CHAPTER 1
AN UNEQUAL WAR — A NATIVE WOMAN'S STRUGGLE AGAINST NEW AGE CONQUISTADORS

When the trumpet sounded, it was all prepared on the earth, the Jehovah parcelled out the earth to Coca Cola, Inc., Anaconda, Ford Motors, and other entities: The Fruit Company, Inc. reserved for itself the most succulent, the central coast of my own land, the delicate waist of America. It rechristened its territories as the 'Banana Republics’ and over the sleeping dead, over the restless heroes who brought about the greatness, the liberty and the flags, it established the comic opera: abolished the independencies, presented crowns of Caesar, unsheathed envy, attracted the dictatorship of the flies, Trujillo flies, Taacho flies, Carias flies, Martines flies, Ubico flies, damp flies of modest blood and marmalade, drunken flies who zoom over the ordinary graves, circus flies, wise flies well trained in tyranny.

Among the blood-thirsty flies the Fruit Company lands its ships, taking off the coffee and the fruit; the treasure of our submerged territories flow as though on plates into the ships.

Meanwhile Indians are falling into the sugared chasms of the harbours, wrapped for burials in the mist of the dawn: a body rolls, a thing that has no name, a fallen cipher, a cluster of the dead fruit thrown down on the dump.

— Pablo Neruda (“The United Fruit Co.”)
I begin this chapter by quoting Pablo Neruda’s lines to provide a poetic metaphor to a land and to its people who have suffered much at the hands of those driven by endless greed. Nature’s bounty has been exploited to fill coffers; and all this at the cost of the blood of those who committed no sin except to be born in this land.

In her eponymous memoir, Rigoberta Menchu details the suffering of the Mayan Indian community whose lives have been torn by the political repression of Guatemalan military juntas. She proves to be a fierce warrior in an unequal war — albeit without the usual weapons that armies carry to the frontline. Amidst a sea of controversies surrounding the authenticity of her memoir and the truthfulness of facts in it, Menchu has been stoic and steady in her quest for social justice in Guatemala. Hers is an anguished remembrance of lives shattered by the aggressions of a militarist state and the wounds of the genocide still fester.

By giving voice to her experiences of growing up in the Guatemalan altiplanos (the mountainous region in the north-west of Guatemala where the majority of the Indian population lives) in a close, community-bound environment and working hard on the coastal fincas (plantations or estates where coffee, sugar, cotton, etc. are grown) to the subsequent tragic civil war years in Guatemala, Rigoberta Menchu overcomes the subaltern tradition of silence. Like the Chicana feminist, Gloria Anzaldúa, she refuses to ‘have her tongue tamed’ (Anzaldúa, in Hunter 585). This chapter deals with the unraveling of globalization as a violent, destructive and gendered process where indigenous communities are not only discriminated against but also exterminated by local ruling elites in complicity with neo-imperialist powers for mutual economic gains. Masculinist financial institutions and multi-national corporations facilitate this process of endless capital accumulation and ruthless exploitation. Neo-imperialism, an important aspect of the global-capitalist process, very often gives rise to the political repression of indigenous communities and their racial subjugation at the hands of local ruling elites. In Menchu’s case, it is the systematic violence perpetrated by the Guatemalan Army against the Mayan community to exterminate all communists and subversives. The American authorities coerce the Guatemalan military Government to carry out its anti-communist agenda and also to see that their mutual economic interests are protected by all means.

The first part of this chapter is an exposition of Menchu’s testimonio or self-narrative, I, Rigoberta Menchu to bring forth its significance as “a rich and complex
form of cross-cultural communication” (Millay 155). As a work that effortlessly flows across the spaces of reality and imagination and bridges the crucial gap between theory and activism, it lends vigour to literary discourse. The second part of this chapter deals with another aspect of this text: besides its primary function as a work revealing the Guatemalan Army’s atrocities against civilians, it is a treatise revealing the insidiousness of Western global-capitalist project and its racist undercurrents. The Western notions of ‘progress’ and ‘development’, earlier the connotations for ‘modernization’, now subsumed by the all-encompassing, umbrella term ‘globalization’, have contributed to the propagation of patriarchal subjugation of women. In this entire exercise, Western science has proved to be a crucial hegemonic tool for the neo-imperialistic acts of the West. Thirdly and most importantly, this chapter examines this text as one which forms a unique means of voicing indigenous resistance by women who have few venues open to them for agency. Menchu speaks for the native Indians who have been pushed to the margins by a complicit Guatemalan oligarchy and American hegemonic forces. Lastly, I explore how globalization is an ideological construct and a gendered discourse that perpetuates the further marginalization of those on the periphery yet also provides a distinct opportunity to the latter to resist and subvert it at various junctures, thus kindling the hope of a more equal and more just tomorrow.

BRIDGING THE GAP: MENCHU’S TESTIMONIO AS A CROSS-CULTURAL CONSTRUCT LINKING THEORY AND ACTIVISM

I, Rigoberta Menchu belongs to the genre of testimonial literature which is an apt medium for expressing personal experiences. A testimonio is a “narration of urgency”, “a powerful textual affirmation of the speaking subject itself”, and a narration that “always signifies the need for a general social change in which the stability of the reader’s world must be brought into question” (qtd. in Sanford 53).

Taking activism out of literary discourse makes it impotent. It loses its efficacy, its engagement with the outside world. Rather, it becomes sterile and loses its vigour. In recent times, there has been a displacement of the “activist culture” which reached its high in the 1960s and early 1970s in the West with a “textual culture” (Ahmad, In Theory 1). To bring this deadened set of literary formulations back to life, theory needs to be infused with activism. And Rigoberta Menchu does
exactly that. She combines the potency of words on paper (in her testimonio) with affirmative action. This makes her work more urgent and compelling, setting off a chain of positive actions and reactions. She has been instrumental in raising international awareness about the atrocities committed against indigenous Guatemalans. It has been largely due to her efforts that many Guatemalan military officials involved in the Maya massacres have been prosecuted for war crimes and are being tried in the International Court of Justice today.

A testimonio also conforms to the concept of the ‘aesthetic’ that Tharu and Lalita speak about in the introduction to their pioneering work, Women Writing in India. This ‘aesthetic’, they write, “must undo the strict distinctions between the literary and the social text, abdicate the imperious functions it has been charged with over the last century and a half, and redesign itself to orchestrate contradictions and cherish the agonistic forms of insurgency and resistance” (Tharu and Lalita 39). A testimonio thus has affinity towards this ‘aesthetic’ because it deals with the material social reality of the narrator-protagonist’s life which is inscribed in words by the transcriber to give the work a sense of ‘being of the real world’ and not being adrift in any imaginary, fictitious or non-real realm. It relates the real-life incidents and ‘lived’ experiences of the former’s life which are affected by the social, economic and political realities of her specific geographical location. These experiences do not fall into any universalist patterns or pre-conceived notions and assumptions of the general plight of third world women. In this case, though Menchu represents third world women to the extent that she is subjugated by patriarchal authorities, it has to be understood that these experiences are particular to Menchu and cannot be generalized in a broader sense and taken to be true of all third world women. This is one way in which third world feminism differs from Western feminist thought as the universalist assumptions of the latter are questioned and replaced by the historically specific material reality of groups of third world women. “It is only by understanding the contradictions inherent in women’s location within various structures,” writes Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “that effective political action and challenges can be devised” (1991: 66).

There are some contradictions and inconsistencies too regarding testimonio as a literary genre because it has to tread the difficult path between orality and literacy. Amy Nauss Millay talks about the complexities of the transcription process (154). It
becomes problematic as there are bound to be certain discrepancies owing to what the narrator-protagonist wants to say and how the transcriber conveys it to the readers. Though Menchu is purported to be speaking on behalf of an ethnic group, “her narration deviates significantly from this conception of a cultural totality, and conveys indigenous culture as fragmentary and secret” (Millay 154). This is a downside of testimonial literature that cannot be avoided. What has to be appreciated, though, is that a *testimonio* not only performs the difficult task of bridging the chasms between two different cultures, languages and sensibilities but also seeks to bring together the widely divergent areas of theory and activism. John Beverly and Marc Zimmerman define *testimonio* as an “extraliterary or even antiliterary form of discourse”, a “means of popular-democratic cultural practice” (qtd. in Millay 156). But Millay criticizes these definitions of *testimonio*, asserting that this genre is not perfectly reliable and is based on “a complex sociopolitical negotiation shaped by Western ideological and aesthetic concerns” (156).

In the introduction to *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, Elizabeth Burgos-Debray, the editor and transcriber of the text, admits to the fact that though she trained as an ethnographer, she had neither studied Maya-Quiche culture nor done fieldwork in Guatemala. Although she thought that this would be a major handicap, it proved to be an advantage. She was able to adopt the position of a learner and that is precisely the reason, she says, that the descriptions of ceremonies and rituals in the text are so detailed (xix)

Menchu sensed her listener’s unfamiliarity with the Indian culture, landscape and way of life and so gave a much more vivid and realistic picture of her homeland. Burgos-Debray also explains that while tape-recording Menchu’s story, she was initially particular about following a chronological sequence of events but when Menchu made frequent digressions and introduced descriptions of cultural practices in her story, she gave up the idea of a rigid chronology and gave Menchu greater elbow room to traverse freely from her past to the present and vice-versa. When Burgos-Debray transcribed all the tapes, she claims, “nothing was left out, not a word, even if it was used incorrectly or was later changed. I altered neither the style nor the sentence structure. The Spanish original covers almost five hundred pages of typescript” (xx). The English version, translated from Spanish by Anne Wright, runs about two-hundred and fifty pages. After reading the transcript carefully, Burgos-
Debray “established a thematic card index, first identifying major themes (father, mother, childhood, education) and then those which occurred most frequently (work, relations with ladinos², linguistic problems)”(xx). She then made the chapter division accordingly and decided to give the manuscript the form of a monologue, deleting the questions that she had earlier asked Menchu. To make the narrative into a fluid, continuous read which would be easily accessible to the reader, she admits to having inserted linking passages in certain places in the text (xx).

There is a creative tension that runs through this narrative, confirming it as the fusion of two minds; one invoking the oral tradition to narrate an intense experience, the other inscribing it to give it the permanence of words. “The autobiographical redaction”, claims San Juan Jr., “unites in a precarious but heuristic tension the political and scientific concerns of both the anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos-Debray and the protagonist Menchu. Ethnography mutates into a unique practice of dissent combining both alternative and oppositional stances” (37). Despite the straining towards two different directions, there is a structural coherence and an organic unity that holds the text together. Though there is some repetition in the text, it only serves to highlight the intensity of the experience. It emerges as a powerful narrative which is an amalgamation of personal thoughts, experiences and ideas. It manages to convey the very essence and spirit of a resilient and proud people.

THE INSIDIOUSNESS OF INTENT: VIOLENCE OF THE GLOBAL-CAPITALIST SYSTEM

At the outset of her testimonio, Menchu asserts that “it’s not only my life, it’s also the testimony of my people. . . .My story is the story of all poor Guatemalans. My personal experience is the reality of a whole people” (1). She assumes the role of a representative leader right at the outset. Her attachment to her homeland is all too clear when she says:

The village is called Chimel, I was born there. Where I live is practically a paradise, the country is so beautiful. There are no big roads, and no cars. Only people can reach it. Everything is taken down the mountainside on horseback or else we carry it ourselves. So you can see, I live right up in the mountains. (2)
Her resentment of the Ladino community is evident when she describes how her father is ill-treated and looked down upon by his employers when he works in a Ladino household as a young servant. “They found him repulsive because he had no clothes and was very dirty,” writes Menchu (3). The undeniable currents of internal colonialism flow through the narrative’s length, highlighting the simmering hostilities between these communities. When Menchu’s father starts earning enough as a worker on the fincas, he sends money to his mother so he could liberate her from her exploitative Ladino employers.

The first instance of gender discrimination in the text occurs when Menchu describes both men and women being employed as wage labourers on the fincas on the south coast where “coffee, cotton, cardamom and sugar are grown. . . . Cutting cane was usually men’s work and the pay was a little higher” (3). In a rather matter-of-fact manner, Menchu ironically predicts the biased division of labour that would take place in the near ‘global’ future. Picking coffee and weeding out coffee plants, Menchu’s parents would struggle through a life of poverty. “A very few families owned the vast areas of land which produce these crops for sale abroad. These landowners are the lords of vast extensions of land”, writes Menchu (5). The paradigm of ‘ownership of property’ is an old way of asserting patriarchal authority over land and by transference, women. This could be the private ownership of property or the State control over this natural ‘resource’. In the introduction to her book, Globalization’s New Wars, Vandana Shiva asserts:

An economy based on greed and profits alone is inevitably an economy of death, and it creates politics and cultures of death. An economy of death is based on fear — it creates fear among those who lose their livelihoods, allowing them to be more easily manipulated by fascist and fundamentalist regimes: but it also creates fear among those who set their eyes on the resources and wealth of others. This is the fear which drives the current wars, a fear that supports the economies of death with cultures of violence, and the politics of violence and exclusion. (10)

Shiva considers “gender subordination and patriarchy” to be the “oldest of oppressions” that have taken on more violent and destructive forms “through the
project of development” (Staying Alive 3). It has led to the devaluation of women’s traditional role as sustainers of life through their participation as both producers and reproducers. Through their everyday contact with nature, peasant and tribal women have accumulated intensive knowledge about nature and agriculture over the years. This includes knowledge regarding the nutritional and medicinal properties of plants, coping mechanisms during drought and famine, seed selection work and knowledge of different varieties of crops (Agarwal, in Menon 124). This agricultural knowledge has been rendered redundant by the global-capitalist system. Institutions creating ‘scientific knowledge’ tend to exclude women from their ‘modern’, mechanized and technocratic model of agriculture. Replacing of subsistence crops with cash crops has resulted in a disturbing of ecological systems. In the Indian context, the Green Revolution of the 1960s led to a massive increase in crop production in the subsequent few decades but its long-term effects have been damaging to the extreme. Falling ground-water tables, water-logging, soil salinity, declining soil fertility due to excessive chemical fertilizer use and water pollution with pesticide run-offs are some of its consequences. This ecological deterioration has led to a lengthening of women’s working day as they have to travel longer distances to fetch drinking water while the disappearance of forests makes them search harder for fuel. Also, the rapid vanishing of village commons for grazing animals makes them expend more energy in looking for fodder.

Women’s relationship with nature has always been a symbolic and symbiotic one. “The symbolism of Terra Mater,” asserts Shiva, “the earth in the form of the Great Mother, creative and protective, has been a shared but diverse symbol across space and time, and ecology movements in the West today are inspired in large part by the recovery of the concept of Gaia, the earth Goddess” (Staying Alive 41-2). With the advent of global capitalism, this view has undergone a sea change; nature is no longer the nurturing, life-giving ‘Great Mother’ but a resource to be exploited. This devaluation of nature is linked to the marginalization of women in society as women and nature work in partnership with each other to produce and reproduce life. It also means the derecognizing of women’s domestic work as ‘productivity’ is now seen in terms of capital accumulation only. Unlike men’s exploitation of nature for generating profit, women’s relationship with nature is not based on domination and control. It is based on mutual give-and-take as women not only “collect and consume what grows in nature but make things grow, thus producing life” (Shiva, Staying
Their role in producing sustenance has been crucial in maintaining the delicate balance between nature and mankind. This harmonious relationship has been disrupted by the violent conniving and manipulations of the globalization process. It is now replaced by a masculine, technology-driven, science-oriented psychology which sees everything in terms of profit and loss.

Menchu recounts in her memoirs of working as a ‘maid in the capital’ where she is discriminated against by the mistress of the house. She is treated “lower than the animals in the house” and given “a few beans with some very hard tortillas” to eat (92). She says that “the dog had a good meal and I didn’t deserve as good a meal as the dog . . . [I] felt rejected” (92). This kind of internal racism is endured by most of the native Indians in their everyday interactions with the Ladino community. It is a part of the colonialist legacy where the Spanish intermixed with the indigenous people of Guatemala to give birth to a new race, that of the Ladinos or mestizos who consider themselves superior to the native Indians. The Ladinos hold most of the positions of power and influence in Guatemala including high government offices and administrative posts. Discrimination based on ethnic differences forms an integral part of the colonization process whereby a minority rules over a majority by asserting its cultural superiority over the latter. Indigenous populations are thus subjugated by their psychological domination at the hands of the colonizers. Even as ‘race’ forms a major issue of discrimination, it is ‘class’ that is the underlying source of most problems. In a later interview, Menchu reconsiders the situation of the Guatemalan Indians dispassionately:

We must view the situation of the Indians objectively, not romantically. To the degree that an Indian has had privileges to defend and has participated in profiting from the labour of others, he has become transformed to the extent that he is even cruder. It is not a question of race but one of class. (qtd. in Yanez 98)

Neo-imperialism works in much the same way as colonialism. The only difference is that nowadays, due to international media presence, the process of domination is more subtle and less obvious than the colonization process of the erstwhile colonial powers. The global-capitalist process works with a pulverizing precision where a hegemon does not actually invade the territorial limits of a country but still defies its sovereignty with pernicious policies adopted by its appendages like the IMF, the
WTO and the World Bank as also by multinational corporations. This process of domination whereby “the ruling ideas of an era are ever the ideas of its ruling class” was explained by Marx as justifying the power and privilege of the ruling class (Raines 3). Marx termed this as “false consciousness” when “class inequalities come to be seen as the intention of the gods, or the legacy of karma, or, more recently, the result of alleged individual merit” (Raines 3). Ideas thus have the power to rule, and they do so with more subtlety, and therefore with more effectiveness, than guns (Raines 3).

Ann Oakley in her book, *Gender on Planet Earth*, argues that the marginalization of women by “masculinist institutions” has led to an increase in inequality by “monstrous proportions” (152). She terms the exploitation of nature as “The Rape of Mother Earth” where the domination of nature and women is symptomatic of a violent, destructive society. Modern science and technology have been manipulated by the czars of global capitalism into serving as crucial hegemonic tools for furthering their control over third world societies. She writes:

> The desecration of the earth is the result of a specific masculine consciousness that devalues women’s experiences. Globalization is turning life itself into the ultimate commodity: planet earth is being replaced by Life Inc. in the masculine world of free trade and deregulated commerce. The industry of risk assessment produces ‘scientific-looking claims’ to defend the indefensible: the continuing production of dioxin; the incineration of plastics and nerve gas weapons; genetic engineering for herbicide-resistant crops; feeding cows dead animals. Globalization is the grim, destructive economic reality of untrammelled profit maximization: ‘the overriding corporate purpose’. (152)

On the contrary, the notion of nature as a nurturing, benign force is dying a fast death; a rupturing of the relationship between humankind and their Terra Mater has occurred. Irreverence and disrespect have replaced the sacredness of this relationship. Humans are fast alienating themselves from the placental force which nourishes and sustains them. In the current ‘economy of death’, corporations like Halliburton, Monsanto and Bechtel rule, patenting seeds, water and biodiversity of third world
countries. Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) have brought thousands of farmers in third world countries into the debt trap and on the brink of suicide as seeds are made too expensive and out of their reach by the patents of multinational corporations. These patents ensure that seeds that are ‘genetically modified’ by these so-called ‘life sciences corporations’ can only be planted once and that their capacity to germinate if planted again is terminated. Farmers are treated as criminals if they are found to be saving seeds from their own harvests. ‘Life sciences corporations’ is a euphemism for big chemical companies that buy up seed and biotechnology companies to form even bigger conglomerates (Oakley 142). Thus taking away the livelihood of the rural poor, corporate globalization gives rise to vicious cycles of turbulence, violence and death where negative forces like fundamentalism, militarism and terrorism thrive.

Menchu describes in detail how the political repression began in her village and gradually consumed most of the villages where the Indians lived. The initial rumblings were felt when the land that belonged to the Menchu family was claimed by local, influential landowners, the Garcias. They began harassing her father and even threw her entire family out of their house on one occasion. A long drawn-out legal battle was waged by her father where he had to make the rounds of Government offices and agencies like the INTA (National Institute for Agrarian Transformation) for twenty-two years. When he tried to garner the support of peasants’ unions, he was arrested on charges of “compromising the sovereignty of the state” (109). Menchu and her entire family worked hard to gather enough money to get him out of prison; her mother worked as a domestic help or a ‘maid’ in the city. She and her brothers toiled on the fincas for days on end until they were able to put together the sum required to get her father out of prison. After a few days, the landowners’ henchmen kidnapped her father and abandoned him near the village. He had been beaten up badly and had to be hospitalized. “After that he came home but he was in so much pain that he was never his old self again”, says Menchu (113). This kind of violence against her father who was a much admired figure in her community, a representative leader of her village whom all villagers looked up to, makes Menchu think over what she had been taught by the nuns and priests of the ‘Catholic Action’: 
Their religion told us it was a sin to kill while we were being killed. They told us that God is up there and that God had a kingdom for the poor. This confused me because I’d been a catechist since I was a child and had had a lot of ideas put in my head. It prevents us from seeing the real truth of how our people live. (121)

As the narrative progresses, Menchu’s attitude towards the Ladino community undergoes a change. She begins travelling to the surrounding villages to mobilize people against the growing threats to their lives and during these travels comes across many Ladinos who lived in “terrible conditions” like the Indians and were discriminated against by the rich Ladinos (165). She is taught Spanish by a Ladino who worked as a teacher with the CUC (United Peasant Committee). Her interactions with many other Ladinos who worked in this organization make her realize that she had been too rigid in her attitude towards the Ladinos and her perception of them changes a little. In her discussions and meetings with them, she sees the root cause of the problem in the ‘ownership of land’ where the best land was in the hands of a rich few. Even so, she apprehends that “[n]o matter how bad their conditions are, they feel ladino, and being ladino is something important in itself: it’s not being an Indian” (167).

In 1979, Rigoberta’s younger brother was kidnapped, tortured and burnt alive by the Guatemalan Army in front of his family members and the village community. Her entire family was persecuted for being communist and for spreading communist agenda in neighbouring villages. The Army then made a public spectacle of it all, distributing pamphlets, urging the villagers to come and witness the punishment being given to the subversives of the state. It was a strategy to instill fear in the minds of the Guatemalans and to make it known to them that all dissidents would meet a similar fate. It is with great pain that Rigoberta narrates the horrendous experience where her mother witnesses her son being burnt alive. Thereafter, Rigoberta’s father was killed in the occupation of the Spanish Embassy in Guatemala. Her father’s last words exhorted her to give all her blood and strength to the community’s cause.

The suffering continued for Menchu when her mother was kidnapped, raped and tortured for many days by “the town’s high-ranking army officers” (198). Menchu movingly describes how her mother momentarily transcends the ungodliness
of the world she inhabits; by her refusal to yield any information as to her children’s whereabouts and enduring all the torture, she rises above the profanity around her and attains an almost mythical quality, an other-worldliness through her sacrificial act. In the end, she dies “surrounded by the nature she so loved”, letting “the sun, the rain, the night” envelop her aching body (199). Later, Menchu reminisces about her mother; though illiterate, her mother was a very politically aware woman and always urged Menchu and her sisters to participate as equals with their brothers in the struggle against the political repression of their community. She told them to perform their duties as strong, responsible women and to face everything in life boldly and bravely. It is this legacy that Menchu resolved to carry forward.

From here on, the personal became the political for Menchu. She decided to renounce marriage and motherhood and devote her life to consciousness-raising among the indigenous Guatemalans. On 31st January 1981, a united front called the 31st of January Popular Front was formed in which many local peasant organizations, including the CUC came together to fight the political repression of their people. It was named so “in honour of [the] compañeros who died on that day in the Spanish embassy”, says Menchu (231). The members of this Front organized many political activities that were aimed at weakening the government “economically, politically and militarily” (231). After going into hiding in many places inside Guatemala, including Guatemala City, Menchu was forced to go into exile in Mexico as the Guatemalan Army followed her tracks closely.

After the Spanish colonial rule that started with the arrival of Columbus in America in 1492 and lasted for centuries, it has been the American neo-imperialist forces that have been draining the natural resources of Guatemala in the twentieth century. Through the multi-national corporation, the United Fruit Company of Guatemala, the Americans were able to rake in huge profits for a long time. This was due to the complicity between the ruling elites in both countries. This usurpation of the country’s resources is evident from the piece of information that if each foreign corporation is counted as an individual, then 98% of the land in Guatemala was owned by fewer than 150 people. The United Fruit Company was once the biggest landowner and had Allen Dulles, the CIA director and Walter Bedell Smith, a former CIA head, on its board of directors. Also included were Henry Cabot Lodge, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, John Cabot, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs and John Foster Dulles, the legal advisor to the Company (San Juan
The presence of the American administration’s top brass in key management positions of the Company brazenly proclaims US hegemony in the region. As the Company’s profits were temporarily threatened by the mild land reforms instituted by Jacobo Arbenz, the President of Guatemala, the CIA convinced the Eisenhower Government that Guatemala had turned into a “Stalinist beachhead” (Stoll 46) and that communist influence was strong. This resulted in the military coup in Guatemala in 1954 which toppled the democratically-elected, reformist government of Jacobo Arbenz.

Post coup, the American Government gave massive aid to the military junta that swiftly transformed Guatemala into the ‘killing fields’ of the last four decades (San Juan Jr. 32). The genocidal slaughter that took place has been unprecedented in the history of the American hemisphere in the modern times. Sanford in Buried Secrets explicates the “phenomenology of terror” that was unleashed by the Guatemalan Army against the civilian population of Guatemala (123). The genocidal campaigns that started with selective killings in Mayan villages all over the country soon transformed into massacres of entire communities (123). The first phase of violence included “premassacre community organizing and experiences of violence” in which local village leaders were targeted and killed (123). The second phase was the massacre of suspected guerrillas and subversives, particularly catechists, literacy promoters, agricultural cooperative leaders and health promoters. The third phase was the “postmassacre life in flight in the mountains” in which the massacre survivors suffered extreme hardships in the mountains where one-third died of hunger and diseases caused due to exposure to natural elements while the Army troops pursued and fired upon whole villages in flight, burning abandoned villages and crops and killing all livestock (123). In the fourth phase, the majority of massacre survivors had surrendered to the Army in exchange for food under the ‘Rifles and Beans campaign’ (also referred to as Bullets and Beans campaign) by late 1983. The next phase was the construction of “model villages” that were army-controlled resettlement work camps developed to maintain absolute control over Mayan communities where massacre survivors were forced to build houses and roads in return for food and the “militarization of community life” whereby the Army continued to maintain tight surveillance and control of the community through the PACs or Civil Patrols (123). The last was the “living memory of terror” where the violence of the genocide still lives on in the individual and collective memory of the Mayan community (123).
In this planned government pogrom that has been well-documented by various sources, the Guatemalan Army placated its position by saying that the massacres of unarmed men, women and children were “not the killing of civilians but rather the ‘scorching’ of communists” (Sanford 202). The open secret of the Guatemalan military officers being provided counterinsurgency and intelligence training at the U.S. Army School of Americas and meetings being organized by the U.S. State Department to discuss and “develop ways of dealing with subversion” with Central American ministers in the 1960s points to the full support given by the American authorities to the Guatemalan military Government to carry out its anti-communist agenda (Sanford 61).

It can be inferred that global capitalism is a violent, negative process that induces the merciless decimation of those who come in the way of returns and profits. It further marginalizes those who already live on the edges of society and are assumed to be easily dispensable. In the process, women become doubly marginalized by virtue of their being women and also being hit the hardest by skewed globalization policies. Menchu recounts the plight of Guatemalan women in general and the exploitation they have to undergo for sheer survival. On the fincas, where hundreds of indigenous workers are forced to stay in make-shift shelters, she writes:

[There] are people who’ve gone through a great deal, a lot of upheavals in their lives. Prostitutes and people like that. So it’s a very difficult atmosphere to live in and children are not looked after very well. Mothers are very tired and just can’t do it. This is where you see the situation of women in Guatemala very clearly . . . most of them [the children] have bellies swollen from malnutrition and the mother knows that four or five of her children could die. . . .Many girls have no families and earn only the little they get in the finca, so you start getting prostitution. (36-7)

Globalization entails a biased division of labour, resulting in the ‘feminization of poverty’ as women currently make up 70% of the world’s poor. The term, ‘feminization of poverty’ means that the level of poverty among women is relatively more than among men and that there are an increasing number of women who are poor. Commercial exploitation of forests for timber and clearing of forest land for agriculture affects women’s real incomes directly as gathered items from forests and
village commons are reduced. Also, the extra amount of time needed for gathering fuel and fodder reduces the time available to women for crop cultivation and production and affects their crop incomes. This is especially true of communities where women are the primary cultivators due to men migrating elsewhere in search of better incomes (Agarwal, in Menon 121). Profit-oriented agriculture has an adverse effect on women’s health too. Apart from malnutrition caused by shortages of food and fuel, the use of pesticides in the cultivation of crops like cotton leads to limb and visual disabilities and their inhalation can even lead to death in some cases. Women agricultural workers, who are also nursing mothers, when exposed to such toxicity, can pass on the poisonous substance to their babies who are fed on their milk. Menchu explains how her two brothers die on the finca: the elder one of pesticide inhalation as “they’d sprayed the coffee with pesticide by plane while we were working, as they usually did....” and the younger one, a two-year old with a swollen belly, of malnutrition (38).

Another disturbing phenomenon is that of feminism being very cleverly co-opted by the global-capitalist system in its ‘development’ project. Women fighting for sustainability, peace and justice are made to believe that their interests collide with those of the progressive, liberal, ‘development’ endorsers who work for the ‘emancipation’ of women by including them in the workforce. But this is only an eyewash as barring a small percentage of educated, professional, mostly middle-class women who are employed in well-paying, respectable professions, the majority of third world women sweat it out in ‘sweatshops’ in third world countries or are employed in lowly-paid construction work where they are discriminated against not only in terms of less wage-rate but also in their easy dispensability when not required. Some of them work as domestic workers in rich and middle-class households where they are vulnerable to exploitation. Many are unsuspecting victims of human trafficking or enter into prostitution for sheer survival. In the development discourse, this class difference is highlighted for reasons obvious and not-so-obvious; for instance, in television commercials and advertisements, urban, middle-class women are depicted as being the market-savvy ones or the intelligent ‘consumers’. As a corollary then, poor, rural women are taken to be the ones involved in hard, manual work such as related to agriculture, thus primarily being ‘producers’. But this distinction between “middle-class consumerism in a liberalized economy” and the “World Bank reports on poor women’s economic productivity” is pointed out by
Mary John “as precisely being the way poor women are classed and gendered in development discourse” (John, in Sunder Rajan 170). It is also a deliberate masculinist strategy which aims at creating a division within and among women so it becomes easy to co-opt the ones who are educated and aware and hence, nullify the threat, even if somewhat mild, to patriarchal authority. This attempt at inclusion of feminism into the global-capitalist system is a dangerous trend as issues vital to feminists like the unbiased division of labour and social and economic security of women are conflated with the paradigm of ‘progress’ which actually works to marginalize them.

The extent of the penetration of global capitalism in today’s world can be gauged from the observation that Menchu herself had to “commodify” her story to reach an international audience. Marc Zimmerman writes that “under capitalist hegemony, you must enter into market relations. If you are outside the circuit of commodities, if you do not have a commodity or cannot become one, you do not signify and you do not exist” (Subaltern Studies Reader 113). Commodification and homogenization are the inevitable consequences of globalization. They are essential outcomes of this process in which a handful of corporations control the majority of earth’s natural resources which are seen as ‘commodities’ to be sold for profit. Goods flooding supermarkets are believed to be a sure sign of a flourishing economy. In this process, biological and cultural diversity is overridden and a uniform model of production imposed on all peoples.

**RESISTING THE HEGEMON: ARTICULATING SUBALTERN AGENCY**

Asserting the cultural autonomy of her people, Menchu says that they never do anything which goes against the laws of their ancestors. Her resistance of the Ladino culture is expressed in the following lines:

It’s not the custom among our people to use a mill to grind the maize to make dough. We use a grinding stone; that is, an ancient stone passed down from our ancestors. We don’t use ovens either. We only use wood fires to cook our tortillas. (43)
A certain sense of pride in the ancient Indian customs and traditions is evident in Menchu’s intention of keeping things secret from the outside world. The birth ceremonies, the initiation into adulthood and marriage ceremonies are ways to perpetuate their centuries-old cultural traditions. She describes in great detail the birth of a child in an Indian family; how he is kept alone with his mother in a special place for eight days after his birth to protect the purity with which he comes into the world, the tying up of his hands and feet during this time so that he imbibes the notion of working in accordance with nature and never steals or abuses or shows disrespect for any living thing. His integration into the universe is celebrated by lighting candles representing earth, water, sun and man and the child’s candle is kept with them, along with “incense” and “sacred lime” (12). His baptism is marked by speeches given by the elders of the community who “promise to teach the child to keep the secrets” of their people so that their culture and customs are preserved (12). When the child is ten years old, they tell him how their ancestors were “dishonoured by the White Man”, when the Spaniards colonized their country and how it is to honour their forefathers that it becomes essential to keep their secrets (13).

The concept of the *nahual* or the protective spirit of an individual is an important part of the Indian culture. This *nahual* is like a shadow that always accompanies a person right from his birth to his death. It is actually “the representative of the earth, the animal world, the sun and water, and in this way the child communicates with nature” (18). The significance of the natural world in their lives cannot be overstated. They consider the earth to be “the mother of man” as it gives them food. Before sowing seeds, they perform an elaborate ceremony in which they ask for the permission of the earth; the ‘seed’ which is considered pure and sacred is then buried in the earth, candles are lit and prayers are offered to “the earth, the moon, the sun, the animals and the water” as they “all join with the seed to provide them food” (52-3). The relationship between women and nature is such that when a woman is pregnant in her seventh month, she introduces her baby to the natural world by going out to the fields and walking over the hills. She continuously talks to her as yet unborn child, telling him that he must never abuse nature or harm any living being. Another significant feature of the Indian culture is that after a baby is born, the mother’s placenta is burned and not buried in the earth because the earth is considered to be sacred and ought not to be desecrated by burying the placenta in it.
These rites and rituals of the indigenous people of Guatemala provide them with an emotional anchorage to go through the uncertainties of life with a certain amount of steadfastness and rectitude. Besides being a source of spiritual succour to them, these traditions and customs ensure a continuing, vital link with their Indian ancestors. In the process, a significant fact emerges; the daily observance of these customs and norms constitutes a means of resistance to the political, economic and cultural oppression of these people. With only ‘machetes’, ‘sticks’, ‘hoes’, ‘stones’, ‘hot water’, ‘chile’ and ‘salt’ as their weapons of self-defense against a well-equipped and well-trained Guatemalan Army, the tenacity of tradition offers them the much-needed emotional strength to cope with the turmoil around them. Menchu gives vent to her anger and resentment against the *Ladino* landowners when she says:

> It was not only now we were being killed; they had been killing us since we were children, through malnutrition, hunger, poverty. We started thinking about the roots of the problem and came to the conclusion that everything stemmed from the ownership of land. The best land was not in our hands. It belonged to the big landowners. Every time they see that we have new land, they try to throw us off it or steal it from us in other ways. (116)

To harm or to kill a living creature is considered sacrilegious in Indian culture. A child is taught that if he kills an animal, that animal’s human double will be very angry with him and if he harms a human being, that person’s animal counterpart or his *nahual* will be hurt too. It would seem a dubious kind of logic to cultural outsiders, yet there is a hidden meaning in this belief system. This concept is symbolic of the deep and abiding respect that indigenous Guatemalans have for all God’s creatures. And it is this respect that prevents them from harming nature in any way and consequently to consider all ‘life’ as sacred. When they see the bloodshed and destruction around them, it makes their revolt against the perpetrators of violence even stauncher. Menchu’s mobilizing of the indigenous Guatemalans to organize a strong resistance movement against a blood-thirsty military regime is also born out of this love and attachment for her people and her native land that was forcibly being confiscated by powerful ruling elites.

The fiestas⁴ that are held in many towns of Guatemala showcase the struggles of native Indians against the Spanish conquistadors. These are portrayed through
dances such as the ‘Dance of the Conquest’ in which the Indians dress up in white or red masks representing the Spaniards and the Indians respectively. These dances are a way of avenging the past wrongs done by the Spanish to the native Indians when some of their (Indians’) “ancestors’ finest sons” were “dishonoured” (13). But the local contests in which Indian girls dress up and walk the ramp to be chosen as the ‘Indian Queen’ are seen by Menchu as disrespectful to Indian women who are made to present themselves in a particular way so the Ladinos can select the best and the prettiest out of them and thus use them as a kind of tourist attraction to earn money out of it all. These ‘beauty contests’ are again a Western concept that have somehow been inducted into the Guatemalans’ lives by opportunist Ladino entrepreneurs who exploit the exotic appeal and bright, colourful costumes of young Indian women to earn quick money.

The shunning of aerated drinks such as “Coca-Cola” which are manufactured by machines is another way of asserting indigenous cultural resistance against globalization. Using candles made of beeswax and not artificial wax for birth and marriage ceremonies, cooking in earthenware pots “made by grandmothers and mothers”, making their own guaro or liquor, lighting their cigarettes with “little stones” and eating tortillas made of the “sacred maize” are the various ways in which native Indians resist the onslaught of corporate globalization. As Menchu explains:

[O]ur grandparents say of Coca-Cola: ‘Never let your children drink this dreadful stuff because it is something which threatens our culture.’ They say: ‘These things are made by machines; our forefathers never used machines. The fincas mean an early death for our people. They provide food for white people, and white people get rich from them.’ (71)

These lessons, a part of the everyday lives of indigenous Guatemalans, gradually become a part of their collective unconscious. Nevertheless, Menchu undergoes acculturation when she decides to learn Spanish, the language of the ruling elite to use it against her oppressors. Her quoting of the stories of Judith, Moses and David from the Bible as inspiration for active self-defense in her village is indicative of her adoption of Christianity as a practicing religion and its holy text, the Bible as a guiding force along with her own Indian religious beliefs. Also, the organization of agricultural and peasant unions is a Western concept that Menchu and her community
adopt. So, if it is the rejection of the colonizer’s ways and means on the one hand, it is the acceptance and assimilation of some of his cultural norms on the other. At the same time, it has to be emphasized that the latter form strategic tools of resisting the oppressor. In other words, the Spanish language, the Bible and the unions like the CUC (Comite de Unidad Campesina or United Peasant Committee) are Menchu’s weapons of articulating subaltern agency.

Alberto Moreiras expounds the concept of “negative globality” in an essay where he writes that “modernization has not happened the way it was supposed to have happened”, that there has been a “narrative fissure” between the expectations of modernization and the actual course of events and that this reversal of expectations has produced a kind of “negative globality” (Subaltern Studies Reader 81). The mobilization of peoples, things, ideas and images across the globe has led to a great degree of turbulence and unsettlement which have, in turn, resulted in a rupture at the level of consciousness. Thus, negative globality is “the underside of the great narrative of global modernization” where the subaltern views modernization as nothing but “a foreign consciousness as a veneer on a real condition” and negative globality can then, inversely be taken to mean “a real consciousness as a veneer on a foreign condition” (83). This, says Moreiras, leads one to understand that negative globality is a “genuine subaltern consciousness” (83). Menchu asserts this negative globality when she stands up against the brutality of the authorities in Guatemala. Mobilizing indigenous Guatemalans in a full-scale resistance movement, travelling to Europe and America, narrating her experience and garnering international support to stop the mass killings in her country, she expresses her subaltern consciousness and prevails upon her oppressors.

In this resisting of power and authority, Menchu stands doubly marginalized; she is a woman and an Indian. Nevertheless, hers is a formidable resistance as she uses the tools of the hegemon to her advantage. As she meets her sympathizers in Paris, she voices her concerns for her community who are being persecuted in Guatemala. It is a plea of urgency from a genocide survivor; a woman who has been through an intense, traumatic and life-altering experience and who does not know at that point of time if she will ever return to a safe Guatemala. Her deep anxiety for the immediate future of her countrymen and women and her sense of commitment to her struggle are both reflected at the end of her narrative:
My life does not belong to me. I’ve decided to offer it to a cause. They can kill me at any time, but let it be when I’m fulfilling a mission, so I’ll know that my blood will not be shed in vain, but will serve as an example to my companeros. The world I live in is so evil, so bloodthirsty, that it can take my life away from one moment to the next. So the only road open to me is our struggle, the just war. (246)

This emergence of class consciousness in Menchu which is an awareness of shared interests and a sense of exploitation of her community at the hands of the ruling class is her effort to turn her community from “a class in itself” to a “class for itself” (Abraham and Morgan 35). This is a movement from a “class’s potential self-awareness to actual self-awareness” (35). At this point, false class consciousness is replaced by a full awareness of the true situation. A common identity is recognized, thus producing class solidarity. Menchu mobilizes her community effectively for collective action against the ruling class to overthrow it and bring about radical political and social change.

“It’s not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time”, writes Michel Foucault (133). Through the articulation of subaltern agency, Menchu takes away this ability to distort facts and hence, history from the oligarchs of Guatemala and their American counterparts. Her resistance is all the more effective as it is aimed right at the confluence of power relations. It acquires more potency because it intersects exactly at the conjunction of political, economic and cultural interests of the ruling elites.

Towards the end of her narrative, Menchu explains the death ceremonies in the Indian culture: when a person is dying, he/she passes on the secrets of his/her ancestors, the wisdom and knowledge gained from life’s experiences to those close to him/her. On his deathbed, she illuminates, “he makes an inventory of his life, and his mind passes over all the places he has lived. That is, if he’s lived in a finca, he returns to it again in his spirit, in his mind” (202). Having said so, Menchu also explicates that she would always keep her Indian identity a secret:
I’m still keeping secret what I think no-one should know. Not even anthropologists or intellectuals, no matter how many books they have, can find out all our secrets. (247)

David Stoll, an American anthropologist, critiques the details of Menchu’s testimony in his book, claiming that Menchu’s account of her life and events in Guatemala cannot be taken at face value. Basing his views on ten years of extensive research in various places in Guatemala (including Menchu’s hometown), he claims that Menchu never worked on plantations, that she attended school and that it was the guerrilla themselves who provoked the army to retaliate in a severe manner. In this rewriting of history, Stoll puts the blame largely on the guerrilla forces for the ensuing violence in Guatemala. This, however, cannot be used to justify the unpardonable acts of the Guatemalan army and the atrocities it committed on innocent civilians. As already mentioned above, there is ample evidence that suggests that it was a planned government pogrom and that in its ‘scorched earth’ campaign begun in 1981, the Guatemalan army had a carte blanche to destroy not only the insurgent guerrilla forces but any Mayan Indian suspected of having links with the guerrilla or the communists. Stoll’s version is “an official contemporary history of Guatemala that is void of facts, lacks critical analysis, and has no room for the testimonies of survivors. . . . Silencing victims and survivors by attacking their credibility is a practice that is enacted at local, national, and international levels” (Sanford 62).

Rigoberta Menchu offers an alternative vision to the “official discourse of the war against communism” as she puts “the Maya in general, and Maya women in particular, back into the historical narrative of Guatemala” (Sanford 51-2). Menchu represents the “antithesis of stereotypes of Maya women as silent, traditional, static, without politics, and without agency” (Sanford 51). She erases the ambiguities and doubts over the rhetorical Gayatri Spivak question: Can the Subaltern Speak? As an object of malevolence and also as a female subject that fights the patriarchal system, Menchu’s is a compelling case-study for third world feminists. Her situation is both objective and subjective as she challenges the militarist authorities of her country.

The awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize by the Norwegian authorities to Menchu in 1992 was significant not only as an acknowledgement of her courage and quest for social justice but also because it was concomitant with the celebrations marking the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’ arrival in the New World.
Was it just an arbitrary coincidence? Or was it a deliberate move by the Nobel Committee to make a political point? Whatever the reasons, it did spark off a controversy that made Menchu publicly denounce the celebration of Columbus’ ‘discovery’ of America as an insult to the Indian people and their age-old culture. In the midst of such controversies, Menchu has stood her ground even as her detractors have been busy dissecting the validity of her credentials. Her struggle, Menchu asserts, has been born out of “wretchedness and bitterness” and not “something good” and it has been exacerbated by poverty and oppression; her commitment, therefore “knows no boundaries or limits” (246-7).

GLOBAL ACTIVISM: TOWARDS A NEW HORIZON OF EQUALITY, JUSTICE AND PEACE

In the current ‘economy of death’ where militarism and war are used as physical, coercive instruments for control of the earth’s natural resources, corporate globalization is a less visible, seemingly harmless way of expropriating the vital resources of less powerful countries. The latter is, precisely for this very reason, an equally, if not more destructive process than the former. War and globalization are the products of a masculine mentality that is based on greed, aggression and violence. If militarism is the political war and fundamentalism the cultural war, then globalization is the economic war of the present times (Shiva, Globalization’s New Wars x). By depriving whole populations of seeds, food and water, globalization threatens the very survival of the rural poor in third world countries. In its workings, globalization profligates a gender bias that marginalizes women in both formal and informal spheres of economies, cultures and politics. An interesting point has been made by P. Kelly when she says:

By constructing a particular vision of global space and the ‘place’ of individuals, national economies and so on within it, it has been argued that the idea of globalization forms part of the rhetoric to legitimize certain political strategies. Thus . . . globalization can also be seen as a myth, a construction, a discourse. (qtd. in Nagar 262)

If globalization is thus seen as socially constructed and not as an inevitable, inexorable, materialist process that most globalization endorsers make it to be and
refer to as ‘late-capitalism’, then it can be safely inferred that it is a remarkable way of silencing those who do not necessarily agree with the capitalist logic. The belief that global capitalism is the only way forward for the world economy results in a “capitalist myopia” for many who disregard or ignore other possible “noncapitalist spheres and actors” (Nagar 263).

The reconfigurations of space, time and territory caused by globalization have resulted in uneven developments around the world — some people have a locally-bound, slow, embedded existence whereas others are forcibly displaced from their homelands. These contradictions of a globalized world simultaneously allow for the “subversive possibility of women seeing beyond the local to the global” (Eschle, qtd. in Nagar 275). There has already been a significant shift in feminist discourse where one “grand theory” trying to “explain all aspects of women’s subordination” is being replaced by “forms of theory which are more sensitive to local contexts and to differences among women” (Jackson 27). Third world feminism conforms to such a context-specific analytic and is critical of the detached, impersonal style of the Western feminist discourse. More importantly, it supports a dynamic feminist activism that is complementary to the theorizing of the personal. Menchu’s testimonio is such a narrative that lends itself to a third world feminist analysis as along with voicing the personal, it also asseverates that the ‘personal is political’. Avtar Brah succinctly elucidates the various contradictions inherent in the process of globalization when she writes:

[T]hese [global] processes are thoroughly marked by human agency. Globalization does not exist in some rarefied stratosphere. It always touches ground. It has regional and local impact and ramifications. It confronts us with predicaments about the meanings of locality, staying put in a place, no less than those of mobilities, migration and displacement. It is neither a teleological expression of what went on before; nor is it some kind of hermetically sealed totality. Its effects are multifarious, negative as well as positive, and there is both continuity and discontinuity. (36)

Globalization has led to the creation of new areas of ownership that were not previously considered as goods or commodities — water, seeds, genetic material, body
parts, even ideas. It would seem a bizarre list to the unprepared eye. One phrase that occurs often in the discourse of globalization is the paradigm of ‘ownership of property’. This is an expression that reflects clearly what ‘patriarchy’ means. Till recent times and it continues in some traditional societies even today, family property has been passed onto the male heirs of the family. The sons of a family are considered to be the ‘natural’ inheritors as daughters are supposed to leave their paternal home and go into another family after marriage. This is especially true of agricultural societies where land is the basic source of income and survival. The horrific practice of female foeticide is a consequence of the strong male-child bias in these societies.

The paradigm, ‘ownership of property’ has seen its way into the globalization discourse as it is symptomatic of a masculine mentality where it boosts the male ego to ‘own’ or to physically acquire a piece of land (land/earth is seen as a feminine entity) which is similar to owning a house, a car, a wife or any other commodity. This adds to the male sense of self-worth and simultaneously detracts from the status of women in society. Global capitalism, thus, reflects a grasping, acquisitive mind-set where patriarchy is an inalienable part of the process. Karl Marx vehemently criticizes ownership of private property in his Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844. He proclaims:

Under private property . . . every person speculates on creating a new need in another, so as to drive him to fresh sacrifice, to place him in a new dependence and to seduce him into a new mode of enjoyment and therefore economic ruin. Each tries to establish over the other an alien power, so as thereby to find satisfaction of his own selfish need. . . . The power of his money declines in inverse proportion to the increase in the volume of production: that is, his neediness grows as the power of money increases. (49)

Though Marx makes a trenchant critique of private property in his writings, it was Engels who attempted to draw conclusions about the way in which property relationships distorted gender and family relations in capitalist society, thus providing a picture of an alternative future communist society free from gender discrimination. In his work, The Origin of the Family, he postulates that primitive people at the dawn of human history were economically and sexually communistic (Worsley 62).
time, ties of kinship were more important than economic relationships. It was
gradually, through a number of stages, that the practice of unconstrained sex-relations
became limited. Firstly, only groups of brothers jointly had privileged access to
groups of women, and then single males to several wives until eventually the modern
monogamous marriage emerged (62-3). Along the way, descent which had originally
been traced through the mother (as many sexual partners made biological paternity
uncertain), now switched to the male line (63). The former equality of the sexes that
was based on complementary economic roles, now gave way to male control over
property, including rights over women and children (63). Although this argument has
been criticized by many, it does give some explanation regarding the relationship
between ownership of property and subjection of women.

The discontents of globalization have led to the witnessing of pockets of
resistance in different parts of the world where marginalized groups are waging
resistance struggles in their specific regional or national contexts while at the same
time, global protests and mass demonstrations are being held in major cities around
the world against free-trade policies and Western financial institutions. The anti­
globalization protests in Seattle during the WTO meeting in 1999, the anti-capitalist
protests in Prague during the IMF and World Bank summit in 2000 and the anti­
globalization demonstrations in Quebec in 2001 are some prominent instances of the
social disquiet spreading in the West. For these various struggles to acquire the
momentum of a popular mass movement, a convergence has to take place. The
different strands have to come together to have far-reaching consequences that would
change the lives of the dispossessed and the marginalized for the better. The
emergence of a “capitalist civilization” that has reorganized the national, regional and
local cultures of the world has to be challenged en masse (Ahmad, Globalization 103).
The connections between the local and the global have to be forged to form a
comprehensive resistance movement.

Corinne Kumar writes about a new political imaginary in which the spiritual
returns to the material, the feminine to “the increasingly violent male, civilizational
ethos” and the sacred to the earth (Dialogue and Difference 183). This imaginary
would not have its moorings in the dominant patriarchal discourse. She also speaks
about finding new universalisms which are not “born of eurocentricities or
patriarchalities” but that “recognize the universal in the specific civilizational idioms
in the world” (185). These universalisms would respect the plurality of different
societies — their languages, their philosophies, their customs and traditions. Miguel Angel Asturias in *Men of Maize* writes:

> An obscure vision, obscure because he dared not free it from his consciousness and examine it; he was content to half look at it, and seek no explanation. (qtd. in Menchu 117)

This is the vision that the marginalized have for a more equal tomorrow and women like Rigoberta Menchu have given it practical shape. It is no longer an ‘obscure’ vision but a tangible concreteness that is being realized by many around the world through a global activism. If globalization has given rise to greater inequalities in the world, it has, by virtue of its very *global* nature, also provided the means to counter them. The transnational organizations and networks of women activists, for instance, have been made possible only due to faster means of communication and travel. There are strong winds blowing across the globe and the non-actors or those on the periphery are demanding their rightful place in the ‘global’ scheme of things. This building of an oppositional politics and a “grassroots globalization” is based on the articulation of strategies that resist various forms of global power (Appadurai, qtd. in Nagar 278).

Vandana Shiva rightly asserts that “globalization is a political project and it needs a political response” (*Globalization’s New Wars* 121). This response comes from an impartial and inclusive global activism where there is an engagement with power and the complex ways in which power works at multiple levels. Narrating of personal experiences in autobiographies, memoirs and *testimonios* by women, minorities, tribals and other oppressed groups, thus using the power of ‘words’ is a cogent way of challenging the dynamics of power structures. Words are Rigoberta Menchu’s most powerful weapon with which she challenges her oppressors; learning Spanish allows her to break the linguistic barriers which had earlier prevented the Indian community from coming out into the open and telling their life stories to the world. Through this *testimonio*, Menchu not only asserts her cultural sovereignty but also subverts the opprobrious apparatuses of power in her country. In the middle of her *testimonio* she says, “We express ourselves through our designs, through our dress — our *huipil* for instance, is like an image of our ancestors” (81). This statement makes it amply clear that it is not easy for those in positions of power to mark the erasures of marginalized peoples as long as the latter continue to voice resistance and
engage in constructive global activism aimed at ending militarism, ecological
destruction and fundamentalism, thus, ushering in an era of ‘global’ peace, justice and
egalitarianism.

End Notes

1 Subsequent page numbers of *I, Rigoberta Menchu* are given parenthetically in this chapter.
2 A *Ladino* is one who is born out of the intermixing of the Spanish and the Indian peoples. This term
is used nowadays to refer derogatorily to any Guatemalan who rejects, either individually or through
his cultural heritage, Indian values of Mayan origin.
3 *Tortillas* are maize pancakes that constitute the main food of the Central American peoples.
4 These fiestas are annual celebrations marking the birth anniversaries of important Saints of
Christianity and also commemorating the day of Tecun Uman, the national hero of the Quiche people
who fought the Spanish and was killed by them.
5 A *huipil* is an embroidered or woven blouse used by Indian women. It is the top half of the traditional
dress, used with the *corte*, which is a multi-coloured skirt.