

Rigoberta menchu



1st Essay: Reflections on I, Rigoberta Menchu There are many things one feels when reading I, Rigoberta Menchu, everything from sympathy, empathy, frustration, enlightenment, sadness, and retribution. Rigoberta's journey of finding her voice and her story consists of horrific conditions, government oppression, and stunning countryside recollections of life and its many trials and tribulations. Guatemala, in her words as geography goes, sound as stunning as any National Geographic article, and that is where I find it interesting to focus on, the imagery.

The recollections of the traditions of childbirth, and her time away from the fincas to the altiplano with her family. There are many themes in which to consider as well when looking into the imagery I saw in my mind's eye. One theme in particular that I associated with was the cost of progress she and her people had to experience, from childbirth to the eventual education Rigoberta gains by distancing herself from the old ways of the elders and her people. As a child, she was educated from her community in keeping the tradition of childbirth very sacred.

In chapter 2, she reflects on the birthing process, " Well, when the woman is about four months pregnant, she starts taking these baths infused with evergreens, pure natural aromas. There are many plants the community uses for pregnant women, colds, headaches, and things like that. " (Menchu pg. 10) While I'm very for the natural, organic ways of caring for women during pregnancy, who knows how many children and mothers lost their lives while in labor due to traditional ways of the Meyer 2

Guatemalan Indians. The imagery is fascinating to imagine pregnant women bathing in large, warm baths, almost as if they were being stewed for a feast. With deep beliefs in the ancestor's teachings and traditions, the children of the antiplano were born healthy and ready to work. It surprises me that she does not mention any cases of stillborn babies or even difficulties in the childbirth itself. Although they didn't need medicine such as penicillin or prenatal care in these circumstances, it's at the cost of keeping these traditions sacred that seems a bit ignorant to me, coming from a background of having a father who is an OB/GYN. He travels many times a year to Africa and communities that still keep old traditions alive, where many women suffer from poor prenatal care. When Rigoberta accepts that she must step out of the old ways of simply working and providing for a family, she realizes that progress is inevitable and that she must take that step and fulfill her destiny. In chapter 31, she states, " That is just the situation we're facing at the moment.

Perhaps in the future, when there's a need for it, there will be a women's organization in Guatemala...If they don't learn, they don't progress. "

(Menchu pg. 261) This passage brings an image of a woman becoming empowered with her on independence. The imagery is that of a woman standing with a flag in one hand and a machete in the other leading others into battle for their freedom. In another light it shows a strong woman standing her ground amongst men in a feudal, militaristic courtroom. Another theme I found interesting was virtue of hard work that is instilled in her and her people.

Whether they are at home in the Altiplano or on the job at the fincas, Rigoberta and her people embrace manual labor wholeheartedly. Even in harsh conditions, such as the trips in the lorrys to the fincas and at the plantations themselves, they work their backs to the bone Meyer 3 essentially while never letting the ladinos get the best of them. The lorrys, or army truck covered in a tarp, would be horrific to be transported in especially in the tropic heat of Guatemala. She recalls in ch. 4, “ The lorry holds about forty people.

But in with the people go the animals...which the people from the Antiplano take with them to the finca. We have to take our animals.... During the trip the animals and the small children used to dirty the lorry and you'd get people vomiting and wetting themselves. ” (Menchu pg. 23) I can't even imagine the smell. The imagery in itself sounds like a vision of what a concentration camp transport would be like. It brings to mind a smell so horrific; sweat, vomit, urine, animal scat all blended with the suffocating humid heat.

The roads, if you'd like to call them that, were hard, bumpy and unkempt. The ladinos wouldn't even pull over to let them out! It makes one cringe. To have the conviction of having to endure this for less than pennies is quite impressive. Once they get there, there's the arduous task of the picking fields. Picking coffee beans is a pod-by-pod process, so it's no easy task, and when working to ensure next seasons crops back home on the antiplano it's even more impressive.

Rigoberta goes on to explain what happens in the fields in the same chapter, “ When you’re working, for example, and you take a little rest, he (the caporal) comes and insults you. ‘ Keep working, that’s what you’re paid for,’ he says. They also punish the slow workers...The caporal stands over you every minute to see how hard you’re working. ” (Menchu pg. 25) I see the Grim Reaper silently floating behind them, bating his time until they drop to carry them off into a hell where one never gets to rest, and work as a slave for the rest of eternity.

How society was then and how society is now I find similarities. “ Work hard for the American Dream, and you’ll reap the rewards of comfort into you’re retirement! ” Yeah, right. Good people work all their lives just so they get denied benefits and social security in the end. Meyer 4 The IRS and the Federal Reserve have made sure that you keep feeding the slave drivers until you drop, and leave your family with the burden of picking up your debts in your passing.

Her people go through the same thing as far as carrying the debt to the ladinos if a family member dies. Hard work is hard, and in her recollections of when she was 8 years old, hard work has even harder. The perseverance of Rigoberta and her people is commendable, and I can only imagine the virtue of hard work that can come from such horrific conditions. The imagery of such a beautiful country is hard to stomach with the story of Rigoberta and her family. The suffering and eventual personal victory for her is touching.

With the pictures and images of the countryside seen in class, I find the themes even stronger, and find myself stunned when I hear people of this

society complaining about not having enough funds for their iPhone bill. Try picking coffee beans in smoldering wet heat and having nothing to show for it. Try learning the language of your fellow workers and rising up to the challenge of you and your families belief system and coming out the other end triumphant. I certainly would like to see that, and when thinking of the tough times I will face and have faced, I'll remember what Guatemalan Indians had to go through in her day.