# Space, Place, and Social Conflict in Rosario Castellanos' Indigenista Novels

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**Abstract**

The colonial condition in Latin America marked not only the appropriation of land and life by the colonizers, but also generated during postcolonialism a series of political, social, and artistic ideologies and projects such as *mestizaje* and *indigenismo*. Such projects became intertwined and grew in parallel fashion, as did the socio-political conflicts concerning race and land possession in the region, which continued through the aftermath of Western colonialism. *Indigenista* novels exposed such conflicts, and because both the authors representing Indigenous worlds and struggles and the readership of the works were *mestizo's*, this literary movement has been considered contradictory. *Indigenista* works then have been widely studied either in the light of this inherent contradiction, on their representations of racial, class, and gender oppression, and on how they portray clash views and understandings of worlds. Yet there has been little consideration on how space and place play active roles both in the novels and in postcolonial social and historical configurations, specifically minding how social relations are constituted and constituent of space and place (Massey "Space" 2); or the implication of local and private spatial scales in both history and politics, as well as its connection to identity in relation to place (Massey "Space" 5,7). I argue that looking into what is at stake in the novels, which is land (place), can provide a richer understanding of subtler aspects and diverse levels of social conflicts in interrelational postcolonial settings. The focus of this study will then be on Rosario Castellanos' indigenista novels, *Balún Canán* [*The Nine* Guardians] and *Oficio de Tinieblas* [*The Book of Lamentations*], both set in 1930's Chiapas, México. From a geocritical approach and with concepts from feminist geography, this thesis will prioritize places and public/private spaces and the dynamics and tensions that develop between them. I will frame the conflicts in terms of social relations within spatiality, paying attention to those relations and interactions

occurring in private spaces, and mapping how they shape the plot, social phenomena and conflicts.

## Introduction

Growing up I was never unaware, first of my class privileges, second of racial difference, third of the status of my assigned societal gender. Every time I claimed not to like chicken or eggs I was reminded by my grandmother that other children had nothing to eat, that there was a shortage of food, an economic blockage, a civil war, and so I ate. I knew that the different women who cleaned and cooked in my house were poor, and that this was why they had those jobs. I heard racist comments by my grandfather directed towards some of my grandmother's darker skinned relatives, it hurt in my chest to hear those words, it made me feel both sad and uncomfortable. I also knew that because I was a woman, I had to be distrustful of men either strangers or not.

Growing up I also learned to love books, and to enjoy being alone in my grandparent's library. I realized in college though that I had seldom read women, and so began my reeducation, one that I like to believe is still in process. Much later, when I took a class in early twentieth century Latin American literature and cinema, I was able to retrace part of my school indoctrination on the same literary tradition, and make links between my privileges, gender, racial and class differences, and the stories in those books I had loved. Stories which were sometimes at fault and others challenging the situations I had witnessed and lived, yet was not able to name while growing up. The reeducation led the way to re-reading *indigenista* works and putting them in context with colonialism, the idea of modernity and literary currents from the West. *Indigenismo*[1] is both a political, social, and artistic ideology that developed in most of Latin America since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and together with the concept and project of *Mestizaje*[2] formed the

[1] Literary *indigenismo* was a movement spearheaded by *mestizo* authors who wrote about the different struggles and situations lived by diverse Indigenous groups in the region.
[2] *Mestizaje* is an ideology and cultural identity which refers to the mixing of ethnic and cultural groups (Spanish and Indigenous).

politico-ideological basis of the newly formed nation states. To untangle them and arrive at Rosario Castellanos, the *indigenista* author who is the focus of this research, in the next section of this introduction I will examine both concepts as understood in several countries in Latin America, but specifically in Mexico, Bolivia, Brazil, Guatemala, and Peru, where there remained a significant Indigenous population after independence from Spain (Alemany Bay 87).

Rosario Castellanos was a prolific and versatile author, she wrote poetry, literary journalism, novels, short stories, and plays. She was born in Mexico City in 1925, although she lived in Chiapas until the age of sixteen, and only later returned to the capital. She majored in philosophy, was a literature professor in Universities in Mexico and the United States, and in her last years worked as Ambassador of Mexico in Israel, where she also taught Latin American literature and was found deceased in her home after a domestic accident in 1974 (Ahern 1-5). Castellanos *indigenista* trilogy includes two novels, *Balún Canán* (1957) [*The Nine Guardians* (1959)] and *Oficio de Tinieblas* (1962) [*The Book of Lamentations* (1996)], and a short story collection, *Ciudad Real* (1960) [*City of Kings* (1993)][3]. In the three texts she focuses on the same geographical area, her home state of Chiapas, Mexico. Specifically the two novels occur in synchronicity, during the 1930's, which is when the initial stage of the Agrarian Reform developed in Mexico, yet in different places in the same state. Both novels also include a diachronic element or origin story of places, which is directly related to the social conflicts present in the novels.

[3] For this research project, I have decided to use both versions of both novels. Although I have read and done the close reading of the works in the Spanish version written by Castellanos, for in-text citations I will use the only available English translations which for *Balún Canan* is *The Nine Guardian*s translated by Irene Nicholson. While for *Oficio de Tinieblas* is *The Book of Lamentations* translated by Esther Allen.

Land conflict between *mestizo*[4] landowners and Indigenous[5] workers is at the core of the narratives, in between them is the government of Lázaro Cárdenas, President of Mexico from 1934-1940 and member of the National Revolutionary Party (PRI); and the laws that were dictated during his term in favor of redistributing large areas of land owned by *mestizos* and turn them into ejidos[6]. Because of the weight of colonial rule and history, and the complexity of the racial caste system[7] imposed by the Spanish Crown—which although did not remain in place since the nineteenth century still functioned as an exclusionary ideology—this land conflict has been read as a racial one between *mestizos* and Indigenous.

However, the conflict in the novels as in life is not one but many, and these books not only make this clear by underlining the interrelational reality between ethnic groups in both colonial and post-colonial times, but also by bringing to the fore the importance that space and place have in such contexts. In the texts spaces are both gendered and racialized, as well as limited by other identity markers such as class, religion, and sexuality. In the novels it is evidenced how the postcolonial condition functions within several levels of ambiguity, and how social relations regarding norms about gender and race, but also about sexuality and religion are bounded by an internal colonialism. According to Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui[8], internal colonialism is a mode of domination based on the colonial horizon articulated in recent cycles of both liberalism and populism ("Violencias" 37). For Cusicanqui, it is through *mestizaje* that these liberal and populist political cycles have managed to rework the original

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[4] Person of mixed ancestry, generally understood to be between White European and Indigenous American.

[5] Tzeltal and Tzotzil Mayan Indigenous groups who live in central Chiapas.

[6] Plots of communally Indigenous owned land.

[7] A caste system used in Colonial Spain to explain racial mixed individuals to people living in the peninsula, which also governed the social and economic systems in the colonies.

[8] Cusicanqui in her texts focuses on the Bolivian and Andean context, however, the concept of internal colonialism can be applied to other countries in Latin America where *mestizaje* has functioned, and it has been likewise explored by other authors like Pablo González Casanova and Walter Mignolo.

colonial structures, turning them into internal colonial ones, which has become the norm in political and economic mechanisms of exclusion and violence that characterize governance in Bolivia ("Violencias" 37). With this historical and spatial explanation Cusicanqui brings forth a diverse notion of time inspired by Ernest Bloch's multitemporality (Thomson 11), an 'abigarrado' or motley time in which *mestizaje* lives and infiltrates social relations and subjectivities (de Oto and Catelli 247). Hence limitations to space, and to what occurs in spaces depending on whether they are public or private, or on the actors inhabiting them, are infiltrated by *mestizaje*. Allowing for a racialized matrix to exist which is malleable, and admits for identities to be negotiated by subjects depending on spaces and places via "strategies, behaviors, discourses and cultural artefacts" (De Oto and Catelli 247).

However, in Mexican, and specifically in Chiapan society portrayed in Castellanos' novels, there are also motley or heterogeneous spatial configurations regarding places such as towns and villages, and spaces either public or private. Moreover, the subtleties of how racial, gender and class differences intersect, and how identities fluctuate and are shaped depending on place, is symptomatic of the complex divisions subjects must navigate in postcolonial settings. In the following case studies I engage with the same timeframe and place, which allows for a deeper look into a social conflict characterized by its confrontation between groups such as the state, the Catholic Church, Mayan Indigenous groups (Tzeltal-Tzotzil), and large landowners. Because in the public sphere the Catholic Church and the landowners stand against the government, who is seemingly favoring Indigenous groups, the social conflict is on the one hand of politics, class, and religion. Yet on the other, in private spaces alliances are formed between these same *mestizo* actors in apparent friction, precisely when Indigenous groups take actions that are not in accordance with neither state, economic nor religious power; that is if they assume any type of autonomy, engage in protest, or choose to follow another spirituality. What is said or happens in public and private spaces in *Balún*

*Canán* and *Oficio de Tinieblas* is in tension and at times in contradiction, and this both shapes the plot of the novels as well as the developing social conflict. Moreover, as the novels are about land and people's relation to it, places and their meanings are salient, as well as their relation to personal identity and identities of places. Characters in the novels are attached to certain places and are determined to fight for them for the same reasons (they belong there), yet with different outcomes in mind for the contested places; a continuation of how the colonial condition in what used to be New Spain marked the appropriation of land and life. Hence it is through a spatial analysis of these works that it will be possible to attend to the multiplicity of conflicts and relations developing in the novels, which are in tandem with historical and the social aspects.

I consider that the main conflict in the novels, that of land or place, is also dramatically current now as Indigenous grass-roots movements[9] all over the world continue to fight for the same issues. My case studies will be Rosario Castellanos *Indigenista* novels, as they state in a prominent manner an ageless conflict which can be best explored through the spatial: the use of land, of space, by whom and for what purpose. I will focus on these two novels, because they allow for a wider yet directed analysis of land conflict in a specific area and timeframe. I am not including in this research the short story volume *Ciudad Real*, also part of Castellanos' *indigenista* trilogy, because it delves into themes already explored in *Balún Canán* and expanded in *Oficio de Tinieblas* (Gil Iriarte 233). While other *Indigenista* authors have also dealt with similar topics, it is Castellanos that provides an intersectional framework via her characters, giving relevance to children, servants, wives, spinsters, and Indigenous people (Tarica "Inner Life" 140). Such focus enriches and anchors the

[9] Examples of such movements are the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe protesting the North Dakota Access Pipeline on reservation land, or diverse Indigenous groups in Brazil fighting for their right to traditional lands in the Amazon Biome.

postcolonial space and time she addresses, by dealing with actors who in the same context are not considered political subjects.

To be able to focus on the roles of identity and meaning of places, as well as on how public and private spaces are in tension in the social conflicts within the narratives; I will provide in the first chapter an overview of critical theory from literary studies regarding the spatial turn in the humanities, in correlation with how social sciences via feminist geography has added a comprehensive understanding of the spatial in conjunction with the historical and the social. Additionally, because I am working with a postcolonial context, and with novels that explicitly focus on social interrelations between individuals with diverse identity markers, I will include an intersectional framework to pay attention to how those different identity markers vary and are performed by characters in the books depending on the spatial. This chapter concludes with a detailed overview of how I will use each theoretical avenue, and with a series of key concepts that will serve throughout my close readings of both novels, and could potentially be utilized in other texts with similar postcolonial settings, or that deal with ethnic, cultural, and social conflicts.

In the second chapter, I will read how in *Balún Canán* recurrent stories of origin and meaning of places reveal as the basis of social conflicts in the novel, how identities of place intersect with personal identities via the novel's main character, Girl; and how the relationships between *mestiza* and Indigenous women are negotiated in public or private spaces, allowing for *mestiza* women to in some instances perform Indigeneity. Finally, in the third chapter I will focus on the relevance of private spaces and interactions in them within the broader structure of social relations in *Oficio de Tinieblas*. In this second novel the role of public spaces and of governmental public discourse is not only less important than what occurs in private spaces, but also not as contradictory as that of the landowning classes. Moreover, I will read how identity fluctuates for both Indigenous and *mestizo* characters

depending on place, making this malleability key in how either ethnic group relates to the other's identity. The above will allow me to focus my research on how private spaces are central in advancing the social conflict in the novels, in making the status quo transparent, and in some cases allowing or preventing solidarity between certain subjects. Additionally, looking into what is at stake in the novels, which is land (place) will provide a richer understanding of how by focusing on space one can explore subtler aspects of social conflicts in interrelational postcolonial contexts.

### *Colonialism, Indigenismo, and Mestizaje*

The binary categories Indigenous and *mestizo* in Latin America were established in opposition to each other as part of the colonial project. Although Indigenous is currently understood primarily as a political category, it has also been historically figured as a racial one (Aguilar Gil). The word and racial category Indian[10] was initially used within the colonial order since the Spanish colonizers arrived in America due to a well-known case of mistaken geolocation and identity (Aguilar Gil, O'Connell 49). The nature of Indigenous people was an issue of debate by both the Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church, and as of 1542 laws were passed granting Indigenous population rights which meant that "their labor was not to be coerced" (O'Connell 50), nonetheless these laws were not respected, and in addition to the enslavement of Black Africans, "For three centuries in New Spain, Indians were compelled to supply labor in one form or another as tribute or to pay off debts" (O'Connell 50). However, after 1822 "racial designations were not permitted" legally, and

[10] In the novel as well as in some secondary readings the word *Indian* or *Indio* is used to refer to Indigenous people, I will only use that word when either using in-text citations or paraphrasing other authors that use it, otherwise I will employ the term Indigenous or when appropriate the name of the specific Indigenous group that is being discussed.

the term changed to Indigenous, while the concept remained as well as the enforcing of debt peonage (O'Connell 50).

Similarly, *mestizo* as category was also racialized and supposedly "born" out of the Conquest. It originated in what was called carnal or blood *mestizaje*, a conquest strategy in the early colonial period consisting of biological mixing, mostly by violence, of Spanish Conquistadors and Indigenous women to form alliances with diverse groups (Catelli 27). Following this, in Latin America in the eighteenth century a racial caste ideology which governed the social and economic systems was installed . The different groupings such as "Peninsular Spanish, Criollo Spanish, Indians, and Blacks" (Martínez qtd in Catelli 41) maintained the ideology of "blood purification" born out of the earlier carnal *mestizaje* (Catelli 31). In this same period Europe had already consolidated as a capitalist and colonial power and defined itself in "opposition to others—Africans, Natives, Americans" (Wade, "Race and Ethnicity" 8), thus human identity as well as personhood became deeply delineated by race (Wade, "Race and Ethnicity" 8).

As scientific racism developed in the nineteenth century, race was also regarded as 'types' of humans which were stable and passed such stable qualities through generations. Racial types were ordered in an evolutionary scale, and the inferiority of some races was allegedly proved by medical and scientific methods (Wade, "Race and Ethnicity" 10). In this context *mestizaje* became reformulated via racial theories from biological anthropology, and later in the twentieth century by eugenics (Catelli 31). The concepts used were varied, such as "hybridization, mestizaje, miscegenation, or amalgamation" (Catelli 42), while at the same time biological aspects were transferred to cultural and economic levels, with debates on the consequences of mixture of races in relation to nations' strengths, and their status on the civilizational scale (Catelli 42). The creation of Latin American nation-states was in turn informed by such positivist theories of social evolutionism (Catelli 47), and national

discourses, as well as discourses on the identity of inhabitants of the newly formed Latin American nations propelled by pro-independence leaders and intellectuals, such as Simón Bolivar, José Martí, and José Vasconcelos included the idea that the mixture of races (Indians, whites, and Blacks) brought forward a new race and identity. The latter argument was used to support the case for a diverse political destiny for Americans separate from Spain (Miller 3-11). Thus, *mestizaje* during independence was both a political and rhetorical move forwarded  American born Spanish or *Criollos*, and a common denominator throughout the continent from México to Argentina although with local nuances.

A key moment was 1925, when the term *mestizaje* appeared in the book *La Raza Cósmica* by José Vasconcelos. The intention of this text, authored by a former government official and contemporary to the Mexican Revolution, was the creation of the Mexican national identity via cultural policy (Catelli 59). In it *mestizaje* takes on a new meaning, it becomes the basis for forming a culturally homogeneous identity "superior" to the current ones which derived from a heterogeneous population (Catelli 66). The thesis of this text is that the conquest and genocide was a necessary evil for the already existing races to mix and produce the "synthesis of all human races" in Latin America (Catelli 62). This synthesis for Vasconcelos was the cosmic race, a mixed race, both biologically and spiritually that would be capable of "assimilating or at least equaling white culture" (qtd. in Miller 34). Thus, the idea of *mestizaje* remained a strategy not only to whiten the population but also to continue to assimilate and eliminate Indigenous and Blacks[11] who inhabited America.

*Mestizaje's* conception in twentieth century Mexico and Latin America was strongly defined by Vasconcelos' text, which was likewise influenced not only by earlier scientific

[11] In Mexico the project of *mestizaje* has at the same time rendered Blackness invisible since the gradual abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century followed by independence, after which Blackness was only visibilized in terms of cultural expressions in specific coastal regions of the country. It was until 2015 that the Federal Mexican Government included in its population census the possibility to identify oneself as Afro-descendant (Cohen 2-5).

racism, but also by ideologies of European Liberalism within the creation of new-nation states led by the *criollo* elites (Wade, "Race in Latin America" 188). Following Vasconcelos, as well as already established ideas of biological and cultural *mestizaje*, Octavio Paz (Mexico) in the book of essays *The Labyrinth of Solitude* (1950) discusses Mexican national identity, and claims it was instead born out of the violent encounter of the Conquest; specifically from the rape of Indian women by Spanish conquistadors.Thus, according to Paz, all Mexicans are born of this violence inflicted on the Mother by the Father, making them *hijos de la chingada*. *La Chingada* in Mexico is the figure of the mythical Mother who has suffered an aggression (*Chingar*), meaning she has been raped. Paz sets this mythical Mother together with other Mexican figures such as *La Llorona* (the weeping woman), who is the sacrificed Mother (88-89), and the Virgin Mother or *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, an "Indian Virgin" who appeared on a hill previously dedicated by the Aztecs to *Tonantzin*, their Goddess of fertility (Paz 99).

For Paz *La Chingada* is associated with the Conquest through the figure of *doña Malinche*. In Indigenous codices *Malintzin/Malinche* appears as translator with a transparent body, in chronicles written by Spaniards she is an aid to the Conquest. In fact, she was a noble woman sold to Hernan Cortés, and because she spoke Nahuatl and Maya she became an interpreter for him and was key during negotiations with different Indigenous groups (Franco xix). Paz states that Mexicans are not able to forgive their Mother *La Malinche,* and her alleged betrayal, and are defined within the rupture and negation of such violent union. He states that Mexicans do not want to be "Indian nor Spanish" and are therefore left in solitude (Paz 101-102). With this text Paz both reinforces the identarian project of *mestizaje,* now as a product of a violent encounter, as well as the myth of the Indigenous figure *La Malinche* as the Mother/Traitor of all Mexicans.

In the eighties Gloria Anzaldúa with her breakthrough work, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza Identity*, complicates Paz's assertion of Mexicanness by taking the three mother figures of Mexicans and Chicanos, and analyzing them in their ambiguity and on how they exert oppression. "*Guadalupe* to make us docile and enduring, *la Chingada* to make us ashamed of our Indian side, and *la Llorona* to make us long-suffering people. This obscuring has encouraged the *virgen/puta* (whore) dichotomy" (Anzaldúa 53). In this book Anzaldúa proposes a new *mestiza* identity, focusing on Chicanos as a minority born in the United States after the Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty in 1848[12]. She gives special relevance to the role of Chicana women and their identity as *mestizas* and racialized women in the US. Anzaldua is speaking also for lesbians of color, and the feeling of unsafety that lesbians or queers of color[13] experience in the US, thus, her identity as Chicana "is grounded in the Indian's women history of resistance" and in rites where there is mourning and wailing (Anzaldúa 43). She defends her Chicana or Mexican culture, but at the same time is critical of how it oppresses women and queer folk. Her aim is rather to remake a culture and space for herself as queer *mestiza*, born out of Mexican, 'Indian', and White (Anglo) identities (Anzaldúa 44). Anzaldúa considers José Vasconcelos' *La Raza Cósmica* and his concept of a mixture of races, of a "synthesis", and deems it opposite to the drive for racial (white) purity in the US, however for her Vasconcelos' theory is one of inclusivity. "From this racial, ideological, cultural and biological crosspollinization, an 'alien 'consciousness is presently in the making—a new mestiza consciousness, una conciencia is a consciousness of the Borderlands" (Anzaldúa 99). Nevertheless, Anzaldúa's take on Vasconcelos does not sufficiently acknowledge his original intention of situating this "new" race closer to

[12] This treaty was signed following the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), and with it Mexico surrendered 55% of its territory to The United States, establishing the Rio Grande as a new border (National Archives).
[13] As Anzaldúa situates herself.

whiteness than to Indigeneity or Blackness. Although she does take this into account when she describes how Mexicanness has been built on negating Indigeneity and on being *hijos de la Chingada* as per Paz´s account.

Precisely because *mestizaje* was first proposed as a civilizing strategy of colonial conquest, later as a racial category, and then as a nation-building concept turned into a national identity, it is important to view it from all its dimensions; and to mind that no understanding of *mestizaje* at any stage of the evolution of the term is clearly separated from the other, rather they coexist and feed each other (Catelli 41-62). My intention then is to deal with how all these levels inform social relations between *mestizo* and Indigenous characters in the works of Rosario Castellanos, and in which manners they intersect with space, place, nation, class, and gender. While *mestizo* identity was generally associated to a positive idea of conciliation, progress, and inclusion, in the late twentieth century *mestizaje* began to be analyzed through its origin in colonial domination and racism, and on how it deployed "a rhetoric of inclusion that operated concurrently with a practice of exclusion" (Miller 3-4). Even if *mestizaje's* discourse has widely privileged whiteness and ideas of inferiority of Indigenous and Black people (Wade, "Racial Identity" 849), in nations like Mexico where there was a significant Indigenous population, ideologies such as *indigenismo* developed. *Indigenismo* "glorified the indigenous past and held up indigenous people as a symbol of nationhood" (Wade, "Race in Latin America" 188). In addition to a sociopolitical ideology, indigenismo evolved into a literary movement spearheaded by *mestizos*, who produced narratives about Indigenous populations and their struggles within diverse contexts across Latin America.

*Indigenismo* has been said to have had three stages in its development, the first one was called *indianismo*, then *indigenismo*, and later or at times simultaneously, *neo-indigenismo*. As a discourse that defends or "gives voice" and aims to change the situation of

Indigenous population (Tarica, "Indigenismo" 2), *indigenismo* had its origin as early as 1552 when Bartolomé de las Casas published *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*. In this text de las Casas refuted the idea that Indians were barbarians or inferior to the Spaniards, and that their conversion to Christianity had to be done by force (Tarica, "Indigenismo" 2, Alemany Bay 86). There were also other sixteenth century contributors to *indigenismo* such as Huamán Poma de Ayala, a Quechua nobleman who in his *The First New Chronicle and Good Government*, wrote about the treatment given to Indigenous people by the Spanish, thereby proposing the Crown a different way of governance (Alemany Bay 86).

Broadly speaking literary *indianism*o, the first stage, came to be in the nineteenth century in the form of novels mainly filled with nationalist discourse in the wake of independence and ideas of nationhood (Tarica, "Indigenismo" 4). *Indianismo* was known for its "exaltation" of the "Indian" and its valor as a historical background of Latin America. According to a study by Concha Meléndez, Indigenous characters in these texts were mainly flat and transformed by the European spirit (qtd. in Alemany Bay 87). The writers and promoters of *Indianismo* were either *criollos* or *mestizos,* and the image at the time that this movement painted of Indigenous population was also that of backwardness and savagery, of a people that needed to be improved by education and Christianity.

*Indigenism*o, the second stage, began in the early twentieth century, paired in countries like Mexico and Peru with liberal positivist ideas of anticlericalism and modern states, as well as the inclusion as political subjects of Indigenous populations (Alemany Bay 87-88). Nonetheless, these populations in countries like Mexico had since well before Independence from Spain been fighting for their rights lands through resistance and revolts (O'Connell 50). Literary *indigenismo* either through liberal or socialist economic and political agendas added a more "naturalistic" style, and supposedly a closer approximation to Indigenous "reality", as well as supported claims for social inclusion of these same

populations. Nevertheless, the texts remained constrained within the binary Indian/*criollo* or *mestizo* and exploiter/exploited, as well as within either stereotypes of Indians as good, wise, strong, connected to their community and land and being exploited by the white-*mestizo* classes, or Indians as negative elements for progress, thieves, liars and vengeful, and in some cases even a utopian return to a past before the Conquest (Alemany Bay, Máiz, Fernández).

The third stage, *neo-indigenismo*, is a renovation understood to have stemmed from what were called regional novels in Latin America, which included narratives mostly set in rural areas favoring allegorical characters and spaces rather than stories of individuals[14], as well as conflicts set between agrarian societies and new urban modern cities and their interests (Cornejo 59-61). *Neo-indigenista* authors used a new or specific style that fused Spanish with other Indigenous languages, including oral and written myth by Indigenous cultures, in sum there was a deeper engagement with the Indigenous world by the authors (Alemany Bay 90). Supposedly these writers communicated a more authentic view of Indigenous people, and presented them as individuals with contradictions rather than exoticized or antagonized.

*Indigenismo* in general was widely studied in the twentieth century by two of Latin American most well-known scholars, Angel Rama and Antonio Cornejo Polar. The first, focusing on Andean *indigenismo* put forward Fernando Ortiz's concept of transculturation as contrary to acculturation which is the imposition of a dominant culture (Spanish) over others (Indigenous). Transculturation instead is a creative force that acts and is acted upon, which loses, gains, and creates traits. Rama makes an emphasis in analyzing transculturation and its influence by the external or dominant culture, paying attention to how this dominant, mostly European culture, is formed and produced by the urban centers and capitals of Latin America

[14] As in the idea of the Western liberal individual subject.

(Rama 32-34), what he called *Ciudad Letrada* (Lettered City). Cornejo Polar similarly considered indigenismo via his concept of heterogeneous literature, which to him applied perfectly to this movement because it involved an external urban vision to an internal rural issue. He adds that there is an unfulfilled desire of the *indigenista* novel to be Indigenous, but it can never accomplish this because that is its condition, since the authors are unavoidably external, non-Indigenous, and most of the times also urban (Cornejo 60-62). In essence, Cornejo considers *indigenista* literature as fractured and a failure of the elite or dominant half of society, Peruvian society in his case-study in point, to produce an honest account of the Other Indigenous half (Tarica, "Inner Life" 25).

This inherent contradiction sustained by all stages of *indigenismo*, that *mestizos* both represent Indigenous worlds and are the main audience of the books they produce (Máiz 3) was also the reason for many of its praises. *Neo-indigenistas* authors[15] such as José María Arguedas (Perú) and Rosario Castellanos (México) were specially recognized for the integration in their narrative techniques of grammar structures, words, and worldviews from diverse Indigenous languages and cosmogonies into the Spanish text (Alemany Bay 92, Máiz 18). In addition, these same authors were influenced both by European discourses of social anthropology to study so-called primitive societies, as well as by artistic movements such as surrealism and later modernism and their fascination with primitivism (Fernández 21). Thus, there remained in their works an idealization of Indigenous societies but via a nostalgic return to the author's childhood, in which they were surrounded by the Indigenous world. Such were some of the strategies used in their search for a "real" representation of Indigenous people and their cosmogonies, which were paired with intentions of the same authors not only to understand but to change unequal relations between Indigenous and *mestizos*

[15] Other *neo-indigenista* authors are Ciro Alegría (Perú) and Miguel Ángel Asturias (Guatemala).

(Fernández 28). In specific Rosario Castellanos has been classified as *neo-indigenista* because of her well rounded characters and non-Manichean portrayal of Indigenous and *mestizos* as victims and victimizers, as well as her deeper knowledge of Mayan Indigenous culture (O'Connell 78).

The author herself did not identify as being part of this literary movement because for her it exoticized Indigenous worlds "in which the characters, as victims, are poetic and good. That simplicity makes me laugh (Castellanos qtd. in Tarica "Inner Life" 154). Nevertheless, Tarica considers that Castellanos *indigenista* poetry did attribute to Indigenous people similar characteristics to the ones she criticized ("Inner Life"154). Yet through a nuanced perspective of Indigenous people as not only connected to land but to their individual presence, divorcing Indigeneity of its "savage" connotation, while writing through her personal connection to place and to a discovery of herself (Tarica, "Inner Life"156). I am interested in this connection to place via her novels which are both set in the same geographical area, namely the state of Chiapas, Mexico.

### *Castellanos and Political Indigenismo in Mexico*

While Rosario Castellanos did not consider her novels, *Balún Canán* (*The Nine Guardians*) and *Oficio de Tinieblas* (*The Book of Lamentations*), and short story collection *Ciudad Real* (*City of Kings*) a literary *indigenista* trilogy, the author herself was in fact a political *indigenista* activist, and as of 1956 worked at the *Instituto Nacional Indígenista* (INI)[16]. Regarding political *indigenismo* in Mexico it should be clear that its defining characteristics according to Estelle Tarica, include it being firstly a state-sponsored strategy focused on the "integration" of Indigenous societies to Mexican national identity. Secondly,

[16] National Indigenista Institute

an anthropologically driven endeavor, which incorporates the common contradiction of both presenting Indigenous people as a "source of national pride" and key part in national cultural identity, yet at the same time as "insufficiently modern" (Tarica, "Indigenismo" 6). Lastly, it relied on the project of *mestizaje*, and searched to unify *mestizo* identity to both modernize Indigenous groups and Indigenize modernity (Lomnitz qtd. in Tarica "Indigenismo" 7).

In its formation political *indigenismo* in Mexico was closely affiliated to the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) and post-revolutionary period. While in the previous regime led by Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911) citizenship was equal to all by law, this did not mean that racial considerations regarding skin color as well as language, dress, religion, or affinity to a certain group, were not only identity markers but also directly linked to economic status and social mobility (Knight 73). When the Revolution sparked due to unequal economic policies favoring elites and large landowners supported by Díaz, a large part of the revolutionary armed forces and support was indeed of Indigenous origins, yet the conflict was mainly managed in terms of class and not ethnicity, and it did not have any clear project in specific favor of Indigenous populations (Knight 76). Even if during the Revolution there were exceptions in the form of Indigenous revolts in several areas of the country, their recognition was rendered in a negative light and feared as possible caste wars[17]. Zapatismo itself was connected to Indigenous causes, first because of similar fears of the faction being in support of a caste war, and later *mestizo* political "*indigenista* reformers" came to consider Zapatismo[18] "in retrospect, as the awakening of the Indian people of Morelos" (Knight 77).

[17] Caste war or *Guerra de castas* is a term employed in Mexico referring usually to the nineteenth century or earlier, "to describe rural violence that is easily racialized, in other words, made intelligible through reduction to a typically misleading binary struggle between Indians and non-Indians. It is most often, although not exclusively, associated with uprisings in southern Mexico". One of the most memorable ones is the Caste War of Yucatán (Lund 166).

[18] The first Zapatismo was a faction of the Mexican Revolution based mainly in the State of Morelos south of Mexico City and headed by General Emiliano Zapata. They demanded communitarian land ownership, including mountains and water, social rights, and rights of the native peoples. All this tainted with syncretic (Christian-Indigenous) religious beliefs (Arnal).

This appropriation and fear of Indigenous revolts managed by the *mestizo* political class caused post-revolutionary *indigenismo* to also remain a *mestizo* construct addressed by outsiders (Knight 77). Thus, *indigenista* policies while indeed advocating for emancipation of Indigenous populations, and offering "indigenous people education, legal support, even land;" […] "also destroyed or appropriated much of their culture and subordinated them to the state" (Fallaw 551). One of the main promoters of such policies was President Lázaro Cárdenas, whose government centered around land reform[19], railroad, and petroleum nationalization. He was the founder of the INI, and Rosario Castellanos regarded him as a person who had influenced her own life due to his "critical conscience of the Mexican Revolution" (Schaefer 44). Yet Cárdenas, like most of the state's institutions, viewed Indigenous population in a paternalistic manner, and his political liberal aims were to incorporate Indigenous as an indistinct mass of people. Considering the vast ethnic and cultural diversity within Indigenous peoples in Mexico Cárdenas policies were revealed as an "attempt at complete acculturation" through education and 'Castilianization' (Schaefer 44-45).

Castellanos herself became part of the process of acculturation through a puppet theater show, *Teatro Petul,* which she directed and traveled with for a few years in the late fifties. She "wrote the scripts for plays about hygiene, education, national history, and the like" (Tarica "Inner Life" 172), and some narrative lines in short stories from her book *Ciudad Real,* as well as certain dialogues from the novel *Balún Canán* can be found in plays for *Teatro Petul* (Tarica "Inner Life" 172). For these reasons Castellanos' *indigenista* writings have been understood as constructing the conditions of her privilege of being *mestiza* and from a family of landowners, while at the same time facing her own oppression

[19] Land reform essentially forced Castellanos family to leave Chiapas for Mexico City due to partial loss of their lands (Schaefer 47).

for being a woman (O'Connell 46). Nonetheless, Castellanos would remain, according to Cornejo Polar, on "the hegemonic" or dominant "pole" of indigenismo because what is available to her (language, knowledge) is derived from exclusion and suppression (O'Connell 47).

***Castellanos' narratives: Indigenista, feminist, a search for identity or historical?***

Because of their broad characteristics and nuances, Castellanos's indigenista narratives have given themselves to wide and voluminous readings and interpretations. Special attention has been paid to her first novel *Balún Canán* because of its innovative use of multiple narrators and merging the bildungsroman genre with *neo-indigenismo* (Gil Iriarte 15). Literary criticism in the decades immediately following the publication of both *Balún Canán* (1957) and *Oficio de Tinieblas* (1962) mainly regarded them as neo-indigenista (Sommers, Crumleey de Pérez, Lienhard), as the dominant theme and ideology in the texts is that of the suffering and oppression of Indigenous population in Chiapas, Mexico. Both novels were understood to reveal the values and attitudes of dominant Mexico and its paternalistic discourse on Indigenous populations (Sommers 10, 38), as well as from an angle that considered the author's inclusion of oral narrations and Indigenous cosmogonies within the narrative (Crumley de Pérez 592). Additionally, Castellanos' narratives have been read as a type of ethnofiction, because she uses 'Indigenous discourse' with the intention of helping their cause and showing non-Indigenous readers other forms of living with nature (Lienhard qtd. in Gil Iriarte 92).

Other more nuanced approaches to the *indigenista* nature of her prose are Jean Franco's, *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico,* and Estelle Tarica's *The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism*. In the first Franco aims not to write a history of women and writing in Mexico, but to "discover those incandescent moments when different

configurations of gender and knowledge are briefly illuminated" that suggest other possible plots (xxiii-xxiv). Franco centers on Castellanos' *Oficio de Tinieblas* as a national Mexican narrative, and on the author's attempt to write women into this plot. She questions whether this is even possible to accomplish, considering that Mexican identity and heroes have been shaped by and as males. Ultimately, for Franco, Castellanos is unable to accomplish women's inscription into Mexican history in a non-negative manner or beyond the stereotypes of *La Malinche* (a betrayer) and *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (protector of *criollo* nationalism) (xviii). In the end, according to Franco, women characters in *Oficio de Tinieblas* betray and doom their communities and are unable to gain recognition in the national narrative (144-145).

While Tarica rather looks into intimate relations in *indigenista* authors, she coins the term 'intimate indigenismo' to consider this movement both in its subordinating and critical intentions in relation to Indigenous populations within the colonial and postcolonial order. She examines "personal, informal, and 'intimate' expressions of indigenista sentiment" in fictional autobiographies of three authors (Tarica, "Inner Life" xiv). By looking at *indigenismo* not only from the perspective of the subject or Indigenous characters, but examining the author's life and sociopolitical contexts of the times the texts were produced, Tarica aims at finding other types of *indigenista* rhetoric in which there is a search for affiliations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous to rehabilitate the "Indian 'within'" ("Inner Life" xx). For Tarica it is this intimate sphere that shapes *mestizo* nationality which is in opposition to being Indigenous ("Inner Life" xx). Tarica concludes that Castellanos' sense of entanglement with Indigenous subjects navigates between the intimate feeling of straddling in "two worlds that cannot be reconciled" ("Inner Life" 179), and the material idea of being in debt with Indigenous people, which pushed Castellanos to other endeavors including working at the National Indigenous Institute, whose purpose was to "civilize" and "educate" Indigenous population ("Inner Life" 180). Both these spheres, the public material

one and the private entangled one are never reconciled for the author. In the end, Tarica argues that Castellanos' internalized *indigenismo* liberated her, but not Indigenous subjects she worked for ("Inner Life" 182).

While racial and social conflict between *mestizos* and Indigenous is indeed the main theme in both novels, as well as in the short story collection, the texts have also been studied together with topics concerning unequal treatment of women, as well as comparing situations of oppression faced by both women and Indigenous people in post-colonial Chiapas. Maureen Ahern in her book, *A Rosario Castellanos Reader: An Anthology of Her Poetry, Short Fiction, Essays, and Drama*, frames Castellanos' work as concerned with how culture is linked to specific issues dealing with gender, race and class in Mexico (xiii). Ahern equates how her prose centers on "the perversion of signs as a tool of oppression […]" of both Indigenous people and women, and "particularly their relationship to each other […]" (xiv). Ahern argues that Castellanos already practiced "an *écriture feminine* in Mexico: the body as sign, puns as poems, language as oppressor, silences as meaning" (Ahern xv). The body, language and silences come back in a series of more recent studies which I will also include later in this section.

Instead of focusing on semiotics, Joanna O'Connell in her volume *Prospero's Daughter: The Prose of Rosario Castellanos,* analyzes how gender relations shape Castellanos' indigenista project, as well as how this contributes to her feminism (14). For O'Connell, Castellanos within the masculine culture of both colonialism and literature writes stories in which she represents and understands how gender difference works in "the competing visions of national identity" (3). At the same time she proposes a "space in which readers can imagine their social relations in new ways, not by suppressing knowledge of gender hierarchy in the service of national fraternity, but in ways that incorporate a critical consciousness" (O'Connell 13). O'Connell delves into the narrative voices in Castellanos'

novels, roles of women and Indigenous characters, linguistic aspects regarding access of subjects in different social spheres, inclusion of texts of Indigenous origin in her prose, and on the intersection of *Indigenismo* and feminism in the author's works. Importantly O'Connell does not think that Castellanos is trying to equate oppressions between subjects (3), and in this sense she disagrees with María Luisa Gil, who in her book *Testamento de Hécuba: Mujeres e indígenas en la obra de Rosario Castellanos,* asserts that for Castellanos women's resistance is equivalent to Indigenous resistance (Gil Iriarte 200). Gil's reading of Castellanos remains within feminism and follows on Lienhard's assessment of Castellanos' novels as ethnofiction. In addition she adds theories from deconstruction and psychoanalysis Gil to examine what she views as two fundamental lines in Castellanos, silence imposed on female experience and focus on the Other (15, 56).

In addition to this, both O'Connell and Gil when analyzing *Oficio de Tinieblas* center on the historical aspect of the novel, which was previously advanced by Sommers. Sommers sees the conflict between *mestizos* and Indigenous in *Oficio de Tinieblas* as a problem of "history", because according to him Castellanos equates Indigenous people with myth and *mestizos* with history. He reads the novel as stating and representing cultural systems in opposition, one would be history (*mestizo*/European) and the other would be myth (Indigenous). Furthermore, Sommer claims that such representation of Indigenous people as mythic "shows them incapable of the historical consciousness necessary for social change, and that Castellanos fails to suggest alternatives to the failed revolt" (qtd in O'Connell 139). O'Connell disagrees with Sommers and argues that there is not an inherent opposition between myth and history, nor is the first regressive and the second modern, but that Castellanos aim was to "represent two communities as having different ways of understanding the past and of narrating their experiences […] of constituting their identities as groups, that is, as having different ways of knowing and telling their histories" (139).

As O'Connell suggests there are several layers of history within the novel. First, the events known as the Caste Wars that occurred in Chiapas between 1867-1870, which began as a revitalization movement and then became violent when suppressed by *ladinos*[20] (135). According to the sources followed by Castellanos,

> […] a Chamula woman, Agustina Gomes Checheb, found three stones in Tzajalhemel that she said fell from the sky. A Chamula Official, Pedro Díaz Cuscat, began a cult around the stones, claiming they could speak, and organized their worship. The priests and Ladino officials tried to suppress the cult by arresting its leaders, but failed. A mestizo teacher named Ignacio Fernández de Galindo took up the organizing while Cuscat was in jail. When he exchanged himself for the release of the Maya leaders, he was executed. The rebellion was crushed and the rebels massacred, again with the help of troops from Guatemala in alliance between regional elites that disregarded national boundaries (O'Connell 135).

Second, the set of oral and written narratives about the events, of which Castellanos only had access to two written accounts which favored the *ladino* side of the story. Importantly one of the major events which is included in the novel, a crucifixion of an Indigenous boy in Chamula by Tzotziles believing that "this would give them power against their foes", might have never occurred as per Jan Rus and Robert Wasserstrom individual studies written in 1983[21], which Castellanos could not have had access to (O'Connell 141). Third, is the interpretative economy of the novel that is additionally set during the Agrarian Reform in

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[20] In both novels the term *ladino* is used as meaning non-Indigenous, another way to call non-Indigenous persons is *gente de razon* or rational people. Indigenous Mayans would call non-Indigenous whether *mestizos* or white Europeans caxlanes (O´Connell 51). *Ladino* is like mestizo in the sense that it means non-Indigenous, but *mestizo* more specifically means mixed race, and *ladino* can refer to cultural aspects indistinct of ethnicity, including Hispanicized Indigenous people who spoke Spanish (Pitt-Rivers 27). Throughout this thesis I will use the terms *ladino* and *mestizo* as synonyms.

[21] Anthropologist Victoria Bricker does accept the crucifixion account.

1930s Chiapas. Although the author is utilizing *ladino* accounts of the Caste War events, she also considers the legitimacy of the revolt in terms of the conditions of oppression that Indigenous people faced (O'Connell 141). Thus, history and time play a major role in the novel concerning how events are told, but also how the past has an influence in the present. In the novel itself both *mestizo* and Indigenous characters recall the past Caste Wars and link them equally to spiritual, racial, and socio-political situations.

As mentioned earlier, other readings of her novels have included identity formation and representations of the subaltern subject via silence, the body, and language. María Inés Lagos within the first novel *Balún Canán* considers the Girl narrator (the main character) and her identity formation in relation to the Other, who in this case is the character of the Indigenous Nana (162) amid the social conflict within the novel (Lagos 166). Ultimately relating the narrative arc of the Girl as one that is shaped by language and writing (Lagos 176). Regarding language, both Stacy Schlau and Maria Rosa Fiscal explore Indigenous and women characters stressing how for them the use of language, as well as the impossibility of using it marks their disadvantageous situation and conditions (Fiscal 33); how discourse is differentiated by class and ethnicity, and communication between women and men is almost always indirect (Schlau 47).

While Leah Strobel instead delves into how silences of subaltern subjects can be interpreted beyond meaning obedience or benevolence (202). Focusing on the Nana in *Balún Canán*, she questions how silences and their prominence in the narrative are key in determining the novel's development, and how in the same silences there could lie proposals for a type of solidarity between women, although not necessarily accessed by the author at the time (Strobel 204). For Strobel silences and breaks can be markers of protest, social or cultural limits to address certain subjects that are foreign to the non-indigenous, as well as defiance or refusal (211-212). Eventually for Strobel *Balún Canán* shows two failures: the

writer cannot speak for the subaltern and the subaltern also cannot speak at least within the Spanish text (language) (216-217).

Striving away from language or lack thereof, and into representations of bodies in contemporary Mexican narrative, Rebecca Janzen in *The National Body in Mexican Literature: Collective Challenges to Biopolitical Control* uses feminist psychoanalysis and postcolonial theories to account for how bodies are represented (white, *ladinos* and Indigenous, male and female) in Castellanos' novels (89). In addition to this she focuses on certain adoptive relationships between female characters (Janzen 89). Janzen examines how bodies interact, proposing that the "sick, animalized and hyper-sexualized bodies" of Indigenous and female characters' "are literary manifestations of state repression" (13-14).

Intersectional approaches to studying Castellanos outside the two previously mentioned categories of women and Indigenous subjects are however less common. Priscilla Meléndez exercises one via a study of genealogy in *Balún Canán*, in which she asserts that Castellanos did not aim to find a single vehicle of oppression in her novel but managed to center it on a genealogical project[22] with emphasis on discontinuity and contradiction (Meléndez 343). Meléndez's purpose is to strive further away from the novel's reading as autobiographical towards a fragmented vision of time and space and a rejection to conclusive endings (345). While Sarri Vuorisalo-Tiitinen goes further from gender, race, class, or age, to add religion and sexuality (166). She amplifies the focus arguing that in *Balún Canán*, "neither masculine gender nor mestizo origin is protection from marginalization" (Vuorisalo-Tiitinen 168). In the present research I will use an intersectional approach regarding all the axes considered by Vuorisalo-Tiitinen (gender, race, class, age, religion and sexuality), and

[22] Meléndez uses the concept of genealogy by Michel Foucault concerning history, paired with Kathy Fergusons feminist approach on the same concept, to consider how the novel is a genealogical project via an antiauthoritarian character (Girl) which centers on the discontinuous, changing and contradictory process of (self-)knowledge and (self-)definition (343).

add to it a spatial dimension minding how social relations and interactions vary not only because of the previously mentioned identity markers, but also due to whether characters find themselves within public or private spaces, as well as depending on places, if rural, urban, mainly Indigenous or *mestizo*, etc.

In the same manner studies concerning spatial aspects in Castellanos *Indigenista* novels are also scarce, there are only two and each focuses on a single novel. Brian Gollnick, aided by sociology and geography, reads Castellanos paying attention to the politics of scale in terms of global, regional, national, and communal levels in her first novel *Balún Canán*. Gollnick explores how scales are unresolved in the novel's narrative and among its characters, between geopolitical scales of conflict that are global and national (colonialism, Agrarian Reform) to domestic local scales (intersecting identities between Nana and Girl) (193-196). He remarks that "the novel never allows the problem of scale to be resolved on a single level" (Gollnick 196). In a similar manner he goes into how *ladino* landowners represent the national scale, because they link the regional with the national in terms of agricultural production, while Indigenous characters stand for the local scale because they are presented as only working for subsistence-based farming (Gollnick 197-198).

While Joshua Lund in *The Mestizo State: Reading Race in Modern Mexico*, studies race within cultural production as a constituent of the socio-historical dynamics in Mexico, to think of cultural history through race as object of reflection (xi). He centers on Castellanos *Oficio de Tinieblas* and goes further than the usual reading of the novel as a racial conflict between "ladinos e indios", to think about how the interconnectedness of both ethnic groups is mediated through place, routes, and circuits (Lund 97). He argues together with Joseph Sommers that

> The Chiapas of *Oficio de Tinieblas* is a totality, and at its center are neither indios nor ladinos but the routes and circuits that bind the two into one. San Juan Chamula over

> here, Ciudad Real over there: what brings these spaces into the novel, together, is precisely the superficiality of their segregation, their lack of disparity, their profound interconnectedness (Lund 97).

For Lund "The center of the novel, then, is the space in between, and the ambience of the story is that of one big contact zone…" (Lund 97). By minding when and how Indigenous characters become racialized, how both *mestizos* and Indigenous refer to the other in their discourse regarding land, and how places mean different things depending on race as identity marker (Lund 80), he concludes that the conflict in the novel is not ethnic "but Chiapas and in the state" (Mexico) (Lund 100).

The previous overview of Castellanos' scholarship makes it clear that it is ample and varied in terms of angles. Her narratives have been read as *neo-indigenista*, feminist, focusing on personal identity, on shared oppression of women and Indigenous people, on the sociolinguistic aspects the novels advance, and as setting up a clash between historical and mythical views and understandings of worlds. Less so however from an intersectional approach outside the two main axes or categories of gender and race, or from a spatial angle. The last two will be central to my analysis of Rosario Castellanos *indigenista* novels, *Balún Canán* and *Oficio de Tinieblas*. I will focus on the roles of identity and meanings of places, and on how public and private spaces are in tension and contradiction in her novels. Additionally, because her works so strongly represents ethnic and social conflicts in a postcolonial context, in which the historical is inextricably linked to space and place, and to the relations that have interconnected the two ethnic groups in the region over time; it is through the spatial turn in literary studies and the correlation between the historical and the social as per feminist geography that I will engage with her works. In the following section I will introduce my theoretical approach, methods and key concepts.

## Chapter 1: Space, place, and literature

Stories are bounded by an internal temporality, with beginnings and endings, even if they open in media res and are inconclusive or in need of a sequel. However, as Robert J. Tally, literary scholar focused on spatial humanities points out in his book *Spatiality*, stories also function as maps (2). They situate you in places, within spaces, describe how these look, feel, sound and smell, and help "[…] readers get a sense of the worlds in which others have lived, currently live, or will live in times to come" (Tally, "Spatiality" 2). Within literary criticism both time and space have been known to play important roles, for instance in Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotopic analysis applied to literature, in which both dimensions as in real life intersect each other (Bakhtin 84). Nonetheless, in real or empirical life, as Karen Barad summarizes in *Meeting the Universe Halfway,* space and time have been defined in opposition to each other, the first as a "container"[23] where inhabitants and things are geolocated, and the second as "divided into evenly spaced increments marking a progression of events" (Barad 223).

The above Euclidean notion of space has been contested famously by philosophers like Henri Lefebvre, forwarding the idea of how space is also implicated in the historical (time), that is both the spatial and the social are mutually constituted and affect each other (Barad 224, Massey, "Routledge" 106). Along the same line geographer Doreen Massey has argued for alternative views of both concepts precisely taking into account how modern physics poses that space and time exist both in tension and interrelation, and instead proposes

[23] This container model of space derives from a Euclidean geometric imaginary, in which space either figured as flat or curved is "a container within which things are placed and find themselves in geometrical relationship to one another" (Barad 447).

to think of the spatial "in the context of space-time"(Massey, "Space" 5), constituted of social interrelations which are dynamic and "ever-shifting" (Massey, "Space" 3).

In my research I will juxtapose the study of literature through spatiality as brought forward by the spatial turn in literary studies, with space in correlation with the historical and the social as proposed by feminist geography. Additionally, by including an intersectional framework with several axes within my analysis, such as race, gender, class, age, religion, and sexuality, I will be able to pay attention to how these identity markers vary and are performed by characters in the books depending on space. Therefore, in this chapter I will first provide an overview of spatiality studied in literary criticism and intersectional feminist geography, to arrive at several key concepts that I will use in my further analysis of *Balún Canán* and *Oficio de Tinieblas*. Ultimately, focusing my study on how social relations are in fact made by and make space and place in Castellanos' novels, and on the role of place, its meanings, identities, and configurations in two novels that deal with land conflict.

### *Spatiality and literature*

The spatial turn in literary and cultural studies has been largely understood as product of historical and political transformations that took place as of the second half of the twentieth century, including the Second World War, yet also displacements, post-colonialism, globalization, and innovations in communications technology (Tally, "Spatiality" 12-14). The new condition that the above mentioned events and developments provoked in art and philosophy, came to be on the one hand of immediacy and the possibility of knowing about and being connected to all corners of the world, and on the other, one of disruption of previous structures and ways of seeing and understanding reality. The response from arts, literature, and philosophy was both postmodernism and poststructuralism (Tally, "Spatiality" 15). The first has been understood as an aesthetic movement and a historical period or a mode of discourse, and the second as a philosophical movement. Both are

skeptical of how the world is represented and critique traditional views of ourselves and the world, as well as what was thought to be universal or 'natural' explanations of things (Tally, "Spatiality" 15), such as binary oppositions or divisions, absolute meanings, truths and understandings; the separation between fictional and ´real life´; and how social relations and power fix meanings, social practices, objects and events, etc. (Woodward et al. 396, Duignan). Both movements inspired a re-imagining of the spatial in several areas including literary and cultural theory and criticism, and geography itself, acknowledging "the degree to which matters of space, place, and mapping had been under-represented in the critical literature of the past" (Tally, "Spatiality" 16).

Regarding poststructuralism and space, it was in Michel Foucault's "Of Other Spaces" (1984), where the paradigm shift from the temporal to the spatial was addressed (Juvan 81). This shift, according to Foucault, marked the end of the nineteenth century's "obsession" with history, "with its themes of development and of suspension, of crisis and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men […]" (Foucault 22). In his lecture Foucault focuses on what he deems external spaces and considers that such spaces are heterogenous and "a set of relations" (Foucault 23), so the spatial is not only a product or productive but producing us (Tally "Spatiality" 120). Additionally, in Foucault's wider oeuvre[24], he delved into how in the modern and postmodern conditions there is an organized spatialization of social forces in terms of geography and demarcation, but also in terms of institutional ordering of data from diverse sources (demographic, political, clinical, etc.); both deriving from a material pervasiveness of power and a capitalist mode of production (Tally "Spatiality"123). In this sense the idea of postmodernity or of a postmodern time also stemmed from the arrival of late capitalism,

[24] Tally discusses here in specific Foucault's *Discipline and Punishment* (1975) and *The Birth of the Clinic (1963).*

according to both geographer David Harvey and philosopher Frederic Jameson. For them, late capitalism with its global scale financial logic and interconnectedness of markets, together with the shortening of distances via technology and transportation (globalization) allowed and propelled the "'time-space compression'" common in the experience of the postmodern condition (Harvey qtd. in Tally, "Spatiality" 39). For both scholars, "this postmodern condition" called "for a form of cognitive mapping that will enable us to comprehend and negotiate these postmodern spaces" (Tally, "Spatiality" 41). One such form of cognitive mapping is literature and its study to make sense of what was considered a world to be comprehended anew (Tally, "Spatiality" 43). One of the methods brought forward to attend to spatial practices in literature is geocriticism, which as a term was coined by Tally in the early nineteen nineties. To be clear Tally does not imply that geocritical approaches to space in literature did not exist before the spatial turn or postmodernity, as it was clear in Mikhail Bakhtin's study of "chronotopes" (Tally, "Geocritical" 1). Nonetheless, geocriticism did expand the interests and foci of the role of space and place in literary works to, for instance, exploring the "significance that some places have taken on in world culture" (Prieto 22), or literary representations of types of places around the globe (for example suburbia), and spatial practices such as *orientation* as literary theme in intersection with personal identity (Prieto 23).

Another key scholar in this practice is Bertrand Westphal, whose approach is a geocentric one to the study of literature. Westphal frames his book, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces,* precisely in the postmodern era, and argues that the salience of space was forwarded in literary criticism in the aftermath of World War II, mainly due to the destruction for the West of the idea of progress and history as a linear process (2). Westphal bases his understanding of postmodernism from the book, *The Spaces of Postmodernity,* by geographers Michael J. Dear and Steven Flutsy, in which postmodernism is radical

uncertainty, emerges from a crisis of objectivity, and sees reality as relative, plural and based in difference; this reality includes "real spaces" (qtd in Westphal 3). Yet for him it should also include representations of spaces, as well as entirely fictional ones, because "if the perception of spatiotemporal referentiality fades, then the fictional discourse conveyed through the arts is ipso facto also transformed from its original vocation" (Westphal 3). Regarding this uncertainty, or rather this certainty of subjective understandings of the world, Westphal proposes to examine human spaces in cultural production through geocriticism paying attention to both space and place.

While I stated earlier that space can be thought of as historical, that is in conjunction with time (Lefebvre), as well as constituted of social relations (Massey), similarly place can have several meanings. It can be thought of as *location* (a specific place in space), or as a social setting or locale (a generic space such as a workplace), in a metaphorical manner (a sense of place), or related to identity, community and belonging (Agnew 236-327). In specific for Westphal the line between space and place is shifting and "conflated […] in the concept of 'human space'", which is what happens in the relationship or interaction of individuals and their surrounding space (5-6). Nonetheless, geocriticism a la Westphal prioritizes a "geocentered" approach to place, for instance studying a city written by many authors, thus obtaining plural points of views "at the crossroads of distinct representations" (114-112), and consequently arriving in proximity to "the essential identity of the referenced space". Yet simultaneously confirming "that any cultural identity is only the result of incessant efforts of creation and re-creation" (114). Places for Westphal are cities, regions, imaginary places like Atlantis, or topographical features like archipelagoes. He excludes from places "nongeographical" intimate generic spaces, and specifically excludes domestic spaces because they are not singular or identifiable in a map (Westphal 118-119).

Other approaches to the study of spatiality that do not necessarily prioritize place over space have been Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, and its attention to private or intimate spaces of our imagination, "the topography of our intimate being" (Bachelard xxxvi). Or the concept of Heterotopia forwarded "In Other Spaces" by Foucault, which are "real places" that are present in every culture and represent said society in a distorted way (24). These sites, as he calls them, are both geographically locatable, yet they are also "outside all places" (Foucault 24). Examples of heterotopias are the prison, the nineteenth century boarding school, but also the zoological gardens, ships and even some colonies[25] (Foucault 25-27). Finally, Edward Soja's notion of the "thirdspace" (real-and-imagined-spaces), the space that is lived or experienced and changing, contrary to a space that is locatable in a map (real) or one that is understood as a concept (imagined) (Tally "Spatiality" 119).

The prior explorations or understandings of the spatial open several ways in which this subject can be explored and thought of through literature, cultural studies, and geography. In my geocritical approach to Rosario Castellanos' novels I will include both geolocatable places as well as spaces relegated to the domestic or private and public spheres. Additionally, by incorporating concepts and understandings of space and place from feminist geography, I will be able to explore the assertion that spaces are gendered and this has not only contributed to the construction of reality, but as Doreen Massey has added, that in being gendered they also construct conceptions of such and other categories (Massey, "Space" 179). Massey's approach to key issues in our understandings of place and space regarding gender and class will be useful for my research, as social relations in the context of the novels are mediated by both categories, yet because the books are embedded in a post-colonial space

[25] In this speech Foucault gives the specific example of the Jesuit colonies of Paraguay as a heterotopia of compensation, which compensates for the messiness in the outside space (27).

and time, it is pivotal to also mind ethnicity and race which Massey does not include in her formulation of social space in terms of social relations (Massey, "Space" 2), hence I will also delve into more recent studies of intersectional feminist geographies.

### *Massey's Feminist Geography*

In this section I will point out the aspects of Massey's theory I will employ in my analysis of Castellanos' novels. First, her discernment of the inherent dynamism of space via social relations occurring in it, which arrive to her view of space-time as a more comprehensive way to see the configuration of the social, the spatial, and the historical. Massey argues that "The spatial organization of society […] is integral to the production of the social, and not merely its result. It is fully implicated in both history and politics" ("Space" 4). Thus for her, space is not only produced, but produces, because it exists in relation to actors and time. This assertion implies that not only is the spatial made of multiple social relations which are implicated in politics, but that these relations exist in every scale from global to local (Massey, "Space" 4). By paying attention to how the spatiotemporal is enmeshed with politics and social relations in diverse scales, I will be able to read how the novel's seemingly local social conflicts are embedded in larger national and global structures.

Second, her rethinking of space and identity of place from a feminist and post-colonial view of personal identity as relational (Massey "Space" 6). Identities in a place and of place are multiple, because there are multiple social actors interacting in different manners and having varied interpretations of such interactions (Massey "Space" 121). Since different actors interact over time in the same place(s), "this in turn implies that what is to be the dominant image of any place will be a matter of contestation and will change over time" (Massey "Space" 121). Identity of place is then constituted in particular "envelopes" of space-time, but because such envelopes encompass ever-shifting social relations and history,

one of the ways of reading social conflict and battles which are constantly being fought over what a place is or should be, is that they are attempts to stabilize its meaning (Massey, "Space" 5). This view coincides with Westphal's idea that even if there can exist a certain identity of a place, by studying how such place is represented over time and by diverse authors it becomes clear "that any cultural identity is only the result of incessant efforts of creation and re-creation" (114). This view of identity as relational and changing will be useful to mind clashes between ethnic groups around land, their personal identity, and identity of place.

Third, that spatiality should be conceived outside the male, able-bodied, heterosexual experience. When studying space attention must be paid to gendered and class constructions and conditions, which add nuance and context to diverse spatial experiences (Massey, "Space" 182). Gender conditions not only regarding separation of public and private spaces, where women are relegated to the domestic (Massey, "Space" 179), but also the threat of violence in spatial control (Massey, "Space" 180), and the political alliances that people are able or unable to make because of spatial divisions (Massey, "Space" 178). In addition to this, recognizing how gendered spatial variations enacted via capitalism and patriarchy have an impact on the "organization and reorganization of the national economic space" (Massey, "Space" 180). That is gender and other categories (class) are implicated in the construction of political and economic spaces, and in state policies. Through observing spatial limits and variations I will think about the possibility or impossibility of solidarity between groups that spaces in the novel allow or prevent, as well as how characters remain constrained by spatial divisions, what this means for their social mobility and for resolutions to the conflict at hand. Moreover, in my analysis I will pay attention to how the national economic space is being constructed in the struggle between *mestizo*s and Indigenous groups.

In Rosario Castellanos' *indigenista* novels social relations are in constant conflict. Spaces and places are divided by gender, class, ethnicity, and other markers, and identities of place are in constant tension, thus Massey's feminist geographies and concepts regarding space as constituded and constituent of social relations will prove useful to analyze such works. Yet,in dealing with works in a post-colonial context, categories such as race, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality gain prominence. To mind this, I will need to implement an intersectional framework for the geocritical analysis of both novels. Thus, in the following section I will give a short overview of how intersectionality has been applied within feminist geography.

### *Intersectionality and Feminist Geography*

According to the *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Feminist Geographies*, while feminist geography developed together with other social movements in the 1970s, scholars from the same field have highlighted the work of professional women geographers since the late-nineteen century, as well as that of activist geographers outside academia (Johnston et al. 3). In this sense, feminist geography has brought into the study of space concepts like gender, class, migration, mobility, as well as broaden the areas of study to add the body, affect, sexuality, political ecology, transgender, and indigenous geographies (Johnston et al. 3). The previous succession of topics of course has happened in diverse stages and can be divided into three strands of inquiry. The earliest one established the discipline by addressing the lack of representation and masculinist views in geography (1960s-1970s). The following (1980s-1990s), focused on class and gender relations from a socialist standpoint, Doreen Massey's work is included in this strand (Johnston et al. 3). The third strand forwarded by postmodernism (as of mid-1990s), came to be "a feminist geography of difference" in the intersections of "bodies, identities, place and space" (Johnston et al. 3-4). However, within

this third strand uneven representations of scholars and theories from nonhegemonic Anglo-American center remained. Additionally, even within the hegemonic center other intersecting identities such as "Black geographies of gender, sex and sexuality" have only "recently been imperfectly integrated into the canons of feminist theory" (Johnston et al. 4).

Thus, it was until the 1990s that feminist geographers began engaging with intersectional approaches in their work. However, according to Sharlene Mollet and Caroline Faria, "intersectionality was, at its inception, already a deeply spatial theoretical concept, process and epistemology, particularly when read through careful and serious engagement with Black Feminist Thought" (Mollett and Faria 566). For example, they point out that Kimberle Crenshaw, who coined the term intersectionality[26] in 1989, used "conceptual and geographic bridging of scales of the body, home and state" in her work (Mollett and Faria 566). They also consider that intersectional perspectives by feminist geographers are closely influenced by Black feminist and radical women of color scholars such as bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa, Audre Lorde, among others (Mollett and Faria 566). Regarding intersectionality outside the United States or the lives of Black or African American women, Mollet and Faria apply its relevance to the Global South, where in addition to race, attention must be paid to ethnicity and caste. They utilize the term 'postcolonial intersectionality' to address "the way patriarchy and racialized processes (including whiteness) are consistently bound up in national and international development practice" (Mollet and Faria 571). The aim of intersectionality for these and other scholars is to "de-center whiteness […] and to see the production of space through multiple power formations" (Mollet and Faria 571). Importantly they also consider how this work "disrupts myths of racial democracy and equality among communities in Latin America" (Mollet and Faria 571). Intersectionality here is a

[26] Intersectionality as fostered by Kimberle Crenshaw in the late 1980s focused on Black women's experience to argue that the intersection of race and gender should be analyzed in tandem to better understand social relations and power structures (Crenshaw 56-57).

"framework for understanding multiplicity" and interrogating inequalities, not just identity categories, while minding of course the temporal and spatial specificities (Mollet and Faria 571).

One of the problems that might come up when using an intersectional framework is as Peter Hopkins puts it, to question whether "it is appropriate to only consider the intersection of two axes of difference or if additional intersections also need to be considered?". That is, to consider only gender and class or race, but not sexuality for instance (Hopkins 587). However, as Yuval-Davis points out, it depends on the context (qtd in Hopkins 587), and on the social divisions that certain people might deem important at different moments in space-time. Another issue is that to apply intersectionality there are no specific methods, so in feminist geography the diverse approaches have been similar in the sense that they are flexible and exploratory, but diverse in terms of instrument types, from interviews, to maps, to stories and biographical narratives (Hopkins 587-588). By minding multiple identities and what this implies in social relations and societies amid social conflict, I will be able to use an intersectional approach when reading Castellanos' narratives through the spatial. In the next section I will further expand on my approach, methods, and key concepts.

### *Intersectional geocritical approach, methods, and key concepts*

The books I will be analyzing are set in the same geographical area, Chiapas, México. They have been read as addressing mainly racial, class, and gender conflicts taking place in the area during the early to mid-twentieth century. In terms of places there are cities like Comitán, San Cristobal de la Casas, Tuxtla Gutierréz, or Tapachula, yet also other distant from the state of Chiapas such as México D.F. or Guatemala City. Rural places are also important, like Chactajal, Palo María, Chamula, Tzajal-hemel, and other communities where mostly Indigenous people live. As to spaces, private ones are recurrent, for instance within

large houses such as rooms, kitchens, corridors, or huts which are a single room, as well as outside spaces such as markets or schools that turn private via language or gender distinctions. While public spaces are depicted as political demonstrations, official meetings between civil servants, or gatherings like parties. However, public discourse regarding laws and governmental dispositions which drives social conflict between *mestizos* and Indigenous, is enacted in both private and public spaces.

Spaces are both gendered and racialized, limited to certain individuals depending on class, and at times they are also challenged or transgressed by the same individuals who are not allowed there. Concerning context, places will be important to set the space-time envelope which holds the novels, as well as to investigate what roles identity and meaning of places have within the social conflict driving the plots. Places will be key to think about how identities of place intersect with personal identities, and what identity fluctuations depending on place mean for both Indigenous and *mestizo* characters. Additionally, for the analysis of the works I will also focus on spaces, on how spatial organization of social relations within the novels reflects the tensions between discourses in public and private spaces, and on the relevance of private spaces and interactions in them. Moreover, I will mind how relationships between *mestiza* and Indigenous women are negotiated in public and private spaces, allowing for *mestiza* women to in some instances perform Indigeneity. I argue that in the novels social relations in private spaces unmask discourse held in public ones, especially in connection with economic and political legal reforms in 1930's Mexico. By revealing these operations the novels demonstrate how colonial order is held during postcolonial times, within a logic of internal colonialism and the structure of the nation-state, all together with a burgeoning capitalist economic system, as well as with Western religious institutions.

I will use Westphal's geocritical approach to read how Castellanos makes use of place in her books to comment on mobility of identities and ideas as well as on transgressions to

space. How remoteness, particularities, and histories of places are highlighted in relation to social and class conflict in the books. I will also utilize geocriticism to provide a spatial context of why these events occur in these specific places, and what that might mean in the larger time-space context of the novels in Mexico and Latin America. Additionally, with the aid of Massey's space-time envelope concept, I will map how spatial organization in the societies within the texts has an influence on historical and political events taking place in the plot. Thinking with space and place in these novels will help us understand how social conflicts driven by contrasting national, ethnic, or economic interests are in part also struggles to change or keep a certain identity of a place, and perhaps provide other solutions and exit routes to similar struggles.

Because of the multifaceted character of identity in Latin American postcolonial contexts, I will consider identity within feminist theory as fractured, fluid, multiple (Branaman 33) and constructed by 'discourse', 'frameworks of intelligibility', and 'disciplinary regimes' (Butler qtd. in Branaman 43). It is within this understanding of identity as constructed within discourse, and produced in "specific historical and institutional sites" (Hall 4) that I will delve into identities of characters, especially *mestiza* women characters, as relational and multiple, and on the similarities suggested in the novels regarding identities of places being contested and personal identities in conflict. Identities, as Hall explains, are understood as representations shaped through difference and in relation to the Other, and to lack (5). Approaching identity this way might help shift nationalist discourses on personal identity and identity of place towards a broader and complex view of places beyond nation-states.

Via an intersectional framework I will pay attention to how spaces in light of gender, class, and racial constructions generate nuances or enrich the context of the plot, which characters relegated to certain spaces drive the plot, and what this means in the general

context of social and economic struggle taking place in the novels. I will think about spatial control over certain groups, and which alliances are able to exist or not because of spatial distinctions marked in the books. For instance, how while women are relegated to domestic spheres they have a large part in driving the social conflict. Furthermore, I will address how public discourse within public spaces enacted by both the state—represented by the revolutionary government—and the landowner wealthy *mestizo* classes, are only apparently opposing each other in terms of political ideology and the meaning they want to establish for place. Contrary to this operation I will focus on how what occurs in private spaces disrupts public discourse, and how this is played out by the same actors (government and landowners) who work in collusion to center whiteness.

In terms of methods, I will structure the close reading of each novel prioritizing places and public/private spaces and the dynamics and tensions that develop between them. This will allow me to read social conflicts in terms of social relations within spatiality, to pay attention to those relations and interactions occurring in private spaces, and map how they shape the plot (social phenomena and conflicts). In addition I will mind how both novels occur in synchronicity, yet in different places in the same state, and they also include a diachronic element or origin story of places directly related to the contemporary social conflicts. Consequently, it is an analysis of space-time which will prove appropriate to attend to how the novels reveal a multiplicity of places, the interrelational quality of colonial and post-colonial conditions, and the importance of private spatial scales in social, historical, and political levels. To conclude this section, I will give an overview of key concepts I have developed for this analysis, as well as concepts I will use and adapt for my close reading of both novels from geocriticism and feminist geography.

- Origins of place: These are oral or written stories (intertexts) that narrate origins of places such as Comitán, Chactajal or San Juan Chamula, which in the present time of

the novels are contested lands. I will focus on how such origin stories are related to two concepts that Massey employs, meaning of place and identity of place.

- Meaning of place: Massey considers that attempts to either set horizons, boundaries or identities to places are "attempts to stabilize the meaning of particular envelopes of space-time", and such attempts are the site of social contest ("Space" 5). In this sense, because social conflict in the novels is driven by land and its meaning I will read the different attributions and functions given to land (place) in the novels by different ethnic groups, namely *mestizos* and Indigenous. Since such attributions, whose land is it or how it should be used, are most of the time in contradiction.
- Identity of place: I will look at how identity of place is both constructed in relation to the past (origins of place), yet also as Massey argues via social relations in the present. I will explore the parallel Massey advances between personal identities and identities of place, in specific with *mestiza* women characters, because it is within private spaces they inhabit—where power relations are both heightened and blurred, and characters appear to be more vulnerable—that the construction of *mestizo* identity is revealed in its attempts to reconcile with the Indigenous other, and their imagined Indigenous self.
- Public and Private Spaces: There is a cultural distinction between public and private spaces, with women and children being confined to the domestic, and men to the outside public labor including politics and religion. However, within this distinction because the context of the novels I am studying is infiltrated by *mestizaje,* such divisions are also translated to ethnicity. In addition to this there are limitations and malleability within spaces, as in some cases private spaces turn public because of the actors and conversations occurring in them, and public spaces function to obscure political intentions and reality.

- Transgressions to space: Transgressions cross boundaries from norms, violate a physical limit or the law itself (Westphal 42). These are limitations of mobility to access certain public and private spaces depending on class, ethnicity, age, sexuality, and gender. In the texts such limitations are often transgressed by actors which signals the rising social conflict and are feared by both ethnic groups.
- Identity fluctuations: I argue that some of the characters' personal identities fluctuate between being closer to whiteness or Indigeneity depending on place, and whether they are Indigenous or *mestizo*. These fluctuations can be either socially accepted or cause for fear and concern. I will read such fluctuations in both *mestizo* and Indigenous characters, and consider how they are accepted or feared depending on identity markers such as gender, class, and ethnicity.

## Chapter 2: Balún Canán

*Balún Canán*, the first *indigenista* novel written by Castellanos, is set in Chiapas during the 1930's in the wake of the Mexican Revolution and during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, who is mentioned several times in the book. It starts out in Comitán, a town in the southernmost state of Mexico, closer to Guatemala City than to the country's capital, Mexico City. The first and third section of the novel is set in Comitán, the narrating voice is a Girl who has no name and is daughter of a wealthy mestizo landowner. In the second section there is a change of scenery to a rural *hacienda*, Chactajal, which is property of Girl's family. When the setting of the novel remains in Chactajal a third-person narrator who has several focalizer characters takes over, these focalizers are mainly *mestiza* women, but there are also one or two chapters in which the narrator stays closer to male characters. In one instance a plural us, who is clearly talking from an Indigenous point of view, is also a focalizer. I will divide the following close reading into two themes prioritizing places and spaces, and how their configurations develop the plot and influence social conflict in the novel. By paying attention to social conflicts and relations in terms of spatiality I will be able to answer a) what the recurrent stories of origins of place reveal about social conflicts in the novel, b) how the identity of Girl is constructed in relation to identity of place; c) what is the role of private and public spaces in the novel's portrayal of social conflict, and d) what do transgressions of space by both *mestizos* and Indigenous Tzeltales signal in the novel.

### *Origins of place*

The novel opens with an origin story about how place is co-constituted in relation to history and identity. In this case, where did the main ethnic configurations that inhabit the town of Comitán, but also where it is held, the State of Chiapas and the Nation of Mexico come from? They come from a world ending, the world before the Conquest of Spanish and

other European nations. In the opening chapter we hear this ending from the voice of the also unnamed Nana, who could or could not be addressing Girl.

> 'And then in anger they dispossessed us, they confiscated what we had treasured: the word, which is memory's strong-box. Ever since that day they have burned and been eaten up with the great logs on the hearth. The smoke rises on the wind and crumbles away. Only the ash remains, and it has no face. All this so that you might come, and he who was younger than you are, and a breath—just a breath—might suffice you…'(13).

On the same page, Girl introduces herself as being seven years old and having a younger brother who knows even less of the world than she does, she for instance knows that "'Columbus discovered America'" (13). Thus, the origin story of this place as they now know it, is told from both points of views, of the colonized (Nana) and colonizer (Girl and family). From the first page of the book the reader can understand that the conflict of the novel will revolve around a place that is contested, and that the conflict itself is as much about place as it is about socioeconomic and racial issues represented in the plot. Tarica reads this origin story with Edouard Glissant's concept of "'point of entanglement', where previously separate cultures join fates" (qtd. in Tarica "Inner Life" 173), as a clash between a "multiplicity of stories" (173). Moreover, Tarica focuses on the 'confiscated' words that Nana addresses in her part of the story, as a comparison between "stolen land and stolen word-memory" ("Inner Life" 173). Naming can also be a way to possess land, for instance changing the names of places.

In addition to this the reader is introduced to Girl's and Nana's intimate filial relationship. In fact, Girl feels distanced from her mother, Zoraida, her father, César, and to a certain degree from her brother Mario as well. This distance is in direct relation to Girl's closeness with Nana, and to the type of narration that guides the first part of the novel, in

which there is an eternal attempt of dialogue between Girl and Nana (Gil Iriarte 161). This narration switches in the third section to a more individualistic one with a stronger sense of self (Tarica, "Inner Life" 173), at which point Nana also leaves Girl's house. Besides this domestic configuration, we quickly learn about the general situation outside the privacy of the house and childhood routine. First, there is news of unrest of Indigenous Tzeltal workers who live in Chactajal. Second, that this unrest comes from laws dictated from above and afar by the President and government officials in Mexico City. These laws include an agrarian reform, which means redistribution of lands owned by *mestizo* landowners to Indigenous population, an obligatory minimum wage to be paid to Indigenous farm workers, and for formal education to be provided to children of Indigenous farm workers. Third, that Catholic religion is being targeted by the government, churches are shut down as well as private religious education.

The second origin story is adapted from the *Popol Vuh*. It is important to say that before every section of the book there is an epigraph form three foundational scripts in the Mayan (K'iche', Yucatec, and Tzeltal) culture[27] (González 113). Moreover, within the novel there are several stories as well as knowledge regarding the nature of the land as sacred, the role of non-human beings, stories of spirits and beings, healing practices and witchcraft, among others that are discussed and practiced by Indigenous population. The above mentioned origin story adapted from the *Popol Vuh* is about the creation of humankind, it is used by Nana to explain to Girl why her mother visits and helps a woman who lives in the poor part of town, who is referred to as "the crookback" (29). In the story the world has already been created, and the four "'lords in heaven'" who were there before "'Santo Domingo de Gúzman and San Caralampio and the Virgin of Perpetual Succour'" (30) decide

[27] These are the *Popol Vuh, Chilam Balam of Chamuyel,* and *Annals of the Cakchiquels*.

to create man. They first try with clay, then wood, and neither work. They then try with gold, and this man lasted but he could not communicate nor have feelings, and so they try another one made out of their own flesh. The lords fall asleep, and the man of flesh "'learned which fruit is good to eat, with what big leaves they could protect themselves from the rain, and which animals don't bite'" (32). The man of flesh one day meets the man of gold, and after many days of taking care of him the man of gold becomes "'softened, until the word of gratitude the four lords had placed within him rose to his lips'" (32). When the lords wake up they look down to see what had happened and they approve of it.

> 'And from that moment they called the man of gold rich and the men of flesh poor. And they ordered things in such a way that the rich man should care for the poor and shelter him, since it was the rich man who benefited by the poor man's acts. And the lords so ordered it that the poor should answer for the rich before the face of Truth. That is why our law says that no rich man can enter heaven if a poor man does not lead him by the hand' (32).

The initial part of the story according to Nelson González Ortega is similar to one in the *Popol Vuh* of the XVI century (cfr. PV-R: 23-48, 103-126. cfr. cite 11) (118). However, in the Mayan text the man created is finally made of corn (cfr. cite 11) (González 119). The story is changed by Castellanos, according to González, to show syncretic customs that co-exist in this same place by naming the Catholic Saints (118), and to illustrate how the character of Nana, by proxy Indigenous people, has assimilated the socioeconomic and cultural power relations that exist in post-colonial Chiapas (119). Although González argues that Nana's passive assimilation is refuted by the novel's central conflict, which is the agrarian reform and other laws that destabilize the landowners' status quo, to him this origin story illustrates primarily a socioeconomic and spiritual struggle between *ladinos* and Indigenous for land possession. A class struggle between the landowners' neocolonial

capitalist intentions, versus a subsistence relation with the land by Indigenous people. I agree with the syncretic representation, but not only for the sake of showing religious assimilation or resistance by Indigenous people, but to mark who was there first. Nana explains that the four God-men were there first, created the earth (ocean, land, and wind), created men, and only then came the Catholic saints. This clear statement is marking her position, first she believes in the four God-men and this origin story, second she includes the Catholic religion.

This altered *Popol Vuh* origin story also has a similar ending to the "Parable of the Rich Young Man" in the Christian *New Testament*, in which Jesus, when asked by a wealthy man how to gain eternal life, tells him to sell everything he owns and give it to the poor. As the man leaves saddened Jesus says to his apostles, "Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God" (ESV Bible, Mark 10). However, this would not necessarily account for Nana's syncretism, but for *mestizos'* syncretic spirituality. As much as Indigenous people were forced to convert to Catholicism during and after colonial times, in the novel there is emphasis on how non-Indigenous people, especially *mestiza* women, are in turn deeply influenced by Indigenous spiritual beliefs. I will expand on this influence when I touch upon the functions of private and public space and their interactions in the narrative.

In terms of class struggle, this origin story also marks how Girl is completely aware not only of racial identity markers, but of class identity markers in Comitán. Girl immediately asks Nana who her poor is, and she replies "You don't know yet. But if you watch carefully, when more years and understanding are upon you, you will recognize the poor one that is yours" (33). This which has been understood as passivity or a static attitude attributed to Indigenous characters by the author (Gil Iriarte 184), could also be seen as an assertion of social relations that constitute a space in the wake of colonialism. At the same time it stands as an explanation that Nana provides to Girl of how their worlds have existed since the

Conquest, as co-constituted and interdependent, and that while minding power relations, still the man of gold would not exist without the man of flesh (nor without the four Mayan God-men).

The third origin story is about Chactajal, the *hacienda* property of the Argüellos for several generations. Landowners in Chiapas generally oppose the laws being brought forward by Cárdenas' administration, but some like Girl's father are willing to half comply with them for appearances and to avoid an Indigenous rebellion. César decides to settle for the season with the entire family in Chactajal. This means that Girl must leave Nana, who cannot come to Chactajal because her former neighbors and family reject her, as she had left her Indigenous community to go work and live with *ladinos* in Comitán (19). Right before the family leaves, Girl finds a notebook in her father's study. The study is both a private and a forbidden space for Girl, but since Nana is busy toasting coffee no one is watching her. The study is filled with yellowish and blurry portraits of old bearded-men and pale ladies with loose hair, there amongst her European lineage and past, she finds a small notebook with drawings. A voice that identifies as "the tribe's elder brother" (56), therefore Indigenous, tells the history of the first settlers of Chactajal, as well as how "they who were destined to come" arrived (56). Before the arrival of the Spanish there were omens of "drought and death" (56), then the elder brother talks about the suffering brought upon them by "men of Castile"(56), including the theft of their lands, death, rape, and forced work, as well as when the first Argüello came to take Chactajal. How the *casa grande* (big house) and a chapel were built by their hands, as well as the rest of the property. Everything from infrastructure to land boundaries, to cattle acquisition, to mahogany and cedar trees cut down to make furniture for the *casa grande*, to the introduction of new crops such as sugar cane, is described in detail, and which Argüello ordered each project is also noted (57-58). This tale concludes by saying that "'it is here, my younger brothers, that we meet again. In these words we are once more

joined together as in the beginning; just as many branches unite at the trunk of the silk-cotton tree[28]'" (58).

In the previous story we not only see how the Tzeltal tribe that lived in Chactajal was exploited by the Argüellos, or how their work and flesh built this *hacienda*, but we also see how history meets place. The detailed description of how Chactajal was transformed by social relations is palpable in how orders by different members of the Argüello family across time influenced the structure of the place, and with this the lives of Tzeltales. In this sense both the landowning family and Tzeltales who eventually worked for them are part of the place named Chactajal. The ending is quite telling and key, since for the elder it is in those words or story that the tribe is joined together as in the past and in the second section of the novel this past becomes present. A new tribe elder, Felipe, also writes an origin story, that of a school building to provide education for Indigenous children who live in the *hacienda*.

The family finally arrives at Chactajal after a three-day journey by foot and horse. That is, the father and Ernesto travel by horse, while the children and mother "in sedan chairs carried by Indians" (63). The first thing that César does is show the land to Ernesto, who will pose as teacher, but is also his nephew (illegitimate son of César's deceased brother) (53-54). The tour of the *hacienda* that César gives confirms the elder's story Girl had found, what the different members of the Argüello family did, and it also reveals that César needs this document written by an Indian in Spanish to "'prove how old our properties are, and their extent" (81). In this same sequence the reader grasps Chactajal via César's perception of the place. We learn how the space is divided. *Ladino* space is at the center of the plain in the *casa*

[28] Silk Cotton Tree or Ceiba Tree has a central place in Mayan and in other Indigenous and Afro-descendant cosmogonies. For different Mayans since their classic period (A.D. 250-900) it has been considered as a passage that allows spirits to go from one realm to another, and it is also a pillar that supports the world (Tareau et al. 129).

*grande*, shared space is near the house, this includes the chapel as both *ladinos* and Tzeltales go in there even if not at the same moments. In this chapel there is a statue of Our Lady of Health carved in wood and brought by an "Indian" on his back from Guatemala, which César claims is very miraculous (77). Farther away are the derelict huts where Indigenous workers live, which are as many as fifty but only twenty are inhabited, because as César explains "'illness is decimating the Indians'" (78). César also makes clear to Ernesto that he has raped Indigenous women in his *hacienda*, that many of their children are his, and that this is his right as landowner, he even advises Ernesto to do the same (79).

Then came the Graveyard Field, there they had found a grave with skeletons and potsherds (80). Further away are the cane field and mill, the latter is described as "the oldest type of crusher, the kind still turned by animals" and in case of need it can be turned by an "Indian" (85). Ernesto is unimpressed by the hacienda, yet César insists that it is the best one for miles around (85), he is proud of his lands, of being a landowner and of defending what he considers his. César's description of Chactajal acts as a mirror oral description of the same place and inhabitants by the tribe elder. The earlier presence of Tzeltales is acknowledged by César by mentioning the burial ground and the document which functions as deed. Violence is attested in his admittance of rape, as well as the death of many Indigenous workers he attributes to malaria or other diseases. In this sense both stories and descriptions of space, while holding different points of view, work to confirm and reinforce each other. Chactajal for César is a space that is rightfully his as well as that which inhabits it, like the workers, the women, etc.

Felipe, an Indigenous man also literate in Spanish language, now becomes the elder brother of the Tzeltal tribe, when he records a new origin story about building the school in a similar manner that the other tribe elder had recorded how Chactajal was built. The place they choose for the school is on top of a hill blessed by the sun and the stars, yet also

“because in its entrails under the earth we shall find the roots of a silk-cotton tree” (121). The Spanish version of the novel does not say this in the future tense, but in the present *hallamos*, that is, they found the roots of a Ceiba tree when removing the soil (Castellanos, “Balún Canán” 123). The Ceiba’s roots, their words, work, and knowledge is what again joins them together, just like in the beginning, and this was meant to happen as the Chactajal origin story had said earlier.

> ‘This is our house. Here the memory we have lost shall come to be like the maiden redeemed from the river’s rage. And she shall sit among us and teach us the doctrine. And we shall listen to her reverently. And our faces shall shine as when the dawn lays its light upon them’ (121).

The first origin story Nana tells is about losing memory and words, it is about a world-ending for the Mayans, and the following ones told by the first elder and Felipe, are about remembering how Chactajal and the school were built and what had happened to them as a tribe. The elders' stories are gestures to recover words, memory, knowledge, and community, and by recovering this the tribe can do the same with place. At the same time the school and Chactajal are the spatial center of conflict in the novel. Initially César is unwilling to fully comply with proper schooling by bringing an actual teacher and not Ernesto who was barely schooled himself (53). Following this Ernesto gets drunk and hits a child in school, when Felipe asks César to change the teacher, he responds that he will only do this after the sugar cane harvest which is about to start. Felipe is firm and believes that education must be provided “To obey the law” (170), the workers decide to go on strike, and César holds them at gunpoint to make them resume work on the harvest (178-179). In this sense Felipe is aligned with the governmental discourse of acculturation by education, not necessarily because he agrees with it, but perhaps because as another Indigenous worker says, his son will “be able to stand up for himself. They won’t deceive him that easy" (170). The clash here

is not one between Indigenous workers and *ladino* landowners, but rather between two discourses forwarded by *ladinos*, César as landowner defending primitive accumulation of in this case land, and Felipe who is defending the nation-state's dispositions of 'integration' of Indigenous population into *mestizo* economic and political system.

The last origin story I will go into comes right after the workers are forced to leave the strike, and it concerns Chactajal and the meanings of this land. The main difference of this story of Chactajal, is that in addition to humans it includes several earth-beings[29], as "other-than-human beings who participate in the life of those who call themselves *runakuna*, people" (de la Cadena "Earth-Beings" xxiv). In the case of de la Cadena's text she is referring specifically to Quechua individuals from the Andes, these are the *runakuna*. However, I will use the term earth-beings or *tirakuna* because it is how in *Balún Canán* these other-than-human entities are described, as beings with agency and in relation to humans. Chactajal means "The Place of Much Water" and it was named in their language by the first ones who met this land. The liquid voices of tributary rivers, that carry the name of the Jataté river, whose waters are one with the ocean, was also heard by the first ones (180). The tastes of the land were sensed by those first ones that named it, and those who first settled "in this land took stock of it as they might have done of a treasure" (181). This inventory or stock is then described in relation to the humans that favored from it, but also to how other-than-humans used it, such as animals and trees, including the Ceiba which was "keeping guard over the villagers" (181). Then the narrator describes how those who came later "baptized things differently" and "measured the land and fenced it" (181). "And they set their house on a hill treated kindly by the winds. And they put the chapel there, where they could see it. And for

[29] Marisol de la Cadena translates the Quechua Word *tirakuna*, which is a composite noun made of 'tierra' in Spanish or 'earth' in English and made plural with the suffix *kuna* ("Earth-Beings" xxiii).

the sugar-mill they measured out a generous distance which year after year the canefields spread and covered" (181-182).

The canefields bring the reader back to the present, where Indians are waving their machetes. Minutes later during the noon break, and in a "moment of perfect stillness" (182) a flame leaps and burns the fields and a large area of the land. The workers try to flee but César forces them to help put out the fire, nonetheless they manage to leave. Among this turmoil "All Chactajal was speaking now, speaking in a powerful, fear-inspiring voice, regaining its old supremacy under threat" (185). Both the story and the fire set that the supremacy is that of land, earth-beings, other-than-humans, and those first settlers of Chactajal, which evidently were not the Argüellos but the Tzeltales from the first Chactajal origin story. Ultimately the fire is implied to have been caused by one of the Indigenous workers, perhaps Felipe. This last story, in part temporarily solves the main conflict, as the Argüellos end up fleeing the *hacienda* and the land is never explicitly repossessed by them, thus it can be inferred that Tzeltales take it back. Additionally, it marks the importance of Chactajal and the different meanings that are given to it by its inhabitants (Indigenous, *ladinos*). The sum of origin stories in the novel both establish Chactajal as if it had static qualities and characteristics that shape its identity, yet at the same time they describe how this place has changed over time because of the human actors inhabiting it. The meanings of place are also relevant, because for the Argüellos it is a private property linked to family, yet also to personal wealth. Embedded in modernity and linked to economic forces in several scales from local to global (Gollnick 193). This meaning however in reality is not different from the one attributed by the state, as the final aim is to redistribute the land for it to be kept for agricultural use by Indigenous workers.

Meanwhile for Indigenous people the same place is linked to community, memory, to other-than-humans, and also to material well-being, as living in the land means also living off

the land. There are at least three sides of the conflict in the novel and not only two (Landowners, Nation State, and Tzetal Mayans in Chactajal). Yet two of the sides have similar objectives for the same place. As Massey points out, each side has an intention to stabilize a meaning of place ("Space" 5), its identity. Nonetheless, this meaning and identity which has both changed and remained over time is now again being fought over. In the current space-time envelope of the novel social relations are affected by systemic changes implemented by the government, who are in turn apparently questioning the status quo (ownership of the territory). Yet also identity, as this means that *ladinos* are not necessarily superior to Indigenous. However, the place remains heterogenous, not only because there are diverse actors populating it, but because to be able to attribute a specific identity and meaning to it the same actors need to account for others, just like the origin stories point out. The meaning of Chactajal is present in Indigenous origin stories in the past, as well as through memory and words in the present, as we see with Felipe's story of the school. As for the *mestizo* meaning of place it is in the end one and the same with the Indigenous one, because it uses the Tzeltal origin story of the *hacienda* to assert their own legal property (their place) (González 126). The battles for place and its identity in this novel are impossible essentially because of the shared origins of place that both the Argüellos and Tzeltales have in common in the story's present time. For this same reason personal identities are entangled in the novel similarly to identities of place. We can observe this in *Balún Canán* in the filial Nana-Girl relationship, which I will expand on in the next section.

### *Personal Identity and Identity of Place*

The Nana-Girl relationship in the first part of the novel is one where Girl looks to Nana for knowledge and to make sense of the world. Through Nana Girl can comprehend her place in the world and the social conflict she is witnessing. For instance, when Nana tells her

the origin story of the man of gold and the men of flesh, yet also when Girl is faced with situations that make her nervous. Due to the first-person Girl narrator, one of the canonical readings of the novel has been that of a narrative of female discovery (Lund 104). Relating to this it has also been read as how it emphasizes the discontinuous, changing, and contradictory process of self-knowledge and self-definition especially for women (Meléndez 343). While O'Connell instead focuses on a doubled perception of the world that Girl is exposed to by Nana and other Indigenous characters, which at many times contradicts what her parents and the *mestizo* world impose (90). This doubled perception of the world afforded to Girl by Nana is intrinsically linked to how place is perceived and understood in the novel. The different meanings given to place and the shared origin of place are in constant communication, miscommunication, and struggle, not necessarily because there are different perceptions of the same world, but because two meanings of place or two worlds co-exist in the same shared space. *Mestizo* perception which comes from the Western European world, and as explained by Bruno Latour, includes conceptions and divisions advanced by the Enlightenment and modernity, in which on one side is the human, which includes culture, the social, the political and the subject; and on the other nature, which is both science's object of study and everything that is outside the scope of the human (qtd in de la Cadena,"Cosmopolitics" 341-342). Whereas in the Indigenous world the mind/body dualism does not prevail, nor does the definitive separation between human and nature, or between the scientific and the spiritual (de la Cadena, "Cosmopolitics" 341-342). A blending of these worlds is constant within the book, and I argue this is what occurs in the Nana-Girl relationship.

Nana imparts knowledge of the Indigenous world, such as when Girl comes home to let her know that she went to the wind's homeland (26). Girl has gone with her parents and brother to a kite flying competition at Nicalococ Moor (25). There she focuses on how the

wind is free and bold, and remembers several instances where she has been in the company of the wind. She then "stands here with lowered eyes because (Nana's said so) that's the way humility looks at bigness" (26). For this she is admonished by her mother since she misses her brother's kite as he wins, yet she does not care.

> The moment we're back home I look for Nana to tell her the news. 'You know? Today I've met the wind.' She does not stop working. Thoughtful and unsmiling she goes on husking corn. But I know she's happy. 'That's good, child. Because your people possess Nine Guardians, and the wind is one' (26).

The knowledge Girl has, and the way she can start to see the world is not only deeply influenced by Nana, but also by the place where she lives. In the Spanish version of the book Nana's last line reads "'Eso es bueno, niña. Porque el viento es uno de los nueve guardianes de tu pueblo'" ("Balún Canán" 23). The word pueblo can refer to both town and people, and the name that the Mayans initially gave to Comitán is Balún Canán, which has several translations attributed to it, nine stars is one, yet it also translates to nine guardians (Comitán de las Flores). Nana is not from Comitán like Girl, but from Chactajal where the hacienda is, so, by guiding the Girl to know one of the guardians of her town and people she gives her access to the Indigenous world, and to a meaning of place that is also hers because she was born there. By using the word *pueblo*, she also suggests how place and people are entangled, and comments on the different names and meaning afforded to a place that Girl should know and recognize.

When Girl is without Nana this Indigenous world also has a way of seeping through via other interlocutors. Uncle David, who is a drunkard old man and relative of Zoraida, comes to the house but only finds the children present. He starts singing about how now because the *baldío* or free work performed by Indigenous people will be eliminated by law, everything will go to ruins and everyone, even the Girl's family, will become poor (26-27).

Mario says he does not want to be poor but a hunter like Uncle David, and so he teaches them a lesson about hunting the Quetzal bird for taxidermy and commercial purposes (28). Uncle David tells them where to find the bird, that only lives around Tziscao[30], and when Mario says it sounds easy enough, he replies "'It has its risks, […] Because Tziscao's the place where the lakes are of many colours, and that's where the Nine Guardians live'" (28). The Girl then asks "'Who are the Nine Guardians?'", and even though he first scolds her for being curious he then responds.

> 'The old people know, and that's why they call the place Balún-Canán. They give it that name when they talk among themselves. But we, little people, it's better we keep quiet. And you, Mario, when you go hunting, don't do as I did. Ask, find out things, because there are trees and orchids and birds that one ought to respect. The Indians have singled them out specially to appease the guardians' mouths. Don't touch them or they'll bring you bad luck. Nobody warned me about that when I went into the mountains of Tziscao for the first time' (28).

At this point Girl has just learned about the wind being one of the guardians, and now she wants to know more. Uncle David, although a drunk, poor, and otherwise an outcast in town, imparts valuable information he had lacked in his time to the children. Although minutes before and right after telling this story he is in fact complaining about the new laws that will prohibit the landowners from exploiting Indigenous workers. In this sense Girl is constantly exposed to duality and contradiction, and to the fact that for *mestizos* the same bird is valuable for its money and beauty, and for Tzeltales it is valuable in relation to the place it inhabits, in this case the Tziscao. It is unclear other than wind which are the rest of the

[30] Tziscao is part of an area where there are several lakes and lagoons in the State of Chiapas in the border with Guatemala, it is now a national park and a protected area (Comisión Nacional de Áreas Naturales Protegidas).

guardians, but we can assume by what Uncle David is telling that they are other earth-beings that should be respected. Thus, Girl's identity is constructed by the place she inhabits and she must navigate its several names and meanings.

### ***Private and public spaces***

In the novel public and private spaces are delineated and available depending on each individual's identity markers (class, age, gender, race). For instance, in houses there are clear divisions of spaces depending on gender and class, yet this also occurs in public spaces such as schools, markets, fairs, or rivers. To focus on how spatial organization of social relations within *Balún Canán* reflect tensions between discourse enacted in public and private spaces, and on how public discourse is contradicted by interactions in private spaces; I will first establish how each type of space is understood and divided within the novel, and then relate how tensions and contradictions develop between them. I will therefore subdivide this section into Private spaces, Public spaces, and thirdly Transgressions to Spaces which are limitations of mobility transgressed by either *mestizo* or Indigenous characters.

#### *Private Spaces*

Houses in Balún Canán provide the main sets for the story, within them the action takes place in rooms, kitchens, corridors, or huts which are a single room. Both the first and third sections develop in Comitán, and Girl is the narrator. She remains mostly in the Argüello house with Nana, either in the kitchen, internal corridors, or other spaces where servants perform their work. It is in these spaces where Nana tells Girl stories and lessons, but also where we first learn the point of view of Indigenous workers about the uprising that will soon happen in Chactajal. When Indigenous workers arrive from Chactajal bringing with them sacks of maize, beans and other other products grown in the farm, first they pay their

respects to the father and talk with him in Tzeltal about farm business, “They answer respectfully in words of one syllable, laughing briefly when they’re supposed to” (19). Girl wisely rushes to the kitchen where she will find out what this visit actually brings. Nana is heating coffee and says “‘They’ve brought bad news, like the black moths’” (19), she explains it is all witches’ business, and for proof she rises her *tzec* and shows her a “soft reddish wound disfiguring her knee” (19). She continues saying this was done to her because she has lived in their home and loves Girl and her family, and according to the law, “‘It’s wicked to love those that give orders and have possessions’” (19). Girl understands it is her father who gives orders and owns things, and she cannot bear this so takes refuge in the kitchen with Nana. Then she witnesses how Nana serves coffee to other Tzeltales, as if they were kings, but instead they are dirty and have no food (20).

> When she’s finished serving them, Nana sits down too. Solemnly she stretches both hands to the fire and holds them there a while. They talk, and it’s as if a circle had closed around them. I break in my suffering: ‘Nana, I’m cold’. She draws me to her lap, as she always has done ever since I was born. It is warm and tender, but it has a wound. A wound, and it’s we who’ve opened it (20).

In the prior scene we realize that it is in these private spaces that are inhabited mainly by servants, Indigenous, and children, where struggles and situations concerning the Indigenous side of the social conflict are openly discussed. When Indigenous workers talk to the father they answer with monosyllables and courteous laughter, what they say to him is handled strategically as not to disfavor them, since their livelihood is at stake. Whereas in the kitchen with Nana they talk “as if a circle had closed around them”, they are equals and are not being observed by *mestizos* other than Girl, who because of her age, gender, and closeness to Nana is granted access. This scene flags how identity markers such as age and gender are at times then more important than race and ethnicity.

Within private spaces attitudes and relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous characters are negotiated. *Mestiza* women use an ambivalent discourse to relate to Indigenous spirituality, myths, magic, knowledge and practices to make sense of their world, and in some cases to protect each other. Nonetheless, in the novel's public *mestizo* world these practices are not tolerated, specially not by regulatory institutions like the government, the Catholic Church, or what is considered to be rational and modern understandings of the world. One of the recurrent myths told to and by *mestiza* women in the novel is the *dzulúm,* which according to Nana means "a yearning to be dead" (24). This myth is initially told by Nana to Girl in the kitchen, and it is later discussed among *mestiza* women like Zoraida, Matilde, and Francisca (the last two are César's sisters and Girl's aunts).

The *dzulúm* is an animal that goes out at night and scares felines like lionesses and tigers, but also monkeys and cattle. The *dzulúm's* material form is unknown yet according to Nana male, "No one's ever seen him and lived to say. But I've a feeling in my bones he's handsome, for even educated people pay him tribute" (23). Educated people in the Spanish text is "gente de razón" or rational people ("Balún Canán" 19), which was both another way to refer to non-Indigenous persons in Chiapas (O'Connell 51), and of signaling the superiority of *mestizos* because of their Western rational worldmaking. These rational people paying tribute or believing in its power are mainly *mestiza* women, that is the *dzulúm* is only seen by *mestiza* women in the text.

The first woman is Angelica, an orphan who a long time ago had been adopted by Girl's grandfather and lived in Chactajal. Angelica, despite having many suitors did not notice them, after news that the *dzulúm* was nearby the farm she grew uneasy and was unable to find peace. The grandfather called a male healer to cure her and after speaking with Angelica in private leaves without saying a word. Angelica then wanders around the farm as if asking for help, but no one knew what to do until one day she went missing and was never

found. They said she had gone with the *dzulúm* (23-24). This story serves as a prelude and can only be fully understood until the second part of the novel, when Matilde arrives at Chactajal fleeing her's and Franciscas' farm, Palo María, after an Indigenous uprising. Francisca, who is the landowner there, had tortured and killed Indigenous servants who rebelled, had shut the house down, and one night was found beaten up at the bottom of a cliff. The rumor among the workers was that she had been taken by the *dzulúm*, and that she was alive because she had made a pact to serve and obey him. Francisca confirms her sighting to Matilde and becomes a witch and healer, for which she is feared by Indigenous servants and at the same time manages to retain the property (111-116). Matilde confides this only to Zoraida, and while she initially disregards it as "tales to scare the Indians" (112), she immediately believes her after Matilde tells her about a man that Francisca had warned about falling ill, who then ended up getting sick and Francisca had cured him with a drink (113).

Matilde, who starts living in Chactajal with the Argüellos, eventually becomes pregnant with Ernesto's child, she tries to kill herself and finally also falls ill. Zoraida then calls a healer as well. The healer is a *mestiza* woman who only interacts with Matilde, Zoraida, and Indigenous servants. During the process several medicinal herbs used by Indigenous people are given to Matilde by the healer, such as madre de cacao, rosemary, and chacgaj infusion. Finally Matilde tells the healer she is pregnant, she responds that she will help her and Matilde has an abortion (157-163). The reader cannot be certain if Zoraida is aware of the abortion, what is certain is that Zoraida, the healer, and Matilde are all performing practices and utilizing Indigenous medicinal and spiritual knowledge to find a cure for her ailment. All of these practices take place in private spaces within the house where men do not intervene, Ernesto even blames Zoraida and Matilde for "killing his child" (160). In addition, the *dzulúm i*n Angelica's and Matilde's stories is not only accepted as real and true by *mestiza* women, but it is used to explain situations that in the patriarchal society

they live in are unspeakable, such as premarital sex, rape, becoming pregnant out of wed, or having an abortion (Harris 691). Through the telling of this myth in gendered private spaces, mestiza women can communicate what is happening to them without putting themselves in danger, because they are certain it will be dismissed by men as foolishness or magical thinking.

After the fire in Chactajal, César sends Ernesto to deliver a letter describing the incidents to the municipal authorities. On his way there Ernesto is shot. After this Matilde flees away and disappears, and no one knows where she ends up. Only her sister Francisca later says that the *dzulúm* had taken her, to which César replies "that it is nonsense", and mocks Francisca for practicing witchcraft and preparing potions (205-206). At this moment Zoraida remains silent and the family leaves. For Francisca the *dzulúm* works as a liberating tool, by becoming a witch and living with the Tzeltales Francisca is navigating the ambiguous identities within *mestizaje*, she is both a *mestiza* who retains partial ownership of her land, while using the myth as a rite of passage to be closer to Indigenous society. It is unclear in the novel if the *dzulúm* has only negative connotations, in the beginning we know Nana thinks it might be handsome, yet the reader remains unaware of the nature of such being outside the three stories of *mestiza* women.

Eventually the family goes back to Comitán and César takes off to the state's capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, to find a way to get the land back through legal proceedings. The third part of the novel is set again in Comitán and Girl returns as the first-person narrator. An event that is crucial in this last section is a warning told by Nana to Zoraida, that the tribal elders of Chactajal have condemned Mario, the girl's brother, to death. Mario is the only son in the family and therefore the heir of Chactajal. The elders had all heard a voice in their dreams saying, "'May they not prosper or be perpetuated. May the bridge they have thrown into the future be broken'" (218). After listening to this story Zoraida hits Nana and tells her to leave

the house immediately, but she then becomes worried and obsessed with the warning. First, Zoraida believes that this spell against Mariowill not work because Indigenous people do not have power over *mestizos*, but another of Francisca's sister assures her that this is not the case, and that the proof is that Francisca herself is bewitched (223-225).

With this fear in mind Zoraida embarks on a series of rites, yet the only friend that Zoraida confides in to talk about the spell against her son is Amalia, who prepares both children for their First Communions, and helps her talk to a priest. However, the priest ends up admonishing Zoraida for not being a devout catholic, and all women for believing in "witchcraft and superstition" (233). Mario falls ill and a physician comes to visit him, he is unable to diagnose Mario properly because he does not have symptoms other than being tired and not having an appetite. The doctor says it is best to wait, and that it might be malaria or appendicitis. When Zoraida mentions the witches in Chactajal the doctor also dismisses her. After this, Zoraida and Amalia do a Tarot reading, force Mario to drink holy water, and build an altar to fight the spell, yet he does not recover, and in the end dies.

Zoraida initially refuses to consider that the spell Nana had talked about could be real, as she looks for help when her son gets sick the men she tells about the spell dismiss her. She never tells César because she knows he will not listen to her arguments either. Zoraida, out of fear of losing her son and her status (because only a man should inherit Chactajal), uses Catholicism to 'fight' a spell that was done by Indigenous witches. Hence, by doing this she gives credit to Chactajal elders' beliefs. Ironically the only friend who helps her out is Amalia, who is a devout catholic, and together they find ways to support and protect each other. Ultimately to make sense of what is happening to them they go against what is considered scientific or rational. They do this both by using catholic and other rites, and by firmly believing in the elder's dream. At the same time Zoraida is consumed by anger and hate towards all Tzeltales from Chactajal.

*Mestiza* women in the previous passages engage with indigeneity in an extremely utilitarian manner. They negate Indigeneity and know they are and should remain as far away from anything that signals it. It is only in private spaces and among each other that they come to terms with the possibility of not being what institutions like the state, church or the patriarchal system expects from them. In the worlds inhabited in *Balún Canán* performances of Indigeneity regarding healing practices and myths are enacted by *mestiza* women even if they are at odds with the Western world. For this they gain benefits, that is, they connect and help each other, but are also admonished by male figures of power as well as ashamed to show this side of them in public.

*Public Spaces*

In domestic private spaces mostly women, children, and Indigenous servants are present, yet when *mestizo* and Indigenous men bring news from outside such spaces become public. That is public discourse mostly governmental, but also that of the landowning class enters private spaces. At the Argüello house in Comitán news from the capital arrives with a friend of the family and fellow landowner, Jaime Rovelo. This scene occurs in the first section of the book, after Nana and Girl already know that conflict is coming, as they have been warned about it by Tzeltal workers from Chactajal and Uncle David. Comitán is an isolated place, it is both far from the capital of the country or any other large cities. It becomes especially isolated during the rainy season when the roads are closed due to mud and storms, and mail and newspapers from the capital get lost (43-44). However, Jaime Rovelo is able to get a letter from his son, from whom he first learns that "The Government has passed another decree against us", a law that mandates that farm owners "with more than five families of Indians in their service must provide" teaching facilities and pay for a rural

teacher (45). Zoraida becomes furious by this news, but César is certain that they can find a way out of this duty, just as they did before when the minimum wage was dictated (46).

In this space the children are present but are not considered capable of understanding. Nana is not there, and the Girl hopes she has not listened to anything because Zoraida has said horrible things about Indigenous people, but César quickly scorns her and she stops talking (47). In this private space turned public Zoraida is allowed to listen but not to give her opinions, especially not over other two men. In this scene public discourse from the capital which affects rural areas filtrates in private spaces. However, these laws, as César says, will have no real effect because farms are too distant from the capital, making it impossible for the government to monitor them. César is proved right, not only because of his ability to avoid the laws at least for a period of time, but because after the fire in Chactajal and Ernesto´s death, the only way he finds to recover his lands is by going to the capital of the State of Chiapas to abide by the governments laws of arbitration, and divide the land with Indigenous workers as per the government´s mandates (208). César's friend Jaime disagrees and does not think this strategy will work, but César is determined to get Chactajal back (209). In other words, for the law about rural *haciendas* to be exercised parties have to travel to the capital of the state, and not the other way around. In the end, César's trip to Tuxtla proves fruitless because the governor refuses to meet him. Jaime decides to return because he thinks officials in Tuxtla will not listen, and are only trying to get on the good side of functionaries higher up in the capital (220). Official government discourse and laws turn out to be meaningless not only for Indigenous people but also for *mestizos*. Moreover, while the education reform was dictated by the government, it is only checked upon by one municipal government inspector who tells Tzeltal workers, including Felipe, that they should open the school. However, the workers must figure out themselves how to get their *patron* to abide by the law.

The inspector arrives on the day of Our Lady of Health, which is the saint of the Chactajal chapel. This chapel is a public space where everyone should be allowed indistinct of their identity markers. Nonetheless, on this day, celebrated by both Indigenous workers and the *patrones*, there is a separation. Tzeltal women bring other images in addition to the Virgin's statue, "Effigies of more saints wrapped up like mummies in yards and yards of coarse cotton leaned against the wall or lay on the ground" (122). This day is one of loud communal grief for Tzeltales.

> Their single, communal voice became the voice of a whipped dog, of a cow that had been cruelly separated from its calf. They shouted aloud for help. In their own dialect, liberally interspersed with Spanish words, they complained of hunger, sickness, and of the ambushes the sorcerers laid for them. Little by little the voices were overcome with exhaustion and faded off into a hoarse murmur, as of water trickling among stones (122).

The *patrones*, especially Zoraida, become very uncomfortable with the ritual, and complains to César because this had been "condemned and labelled idolatrous" by the priest, and before the workers would do it in the forest. Yet César responds that this is something they must put up with now because the situation has changed (123-124). Zoraida and César are both afraid of a potential uprising, of the unity among Indigenous workers, and perhaps also of how many they are. They know that the grief they are witnessing has been inflicted by them, and are scared that Tzeltales might take revenge. This ceremony, their prayers, laments, and supplications let out the sufferings and sorrows of Indigenous women, while men get drunk and cry until they fall unconscious (123). Although, when César and the family attend the prayers in the same chapel, "there would be no trace of the events of the days before. The effigies wrapped in their coarse cotton would have been put away once more in the corners where they lived the year round" (123).

Even if the chapel is a public space it has to be prepared for *mestizo patrones*, and it is only permitted for Indigenous people to use it as they please on certain days that the Catholic Church states, like the festivities of Our Lady of Health. However, on these days the same space becomes Indigenous and even private. Only two *mestizos* transgress it, Matilde who is praying and manages to overhear what the government inspector says to Tzeltales in the Chapel. "'He told them . . . he told them they haven't a boss any more. That they own the ranch, that they're not obliged to work for anyone. And he made them a sign, raising his clenched fist'" (131). With this César's and Zoraida's biggest fear becomes real, and it is after this visit that Felipe and the other Indigenous workers demand and act to obtain their education rights. Later they also decide to take over the land. Still, if the land is not properly demarcated, and title deeds are not given out by the authorities, nothing legally prevents anyone else from taking it from the Tzeltales. In this sense the government is sending a public message stating their objectives to be equal rights and land distribution for all citizens, and at the same time they are allowing the powerful landowning class to half comply with laws. Therefore, the government exposes Indigenous workers not only to violence and lack of protection but to take measures such as setting fire to Chactajal.

When spaces turn public, like when Jaime Rovelo arrives at the house in Comitán, as readers we already have in-depth knowledge of the social conflict at hand via private spaces, such as when Indigenous workers from Chactajal talk in the kitchen. The public/private divide in this novel then is of no consequence, as the developing social conflict is already within the house in the form of racial, gender, and class divisions. Whereas public discourse enacted by the government enters private spaces and localities, which in turn are embedded in national and global scales (Massey "Space" 9). In the case of the inspectors' visit to Chactajal, it is an empty gesture to appear as if the government is invested in enforcing the law, yet nor the teacher nor the curriculum are regulated, allowing César to create a situation

in which he seems to be a law-abiding landowner, at least (he thought), until the harvest was finished. This strategy is proved fruitless, and by the end of the book it is unclear what will happen with the land for both the landowning family and Indigenous workers. While in public the government is at odds with the landowners and defends Indigenous workers, in private we learn that it is doing neither. Thus, public spaces function to obscure political intentions and reality.

*Transgressions to space*

According to Westphal's geocritical theory, space should be understood in its heterogeneity (37), in its ability to be fragmented and open. But since it also can be subject to homogenizing forces (40), transgressions of space are common. Transgressions to space cross boundaries from norms, violate physical limits or the law itself (42).

> The intersection, or contact zone between social actors, is regulated by explicit rules. These rules assume a shared rhythm, a spatiotemporal correlation. In the absence of a common rhythm, transgression is inevitable. In certain cases, transgression is massive, becoming a deliberate intrusion—hence war, a vast state transgression. Transgression is disparate, perhaps by definition. But it also meets a minimum set of defining criteria. Hence, there can be no transgression without the contravention of a code or rite (Westphal 43).

In *Balún Canán* spaces are not only gendered but access is also granted depending on class, race, and in cases also age. In the novel, transgressions to space are crucial and mark the increasing social conflict, yet also contradict the alleged difference between Indigenous and *mestizos*. I want to discuss transgressions to space not only as part of the Indigenous uprising, but also minding how they are enacted and received by characters depending on their identity markers.

The first transgression is at a town fair Girl goes to with Nana in Comitán. While waiting in line to ride the Ferris Wheel an Indigenous man speaks Castilla or Spanish, and *mestizos* complain and insult him for daring to speak their language and ride with them. The man does not respond. During the ride the safety bar on the man's stool is unfastened and he almost falls, but manages to hold on until the attendant switches the Wheel off. He then climbs down and asks the attendant why he had stopped, "'How do you mean, why? Because you fell and you'd have been killed, you damfool Indian'" (41). The Indian looks at him offended and grinds his teeth. "'I didn't fall. I unfixed the stick. I like riding it that way best.'" (41). After this answer the crowd starts mocking the man, still he asks to ride again as he pleases and pays for another ticket. Nana drags Girl as she protests, "I want to ask her why, but the question sticks in my throat when I see that her eyes are cloudy with tears" (41). There are two transgressions occurring here, first a physical one as the man enters a space as equal to *mestizos,* the second one is his use of the Spanish language, as Indigenous people are not allowed to speak it unless they are first addressed by a *mestizo* in the same language (40). Language here acts as an identity marker. For the Indigenous man the fact that he speaks Spanish, and that he has money to pay for the ride allows him to temporarily fluctuate towards being *mestizo*. While for *mestizos,* this disrespect they allude to is in reality a threat to their identity, as the norms of space are being disrupted and an Indigenous person can be equal to them.

Indigenous persons are not welcomed in this public and playful space, at least not as people who want to enjoy themselves, but only as servants or workers like Nana. It is not clear whether the Indigenous man in the episode challenges *mestizos* to avoid further humiliation, or because he would be humiliated either way. Nana feels his humiliation as her own, and knows that she is only welcome there as a caregiver and because she is with Girl. In addition, Girl understands the humiliation, and when she sees Nana crying she stops arguing

about staying and knows exactly why Nana is hurt. This transgression also marks an intimate moment of empathy of Girl towards Nana, at the same time it shows the lack of common grounds between *mestizos* and Indigenous in Comitán. It is impossible for *mestizos* to find another explanation for the Indigenous man's actions other than foolishness (40-41).

There are also transgressions by *mestizos* to Indigenous spaces where they are not welcome. On the road to Chactajal it starts raining and the Argüellos and their servants need to stop and find shelter for the evening at a small Indigenous village. César asks a man who seems to be the owner of a large house if he and his party can spend the night, he offers him some coins. Yet, "The Indian has understood our plight but doesn't want to help. In spite of what he sees, he goes on flatly refusing with his sad, absent, expressionless face" (64). The description of the Indian's face as both sad and expressionless given through the eyes of Girl signals both contradiction and lack of understanding. A mystery that is often repeated within the novel, of Indigenous people's actions and words being inaccessible for *mestizos'* 'rational' ways. While the incident is not further described, we know that Indigenous villagers do not want these strange people there, even if offered money they refuse out of distrust or simply not wanting to look after them at such late hours. Because this is what the exchange represents, an offer to pay for hospitality and service after most likely a hard day's work. The party must then continue under the rain.

While at the house in Chactajal, the only domestic space where Indigenous farm workers are allowed is the veranda, which is practically outside. Here they come to pay their respects to César, and give their reports on the day's work while César offers them a smoke. It is a ritual that is especially important to César because of the government's new dispositions and because, "Loyalty is worth a lot these days when set against the betrayal of some of the others" (93). Whereas for Zoraida and Ernesto this moment is uncomfortable because they do not understand the language, and Zoraida even tells Ernesto that "They're so

uncouth they're incapable of learning Spanish " (94). On that same evening during dinner Felipe enters the house and does not bow. When César speaks to him in Tzeltal he replies in Spanish, "'I didn't come alone. My comrades are waiting on the veranda'" (95). Zoraida is irritated by Felipe's actions and thinks to herself.

> What disrespect is this? A low Indian presuming first to burst in without leave to where they are sitting, and then to be speaking in Spanish! And using such words as 'comrades', words that not even César, for all he's been educated abroad, is accustomed to use (96).

César however reacts calmly, and when Felipe asks him and Ernesto when the school will be opening as per the new law, César responds that he's brought the teacher and the rest is up to them. Felipe replies he will talk to his comrades to decide on this issue. Zoraida deems Indigenous people to be uncultured and incapable of learning Spanish, and at the same time when an Indigenous man speaks it correctly she is outraged. Felipe and the rest of the workers are transgressing this domestic space reserved for *mestizos* and Indigenous house servants, and they are questioning the inequality and demanding access to education. They want their children to go to school because they want them to be able to enter the nation-state system, and to speak Spanish like *mestizo* children. On this occasion Zoraida as a woman cannot react, she must only follow what her husband does, however she does not agree with how César handles the situation. She wants him to be despotic and to eliminate the insurrection at its roots.

Chronologically this is the first time the school is brought up by Indigenous workers, and the first time we meet Felipe. Felipe had worked in plantations at Tapachula, near the border with Guatemala, where he learned to read and write in Spanish and had met the President Lázaro Cárdenas. After the meeting with César, Felipe and the others have an assembly in which he tells them that in Tapachula he had learned Indigenous are equal to

whites, and that President Cárdenas will return their lands and wants them to receive schooling (99-100). When the others ask who this man is and whether he has power, Felipe answers, "'He has more power than the Argüellos and the owners of all the farms around'" (100). However, when they ask where this President is and Felipe answers Mexico City, they find it a place too far away from their locality for this to be feasible, and some of the Indigenous workers become afraid of the *patrones* response because they are closer. Felipe then pushes them to accept his decision to build the school by saying that the *patrones* already know who they are, since they saw them in the veranda while he talked inside with César, so it is now best to just face them. Felipe adds that they are more and have the law on their side (101-102). In this private Indigenous space held outside Felipe hut, it is highlighted that it was them, Tzeltales, who built Chactajal in the first place, even if with the *patrones* money and will, and that this should not be forgotten by them, nor should their customs and history.

Felipe's transgression at the Chactajal house marks the beginning of the conflict in the *hacienda*. This transgression is like the Ferris Wheel one, for Zoraida it causes anger and a threat. While César, even if feeling uneasy, decides to bargain with the Indigenous workers believing they are unable of political organization. While in the private Indigenous space, we learn what the workers' fears are related first to the farm's distance from governmental institutions, and second their general distrust of *mestizos*. What drives the workers to claim their rights, is in part Felipe's political discourse, but also the fact that they feel entitled to Chactajal, not only because it was their family's land before the colonial period, but also during and after, as they had worked to build the *hacienda*.

Finally, not only private household spaces in Chactajal are reserved for *mestizos*, but also public places like the river are not meant to be shared with Indigenous people. While Zoraida, Matilde, the children, and a servant are bathing, a group of Indigenous boys arrive

and dive into the river. The boys are scared at first because Zoraida stares at them in contempt, but then they all dive in and start playing in the water. Zoraida makes everyone leave because she claims the boys have dirtied their pool, and later tells César the children had stripped naked in front of them, insulted them, and forced them to leave the river (145-146). Zoraida relates Indigeneity with dirt and is also afraid to get contaminated by it, thus she is unable to stand in or share the same space. Likewise, she is scandalized when the Indigenous boys speak or share her language, and when they do not mark a symbolic space of respect in relation to her. This last transgression marks how joy or pleasure is not allowed to be shared between ethnic groups, and neither are bodies permitted to co-exist during a routine activity like bathing. Such spatial transgressions are feared on the one hand because they allow doubt to the idea that *mestizos* are not equal to Indigenous, as in that they can learn a language, have fun, bathe, or want education. On the other hand, spatial separations are in fact separations of social relations, of identity markers that denote access to land, lineage related to blood, culture, and language; all factors that provide economic advantages that landlords are fighting to maintain.

Throughout this chapter I have argued that stories of origins of place, either as narration or intertexts, portray how social conflict is related to place, specifically to a shared origin of place by both ethnic groups in *Balún Canán*. These origin stories are directly related to different meanings and identities of place afforded by its diverse actors. Because land is at stake in legal terms (agrarian reform), and in symbolic ones (identity of the place), social conflict can be read as attempts to change or stabilize the meaning of a place. Yet, the shared origins of Chactajal that both *mestizos* and Indigenous have complicates the resolution.

Additionally, cultural distinctions between public and private spaces become irrelevant because of the malleability of the latter, which both become public and reveal public's discourse inaction or deceit. Furthermore, transgressions to space by either ethnic

group relate how strict spatial limitations established since colonial times have a consequence in the current space-time envelope the novel is embedded in. Moreover, they play a role in how two groups of people who have co-existed in the same place for hundreds of years are still incapable of finding common ground or recognition. In the following chapter I will analyze Castellanos second *indigenista* novel, and advance on how private and public spaces work within the logic of *mestizaje*, as well as how actors are not only able to transgress space, but their identity fluctuates between being closer to whiteness or Indigeneity depending on place.

## Chapter 3: Oficio de Tinieblas

This second novel by Castellanos also marks the end of her literary *indigenista* period, after which she continued to explore other subjects and urban spaces in both her narrative and poetry. This novel differs from *Balún Canán* in its omniscient narrator and in that in terms of places it has a larger scope. The action develops mainly in Ciudad Real where the *mestizo/ladino* community lives, and San Juan de Chamula were Indigenous religious and political leaders live, yet also in the rest of the Chiapas highlands (O'Connell 136), as well as in the coastal lands of the same state. The story is that of a failed Indigenous uprising told chronologically and in a mythical tone portraying what occurs within both ethnic communities (*ladino*[31] and Indigenous) (O'Connell 136).

Uprisings like this had in fact occurred in Chiapas in the past, one in 1712, and the one that the novel was based on took place between 1867 and 1870 (O'Connell 133). These revolts took the form of "what anthropologists call a 'revitalization movement'" (O'Connell 133), which Anthony Wallace defines as "'a deliberate, organized, conscious effort by members of society to construct a more satisfying culture'" (qtd. in O'Connell 134). Efforts like the ones narrated in the novel according to anthropologist Victoria Bricker are attempts to reinterpret the Catholic cult and symbols, which had already been forced on Indigenous people by the Spanish (qtd in O'Connell 134). However, these efforts were not only linked to spirituality, but also challenging the Catholic Church's hierarchy, as well as caused by the "economic misery and exploitation" by hands of the clergy, civil officials (O'Connell 134), landowning classes and other lower-class *ladinos*.

In this chapter I will focus first on how it is in private spaces and conversations that the novel's plot is moved forward. While the role of the government's public discourse is not only less important than what occurs in private spaces, but also not as contradictory as it

[31] Throughout this thesis as explained earlier I am using the terms *ladino* and *mestizo* as synonyms.

seems than that of the landowning classes. Moreover, I will read how identity fluctuates for both Indigenous and *mestizo* characters depending on place, making this malleability key in how either ethnic group relates to the other's identity.

***Private spaces as plot triggers and the role of public space***

According to sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, in the postcolonial condition words in public spaces function to obscure rather than to name reality. This was particularly evident when newly born Latin American nation states had to adopt equalitarian ideologies to construct citizenship, however, such ideologies had no effect on Indigenous and non-white populations and their rights, making public discourse into "forms of not saying" (Rivera Cusicanqui, "Ch'ixinakax" 19-20). The above assertion becomes transparent in *Oficio de Tinieblas* where there are three main places, Ciudad Real, San Juan Chamula, and Tzajal-hemel. In Ciudad Real public spaces such as the Bishopric, the Municipal Palace, churches, a party, and exterior locations within the city inhabit the universe of words unsaid. Of beliefs in racial, class, and other hierarchies that are known and embedded in the everyday but need not be mentioned to be enacted. In Chamula public spaces such as political offices like the Municipal´s Council Oath Room, and religious offices like the Church of San Juan, or exterior spaces like the town´s main square (all mainly Indigenous), are also ambivalent; in the sense that what is said among Tzotziles in such spaces is more open and honest than when *mestizos* are present. Whereas in Tzajal-hemel most spaces are private family huts, yet there is one public space that throughout the plot turns into a geographical site or place. It is a cave where stone idols are found by Catalina, and are eventually worshiped by Tzotziles. This cave when turned into a public space remains only Indigenous. In the novel public spaces and decisions taken in them are for the most part in contradiction to what characters are planning

and advancing with their actions, which is only revealed through conversations in private spaces.

I will go through the plot of the novel via each of the places mentioned above and read how it is advanced within them. Everything starts with the origin story of the town of San Juan Chamula, a God, San Juan, the Guarantor paused at the valley of Chamula and decided he should be worshiped in this place. He wanted his temple to be white and so he turned white sheep into stones to send a message to Tzotziles or Bat People, but they were unable to interpret this message. Other men had to come from "another world" (1), yet again did not fully understand the mystery of the petrified sheep. "They understood only the command that work be done. So, they with their heads and Indians with their hands began to construct a church" (2). Although this could only finally happen with San Juan Guarantor's help as he had to push the stones himself for the men to build it with the ones he had intended them to. "The building is white, as San Juan Guarantor wanted. In the air consecrated by its vault resound the prayers and chants of the Caxlán[32], the pleas and laments of the Indians" (2). Then Castellanos describes a series of saints that are important to both the Catholic and Indigenous rites, as for instance "San Jerónimo, with a tiger in his belly, the secret protector of brujos" (2). "These, it is said, are the things that have taken place since the beginning. It is no lie. There are witnesses. All of it can be read in the three arches of the church portal, where the sun takes its leave of the valley" (2).

The above introduction portrays how the town of Chamula and its church building are spaces of interconnection, here there are literal marks not only of Catholic religion and the Spanish Conquest, but also of the Indigenous part in this common history (O'Connell 144). This town is then described, at its center is the Church, and around it three neighborhoods where the leading Indigenous men live fulfilling their political and religious functions for

[32] How Indigenous Mayans would refer to non-Indigenous whether *ladinos* or white Europeans.

twelve months. They must pay worship to Catholic saints and to the father sun (2-3). This initial description of the place points to a syncretic interaction at work, similar to the scene of the chapel in *Balún Canán.* But in this case, it is official, as these positions held by Indigenous men have political importance, yet religious servers also hold power and must command and assist Catholic Church celebrations. A power struggle between what is political or business of the State, and what is spiritual or business of the Church is at play at both the Indigenous town of Chamula and the *ladino* town of Ciudad Real. For instance, Pedro González Winiktón, who is a judge, "took his oath before the cross in the portal of the church of San Juan" (3). While his wife Catalina Díaz Puiljá is a weaver and an *ilol* or shaman, who are "considered to be acting as lawyers for the defense, representing their clients before the tutelary gods" (Laughlin 59). She became an *ilol* because she was unable to get pregnant, and while searching and consulting elders, diviners, and brujos she became "one of those who dare to gaze on the face of mystery" (5). Catalina goes to Ciudad Real, called Jobel in Tzotzil, with other women to sell provisions and merchandise. On their way there they are attacked by a group of *atajadoras*[33], and only one Indigenous woman, Marcela Gómez Oso, escapes with her merchandise and manages to reach Ciudad Real.

Ciudad Real is a place that makes Marcela dizzy, the people and their "strange language" confuses her. When she goes there, she normally gets swindled because she cannot understand or speak Spanish well, "Sometimes the servants took her to their quarters. Then there were the cruel jokes, and an unbearable dickering that Marcela barely understood but that flustered her and made her tremble like a trapped bird" (9). Entering *ladino* houses is a danger for Marcela, she feels uncomfortable in this town especially in private spaces where house servants, most likely also Indigenous, can harm her. As Massey points out, solidarity is

[33] *Mestiza* women who make a living by robbing Indigenous women.

not developed between women of similar ethnicities or classes because they do not share the same spaces in a safe environment (“Space” 178). Instead, when Indigenous women leave their villages to work as servants in *ladino* towns they become isolated, and inhabit a dangerous space where both *ladinos* and Indigenous could potentially hurt them. Yet when Doña Mercedes Solórzano speaks to Marcela in Tzotzil about buying her merchandise she relaxes a little. However, it turns out to be a trick for Don Leonardo Cifuentes, a landowner and prominent citizen of Ciudad Real, to rape her. Mercedes' house is in front of Leonardo's, and his wife Isabel Zebadúa realizes something has happened, because when Marcela leaves she does not accept the money and breaks the pitchers she was selling. When Marcela manages to return to her group, Felipa, her mother, scolds her for having been robbed and arriving late. Catalina tells Felipa that Marcela should come and live with her and Pedro because she is no longer able to handle her. As *ilol* Catalina is respected, she realizes what had happened to Marcela and is able to explain it to her later at her home. This is the first event that pushes the Indigenous insurrection. This event causes Pedro to be reminded that in the past he had witnessed his sister being sexually assaulted by a *caxlán,* and that it was a search for justice for his sister that drove him to become a judge in the first place. Eventually this search materializes for him in another desire and need, that of land and vengeance. Moreover, Marcela becomes pregnant, and this child, Domingo Díaz Puiljá, is born during an eclipse.

Leonardo’s wife, Isabel, is aware of “her husband’s passing adventures”, however now that he starts pursuing Julia Acevedo, who everyone in town calles La Alazana (Chestnut), she becomes jealous. La Alazana comes from Mexico City and is the new object of interest for both men and women in Ciudad Real. La Alazana is married to Fernando Ulloa, an Engineer and government official. They had just moved to Ciudad Real because he has the task of enforcing new agrarian reforms in the region, and providing “native

communities with lands and modify the boundaries of the haciendas" (140). Pursuing La Alazana for Leonardo is a trickier business to accomplish, and so he sends gifts to her via Doña Mercedes (his assistant). One of the gifts is a shawl embroidered in Guatemala, who she promises to wear at a party Leonardo is giving at his house. This party is not approved by Isabel, as she knows it is an excuse for Leonardo to meet La Alazana, although Leonardo assures her he is throwing the party to be in good standing with everyone in Ciudad Real due to his political ambitions. Leonardo, despite having money, is not fully accepted in Ciudad Real, since he does not belong to the same social class as his wife. He was adopted by Isabel's ex-husband parents, who had died in a mysterious accident involving Leonardo's pistol. Shortly after the ex-husband's death, Isabel married Leonardo, and Idolina, her daughter resented her for this. Idolina blamed her mother and stepfather for her father's death and had since then remained bedridden, faking a chronic illness that the doctors could never pinpoint. The only one who accompanies her all day is her Indigenous nana, Teresa. Idolina is extremely intrigued by the party and wants to attend, since she has been secretly learning to walk again with the help of her Nana. They then decide that it is safer to observe the party from the attic.

The party is a grand and public event, all of "Ciudad Real's finest families" are present (63). The attendees are from different social classes, the more respectable ones are the families with lineage who are dressed more conservatively, while those who wear colorful shoes are the newly rich. Then there are the priests conversing mostly with "spinsters, beyond all hope by now", married women who force their husbands to pay tithes to the church, and "timid men who were uncomfortable with the crude expressions and manners of the other men and incapable of approaching the eligible women" (83-84). In this event we witness the city's social configurations, how space is inhabited and divided, and how identity markers determine who people speak to. In this party groups are split according

to class, yet also to sexuality, for both men who are not interested in approaching eligible women, and single and married women are relegated to be around the priests, who are theoretically celibate. Sexuality is not only exclusively heterosexual, but also only available depending on age and marital status, as married women are not considered sexual beings. At the same time the only Indigenous people present at the party are the servants including Teresa, the Nana, who is with Idolina when she meets La Alazana. La Alazana introduces herself as "Mexicana" or from the Capital. Idolina asks her not to say anything about seeing her walk, and La Alazana promises not to because they are now friends. La Alazana goes down to the party and Idolina sees the encounter between her and Leonardo and suspects that there is something between them. La Alazana is a woman who, coming from the capital city, is regarded as freer. Even her nickname, which refers both to her hair color and style, is one that compares her to an animal with ample mobility. As urban spaces and metropolitan life afford mobility for women which throws a threat to patriarchal controls (Massey, “Space” 180).

Meanwhile after being sexually abused Marcela has had no other choice than to marry Lorenzo, Catalina’s brother, whose first wife had left him because he was impotent. After learning she is pregnant Marcela decides to have the baby because Catalina promises to care for him. Although, when he is born, she rejects her son because while his “skin was a sturdy color and he had the tenacious almond-shaped eyes of her race […] the hair was curly, like a caxlán’s” (40). Eventually the family must go back to Tzajal-hemel, their village, because Pedro's period as judge ends. That and the following year they have bad harvests, and because now they also have Marcela and Domingo living with them, Pedro is forced to go work with other Indigenous men to coffee plantations near Tapachula. There he learns Spanish and meets President Lázaro Cárdenas, just like Felipe in *Balún Canán*. However, in

this novel the trip and visit are fully narrated and not set as a flashback, I will go into these scenes in detail in the following section on Identity Fluctuations.

After Pedro returns to Tzajal-hemel from Tapachula two *ladinos* arrive in town, one is the new priest from Ciudad Real, Manuel Mandujano, who was sent there by the Chiapas Archbishop. The other is Fernando Ulloa, who Leonardo Cifuentes had previously tried to bribe in representation of the rest of Ciudad Real's landowners. This last event takes place at Leonardo's *hacienda*, and it is a strategic private meeting which Leonardo sets up. There he asks Fernando to help landowners "maintain order" and be flexible with the agrarian legislation. Fernando refuses, and after this meeting he is even more determined than before to continue his course and to, as he calls it, give Indians education and "a sense of responsibility", because they will now be their own *patrones* (142). In this conversation Leonardo recalls past Caste Wars in Yucatán and Chiapas, and tells Fernando they are concerned that this could occur again. Following this encounter Fernando plans a trip to Chamula not only to determine the *haciendas'* boundaries, but to investigate the titles that Tzotziles have of their villages and land, and reinstate their property (175). When Fernando arrives in San José de Chamula he first meets with the leaders or *principales* in the Municipal Council (*Cuarto de Juramento del Cabildo Municipal*). Most of the *principales* are elderly men, but there are also other younger ones like Pedro González Winiktón who acts as interpreter.

> He said that he was a friend to the Indians and that he had come from very far with a request from the president of the Republic that they be given back the ownership of their lands. When each man is the owner of his own plot of land it will be necessary for all men to work, to bring in good harvests, and to take them to sell in the markets (176).

This passage describes what the state, as Fernando is speaking as representative of the President of the Republic, wants Indigenous people to do with the land when returned to them. Coincidently this is also what the landowners consider they are already doing with the same land, and what they deem makes them the rightful owners and not Tzotziles. As Leonardo had previously explained to Fernando,

> When we came to this region, there was nothing but uncultivated land, forests that had been cut down and burned-off clearings. The Indians couldn't do anything else with the land during all the centuries they were its owners. We were the ones, with our sweat, our effort, who made this place into fertile and productive property. Tell me, in all fairness who has property rights here, us or them? And it's not just a question of justice, but of the best use of the land;" (142).

Thus, both the landowners and revolutionary government want the land to be productive, to enter the local and consequently global economic market. Although this is not necessarily what the Indigenous have in mind they also want their land back, not only because it would free them of their debts to *ladino* lessors, but because they would be able to give their families a permanent place to live in, and not be in danger of becoming exiled. For Winiktón this also means that justice has arrived, "that the President of the Republic had promised to come, strip the patrons of their privileges and give the Indians satisfaction for all the offenses they had endured, all the humiliations, all the outrages" (177). It is this promise that draws him to Fernando. Justice here is what both Winiktón and Leonardo are seeking, and they both want to persuade Fernando who is acting as mediator in this case. Nevertheless, Fernando represents the growing nation-state and its developmental objectives, and thinks that because landowners are keeping "vast expanses of land" fallow and rent them at scandalous prices, the duty of the state is give that land to "the campesino, the Indian, those who sow and will share their harvest with all" (169). There are diverse interests at play here,

the state's and landowners' objective is wealth and prosperity (for themselves and the nation). Winiktón's objectives are more comprehensive, and they also include seeking other types of social justice, yet all actors are attaching the conflict to land and place.

Fernando also asks the *principales* for their deeds to the land which had been signed at some point during colonial times by The King of Spain (142). Tzotzil men are suspicious of Fernando's intentions but tell him they will look for the papers, and that they can spend the night in that room "since it was the place the Chamula authorities had designated for the town's guests" (177). Fernando is surprised but has no other choice than to sleep there with César, his assistant. He is supposed to take the large wooden table and César the pine needle rug. This room is a meeting space, but because they are *ladinos* and government officials this is where they should be according to the leaders. Moreover, as *ladinos* they are not trusted, so it is wise of the leaders to leave them somewhere they can be watched. Pedro then offers to be his guide and takes him to several homes and fields where Indigenous people live, work, and pay rent for the land to *mestizos*. Domingo Díaz Puiljá, who is now ten years old, accompanies them. Fernando can only enter Indigenous homes and private spaces because he is with Pedro, only like this can he be trusted. Fernando starts to listen to their complaints and makes promises to speak to *ladino* authorities, while warning them that they should not go beyond the law. Eventually Fernando triggers suspicion from Catalina who is now feeling alone and powerless again, because Domingo is growing up and as a man he becomes inseparable from Pedro. She does not appreciate that Pedro takes him with the *caxláns* (Fernando and César his assistant). She then announces that as *ilol* she has seen that these two *caxláns* will "bring harm to the people of the tribe", either denouncing the aguardiente distillers or selling information to ranchers or *enganchadores*[34] from Jobel (183). This is taken seriously and spreads all over town, Pedro dismisses it and he and Catalina argue,

[34] Middlemen who hire and exploit Indigenous men to work in haciendas far away from their villages.

because for Catalina it is only natural to distrust *ladinos*, while Pedro is determined to reclaim their land and gain justice by any means necessary.

It is the presence of the *caxláns* and Pedro's decision to partner with them that ultimately alienates Catalina, she feels unloved without her husband and Domingo who she considers her son. She enters an unstable mental state, starts having flashbacks of her childhood when she found a cave with stones whose form was "not fortuitous like that of other stones" (187). She manages to return to that cave and the three stones are still there. She wants to go out and shout to the world that she found the stones, as she believes that in worshiping them lies the answer, first to her loneliness, and second to regaining her powers as *ilol*. She must now tell everyone to worship these stone-Gods, and due to this discovery Tzajal-hemel gains relevance as a sacred place. It is now where Catalina and Pedro live and where the cave with the idols is located. Catalina, the *ilol*, becomes the leader of a cult of ancient gods that is visited by pilgrims from "the farthest reaches where Tzotzil is spoken" (203).

In the cave only Indigenous people can enter, even the objects inside must be made by Indigenous hands and never by *caxláns*. One object though which was previously owned by a *caxlán* is allowed, because it was made by Indigenous hands from Guatemala. It is La Alazana's shawl, which covers the idols' altar, and is permitted because "she is not a coleta[35], she is not from Ciudad Real", and because she is "wife of our protector and father Fernando Ulloa" (204). The idols' power does not reach Jobel or Ciudad Real but only the Chamula region. For Tzotziles following the idols represents both a return to the past, as they are ancient and forgotten Gods, and a promise of change, that "the time of adversity had reached

[35] The term coleto according to Edgard Sulca refers to a mestizo person who is a native of San Cristóbal de las Casas (Ciudad Real) and who has a "consanguineous continuity" in the city, that is, whose family has remained in the town for several generations. Frequently, *coletos* emphasize the existence of a European ancestor in their family, generally Spanish" (qtd. in Montaña Barbano et al. 184).

its end" (207). They will no longer be humiliated, there will be no more injustice, they will be free (208). The idols are statues carved in stone probably from pre-colonial or early colonial times, as César, Fernando's assistant, mentions he has seen similar stones in other places around the area (305).

When Pedro learns about the cave and Catalina's role, he becomes angry because he feels he has lost his wife, but eventually he too believes in the idols and starts to fear Catalina. For Pedro the Gods' words will become real through Fernando Ulloa's promises to restore their land. "We will be, from that moment, Indians with land, Indians equal to the Ladinos" (209). The cave goes from a private generic space, that is any cave as there are probably more in the area, to a specific geolocatable place, the cave where the idols lie which in the novel turns into a landmark (Westphal 5). This place is Catalina´s domain, where she is the center of attention of her family and people. In the same manner the village Tzajal-hemel gains importance among other Tzotil Indigenous villages in the region, and people travel there to see both the idols and Catalina. The fact that only Indigenous people and objects are allowed in there is also significant, and it is most likely due not only to spiritual reasons, but also to the fact that Tzotziles know this will be considered idolatry and condemned by *ladinos*.

At the same time a new priest, Manuel Mandujano, had arrived in Chamula, a *coleto*, who was sent there by the bishop of Chiapas Don Alfonso Cañaveral. Mandujano in Ciudad Real was running the San Diego Parish, which was in the outskirts of the city. There "The parishioners were primarily families of antique lineage, left little by little at the outskirts of the town by the expansion of more recent powers-that-be. Without any inheritance other than their names", as well as craftsmen who now lived in the same area (95-96). These two groups were Father Mandujano's audience, and they "were like oil and water" (96). He feels he has no influence over his parishioners, decides to become more energetic and begins to profit

from the double standard attitudes of *coletos* in dealing with *ladinos* and Indigenous. He takes advantage of their obsession with the past and with the customs of the place, and begins to criticize foreigners like Fernando Ulloa, as well as new governmental policies which according to him are unjust to *coletos*. The archbishop then decides to move him to another parish because his animosity could put their church on the spot at a time when, according to the bishop, they were being persecuted by the government. The Catholic Church is one of the institutions being ousted of its power. In colonial times in addition to religious doctrine and conversion of Indigenous inhabitants to Christianity, it was in charge of education and of teaching Spanish language. Moreover, the Church owned lands which were partly seized by the Mexican government in the early twentieth century (Schell 3). Thus, at this moment, it was unwise to use the parish's public space to challenge governmental policies, since Cárdenas' government was openly anticlerical, and in general had an antagonistic relationship with the Catholic Church (Meyer et al. 579-581). Although priests like Mandujano, did retain enough legitimacy to persuade Ciudad Real´s *ladinos* to be against the government.

At this point Mandujano has no other option than to accept the archbishop's decision. To further convince him Don Alfonso tells him that because Fernando Ulloa is there to distribute land to Tzotziles schools will soon open to teach them to speak Castilian, and this means that these "souls" will be taken away by the government. Consequently, it is their duty as Church to evangelize Indians, like the missionaries did during the early times of the Conquest. Mandujano is a *coleto* who despises Indigenous people, and is already planning his exit strategy from Chamula. This conversation is held in the dining room of the Bishopric, only between them. While Don Alfonso might be genuinely afraid of possible retaliation by the government because of Mandujano´s sermons, he is also trying to find ways to retain power within the Church, in this case within Indigenous population of the Chamula region.

This power struggle between religion and the state in the *mestizo* world is the reason the alleged uprising develops, as both Mandujano and Fernando are key elements in triggering it.

Don Alfonso had already warned Mandujano that there was going to be a certain amount of idolatry in Chamula, yet when he gets there he considers the Tzotils have gone too far. Firstly, Mandujano realizes that the Church´s statues have been mistreated "exposed to a destruction the impatient Indians accelerated with abuse" (109). Yet some images "had been treated differently, though Manuel would not have gone so far as to affirm that their fate was any better". It seemed to him that "There were hated figures and favored figures" (109).

> The Indians manifested their favor by swathing the sacred statue in rolls and rolls of fabric, producing an obesity that was increasingly out of proportion with the size of the body parts that remained uncovered […] The saints looked like enormous tortoises standing upright, with a tiny, timid human head emerging from the massive shell. And what to say about the adornments? Palm-leaf hats, tiny mirrors that scintillated among the profusion of fabric, small jicaras, diminutive clay vessels (109).

Secondly, his interactions with Xaw Ramírez Paciencia, the church's sacristan, frustrate him because he knows very little of the Church's doctrine, and he finds Xaw with the rest of the Tzotzil leaders having a pagan celebration at the San Juan Church. The San Juan Church and town is an Indigenous space and place and it had been without a priest for a while. During this time Xaw, who is also Tzotzil, had continued to perform some rituals like baptism and marriages. However, Xaw did not dare take anyone's confession, as "brujos were in charge of inquiring about sins and establishing the conditions for their forgiveness" (110). This public space is then used and governed by both Catholic and Indigenous spiritualities, and Mandujano is not satisfied with that situation because he must share his power quota with Indigenous leaders.

Thirdly, Mandunajo's sister recommends he talks to Xaw because he had seemed uneasy to her lately. Xaw confesses he has witnessed a cult in Tzajal-hemel led by an evil woman who is marked because is unable to have children. Mandujano is almost glad this is happening, and the next day goes to the village. When Mandujano irrupts in the cave he pushes Catalina violently and begins to give a sermon while grabbing the idols. He sheds the idol´s clothes and ornaments and sprays holy water on the stones and their followers. Everyone witnesses with fear what is happening but no one helps Catalina. Mandujano leaves "Tzajal-hemel with his conquered booty. No one opposed him when he dragged the idols out of the cave", and some even offered to carry them to Chamula and then to Ciudad Real (222). Mandujano arrives in Ciudad Real and tells the bishop the news, but he dismisses it as "Indian nonsense" and a matter to be solved between Tzotziles and the Church. However, Mandujano thinks it fit to warn the authorities as this could be the beginning of an uprising, and if they ignore it the government might think the Church is complicit. They call a meeting that takes place at the Bishopric among "Church dignitaries, civil servants and all the notables of Ciudad Real" (223), in which they debate whether to warn the authorities in the state capital or to imprison the "Indians". Leonardo Cifuentes recommends they should vote, realizing first that the images had come wrapped in La Alazana's shawl, which signals to him Fernando was involved, and second that this vote will most likely lean towards imprisonment of the cult leaders. For the participants it is unclear and matter of discussion whether the cult in Tzajal-hemel should be treated as business of the state or of the Church, what goes unquestioned is that for all parties (government, Church, and landowners) an Indigenous rebellion should be halted at all costs.

After the meeting at Ciudad Real Catalina and other women are captured, tied down, and taken by foot from Tzajal-hemel to Ciudad Real while the police burn and ransack their village. The women are received in town with hostility and are put to a trial. The trial is held

at the Municipal Palace in Spanish, first Xaw and Father Mandujano testify, then the women. The prosecutor leads the trial to prove that the idols and revival of ancient ceremonies was in fact a strategy planned by Fernando for Tzotziles to "rebel against the Ladinos of Ciudad Real" (229). The women are coerced to blame Catalina as responsible, and in the end they are all convicted. This issue is brought from a public space that belongs to the Church where it is regarded as idolatry, to the Municipal Palace where it transforms into an Indigenous political rebellion, which is the biggest fear of *coletos*. Nonetheless, the events that trigger the threat of an uprising for *ladinos* have been set in motion by themselves. First Leonardo rapes Marcela which causes her to go live with Catalina and have a child. For Pedro Winiktón this event not only brings back memories of past injustices, but he now has two more persons to feed at home, thus he goes to work at the coffee plantation where he learns Spanish and meets the President, which in the end makes him side with Fernando. Second, when both Fernando and Mandujano arrive in Chamula they enter and disrupt Indigenous spaces. Mandujano with violence, and Fernando whose intentions of helping Tzotziles have negative consequences like making Catalina feel threatened, and the *principales* to distrust him. Moreover, it is César, Fernando's assistant, who gives La Alazana's shawl to Catalina as a sign that Fernando has sympathy for their spiritual beliefs and for the idols. Yet, Fernando does not know this and instead he considers this rite a superstition (305-306). Finally, the imprisonment of the women, who because of the shawl are thought guilty of following Fernando's orders, are all situations created through *mestizo's* interactions and intents to harm, evangelize, or help Indigenous characters. Tzotzil's responses are varied, Winiktón is searching for justice in the shape of land, while Catalina seeks attention and love from her family and tribe by keeping her status as *ilol*. The cult's followers are searching for hope and a space of spiritual community, whereas Xaw betrays other Tzotziles because he believes,

after being threatened by Father Mandujano, that he and his people will be punished for such actions.

Fernando and Winiktón go to Tuxtla to ask the governor to interfere and the women are released from prison. When Catalina returns to Tzajal-hemel she still has followers, although she feels to have lost her powers as *ilol* again, and does not want them back. Eventually she returns to the cave and realizes the space has remained sacred as she sees some women praying. She wants to tell them that she has been dispossessed of her gifts, but the women hurry to the village and let everyone know the *ilol* has returned to the cave. Catalina goes back to the cave searching for a revelation several times after this, she then enters a trance and makes clay figures of the idols. "And it was not repose that Catalina found when, at last, the work of her hands corresponded—however imperfectly—to the demands of her memory. It was not repose but a frenzy, the heaving of the female who is about to give birth" (245). This spiritual birth or rebirth in this case is accepted by both Catalina's followers and Pedro, yet for the latter it still means the possibility of getting the land back, even if it also means risking their lives. The cave once again is revitalized as a place of worship for Tzotziles, and now Catalina gains an even higher status as she has managed to bring the idols back to life.

News of the new idols travel back to Ciudad Real. First Teresa, Idolina's nana, who has left her house returns. Teresa had left after La Alazana had managed to befriend and bring Idolina outside of her room. Teresa then stops feeling needed and ends up living with Marcela's parents in a village near Tzajal-hemel. There she learns about the *ilol* and pays a visit to the cave, yet she feels out of place and goes back to Idolina's house where she tells her all about the new idols. Idolina passes the news to La Alazana because she wants her to take her away from Ciudad Real. Leonardo finds out from La Alazana and immediately goes to see the bishop before informing civil authorities. Don Alfonso advises Leonardo not to tell

anyone, not the landowners nor the government about this public state matter, which is odd considering there had been a trial accusing Catalina of attempting an uprising. Don Alfonso fears that “The uprising will break out if a panic breaks out” (259). Leonardo complies as they both know that *ladino’s* imagination (specially the ranchers) is enough to create a state of emergency and a war. They agree he will keep the secret but only if Mandujano returns to Chamula as Leonardo claims “he knows the territory” (259). Yet Leonardo's plan all along was to send Father Mandujano with armed men to the cave in Tzajal-hemel. However, this time Catalina and her followers react and kill them, only Xaw survives as he does not enter. Thus, this private arrangement about public matters between Church and landowners is bypassed in favor of the landowner’s economic benefits. This second irruption to the cave sparked a crisis, which is what Leonardo Cifuentes had intended, and he then manages to stand as leader. The bishop refuses to participate or support the landowners out of fear of the government. Leonardo makes a speech to the citizens of Ciudad Real exalting their local nationalist pride and tells them that men must take up arms. The citizens prepare for war, the rich stock up and hide their goods in case of looting, old money families have a harder time, and the poor must resort to begging. Wealthy *coletos* are afraid of Indigenous and poor people, and begin to imagine an uprising via rumors. Leonardo calms them down and tells them that Doña Mercedes is at the Indigenous villages and she will bring them information.

In the end they must wait because they have no support from the government, although they had sent communications to Tuxtla and Mexico. However, Comitán and Guatemala did send troops. The wait becomes strenuous both psychologically and financially, and to keep people’s interest and fear alive one of the ranchers sends a group of Indigenous workers to Ciudad Real with orders to bring machetes and shotguns but no cargo. "Their faces, their presence, were enough to make the people of Ciudad Real rush into the streets. Screaming, they launched their attack. The soldiers couldn’t rescue the Indians from

the fray until more than one of them had been wounded" (279) The workers are judged and accused of intending to take Ciudad Real by assault and of conspiring for a "vast uprising", then they are declared prisoners and sent to Tuxtla. In Tuxtla the governor still refuses to send troops to Ciudad Real, but tells them that he is going "to put the screws on that rebel Fernando Ulloa" (280). Up to this point the crisis and feared Indigenous invasion are fully created by *ladinos* in Ciudad Real.

Fernando is in Chamula with his assistant and they manage to also create alarm among Indigenous leaders. It is Holy Thursday when they arrive and see people congregated wearing their best clothes and preparing for the celebration. Several men are "trying to hang a Judas, a grotesque effigy filled with straw whose mask depicted a Ladino face with a threatening expression" (293). While looking for Winiktón they see the image of Christ being protected at his head and feet with crossing rifles. The syncretism within this celebration is a shock to *ladinos,* while they are not concerned with it being idolatry like Mandujano, they are invaded by fear of these unknown rituals. This is rather comical considering the theatrical qualities and amount of carnage of Catholic rites during Holy Week. When they finally find Winiktón they ask him why they are not hiding, tell him that in Ciudad Real "feelings are running very high" (298) and that *ladinos* might attack them. Winiktón says that people had waited for too long and nothing had happened, they needed to tend to their crops and huts, plus they feared that if the "ritual of Holy Week were not followed exactly the powers that had protected them until then would turn against them" (298). Catalina had also tried to persuade the leaders not to observe Holy Week rituals and to only worship the idols, but the elders did not agree as San Juan might harm them if they failed to honor him. This celebration is also linked to land and harvest so it must be carried through. Now San Juan de Chamula is indeed an exclusively Indigenous space, as the only ones presiding the rituals are Indigenous religious leaders.

Fernando asks Winiktón to call for an assembly at the municipality while outside the celebration continues. The leaders are feeling protected by their rituals, they are feeling powerful and know that "time had passed (empty of the events they had feared)" (301). Fernando insists on two things, that the army from Ciudad Real is coming so they should hide, and that they should not resort to violence. However, Tzotziles ask if *ladinos* had taken out The Virgen de la Caridad, and Cesar answers that they had not. This Virgin is said to protect *ladinos*, thus the leaders remain strong in their choice to continue with their celebration. When discussing without *caxláns* present the leaders reveal they are feeling uneasy. They do not want to go to war because *ladinos* could still take the Virgin out, and they do not know with which God to fight back. Pedro suggests going to Tzajal-hemel, but these Gods have not yet proven themselves as powerful as the saints of Chamula, or the God of *caxláns*. "'They nailed him to a cross and killed him and drank his blood. Ever since then, no one can beat them'" (308). The leaders leave the room determined to defend their land as men had done before them centuries ago, "there were many who preferred to die than to give in to them" (309). They invite Fernando and Cesar to join them the next day on the Good Friday celebration. While the leaders listen to Fernando and partially trust him, it is only when he leaves that they feel comfortable expressing their doubts. Even so they consider both things are possible, celebrating Good Friday and standing up to *ladinos* in case they attack their traditions, people, and land.

Even though Catalina thinks they should be worshiping the cave Gods and not Christ she attends the Good Friday celebration with Domingo, and Xaw blesses them with holy water. By mistake Xaw lets the basin fall over the child's head and when this happens everyone remembers Domingo was born during the eclipse. Outside in the square they are unveiling and preparing the Great Cross and incense burners. Catalina starts to feel uneasy and about to collapse like she had before her revelations. She again begins to resent everyone,

even the idols, and keeps asking herself "Why did they abandon me? Her family, her people" (314). She sees the cross and thinks that she "the ilol, has in her hands what the cross is missing in order to be not an inert symbol but the instrument of salvation for all" (316). Catalina holds Domingo in her hands and "speaks the words that anoint those who are chosen" (317). She starts to resent Domingo, to think of him as a stranger "The bastard of a Caxlán from Jobel; the dishonor of a girl of her own race […] her open wound" (318). In a series of rites they give alcohol to the boy, then they give him posh (drink based on sugar cane and corn) with something to make him sleep. Catalina decides to wake Domingo up because she thinks that if he dies unconscious the Gods will not be satisfied, so he must be awake and fight. When Domingo comes to his senses he starts to fight, he wants to move, but he is restrained and nailed, then bleeds to the point of losing consciousness and dies. "After the consummation, a leaden silence drops over the crowd […] In this silence prophecy is gestating. Because what has happened means nothing if words do not give it form" (322). Catalina speaks clearly and in her senses now, of how they have given everything to *ladinos*, but *ladinos* have always wanted more, and now the Gods have manifested themselves and their will is for them to be equal to *ladinos*, who "grew haughty in the possession of his Christ" (323). Catalina continues saying that now they have a Christ who "was not born in vain and has not suffered and died in vain. His birth, his suffering, and his death have placed the Tzotzil, the Chamula, the Indian on the same level as the Ladino". Thus if threatened they will stand up to *ladinos*, and they will not die because they have now been baptized with blood.

This event takes place at the Chamula town square in a public manner as is customary during Holy Week celebrations. Fernando and César also witness the crucifixion and speech. This crucifixion had been recorded in historical accounts of the Chiapas Caste Wars (1867-1870), and as both O'Connell and Franco point out these accounts favored the *ladino* side of

the story. Yet anthropologists Rus and Robert Wasserstrom who investigated the event concluded that the crucifixion never happened, and instead argue that *ladinos* added it to records later to justify their side of the political struggle (O'Connell 141, Franco 221). Nonetheless, Castellanos never had access to such investigations as they were published after her death. Importantly in another research by anthropologist Victoria Bricker in which she provides oral and textual accounts by both Maya and *ladino* informants, she considers that the crucifixion during the Chiapas Caste Wars was factual (O'Connell 241). In this sense Castellanos' point of view towards Indigenous actions and representations of this historical event is of course subjective, yet comprehensive since she also writes *ladino* characters as manipulating the alleged uprising.

When Tzotziles in other villages get the news of the crucifixion they prepare for war, men assemble their weapons and stop traveling to Jobel. Not all Tzotziles go of course, nor all go together. Old people, women and children remain, animals, things, foodstuff, land, and its fruits also must stay, as the men are not leaving for good; they will return (325).

> Each thing, as at the time of creation or during time of peace, remains with its guardian. Meanwhile the tribe moves like a great, clumsy animal, disjointed and headless, changing direction whenever it finds an obstacle in its path […] Each one knows the place of hostility, the place where vengeance will be fulfilled; each one wants to present himself there and be satiated. The tribe disperses. A few men band together around Winiktón's will and Ulloa's orders. Their goal is Ciudad Real (325).

Tzotziles start moving from place to place, raiding farms, hamlets, churches, killing those who are left as most *mestizos* have already fled. They rape women, kill children and old people. These places they are targeting, as the previous passage indicates, are specific places where they have been harmed by *mestizos*, or where their landlords or past *enganchadores* live. They are not necessarily enacting an uprising but taking the opportunity to find some

type of justice. Tzotziles never reach Jobel though, they purposely avoid it out of fear. Fernando and César do not understand why their group's initial impetus to go to Ciudad Real and raid the ranchers is not accomplished. César tells him that he should have taken command earlier, but now it was too late. Fernando thinks Winiktón has stopped trusting him, and starts fearing that he and César will either be killed by the Tzotziles, or imprisoned and killed in Ciudad Real. Simultaneously Leonardo dictates a set of Military Directives to end with Tzotzil rebels and their families, and destroy their villages. When he tells La Alazana his plans she responds, "That would take care of a few of them, the leaders. And the rest?" (339).

> Carried away by his own oratory, Leonardo had forgotten that the vast majority of the Indians were neither rebellious nor conspicuous but indifferent, with a submissiveness they inherited from their parents and grandparents. […] He rapidly improvised a response. 'Let the government send them somewhere else. The map of the state is full of areas of federal land. Let them colonize that land.' 'And if the Indians don't want to go?' 'They'll be killed' (339).

The Military Directives, although with doubts, are backed by the rest of the ranchers, for whom killing Indigenous workers also means killing what they considered their property and workforce. However, the directives are carried out, and further enabled by Fernando who surrenders himself to Ciudad Real and tells them where the Tzotziles are hiding. He is later killed outside the prison by *coletos*. Fernando, as Catalina predicted, betrayed Tzotziles and contributed in creating the uprising, as he and César are the only ones who wanted to invade Ciudad Real. Tzotziles are not convinced that this is the way to go, nor are they all in agreement with the acts of violence that some exert. The social conflict and its underlying causes do exist, but it does not follow that because of this Tzotziles would be willing to invade Ciudad Real. It is rather *mestizo* imagination, their knowledge of how deep

inequalities are, and the fact that there are deeds declaring the land Indigenous owned, that create the uprising. First in their heads and then via their interactions with Indigenous people.

The state and federal government, who did nothing to prevent the alleged uprising nor the Indigenous massacre, finally meets with the landowners and Church authorities at the Bishopric in Ciudad Real. This is a public official meeting in a religious space with a similar *mestizo* audience to the one in Catalina's trial. A priest is in place of the bishop who is ill and remains in his room, the state governor and other civil servants from Ciudad Real and Tuxtla also attend, as well as "the ranchers from the oldest families, the merchants whose capital was most unencumbered, the professionals whose prestige was greatest". All are wealthy *mestizo* men, making this public space limited by gender, class, religion, and ethnicity. The meeting starts out with reproaches from *coletos* to the governor for not attending their demands and requests for help when they were "'on the verge […] of perishing at the hands of the Indians'" (349). The governor responds that on their tour of the region they have seen Tzotziles obeying the laws, and to the contrary have accused *ladinos* of Ciudad Real of "'stealing from them and killing them'" (350). *Coletos* reply that this was probably due to epidemics or because they wallow in filth, "'Yes, it's true; they are dirty. We saw dried blood in the empty huts' […] 'And the bones of women, children, even men were scattered across the countryside, picked clean by animals'" (350). The massacre, without being directly mentioned by the men is overtly present and accepted by everyone, even if the governor tells *coletos* that the Military Directives written by Leonardo and executed by the paramilitary army were very harsh.

In the end the government, the Church, and the landowners call a truce which results in Leonardo's candidacy for Federal Congress as part of the "The official party" (351). As the priest commanding the meeting says, "justice, order and peace". This justice is of course *mestizos'* or Leonardo's version of justice, in which they are the rightful owners of the land

as they are the ones making it productive for the nation-state (Lund 111). The struggle between religious and political power is momentarily resolved, the massacre is hidden by both, and not one Indigenous leader is present in the meeting. Moreover, if at this point the government accuses *coletos* of faking an Indigenous uprising to avoid the Agrarian Reform, they would reveal they are complicit in not preventing the Indigenous massacre.

After this meeting the governor has a private talk with the bishop, he confesses he refused to send troops because he had received letters from Ciudad Real saying that the situation was not serious. That instead it was the ranchers who were simulating a crisis to demonstrate that "laws on the redistribution of land could not be put into practice in Chiapas without the risk of bloodshed" (357). He had sent people to investigate the matter and they confirmed what the letters had said. However, he later realized that the letters came from false addresses and names. The letters also accused Leonardo of being in collusion with Fernando Ulloa through La Alazana, and of having ordered Fernando to be killed for La Alazana to stay with him in Ciudad Real. The bishop knows it was Idolina who wrote the letters, but he does not reveal her identity to the governor. The governor feels he has been deceived, and although the bishop reprimands him for not preventing the Indigenous genocide he says it was unavoidable even if he had sent the army. Only in this private space do we confirm that the government knew the uprising was fake and created by *coletos*, and that the Indigenous massacre could have been stopped by the authorities on time. Moreover, the governor, even knowing what Leonardo had done, still supports him in his political career.

Tzotziles have indeed been decimated and are now on the move, fleeing from the *caxláns* and facing "hunger, fear, cold and madness" (360). They have retreated to the highest points in the mountains and have continued to live their lives, to sow, weave, work the clay and the wood, and pray in caves. In one cave they gather around an ark, which is a book.

"There are only a few pages. A few pages but nevertheless the bridge between humanity and the divine" (362). This book turns out to be titled *Military Directives*. The readings of this scene in which Tzotziles gather around a document which essentially served to killed them have been varied, one is as a way of "destabilizing the ontology of indigenousness, of suggesting that what we understand as Indian has no pre-Columbian foundation, that it is irreducibly the result of transcultural violence" (Lund 112). While O'Connell and Sommers agree that it means Indigenous people will succeed in their struggle when they are able to understand "all the signs" (qtd. in Lund 112). Lund, although unable to give meaning to the symbolism of the book becoming sacred, considers how it might be not a comment on Indigenous people but on readers, "as subjects of a modernity constructed and, indeed, maintained, on ordenanzas militares" (112). In other words, as a society based on state violence. As subjects of modernity this scene could also be understood as proof that the massacre occurred and of who the perpetrators were. As the novel affirms, "The leader raises it between his hands with exquisite care. He brings it close to the faces of those who are present so they may testify to its existence…" (362). In this scene we have survival and congregation in a private sacred space, again a cave like where the idols were kept. Perhaps what is at stake here is not really the object being worshiped, but the meaning of a space which allows for group healing, comfort, and why not, hope of a more just spacetime.

### *Identity fluctuations*

In this section I will delve into another salient situation in *Oficio de Tinieblas* regarding place, which is how identities of both Indigenous and *mestizo* characters fluctuate depending on where they are spatially. Such fluctuations are key for characters, and either necessary or unbearable depending on the situations. I will focus on four characters, two Indigenous and two *mestizos*. The first are Pedro Winiktón and Teresa Entzín López. After

Pedro's term as judge in Chamula ends he and his family return to Tzajal-hemel, but for two years in a row they have bad harvests and still must pay land rental to the *ladino* owner. Pedro has to leave his village and venture to work for an *enganchador* who sends him to a coffee plantation in Tapachula. When the *enganchador* asks his name Winiktón just answers Pedro González. "He did not speak the name of his chulel[36]; he safeguarded his soul from the stranger's "power; he left the deepest and truest part of his being out of the agreement" (42). His identity as a Tzotzil then is guarded and protected by not giving the part of his name that marks him as Indigenous.

Pedro´s crew goes from Chamula to Ciudad Real. As soon as they leave their villages they experience a "strange transformation" in which they cease to be harpist, mountain cat hunter, pulse taker, or witch (42-43). Pedro is not comfortable and feels reduced to a thing without value, in addition he realizes that this deal is a scam because his salary will be paid directly to the *enganchador,* who will only give him what was left–if anything–after all expenses which included, travel, lodging, working tools and anything he got at the *Patrón's* store (44). When he tries to complain about this to his crew they dismiss him and tell him that it is his own fate for being born Indian (44). He then feels very lonely and misunderstood even by those like him, nevertheless he travels with the rest to Tapachula. As they walk the landscape changes from mountain ranges to flatlands and Pedro feels he is also changing.

> Some inner rigidity whose tension was sustained by the mountains yielded here […] during the march and amidst his obedience, a greedy eye was gathering in the color of a fleeting bird, sensitive pores were assessing the fertile earth underfoot […] Never had the sky been so close, the clusters of stars within such easy reach of the hand. The constellations slipped by, silent as a great river (45).

[36]Chulel in Tzotzil-Tzeltal cosmogony can mean soul, sacred, conscience or spirit, it is something that is invisible. Not only humans have chulel but also the Sun or a place like a church (Lunes Jiménez 221-222).

Pedro is both changing and observing, he is becoming a traveler and is therefore sensitive to land and earthbeings, how some are different and others similar. Still, he remains weary of this transformation.

They arrived at the coffee plantation they are bound to, it is owned by a German man, Don Adolfo Homel, who is married to a woman with dark skin color like a Zoque Indigenous. Their daughters however were white and with blue eyes. Don Adolfo considers himself a just and law-abiding man, because as a European he understands the importance of education for everyone including his Indigenous workers. Yet, when he offers Spanish lessons in his farm they are held at night after the day's work, and is later surprised that workers do not want to attend because they are tired. He deems America to be backwards because of its climate and race, not like Europe where education has made nations prosperous. Even if Don Adolfo´s ideas derive from nineteenth century scientific racism he is considered progressive by *mestizo* coffee farmers. Pedro manages to attend night classes and learn Spanish. He is very happy with his new achievement and when Don Adolfo realizes it Pedro becomes his footman. Due to his new acquired position and language abilities Pedro manages to enter private spaces of wealthy *mestizos* which he had never been able to access before, such as private homes and municipal buildings.

There is news that President Lázaro Cárdenas will visit Tapachula which makes the landowners nervous. They comment on what is happening in the Chiapas highlands, and mention that in Comitán they are already redistributing ranches by orders of the President. Yet, another one argues that they are not at risk because "Coffee can only be profitable when it's grown on large expanses of land. What's more, who disputes our ownership of the land? We didn't take it away from the Indians" (50). Here we see how the agrarian reform was valid only in light of the economic interests of the landowners and the state. The President asks to visit a farm and they choose Don Adolfo's, which makes him proud because he thinks

it is due to his commitment to progress that he has been rewarded with hosting such a grand guest. It is during this visit that Pedro has a political awakening, when he hears from the President the word justice linked to land. “Pedro linked it (justice) inextricably from that time on to a fact with which he had intimate and immediate experience: the possession of land” (52). After this moment Pedro is certain that what he and his tribe need is not only to have their land back, but also to feel equal to *ladinos*. During this trip Pedro stops feeling inferior because he is able to enter spaces only reserved for powerful *mestizo* men, either with Don Adolfo as his trusted employee, or when he is addressed by the President. He even visits a brothel for the first time and has sex with a *mestiza* woman. He later thinks to himself that they are women just like his wife, and therefore as a man he is not inferior to them. He shows this change by transforming his identity, by changing his clothing and dressing as *ladino*, as well as by learning to speak fluent Spanish.

Upon a few weeks after returning to his village he and the other men who worked in the same coffee plantation “rapidly yielded to the pressure of his group and by no external sign could a rebellion against traditions, and independent criterion for judging facts, an assimilation to Ladino ways, be detected in him” (53). Yet in secret he continues to review his Spanish lessons and speaks to the leaders about his meeting with the President. However, the *principales* do not take this well, as justice in Chamula not only means getting their land back but a profound upheaval which the leaders were uncertain the tribe could achieve. While Pedro’s identity fluctuates back to being Indigenous when he returns home and goes back to his clothing, work, and status in the tribe, he decides not to let go of the language nor of the ideas of justice. Thus, when he meets Fernando he sees this as his opportunity to fight for justice in the form of land, and when Catalina announces the idols this also becomes a way for him to accomplish his objectives.

Teresa Entzín López experiences a path in some ways similar to Pedro's but to fulfill her desire to be needed by Idolina, who she has raised. Teresa and Idolina spend most of their time secluded in her room, and to pass time she tells Idolina horror stories and tales from her youth. One day Idolina becomes convinced that Teresa, because she always remains in a spot in the room "where a brazier was always burning", is "a canán, a possessor of a fire nahual, endowed with the power to transform herself into fire and dictate her commands to the flames" (78). She asks Teresa what the ashes are saying, and while Teresa avoids answering right away, and only replies to her weeks later, she says "'The ashes say you'll get well […] The ashes say this house will burn. They say the husband and wife will die'" (78-79). From that moment on Idolina starts to feel better and tries to walk and exercise her muscles with Teresa's help, but they both keep this from her mother Isabel and stepfather Leonardo. Idolina likes this premonition as she hates her mother and Leonardo, and blames them for her father's death.

Idolina does not know that Teresa was forced to nurse her when she was a baby because Isabel was unable to do this. Teresa also had a newborn at the time, and when Isabel finds out that Teresa is feeding less milk to Idolina to save some for her own daughter she separates her from the baby, who eventually dies. After this Teresa tries to return to her village, but her husband refuses her and blames her for the baby's death. She then goes back to Idolina and cares for her. Yet, after La Alazana finds out Idolina is faking her illness she befriends her to hide her affair with Leonardo, and eventually helps Idolina resume a normal life. La Alazana also promises Idolina that they will leave Ciudad Real when she manages to fully regain her health. Teresa feels displaced by La Alazana and decides to leave the house, and "several days went by before anyone noticed that the nana had deserted the Cifuentes house" (134). Because Teresa had lived in that house for so long she does not know where to go, she has no home. Not certain whether to find another house to work for or "go back to the

Indians" (247), she wanders around the market where she meets several women and goes with them. She then tells them about having spent "years in confinement in the house of some rich people in Jobel", which sounded common enough, so they believe her. She then is allowed to stay at Marcela's parents' home in exchange for her work (247).

"These abrupt changes of perspective (from high to low in Jobel and now, suddenly, on an equal footing) made Teresa observant" (247). She watches Marcela's parents fight over having allowed Marcela to marry Catalina's brother. From them she learns about Catalina having great powers, and also she starts missing the Cifuentes house, "Teresa murmured in Castilla the names of the things she felt nostalgic for […] She never murmured Idolina's name. Because when one loses a child […] one cannot speak" (248). Teresa feels empty without Idolina and "Because no one really needed her" (249). She cannot return to Jobel because by then Catalina and the women had already been imprisoned, and Tzotziles no longer felt it was safe to go there. When Marcela's parents find out that Catalina is back and has birthed the idols out of clay they all decide to pay a visit to Tzajal-hemel. In the cave Teresa realizes she must go back to Idolina, and so she returns to Ciudad Real where she notices that her presence goes unaccounted for, so concludes things must be back to normal. When she sees Idolina again they embrace each other, but she knows that Idolina no longer needs her as much, and thinks about leaving Ciudad Real. Teresa wonders again "What do I have to do with this place?" (255).

Teresa tells Idolina about the cave and the powerful *ilol*, but she embellishes her story to grab the girl's attention and says that the "Ilol had spoken to her (as if, under Teresa's insignificant exterior, she had recognized a very powerful canán) to tell her that the promises of the ashes would be fulfilled" (256). With this story she manages to become important again, and asks Idolina to take her when she leaves, Idolina agrees but first they must go to La Alazana and confess everything. In the end it is Teresa who remains by Idolina's side. La

Alazana leaves Ciudad Real, and Leonardo and Isabel become engaged in his political career. Teresa tells Idolina a final story of a powerful *ilol* who was alive a long time ago, and both Indigenous elders and lords of Ciudad Real fought against the *ilol* and her son. When they manage to kill the son the *ilol* unleashes her fury on all the villages. The survivors were ordered by the lords of Ciudad Real to do acts of penitence and "The name of that ilol, which was once spoken by all with hope and reverence, has been outlawed" (366-367). To be useful to Idolina Teresa must become a powerful canán, a guardian of fire, a deity almost, and because what Teresa wants is to be needed and to have a daughter she engages. Teresa is bound to Idolina because she was forced to be so, but when she is freed from serving her she still goes back, because outside that room Teresa has nothing, no family or village to return to. Even when Teresa goes back to an Indigenous village, she is uncomfortable and does not feel like she belongs there, just as she also knows she does not belong in Ciudad Real. Teresa is errant and therefore feels out of place, her identity is in constant flux, she can be a victim of forced labor to Marcela's parents, a fire canán to Idolina, a humble servant to Isabel, she can even write an alternate ending to the story for Idolina.

While for Indigenous characters identity fluctuations derive from need, and are temporarily allowed, for *mestizo* characters they are cause for concern. *Mestizos* fear to become Indigenous, especially men. For instance, Fernando Ulloa is a lower-class mestizo born in Mexico City, son of a campesino who fought in the Revolution on the side of Emiliano Zapata, and of a working-class woman. He identifies with the Indigenous struggle in terms of class because he had worked his way through school and university. Class solidarity is what makes it impossible for Leonardo and the ranchers to bribe him, and what drives him to convince Pedro and the leaders to revolt. In Ciudad Real he enters as an outsider and enemy for being a government employee whose "mission was to map out the regions of Chamula and distribute plots of communally owned land called ejidos to the

Indigenous communities; in other words, he was to establish on the large landed estates the regime of small properties" (117). For this he is ostracized by *coletos* and feels the need to get on the good side of Indigenous leaders, become their friend and help them. His attitude, like the nation-state´s discourse, is paternalistic, and considers that for Indigenous people to be better off they must be educated and work the land for profit like *mestizos*.

Yet as soon as he finally manages to get close to Winiktón and Indigenous leaders start to trust him he begins to feel uneasy. After the crucifixion he joins a group with Pedro and others. He and César think they are headed to attack Ciudad Real, but they never get there and are sleeping out in the open and hiding from *ladinos*. Fernando at first refuses to wear clothing that Winiktón and other leaders give him, but he then has to wear the "coarse woolen shirts" (343), as his own were falling apart. "He had to give up the cleanliness he was accustomed to as well, and his scraggly beard gave his face a sickly, sullen expression" (344). Contrary to him, his assistant César is "in greater harmony with the elements", and adapting better to the situations. Fernando starts arguing with Winiktón about their actions and cannot comprehend why they are wasting time and energy and not attacking Ciudad Real. However, César tells him that Indians will never understand anything, and that he should have taken the lead from the beginning. By now Fernando agrees with César. When he is engaged in a struggle as equal to Indigenous people he is shocked and does not understand their actions, which to him and Cesar seem pointless. For them robbery and murder seem like empty releases Indigenous men engage on, and they do not understand that these crimes are targeted at *mestizos* that had harmed the Tzotils in the past. After witnessing the boy's crucifixion in Chamula he had believed that Tzotziles could carry out a strike against Ciudad Real and the ranchers. This event which in the beginning he had experienced with fascination afterwards fills him with guilt and horror. He is surprised when César tells

him that they have always been avoiding Ciudad Real because Tzotziles are afraid of the *ladinos*' power since the Virgen de Caridad had appeared to them

> None of the recent events could be understood rationally or assessed morally. He was revolving in an orbit that was alien to his most intimate convictions, his most deeply rooted habits. He did not recognize himself. He was part of the mechanism of an unintelligible world (345).

Fernando then becomes afraid of what Winiktón and the leaders might do to them, and starts thinking about their personal outcome in this situation, which seems to him doomed to fail. Either Tzotziles decide they are traitors because they are after all *caxláns*, or they are killed by *coletos* in Ciudad Real. Fernando thinks there is no way out for them, nothing seems logical and has no idea how he got himself into this situation. For Fernando his point of view and ideas on what is wrong with Mexico and what should be done to solve the country's problems are the correct ones. As an outsider he empathizes with the Indigenous struggle and wants to be an equal to them, while at the same time defends a neocolonial discourse on economy and politics. He is afraid of becoming Indigenous, even of using their clothing or acting in their ways. Like other *ladinos* he considers Indigenous people irrational, amoral, and deems their beliefs unsophisticated. All the while *coletos* are also being guided by both religious beliefs and fear, yet Fernando trusts them more since he ends up surrendering himself to them.

Finally, Father Mandujano is another *mestizo* who is afraid of becoming Indigenous. This fear drives him to become violent and use the idol's cult as an excuse to be released from Chamula, a place where he never wanted to go in the first place. Since he arrives there Mandujano experiences a culture shock, and finds the situation in the San Juan Church and parish house astounding. He is unable to even update Don Alfonso on what he has witnessed, and is afraid of what could happen to him in Chamula, as he knows that his predecessor had

ended up a “reprobate, drunk, lecher and blasphemer”. He thinks that the priest before him “had been transformed into that by something worse than isolation: a life shared with those strange, hermetic beings, the Indians” (106). Because of his rejection of anything Indigenous he also rejects any help or gifts from San Juan parishioners. He forces Xaw to learn the Church’s doctrine, and when Xaw seems not to understand something he inflicts physical punishment on him. Mandujano is convinced that his violent behavior is because a demon is corrupting him, just like it happened to his predecessor (112). After he sees how the statues have been redecorated, and how the leaders and Xaw take over the church to perform what he considers “barbaric music” while “the Indians had congregated. Not simply on their knees, but flat out on the ground, they protected the dying flames of votive candles with the hollow of their hands and moaned, writhing” (114), he confronts Xaw and the leaders but Pedro challenges him, and Mandujano leaves them be. After these events Mandujano learns about the cult in the cave and rushes to destroy it and bring the news to Ciudad Real. This makes him both a hero for *coletos* and gets to leave Chamula. Above all what Mandujano feared was to become Indigenous, to understand them, share their customs, place, and spaces, and this causes him to become violent. He is unable to find a way to coexist with the Tzotziles, so he decides to help eliminate them.

Identities can fluctuate depending on place and on the actant’s identity markers. Both ethnic categories in the novel are used to coexisting within the conventions of *mestizaje*, therefore in certain instances their identity fluctuates either closer to whiteness or Indigeneity through different tools and strategies (language, clothing, going unnoticed or simply responding as expected). While for women or Indigenous subjects it is mostly acceptable to become *mestizo*, for *mestizo* men it renders no profit to navigate closer to Indigeneity, to the contrary because of the lower status within *mestizaje* of this racial and ethnic category in both cases it drives *mestizo* men to death.

# Conclusions

The conflict at the heart of Castellanos' novels is that of land, in essence of identity of place and of origins and meaning of place. Identities of places are being contested by two different ethnic groups which in turn embody two worlds, diverse spiritualities, and intentions or objectives for the same spaces. Apparently, the conflict is between the landowning classes and the revolutionary government (in favor of the Indigenous), yet both parties are pursuing a neocolonial capitalist configuration for the nation-state, and aim to establish productivity and inclusion in modernity as meaning and identity of place. The Tzotzil-Tzeltal meanings of places are discussed in the novels through diverse stories of origin of place, in which land, water, crops, and other earthbeings are in relation with spirituality, as well as with agroecological knowledge and practices. At the same time those stories include the colonizer's arrival, how this changed places and contributed to the current status quo which determines who owns the land, which religious practices to follow and languages to speak, as well as other identity markers of difference. Thus, the conflict firstly is not a racial or ethnic one, since the parties driving it (landowners and nation-state) are both *mestizos* and in the end have the same objectives (productivity, capital, modernity). Secondly, Indigenous groups while politically and religiously organized are afraid both of rebelling to landowners and of remaining without secured land or sustenance, as the consequences for them might be fatal in either case.

The impossibility of finding a solution in the novels points out not necessarily to irreconcilable cultural systems or worlds, as some readings of the novels have concluded (Tarica, O'Connell, Gil, Sommers), but to the fact that *mestizos* never understand that their places and realities are interrelational, syncretic, and shared with diverse Indigenous groups. In negating Indigeneity *mestizos* aim to erase it, yet are unable to because of the shared origins of place. For *mestizos* to recognize this means to come to terms with heterogeneity

and to account for others, as well as to consider identity as relational and entangled. The only ones that come close to navigating heterogeneity are *mestiza* women, mainly because they share private domestic spaces since their childhoods with Indigenous caretakers. Thus they gain access to myth, Indigenous spirituality, and knowledge, which helps them make sense of their world and in some cases protect each other. Performing indigeneity for *mestiza* women is only possible in private gendered spaces, and this is at odds with institutions such as the Catholic Church, the state, or patriarchy in general, because *mestizo* men indistinct from their political faction dismiss such practices as nonsense and irrational. Both *mestizaje* and *indigenista* literature are shaped by negating and desiring Indigeneity, and in the novels this is best observed in *mestiza* women's privileged ability to perform Indigeneity in private spaces, stem away from it in public, or do both simultaneously.

Such performances are also available for Indigenous people via spatial transgressions or their experiences inhabiting *mestizo* world. That is partly through the process of de-indigenizing or becoming a *ladino* by learning the language, observing religious practices, or forming bonds with *ladinos* or *mestizos*. However, spatial transgressions of Indigenous persons in *mestizo* spaces are cause for concern because they allow the idea that Indigenous are equal to *mestizos,* while also signaling the rising social conflict in the novels. Since identity is troubling, transgressions to space denote how characters understand where they belong to, or are the cause of internal conflict regarding their place in the world. However, Indigenous people who inhabit *mestizo* spaces must deal with their identities being in constant flux, or with alienation and marginal existences. The latter is especially troubling for Indigenous women because they are unable to develop solidarity or form safe networks with other women from different or similar classes or ethnicities. Contrary to this, spatial transgressions into the Indigenous world are deeply feared by *mestizo* men in positions of

power, for them to perform Indigeneity means to lose their status and privilege, and this causes them either to react violently, fear the Indigenous, or die.

In terms of spaces, private ones in which *mestizo* men (including government officials) have conversations, are when events are forwarded and where alliances otherwise unknown in public are unveiled. Religious representatives collude with landowners and government agents, landowners bribe and warn government agents, and finally the government lines up with both the landowners and the Church. Ultimately their objectives are the same, "justice, order and peace" for the nation-state, which is intrinsically a *mestizo* male project. While in the novel women from higher classes are relegated to household and family matters, and their involvement in public spaces is either through their male partners or through priests, however it does not follow that *mestiza* women have less influence in the developing social conflict, much to the contrary because of the relevance of private spaces in several ways they drive the plot. Either by secretly communicating with powerful men or by confronting their partners in their economic and political decisions.

In Mayan Tzotzil-Tzeltal towns and villages public and private spaces function in a similar manner in terms of gender, that is political and religious leaders are mostly old men, as well as some younger ones. Yet there is a generational gap between these two types of leadership, the younger men generally agree with the government's political ideas, while the older men are weary and distrustful. In this sense I agree with Joshua Lund in that this new leadership is linked to acquiring the Spanish language, revolutionary ideals, and to the figure of President Lázaro Cárdenas; all ways of becoming *ladino* or *mestizo* (98). Only one Indigenous woman, Catalina, becomes a public figure. Jean Franco considers this was Castellanos attempt to write women into Mexican national narrative, which was a male terrain, yet for Franco in Catalina's character Castellanos repeats the betrayal of La Malinche (132). The treachery or betrayal Franco refers to is the betrayal of one's roots, and it is this

Indigenous woman who again betrays and dooms her community, and at the same time is unable to gain recognition in the national narrative (144-145). I argue that Catalina does not betray her community, she in fact sacrifices her adoptive son to them, and is the leader of a revitalization movement which creates a space where Tzotziles find congregation and hope. Instead this story ends badly because of violent events unleashed when *mestizo* men enter Indigenous places and private spaces.

I argued throughout this thesis that in these novels it is through a focus on the spatial that contradictions within and among actors involved in social conflict in postcolonial Chiapas become transparent. This is crucial in postcolonial contexts because social relations function within different levels of ambiguity, and spaces are normed depending on gender, race, class, sexuality, and religion, as well as bounded by internal colonialism. Because of internal colonial structures public spaces and discourse are utilized to obscure both political and economic interests of *mestizos*. Whereas in private spaces *mestizos'* real intentions and fears are disclosed. The specific spatial analysis that I developed for postcolonial novels that deal with ethnic and social conflicts reveals how in Latin America limitations to space are infiltrated by *mestizaje*, and actors are forced to navigate such limitations through the malleability *mestizaje* itself allows, either via identity fluctuations, transgressions to space, or both negating and desiring Indigeneity. The spatial also sheds light to how the colonial horizon is embedded in the postcolonial condition. Thus, minding space and place in postcolonial cultural products is an interesting method to think with the complex historical and socioeconomic structures they represent. However, because history is embedded in the spatial, it is key to contextualize this method in terms of regions and places. Having said that, the proposed method has room for development. For example, further research into specificities regarding meanings of place and historical relevance of the same places for Indigenous groups represented in the works could enrich the prior analysis.

Additionally, Castellanos as author proved to be an appropriate choice for this research as she situated her novels in the same place, which allows for a deeper understanding of this locality, and could be also useful if compared with other authors who explore social conflict in Chiapas or Mexico. Furthermore, Castellanos' specific focus on women and Indigenous characters, who in the context of the novels are relegated to domestic spaces and not regarded as full citizens, is key in unveiling how public spaces and discourse in Latin American postcolonial societies works to cover *mestizos'* economic and political intentions. It is also an important factor when thinking about how identities of place and personal identities mirror each other in her narratives, allowing *mestiza* women to at least in some moments embrace heterogeneity in their identity, as well as in the identities of places and Indigenous others that coexist with them. I consider that the above utilized geocritical approach to think about place in the literary, together with concepts from feminist intersectional geography to comprehend space as constructed and constructing the social, is a useful tool to read other postcolonial works. It would be especially interesting for instance to compare readings of the same themes and similar places published by *neo-indigenista* authors from other countries where this literary movement was widely developed, such as Perú and Brazil, to regard the similarities and specificities of how this type of literature renders transparent the intricacies of *mestizaje* during the postcolony.

Another potential avenue to explore would be to compare *indigenista* literature from the mid-twentieth century with contemporary Latin American works about ethnic, cultural, and social conflict, to study how the colonial horizon continues to be embedded in the present century, or the influence that recent feminist, historical and postcolonial perspectives have had within the same horizon; and if still only *mestiza* women are the ones that allow for heterogeneity in the contemporary postcolonial context. Perhaps to also ask what consequences spatial limitations accepted since colonial times have in our current space-time

envelope, and what role they play in how societies with diverse ethnicities and cultures are still incapable of finding common grounds or recognition. This latter research avenue could be significant, because by understanding social conflicts in literature we can imagine other paths, and embrace that for both humans and non-humans alike our well-being and existence is relational and co-dependent on others.

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