

Guatemalan testimonies. Five *militante* works within histocial-literary archetype

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Resumen: En Guatemala, la configuración de obras testimoniales derivó de su propia dinámica política, si bien, la revista *Casa de las Américas* –que se desarrolló como un elemento difusor del discurso revolucionario en América Latina– mantuvo relación con intelectuales guatemaltecos. El Testimonio fue configurado culturalmente como un espectro propio para expresar la realidad que desarrolló una espiral de violencia, así como un instrumento por el cual se permitiera denunciar los hechos atroces de la contrainsurgencia. La lucha política configuró estrategias de la lucha ideológica que son visibles en estas obras, por ello, la necesidad de mostrar un conjunto de textos concernientes al conflicto armado interno es pertinente ante la constante reinterpretación histórica guatemalteca, donde la voz de los actores principales del hacer histórico obtienen un marco de referencialidad que se vincula al desarrollo historiográfico. El devenir histórico enunciado en las obras testimoniales se complementa con el trazo de su desarrollo frente a la dinámica cultural, política y social, en la que se reconocen sus motivaciones como militantes de las organizaciones revolucionarias.

Palabras clave: Guatemala, testimonio, conflicto armado interno.

Abstract: In Guatemala, the configuration of testimonial works derived from their own political dynamics, while the journal *Casa de las Américas* –developed as a spreading element of revolutionary discourse in Latin America– held a relationship with the Guatemalan intellectuals; the testimony was cultural and configured as a spectrum to express the reality that developed a spiral of violence, as well as an instrument which would condemn the atrocious events of the counterinsurgency. The political fight set up strategies for the ideological struggle that are visible in these works; therefore, the need

to show a set of texts relating to the internal armed conflict is relevant to the constant Guatemalan historical reinterpretation, where the voice of major actors in the history obtained a framework of referentiality that relates to the historiographical development. The historical evolution set forth in the testimonial works is complemented by the outline of its development from the cultural, social, and political dynamics which recognize their motivations as a militant of the revolutionary organizations.

Keywords: Guatemala, testimony, internal armed conflict.

The countries comprising the Central American region are in general a source of testimonial works, which relates socio-political changes lived in a violent manner during the decades of the sixties, seventies and eighties¹. In particular, the experience of the armed struggle in Guatemala prompted the production of a literary and testimonial discourse emerging from the context that began after the triumph of the Cuban revolution. As part of a strategic function in the process of social changes from the sixties –in particular, the military uprising on November 13, 1960– to the signing of the Guatemalan Peace Accords in December 1996.

The genesis of the testimonial genre concerned the literary journal *Casa de las Américas*, which was involved in the dissemination of the matter of Gender in Latin America especially in that “The testimony also issued an anthropological and political purpose but with literary value promoted, for example, by ECA at the Catholic University José Simeón Cañas in El Salvador”². The impetus of testimonial works in Guatemala is part of the cultural development that arises from the revolutionary struggle of the country. It is one of the expressions of that development that he obtains to show as part of the rebellion against the system, which already entered in the field of literature and history, and has a liberating role to people that display their experience to whom reads them and knows they are educational and revealing. According to Jose Luis Balcárcel, testimonies as literary works serve as an instrument of revolutionary struggles:

Literature, like all art, has to do in some way, or several, with the processes of national liberation. Not say only an ideological argument, but it is likely to postulate a historical one. This is demonstrated by various national and liberation movements, through the study of their development. Literature contributes to the formation of

¹ To view general evolution of Testimonial Genre in Central America, it is possible to read Mackenbach, Werner, “Realidad y ficción en el testimonio centroamericano”, in *Revista Istmo*, 2 (2000) <<http://istmo.denison.edu/n02/articulos/realidad.html>> [Consultado el 9 de noviembre de 2010].

² Torres-Rivas, Edelberto, “La sociedad: la dinámica poblacional, efectos sociales de la crisis, aspectos culturales y étnicos”, in *Historia general de Centroamérica. Historia inmediata (1979-1991). Tomo VI*, España, Sociedad Estatal Quinto Centenario, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, 1993, p. 196.

conscience which they are formed by and origin movements. Literature, along with other artistic and cultural events, plays an important role in the processes of national liberation, to a greater or lesser extent, depending on the specific and peculiar circumstances of those concerned³.

Guatemalan Testimonies have been published within the framework of the armed struggle in Guatemala, giving the impression that they are limited in quantity, compared to those produced in other Central American countries. In fact, the entire Guatemalan Testimonies have remained isolated from international criticism, and also have lacked the recognition they deserve, which leads to their being ignored and very little expansion. Nevertheless, at least one of them has transcended not only like a testimonial work, but as a reference to the same genre while it has been the subject of countless studies around the testimony of the protagonist and the tracks that converge around of testimony genre: I refer the publication of Elizabeth Burgos entitled *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*⁴, first published in 1983.

The work compiled by Burgos overshadowed, to some extent, to other works of the Guatemalan origin. However, it coexists with other texts from diverse forms showing who support Gender: in Guatemala her work has developed testimonies that host their own characteristics and mingle with the literary trends of the region, arising mainly from the armed conflict faced by the Central America countries. That is the reason why Gender in Guatemala is characterized as part of a regional trend. Mario Roberto Morales said that:

[...] the fact that the *testimoniante* is not necessarily an eyewitness to what it tells but it can be a personalized *ficcionalización* of what happened, not causing a big surprise in Central America, where the testimony and testimoniality accounts as axes of the narrative of the last twenty years and have explored the relationship between history and fiction with great breadth and exuberant wealth of resources, without restricting the genre ever to the requirement of an eyewitness. What has characterized the Central American Testimony has been the imaginative and multivocal character, which means you can actually be a multiclassista, multiethnic and intercultural expression, and not exclusive of subalternity illiterate and oral, as required by the U.S. theory of testimony⁵.

Guatemalan testimonial works that can be considered part of the testimonial production within the historical and literary archetype describe the experiences of the

³ Balcárcel, José Luis, "Literatura y liberación nacional en Guatemala", in *Revista Casa de las Américas*, 126 (1981), p. 18. Traducción propia.

⁴ Burgos, Elizabeth, *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*, México, Siglo XXI Editores, 1998, pp. 290.

⁵ Morales, Mario Roberto, *Stoll-Menchu: la invención de la memoria*, Guatemala, Editorial Consucultura, 2001. To view the paper of Berveley where he points out an idea, Literary is liberation issue after of Cuban revolution, Beverley, John. "¿Posliteratura? Sujeto subalterno e impasse de las humanidades" in *Revista Casa de la Américas*, 190, (1993), pp. 13-24. Traducción propia.

guerrillas –both rural and urban–, the peasant and indigenous struggle, international cooperation, the disagreements of the armed movement in that the criticism comes to light, and as well as other topics related to the period of Guatemalan insurgence. For the arising historical problems, the testimony is the main information tool, where the exercise of conveying the experiences of *Testimoniantes* works as a cathartic, and a requirement of a psychological and subjective of what people lived, which shows an immediate intention of complaint.

1. The awareness of Guatemalan testimonies

On one hand, while the armed political conflict faced a spiral of violence, the social movement denounced the repression by the Guatemalan government. On the other hand, cultural representations in Latin America arising from the political-military organization fighting against the government repressor had a frame of reference within the literary field, such the Cuban literary journal *Casa de la Américas* and its annual competition. The book relates the history of Guatemala, the literary contest and the Gender Testimony of the work of Elizabeth Burgos –a testimony that became a paradigm of the same gender. In 1982, Rigoberta Menchú conducted an international tour in which she denounced the violation of human rights suffered by the indigenous peoples of Guatemala. In the same way, she showed the deplorable political and social situation that had befallen the Central American country after facing more than twenty years of revolutionary struggle and a state policy against the guerrillas. While Menchú was in France, she met the Venezuelan ethnologist Elizabeth Burgos through the Guatemalan historian Arturo Taracena, with whom she started a work project related to the task played in her European tour. That project consisted in gathering the testimonial material about the life of Menchú, being the primary idea “particularly the life and situation of indigenous Guatemalans and those who participated in any clandestine political group in general”⁶.

The testimony of Menchú was arised from the outset as a project in which different people are involved, being a collective effort⁷. Nevertheless, it would only be the voice of Menchú which would appear in the body of testimony. The inclusion of *others* in the body of the testimony of Menchú –as the participation that took some members of the Peasant Unity Committee⁸– accounted as a community work: “All those involved in the project worked a lot on what could be said and what could not and what was needed or almost

⁶ Gutiérrez Magallanes, María del Socorro, *Haciendo Camino: Mujer y Palabra. Autobiografía política latinoamericana escrita o enunciada por mujeres*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006, p. 59.

⁷ Gutiérrez Magallanes spoke to Mercedes Olivera to write her thesis, where it is possible to view some parts of the interview. Gutiérrez Magallanes, María del Socorro, *Haciendo Camino: ... op. cit.*, pp. 42-62.

⁸ Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC) was an organization that EGP used as one as popular front of movement armed.

obligatory to say in this book through Rigoberta”⁹.

The project sought to impress the publication of the testimonial material, which is why the participation of Burgos was not fortuitous, but the wife of the anthropologist Regis Debray¹⁰, a leading political figure and renowned writer and historian. Debray wrote about the development of the armed conflict in Guatemala alongside Ricardo Ramírez de León¹¹, Commander Rolando Morán, who belonged to the same Guerrilla Army of the Poor¹². The impact of the texts and the presence of Regis in the Latin American left wing were of great significance to revolutionary groups in Latin America.

The testimony of Rigoberta was first published in French and later on by the publisher of *Casa de las Américas* after receiving the award of the *Premio Casa* 1983 under the title *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia*¹³. Burgos stated in her work some important aspects of the testimony of Menchú; similarly she underlined several features of the testimonial works in her foreword: “Rigoberta has much to count because his life, as she herself says, is the life of the entire people”¹⁴.

Menchú narrates various aspects of the political life in Guatemala that are key points in the history of the country itself. Among the events that brought on site are the creation of the Peasant Unity Committee (CUC in Spanish) and the Popular Front January 31 (Frente Popular 31 de enero). The latter was established to commemorate a year of the takeover of the Embassy of Spain in which almost all its occupants died, among those the father of Rigoberta, Vicente Menchú.

In her story, Menchú told about the culture of the Guatemalan people, their traditions that have developed over time and how they have been developed in the system that has remained in an oppression state. She highlights how the peasant organization is a mechanism that has enabled to resist forms of domination and extermination at the hands of the Guatemalan government, where the revolutionary struggle is supplemented by forms of peasant and indigenous struggle. The testimony of Menchú is the story of the people, who after resisting the ravages of the system have to go into exile and face persecution. Not only is the claim of the Indian problem in Guatemala, it is the constant struggle against ethnocide, “What it requires is the recognition of their culture, the acceptance of its otherness, and the power it deserves by law”¹⁵.

Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia succeeded beyond the expectations of the authors. What is more, the testimony of Menchú became a point of

⁹ Gutierrez Magallanes, María del Socorro, *Haciendo Camino: ... op. cit.*, pp. 59.

¹⁰ Burgos was a member of the Communist Party in Venezuela from 1958. From 1963 she traveled to many Latin-American countries together with her husband Debray. They were in different groups of the left. They had a guerrilla entrapment at Cuba. She was an activist when her husband was in the jail. Later on she tried to found the Latin American peace and preferred the Democracy.

¹¹ Debray, Régis, *Las pruebas de fuego, la crítica de las armas*, México, Siglo XXI Editores. 1975.

¹² Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (EGP).

¹³ Burgos, Elizabeth, *Me llamo Rigoberta... op. cit.*, pp. 290.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 11.

reference in the testimony genre, causing a controversy regarding the veracity of its contents after the publication of the book by the anthropologist David Stoll entitled *Rigoberta Menchú, And the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*¹⁶. It strives to demonstrate the lack of truthfulness on the testimony of Menchú and was an answer and a tendentious reaction for various academic and political splinter groups, mainly driven by the pursuit of a reputation, sponsored by the American right wing; it was through the journalist of *The New York Times* Larry Rother who supports the research of this anthropologist¹⁷. It should be noted that the position of the right wing and the U.S. literary critics does not manifest itself from the publication of the book of Stoll, but appeared some time ago, as noted by John Berveley, in an article published in the journal *Casa de las Américas* in 1993. He suggested several problems faced by the story of Menchú as the subscription of testimony in the literature and the position of the *subaltern* subject within the same ratings¹⁸.

The work of Menchú is, among other things, accused of being part of a political pamphlet seeking to make propaganda to guerrilla group which Menchú was linked to, because neither was she involved or was an eyewitness to violence happenings that were narrated in her testimony. To Stoll, the work is a documentary novel and not a testimony about of her life, in which he questioned the participation of Burgos to the extent of altering the voice of Menchú. Whatever the political reasons revealed by the confrontation between the works of Stoll and Burgos, there was the need to deep into the issues that concerned the testimony, especially the veracity of the facts in question since one of the characteristics of the testimony is the *truth* imposed on the aesthetic issues.

On the issue the *Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies* states that “it is not appropriate to address this issue because the true as such is irrelevant for the testimonial narrative, which is a testimony regardless of the generating a transforming praxis”¹⁹. To continue with the Beverley argument which states “the core of the testimonio is found in its ethical / aesthetical function, which may be fulfilled only the Narrator is truthful and real”²⁰.

In short, the book *Me llamó Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* remains open for the study of the testimonial genre, both in the academic and literary-historical debate as well as in the political field. In the same way it has stimulated the development of research, focusing on gender studies within the same testimonial thematic²¹. It is a book that not being the portrait of Guatemala shows the same interest in the Central American

¹⁶ Stoll, David, *Rigoberta Menchú, and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*, Colorado, United States, Westview Press, 1999, pp. 336

¹⁷ Cortez, Beatriz, “La verdad y otras ficciones: Visiones críticas sobre el testimonio centroamericano” in *Revista Istmo*, 2, (2004). «<http://istmo.denison.edu/n02/articulos/testim.html>» [Consultado el 9 de noviembre de 2007].

¹⁸ Beverley, John, “¿Posliteratura?... *op. cit.*”, p. 13-24.

¹⁹ Hawley, John, *Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies*, Westport, United States, Greenwood Press, 2001, p. 432.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 433.

²¹ Franco, Jean, “Si me permiten hablar: La lucha por el poder interpretativo” in *Revista Casa de la Américas*, 171 (1988), pp. 88-94; Gutiérrez Magallanes, María del Socorro, *Haciendo Camino:... op. cit.*, pp. 153.

countries and the circumstances of the people who faced a struggle. Moreover, the book shore up studies on various topics that holds the testimonial production in Latin America.

2. From the jungle to the *Casa de las Américas*

In 1981 the editorial of the journal *Casa de las Américas* published the book *Los Días de la Selva*²² for the first time, two years before publishing the work of Burgos. The book of Mario Payeras was awarded in *Premio Casa* that year, being over time one of the great pieces of Guatemalan testimonies that has transcended the borders of the Central American countries. *Los Días de la Selva* is one of the instances of the guerrilla aesthetic references. Payeras belongs to a group of revolutionary writers who are known as the "Compromised Generation". Amongst others belonged to this group the revolutionary poet Otto René Castillo and Roberto Obregón, as well as novelists Marco Antonio Flores, Mario Roberto Morales, Arturo Arias, Luis de León.

Among other works of Payeras, we may point out *El trueno en la ciudad. Episodios de la lucha armada urbana de 1981 en Guatemala*, published in 1987, which belongs to the testimonial genre, as well as *Latitud de la flor y el granizo*. Both books address the critical issue from an eco-Marxism and seek to establish the *dialectical* link between the environment of Guatemala and social life. They are the reference point of capitalist development and certain phenomena, which have caused irreparable damage to the Guatemalan region. The book consists of eight chapters and begins with the stories entitled *January 19*, when the Front Guerrilla Edgar Ibarra (FGEI) penetrate from Mexico to Guatemala by the territory of Ixcán in 1972 and who later formed the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP).

In *Los días de la selva* it is narrated the journey that the revolutionaries had to spend during the preparation of the guerrillas. Some moments of great disappointment are portrayed in the story, as happened with the defection of a fellow named Ephraim, who had been one of the fifteen founders of the guerrillas²³. Another tough time for the combatants is making decisions that entail the defection of another member of the group. The narrative is intertwined with the feelings of the author and the arguments used by the guerrillas to end the companion Minche and the attitude of the staff member to know his fate²⁴.

The story of Mario Payeras focuses on the task that the guerrillas had proposed in providing support for it, as well as the adaptation to the land they occupied during those years of preparation. Regarding Erick Aguirre, he points out that the work has examined previously:

Key parts of his reflections on *Los días de la selva* are focused on trying to take over

²² Payeras, Mario, *Los Días de la Selva*, México, Joan Boldó i Climent, 1989, pp. 167

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 56.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 56-59.

and amend the error committed by the Guatemalan guerrilla movement to bypass for many years the symbols and expressions of indigenous identity of the villagers in the mountainous region of Quiché, Huehuetenango and Ixcán, which hindered them secure their support in the Revolutionary War²⁵.

The guerrillero emphasizes on natural landscapes in which they are immersed and do not go unnoticed surrounding the plants and animals that live together in a new environment. The daily life of peasants is perceived as brushstrokes in the narration as well as indigenous customs that are part of its coupling to the ground.

Among the actions of great significance that narrates the author of *Los días de la selva* is the planning and execution of the death of Luis Arenas Barrera, known as the Tiger of Ixcán, who was a fearsome landowner in the area and the author of *San Luis Ixcán* and *La Perla* farms, which was carried out on June 5, 1975. This action represented a momentous time in the armed struggle in Guatemala, as it marked the first armed action of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor. Moreover, indigenous Guatemalans saw some affinity with this group; although other groups criticized the action as it unfolded an antiguerrillera operation, not only in the Ixcán area, but throughout the country. Payeras mentioned how they were harmed by the offensive which was unleashed after the implementation of the Tiger of Ixcán.

The text ends with the narration of the unpleasant experience that the guerrillas lived to see a partner (Fonseca) becomes in the leader of the actions to arrest several associates and members of guerrillas, after he was taken prisoner by the army Guatemalan. The arrest and denouncement of his colleagues put at risk the work the guerrillas had done for years, complicating his situation. The outcome of this experience is almost novelistic; it ends with the escape of Fonseca from military troops and returned with the guerrillas only to be sentenced by them, because he wanted to pay for his betrayal in that he knows he would be shot and decided to die that way, as a sign of repentance because of breaking with the guerrillas.

In the structure of the text, Payeras conveys some of their intentions and some literary devices can be used like “chronotopical the trajectory of the plot structure articulates a course for growth of the community and individuals defined by the ideological and moral requirements of the revolutionary action”²⁶. The issue led to *Los días de la selva* to be a transcending testimony work outside the Guatemalan border, as well as radiography of the guerrillas who introduced it. The guerrilleros are seen as characters in flesh and blood, with virtues and moral principles, but also it shows their errors and defects, which makes

²⁵ Aguirre, Aragón Erick, “Control discursivo y alteridad en el testimonio centroamericano. Cinco modelos representativos” in *Revista Istmo*, 2 (2000), «<http://istmo.denison.edu/n02/articulos/control.html>» [Consultado el 9 de noviembre de 2007]. Traducción propia.

²⁶ Duchsne Winter, Juan, *Narraciones de testimonio en América Latina, Cinco Estudios*, Río Piedras, United States, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1992, p. 126.

the book an impact and it continues being awarded from the *Premio Casa* in 1981.

Mario Payeras obtained a philosophical training through three different institutions –University of San Carlos de Guatemala (USAC), Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and University of Leipzig in Germany–. His political career began with the EGP in 1968 and was part of his leadership when he entered the territory of the jungle of Ixcán and continued with the urban front in 1978 until 1982. He ended with the political-military organization in 1994 because of political, ideological and ethical differences. The break with the EGP did not interrupt his political work, since he founded an armed organization called *Revolutionary October*. Finally, he died in Mexico in 1995.

When *Los Días de la Selva* was published in *Casa de las Américas*, the journal celebrated eleven years of having established the Gender Testimony in the foundations of their contest, as well as raising the theoretical problems to be faced, the pair were presented as the *true revolutionary literature*²⁷. Since then and even before it has formalized the *Premio Casa* in that category, their representation –both *Los Días de la Selva* and the Gender Testimony– were present in the contest as literary works that contained the guerrilla experience in various ways. The presence of these works meant to the genre an important aspect that “gave it, at least in our language, one personality that it lacked”²⁸.

From its inclusion as a literary genre in *Premio Casa*, it was expressing the essence of a proper link on a par with the Latin American model of *Real maravilloso*. While the linkage of the speech was based on the identity of post-revolutionary Cuba, it contained an element of integration socializing, and helped to “contribute to articulate the collective memory, the *us* and not *I*”²⁹. The *I-collective* in the testimony permits to externalize the presence of subsumed cultures, starting from the various forms of manifestation of Gender in Guatemala.

The prominence that has enjoyed the testimonial book of Burgos *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* placed various works of Guatemalan origin to a lesser privilege, despite being works of great importance that have been virtually ignored or unknown outside its borders. Also, the monopoly of testimonial works that relate Guatemalan political and social movements whose key is their ethnic appearance, can tell us that this claiming element is considered a challenge to Marxist thinking that prevailed in the armed organizations and a stroke for the fight classes. At the same time, the reflection from the seventies about the Guatemalan reality that carried

²⁷ Ochando Aymerich, Carmen, “Hacia la Institucionalización del Testimonio”, in Christian Paepe. (ed.). *Literatura y Poder*, Lovaina, Bélgica, Leuven University Press. 1995, p. 167.

²⁸ “La Casa de las Américas y la «creación» del género testimonio” in *Revista Casa de las Américas*, 200 (1995), pp. 120-121.

²⁹ Dröscher Barbara, “El testimonio y los intelectuales en el triángulo atlántico. Desde El Cimarrón, traducido por H. M. Enzensberger, hasta la polémica actual en torno a Rigoberta Menchú, de Elizabeth Burgos” in *Revista Istmo*, 2 (2000), « <http://istmo.denison.edu/n02/articulos/intel.html> », [Consultado el 9 de noviembre de 2007].

out the political-military organizations led to the involvement of the indigenous sector. This was strengthened by the currents of thought which contained a political sense by combining the religious aspect, and also the contribution of these social organizations that worked within the indigenous communities. Those ones produced an awareness of importance that individuals have a role in the historical transformations in which they are immersed. One more reference of their input is referred by John Beverley, in particular for the Central American country:

One of the most important aspects of the peace process in Guatemala, as in other countries who went through similar experiences of genocide, is the work of forensic anthropology rebuilding the genocide committed by the military and paramilitary forces during the war against the guerrillas. What makes Menchú in her testimony and what a forensic scientist in the reconstruction of a past erased by the violence of power, neither alternative is not competitive but are complementary projects, which for its own development process create forms of dialogue, cooperation and coalition among intellectuals, scientists, teachers, artists and social movements of subordinates who cross borders prior to class, gender and ethnicity³⁰.

3. With the pen in his hand: Signing of Agreements, writing testimonies

The decade of the nineties in Guatemala suffered the remnants of a escalation of violence that led the regime to rule since 1954, which managed to create terror among the population. The citizens were aliens to the shore to remain in the political environment (though this is not guaranteed to stay with life), and exile from the country or linked to the revolutionary groups to deal with military offensives. The social partners were looking for a new political scenario, a dialogue with the government strengthened the tripartite National Revolutionary Union of Guatemala (URNG) formed by the Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT), the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) and the Organization of People in Arms (ORPA), in order to shadow other small groups that were absorbed by these or disappeared on the road, without diminishing their performance in the process.

The signing of the Agreement on a Firm and Lasting Peace in December 1996³¹ is the result of a path of dialogue among major political forces that survived the 36 years of fighting in the Central American country. Nevertheless, the result did not meet a major sector of fighters. The signing of the agreements marked a new political strategy, in which

³⁰ Beverley John, *Testimonio. On the Politics of Truth*, United States, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 2004, p. 6.

³¹ Who signed the Acuerdos de Paz were: Government's members: Gustavo Porras Castejón, Raquel Zelaya Rosales, General de Brigada Otto Pérez Molina y Richard Aitkenhead Castillo. Unión Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca's members: Ricardo Ramírez de León (Comandante Rolando Morán), Jorge Ismael Soto García (Comandante Pablo Monsanto), Ricardo Rosales Román (Carlos Gonzáles) y Jorge Edelberto Rosal Meléndez. Naciones Unidas's members: Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

the pen was a common resource, and irony-recurring acquired ownership of a weapon, so that, on a par with the dialogue process on course and the completion of the Agreements, testimony resumed quite importance in Guatemala, making the compilation and writing of the experiences to become a more complex *praxis* that the mere attempt to document the experience of the libertarian or revolutionary movements in Latin America "in terms of an immediately political and social action"³². To some extent *it is a way to continue* within a ideological framework that seeks to transform the political and social reality of Latin American countries, or in this particular case, the Guatemalan reality, as it has not abandoned the struggle by the testimoniantes, who make use of alternatives to suit their position in society, and also reassess the mechanisms of *how* the fight was driven by the political-military organizations.

A surprisingly fact is that various social actors were involved in the revolutionary struggle that concluded its involvement with cultural activities strengthened during the course of the armed confrontation. An example to illustrate is Mario Roberto Morales, who from his beginnings as a writer has experienced with the literature in different ways. *Señores bajo los árboles* was published in 1994 that he himself categorized as a *Testinovela*. The work has focused on the massacres committed to the indigenous and peasant communities in Guatemala during the eighties. It is a hybrid proposal that combines pieces of testimony with fictional aspects of documenting the massacres, in which Morales is not depending on a single witness voice, but many of them, because he refers to the *tierra arrasada* phenomenon driven by the Guatemalan government as a mass phenomenon. It is a complaint through writing; there is evidence of his criticism about the activities of the Guatemalan army and the guerrillas. Regarding Morales, *Señores bajo los Árboles* is located within the genus testimonial. Besides the features he underlines the mark that the testimonial works should have to feature: "A book that would respond to this aesthetic style would be, therefore, polyphonic, plural and diverse, according to the experience of the individual victims"³³.

The constant experimentation of the author led him to execute between September 1996 and January 1997 a series of publications in his column for the newspaper *Siglo Veintiuno* of Guatemala, which formed the testimonial work issued under the name *Los que se fueron por la libre*³⁴. Morales returned to play with words and classified the text as Folletimonio³⁵ due to the mixture that composes the saga and the testimony. The book recounts his involvement in the armed conflict developed in Guatemala from the sixties.

The work of Morales is hardly known outside his country. Nonetheless, it contains a prominent place within the written testimonials produced in Guatemala. His texts are

³² Prada Oropeza, Renato, *El discurso-testimonio y otros ensayos*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2001, pp. 18-19.

³³ Morales, Mario Roberto, *Stoll-Menchu: ... op cit.*, pp. 214

³⁴ Morales, Mario Roberto, *Los que fueron por la libre. Historia personal de la lucha armada y la guerra popular*, México, Praxis, 1998, pp. 129

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

regarded by Seymour Menton as the Guatemalan version of the Generación de la onda because it resembles the thematic content and discourse of the Mexican writers and representatives of that generation: Gustavo Sáinz, Jose Agustín, and Parménides García Saldaña. An illustration is *Los Demonios salvajes*, where the characters “are young revolted in 1968 against all institutions, even against the literary traditions”³⁶. To Menton, its similarity to the drift in the thematic area of the works is found in the recount of the exploits of some *stupid* fellow college, but unlike the Mexican writers opposed to the Guatemalan writer is that his characters offer a revolution in the political process in the Central American region.

Morales critic to university students and their leaders like to Oliverio Castañeda de León, since he defines the personality of the academics “who believe that comply with the revolution by participating in the strike of pain (Huelga de Dolores), when they will become the political leaders of the future without removing their commitment or attitude of current politicians”. It is the same attitude of self critics that performs on the testimony published between 1996 and 1997.

The use of everyday language is part of the characteristics that have the deeds of Morales. Just as he uses the popular speech in his works, other contemporary authors to Morales, referred as “the writers involved”, use “profanity, scatological and juvenile that unifies the narrators and characters as a separate group, give then cohesion and the also comes as talks of resistance”³⁷. This type of language can be seen in some of his works, which were mentioned in testimonials and through novels: *El ángel de la retaguardia*, *Los Demonios Salvajes*, *Señores bajo los árboles* y *El esplendor de la Pirámide*. They rebuild the own history, from the involvement with the Rebel Armed Forces (FAR) in the sixties when Morales remains a young student at the only private University in Guatemala during those years, Rafael Landívar University. Morales finishes his testimony telling the experiences in Costa Rica and the headquarters of his political exile around a constant revolutionary activity.

Mario Roberto Morales leaves us his testimony in which he tells the problems about *Los que se fueron por la libre*³⁸, one of the two groups that were formed after the division of what became known later as the ORPA. Morales was part of the group with those that formed the Movimiento Revolucionario del Pueblo-Ixim (MRP), also known as Nuestro Movimiento (NM).

In the book he shows some cultural and political events that took place around

³⁶ Menton, Seymour, “Los señores presidentes y los guerrilleros. La nueva novela guatemalteca (1976-1982)”, in Menton, Seymour, *Caminata por la narrativa latinoamericana*, México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2002, p. 255.

³⁷ Contreras, Ana Yolanda, “Rebelión e identidad en la palabra y la mala palabra: Un discurso contra-hegemónico en la novelística de Arturo Arias, Marco Antonio Flores y Mario Roberto Morales”, *Revista Istmo*, 9, «<http://istmo.denison.edu/n09/articulos/rebelion.html>» in [Consultado el 9 de noviembre de 2010].

³⁸ Morales, Mario Roberto, *Los que fueron por la libre...*, *op cit.*, p. 51.

the armed struggle, for instance the process of muralización of San Carlos University (USAC) where Marco Antonio Flores and Arnolando Ramírez Amaya were part of it. In the text we can appreciate that the criticism towards the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG) does not go unnoticed; a position that led him to confront situations of abuse deeds committed by the left wing and not only from the Guatemalan left, but also from the Nicaraguan and Cuban left (Perdomo Orellana pointed out as the left "nicachapinacubana"³⁹).

The author is fully aware of the importance of the testimony and the implications that may arise by his publication: "When all this is counting down to the account that I cannot say everything, and I believe that no witness, in any chronic, in no reportage or in any memory can say everything"⁴⁰. But Mario Roberto Morales leaves the testimony of his experience in the armed struggle in Guatemala, which strikes by its importance in the genre produced by the Guatemalans. In their documents it is found the involvement of marginal groups that formed part of the history of armed struggle; they had to move against the tide, not only because of the political system introduced by the Guatemalan military, but the system introduced by the URNG and the government sponsored revolutionary Cuba and Nicaragua.

Los que se fueron por la libre is a testimony that has come to light without passing through the consent of the Guatemalan left. Hence, it is not afraid to point out the mistakes committed by insurgent groups during the armed conflict, as well as contradictions of Latin American left governments of the eighties. It is a work force that keeps the genre alive and reformulates the vision of armed struggle in Guatemala.

4. Utopía as life. A life in history

A feature of the testimonies of Latin America is tied to the circumstances of marginal Testimonies. The place within the social, political and economic processes prevents a presence within those systems, through the testimony, intended to confer value to their aspirations and legitimacy along with their political party. The work and the dynamics of the social movements put some political actors in places where the historic work was linked directly with the construction of the history itself. However, their participation is viewed so apologetic or demeaning that is put into a situation marginal. Pointed out the words of John Beverley written in his article *Anatomía del Testimonio*⁴¹, he conceptualizes

³⁹ *Ibidem*, prólogo.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 64.

⁴¹ Beverley, John, *Del Lazarillo al Sandinismo: Estudios sobre la función ideológica de la literatura española e hispanoamericana*, Michigan, United States, Institute for the Study of Ideologies and Literature, Prisma Institute, Series Towards a Social History of Hispanic and Luso-Brazilian Literatures, 1987, pp. 153-168.

the testimony from a selection of 22 texts –that the author designates as “testimonial corpus”– in the following manner:

a testimonial is a narrative –usually but not necessarily the size of a novel or short story–told in first person narrator for grammar that is both the protagonist (or witness) of his own story. Its narrative is often a “life” or a particularly significant experience (employment status, political affiliation, incarceration, etc.). The situation in the narrating testimony always involves some urgency or need for communication that arises from an existential experience of repression, poverty, exploitation, marginalization, crime fighting⁴².

In this way, the life experience of someone who has ordered his existence for the sake of a utopia is transformed into a *socio experience*, as shown in the text of Julio César Macías, whose real name is César Montes. This character is a renowned guerrilla leader from the sixties. The testimony of Macías is known as *Mi camino: la guerrilla*⁴³, where the author narrates his participation in the armed struggle in Guatemala. The same author draws on his experiences as he told the Minister of Interior of Cuba, General Abelardo Colom Ibarra (Furrí): “Your memories are not personal wealth, are part of the history of guerrilla struggle in your country and Latin America. Your version will not be the official story, but it surely will be free of commitments or pressures”⁴⁴.

The appointment remakes the importance of the life of César Montes, the character-testimonies of the work. Through the testimony given we can know the version of Macías since he joins the front Guerrilla Edgar Ibarra (FGEI) and Rebels of the Armed Forces (FAR) by Luis Turcios Lima (Hebert). He describes how they formed the guerrilla fronts, which highlights some enterprises own youth and inexperience guerrilla. It also talks about the personality and character of the members of these fronts as well as the people who are interested in helping the fledgling Guatemalan guerrillas.

Among the events mentioned is the expedient *28 desaparecidos*⁴⁵ (28 missing), which indicates the actual figure of missing people to be 35. This event was important in the political life of Guatemala and marked the revolutionary struggle, as the event ended with the lives of important personalities of the Guatemalan resistance: ideologues of the Guatemalan Labor Party (Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo) and the revolutionary vanguard. Among those missing was the brother of César Montes, Francisco José Macías. The expedient recounts how he escaped the insurgency operations along with Luis Augusto Turcios Lima, Bernardo Alvarado Monzón, secretary of the Patriotic Youth of Labor (Juventud Patriótica del Trabajo) and Fernando Álvarez, secretary of PGT.

It also refers to the death of Luis Turcios Lima and how they faced this duel. Then, it is told how is acquired the responsibility of being the commander in chief of the FAR,

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 157. Traducción propia.

⁴³ Macías, Julio Cesar, *Mi camino: La Guerrilla*, México, Planeta, 1999, 369 pp.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 25.

⁴⁵ In the 28 missing, they were rapped member of PGT and FAR between march 2 to 5, 1966.

but not before without facing the power struggle that unfolded the Guatemalan left controlling by Turcios Lima.

Moreover, the expedient describes the relationship Macias had with the Guatemalan guerrilla and Maryknol clergy, who conducted the work in rural communities and indigenous religion; but the momentum of the Theology of Liberation led to a compromise sensitized to the faithful. At the same time, he tells the deal with the group CRATER, which was formed by young people from the national bourgeoisie of Guatemala. Nevertheless, his social background and the youth of this class gradually took a high awareness of the Guatemalan reality, which led to cooperate unconditionally with the guerrillas and with some of the members of CRATER, which was founded as the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP)⁴⁶.

In the testimony of César Montes one can know the relationship with the experiences of the revolutionary Cuba, Vietnam, North Korea and Moscow. The journeys are part of the guerrilla of the communist utopia which was founded under the impact of the Cold War. There were no longer forces for the socioeconomic situation in Guatemala. These experiences are related by the author between the thoughts that continually give the political situation in his country.

He, as an essential part of the New Revolutionary Organization of Combat (Nueva Organización Revolucionaria de Combate) –later known as EGP– cannot put aside his version of the constitution of the group, as well as how Guatemala entered the territory of Ixcán alongside Mario Payer, Gilberto Ramírez, Antonio Fernández, among others. In his testimony, Macias deals with the book *Los días de la Selva*⁴⁷ and so do a dialogic payer, which accounts the other really opposed to each other. However, he justified and agreed to pay the confinement of his work which took over control of the Directorate EGP during the publication process. It also gives an account of the situation that Mario Payeras would be later relegated himself from the political-military organization by ideological and ethical positions, so he decides to secede from it⁴⁸.

Not only we can know the contribution he made the life of César Montes to the revolutionary struggle of Guatemala, but also he includes their relationship and involvement in El Salvador with the Armed Forces of National Resistance Front Farabundo Martí for National Liberation (FARN-FMLN) where he founded the Revolutionary Information Service (SIR), as well as the involvement he had with the Sandinista government.

This book is a story of the life of César Montes and not of Julio César Macías. It was written as an epitaph of the man of the guerrillas, in which the author tries to bury the man who accompanied him for many years and brings life to Julio César. Nevertheless, the guerrilla resisted again and cohabited with his creator. The same author says in an

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 161-163.

⁴⁷ Payeras, Mario, *Los Días de la selva... op cit.* pp. 167

⁴⁸ Macías, César, *Mi camino: ... op. cit.*, pp. 227-229.

interview with José Domingo Carrillo:

I wrote a book in El Salvador called *Epitafio de César Montes*; in Nicaragua as a subtitle *La guerrilla fue mi camino Epitafio de César Montes*, and it turned out that was not died canija...most experienced! The guerrilla César Montes is for Julio César Macias a fictional character who is more real than the chingada⁴⁹.

5. Recent history of Guatemala. The History of Great Men

The knowledge of the Guatemalan history in the late twentieth century involves a recurring eye to the state violence, which reached high figures concerning casualties. The testimony emanating from Guatemala contains an element of constant complaint with the exclusion, oppression, marginalization and intimidation from an oppressive government, as well as their military, political, economic and cultural rights.

The testimonial of gender expresses the own personal experience, while demanding recognition of their culture. It is presented as a challenge to the Tropelías State and its presentation confers a greater impact in their writing. The social self of the subject, often excluded, is built on a par with the vicissitudes of the history itself and shows the social dynamics of the community it belongs. What is more, the history itself breaks so violently in the life of Testimonies.

The testimony offered an opportunity to look at history from the vision of its own trainers. The lives of men are parallel to the story. Although, they are involved writing history, rarely the story of men reaches to be history as the life of the Guatemalan Colonel Carlos Paz Tejada, who redeemed the Guatemalan sociologist Carlos Figueroa Ibarra published as *Paz Tejada. Militar y Revolucionario*⁵⁰. This book relates the life of a Guatemalan colonel who was a participant in the history of Guatemala. In it “it was for a good time privileged witness, if not the protagonist. And his life ran the vicissitudes of political developments in the country”⁵¹.

The work consists on sixteen chapters in which Paz Tejada tells his life experience from childhood through Guatemala and El Salvador, where he refers to passages in the political history of his country as the fall of the dictator Estrada Cabrera. The book reflects as well the life of the military colonel and visualizes the development of the Guatemalan military institution through his testimony. It was also narrated the events that led to the

⁴⁹ Carrillo, José Domingo, “Entre la historia y la memoria. Entrevista y revolución: Estudio de las elites políticas revolucionarias en Guatemala, 1960-1996”. «<http://viraugasot.blogspot.com/2007/11/de-nuevo-la-izquierda-en-guatemala-le.html>» [Consultado el 8 de noviembre de 2007]. Traducción propia.

⁵⁰ Figueroa Ibarra, Carlos, *Paz Tejada. Militar y Revolucionario*, Guatemala, Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades de la Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, F&G editores, 2004, pp. 512

⁵¹ Figueroa Ibarra, Carlos, “Rebeldes en el ejército guatemalteco. El insólito coronel Paz Tejada” en Camacho Navarro, Enrique. (comp.), *El rebelde Contemporáneo en el Circuncaribe, imágenes y representaciones*, México, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Ederé, 2006, pp. 123-124.

overthrow of Jorge Ubico, known these as the October Revolution and began with the “*democratic Spring*” in which thought and fought unconditionally for there to be the revolutionary dream. What “makes the most relevant case of Carlos Paz Tejada is the fact that among all the military rebels in Guatemala, he was the one who had the highest-ranking post in the army of his country”.

In this period he became the head of the Guatemalan armed forces with which worked to defend the government of Juan José Arévalo. He conducted diplomatic relations under the post that holds. In addition, he controlled times of political crisis during the revolutionary government. During the military *coup d'état* in charge of Castillo Armas, he then no longer serves as the Chief of the Armed Forces. But the army tried to fight the release and settle him in power and had to wage a tough battle for which he was the victim of retaliation. They left in exile to El Salvador while Castillo Armas in the chair and tried to organize themselves to carry out a guerrilla war in Guatemalan territory. Among young people who sought this was Otto René Castillo, as indicated in his testimony:

Since the early months of my stay in El Salvador I began to search the exiled Guatemalans. Perhaps the first was a boy of about 17 years to be named Otto Rene Castillo, and that I was to say that I had to lead the fight⁵².

The exile was not an impediment to organize the opposition to the Guatemalan military regime. The rebellion of Paz Tejada led him to relate the military group who rose in November 13, 1960 and how they prepared together with other men a subversive group known as Columna 20 de Octubre, which represented the first organization to seek a guerrilla war in Guatemala⁵³. However, inexperience and improvisation led to the guerrillas –also known as guerrilla de Concúa– fail almost immediately. Of the 23 fighters who formed the guerrilla column survived ten, among the presence of *Gaspar Illom* (Rodrigo Asturias) is highlighted, who later was the commander in chief of the Revolutionary Organization of People in Arms (Organización Revolucionaria del Pueblo en Armas).

The failure of the rebels forced him to go into exile to Mexico, where he worked alongside humbly with Lázaro Cárdenas that played with the composition of Engineering. He tried to return to Guatemala in 1966 but the government of Méndez Montenegro prevented him, until 1996 when he could return to his homeland at least.

For Figueroa Ibarra, the testimony of Paz Tejada has a significant contribution to gender testimonial since *his years and his days are intertwined with the history of Guatemala*⁵⁴, and, therefore, his life deserves to be told. The researchers added two

⁵² Figueroa Ibarra, Carlos, *Paz Tejada. Militar... op. cit.*, p. 290. Traducción propia.

⁵³ Figueroa Ibarra, Carlos, *Rebeldes en el..., op. cit.*, p. 153.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

conditions for a life story deserved to be told, saying that “it has to be unique or truly representative of a wider”⁵⁵. The published book is a testimony to be inserted in the standards that have given the genre a transcendent and cultural development in Latin America. And, not far from its own political and social development, it will lead to an appreciation of the experience of Paz Tejada as part of the history of Latin America.

6. The awakening of the Guatemalan testimony

The existence of Guatemalan testimonies had an intrinsic relationship with the armed process in its own territory, as well as our America. The contents poured into his enunciation can be perceived as an object of study with the capability to provide several elements to the knowledge of the Latin American countries. By the same token, we have these cultural manifestations of Latin America as tools that allow us to understand the political, cultural, social and ideological factors that operate within its territory.

The panoramic view of the representation of the Guatemalan Testimony gives rise to link the historical process that lived the Central American country with the global context, where the ideological struggle between the capitalist system scarce and socialist systems led to the Cold War. Notably in Latin America, the triumph of the Cuban Revolution and the figures of Fidel Castro and Ernesto Guevara prompted a political upheaval that tried to emulate the former revolutionary paradigm, in the political process and in the cultural such as the Gender testimonial.

Some elements of the testimonial work pay attention to the recovery of the Historical Memory. The same effect is observed in the emergence of testimonial works in Latin American countries, so it is installed as a suitable mechanism for dealing with oblivion. In particular, the Central American country experienced a process of political struggle and the texts emanating from it pose an idea of community participants in revolutionary movements and departing from ideological systems in search of deploying a new system, the Just as a source of information needed to make a history of ideas from such organizations as well as ideological systems that embraced the revolutionaries in Latin America. The presence of culture is manifested subsumed in the works, which presents itself as a project integrator of diverse cultures.

Under the same item, which also underpins the testimony of Guatemala, it has a wide range of events, which makes their study to be launched from the interior of Gender, but point the rest of their equivalents in the Central American region. As we have noted, the distinction of the work of Burgos *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* has been left behind the works of great importance. The common feature of all these is the presence of voices concerning the historical processes of the armed struggle; same mechanisms that acted as resistance traits with political-ideological, social

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

and cultural knowledge, capable of providing to the understanding of these processes and these elements, which is hardly set forth in the official history.

The testimonial texts are a manifestation of the cultural evolution of the region, with elements for the knowledge of the social study –the experience of human beings– in which subjectivity serves as a source of knowledge. It, therefore, takes into account the awareness of social issues, both historical and literary Latin America and Guatemala as part of it.