

The Guatemalan Genocide Through Indigenous Mayan Literature Twenty Years After the Peace Accords: Rigoberta Menchú, Humberto Ak'Abal and Victor Montejo

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Abstract

Guatemala experienced a cruel genocide in the early eighties, in the context of a repressive Conflict. Due to the different governments' repressive policies, this terrible social situation was little known abroad, and even in the own country. Just after the Peace Accords, several organisms worked to uncover the historical truth. In any case, we cannot forget that testimonial literature is a privileged mean to know this dark period of the contemporary history of Guatemala. This genre is particularly relevant, because the main writers are originally Mayans, and have directly suffered both repression and social exclusion due to ethnic reasons. Rigoberta Menchú, Unmberto Ak'abal and Víctor Montejo represent a new and original point of view in the measure in which they describe feelings and situations from the perspective of those who experience them personally. Testimonial literature or *the Testimonio* becomes an ethnographic document that allows us to know not just a period but a people who have suffered from repression and exclusion for centuries.

Keywords: Guatemala, testimonial literature, Mayans, genocide, Conflict.

Introduction

Testimonial literature or *the Testimonio* emerged in Latin America in the wake of the Cuban revolution, of the need to face the society's most urgent problems and the serious violations against human rights which took place in several countries in that region (Figuerola, 2004). In several countries as Guatemala or Colombia, in the eighties decade, this literary gender becomes a means of rewriting national history, in order to avoid the government censorship or the official interpretation or the national historiography. That is why Ortiz (2000) considers *the Testimonio* as "an

alternative perspective of the life conditions of those who are affected by wars, political prosecution, inequality or violation of rights” (p. 341).

Suárez Gómez (2011) considers that testimonial literature is “a hybrid representation which juggles realities, literary subjectivities and memories” (p. 57). In this sense, *the Testimonio* marries direct and experienced elements with the rewriting of obtained and reinterpreted data. The subject narrator, as a matter of fact, fluctuates between the perspective of some cultural and experienced components of the reality, and in turn, another different imagined aspects. That is why some elements of veracity can be perceived as diffused, as far as an empirical or pragmatic point of view is concerned. George Yúdice (2009) synthesized *the Testimonio* as follows:

Testimonial writing may be defined as an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e. g. war, oppression, revolution, etc). Emphasizing popular, oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as an agent (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting aright official history (p. 17).

We cannot forget that narrative is fiction, and the creation of narratives spaces implies a substantial reinterpretation of spatial-temporal sequences, despite the events are usually represented in a similar way as they took place, located in real and verifiable stages. In this regard Barcena (2001) underscores that “the words do not rise to the wound they concern” (p. 3). Semprún (2001), on flip side, underlines the importance of the witness, because the real witness is the one who cannot transmit the testimony anymore, because he was not able to survive the atrocities. The writer, in this case, does not take part in this victims sector, but he becomes the unique witness, capable of transmitting and translating these events into reality. Testimonial literature, despite its limitations, is a privileged vehicle to know and analyze specific events which took place in a determined situation and time.

Nora Jilevich’s perspective (2006) is particularly interesting, because she tries to approach the reality, in an objective way, in order to “retrieve the dignity of the community” (p. 17). Despite limitations that could be found in this literature, mainly due to the inherent intentionality, or even owe to ideological bias, we must not look sight of the fact there is an unavoidable link between this literature and social commitment. This social engagement becomes bigger after the massacres, the scorched-earth policies and the genocide, that “causes the nightmare of the helplessness and the silence in face of the horror that was going on in front of their eyes” (p. 20). The *Testimonio* has not just a *therapeutic* function, but it turns into an effective way to spread the truth that was forced to be gagged.

If we take into account the ethnographic significance of the literary and testimonial documents, we should draw the attention on several significant questions. First, the relevance of the testimony cannot be questioned. However, *the Testimonio* consist on an interpretation of the reality, and this fact has in itself different nuances we should take into account. Secondly, and due to the reason we have just described, there are some subjective elements, despite they should not affect the objectivity of the process. It is a well-known fact that writers expose the diverse events from an external perspective in spite of they were part of the event to a greater or lesser extent. tz (1998) discusses whether or not the analysis of a culture can be objective, and this question can be applied to the testimonial literature:

Translate pain, uncertainty, the insurmountable distance that separates this today from that decade in which we used to move like fish in water, not knowing that water was poisoned (Strejilevich, p. 117).

The Testimonio, in all its facets, accurately contributes to know the facts, *ad intra* and *ad extra*. This is essential to build social justice and memory Figueroa, (2004). It is a way to give voice to the voiceless (García, 2005).

Genocide victim's testimony: indigenous-Mayan testimonial literature

It can be considered as a privilege to find indigenous voices in Guatemala that express their experiences and own perspective from *the forgotten side*. The genocide testifies "the indigenous side of the inequality" (Del Álamo, 2004). In this sense, it is a real breakthrough in the fight against injustice the emergence of Mayans, describing their own drama. This new literature goes beyond the rigid patterns of the indigenous literature, which reinterpret, adapt and even distort the references, in order to build a new conscience (Cornejo Polar, 1989). In contrast, this new literature breaks away from previous ideologies, and in turn, it fulfills aesthetic and social functions, but they also turn into an ethnography that provides privileged data.

In the case of Guatemala, we cannot forget there is an ethnic diversity, often under the hegemony of certain majority groups, in this case, kakchiqueles (Bastos y Camus, 2003), although there are another important collectives with a strong cultural identity. In any case, we should take into account that indigenous testimonial literature has different manifestations and nuisances, depending on the ethnic origin, personal education, personal trajectory and the experience of the genocide they have. Bastos and Camus (2003) underscore that identification and self-identification with those elements linked to the *mayanity* can be vast or very specific. In this sense, some sectors of the Guatemalan society feel complete Mayan awareness, while other rural collectives are not aware they belong to the Mayans, but to a concrete or specific group, what is to say a particular ethnic group.

As far as testimonial indigenous literature in Guatemala is concerned, we will focus on three significant examples of this positive change: Rigoberta Menchú, Humberto

Ak'abal y Víctor Montejo. In the first authors, we must take into account there is little contact with biculturalism. That is why their Mayan identity is manifested in the use of their mother tongue. This circumstance will determine not just their writing, but their perspective on the genocide. On the contrary, Víctor Montejo represents a mixed perspective. He is from Mayan origin, but with a significant *ladina* influence. As a result, his narrative shows a three-tridimensional perspective: indigenous, Castilian, and, in turn, living exiled in the USA. (García, 2005). An important part of his work will be written in English, directed to an external collective. It aims to inform the American readers about these tragic events.

Humberto Ak'abal y Rigoberta Menchú usually write in Spanish, and this could be interpreted as a self-ethnocide, due to the paradox of writing in the colonial language to denounce the injustice. Nevertheless, we cannot forget some important elements. As far as Rigoberta Menchú is concerned, we must underscore she is not the direct author of her work, but the source, by transmitting the information. As a matter of fact, it is a re-interpretation of oral communication, a direct experience of a woman who learned Spanish at the age of adulthood. Concerning Humberto Ak'abal, he normally writes either in Spanish or Mayan. Even, some of his poems are written exclusively in Mayan-quiché.

To narrate the past events from the indigenous point of view can be considered as a privilege, despite the translation or the interpretation they carry out. Buxó (1983) considers that "two languages are not similar enough to claim they both represent the same social reality". As a result, "two worlds, living different realities are different worlds, and not the same world with different labels" (p. 28).

On the following pages, we will approach the genocide through these three authors.

The Mayan writers of the Guatemalan genocide.

Rigoberta Menchú Tum

Rigoberta Menchú, who was awarded with the Peace Nobel Prize in 1992, has generated many controversies in her country and in all over the world. There are some elements we cannot forget if we analyze her work. First, the controversy that arose from her publication can be partially understood as a spear campaign against her own person. Second, we cannot ignore her testimony has been ratified by diverse entities which have researched these tragic events, during the hardest years of the Conflict. Third, we must mention Guatemala is a ethnocentric country, and in this context, Mayans usually claim their rights and cultural identity. They are the basis of Guatemalan society, despite they suffer from social exclusion.

Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia (1982) (*My name is Rigoberta Menchú and this is why my Conscience was born*) was written by the anthropologist Elizabeth Burgos from the transcriptions of the personal interviews with the Rigoberta. This book has sparked controversies and contradictory opinions

since it was published. Thereby, some authors, like David Stoll, in his work *Rigoberta Menchu and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (1999) expresses that the Mayan is not faithful to reality, and the events and she usually overemphasizes situations she descriptions. In any case, the literary critic Arturo Arias puts the counter argument by bringing into relief that Menchú was the first woman who tried to break the stigma of discrimination, a triple discrimination in the case of the rural woman in Guatemala: female, indigenous and poor. Her testimony let the world know the harshness of the Conflict and its significant consequences. Besides, she describes habits, ways of life, beliefs, traditions and the Mayan cosmovision. By the very first time, this Mayan writer invests her people with the deep dignity they deserve.

Elizabeth Burgos respects the Mayan way of expressing ideas and feelings, being faithful to the Mayan linguistic patterns. She even makes grammatical mistakes in order to reflect the authenticity of indigenous thought and practices.

We must put special emphasis on the narrator's perspective. Burgos (Menchú) writes in the first person, like an autobiographical work. Thanks to this fact, many cultural issues are described, and when the author approaches *ladina* culture, she observes that reality with surprise and perplexity, as it were a totally different perspective:

La forma en que se siembra ahí no es la misma forma en que se siembra entre nosotros. El indígena rechaza cualquier clase de abonos químicos que le traten de enseñar (Burgos, 2005, p. 170).

The common thread of this narration is the confrontation between the indigenous and the *ladino*. In this context, the problem of land becomes a recurrent theme: its equitable distribution, justice indigenous tradition and Mayan cosmovision are unavoidably linked to this crucial issue. Menchú reveals all social miseries when she narrates her personal experiences in the capital city, in a unfavorable context for her. As she worked as maid, she concludes that Mayans have a position of social exclusion and inferiority in Guatemala:

Cuando vi que la sirvienta sacó la comida del perro. Iban pedazos de carne, arroz, cosas así que comieron los señores. A mí me dieron un poquito de frijol y unas tortillas tiesas. A mí eso me dolía mucho, mucho, que el perro había comido muy bien y que yo no merecía la comida que mereció el perro (...). Pero me sentía muy marginada. Menos que el animal que existía en casa (Burgos, p. 143).

Rigoberta reflects the personal pain suffered by every indigenous who must leave his land behind. All these testimonies are really useful to understand, to a greater or lesser extent, the posterior development of rebel movements, against injustice and arbitrariness. In this specific case, Vicente Menchú becomes a key piece in the struggle for social justice by the force, if necessary. His life and death make us realize the harsh living conditions of millions of Mayans, belonging to a number of generations.

The chapter XXIV describes the occupation and burning of the Spanish Embassy, in 1980. In principle, these peasants took over the Spanish Embassy in order to protest against government and its repression policies. The final result can be considered as one of the most significant violations of human rights. The author projects in this narration a personal and direct experience of the Mayan genocide.

Entonces entraron en la embajada de España. Ni siquiera nos pasaba por la cabeza lo que sucedería después. En primer lugar porque allí había personalidades importantes. En segundo lugar porque allí se encontraban también elementos del régimen que cayeron, murieron quemados junto a los campesinos. Por supuesto sabíamos que iba a haber una tensión, pero pensábamos que era posible que a todos lo que tomaron la embajada les concedieran una salida del país como refugiados políticos para que también pudieran dar a conocer su lucha afuera (Burgos, p. 250).

Despite we must underscore that Rigoberta's perspective is crucial in order to understand the social context she lived in, and the events those took place in the Spanish Embassy, we cannot forget there are another different reads of this fact that puts into question the veracity of this narration. In this sense, David Stoll (1999) differs considerably from Menchú's testimony as far as the causes of the occupation are concerned. He affirms that "the massacre at the Spanish embassy could have been a revolutionary suicide that included murdering hostages and fellow protesters" (p. 88). This accusation against the Mayan peasants contradicts this version, because there were found many provisions and food among the peasants' belonging, and this shows that the inherent intentionality they had was to stay in the embassy for an indefinite period. Despite Stoll calls into question these evidences, and one key issue (the condition of the bodies, after the fire), there was not any terrorist intention in this pacific occupation. Arias (2001) considers these affirmations by Stoll as an attempt to discredit Menchú and to falsify this information, due to ideological reasons.

El Clamor de la tierra: luchas campesinas en la historia reciente de Guatemala (1992), written with the *Comité Unidad Campesina* (CUC), describes a similar situation. We can perceive a significant affinity with the revolutionary movement of 1994, and, in turn, a deep social denouncement. Relevant themes are emphasized in this work: social exclusion, inequality, the problem of land, speculation and the abused suffered by Mayans:

Así los criollos y ladinos ricos, a lo largo de la historia han organizado políticas sociales y culturales prescindiendo de la existencia de cinco millones de indígenas. Esto les ayuda a convencerse de que no les somos indispensables (p. 23).

The Conflict, the peasant movement and the Massacre of Panzós become the key elements in order to understand the events:

El 29 de mayo de 1978, cerca de 600 hermanos kekchíes del departamento marcharon sobre el pueblo de Panzós (...). Al llenarse el parque empezaron a

escucharse detonaciones (...). Cuando las armas callaron, más de cien personas yacían en el suelo sin vida, nunca se supo el número de víctimas exacto (p. 45).

Within this background, it is possible to see one important fact: the unity of Mayans, from a significant sense of belonging, basis for the posterior vindication.

Humberto Ak'abal.

Humberto Ak'abal has become one of the most significant Guatemalan literacy figures. He is a Mayan poet widely renowned and his poetry has exerted a deep influence both in Guatemala and abroad over the two last decades, mainly owing to his personality, creativity, capacity, originality, social commitment and even the controversies he has been embroiled in. We must affirm that this relevant Central American writer creates poems saddled between the *Testimonio* and a profound lyricism. *Grito-Raqonchi'aj* (2004) implied a real bysector, a complete change of direction in Guatemalan literature, and not just a sharp shift in trend. *Grito* (yell) turns into a cry, a scream, a groaning and a grief for the dramatic situation and the pain suffered by the Mayan people, and the dramatic consequences of the genocide for the indigenous.

We could think that testimonial experiences are exclusively represented by narrative text. It is obvious that narrative presents facts relating an external reality through dialogues and descriptions. In this sense, fiction has become the most significant manifestation of this literacy genre in most countries of Latin America. Despite, several decades ago, Urbanski (1965) recognized the proliferation of testimonial poetry. Testimonial verses started to surpass the boundaries of the traditional craft of poetry to express own experiences about the genocide, exclusion, asymmetry and social denouncement.

In this regard, Ak'abal's literature represents a posterior as well as crucial moment. His verses are full of lyricism and testimony. That is why they can be considered as an indispensable document to read the reality in a different, non-official way. His poetry expresses a witness which is capable of reaching out any sensitiveness. Hence, the crucial role of testimonial poetry in the general context of the *Testimonio*, despite some components of the lyricism could hinder the access to an easy comprehension of the general events. We should underscore that

In addition to his many literary works, it is relevant to underline he also writes narrative. In any case, we would like to focus on *Grito-Raqonchi'aj*. These verses reflect inner concerns and *testimonial* experiences, going beyond conventional canons, and trying to construct the indigenous-Mayan subject by assimilating, consciously and directly, his own reality. (Claudia García, 2005, p. 75).

Ak'abal's poems, fresh, direct, full of lyricism and melancholic pathos and metaphorical and subtle as well, revolve around two axes. On the one hand, the languages he writes in, both Spanish and Kiché. His verses are written in both

linguistics expressions. However, his mother language (Mayan-Kiché) is most significant in his thinking and expression. Castilian verses are just a translation of his Mayan original poetry. This is a relevant way to fight for indigenous rights and to underscore the importance of his own language, often repressed and sullied by the violent repression. In addition, his Mayan expression is revealed in the syntax, logic and lexicon he cannot hide. The themes of his poems can be summarized as follows: social denounce, his suffering people, common awareness of belonging to a Mayan collective, the social and cultural background of the author, and a society marked by injustice and full of unequal or asymmetric relations. The main question revolves around social criticism and the pain of the most deprived sector of his society: the indigenous people:

Camposanto de flores,
Flores de muerto,
Arcos de ciprés,
Ramas de pino,
Coronas. Es día
De difuntos.
-Te traje atolito con cuchum,
-le hablan a la tumba-
Se le ofrece una jícara
Y el muerto bebe (p. 127).

His social sensitivity is mainly represented by the pain that Mayans experience. He clearly describes this collective subjected to abuses and social exclusion by the *ladinos*, and this issue plays a key role in Ak'abal testimonial poetry. Women, quintessential element for the indigenous cosmovision, turns into the main object of discrimination. That is why this poet often takes females into account in from his deepest feelings.

Cargando tu ropa
Y tu pueblo
En una caja de cartón.
De puerta en puerta,
De casa en casa:
Ajena y triste.
Sos la "muchacha"
La cholera.
Te humillan,
Te descascaran
Queman tu juventud
Y te machan el alma (p. 182).

Children, the weakest of the weak, also crop up in his work. They are described as innocents, fragile, and carriers of hope as well.

El patojito lloraba
Y entre lágrimas pedía
Que su mamá lo abrazara.
No llores, que está durmiendo.
Y dejó de llorar
Para que ella no se despertara (p. 200).

The context of the Conflict becomes constant and it is often related to the five centuries of pain, considered by Ak'abal as the starting point for the ethnocide, the genocide and the beginning of the end to the traditional Mayan culture. In any case, the Guatemalan poet refers to the death of innocent people, nameless and the total lack of human dignity:

No podré olvidar
El ladrido de los chuchos
Cuando comían
A los muertos
Que se quedaron tirados
En los caminos...
Los chuchos
También se comieron mi nombre. (p. 84).

The poem entitled "30 Years" makes explicit reference to the situation experienced by the country during the repression period. It is a reminder of the suffering, owe to the genocide, and, in turn, the need of remaking the lives of those who suffered from the war, what is to say "sew together the wounded land" (p. 72).

The opposition between Mayan cosmovision and the one imposed by the western culture turns into the most striking issue of this poetry.

Desde hace 500 años viene esta persecución;
Matan indígenas bajo cualquier pretexto,
Han borrado pueblos y aldeas enteras.
Señor de los cielos,
Señor de la tierra:
¿En dónde estás cuando pasan estas
Cosas? (p. 22)

There is a significant parity between the ethno-genocide that took place during the Conquest, perceived as a human and cultural tragedy of incalculable consequences for the development of Mayan society; and the ethno-genocide of the sixties and eighties, through the terrible scorched-earth policies, adopted by the repressive governments.

In other poems the author continues to write about his worries, that is to say, the genocide, erase the roots of their origin and culture, and by extension, the scorched-earth policies:

Y todo se consumió.
La ceniza aún quema,
el viento llora, busca,
sabe que allí
Humberto Ak'abal
Hubo una hoguera (Ak'abal, 118).

Humberto Ak'abal sets a unique precedent in the history of his country. This poetry inaugurates a new stage in the history of Guatemala, characterized by Mayan writers who claim their place in the country, its history and culture. Mayan people are currently far away from their glorious past, to a greater or lesser extent owe to the imposition of an external culture.

Victor Montejo: the direct experience of the massacres

In the same vein, although with nuances, the jakalteko writer Victor Montejo (1951) can be considered as one of the most relevant authors in this genre. His fundamental work, *Testimonio: muerte en una comunidad indígena* (1987) describes the real situation of a small community in the context of the genocide. Claudia García (2005) explains that both authors, Montejo and Ak'abal, share common elements: they are indigenous, although belonging to different ethnic groups; humble beginnings; and they write both in Spanish and in their Mayan language. However, Victor Montejo also writes part of his work in English, to a large extent because of part of his work was published in the USA. Both the authors have achieved international recognition, and this fact represents a landmark, owe to indigenous literature takes on a new dimension that transcends themes and structures of the indigenist literature, characterized by the external vision and description of the social injustice, but from a non-indigenous point of view.

Montejo had to move from Guatemala to the USA, because of political problems in his homeland, and when he was working abroad with Wallace Kaufman about the poem *El Kanil: man of lighting*. In order to protect both his integrity and his family's, he had to move to a different context which conditioned his literature and the way of expressing his *Testimonio* (Montejo, 1999, p. 115). His work is presented under a three conditioning factors: originally indigenous thought and writing, Spanish-Mayan biculturalism and its subsequent English translation. Nevertheless, it is important to underscore, with García (2005) that this circumstance gives him the privilege of being a "theoretician at the border" (p. 1). Montejo is a writer, an anthropologist and a Mayan as well.

The story is based on the events that took place in Tz'alalá, a remote and small village to the west of Huehuetenango. The army arrived at the community at the

beginning of 1982. They were dressed as civilians. Hence, they were confused with guerrillas by civilian patrols of that village, who dared to attack them. This attack, with stones and rudimentary weapons provoked a massacre that killed more than twenty people. Montejo bears witness to the events he experienced when he was a rural teacher in that region. In an indirect way, other massacres are mentioned. This underscores that similar situations were quite frequent in this decade.

This narration describes the lack of sense of the conflict, and the terrible forms of the armed violence. Hence, the author considers that violence has no foundations. That is why repression is observed as an effective way of spreading fear and social control, but it has no sense and it can be considered as a paradox. In this specific case, the situation was completely absurd, because those who tried to defend government forces were devastated by them,

It is necessary to refer and understand the historical context in which the event takes place. In September 1982 Efraín Ríos Montt had held power for few months. In any case, Ríos Montt's government can be considered as *the government of the horrors*, due to the brutality and the repression exerted by its armed wing. If with the previous president (Romeo Lucas García) both violence and repression reached unknown levels, the new one took Guatemalan society to a new level of fear of unexpected dimensions. Ball (1999) describes how in seventeen months were committed the 43 per cent of the violations of human rights. Victor Montejo (1999) underlines that "with the raise to power of Efraín Ríos Montt, all human rights were abolished, and the army became the sole arbitrator over the lives of Guatemalans" (p. 113). This anthropologist experienced the savage repression. Therefore, Montejo carries out a scathing criticism against Ríos Montt, and this situation led the author to a forced exile.

Reference ought to be made to the army methods, characterized by its rawness and cruelty. Owing to the rigorous military training, they carried out a number of assaults, using all sorts of abuses and arbitrariness in order to achieve their aims. Montejo, like most of the authors of the genocide, stresses that violence is gratuitous and the members of the militaries seem to enjoy with torture and pain. These descriptions touch the readers' sensitiveness, in part due to the lack of empathy from the aggressors.

A dark skinned veteran or rehooked one, one of the soulless, unscrupulous former foot-soldiers that president Ríos Montt recreated and sent to the Indian villages during the Offensive against Subversion (p. 23).

The collective hum and trauma in the communities is still evident. Despite Mayan culture and identity diverge considerably from these attitudes, the writer considers that indoctrination and terror contributed to transform attitudes and this was why militaries showed little respect for human rights:

They brainwash and indoctrinate us in such a way that we could torture our own parents, if we were ordered to. I spent three years in the barracks, and what did I learn? Fucking zero. The only thing you are taught is to kill and kill, again and again (p. 86)

The abuse of power by the military arms of political classes is represented by the different lieutenants and the general commandant, on the top of the unscrupulous behavior:

First they cut out one eye, then the other. Then, the nose, lips, the tongue, ears and testicles, and last they slice off his head. It is slow, excruciating death, conceived to make a human being die in the greatest possible pain (p. 84).

The third chapter is particularly significant concernig to the *Testimonio*, because it describes the killing of Sebastián, one young member of the community who was one of the victims of the initial obsession with putting an end to the guerrillas. "I watched my son die" supposes a paraphrase of the collateral victims in the genocide.

A woman I know had gotten a bullet in her hand while she was making tortillas in her kitchen. And a man of seventy lay dying in his house, after a beating by the soldiers who broke his jaw (Montejo, p. 102).

We can read here the direct testimony of the victim's mother. This narration arouses empathy and many other feelings in the reader, mainly owe to the painful and heart-breaking description of the whole process. That is why Montejó's work becomes a privileged ethnography to know and understand the Guatemalan genocide and the Conflict itself. Furthermore, throughout this story it is possible to understand traditional Mayan culture and the survival of beliefs, habits and components of the indigenous identity, like the cycle of life and death and the relevance of the dreamworld in their lives. When Sebastian's mother describes how "last night I have bad dreams and felt a danger for you" (p. 31), puts on the table various important issues.

In this context of betrayals and search for culprits, Montejó refers one term, often used by militaries in their effort to find traitors and the guerrillas: "tell jokes" (pp. 37-39). The own military jargon, full of linguistic turns and specificities hides a cynical terminology. Victor Montejó refers this particular expression to describe the tortures and the way the accused were beaten till confessions were extracted by brutal treatment. We should not lose sight of one significant fact: in the early eighties, most indigenous people did not probably understand and speak Spanish. Due to these methods, the organized apparatus of power achieved social control

Conclusions

We cannot call into question that testimonial literature, in special, from an indigenous perspective, turns into a key instrument in promoting knowledge and understanding of the Guatemalan genocide. Own experience expresses facts and feelings from first-hand information. Twenty years after Peace Agreements and almost forty, after the tragic events these authors related, the *Testimonio* keeps on being a significant meant to understand that dark chapter in the recent history of Guatemala.

Montejo and Menchú had to leave the country in agitated times, due to concrete reasons. For its part, Ak'abal has stayed in Guatemala, exactly in Totonicapán, during the Conflict and currently, despite the rigors of the continuous violence. Strejilevich (1991), in terms of violence, genocide and the role of the diferentent goverments to spread fear, control and repression, distinguishes between voices in exile and voices in *inxile*. On the one hand, the exile can be considered, as a way of escape. It is a not desirable situation, characterized by pain and suffering due to the uproot feelings. In any case, it is a good setting for describing situations and abuses without censure. The author would be free to express everything and with the only limitation of his explanations and useful clarifications to contextualize the events, in a foreign cultural framework. On the other hand, the so called *inxilio* (p. 2) describes the situation of repression which suffers the writer who is living in a hostile context, characterized by repression and fear. A militarized country represses the possibilities of freedom of expression. In response to this, the author needs to develop several strategies to avoid danger and risk. To achieve this, the writer will use metaphors, symbols and a codified language to express his social criticism. This is the most common way of writing about the genocide, and this turns into the main means employed by the *damned writers* of the army conflict.

In the concrete case of indigenous authors, Ak'abal is the highest representative of the *inxilio*. In any case, we should take into account that his poetry is for a more specific public. In turn, Ak'abal writes this testimonial work ten years after the genocide, although in the Conflict period.

Finally, we cannot call into question the value and quality of this literature, courageous and decisive, decided to denounce these perverse policies. In any case, despite we can find different similarities among these three authors, each one has its own particularities.

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