The repetition of death relentlessly pushes at Gabi, until the world around her echoes the trauma she witnesses. Looking up she says, "The stars looked like bullet holes shot into heaven" (133). Unable to block out the deaths, and unable to remove herself as a

witness, the world around her becomes seeped with the trauma. The endless violence in the square below her, combined with her own past trauma, becomes so strong that Gabi's reality is shaped by that violence.

Gabi witnesses the soldier's violence during the night and into the next day, stuck in a tree without food or water, and eventually she begins to lose hope and question her sanity. Gabi remains a witness through it all, saying, "All through the night I suffered my own silent torture... The coming of the morning brought new horrors. Children were brought out from the schoolhouse to watch their parents being tortured and raped" (133). The torture of the children, after so much suffering, proves to be the breaking point for Gabi. As she watches the children, who are eventually all killed, she admits, "...I actually wondered if maybe the cruel things I was seeing were only part of a bad dream, part of my own imagination and insanity" (134). Gabi begins to lose herself within the trauma, physically and mentally overcome by the terrible events she witnessed from her tree. Caruth's question, "Is trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?" (7) rings true here, as Gabi can only explain her survival in terms of insanity. However, she does not completely give up her strength, continuing, "...I nearly crawled from the tree and surrendered to the soldiers. I wanted to join those sparks from the fire that floated upward. After all I had seen, what reason was there to continue living? But my anger burned as hot as the flames in the plaza. My revenge would be to stay alive and someday speak of what I witnessed" (135). Although she is an unwilling witness, and although she is overwhelmed by trauma to the point that she, too, wishes to die, Gabi still retains some of her strength and anger. Believing that her sister and the baby still wait for her, Gabi is determined to survive, and that determination fuels her anger. Even with that anger, though, Gabi admits, "I stared back up into the tree where I'd spent the last two days and was

overcome with guilt for having survived. I deserved to die along with everyone else” (138). Laub writes of a Holocaust survivor for whom, “The untold events had become so distorted in her unconscious memory as to make her believe that she herself, and not the perpetrator, was responsible for the atrocities she witnessed. If she could not stop them, or comfort the victims, *she bore the responsibility for their pain*” (80). Like this unnamed survivor, Gabi, too, takes responsibility for the deaths of the villagers. She once again is consumed by the crisis of being a survivor when so many have died. Her strength is drained and her continuous witnessing of the individual torture and death of each of the villagers has taken its toll on her ability to process her experiences and separate herself from the violence.

6.2.4 The Northward Journey

The repeated trauma Gabi experiences, culminating in the loss of her sister, eventually causes her to retreat within herself, giving up on her life and her past. When she returns from the massacred village, her sister Alicia and the baby they rescued are gone. After searching all day, Gabi says, “When darkness finally blanketed the countryside, I finally sank to the ground in tears. Every living human I had ever known was gone... Memories of my family and friends from my past haunted me... Now I wanted everything to end—my loss, the pain, my memories, my life” (141). As Rigoberta Menchú mentions in her own memoir, the deaths of individual family members were difficult, but it was not until she believed herself to be the last member of her family alive that she gave up hope and wanted to die (186). Gabi, too, believes that there is no one left in the world from her past and she is ready to die. Nonetheless, she continues to journey north, eat, and sleep, without even thinking about it: “The first days after the massacre, I must have been in shock. I remember little of that time except walking, sleeping, and weeping”

(143). While psychologically she is overwhelmed and suffering from severe trauma, her body continues to function, and she automatically continues on the journey she began with Alicia. In shock, she does not consciously think or remember, but focuses solely on meeting physical needs. Even though she continues to eat, sleep, and travel, she has fundamentally changed how she interacts with the world, explaining, “I isolated myself from everybody, carrying on my back the burden of shame for having survived when so many others had had the courage to die” (144), and that her “...nights and days were consumed with overwhelming anger and guilt” (145-146). Caruth’s question continues to resonate with Gabi’s experience of overwhelming trauma followed by overwhelming guilt at having lived where so many others have died. She cannot comprehend what has occurred—indeed, Caruth, Felman, and Laub all agree that trauma is not understandable—and therefore cannot process or heal. She has also lost her reason for surviving, Alicia, and so she loses her drive and strength.

In addition to these losses, the traumatic memories Gabi carries—and the post-traumatic stress—cause her to feel constantly suspicious and paranoid. She admits, “Always I feared these people were setting military traps. I worried that if we believed them, we might die, but if we didn’t believe them, we might still die. Everyone lived in constant fear of dying, never trusting anybody... I existed in an isolated world of memories, anger, and hurt” (146-147). The constant fear with which she has lived for the last months is now inextricable from her everyday life. She is consumed with paranoia and fear, unable to distinguish between friend and foe, truth and lie. In addition to her memories, she faces new trauma on the journey, as “[b]ecause of the starvation and the diseases, every few kilometers refugees could be seen burying their friends or family members beside the trails... Sometimes a body lay abandoned and ignored, flies thick around the face... but I ignored the deaths” (150). Gabi is no longer able to witness anything more, instead

choosing to ignore the deaths around her rather than see the details. All of these moments have stripped Gabi of her ability to cope, to recover. The journey itself deepens the trauma because it both refuses to allow her a moment to rest and recover, as well as also inflicting new traumas on her. Eventually her journey ends when she arrives at a refugee camp in Mexico, but harsh conditions continue.

6.2.5 Alienation in the Camp

The refugee camp in Mexico is an alienating place filled with disease, starvation, and fighting, and Gabi is unable to find rest or healing after having spent so long ignoring her own trauma and needs. She describes the camps, saying, “I found thousands of refugees whose shelters and belongings looked like fields of garbage... The camp stretched as far as I could see among the rocks and the brush. Hesitantly I ventured among the scattered people who wandered about, their clothes hanging from their thin bodies like rags on skeletons” (156). The image of death walking—of refugees as skeletons—is symbolic of Gabi’s own internal death after all she has witnessed. She arrives in the camp with barely anything left of her old self, and the camp itself acts upon its inhabitants in a dehumanizing way. Gabi, withdrawn, desperate, and angry, admits, “I, too, behaved like an animal, kicking and shoving others to capture anything thrown to us. I hated living and behaving this way. That wasn’t how my parents had raised me, but starvation was the only alternative” (163). Already so far removed from her family and her former life, Gabi loses herself in her pain and in the chaos around her. However, at the same time she also rejects her own actions, deepening her feelings of anger and guilt in a cycle of self-inflicted trauma. She despises herself and is consumed by her pain and un-spoken trauma, with little time to stop and reflect as she struggles to survive.

The conditions in the camp reaffirm Gabi's self-hatred, as well as her desire to escape from her past and her traumatic memories. She is aware of her avoidance tactics, explaining, "My way of escaping reality was to occupy myself every waking moment of each day, leaving little time for memories or reflection" (174). Similar to Tomasa in *Journey of Dreams*, Gabi tries to avoid all thoughts of trauma and sorrow. However, unlike Tomasa, Gabi is still clearly haunted by her past, and her desperation to forget what she has experienced is clear. She continues, "Now I drove myself even harder, fighting to escape my thoughts. I obsessed over tasks, quitting only when my weary body collapsed in sleep. I was a terrified child running from myself in the only way I knew..." (180). Her post-traumatic stress, combined with the current trauma and stress of the refugee camp, drives her to lose herself even more in her surroundings. The weight of her guilt and pain is too much to bear, so she pushes herself to physical exhaustion rather than face her past. Gabi also continues to ignore those around her, confessing, "Like most, I tried to ignore the dead resting on the ground around the camp. They were simply shapes, sad curiosities with a bad odor" (174). She no longer sees each shape, as she did in her own village, as a person. As on the journey, she refuses to act as a witness to others' suffering, overwhelmed as she is by her own. As new refugees arrive in the camp, Gabi notes, "Each step of the long trail had robbed them of another shard of their identity, their hopes, their cultures, their dreams, and their pride" (181). Unable to reflect on her own circumstances, Gabi sees her own situation reflected in the new refugees. Although this is true of Gabi as well, she is unable to accept that her journey has weighed her down—instead, she blames herself. Eventually, however, Gabi, too, begins to take steps towards healing as she begins to have relationships with those around her.

6.2.6 Struggle and Healing in the Camp

Gabi's healing is sparked by the relationships she begins to form in the camp, most importantly with Alicia, who she finds has survived, as well as in the empowering work she makes for herself. Of these factors, Alicia's presence is by far the most influential, as Alicia's continued silence causes Gabi to take time from her busyness to play with Alicia and draw her out. As she plays, Gabi admits, "It was hard for me to laugh and act happy when inside I felt like crying, but it was good to see guarded smiles steal across the faces of those children who played and those who watched" (192). Her attempt to bring happiness to Alicia is satisfying when she sees other children begin to smile as well. She begins to pay attention to other children in the camp and to take responsibility for their well-being. Confronting an aid worker in the camp, Gabi fights for healing, saying, "'The children need to learn how to be happy again,' I argued, afraid I might make the woman mad. 'To be happy they must play, and to play we need a good ball'" (193). While this approach may gloss over the deep effects of the younger children's trauma, Gabi's advocacy for others is a large step in her own healing. As she begins to take charge and to believe that she is capable of changing the environment around her, she begins to disrupt what until now has been a cycle of crisis and avoidance. This disruption of avoidance occurs in the midst of growing friendships in the camp, giving Gabi the support system she needs to finally face what has happened to her.

Gabi's friendship with Mario is a key place of healing, although it also demonstrates the fragility of her healing. He treats Gabi with respect, speaking openly with her and encouraging her to be self-empowering. As she talks with him, Gabi is inspired, declaring, "Because of Mario, I found new hope in the future. Mario never talked about toilets that flushed or swimming pools. He spoke about the children and the tragedies that war brought to them. He

spoke of the Indios and of self-worth. For the first time... I allowed myself to speak of the massacre in the pueblo" (199). The importance of speaking of trauma in a supportive environment is propounded by survivors such as Zlata Filipović, as well as theorists like Caruth, Felman, Laub, Michael Levy, and many others. Filipović, as quoted in the introduction, speaks of the importance of believing that someone is listening and can understand. Laub writes that, "...it is essential for this narrative that *could not be articulated*, to be *told*, to be *transmitted*, to be *heard*... It is the encounter and the coming together between the survivor and the listener, which makes possible something like a repossession of the act of witnessing" (85). Gabi's ability to directly face her trauma and audibly revisit it is an important step in the healing process, but it also opens her eyes again to "repossess the act of witnessing." After sharing her story, she is finally able to see the suffering around her and she chooses to start a school. However, when Mario decides to go back to Guatemala to fight as a guerrilla, Gabi experiences what Laub refers to as "a second Holocaust:" "And then, as suddenly as he had appeared, Mario turned and walked away, throwing my world into complete confusion" (210). When she finally feels safe and in control in her environment, the departure of one of her friends and supporters re-establishes the traumatic experience as truth. She once again returns to the cycle of crisis, where she struggles for control. She admits, "It frightened me that once again everything familiar was being torn away and separated from my life" (213-214). In her confusion, Gabi prepares to leave the camp, choosing to further rupture her life and create separation, rather than wait for it to happen again. She takes Alicia and a few of their belongings and leaves the camp.

In this moment of crisis, Alicia is essential to Gabi's ultimate decision to choose hope and healing. She is someone who needs Gabi's help, but also someone who can see Gabi with more context than their new friends in the camp. Once outside the camp, Alicia sits under a tree

and refuses to move. Gabi tries to coax her to speak, saying, “If you don’t speak, you’ll trap all of those bad memories inside of you forever… If you don’t speak, you’ll never heal” (218).

However, even as Gabi explains this to Alicia, she recognizes the importance of this in her own experience: “Yes, I, too, had been running, not by refusing to speak but by occupying every waking moment and never letting my mind be still. I also ran by trying to avoid getting too close to others and by always blaming myself for what happened. But I ran the most by refusing to ever again be a Tree Girl. That was my greatest betrayal” (220). As she tries to bring healing to Alicia, Gabi herself recognizes her own need to pursue healing. She is able to draw a parallel between Alicia’s silence and her refusal to climb trees—both controllable reactions to uncontrollable violence and death. In order to heal, Gabi climbs the tree with Alicia, and by doing so, suddenly unlocks the healing process for both of them. Alicia speaks, and Gabi describes that, “Emotions flooded through me, and I saw with tearful clearness Mamí and Papí and everyone I had ever loved and lost. I wept for my past, the past of the ancients and that of my ancestors, and for one brief moment I glimpsed the future, a future that held hope depending on what path I chose for myself that night” (221). Like Tomasa, Gabi’s healing comes rather suddenly and completely. Although Gabi struggled and fought for her healing more than Tomasa, she is still able to find complete healing by climbing a tree—an unlikely and simplified process. She finally decides, “I had survived the massacre not because I was a coward but because I was strong and so that I could help others survive” (223). She is able to completely wipe away her feeling of guilt in one moment and turn her full attention from her own healing to the healing of others. While relationships, speaking about her experience, and empowerment through her work with children are all steps toward healing, and while epiphanies and revelations can be important steps toward healing, the suddenness of her recovery is oversimplified.

6.3 Neocolonial Dominant Discourse

Just as the representation of trauma is more realistic in *Tree Girl* than in *Journey of Dreams*, the representation of the K'iche' community is more respectful and contains more counter-discourse. K'iche' is used more often, and Spanish less, although there are a few moments where K'iche' speakers who know no Spanish use Spanish, and often soldiers who speak no K'iche' manage to have conversations with villagers who speak no Spanish. Certain details of Maya life are given incorrectly, although the fact that Mikaelson tries to address and incorporate Maya traditions is an important step. Several depictions of life and culture are close to what Menchú describes in her memoir, and the presence of political counter-discourses reveals a desire to fight and disrupt neocolonial dominant discourses. Still, Mikaelson does represent some aspects of life and language problematically, and therefore *Tree Girl* occupies a liminal space between neocolonial dominant discourse and counter-discourse.

6.3.1 Representations of Language

Tree Girl often addresses the use of language, and particularly the use of Spanish, as a tool of potential empowerment for Maya groups while at the same time operating as a tool of oppression. While K'iche' is nominally the language used by Gabi and her family, it is often referenced and rarely used. It is mentioned fourteen times in the text, but only actually used a couple of times at the start of the novel. In fact, after the opening chapter, in which Gabi is nicknamed "...Tree Girl, or *Laj Ali Re Jayub* in my native language, Quiché" (3), it is seldom used again. On the other hand, Spanish words are also rarely used directly. Perhaps in order to avoid a glossary, terms like cantón (village), comandante (commander), and Indio (Indian)

appear frequently, but little else does. These terms are explained in the text, rather than in the end matter. As in *Journey of Dreams*, there are a few instances of unlikely Spanish use: for example, Gabí's K'iche'-speaking mother calls Alicia, her youngest child, "bebé" (22), the Spanish word for baby. Also, the word Indio, mentioned above, becomes problematic as it is used frequently in place of the word Maya. For example, when Gabi describes her teacher Manuel, she says, "All the students at the school loved Manuel Quispe. He was Mayan Indian, an *Indio* like the rest of us. He wasn't like the many Latino teachers who thought they were better than the *Indios*" (24). This sentence is particularly problematic for several reasons. The first, although Gabi sometimes uses "Maya," here she calls Manuel a "Mayan," the word used only for languages—Maya people speak Mayan languages. She would certainly know the difference, but throughout the text Maya and Mayan are used interchangeably. Furthermore, instead of specifying from "Indian" to "Maya," Gabi does the opposite, referring to Mayas as *Indios* rather than Maya, generalizing rather than focusing on Maya diversity and uniqueness. Lastly, Gabi calls mixed-race Guatemalans "Latinos," when in reality in Guatemala they use the word "ladinos." All of these instances represent neocolonial dominant discourses, where indigenous groups are homogeneous "Indians" and the word used in Mexico and the U.S., "latinos," is grafted onto Guatemalan experience. However, the dichotomy raised between Mayas and ladinos is certainly real, and is often represented in the first half of *Tree Girl* through language.

Gabi, who learns Spanish in school, is caught within a struggle over power through language, a struggle between her K'iche' world and the Spanish-speaking world of the ladinos. Her reason for speaking Spanish is at first self-contained, as according to her, "Our Mayan people spoke many languages. Manuel had taught us Spanish because the cantóns in different

regions couldn't understand one another. Each cantón needed someone who spoke Spanish to communicate for trade and barter" (41). Here the decision to learn Spanish is not to empower Mayas to participate in the larger Guatemalan society, but instead to remain within Maya communities. Spanish is originally intended to continue working as a tool of separation between ladinos and Mayas, enforcing neocolonial roles of economic and social colonizer and colonized. However, as the military arrives in El Quiché, Manuel tells Gabi, "...already they're killing Indios who can speak Spanish. You and I are among those they wish to kill. Knowing Spanish places us in great danger" (41). This is a simplification of the motivation behind the genocide, and serves to further create a simplified division between Mayas and ladinos. However, it also creates the opportunity for transculturation, or the re-appropriation of dominant languages by (neo)colonial subjects. Knowing Spanish becomes a way of opposing ladino control. Gabi declares, "Each night I lay awake on my sleeping mat, and in the darkness of the night I defiantly mouthed forbidden Spanish words" (62). She chooses to fight back against her fear of the military and the control of language by the dominant ladino power by using "forbidden Spanish." Thus, while terms are not always used correctly, nor are explanations always accurate, as postcolonial critics note, the "...struggle for power is a struggle *over* language" (Bradford 23). This struggle is clear, if simplified, in *Tree Girl*, and that Gabi chooses to join that struggle reveals her decision to resist neocolonial dominant discourses.

6.3.2 Representations of Culture in Traditions, Customs, and Religion

Tree Girl, in addition to mixed representations of terms and languages, also contains mixed representations of Maya traditions. For example, the novel opens with Gabi's preparations for her quinceañera, which she describes as her life's most important celebration.

Menchú's book fails to make any mention of quinceañeras, instead writing about an important coming-of-age ceremony at age twelve. While scholars believe that the quinceañera began in Maya and Toltec times to honor "the childbearing capacity of the young woman's body" (Forman-Brunell 535), I could find no reference to it in modern Guatemalan Maya communities. While that alone does not prove it is not practiced in some Maya communities, Gabi also claims, "On that special day, I would become a woman and be expected to behave as one, no longer wearing socks like a child" (3). In contrast, Menchú writes that she and her community never even owned shoes, much less socks, and never mentions socks in her description of Maya traditional dress. When I researched this issue, there were no mention of socks in any journal, article, or webpage, nor were children wearing socks in the images I found. This particular detail of Maya life is either made up, or simply borrowed from another indigenous culture, either of which represent a neocolonial dominant discourse, pointing back to the generalization of Mayas as Indians.

Gabi's descriptions of daily life and customs are also mixed, but many more accurately fit within Menchú's explanations of K'iche' life. Gabi describes weaving her huipil, saying, "...this new huipil I wove especially for my quinceañera, with blue, red, yellow, and green, and the ancient symbols of my people, the Maya... The symbols held the history of my people and told who I was" (3-4). The symbolism of the weaving is important, and changes depending on the Maya group and region. This depiction is more accurate, and fits with Menchú's descriptions of the importance of weaving for herself and women in her community. Other aspects of Maya tradition, such as the view of the earth as a mother figure (8), and Gabi's decision at her fiesta to take "...time to thank each of the elders for sharing my special day with me" (28) are important, according to Menchú. Interestingly, when Gabi's mother dies, she describes that, "The place we

buried her ashes already held the afterbirth of each of our family members as well as the ashes of our grandparents. This sacred land held the fluids of life as well as the ashes of death” (65).

While the disposal of the afterbirth, or placenta, is important, in reality the tradition is the opposite; Menchú writes, “Later on, the baby’s companion, the placenta that is, has to be burned... The placenta is not buried, because the earth is the mother and father of the child and mustn’t be abused by having the placenta buried in it. All these reasons are very important to us” (9-10). While the detail of the afterbirth is important, in *Tree Girl* its depiction is not quite accurate. Although attention to details and customs of Maya life are given, they are not always true representations, once more revealing a struggle between neocolonial dominant discourse and counter-discourse.

Despite inaccuracies in certain details, though, the general depiction of Maya life is positive and respectful. Gabi writes that although education is important to her, she does not wish to change her life as, “There was no reason to rush and make changes. We had today what our ancestors had, and that was enough” (14). The drive here is not to promote absorption of the Maya communities into ladino culture, but as Menchú encourages, to respect Maya culture and differences as equally valid. Gabi and her community reject ladino culture in favor of their own traditions, refusing to be colonized by ladino customs and social norms. Furthermore, Gabi describes her childhood by saying, “In our cantón, young girls learned many things—to weave, to carry water, to grind corn, to sweep dirt floors, and to make tortillas” (107). Like Menchú, despite the struggles and inequality outside the community, Gabi loves her cantón and her life there. Although not discussed in detail, aspects of K’iche’ life as discussed by Menchú are also present here. Later, as she travels north she explains, “...I spent my days as others did, sleeping or picking berries, *jocote* fruit, or digging for raw *pacaya*, a bitter-tasting root that Mamí and

Papí had taught me to eat" (145), and further states, "My brothers, my sisters, and I had known that we could always find food and medicine if the crops failed. This knowledge was a gift from my parents" (150). Gabi continues to celebrate and respect her Maya values and culture, and the knowledge she has gained from her parents is shown to be life-saving. Although not a Western norm, her knowledge and interaction with the natural world is revealed to be imperative to her survival. Once in the camp, Western ideals and clothing continue to be othered. For example, when aid workers distribute donated clothes, "One woman pulled on pants that were so thin and tight they made her skin look black. She looked around in embarrassment, greatly disappointed that this was her reward for a hot afternoon of shoving and pushing in the sun" (161). Skinny jeans, though so popular in the United States, are shown to be a disappointing embarrassment for this woman, privileging her viewpoint over popular US fashion. Maya counter-discourses are given precedence over Western views, and Gabi's Maya difference is depicted as natural, rather than othered in favor of Western modes.

Another area of counter-discourse is the depiction of religion in *Tree Girl*, which is also much closer to Menchú's depiction than that found in *Journey of Dreams*. For Gabi, Catholicism and Maya beliefs are intermingled and neither one constrains the other. Her quinceañera integrates both religious practices, as Gabi notes, "When the priest finished, elders from our cantón rose and prayed in Quiché, chanting, burning their candles, and swinging their pails of incense and the pine resin we called *trementina*. Our religion was partly Catholic and partly the beliefs of our Mayan ancestors. God to us was bigger than the God that Catholics believed existed" (26). Like Menchú, Gabi remains more Maya than Catholic, integrating ladino religious beliefs into her daily practices but by no means limiting herself to it. She takes the colonizing religion and adapts it to her own uses, creating yet another instance of counter-

discourse and transculturation. At the same time, some traditions remain completely Maya. When Jorge disappears and Mamí falls ill, her mother announces, “We’re going to the caves so that your father can pray and give thanks” (48). Once they arrive, they all watch their father go through the rites: “He swung the smoking bucket in front of the flaming candles and voiced his thanks for hours. I sat quietly beneath a nearby tree and listened to every hypnotic word he spoke in our Indio language of Quiché” (51). The decision to maintain Maya religious practices is an important one, validating in the text the preservation and celebration of cultural differences. Although this depiction is not perfect, as the use of “Indio” instead of “Maya” creates distance and the depiction of her own language as hypnotic is othering, its presence is important. The inclusion of Maya religious practices is certainly a step beyond *Journey of Dreams*’ noticeable lack of Maya identity.

6.3.3 Displacement through Politicized Discourse

By far the most common counter-discourse in *Tree Girl* is the continual criticism toward the United States and the Guatemalan military. While searching for her brother, Gabi and Manuel have conversations about the military and, “...Manuel explained to me that the soldiers’ new rifles were provided by the United States of America, and that the comandantes were trained in the United States” (40). Unlike many books featuring dominant discourse which keep “...silent about wars and other embarrassing aspects of the past” (Petzold 185-186), *Tree Girl* directly and repeatedly addresses the United States’ involvement in the Guatemalan war and genocide. The continual critical discussion of the U.S. is a strong counter-discourse that destabilizes Western power as the moral and social colonial center. In addition to current neocolonial powers, Manuel also discusses the original colonial period with Gabi, stating, “We,

the Indio, we used to have very beautiful names, like Lu, Shuan, Posh, Chep, Tey, and Catoch. Now we have very different names, because the Catholic Church came many years ago and made us change our names" (43). Manuel as a mentor to Gabi passes on to her this critical look at how Maya communities came to be in a situation of oppression today, due to centuries of colonial repression. This in turns opens the door for Gabi to consider current neocolonial dominant discourses and, eventually, what role she can play in fighting those discourses.

One of the ways that she resists neocolonial dominant discourses is in the way she rejects neocolonial constructions of the U.S. In the refugee camp, Gabi reports that, "Some refugees in our part of the camp tried to manufacture hope by sitting around a small fire each night sharing what they knew of the United States of America" (174-175). The United States is described as "heaven," and "a dream" (175), and other refugees report that "...the poor keep their food in electric refrigerators... Their water runs from faucets, clean and pure, and even the poorest Americans have toilets that flush away their dung" (175). Stuck in the refugee camp without hope, many refugees in the novel turn to idealistic representations of the U.S. commonly found in neocolonial dominant discourses, in which life in the United States is held up as the ideal. However, these "dreams" are soon shot down by more critical voices, who speak of the American involvement in the war. Mario insists, "If it weren't for the Americans... the soldiers would never have attacked our cantóns... I was in the Guatemalan military. The United States made the guns that shot our families. They made the helicopters that destroy our peaceful skies. The comandantes that have led massacres were trained in the United States of America" (177). While not everyone believes Mario, Gabi, already taught to question powerful discourses, begins to question the discourse she hears by the fire. Mario, who empowers and respects Gabi, represents a voice of reason and wisdom, and therefore his participation in counter-discourse

influences Gabi. She thinks, “I didn’t know if the stories about the poor in the United States of America were exaggerated, but I had to admit that they sounded wonderful. Still, how was it possible for a country to be so great and yet allow for the massacres in our cantóns and pueblos?” (178). This question is never truly answered, but hangs in the air for refugees in the book and those reading *Tree Girl* to consider on their own. Regardless of an answer, dominant Western discourse has been briefly disrupted by Manuel, Mario, and Gabi’s arguments, replaced instead by discourses that support Maya empowerment and autonomy.

Instead of focusing on dreams of the U.S., Gabi and her friends chose to focus on recovering from the violence they’ve faced, and on taking back their rights as Maya and as individuals. When Gabi and Mario start a school in the camp, Mario opens the first class by making fun of the soldiers who had victimized them: “Telling ‘bad-soldier jokes’ was Mario’s way of helping the refugees to confront and fight back against the monsters that had victimized them so tragically” (205). The decision to fight back, if only in words, is a way of taking power back from the victimizers. By starting a school Mario and Gabi are empowering their community in the camp, in addition to fighting back against the violence they’ve endured. As Gabi empowers those around her, and herself in the process, she regains her pride in her people and her traditions, stating, “The sun was my father. My mother was the moon and the earth. All that I needed, the sky and earth provided. The gringos didn’t know this same mother or father. They knew only a world of cars and computers and televisions, the things that they had created” (212). Her criticism of the north, reading technology not as a blessing but as separation from nature, is another way of regaining her dedication to her own way of living and being in the world. Once again, Maya values and customs are upheld in contrast to Western conveniences. Still, the most important part of this counter-discourse is Gabi’s decision to remain invested in

Guatemala, in her people, and in their future. Like Menchú, who eventually moved back to Guatemala despite the danger it posed to her, Gabi, too, plans to return to Guatemala and continue empowering Maya peoples. She decides, “Yes, before we slept that night I would return to the camp, and someday I would return to Guatemala to find the beauty that a young girl had left behind... I would return to tell of the massacres, and I would return to find the songs of my people, songs left by the ancients, songs heard late at night when my soul was quiet and dared to listen to the wind” (223). Her decision is a decision of hope, for herself and her people, as well as for all of Guatemala—it is the desire for peace and equality. Gabi, refusing to be displaced by war and socio-economic discourses, instead dedicates herself to her people and her country. Ultimately, it is a decision to remain a witness and to participate in counter-discourses that seek to restore justice.

6.4 Conclusion

Thus, although *Tree Girl* is at times a mixture of both neocolonial dominant discourses and counter-discourse, Gabi’s crucial decision to deny neocolonial dominant discourses that encourage her to abandon her home represents the celebration of difference that theorists like Shaobo Xie call for. While trauma, as in *Journey of Dreams*, is healed far more quickly than is realistic, its representation as fracturing and debilitating, and Gabi’s inability to process what she has seen are both aspects discussed by trauma theorists. *Tree Girl* does reflect several aspects that Menchú discusses in her memoir, such as the transculturation of religions and the use of Spanish as a tool for both oppression and empowerment. Also, Menchú’s own loss of hope after experiencing the deaths of her parents and brother, and her eventual decision to verbally challenge the Guatemalan military through her work and memoir, are reflected in Gabi’s

experiences and decisions. Gabi's refusal to remain a victim to the trauma she has witnessed or to the oppression and colonization of her people fundamentally challenges Western neocolonialism and instead celebrates Maya culture and difference.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Findings

I now return to my original research questions to examine how the findings discussed in my chapters relate to my areas of inquiry. The sections are grouped by question, rather than by book, to better analyze how they relate and differ in both areas of trauma and neocolonial dominant discourse. My questions were as follows:

1. How is the experience of trauma represented in these novels? In particular, to what degree do protagonists act as witnesses, how do protagonists experience the reoccurrence or cycle of trauma, and how is the process of healing depicted in these novels?
2. What are the dominant discourses evident in these novels? In particular, how are Maya and Guatemalan cultures represented in these novels? How accurate are representations of Maya and Hispanic traditions? How are native and foreign languages—Mayan (K’iche’), Spanish, and English—used by the protagonists? In what ways are Western (particularly U.S. and Canadian) discourses embraced by the protagonists?

7.1.1 Trauma Theory Findings

In response to the first set of questions, both novels were consistent, although not equally realistic, in their representations of trauma. In *Journey of Dreams*, Tomasa generally does not act as witness in any of Laub’s three levels of witnessing, except through her artwork. She instead tries to compartmentalize the cycle of trauma occurring around her, for the most part focusing on practical day-to-day concerns. While this alone is not unrealistic, the lack of psychological consequences to her silence and her sudden healing create a problematic representation of trauma. As Dori Laub writes, “One has to know one’s buried truth in order to

be able to live one's life... None find peace in silence, even when it is their choice to remain silent" (78-79). Contrary to this, Tomasa *does* find peace at the end of her long silence. By the end of the novel she seems to forget the deaths of her neighbors and friends, hoping that her friends from the village, Catarina and Hector are "alive in the mountains" (Pellegrino 204). Then, when she is reunited with her mother, she is finally able to let her pain go and finds healing. Even though her reencounter with her mother would undoubtedly be empowering and joyful, when healing is depicted simply it creates misunderstanding and supports the many refugee children's books that focus entirely on school struggles rather than the trauma and difference of refugee struggles.

It is important to note here that some scholars may find the use of dreams in *Journey of Dreams* to be an act of witnessing [e.g. Saltman, 2014, personal communication]. Instead of witnessing through spoken conversations with other people, the dreams may be perceived as an act of unconscious witnessing, allowing Tomasa to witness to her own trauma. Interestingly, she never dreams about the massacre, the main traumatic event, but the dreams may be seen as a way in which Tomasa witnesses to the weight and terror of trauma, if not the event itself. When seen in this light, it could be suggested that the dreams then become a healing process. Thus, although Tomasa never has to actually face her trauma in her waking moments, the dreams serve as a way for her to process the trauma she carries. Since the novel is entitled *Journey of Dreams*, in this reading the dreams could then symbolize the process of healing that survivors face, both filled with the reoccurrence of previous trauma, but also ending on a note of hope and healing. Intriguingly, according to an article on dreams in the Talmud, the Talmud states, "A dream unexamined is like a letter unopened" ("Talmud considers sleep"). When applied to *Journey of Dreams*, it opens several possibilities. Although Tomasa never reflects on or examines her

dreams, and indeed, at times stays awake to avoid dreaming, the readers of *Journey of Dreams* do see those dreams, and therefore readers are given an opportunity to act as witnesses. Meanwhile, although Tomasa avoids her dreams in her waking hours, it could be argued that her unconscious witnesses to the trauma that she does not consciously reflect upon.

On the other hand, in *Tree Girl* Gabi chooses to be a witness, paying close attention to the details of the massacres she sees, and vowing "...to stay alive and someday speak of what I witnessed" (Mikaelson 135). In terms of Laub's "three separate, distinct levels of witnessing,"—which are "the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience; the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others; and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself" (75)—Gabi fully participates in the second and occasionally the third levels. She certainly acts as a witness to others, even imagining what might have happened in the deaths she does not see firsthand. She also pays attention to herself witnessing, and to the importance of others' stories in the camp. Although she is not always a witness to her own suffering, the novel takes on this form of witnessing, as I discuss further in section 7.4.

Tree Girl itself is one of the most traumatic refugee novels for children that I have read, matching only one other book—*Never Fall Down* by Patricia McCormick, based on a real man's experiences during the Cambodian genocide—in its level of traumatic representations. Gabi's decision to act as a witness in the midst of pain and trauma is a difficult decision. Even when her pent-up trauma overwhelms her ability to fully see the violence that occurs around her on the way to the refugee camp and within, she eventually regains her ability to witness through her relationships with others. Although her healing process is also quick, it is situated in positive relationships, in breaking her silence, and in finding empowerment through work with traumatized children. Also, the rupture in her role as witness due to the cycle of trauma that

Gabi continually experiences, and her descent into depression, withdrawal, and guilt, creates a realistic image of what trauma can do to survivors. To return to Caruth's definition, "...trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events..." (11). The words "overwhelming" and "catastrophe" are central here to understanding the effects of trauma on survivors like Gabi. In the end, while Tomasa buries and then overcomes her trauma, unable to fully participate as a witness, Gabi chooses to become a witness once more to the struggles of Maya peoples in Guatemala, as well as the violence she has seen.

7.1.2 Neocolonial Dominant Discourse Findings

In response to my second set of research questions, both novels do display neocolonial discourses, but to differing extents. In *Journey of Dreams*, Tomasa's Maya identity is eclipsed by other cultures, and Maya culture is occasionally falsely represented. Maya figures such as Chaac, the god of rain, are absent, replaced by poetic descriptions of rain that pass for Maya beliefs. Beyond these, her experience generally lacks depictions of Maya traditions, and the few Hispanic traditions, like the fiesta at the start of the novel, solely serve as background to the main action. K'iche' is rarely used and quickly replaced by Spanish, and eventually Tomasa begins to learn English as she travels to the United States. Her and her family's decision to leave Guatemala and their traditions behind them and move to the United States reflects neocolonial dominant discourses which situate the West as the ideal. As Dieter Petzold points out, "...in emigration stories, reaching the Land of the Free already constitutes the happy ending..." (184). The fact that Tomasa experiences healing and lets go of her past immediately after entering the United States suggests the complete replacement of her culture and personal history by that "ideal." Instead of remaining a refugee story, in some ways *Journey of Dreams*, and many other

refugee books for children, become emigration stories. In this way, Tomasa ultimately embraces neocolonial dominant discourses, rather than rejecting them.

In contrast, while *Tree Girl* contains some neocolonial dominant discourses, it also contains and celebrates counter-discourses. As Roderick McGillis writes in his introduction, “Tolerance and understanding are, in fact, the aim of postcolonial writing; tolerance and understanding can only come through opposition to prevailing conventions of belief and behavior. Opposition in this sense does not mean thoughtless refusal to accede to convention, but rather a critical examination of convention” (xxviii). At the same time, Shaobo Xie argues, “...only through celebrating and legitimizing difference can the uncanny, alien otherness be recognized, accepted, and appreciated” (4). *Tree Girl* often does just that, as Maya culture is represented as distinct and Maya customs and traditions are respected and espoused by Gabi. In addition, *Tree Girl* also fits into McGillis’ definition, as Manuel and Mario, as well as Gabi, often question Western power and discourse. Although traditions such as the quinceañera and sock-wearing are not accurate, religious observances and descriptions of daily life are similar to those found in Menchú’s memoir. The novel is not free from neocolonial dominant discourse, as language is a problem area, particularly the use of “Mayan” and “Indio,” but both Spanish and K’iche’ words are less frequently used. Additionally, as Spanish is made an area of conflict within the novel, Gabi’s use of Spanish is not simply a sign of interiorized neocolonial dominant discourses, but rather an instance of Mary Louise Pratt’s theory of transculturation. Most importantly, neocolonial dominant discourses are rejected, rather than embraced, by Gabi, and Western norms are frequently de-regularized in favor of other cultural representations. In this way, *Tree Girl* often acts as postcolonial, counter-hegemonic text.

7.2 Contribution to Existing Scholarship

This study fits in to existing scholarship in a unique way. Although certainly extending from a great breadth of scholarship on trauma in Holocaust narratives and war literature for children, the focus on post-Holocaust refugee literature is less common. Elizabeth Goodenough and Andrea Immel's compilation of essays on war, entitled *Under Fire: Childhood in the Shadow of War*, looks at over a hundred years of children's war fiction. Although the compilation looks at media, literature, and images, the focus is on representations of wars up until the Holocaust, with little written about further wars. Adrienne Kertzer's chapter discusses a handful of more recent war depictions, including a look at one refugee picture book, *The Roses in my Carpets* by Rukhsana Khan. In other places, such as Melanie Challenger and Zlata Filipović's compilation of war diaries, and in articles like "Save the Muslim Girl!" by Özlem Sensoy and Elizabeth Marshall, there is content pertaining to recent conflicts in the Middle East; however, often the focus in articles on children's literature set in the Middle East is the prevalence of political discourses rather than trauma.

Similarly, while postcolonial and dominant discourse studies have been used to look at classic and current children's literature, the application of theories of Western hegemonic discourses as a lens with which to read refugee fiction for children is rare. Postcolonial critiques of classic children's literature are certainly the most common applications of those theories, as found in articles such as Clare Bradford's "The End of Empire? Colonial and Postcolonial Journeys in Children's Books," which, among others, looks at *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and the colonial journeying of the Oompa-Loompas. In *Voices of the Other: Children's Literature and the Postcolonial Context*, everything from *A Little Princess* to the American Girls books to Canadian survival stories from the turn of the century to *The Story of Little Black*

Sambo is examined in terms of postcolonial theories, alongside songs and books from the 1980s and 1990s. While articles like Sensoy and Marshall’s “Save the Muslim Girl!” do look at the politicization found in children’s literature about the Middle East, and the appropriation and erasure of Middle Eastern cultural difference, such as in Deborah Ellis’ *Breadwinner* quartet, other postcolonial readings of modern refugee children’s literature are not as common.

The particular focus on refugee juvenile fiction about the Guatemalan genocide is something new and long overdue. The genocide, which took place in the early 1980s, did not appear in English-language children’s literature until Mikaelson’s *Tree Girl* in 2004. While several nonfiction accounts and a few memoirs for adults exist—in part due to Menchú’s memoir and the controversial response it continues to provoke to this day—little has been written for children about Central America in general, and Guatemala in particular. Donn Kushner’s *The Night Voyagers* features a refugee from “Central America,” published in 1995, and *Libertad*, by Alma Fullerton, focuses on two children who travel from the Guatemala City Dump to the United States, and was published in 2008. *Journey of Dreams* was published in 2009, and is the most recent juvenile novel that I could find about Guatemala. Picture books, such as Rigoberta Menchú’s *The Girl from Chimal* and *The Honey Jar*, published in 2005 and 2006 respectively, and several more about Maya culture, are readily available, but there is a gap—an area of silence—in terms of representations of the genocide. My study begins to fill this gap and open this unusually silent area for discussion.

7.3 Limitations of Study

There are several limitations to this study. One of the largest limitations was my distance from Maya communities. Although I read several books on Maya life and the events of the

genocide, I never spoke with a Maya person, nor have I ever visited Guatemala. I have never lived in a Hispanic country or community, and I am certainly influenced by my status as a white female writing from within the Western hegemony. Beyond this, I was also limited by the very few novels available for children on this topic. I could only find two refugee novels on the Guatemalan genocide in English, and my communication with a PhD student creating a compendium of Guatemalan children's literature revealed that there is nothing currently written on the subject in Guatemala for children. Thus, only children's books written from an outside perspective were available, although here Menchú's memoir certainly helped. Besides these limitations, the combination of several lenses, though providing an interesting parallel between representations, means that my analysis may not be as deep in either trauma theory or postcolonial studies. While I was particularly interested in uniting these two areas in this study, the combination of two different theoretical areas may also serve as a limitation. In addition, the combination of the overlapping areas of neocolonial and dominant discourse theories limits the depth to which I explore either one separately; however, I believe that both sets of theories were important to include, as they both address Western hegemonic discourses at work.

7.4 Areas for Further Discussion and Research

There were many other interesting aspects to both novels, as well as in Menchú's memoir and later books. One issue that was not a part of the research questions was the representation of the war in all three books. Menchú's involvement in organizing and speaking out against the Guatemalan government is interesting in contrast to Tomasa and Gabi's involvement in the war. Though only a few years older than Tomasa and Gabi, Menchú was much more aware of the violence and active in fighting back against oppression. While Victor Montejo discusses the

mixed feelings about guerrillas that Mayas in the Guatemalan Highlands had, very little is said about the guerrillas in the books; they focus instead on the military, the enactors of the genocide. Interestingly, both *Journey of Dreams* and *Tree Girl* also give simplified reasons for the war—in *Journey of Dreams* the genocide occurs because plantation owners want more land, while in *Tree Girl* the only explanation given is that the military does not want Maya communities to speak Spanish. This sort of simplification of war and political struggles is common in children's books, according to both Adrienne Kertzer and Kenneth Kidd, who argue that children can handle more complexity in representations of war. In her chapter "The Anxiety of Trauma in Children's War Fiction," Adrienne Kertzer discusses the negative effects of simplified histories for children, and both novels are guilty of simplifying the reasons behind the violence against Maya communities.

In addition to simplification, *Journey of Dreams* in particular contained a great deal of inaccuracies concerning the war—the novel is placed in 1984, but many of the events of the novel are more in line with the start of the violence, in 1980 or 1981. Issues surrounding the civil patrol, which is represented as a group of civilians working on the side of the soldiers in the novel, but which was in fact comprised of all able bodied men within every village, are also simplified and polarized. Interesting, in *Journey of Dreams* and two of the other books I read, the protagonists go through grueling river crossings to reach Mexico, despite few rivers running between the borderlines (although there are several rivers running from north to south). Two of the books, including *Journey of Dreams*, provided maps of the refugee journey, and in both the area of crossing on the maps is a dry crossing area. This is interesting, as the river crossing made by protagonists who cannot swim, increases tension and excitement in the novels, while true moments of tension and excitement, such as death and massacres, are glazed over.

Historical specificity, which I mentioned in my introduction as a motivation for picking novels for older audiences, is still sometimes lacking even in juvenile and young adult fiction. The simplification and misrepresentation of war and politics in children's literature, and particularly in refugee children's literature, is an interesting area for further study; although I did not have time for it in this study, it is certainly an area requiring further consideration.

Yet another interesting area of inquiry mentioned in my literature review is the view that literary texts can serve as witnesses to traumatic events. Shoshana Felman discusses this in her look at Camus' *The Plague*, Leigh Gilmore discusses it in her article “‘What Was I?’: Literary Witness and the Testimonial Archive,” and Homi Bhabha looks at its implications in reading Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. Although I discussed these examples in Chapter 2, I did not have the time to dedicate a section to look at the novels themselves as witnesses, focusing instead on the protagonists as witnesses. However, it would be interesting to examine how the novels act as witnesses as well, and in particular, how the novels may witness differently than the protagonists. Although in *Journey of Dreams* the novel itself subscribes to many of the same issues that Tomasa does, *Tree Girl* acts as a witness to Gabi's trauma in a way that Gabi does not; Gabi focuses outward, acting as a witness to the death and violence she sees more often than the trauma she experiences personally. In addition, a study involving adolescent readers and their responses as witnesses to the novels would be a fascinating application of these theories.

There still remain plenty of areas for further research. In order to use Menchú's memoir as a framing text I focused on books about Guatemala, however there are also books from El Salvador and general books containing Central American protagonists. In addition, books that feature displaced or immigrant protagonists from Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador exist, and it would be interesting to examine the neocolonial discourses present in those protagonists'

reasons for migrating. Although perhaps unanswerable, I still question why there is so little available on refugees from Latin America, compared to books about Southeast Asian refugees, African refugees, Middle Eastern refugees, and Eastern European refugees. Despite many refugees from Central America currently living in the United States and Canada, very little has been written about their experiences. All of these areas, and many more, remain minimally explored or unexplored, and would make for interesting and informative further study.

7.5 Concluding Remarks

Though often treated separately in this study, it is important to recognize the close tie between trauma and neocolonial discourses in refugee juvenile fiction. In his Introduction, Homi Bhabha writes “The hegemonies that exist at ‘home’ provide us with useful perspectives on the predatory effects of global governance however philanthropic or ameliorative the original intention might have been” (xv-xvi). This ties in to Nancy Ellen Batty’s critique of the use of poor and suffering children to elicit compassion for “Third World” nations. She writes that “...humanitarian donors in North America and Europe feel compelled to assume the role of *in locus parentis*, once again placing ourselves, however compassionate our motives, in a paternalistic relationship with the Third World...” (26). She continues, “...a humanitarian discourse that relies heavily upon the image of the suffering, dependent Third World child reproduces and reinforces the discourse of colonialism itself” (29). Both Bhabha and Batty draw attention to the interrelationship of trauma and suffering and the frequent Western response to it—one of philanthropic neocolonialism. Herein, I believe, lies the critical importance of examining both trauma and neocolonial discourses within refugee children’s literature. Precisely because refugee children’s literature represents both discourses of trauma, injustice, and

suffering, and potentially represents neocolonial and hegemonic discourses, attention needs to be paid to how refugee children's literature constructs refugee protagonists. In *Journey of Dreams*, trauma and Maya culture disappear, replaced by Western discourses. Tomasa is aided throughout her travels by benevolent ladino and white people, and would have otherwise been unable to reunite with her brother and mother without that assistance. On the other hand, in *Tree Girl*, Gabi is empowered by friends, who are often Mayas, and Gabi survives because of her own strength and intelligence. While both novels depict the Guatemalan genocide, only one of them directly challenges Western hegemony and empowers its Maya protagonist to support herself. As frequently occurs, *Journey of Dreams* represents the Western desire to "fix" suffering minorities, rather than supporting them or recognizing their strengths. Rigoberta Menchú, as a Maya woman who survived the genocide, has told her story in several books, has won the Nobel Peace Prize, and continues to run for president in Guatemala, represents the possibility and importance of challenging Western hegemonic discourses. These discourses construct refugees as helpless victims that need to conform to Western norms in order to find strength. Though undoubtedly written with the best of intentions, books like *Journey of Dreams* and *Tree Girl* should be read with an awareness of the ways in which trauma and dominant discourses interact and potentially seek to colonize non-Western cultures.

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