

PERSONAL TESTIMONY:
Latin American Women Telling Their Lives

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TRANSLATED WOMAN: CROSSING THE BORDER WITH ESPERANZA'S STORY.

By Ruth Behar. (Boston, Mass.: Beacon, 1993. Pp. 372. \$15.00 paper.)

ME LLAMO RIGOBERTA MENCHU Y ASI ME NACIO LA CONCIENCIA. By Elizabeth Burgos. Reprint. (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1994. Pp. 287.)

WOMEN AND REVOLUTION IN NICARAGUA. Edited by Helen Collinson. (London: Zed, 1990. Pp. 207. \$49.95 cloth, \$15.00 paper.)

MOTHERS OF THE DISAPPEARED. By Jo Fisher. (Boston, Mass.: South End, 1989. Pp. 168. \$35.00 cloth, \$13.00 paper.)

THE HOUR OF THE POOR, THE HOUR OF WOMEN. By Renny Golden. (New York: Crossroad, 1991. Pp. 207. \$19.95 cloth.)

GUATEMALAN WOMEN SPEAK. By Margaret Hooks. (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1991. Pp. 128.)

A DREAM COMPELS US: VOICES OF SALVADORAN WOMEN. Edited for New Americas Press by Brenda Carter, Kevan Insko, David Loeb, and Marlene Tobias. (Boston, Mass.: South End, 1989. Pp. 248. \$25.00 cloth, \$11.00 paper.)

HEAR MY TESTIMONY: MARIA TERESA TULA, HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST OF EL SALVADOR. Edited and translated by Lynn Stephen. (Boston, Mass.: South End, 1994. Pp. 240. \$30.00 cloth, \$14.00 paper.)

CELSA'S WORLD: CONVERSATIONS WITH A MEXICAN PEASANT WOMAN. By Thomas C. Tirado. (Tempe: Center for Latin American Studies, Arizona State University, 1991. Pp. 119. \$14.95 paper.)

"SI ME PERMITEN HABLAR": TESTIMONIO DE DOMITILA, UNA MUJER DE LAS MINAS DE BOLIVIA. By Moema Viezzer. Reprint. (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1991. Pp. 257.)

Testimonial Literature: A Tool for Advocacy

During the past three decades, testimonial literature has dominated studies on Latin American women. As gender has become a greater focus of scholarly interest in the region, the literature of personal testimony has become a primary means of documenting the lives of Latin American women. In the larger context of Latin American studies, the

subgenre of women's testimonial literature has become so central to understanding of the region that some of the best-known works about Latin America are part of it (Behar 1993; Burgos 1983; Jesus 1960; Viezzer 1971).

Testimonial literature can be compelling and immediate, allowing the reader the sense of hearing directly the voices of those recounting their lives. Because testimonies are the words of real individuals, they possess a flesh-and-blood authenticity lacking in the more abstract data of statistics and surveys. The ten books reviewed here all pertain to the testimonial genre: half are testimonial accounts given by individual women; the other half are testimonies of groups of women representing particular socioeconomic classes or ethnic, political, or religious groups. This group of works documents women's stories in all regions of Latin America: Argentina (Fisher), Bolivia (Viezzer), El Salvador (Carter et al., Golden, Stephen), Guatemala (Burgos, Hooks), Mexico (Behar, Tirado), and Nicaragua (Collinson).

As many of the recorder-editors of these books observe, their goal in publishing these accounts is to open a channel to Latin American women that allows them to speak directly to a wider audience. Thus the recorder-editors seek to provide access for women who are often ignored by the media and seldom have any means of communicating beyond their immediate communities. Another goal is to preserve women's history, particularly the story of women's resistance to state and family oppression. By publishing these books, recorder-editors thereby ensure that women's place in Latin American political history will no longer go unrecognized and unrecorded.

In keeping with the goal of opening channels of communication to Latin American women, these books were written to be accessible to a wide variety of readers. Because they were originally written in English or were translated into English soon after their initial publication, they are intended for the global English-speaking audience, particularly in North America and the United Kingdom. In informing a wider public about oppression in Latin America and women's resistance to it, the recorder-editors may also want to influence the formation of public policy toward Latin America. Such a goal is consistent with their advocacy because foreign-based nongovernmental organizations, the United Nations, and other international agencies operate throughout Latin America, affecting the lives of millions.

These books share an emphasis on the politics of women's resistance and activism, whether at the family and community level (Behar and Tirado) or at the state or national level (as in the other eight books). This emphasis reflects a major intellectual current of the last fifteen years. These works also seek to shatter common stereotypes of low-income Latin American women as politically passive and socially marginalized, voiceless and submissive. By relating the stories of real individuals, these works counter the image of Latin American women as a faceless mass.

All ten books are to varying degrees works of advocacy. They chronicle injustices in the testimonies of hard-fought but enduring lives. These books convey in the words of the women who have lived the experiences the staggering inequities that many Latin American women must confront. They report in women's voices national issues like the ethnocide of La Matanza in El Salvador or the catastrophic effects of U.S. policies on Latin American citizens in various countries. When read as a group, these volumes amplify the monotony of violence and poverty that characterize many women's lives. These accounts of individuals apparently ground into defeat yet still engaging life can be devastating. Particularly notable in this grouping is the number of books published or sponsored by activist nongovernmental organizations (such as the Catholic Institute for International Relations and the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign) or activist presses (Crossroad and South End presses).

Each book approaches the common themes of testimony and advocacy differently. Three works focus on well-known activists and the groups they defend: Rigoberta Menchú representing the Guatemalan Maya (Burgos); María Teresa Tula on victims of human rights abuses in El Salvador (Stephen); and Domitila Barrios de Chungara on Bolivian tin miners (Viezzler). The Burgos and Viezzler testimonies are reprints of Spanish-language originals published thirteen and twenty-five years ago respectively. Both works have been widely translated and are now classics in gender studies that are frequently assigned readings in university classes. Stephen's *Hear My Testimony* is a much more recent account in its first printing. A Spanish edition has recently been published by South End Press (Stephen 1996).

Ruth Behar and Thomas Tirado also focus on the life of one woman, but their subjects are more "ordinary" than famous. Yet the lives of the two Mexican *campesinas* recorded by Behar and Tirado are far from mundane. *Celsa's World: Conversations with a Mexican Peasant Woman* is Tirado's record of a survivor of the tumult of the Mexican Revolution. Behar's *Translated Woman: Crossing the Border with Esperanza's Story* presents the account of a fierce survivor of life. The reflections of these two *campesinas* from the Mexican heartland recount day-to-day experiences common to many other Latin American women. Their accounts thus serve as a useful counterbalance to the more extraordinary life experiences of Menchú, Tula, and Barrios de Chungara. The works assembled by Behar and Tirado are similar in that their subjects are older women reflecting back on their lives. Both Celsa and Esperanza recount their experiences through fables, which often impart some lesson that has illuminated their own lives and may be a lesson to others.

Five other works offer edited versions of testimonial accounts from women who have become active in their countries' political arenas: Colinson (Nicaraguan political activists), Fisher (Argentine activists), Golden

(religiously inspired political activists of El Salvador), Hooks (a spectrum of politically active Guatemalan women), and the editors of *A Dream Compels Us* (women activists in El Salvador). Except for the Collinson volume, all five books are edited texts of testimony of activist women recorded by the book editors and their associates. Collinson's *Women and Revolution in Nicaragua* draws on many other data sources in addition to women's testimonial accounts to depict the history of women during the Sandinista Revolution. Thus her book relies least on personal testimonies.

Given that these works of advocacy seek to change the public consciousness about Latin American women and to benefit the women who testify, it is appropriate to ask how the income generated by these books is deployed. Because the issue is not discussed in these works, one can only speculate about what is done with income from sales. With the activist presses and organizations, one assumes that any profits are recycled into these institutions' finances to support other worthy projects. The same assumption can probably be made about the small nonprofit presses. Yet for books like those edited by Burgos and Viezzer, which have generated large global sales over the years, the question remains: what is done with the profits from their sale?

Robert Levine traced in a fine piece of scholarly detective work the history of the proceeds earned on *Child of the Dark*, the well-known testimonial diary of Brazilian *favela* dweller, Carolina Maria de Jesus (Levine 1994). Initially, the diary's author received some of her book's earnings, in accordance with her publishing contract. But as time passed, the financial picture became murkier. Carolina Maria de Jesus ultimately died as poor as she had lived before her book was published, despite the fact that her diary was an international best-seller that is still being published today. Levine asked the book's publishers about the distribution of profits from *Child of the Dark* but received no clear answers.

Those who claim advocacy as their goal in recording Latin American women's testimonies should state straightforwardly how any profits for the sale of these testimonial accounts are disbursed. This issue is especially germane because almost all the testimonies are those of low-income women.

Advocacy and scholarship can be made to serve each other. Given the large audiences some of these works have reached, they may have helped change public consciousness or influenced public policy. Less certain is their contribution to scholarship.

The Methodology of Testimony: Reflection, the Author, and the Recorder

The value of the books under review here is the directness, immediacy, and accessibility of these compelling accounts. Yet only Behar's work represents a methodological advance in the genre of testimonial

literature. The others all fail in one way or another to address issues central to the genre.

An extensive body of literature exists in the social sciences, especially anthropology, on the methodology of taking personal testimonies (see Gluck and Patai 1991; Langness and Frank 1981; Personal Narratives Group 1989; Watson and Watson-Franke 1985). The importance of the context of the account and the relationship between the author-narrator and the recorder-editor have been discussed at length in a nuanced debate (Tedlock 1991). But as common as testimonial accounts have become in the study of women in Latin America, little evidence suggests that much attention has been given to the issues raised in this debate. Certainly, the works under review here reveal disappointing inattention to methodology.

Of particular concern are the intertwined issues of authorship, representation, and self-reflection (a critical process of self-examination that social scientists, especially anthropologists, employ to analyze the discourse between themselves and the individuals they study or the context). The ten works reviewed here are not autobiographies but accounts that were solicited by journalists, academics, or activists who subsequently played a significant role in determining the testimonies and preparing them for publication. Yet except for Behar, the recorder-editors rarely discuss the significant part played by the recorder-editor in creating the structure of the final document. Nor is much said about the social relationship between the authors of the testimonies and those who record and edit them.

Burgos, Tirado, Stephen, and Viezzer provide some commentary on their relationship with the women whose accounts they recorded and edited. But only Behar goes beyond the role of recorder-editor to write a self-reflective account of her relationship with Esperanza, the Mexican campesina who is the focus of *Translated Woman*. After Behar and Esperanza worked on her testimony, Behar crossed and recrossed the Mexico-U.S. border, bringing Esperanza's words with her. The meaning of Esperanza's account became transformed as Behar and the testimony she carried engaged the different cultural contexts existing on each side of the international frontier. Behar herself became a "translated woman" in being considered a rich *gringa* in Mexico and therefore "different" while being viewed in the United States as a minority Latina and thus different in another sense.

More than the other writers in this group, Behar explores the terrain of self versus other or distinctions between subject and object that usually determine the structure of testimonial literature. She blurs these distinctions by discussing her part in recording Esperanza's fables and writing candidly about the meaning of that experience for her. In "*Reflejos/Reflections*," Behar delves into the meaning of her own status as a

Latina living in the United States and a minority woman intellectual employed in academia. Her account is poignant, funny, and thoughtful.

This account, however, is far more than an exploration of terrain largely unriskened by the other writers. She takes care to link her reflections to the existing literature on testimonies and also to the current fiction and poetry being written by Latin American women. Thus in *Translated Woman*, Behar creates a path-breaking melange of advocacy, reflection, oral literature, and social science. In doing so, she links the often separated domains of literature, self-reflection, and social science in the best anthropological tradition.

Tirado and Stephen discuss more than the other recorder-editors the factual circumstances of how they came to record the testimonies of the women with whom they worked. But neither reveals much about the specific relationship, except to indicate that it is a significant one. Tirado's relationship with Celsa spans decades and could have stimulated informative reflection on the process of creating testimonial literature. His lack of discussion of this dimension is especially missed because unlike nearly all other testimonial literature recorded with Latin American women, Tirado and Celsa are working across gender boundaries. The woman-to-woman relationship is gradually being explored in testimonial literature, but the relationship across gender boundaries remains uncharted.

Lynn Stephen's *Hear My Testimony: María Teresa Tula, Human Rights Activist of El Salvador* contains two excellent contextual chapters, but they were misplaced at the end of the book. These background chapters would have been far more useful to readers as an introduction to María Teresa Tula's testimony. Not until the final pages of these concluding chapters does Stephen note her close collaboration with María Teresa Tula in all aspects of the production of the final work, including the contestation, altering of worldviews, and friendship that developed from their collaboration. Moreover, Stephen merely notes these processes. If she or Tirado had delved more into the methodology and self-reflection involved in preparing testimonies, they likely could have produced more innovative works like Behar's *Translated Woman*.

Because the specific questions and the context in which they are asked frame the responses to them, it would be useful to know more about the contexts in which the accounts were elicited and the particular methods employed to elicit them. Seldom in the books under review (except for those of Behar, Stephen, and Tirado) is either the context or the methodology of taking the testimonies described in much detail. This failure diminishes the effectiveness of the accounts because the reader lacks enough information to evaluate the testimonies or to appreciate their broader context. Thus the lack of discussion of the process of taking the accounts detracts from and can even distort the voices of the women recounting their lives.

Another significant issue is the authorship of record. In the Spanish-language original, Moema Viezzer rather than Domitila Barrios de Chungara is listed as the author of *Si permiten hablar . . . : Testimonio de Domitila*, but in the English translation, *Let Me Speak!*, authorship is properly attributed to Domitila Barrios de Chungara with Moema Viezzer. Likewise, in the Spanish publication of Rigoberta Menchú's testimony, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, Elizabeth Burgos is listed as the author; in the English version, *I . . . Rigoberta Menchú*, Burgos is appropriately listed as editor.

In these two instances, who was responsible for assigning authorship and on what basis? Was the assignment of authorship the publisher's decision? In any case, a correction should be made in the Spanish-language publications. Viezzer and Burgos are not the authors—they are the editors and translators of testimonies authored by Barrios de Chungara and Menchú. Surpassing the concern about whose name is inscribed on the book cover or its spine is the symbolic importance of authorship of record. Why were the women telling their testimonies not given proper credit for their authorship?

The Methodology of Testimony: Representation

A distinct yet related issue is that of representation. In their efforts to replace stereotypes of Latin American women as passive victims, some of the works reviewed here are in danger of constructing a new stereotype of Latin American women as resilient survivors. Is it really productive to replace a negative stereotype with a more positive one? Some advocates might argue that construction of a more favorable stereotype is justifiable because it promotes a more positive view of Latin American women to a global audience. But any stereotype, favorable or not, distorts the reality of those it claims to portray. Presenting Latin American women only in certain dimensions of their lives robs them of their human complexity. The works of Behar, Burgos, Stephen, Tirado, and Viezzer generally present rounded accounts of women's lives, usually in the words of the women themselves. Certainly Esperanza as she presents herself through her testimony in Behar's *Translated Woman* precludes being stereotyped as passive and long-suffering or valiant and virtuous. More than the others, her account allows a full-dimensional portrait of a Latin American woman.

The testimonies of Barrios de Chungara, Menchú, and Tula also pose little danger of stereotyping politically active women. Political activism has directed the lives of these leaders for many years. Thus their testimonies are life histories of women whose political engagement represents the core of their self-identity. Through their words, readers can at least partly understand the experiences of these activists absorbed in the politics of protest and resistance. Their individual accounts, as recorded

and edited by Viezzer, Burgos, and Stephen, demonstrate their complex individuality.

The publications under review that focus on a single woman (Behar, Burgos, Stephen, Tirado, and Viezzer) succeed in presenting the human complexity of each woman more easily than is possible in the other five books. Because the others record the testimonies of scores of women, it is more difficult for them to present a flesh-and-blood portrait of any one of the women.

Yet it is possible to use the testimony of many and still write an encompassing, fully dimensional account of women's activism. By comparing Jo Fisher's *Mothers of the Disappeared* with Marguerite Guzmán Bouvard's work on the same group, *Revolutionizing Motherhood: The Mothers of the Plaza de Maya*, one can see how Bouvard was able to use the personal testimonies of many women so that their complexity as individuals was honored while the focus remained on their activism and resistance (Bouvard 1994). She also placed the women's testimonies within the context of the intricate politics of their resistance. In comparison, Fisher's book is a more limited and simplistic account of Latin America's best-known group of women activists.

The apparent goal of Carter et al., Collinson, Fisher, Golden, and Hooks was to record the testimonies of that segment of women's lives that represents their political engagement. Certainly the women's testimonies recorded in these five books direct the reader's attention to the pivotal political events in these women's lives. But their testimonies, which have been edited so that the women speak only of their activism, cannot represent their entire lives. The totality of each woman's reality is missing. Who could appear fully themselves if only a certain part of their lives were allowed to be told? If these editors had chosen to focus on the testimonies of fewer women and had framed them with contextual, ethnographic, and statistical information, then they could have described the worlds of the activist women more effectively.

The format of presenting women's testimonies in abbreviated form—a few sentences, paragraphs, or pages—is particularly problematic. The results are snippets of women's lives cut out from the whole cloth of their reality. This kind of presentation denies the uniqueness of these women's experiences. Thus presenting so little text by so many women allows the reader only unsatisfying glimpses into worlds of the activist women.

Such a limited format can occasionally be used successfully, however. When focusing on a particularly telling experience, women's testimonies can be as riveting as the finest literature. One example is the testimony of Ana Guadalupe Martínez (in Carter et al.), which recounts her imprisonment and torture as a leader of the Ejército Revolucionario Popular of El Salvador. In only seven pages, she describes the physical and psychological destruction of a woman so simply and graphically that

her experience becomes unforgettable. Accounts like this leave one shaken and then thoughtful.

What is haunting about these brief accounts is the shining clarity of the women's own words. The passages recounted by the activist women themselves depict their reality with an immediacy and vividness that is lost in the descriptions written by the recorder-editors to frame these accounts. Reading these direct passages brings to mind the "boom" in contemporary Latin American literature written by Latinas, often with women as central or pivotal characters. The eloquence of activist women demonstrates the rich oral tradition underlying the fine literature written by Latin American women. Activist women who give testimony as well as the women who write poetry and fiction reflect a deeply rooted Latin American literary tradition based on spoken rather than written words.

In their descriptive framework for presenting the women's testimonies, some of the recorder-editors verge on patronizing or romanticizing the authors of the accounts. Elizabeth Burgos's introduction to Menchú's testimony in both the Spanish and English versions seems to present Menchú as a long-suffering but valiant *indígena* rather than evoking her power and complexity as a politically active individual. Menchú's testimony paints her own portrait much more tellingly.

Similarly, Renny Golden's attempt in *The Hour of the Poor, The Hour of Women* to present the spiritual aspect of the lives of Salvadoran women activists sometimes lapses into a distracting emotionality. Golden may be attempting to make her role as recorder-editor more self-reflective and simply not succeeding. Her self-revelations burden rather than enhance the testimonies of women's spirituality as expressed through political activism. Golden's book is unique among those reviewed here in being written from a perspective of faith, which gives it a different tone from the straightforward works of political advocacy and social science under review here. Religion, especially revitalizing interpretations of faith such as liberation theology, is key to the political activism of many Latin American women. Women's religious faith is a significant aspect of their lives that is granted too little importance by some scholars, who tend to view religious faith as an anti-transformative false consciousness. Golden deserves credit for trying to deal with the "messy areas" of emotion and spirituality as they inspire political activism, even if she sometimes puts too much of her own feelings into the analysis.

With these books, the issue is not only how women are represented but also which of them are represented. Nearly all the testimonies in the volumes edited by Carter et al., Collinson, Fisher, and Golden are drawn from low-income Spanish-speaking leftists. Little is heard from middle-sector or elite women, indigenous or Afro-Caribbean women, or women representing the political Center or Right, even though these groups also foster activist women. Thus the sample of politically active women in

these accounts is limited. The reason may be that because these are works of advocacy based on a progressive or leftist perspective, a bias is operating against selecting women who represent other political perspectives.

Of the five edited works of women's testimonies, only Margaret Hooks's *Guatemalan Women Speak* introduces a range of politically active women. To her credit, Hooks includes the testimonies of Guatemalan indigenous and Afro-Caribbean women as well as those of wealthy and right-wing women. For women's resistance and political activism in Latin America to be understood fully, a more encompassing sample of women's testimonies is required.

When books of testimonies of like those of Menchú and Barrios de Chungara become so well known that they are translated into many languages, an additional factor complicates the issue of representation: the accuracy of the translations into other languages. It is a challenge for even the best translator to ensure that such translations reflect the original spoken word. In the case of personal testimonies, the question of the accuracy in translation is critical. Yet this issue has no simple resolution. Readers have little choice but to trust translators and editors to remain faithful to the original text. Sometimes, however, the text reads so awkwardly that one wonders just how well the translations were done. Making available for those interested the full unedited text in the author's original language might be a partial solution to this issue.

Translation becomes even trickier when the author herself is speaking a second language. Such is the case of Rigoberta Menchú, who spoke Quiché Maya until she learned Spanish as an activist adult in order to communicate to a wider audience. Her account as recorded by Burgos was taken in Spanish. At each level of remove from the speaker's original language, some nuances of the speaker's thought are lost or transformed into another expression that may well be far from the speaker's intentions. No ready solution exists for this dilemma of translation.

Testimonial Literature: Immediacy versus Timelessness

The immediacy of the works reviewed here also allows for vivid portrayals of political events. All the recorder-editors had the advantage of being on the scene as events unfolded or able to interview persons directly involved in these important events. Unfortunately, however, Carter et al., Collinson, Fisher, Golden, and Hooks seem to have sacrificed broader analysis in the interest of immediacy. Their books have already become prisoners of time because Latin American sociopolitical events have rapidly eclipsed the conditions under which these five books were written. The result is that they seem outdated. These same five works are now more useful in documenting events that occurred in the past decade rather than in analyzing current conditions in Latin America because

their lack of wider contextual analysis limits their utility for understanding the profound transformations occurring in Latin America today.

Helen Collinson's *Women and Revolution in Nicaragua* exemplifies the sacrifice of timelessness to immediacy. The book excels in detailing the Sandinista era from the vantage point of women's engagement in the revolution. Since the Sandinistas' losses of electoral and political power, however, Nicaragua has become quite a different political arena. The absence of encompassing analysis in the book provides little means of understanding the current political context in Nicaragua. Its close focus on Sandinista women allows too little consideration of important female political actors representing other political perspectives, such as President Violeta Chamorro, and thus little basis for interpreting Nicaraguan political events now and in the years to come.

In *A Dream Compels Us: Voices of Salvadoran Women*, editors Brenda Carter, Kevan Insko, David Loeb, and Marlene Tobias also allow the immediacy of women's testimonies to displace analysis that could have endowed the volume with relevance timely beyond political events in El Salvador in the 1970s and 1980s. They make the common observation that women have solidarity with each other in the extreme circumstances of poverty and political oppression. But they offer no analysis for comprehending what happens after economic conditions improve or victories are won over oppressive political regimes, when life takes on ambiguous complexity.

Conditions have become more complicated in reconstruction. The changing political climate in Latin America, especially democratization, presents a more complex picture than allowed by the good-versus-evil depiction of politics in the books by Carter et al., Collinson, Fisher, Golden, and Hooks. Democracy, however constructed, does not automatically bring political or economic justice, but it does blur the boundaries of political discourse and create gray areas where notions of "good versus evil" are not useful analytical concepts.

In *Celsa's World*, Tirado frames Celsa within a broader context and analyzes her story in more depth than the five volumes recording multiple testimonies. His work with Celsa demonstrates the usefulness of testimonial accounts that contribute a personal perspective on important events. *Celsa's World* pairs well with Ricardo Pozas's *Juan the Chamula* (1962), the testimony of a Chiapan Maya campesino who also witnessed the important historical events in the Mexican Revolution.

Timeliness is also an issue in the testimonies of Rigoberta Menchú and Domitila Barrios de Chungara. Because of Menchú's importance as a global political actor and her prominence as a spokesperson for indigenous peoples, it would be useful to have an update on her life, particularly her reflections on the significant events of her life since 1983, when her account was published (including winning the Nobel Peace Prize in

1992). A similar update on Barrios de Chungara's life since 1971 and her observations would round out the story of a life of conviction, persistence, and cleansing anger. Updating the history of Bolivian union mobilizations and the participation of Barrios de Chungara and other women activists in them would be helpful for understanding this aspect of Latin American women's political history.

Burgos, Viezzer, and Stephen all seem to have achieved special rapport with the women whose stories they recorded and edited. Such rapport presents an opportunity for follow-up accounts that should not be lost. Menchú and Tula are women in early midlife who will continue to be notable activists with much more to say about their experiences. Because *Hear My Testimony* was published only recently, Stephen should be encouraged to continue to her work with Tula. To leave these three lives "unfinished" in the sense of recorded testimony would provide only incomplete portraits of three important activists.

Conclusion

There is much to be admired in the testimonies of the women presented in these ten books. Despite terrible conditions, these women are neither self-absorbed nor alienated. What rings out in their words is the sense that activist Latin American women are doubly condemned, first as political actors and then as women who refuse to stay in their traditionally defined "places." Women's ultimate act of resistance may be their self-construction in counterpoint to societally imposed constructions of what they as women "should be."

These ten books demonstrate that politically active Latin American women are creating with their words a vivid and profound oral literature. Their capability to speak for themselves is obvious. But what spaces are open to them to speak and be heard? Not many, unfortunately. A serious problem for these activists is that many channels of communication remain closed to them. These women need access more than they need translation. Despite the drawbacks of these books reviewed here, their recorder-editors have managed to open channels of communication for Latin American activist women to tell the stories of their lives.

The evocative power of Latin American women's testimonial literature is great in that the women reveal themselves as the central actors in their own stories. They become producers of knowledge. The collective strength of these works is that women express their accounts of oppression and women's resistance to it in an array of forms that include life histories, vignettes, fables, and poetry.

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