SHIFTING PERSPECTIVES.

REPRESENTATIONS OF THE MAYA IN MODERN MEXICAN AND GUATEMALAN NARRATIVE

Cambios de perspectiva: representaciones de los mayas en la narrativa mexicana y guatemalteca moderna

EDYTA ANDZEL-O'SHANAHAN

INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER

eandzel@yahoo.co.uk http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5753-4228

RECIBIDO: 13 DE MAYO DE 2019 ACEPTADO: 15 DE ENERO DE 2020

RESUMEN: El objetivo del presente artículo es un acercamiento diacrónico a la representación de los mayas en función de las principales tendencias literarias de los siglos XX y XXI en México y Guatemala. Partiendo de la narrativa indigenista, a través del híbrido género testimonial, hasta la literatura maya, el artículo demuestra la presencia de los mayas en el discurso literario, en el que se observan cambios importantes en la voz narrativa, perspectiva y agencia. Representados inicialmente por la paternalista narrativa indigenista, los mayas gradualmente van recuperando su propia expresión literaria, libre de la mediación no indígena. La narrativa, con su habilidad de cuestionar los paradigmas establecidos, se convierte en un lugar de resistencia y de la práctica descolonizadora. Dado la extensión del tema a debatir, se analizarán sólo las novelas más representativas o novelizadoras escritas por los autores mayas y no indígenas. El análisis se centrará principalmente en los elementos discursivos de la voz y la perspectiva narrativas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: indigenismo, transculturación, mayas, descolonización, literatura indígena.

ABSTRACT: The aim of this article is to examine the dominant literary tendencies in the 20th and 21st century Mexican and Guatemalan narrative, which depict the Maya in their social and cultural environment. From *indigenismo*, through a hybrid genre known as *testimonio*, to indigenous literature, the Maya have been present over the last century in literary production, in which several important changes in narrative voice and perspective can be observed. Initially represented by the paternalistic *indigenista* narrative, which is compliant with the government-endorsed ideology, the Maya have gradually regained their own unmediated literary voice, which enables them to speak for themselves rather than be spoken for. Literature, with its ability to question established paradigms, becomes a place of resistance and decolonising praxis. Due to the scope of the subject matter, only the most representative and innovative novels written by both non-Maya and Maya authors will be analysed. The article will focus primarily on narrative voice, perspective and agency.

KEY WORDS: indigenismo, transculturation, Maya, decolonisation, indigenous literatures.

Andzel-O'Shanahan, Edyta.
"Shifting perspectives. Representations of the Maya in modern Mexican and Guatemalan narrative".
Kamchatka. Revista de análisis cultural (15 junio 2020): 419-443.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7203/KAM.15.15038 ISSN: 2340-1869

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this article is a diachronic approach to those literary tendencies in Latin-American prose fiction of the 20th and 21st centuries, which portray the Mexican and Guatemalan Maya. The principal objective of this overview is to illustrate the ways in which works of fiction reflect and interact with, conform to or question the extratextual reality, including historical discourse, political ideologies, civic movements and cultural paradigms. Various literary phenomena will be illustrated with examples, and the analysis of the selected novels will be centered on the narrative voice and perspective, considered to be the discursive elements which are vehicles for different standpoints, world-views and value judgements (see: Chatman, 1980: 152-154). The narrative corpus analysed in this article includes seven novels which are representative of the trend know as *indigenismo*, two examples of testimonial literature and two Maya novels. The analysis of the Maya novelistic production will centre on the subject of self-definition and self-representation in political and cultural terms. While indigenous literary production has been studied before in contrast to the *indigenista* narrative, with recent contributions by Kevin T. Hunt and Mariel E. Mussack, the present article offers a detailed analysis of the formal evolution of the *indigenista* novel and focuses on the role of the narrator's and the characters' perspectives as a source of narrative focalisation.

Maya ethnic and cultural identity, aspects of which the narrative corpus aims to render, is a complex and dynamic concept in itself. In terms of linguistic variation alone, it is estimated that between 29 and 31 Mayan languages are currently spoken by over 5 million people distributed over Guatemala, Mexico, Belize, Honduras and the diaspora communities abroad (Law, 2013: 141, 146). All Mayan languages belong to one linguistic family and derive from the common source of proto-Mayan (ibid.: 146). Although the various Maya groups share many characteristics, including aspects of their world view and spirituality, they also differ in certain customs and traditions. The difficulties in defining the Maya identity are further compounded by centuries of acculturating pressure to which the Maya have been subjected since the Spanish Conquest and the colonial times. The concepts of acculturation and transculturation are essential to the understanding of both the history of the Maya and the literary corpus analysed in this article, and thus requires further explanation.

The term transculturation derives from the field of anthropology. It was coined by Fernando Ortiz and elaborated in his study *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1940) (Salvador, 2001: 23). Ortiz applied the term to the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another in a case of sustained intercultural contact (ibid.: 24). Transculturation entails both partial deculturation, understood as the loss of some elements of the original culture, and partial acculturation, or the adoption of elements from the culture which exerts the acculturating pressure. As a result of transculturation, new cultural phenomena arise (ibid.: 24). Transculturation is closely linked to Vittorio Lanternari's concept of cultural plasticity, defined as a mechanism of response to acculturating pressure intermediate between cultural vulnerability and cultural rigidity (in: Rama, 2012: 17). Cultural plasticity has been subsequently interpreted as an ability to incorporate new cultural elements, "not just as objects to be absorbed […] but above all as fermenting agents to inspire the traditional cultural structure, which is thus

capable of inventive responses, drawing from its own component elements" (ibid.: 18). Ortiz' and Lanternari's definitions remain extremely useful in cultural analysis.

David Caballero Mariscal, in his study on the spiritual and religious manifestations of the Maya-poqomchi' identity (2015) sees the process of transculturation as one of three fundamental outcomes of cultural assimilation. Transculturation is there viewed in a positive light, as an adaptive response to the pressure of the dominant culture (ibid.: 53) and a defence mechanism, which allows for the preservation of the original cultural identity under the guise of the imposed forms of cultural expression. The two remaining outcomes, both common in Guatemala, imply either a greater loss of the fundamental cultural traits (identity dissolution) or a complete loss of cultural identity and acculturation (ladinoisation) (ibid.: 54). While transculturation is a painful but to a certain extent inevitable and natural process, acculturation results in the adoption of all core elements of the dominant culture and a greater degree of "identity mutilation" (ibid.: 60). Acculturation can also be regarded as a survival mechanism (ibid.: 55) in situations, where the pressure is exerted by the dominant culture by means discriminatory policies, social and cultural exclusion or military repression.

The study of the social phenomena outlined above calls into question the antiquated construct of ethnic and sociodemographic categories. In Guatemala, this construct is expressed by the binomial opposition *indio* or *indígena/ladino* (indigenous/non-indigenous, mixed race and acculturated Maya), in Mexico more often by the triad *indio/mestizo/ladino*. The issue with these categories is not only their failure to reflect adequately the complexities of the Mexican and Guatemalan social reality. All of these terms are high-inference words and are linked to the relations of power and social status, as well as to discriminatory policies and ideologies. The terms *indio* and *ladino* in Guatemala are particularly controversial. Their usage in Guatemala dates back to the colonial times, as the terms were artificially constructed and imposed by the Spanish colonizers. Far from being neutral differentiating categories based on ethnic extraction, they have been used to justify and legitimise specific power relations: the position of superiority or privilege on one side ("latino"), and inferiority and disadvantage on the other ("indio") (see: Gallegos Vázquez, 2003: 10; Rodas Núñez, 2006: 4). Moreover, the terms *mestizaje* and *ladinización* were reformulated by the supporters of the *indigenista* ideology to designate the desired outcome of social and cultural transformation to which the Maya (and other indigenous groups) should aspire in order to form part of a modern nation (Rodas Núñez, 2006: 7). According to *indigenistas*, acculturation was the only solution to the alleged cultural "deficiencies" of the indigenous people. The premises of the *indigenista* ideology will be expounded in the next part of this article.

An alternative to the imposed terminology is the collective noun the Maya ("los mayas" or "pueblo maya"), which has entered public and political discourse as a result of various forms of Maya activism in Guatemala in the last decades of the 20th century. The word "Maya" itself is not new and refers to the pre-Hispanic origins of the Maya and their common ancestral tradition, existing above inter-ethnic differences and transculturating processes. The term posits a difference between the Maya and other groups, including *ladinos,* Xinca and Garifuna. The term, however, unlike the imposed terms mentioned in the paragraph above, is a form of self-definition and is consciously and voluntarily assumed as a method of identification (Bastos, Camus, 2004: 11). It has a political significance, and reflects the Maya's struggle against

homogenisation on one hand, and ethnic domination or discrimination on the other. It defines the ways in which the Maya wish to participate in modern nations and assert their rights (see: Bastos, 2007: 207). The term "Maya" is not yet universally assumed as a form of self-identification (Bastos, Camus, 2004: 11). Some Maya still refer to themselves as *indígena,* while others prefer to identify themselves with the name of the smaller ethnic group to which they belong (for example K'iche', Q'echi', Mam, etc.). The term also runs the risk of codification based on certain criteria, such as language, way of dressing or religion, which may lead to the exclusion of these individuals who do not fit the criteria and to the introduction of differentiating categories within the Maya population (ibid.: 114). However, the term "Maya" (*los mayas*) is at the moment considered to be the politically correct term referring to the Maya population of Mexico and Guatemala. Consequently, it will be preferred and used where applicable in this article, although it must be stressed that in the English language the word "indigenous" is not generally burdened with negative connotative values. It is often used in academic literature with reference to indigeneity rather than indigenism (*indigenismo*). The use of the term "indigenous" is especially justified in the discussion on Latin-American phenomena not limited to the Maya.

While the above explanations clarify the concepts and terminology useful in the analysis of the literary texts, the postcolonial theory, with its focus on the role of narratives in either perpetuating or contesting colonial discourse, presents ample reasons why this analysis should be undertaken in the first place. The experiences of the marginalised, non-Western subaltern, subjected to the political and cultural domination of the colonisers and denied the right to partake in decision-making, have been the focus of postcolonial studies for several decades. Besides political and economic practices, the colonial hegemony extends into the construction of knowledge through discourses embedded in Western epistemology and based on "the alleged universality of European models of thinking" (Arias, 2017: 5). The superiority of European epistemologies is thus reinforced and indigenous ways of being, rooted in Native American cosmovision, are either silences or marginalised. Decoloniality may therefore be defined as "a visceral reaction against coloniality leading to concrete [...] actions, where the ancestral principles and historic struggles of [...] Indigenous peoples begin to disrupt, transgress, and traverse Western thinking" (ibid.: 13). One of the most important places of resistance to coloniality is literature. The present study centres on such aspects of prose fiction as narrative voice, perspective and agency, through which either the colonial ethnocentric standpoint is maintained or - in the case of Maya literature - the struggle for the right to self-definition and self-representation is articulated. This struggle is often verbalised in response and in opposition to the Western philosophy and cultural paradigms, and includes the critique of *indigenismo,* the 20th century ideology seemingly conceived as beneficial to the indigenous peoples, but based on the same ethnocentric premises as the totality of the colonial discourse.

INDIGENISMO AS AN IDEOLOGY

The profound political and social changes experienced by the Latin-American republics in the first decades of the 20th century are reflected in a particular approach to the "Indian problem" and by extension in the narrative of indigenous theme. The definition of the nation

state, based on the unity of individuals who share beliefs, ideas and objectives (Pimentel, in: Villoro, 1986: 211), called for a formulation of an adequate theoretical framework and policies which would guarantee the accomplishment of this homogenising ideal. Thus, a new governmental ideology, known as *indigenismo*, is conceived and finds its expression in literary aesthetics, particularly in the period from the 1930s to the 1960s.

Indigenismo of the first half of the 20th century can be defined as a state-promoted political and cultural ideology, which aims at the assimilation of the indigenous peoples into the national cultural and social structures as part of the nation state project. In Mexico this ideology is most notably represented by the Instituto Nacional Indigenista, a government agency inaugurated by Miguel Alemán in 1948. In Guatemala, the most prominent spokespersons of the *indigenista* ideology are centered around the Instituto Indigenista Nacional, established in 1945. The founding principles of *indigenismo*, such as the protection of indigenous rights and the economic development of rural communities, are quickly replaced by a "singular focus on assimilating indigenous people to Spanish-speaking, commercially oriented national society" (Taylor, 2009: 3), often through state-controlled agents, such as the educational system. According to *indigenistas*, the "national cohesion and modernization" can only be achieved through *mestizaje*, "understood not as a mixture of two parts in equal measure, but as a genetic and cultural absorption and attenuation of indigenous into Hispanic traits" (Ibid.: 7). Later critique of *indigenismo* is mostly based on the fact that its homogenising practices negate inherent differences in the multicultural society. They also reinforce the hegemony of the dominant culture, which provides unique models to which the subaltern culture should aspire in order to belong fully in the modern society. This approach further emphasises the dichotomy between the westernised, non-Indian part of the society and the indigenous population, seen as traditional, backward and in need of transformation. The patronising attitude of *indigenistas* towards the indigenous subject is best expressed by the condescending term "*el indito*" (the little Indian), as it perpetuates the image of the Indian as a passive, almost infantile "other", whose marginalisation is seen not as a result of centuries of colonial oppression, racial discrimination and deep-rooted social inequalities but as a consequence of his own backwardness and cultural stagnation (ibid.: 20).

The above description of the *indigenista* project is based mostly on the subsequent critique of the ideology, and is limited to the narrow definition of *indigenismo* as an ideology conceived in the first decades of the 20th century. It is, however, a system of political and social ideas which reflects the paradigms of a particular historical period and should be interpreted in this light. Perhaps the most insightful analysis of the 20th century *indigenista* project comes from the Mexican philosopher and writer Luis Villoro, whose critical work *Los grandes momentos del indigenismo en México* was first published in 1950.

Villoro defines *indigenismo* in a broad context as an act of conceptualisation of the Amerindian "Other" by the Spanish, *criollos* and *mestizos*. The process of forming concepts and ideas of the indigenous inhabitants of America is dependent on particular historical contexts and is a function of the historical conscience of the given period (Villoro, 1996: 13). Villoro identifies three great moments of *indigenismo*: the first one corresponds to the Conquest and the beginning of the Spanish colonisation, the second one to the European period of Enlightenment and modern rationalism, and the third one to the 20th century *indigenismo* in the narrower sense of the

ideology of assimilation. Villoro analyses several texts written by different historical figures in order to illustrate how their conceptualisation of the Mexican Amerindian was determined by Western political, cultural and social paradigms of a particular period of time. Villoro demonstrates then the images of the Amerindian were constructed by Hernán Cortés, Bernardino de Sahagún, Francisco Javier Clavijero, Fray Servando Teresa de Mier and Manuel Orozco y Berra as a function of incipient Renaissance humanism and medieval ethos of the crusaders, Christian doctrine, emerging emancipatory *criollo* ideology, independence from the Spanish monarchy and the 19th century scientific method, respectively.

Once the independence from the Spanish crown was won, the Mexican thinkers fixed their gaze on the present social and economic situation of the indigenous people. The new conceptualisation of the Indian is performed no longer by *criollos* but by *mestizos*, defined as liberal middle-class rather than mixed-race descendants of native Amerindians and Spaniards. They turn to the Indian to find an ally in their political and economic project of a modern, capitalist, industrialised nation. They offer salvation to the Indians: incorporation in the economic system to which the mestizo class aspires (ibid.: 221). Yet salvation depends on the total assimilation of the indigenous people in the *mestizo* system of values.

Villoro's essay confirms his initial thesis: the totality of the non-indigenous conceptualisation of the Amerindian is an artificial construct determined by the specific historical context and epistemological paradigm of the period (always from European, *criollo* or *mestizo* perspective). In reality, this conceptualisation is performed to legitimise a particular political agenda. Yet this is only only the tip of the iceberg. Only towards the end of his study does Villoro mention the fact that for centuries this non-indigenous conceptualisation was the *only* representation of the Amerindian deemed to be legitimate, while the indigenous voices were silenced or marginalised. This discursive monopoly of the non-indigenous subject was initiated by the Spanish conquest and persisted until the end of the 20th century. As Armando Muyolema-Calle states:

> [...] los conquistadores instalaron un punto de vista perdurable, transhistórico. Toma de posesión del espacio y desplazamiento de la palabra fueron actos simultáneos del despojo sistemático. […] el acto político del conquistador-narrador que re-nombro el mundo y el orden de las cosas y de las sociedades no inauguró, sin embargo, el mundo sino una disputa por la representación del mundo que se libra desde entonces en el ámbito simbólico del lenguaje y en la arena de las luchas políticas (2007: 6,7).

In *Los grandes momentos del indigenismo* Villoro claims that *indigenismo* entered a new phase, based on the project of nation-building, which should be undertaken by working class *mestizos,* who are able to identify with the indigenous population in their common condition of an exploited, oppressed class. The new *mestizo* should embrace the indigenous part of their identity and unite with the Amerindian in creating the nucleus of the new Mexican society. It sounds like a noble ideal but in effect it is only a reformulation of the old *indigenista* paradigm. The agent changes (now it is the *mestizo* proletariat rather than the middle class) and so do the methods (now it is a non-violent, organic process) but the indigenous part of this project still needs transformation. As subjects unaware of their oppressed condition and unable to liberate themselves from it, claims Villoro, the Indian need *mestizo* guidance. In this process of liberation,

the westernisation of the Indian should be performed with respect for the indigenous tradition and mentality. The "backward" elements of the indigenous society which are detrimental to its progress, must be slowly replaced by the Western counterparts. Whose criteria, however, should be used to determine what should be destroyed or replaced? Villoro gives the answer:

> No se trata de imponerle bárbaramente la *civilización más perfecta*, por una especie de revolución violenta, sino de hacerlo ingresar en ella por medio de la exhortación, la educación y el trabajo continuado. Por eso tenemos que hablar su propio lenguaje, por eso respetaremos incluso sus métodos científicos primitivos, tratando de perfeccionarlos paulatinamente sin destuirlos de golpe. La *liberación desde fuera* deberá ir acompaniada del asentimiento confiado del mismo indígena. *Elegiremos por él*, pero él deberá en todo momento ratificar la elección que nosotros hayamos hecho. (ibid.: 243, my italics).

Luis Villoro envisaged the demise of the *indigenista* paradigm. Later on, he voiced his endorsement for the re-definition of the Mexican state based on its multi-faceted plurality. He also supported indigenous autonomy. His stance will be explicitly expressed, for example, in the magazine *Nexos* in 1994:

> La marginación de los pueblos indígenas es obra de los no-indios, pero también lo es el indigenismo que pretende ayudar a su liberación. Mientras seamos nosotros quienes decidamos por ellos, seguirán siendo objeto de la historia que otros hacen. La verdadera liberación del indio es reconocerlo como sujeto, en cuyas manos está su propia suerte [...]. Ser sujeto pleno es ser autónomo. (Villoro, cited in: Hernández Castillo, 2016: 183).

INDIGENISMO AS LITERARY PRAXIS

The ideological premises of the 20th century *indigenismo* are reflected in a vast narrative corpus known as *indigenista* literature, with common characteristics and almost canonical aesthetics. Firstly, *indigenista* texts are written by non-indigenous authors for the Spanish-speaking, middle or upper class, white or *mestizo* implied reader. The sympathetic narrator of these texts "acts as an interpreter, introducing the reader to a fictional community through a familiar cognitive frame (usually a novel or short story) that serves as a window into an otherwise mysterious and elusive cultural reality" (Taylor, 2009: 26). The indigenous communities seen through the lens of *indigenista* discourse are alien and hermetic; "the Indian" is often seen as part of a uniform collective, without individual traits but "identifiable from outside by markers of radical cultural and ethnic difference, such as dress, food preparation, and spiritual practices" (ibid.: 28). The principal objective of the *indigenista* narrative is that of social vindication of the marginalised indigenous population. Special emphasis is placed on the living conditions, poverty, exploitation and sometimes also on pathological behaviour (such as alcoholism and domestic abuse) that stems from all of the above. The clash between cultures and the hostile relationship between the ruthless landowners and the exploited indigenous peasants are among other most common topics. However, the *indigenista* novel evolves over time and innovative formal solutions are introduced to revive the trend.

With the introduction of the autodiegetic narrator, the *indigenista* narrative places greater emphasis on the indigenous narrative voice. Later on, indigenous myths and beliefs cease to be regarded as mere superstitions, but rather contribute to better understanding of the indigenous

world view. The evolution of the *indigenista* narrative culminates in the syncretic literary works by Miguel Ángel Asturias. In spite of the innovations, however, the "indigenous world" represented in the *indigenista* novel is always an artifice, a construct created by a non-indigenous author and intended for a non-indigenous reader. The totality of the *indigenista* narrative conforms with the paradigm outlined by José Carlos Mariátegui:

> La literatura indigenista no puede darnos una versión rigurosamente verista del indio. Tiene que idealizarlo y estilizarlo. Tampoco puede darnos su propia ánima. Es todavía una literatura de mestizos. Por eso se llama indigenista y no indígena (2017: 150).

As a result of the social and cultural differences between the position of the author (the subject performing the act of representation) and of the object of literary rendering, the *indigenista* narrative is always characterised by conflicting heterogeneity, defined by Antonio Cornejo Polar:

> […] heterogeneidad conflictiva […] es el resultado inevitable de una operación literaria que pone en relación asimétrica dos universos socioculturales distintos y opuestos, uno de los cuales es el indígena (al que corresponde la instancia referencial), mientras que el otro (del que dependen las instancias productivas, textuales y de recepción) está situado en el sector más moderno y occidentalizado de la sociedad […]. (1984: 550).

One of the best known *indigenista* novels concerning the Maya is Ramón Rubín's *El callado dolor de los tzotziles*, published in 1948 and written as a result of the author's travels and observations in the San Cristobál de las Casas area in Chiapas. The plot of the novel is simple and linear, and the formal structure adheres to the premises of realism. The storyline centres on the life of José Damián, a Tzotzil protagonist whose fate is fully dependent on the traditions and beliefs of his tribe (De Beer, 1984: 563). As a product of his cultural environment, José Damián is forced to follow the rules which govern the community, even in spite of his own internal struggles, and as such he is representative of all members of the Tzotzil ethnic group. The rigid tribal prescripts oblige him to repudiate his infertile wife, and poverty forces him to seek employment at a coffee plantation in Soconusco. Unable to find a position as a field labourer, he is contracted to work in a slaughterhouse killing lambs, a practice contrary to his beliefs and proscribed by his people. He fails to adapt to the *ladino* world, which has a corruptive influence on him, resulting in what would be nowadays diagnosed as a mental disorder, as the protagonist begins to experience morbid pleasure in killing the animals. He also fails to reintegrate into his cultural environment on his return and continues to kill animals in order to vent his frustration and to quell his inner turmoil. He is not accepted by the *ladino* world, for whom he remains a ridiculed member of an alien and hermetic community, and he is also rejected by his own people, who see him as contaminated, a traitor of his own identity.

Similarly to the majority of *indigenista* novels, the discourse contains numerous references to the economic condition of the indigenous population, as well as its customs, beliefs and celebrations. However, the most notable innovation in the novel is the psychological depth in the construct of the protagonist. The omniscient, empathic narrator is fully aware of José Damián's internal dilemma and recognises the trauma caused by the process of assimilation. The protagonist displays a vast array of emotions through which he acquires a universal human dimension. This makes him easier to empathise with for the non-indigenous reader. The ending

of the novel betrays the pessimistic attitude of its author: there is no redemption for José Damián, as he becomes a fugitive from his tribe and is forced to return to the *ladino* world, condemned to be the despised "other", an outsider. Reconciliation of the two worlds, the indigenous and the non-indigenous, appears to be impossible, their differences insurmountable.

José Damián's complex personality is very different to that of Ricardo Pozas's eponymous Juan Pérez Jolote, the protagonist of the novel published in 1952. The latter is often impassive and detached, and acts as a metonymic "representative of his community" (Taylor, 2009: 45), who reflects the culture of an indigenous group undergoing transformation as a result of interaction with the *ladino* world (Pozas, 1959: 7). Juan Pérez Jolote, however, is the first-person narrator of his own life story. The introduction of the autodiegetic narrator is one of the most important contributions of the ethnographic *indigenismo* (in Spanish often referred to as works of anthropological re-creation). *Juan Pérez Jolote* is a flagship example of this type of discourse. It combines "literary and ethnographic elements" (Taylor, 2009: 39), derives from the author's careful and on-site anthropological research, in this case among the Chamula community, and adopts the indigenous informant's narrative perspective. It depicts the indigenous people's struggle to cope with their changing milieu, particularly with the agrarian reform as well as with some historical events, such as the Mexican Revolution. Juan Pérez Jolote is Pozas's informant, who recounts his story, from his difficult childhood and his escape from an abusive alcoholic father, through picaresque adventures in several parts of Mexico, a series of employments (often exploitive in nature), to his unintended participation in the Mexican Revolution and his return to the native village. Unlike José Damián, the protagonist of Pozas's novel manages to reintegrate into his community, although not without some effort.

The text contains numerous ethnographic details and clearly serves an additional didactic purpose. However, the main innovation is the introduction of a first-person indigenous narrator-protagonist This literary resource "lends a sense of immediacy and intimacy lacking in previous indigenista novels" (Taylor, 2009: 54). The author, however, retains a focalising function. He transcribes, reorganises and mediates the discourse according to his scientific interest and ideological agenda. His authority and agency are retained also through the paratext - the introduction and the glossary. Therefore, the shift in narrative perspective towards the Maya world-view is only superficial.

In 1962 Rosario Castellano's *Oficio de tinieblas* is published, preceding the demise of now largely discredited *indigenista* novel. Complex and stylistically accomplished, the novel centres on the subject of separateness, lack of understanding and the resulting conflict, as well as on the possibilities of an alliance between indigenous and non-indigenous worlds. The novel is ethnohistorical in the sense that it not only penetrates the indigenous cultural and spiritual reality, but also fictionalises historical events, in this case the 1867 Chamula revolt, reinterpreting them in the context of Mexico's socio-political situation during Lázaro Cárdenas's presidency. It focuses on the difficult and often violent relationship between the white *coleto* community in Chiapas and the Maya Tzotzil population with its own sense of historical and mythical continuity, which often collides with the *ladino* concept of progress. As Analisa Taylor points out, *Oficio de tinieblas* can be understood as "a complex interrogation of the mechanisms of white, patriarchal domination and

indigenous and feminine resistance" (op.cit.: 56) to the imposed colonial political, religious, linguistic and cultural order.

The novel's discourse breaks away from the archetypical image of the passive, fearful, compliant, ignorant Indian, who is silent in the face of *ladino* domination. In the crucial moment of the plot, Catalina Díaz Puiljá, the charismatic *ilol* o prophetess of her people, sacrifices her adoptive son to provide the Tzotzils with their own Christ, a symbol of their resistance and defiance. She explains:

> Aquí llegamos todos al final de la cuenta con el ladino. Hemos padecido injusticia y persecuciones y adversidades. Quizás alguno de nuestros antepasados pecó y por eso nos fue exigido este tributo. Dimos lo que teníamos y saldamos la deuda. Pero el ladino quería más, siempre más. [...] Y nosotros soportábamos, sin protestas, el sufrimiento, porque ninguna señal nos indicaba que era suficiente. [...] Ahora nosotros también tenemos un Cristo. No ha nacido en vano ni ha agonizado en vano ni ha muerto en vano. Su nacimiento, su agonía y su muerte sirven para nivelar al tzotzil, al chamula, al indio, con el ladino. Por eso, si el ladino nos amenaza tenemos que hacerle frente y no huir. Si nos persigue hay que darle la cara. [...] Salgamos, pues, al encuentro del ladino. Desafiémosle y vamos a ver cómo huye y se esconde. [...] Somos iguales ahora que nuestro Cristo hace contrapeso a su Cristo. (Castellanos, 2005: 486).

It is significant that the sacrificial victim should be a *mestizo* adolescent, Domingo, raised by Catalina, but born as a consequence of a rape of an indigenous woman perpetrated by Leonardo Cifuentes. As such, Domingo is a potent symbol of miscegenation, which from the time of the Conquest often resulted from sexual violence and remains a controversial and emotive term in Mexico. However, even the sacrifice of the innocent boy does not suffice: the Tzotzil revolt is suppressed. Fernando Ulloa, who initially sympathises with the indigenous cause, under interrogation reveals information on the rebels' armament, position and plans to the authorities (ibid.: 513). Ulloa is an agronomist and a governmental representative, who was delegated to Chiapas to implement agrarian policies. He is rejected both by the provincial *coleto* community and the indigenous insurgents and embodies Castellano's critique of the paternalistic stance of the inefficient *indigenista* project. Both Fernando Ulloa and Leonardo Cifuentes, the main white male characters in the novel resemble typical *indigenista* stock characters: a well-intentioned but naive intellectual, and a ruthless and abusive landowner.

Shortly after the publication of the foundational *indigenista* novels, another trend begins to gain popularity. It is represented by various texts gathered under the umbrella term of cultural *indigenismo* (Torres, 2009: 342). Their authors seek to incorporate indigenous myths, oral tradition and sacred books such as *Popol Vuh* and *Chilám Balám* into the modern narrative. The mythical aspect of the indigenous tradition is no longer seen as superstitious and unsophisticated but as an integral part of the native world view and the wider national cultural heritage. These texts emphasise the relation between indigenous cosmology or mythical thinking and collective consciousness of the indigenous population, including shared moral attitudes and psychology, which to a considerable extent depend on the indigenous beliefs. The "communal ritual knowledge" is often referred to as "cosmovision" and encompasses "ontological knowledge in relation to stellar patterns and celestial phenomena [..], which succeeded in establishing a subsequent social and cosmic order" (Arias, 2017: 20). In the Mayan area the cultural *indigenismo*

trend is represented by the Yucatec cycle (Leal Fernández, 1996: 398), incorporating novels by Antonio Mediz Bolio and Ermilo Abreu Gómez. Certain aspects of cultural *indigenismo* are also visible in Rosario Castellano's *Balún Canán*.

Antonio Mediz Bolio's *La tierra del faisán y del venado* (1922) was intended (according to the author, quoted by Alfonso Reyes in the prologue) as a literary stylisation of the Mayan spirit and of the notions that the Maya hold in relation to themselves, their origin, their past glory, life, nature and human condition (Mediz Bolio, 1922: IV). It is a book thought in Maya and written in Spanish (ibid.). *La tierra del faisán y del venado* is a compilation of indigenous myths, legends, folk tales and poetic songs, which underline the close relation that the Maya preserve between mythical thinking and nature, natural phenomena and history. The aim of this artistic re-creation of the Maya mythology and world view is to incorporate the indigenous spirituality into the context of a wider national mentality, as a formative element of the nation's "soul" (ibid. III). Mediz Bolio sees the Maya glorious traditions and religion, of which only remnants can be now observed in Mayab, as part of the mexican historical heritage, belonging entirely to the past:

> Porque la tierra de Mayab es santa, desde antes de que tuviera nombre. Debajo de ella está hoy lo que en los tiempos muy antiguos estuvo encima. Y eso es lo que da luz. Así el hijo del Mayab puede ir por el campo, en la mitad oscura de la noche, sin tropezar con las piedras ni herirse con las espinas. Hay quien le alumbra. El indio va solo y en silencio por lo espeso de los montes, muy adentro de la noche, y oye lo que no ve. Porque de la tierra salen voces que le hablan. (Mediz Bolio, 1922: 185).

Maní, known in historical accounts as the site of the infamous 1562 *auto-de-fé,* when numerous invaluable indigenous manuscripts were burned, is for Mediz Bolio the symbol of the fall of Mayab: "No le queda al Mayab sino Maní, sepulcro de los sepulcros, y en Maní está escrito que «todo pasó»" (ibid.: 220). Thus, in Mediz Bolio's view, the continuity between the ancient and the present Maya cultural tradition is disrupted. However, the narrator, pointing to Chilám's prophesies, foretells (albeit rather vaguely) the restoration of Mayab's intangible glory. This will not be achieved by armed uprising but by reviving the memory of the ancient times of peaceful, spiritual plenitude.

Certain characteristics of cultural *indigenismo* can also be found in Ermilo Abreu Gómez's *Canek* (1940). This part prose poem, part novel fictionalises the figure of Jacinto Uc de los Santos (Jacinto Canek), Yucatec leader of the 1761 Maya rebellion against the colonial power. *Canek*'s greatest merit resides in questioning the official historical discourse by presenting an alternative perspective, based on indigenous legends, myths and oral tradition. Through implied quotations, Canek becomes a secondary narrator, often interpreting differences between the *ladino* and the Maya perspectives through images and metaphors rooted in mythical thinking:

> Nosotros somos la tierra; ellos son el viento. En nosotros maduran las semillas; en ellos se orean las ramas. Nosotros alimentamos las raíces; ellos alimentan las ojas. Bajo nuestras plantas caminan las aguas de los cenotes, olorosas de las manos de las vírgenes muertas. Sobre ellas se despeñan las voces de los guerreros que las ganaron. Nosotros somos la tierra. Ellos son el viento. (Abreu Gómez, 2006: 35).

Many of these differences stem from contrasting attitudes towards the natural environment. In the Maya world-view there is no hyperseparation of the human and the natural

world. The spiritual element is present in humans, animals, and in objects considered in the Western world-view as inanimate, for example mountains, rivers, thunder and lightning. The Maya have an intimate relationship with the sacred land of their ancestors. This bond is expressed by the ritual of burying the newborn's umbilical cord in the soil. Exploitation of the environment is seen as a transgression against the sacredness of the nature (Campos, 2008: 24).

NEOINDIGENISMO

The works of the Guatemalan Nobel Prize winner Miguel Ángel Asturias, often included in the cultural *indigenismo* convention, differ considerably from the examples analysed above. *Leyendas de Guatemala* (1930) and *Hombres de maíz* (1949) are a syncretic form of literature, which results from a process of transculturation, explained in the introduction to this article. The term transculturation was applied to literary phenomena by Ángel Rama and elaborated in his study *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (1982). Rama interpreted transculturation in the context of the conflict between cosmopolitan, modernist avant-garde, espoused by urban centres, and traditional, regionalist fiction, focused on the local culture of the American hinterlands (Rama, 2012: 14). Regionalist literature responded to the pressure exerted by modernism by absorbing elements of the new aesthetics and creating syncretic forms, which in fact lead to the revival of regionalist fiction. Some of the modernist innovations visible in linguistic and structural aspects of the transculturated novels include the use of stream of consciousness as a literary device, the integration of liricism into the narrative, and the departure from the system of linguistic duality (alternating literary language of the narrator with the "dialectical register of the rural characters", ibid.: 24). The third level of transculturation, crucial to the analysis of Asturias' novels, is the level of world view. The modernist movement, aware of the epistemological limitations of the scientific method, focused on the subconscious, the supernatural and the irrational, leading to the re-evaluation of mythical narratives. Modernists see myths not as fantastical, archaic fables but as an intrinsic part of world-views and cultural imagery.

Miguel Ángel Asturias' aesthetics clearly point to the European influence of modernist tendencies, most notably surrealism, with which Asturias became familiar during his stay in Paris. In *Leyendas de Guatemala* the author presents a dream-like vision of his native country as a palimpsest of various traditions, both mythical and historical (colonial, especially baroque, as well as modern ones).

In this amalgam of traditions, Cabrakán and Hurakán cohabit the atemporal narrative space with characters from folk tales dating back to the colonial times; gods of *Popol Vuh* share space with Christ and the Madonna. Asturias creates a poetic, oneiric and utopian image of the hybrid reality of Guatemala. Mario Roberto Morales notes that "true to his surrealist and psychoanalytical learnings, Asturias uses dream and the unconscious as a space to articulate the inclusive, democratized country or nation" (in: Asturias, 2011: 26), in which intercultural integration "can be built only in fantasy, in fiction, in the imagination, in dream, the domain of hyperreality" (ibid.).

In *Hombres de maíz* the Maya myth of the creation of mankind from corn takes a central position in the story, linking all elements of the complex plot into a unified whole. In the novel,

indigenous characters led by Gaspar Ilóm oppose, through armed struggle, the exploitive *maiceros,* who see corn fields only in lucrative terms, which contradicts indigenous convictions based on the mythological value of the plant. The poisoning of Ilóm triggers a series of events narrated in the novel. The firefly sorcerers pronounce a curse, which condemns all characters involved in the poisoning of the Maya leader to either death or sterility. The fullfilment of the curse results in the death of Coronel Godoy, responsible for the pacification of Ilóm's supporters and the mastermind behind the poisoning. Tomás Machojón, Godoy's indigenous accomplice, and Machojón's son both die in mysterious circumstances. The entire Zacatón family, relatives of the apothecary who dispensed the poison, are executed by the Tecún brothers, who were made to believe by the shaman Venado de las Siete Rozas that the Zacatóns were responsible for the illness of their mother, Yaca Tecún. Coronel Godoy's subordinate, Musús, is infertile and resigned to raising the offspring of his wife by another man. Benito Ramos, another member of Godoy's squad and the second husband of María Zacatón (renamed Tecún), the only survivor of the family's execution, also dies childless.

The events which constitute the plot can only be explained by their supernatural, magical causes. These events are the kernels of the story and cannot be eliminated, if the logic of the plot is to be retained. The supernatural events are recounted by the narrator with the same objectivity as the rational ones, conforming to the Maya world-view, in which there is no clear distinction between the ontological status of the rational and of the magical. Additionally, many of the structural elements of the novel are analogous to some of the components of Popol Vuh. Several of the characters in the novel display dualistic pairing, through which they function as unity. These pairs include María Tecún and La Piojosa Grande, healer Venado de las Siete Rozas and firefly sorcerer, two of the characters (the healer and the postman) and their *nahuals*. The same principle can be observed in Popol Vuh in the dualistic pairing of Hunahpu and Xbalanque as aspects of Venus, One Batz and One Chouen, the lords of Xibalba One Death and Seven Death. Furthermore, in *Hombres de maíz,* a similar narrative scheme is employed in two or more analogous events in the plot. One of the best examples is the abandonment of the husbands and subsequent search for La Piojosa Grande, María Tecún and Chagüita. Structural analogies between events are reminiscent of the repeated narrative scheme of the summons and the descent to the underworld, first by One Hunahpu and Seven Hunahpu, later by Hunahpu and Xbalanque in Popol Vuh. Finally, the events that happened at the beginning of the novel are reiterated at the end, which is reminiscent of the parallelisms in Popol Vuh (see: Christenson, in: *Popol Vuh*, 2007: 44-51).

In *Hombes de maíz* numerous Maya mythical concepts are incorporated into the text, and the novel is possibly the most accomplished example of a syncretic *ladino* narrative which aims to recreate the Maya world-view. It is truly syncretic, however, only in terms of literary tendencies. It departs from the social realism typical for indigenista novel, and fuses modernist influences with the indigenous theme. Yet it does not transcend the *indigenista* paradigm. It is a literary construct of the elusive indigenous world as imagined by the non-indigenous author, framed in a modernist novelistic format and intended for a non-indigenous reader. Like all indigenista literary production, the novel is therefore heterogeneous in the sense defined by Antonio Cornejo Polar.

The Maya movement in Mexico and Guatemala

Recent decades have seen a marked rise in Maya social and political activism, most notably as a reaction to brutal repression of the Guatemalan Civil War. The Pan-Maya Movement has emerged, defined as "the process of building a coordinated effort for subsistence and cultural reaffirmation among Maya linguistic communities" (Montejo, in: Mussak 2013: 20) and a "movement of self-representation and cultural resurgence", with "the revitalisation of Mayan languages, religion and spirituality, native knowledge, Mayan schools, and political consciousness" as its "most expressive forms" (Montejo, 2005: 66). Maya intellectuals have been focusing on condemning racism still present through discriminatory public policies and on reaffirmation of the Maya right to self-determination in the cultural sense (ibid.: 174).

The Pan-Maya movement, as it is known today, has its source in an indigenous movement which originated in Guatemala and began after the October Revolution in 1944, initially as forms of participation in local political activities. In the following decades the Guatemalan Maya began to expand their political involvement into the national arena, engage with political parties, and form peasants organisations (Camus, Bastos, 2004: 19). Around that time numerous cultural or indigenous associations were established and the revitalisation of the Mayan languages was actively promoted. In mid-70s guerrilla activity increased, and so did the repressions of the military regime. The end of the 70s and beginning of the 80s marked a particularly dark period in the history of the Maya, who were the victims of massacres perpetrated by the army at a scale now officialy recognised as genocide (Camus, 2007: 200). This was also a period of polarisation within the Maya movement: some members joined guerrilla organisations (united in 1982 as URNG), some opted for non-violent struggle centered around cultural and educational activities (ibid.). These fractions are known respectively as *mayas poulares* and *mayas culturales* o *mayanistas*. They reunited in 1994 during the peace process talks under Coordinación de Organizaciones del Pueblo Maya de Guatemala (COPMAGUA), with the common objective to claim recognition and cultural rights for the Maya, along with some degree of political autonomy (Camus, 2007: 202). In 1995 the historical Acuerdo de Identidad y Derechos de los Pueblos Indígenas (AIDPI) was signed, and Guatemala was officially acknowledged as a multicultural, pluri-ethnic and multilingual nation (ibid.). It was a watershed moment for the Maya, now recognised as Pueblo Indígena, and the years following the signing of AIDPI were among the most fruitful and successful for the Maya movement. However, the period of the greatest political and cultural visibility of the Maya came to an abrupt end in 1999, when constitutional reforms "necessary for the ethnic redefinition of Guatemala" (ibid.: 204, my translation) were rejected in a referendum and the party of Efraín Rios Montt (FRG) won the general elections, with Alfonso Portillo elected as the president of the republic. The Maya movement lost its maximum momentum but did not disappear; its work in cultural and educational areas continues both in Guatemala and abroad.

In Mexico, the beginning of the indigenous mobilisation coincided with the Student Movement and the 1968 massacre in Tlatelolco. That period also marked the apex of the critique of both *indigenismo* and the traditional anthropology on which this ideology was based. In 1970, a set of critical studies written by a new generation of anthropologists was published in a volume

entitled *De eso que llaman antropología mexicana*, edited by Arturo Warman. This publication marked an explicit shift in anthropological paradigm and signalled a complete departure from the politics of indigenous assimilation (see: Sanz Lara, 2010: 6-7). In 1973, Movimiento Nacional Indigena was created and a series of congresses was organised, initially under the auspices of the Mexican government, later independently of it. The indigenous activism intensified especially after the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas in 1994.

Maya activism lead to the creation of many cultural and literary organisations and workshops, such as Taller Tzotzil, the Maya'on Society, Calkiní House, Sna Jtz'ibajom and CELALI (Centro Estatal de Lenguas, Arte y Literatura Indígenas) in Mexico; Asociación de Escritores Mayenses and Fundación Cholsamaj in Guatemala, to name just a few. The objective of these organisations is fostering Maya cultural activism, including literary production is Maya languages. It would be a mistake to think that Maya poetry and prose are a new phenomenon; they should be regarded instead as a continuation of oral tradition present in indigenous communities through generations. What has changed is the increase in publishing and promotional activity, which has succeeded in exposing "new audiences to marginalized voices" (Hunt, 2007: 75) in Mexico and Guatemala.

TESTIMONIAL LITERATURE

Towards the end of the 1960s, as the critique of the paternalistic discourse of *indigenismo* intensified, a new literary model emerged in Latin America. *Testimonio*, a hybrid genre blending elements from journalism and fiction, conceded to the indigenous subaltern subjects a greater degree of control over their own stories. George Yúdice defines *testimonio* 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 (Yúdice, in: Henderson, 2001: 84).

While testimonial literature favours the perspective of the narrator, often the story is mediated by a compiler in order to be brought to the attention of a wider, usually an international circle of readers. In cataloguing systems, the compiler is typically listed as the author of the book. *Testimonio's* strong referential aspect and often overtly political message means that it remains in close connection with the extra textual reality, to the point where it is often expected to meet strict requirements of veracity. In Guatemala, testimonial literature has played a crucial role in contesting the official narrative concerning the Civil War, exposing the atrocities committed by the government and the armed forces, particularly in the late 70s and early 80s. *Testimonio* "has not just a therapeutic function, but it turns into an effective way to spread the truth that was forced to be gagged" (Caballero Mariscal, 2017: 32).

One of the best known examples of *testimonio* in Latin America is *I, Rigoberta Menchú, An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1983), edited and introduced by Elisabeth Burgos-Debray. It is a powerful first-person account of the life of a Maya K'iche' woman and at the same time a record

of Guatemalan indigenous population's plight during the Civil War. Menchú recalls the harsh reality of her childhood and adolescence, as well as her involvement as a political activist in the United Peasant Committee and the 31 January Popular Front. A part of her narrative is dedicated to the K'iche' customs, traditions and ceremonies concerning birth, marriage, sowing and harvest, and to the strong ties that unite the community. Menchú's polarised view of Guatemalan society is evident throughout the discourse: *ladinos* are evil ("thieves, criminals and liars" (Menchú, 1984: 126)) and Indians are essentially good and noble. The *ladino*/Maya dichotomy is a result of racial discrimination, economic exploitation and inferiority complex inculcated in the Maya, and it is further accentuated by the brutal repression of the Civil War. Menchú recounts the awakening of her social consciousness:

> In our community we are all equal. We all have to help one another and share the little have between us. There is no superior and inferior. But we realized that in Guatemala there was something superior and something inferior and that *we* were the inferior. The ladinos behave like a superior race. Apparently there was a time when the ladinos used to think we weren't people at all, but a sort of animal. All this became clear to me (ibid.: 145).

With time Menchú realises that the deep social division is a result of discriminatory politics of the wealthy ruling elite. On her admission, Menchú's involvement in the political struggle is a reaction against the suffering and repression that K'iche' Maya have had to endure (ibid.: 238).

Although the narrative voice belongs unquestionably to Menchú, it can be argued that the shift in perspective is not complete. This stems from one important factor: it is an account related to a non-indigenous narratee (the compiler) and intended for a non-indigenous implied reader. The narrator needs to "step outside" her cultural milieu and look at it to some extent from an external position, which partly becomes a focalising point of the narrative. Menchú sees the need to explain or withdraw certain information which would be self-evident and obvious to a K'iche' narratee, for example when talking about her *nahual*:

> We Indians have always hidden our identity and kept our secrets to ourselves. [...] So I can only tell you very general things about the *nahual*. I can't tell you what my *nahual* is because that is one of our secrets (ibid.: 22).

Although the Maya narrator is able to speak for herself, instead of being spoken for, the compiler's participation in the creative process is still visible through arranging, filtering and editing of the text (Hunt, 2007: 74), even if the extent of it is relatively small.

Menchú's testimonio is framed within the format similar to that of the text considered to be foundational for the genre, *Biografía de un cimarrón* (1966). The definition of *testimonio*, however, does not automatically imply the mediation of a compiler, and is based on the genre's function rather than its format. One of the most striking examples of unmediated testimonial literature, written directly by a witness to events, is Victor Montejo's *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village*, translated into English by Victor Perera and published in 1987. The greatest part of this *testimonio* relates to events that happened within a 24-hour time frame between the 9th and the 10th of December 1982, in a "remote village in the northwest of Huehuetenango Department in Guatemala, Central America" (Montejo, 1987: 11), where Montejo worked as a rural teacher at

the time. The author/narrator names the village with a pseudonym Tzalalá to protect the villagers from any possible repercussions. Montejo "presents a mixed perspective" (Caballero Mariscal, 2017: 32): he is a Maya, but he is also familiar with the Western world-view through his exile and academic work in the United States. Montejo provides the geographical location of Guatemala and a glossary of typically Guatemalan terms, which suggests that he intends to tell his story to the widest possible international circle of implied readers.

The first part of the *testimonio* provides information necessary to put the narrative in a historical context. The narrator describes the village, the empty promises made to the villagers by politicians, and the formation of civil defence patrols in the village, ordered by a military commander as a form of protection against guerrilla "subversion" (Montejo, 1987: 13) in July 1982. The account of the events begins with the alarm raised by the head of the civil patrol, warning about guerrillas approaching the village. It soon transpires that the villagers mistook an army detachment for guerrillas, because the soldiers were wearing olive green fatigues, instead of the customary camouflage ones. Armed with "clubs, stones, slingshots and machetes" (ibid.: 16), the villagers attack a military patrol of *kaibiles*, soldiers of the counter-insurgency operations division. A group of civil patrol members is captured and brought to the village in restraints. The first victim of the army fire is named: it is Sebastián, an adolescent who dies "little by little, painfully" (ibid.. 32) of a gunshot wound. The terrified villagers watch helplessly as the soldiers search the houses "like hungry dogs" (ibid.: 34) looking for spoils. The lieutenant in charge checks the names of the captives against a list of alleged guerrilla sympathisers, which had been most likely provided by a resentful villager, denouncing his neighbours to the army for personal reasons. Several villagers are singled out and the tallest one is taken into the school to be tortured. Under severe duress, he casts false accusations on the teacher. Montejo recalls what was going through his mind at that moment, beside fear: "I spat my darkest unspoken thoughts on the ground. What President Lucas García had left undone during his brutal term in office was now being completed by his successor Efraín Ríos Montt. […] I had not know darker days than the present ones" (ibid.: 55). The men whose names appeared on the blacklist are executed.

The arrival of army reinforcements introduces an analepsis to the so far chronologically ordered narrative. It turns out that one of the officers from the second patrol had already been in the village only ten days previously. On August 30th he "ordered an execution of two residents of the village" (ibid.: 62). To avoid having blood on his hands, he forced the villagers to carry out the execution of their neighbours. They complied with the order. Montejo comments sadly:

> How sad it is when a man loses his identity and is easily indoctrinated! […] Destroy, kill, even if it includes your own family. This military doctrine had gradually undermined the foundations of an indigenous culture, causing the Indian to act against his own will […] destroying what is most sacred in his ancient Mayan legacy: love and respect for one's own neighbour, which translates into a policy of mutual support. (ibid.: 63).

In the evening of September 9th Montejo is escorted to the military base in a nearby town. He enters the barracks aware that "any civilian who entered was never seen alive again, and his fate would never be known" (ibid.: 74). Montejo is interrogated and tortured. One of the officers who escorted the teacher through the mountains is sympathetic to his situation and allows Montejo to spend the night in the barracks instead of a cesspool of "mud, water and

garbage" (ibid.: 82). Motejo spends the night listening to the "bone-chilling howls" (ibid.: 83) of a man tortured nearby. The innocent teacher survives the ordeal of the army barracks supported by his faith in God. Montejo's wife is aware of her husband's plight and she asks civil and church officials to intercede for him. Montejo is eventually released on the condition that he presents himself every day at the military base to report any suspicious activity in town. In spite of his daily presence in the barracks, he never denounces anybody. He returns to his teaching post in Tzalalá, which is now enveloped in "hermetic silence" (ibid.: 107). The terror in Guatemala became unbearable "with the rise to power of Efraín Ríos Montt", when "all remaining human rights were abolished, and the army became the sole arbiter over the lives of Guatemalans" (ibid.: 113). Montejo managed to flee the country. His *testimonio* is a powerful account of the Maya's suffering, told by an eyewitness who survived his ordeal and who acts on behalf of the two hundred thousand victims of the Guatemalan genocide, whose stories were never told.

It is worth mentioning that Montejo is also the author of "the most atypical testimonio ever written" (Arias, 2017: 187), *Brevísima relación testimonial de la destrucción del Mayab*, published in 1992, not by accident in the year of the quincentenary of the "discovery" of America. The testimonio is written in the form of a letter to the king of Spain, with clear intertextual reference to Bartolomé de las Casas' work. It "establishes a paradigmatic continuity with the original destruction and genocide of the Spanish invasion" and "resituates the context in which the massacres against Maya peoples took place in the 1980s" (ibid.). Additionally, Montejo is a compiler of Maya testimonies and poetry gathered during his anthropological research in refugee camps in Chiapas, Mexico (*Voices from Exile. Violence and Survival in Modern Maya History*, 1999). Although he employs Western methodology, his position differs radically from the traditional Western approach: he is a Maya and he shares many experiences with his interlocutors. He states that his "task is to decolonize this Maya experience of exile and to write critically from [...] insider perspective about its causes and outcomes" (Montejo, 1999: 13). Rigoberta Menchú, together with members of the Committee for Peasant Unity (CUC), is also the author of unmediated testimonial volume *El Clamor de la tierra: luchas campesinas en la historia reciente de Guatemala*. Finally, the narrative and the poetic works of the eminent Maya K'iche' author Humberto Ak'abal can also be regarded as a form of testimonial literature (Caballero Mariscal, 2017: 35). Until his untimely death in 2019, Ak'abal vehemently voiced his denouncement of the injustice and the pain that the Maya had to endure. His lyrical I encompassed not only his personal understanding of reality but also the collective experiences of the Guatemalan Maya as a discriminated, "deprived sector of his society" (ibid. 35). With reference to Ak'abal's poetic antology *Raqonchi'aj/Grito*, Marie-Louise Ollé states:

> El rasgo dominante de este conjunto es la intensidad lírica en la expresión sin rodeos de la rabia y del dolor que mueven al yo poético. Es una poesía de la urgencia, poesía para un combate frontal que se vale de las estrategias discursivas del tribuno: apóstrofe, amonestación, invocación, lamento... […] Y eso, para dar a ver, para explicitar el mundo binario de la oposición /dominante vs dominado/ y el consiguiente dolor, por parte del subalterno (2012: 306).

The above examples of testimonial literature represent various configurations of *testimonio,* which differ from its original, externally mediated format. Their role in representing the perspective of

the subaltern voice, silenced but not extinguished, is an invaluable contribution to Latin-American narrative.

MAYA NOVEL

In 1992 *La otra cara*, a novel by Maya Q'anjob'al author Gaspar Pedro González was published in Spanish and in 1996 the same novel appeared in a bilingual Q'anjob'al-Spanish edition. The novel depicts the everyday reality of the Maya from the northern part of Huehuetenango region. From the very beginning, the discourse is permeated by a deep sense of Maya spirituality and mythical references (Mussack, 2013: 72). The birth of Luin, the novel's protagonist, occurs on the day of Thirteen Ahau according to the Maya calendar. The glyph corresponding to that date is visible on the cover of both the Spanish and the English edition of the book; the pages are numbered with Maya bar and dot numerical symbols. It is obvious that Maya ancestral traditions play an important role in the narrative discourse. During the ceremony of presentation of the newborn to the community, Luin's godfather addresses him in the following manner: "Tú formas parte de la armonía del universo como lo escribieron nuestros padres en las piedras aún no descifradas por el blanco, cumple tu función y serás feliz" (González, 1998: 29).

Loyalty to the ancestral tradition and service to the community are the cornerstones of the Maya philosophy of life, which differs essentially from that of *ladinos*:

> Nuestro mundo, no es el mundo de los ladinos; nuestras fiestas no son sus fiestas; nuestras vidas se desarrollan en forma diferente. No tenemos la misma visión sobre la vida: unos de una manera y otros de otra. (ibid.: 10).

These differences appear to be irreconcilable, to the extent that the Maya pupils who enter the public educational system feel that they need to assume "a false personality and artificial customs" (ibid.: 103). The *ladino* school environment turns into one of the tools of repression of the traditional values and indigenous identity, resulting in degradation of its indigenous pupils' self-esteem. It emphatically illustrates the failure of the official *indigenista* policies of *mestizaje* or forced integration of the indigenous population into the Spanish-speaking, westernised society. The official educational system, together with imposed religion and politics are seen as components of the system contributing to the silent suppression of the indigenous culture and the inculcation of an inferiority complex, summed up by the derogatory term *el indito*. (ibid.: 100, 122).

It is worth noting that González's novel shares some topics with the *indigenista* narrative: the dire economic situation of the indigenous population, exploitation, discrimination and social injustice. However, from the indigenous perspective these are the result of the official policies of the government, which contribute to the increase of racial prejudices against the Maya people. The indigenous population is excluded from the decision-making and the formation of national policies:

> Nosotros [...] somos como extranjeros en nuestra propia tierra. Somos ajenos a cuanto concepto e ideas se manejan dentro del sistema de la vida. [..] Nunca han tomado en

> cuenta nuestras verdaderas necesidades, ni se nos consulta qué es lo que queremos y cómo queremos que se hagan las cosas. (ibid.: 11, 24).

The solution to this problem is not *mestizaje* or *ladinoisation* but recognition of the pluricultural nature of the Guatemalan society and implementation (not imposition) of modernising policies with a sense of respect for cultural differences, through the indigenous people's own initiatives, with their active involvement and on their own terms. Luin explains this progressive project by means of a metaphor: "Jamás nos vendrá una camisa hecha a la medida de otros grupos que no sea hecha por nosotros" (ibid.: 238). In the last chapter, somewhat idealistically, Jolomk'u is transformed into a thriving Maya community through the introduction of economic and educational changes, under the guidance of Luin and with the active participation of all members of the community. Significantly enough, Luin, already an old man, is accompanied in the moment of his death by his *nahual*, a wolf. He always remains a Maya, never renouncing his identity, customs or tradition.

The present overview of literary representations of the Maya will be concluded with a brief analysis of an important novel written by a Guatemalan Kaqchikel author, Luis de Lión. *Tiempo principia en Xibalbá* was written in Spanish and published in 1985. It is considered by some researchers to be first Mayan novel in Guatemala (Valle Escalante, 2015a: 320). The structure of the novel is complex and nonlinear, perhaps in contrast to the logical, rationalist Europocentric narrative model (ibid.: 323). The temporal ordering of the events on discourse level corresponds to the Maya circular concept of time, expressed both in Maya mythology and in the calendric system. References to the sacred Maya book, *Popol Vuh*, abound in the text, as each chapter begins with a description of a phenomenon reminiscent of the story of creation and destruction of mankind prototypes or the appearance of the first dawn. The name of the Maya mythological underworld, Xibalbá, is included in the title of the novel. Nothing could be more appropriate as Xibalbá is not only a place of death but also a place of re-birth and re-creation, which – in relation to the indigenous identity - are the main topics of the novel. The protagonists, Juan Caca and Pascual Baeza, are indigenous inhabitants of an unspecified town in Guatemala, shaped on the author's native San Juan del Obispo. Both protagonists spent some time in the *ladino* world, the former in a religious seminary and the latter in military service. They both return to their native village but fail to reintegrate into the community: their identities suffer a crisis resulting in a sense of dislocation, a feeling of "floating over the village like a balloon that can never touch the ground" (Lión, 2012: 31). Juan is *ladinoised*: a wealthy land owner, he lives in the only white house in the village and is obsessed with cleanliness. Pascual drowns his sorrows in alcohol and develops violent tendencies. Juan and Pascual are "each other's schizophrenic voice" (Henne, in: Lión, op.cit.: xxi) and are unable to "translate their hybrid identities in the indigenous context of the village" (ibid.). They illustrate the failure of *mestizaje* as an identity-building concept. Their identity crisis is metaphorically conveyed through their sexual behaviour: Juan is impotent, empty; Pascual engages in sexual relations with non-indigenous women and despises the indigenous ones. Both of them desire the only *ladina* in the village: the wooden statue of the Virgin of Conception, an object of religious veneration.

While Juan keeps his desires secret, Pascual acts on them and rapes the statue in an act that can be interpreted as a protest against the colonial power and a rebellion against the imposed

status quo. A meaningful allegorical tale of a hen and a coyote reveals the fact that Juan is in fact envious of Pascual's ability to act, to show initiative: "He wishes he could morph into Coyote, to be like him because he's afraid" (Lión, 2012: 46). Emilio del Valle Escalante sees the rape and destruction of the Virgin as an act of political and mental decolonisation of the community (2015a: 328). How bitter are the words of the wooden statue: "they should remember they were all little Indians, after all. [..] thanks again for putting her back in her glass case in the niche. ¡Thank you, little Indians, for your good little Indian hearts!" (ibid.: 62). The fallen Virgin is substituted with Concha, an indigenous *Virgen*, who embodies pure, ancestral indigeneity. She is the Virgin of Death, who "consolidates those aspects of ancient Mesoamerican female deities that most contrast with the Catholic Virgin Mary – she is passionate, sexually voracious, violent and unpredictable" (Henne, in: Lión 2012: xxiii). Clearly this substitution is not a solution for the community, which as a consequence "disintegrates into violence and chaos" (ibid.). Emilio del Valle Escalante sees the allegorical substitution as an act of establishment of a cultural identity based on indigenous values, traditions and concepts (2015a: 329). It may be argued, however, that this project is doomed to failure; it does not fill the gap created by the inevitable identity crisis of the modern Guatemalan society; it does not occupy the space "between the two poles" (Henne, in: Lión, 2012: xxiii) of a hybrid, transculturated identity. However, the title of the novel, as well as the community's symbolical inability to rebuild the village according to the image preserved in memory for centuries (Lión, 2012: 63), do suggest a need for a new cultural indigenous identity which would encompass the difficult, irreversible changes brought about by the processes of assimilation.

Conclusions

In Ronald Flores' novel *El informante nativo* (2007), the seemingly conventional third-person narration follows the life of a Maya Lacandon family migrating to Guatemala City in search for better opportunities for the younger generation. The young protagonist of the story becomes a promising academic in the field of archaeology. Having made a ground-breaking archaeological discovery, he is obliged to cede his research findings to the Global Museum enterprise, which had funded his scholarship. He is denied the agency over his knowledge. His name, Viernes (Friday), is a clear allusion to Robinson Cruzoe's Native American servant-companion in need of being "civilised". Naming is as a linguistic (semantic) practice, through which assumed superiority and power relations are established. In the academia, the "indigenous question" is discussed and theorised, but the power relations and the situation of the Maya in the national arena remain unchanged. There seems to be no end to the discrimination of the American aboriginal people, perpetrated since the colonial times. Brilliant academic careers are forged and fortunes amassed, but these privileges are reserved for the *ladinos* and depend on the preservation of the existing social and political *status quo*. Towards the end of the novel, the narrator is finally revealed: he is a non-indigenous scholar, a professor of ethnography, and at the same time he is the narratee or compiler of Viernes' story. The narrator's first encounter with his informant leads to the formulation of an important question, a paraphrase of the title of Gayatri Spivak's essay on the subject of subaltern self-representation: can the aborigine speak? (ibid.: 187).

The plot of the story does not take place in a distant past but in the last decades of the 20th

century, which underlines the fact that colonialism did not end with the Latin-American independence from the Spanish crown but has persisted in the political discourse and power relations until the 21st century. This article confirms the above thesis: many of the analysed texts conform to the ethnocentric *indigenista* ideology, which perpetuated the colonial discursive monopoly and represented the Maya way of being with condescension and paternalism. Canonical *indigenista* novels, written and read mostly by non-indigenous upper class, retained a close relationship with the state-promoted ideology of assimilation of the indigenous population into the Spanish-speaking, westernised society. The Maya were seen by the *indigenista* writers as "work-in-progress" (Taylor, 2009: 3), needing transformation in order to be able to participate fully in the modern society. The *indigenista* narrative is not a uniform corpus: it is revived by several innovative changes, most notably by the introduction of the autodiegetic narrator and the inclusion of myths and motifs from sacred scriptures, such as *Popol Vuh* or *The Books of Chilám Balám*. These stylistic advances aim at the artistic recreation of the indigenous perspective and world view, yet the *indigenista* novel remains heterogeneous, an artificial construct of the Maya world performed by non-indigenous authors and intended for non-indigenous readers. Finally, the last few decades see a marked rise in literary works by indigenous authors being published both in their native countries and abroad. These works in majority retain an intrinsic relationship with social movements (Valle Escalante, 2015b: 10) and reflect the struggle to reclaim the right to self-represenation, a right which has been denied and silenced for five centuries. Readers of the Maya literature should accept "the word of «the other» at face value, rooted in a particular discursive site […], accepting their word as their property (in the process of naming themselves, allowing these «othered» subjects to be the rightful «owners» of their subjectivity) and as an enunciative strategy for the sake of gaining agency (as a linkage of subjectivity)." (Arias, 2007: xv).

Neither the suggested approach, nor the selection of novels examined in the paper come close to exhausting the subject. The particular focus of this overview are the narrative voice and perspective: the vehicles for standpoints and world-views, the non-physical places from which stories are told and value judgements pronounced. These terms are very useful in literary analysis, but they have their limitations, too. They belong to the field of narratology and are applicable to narrative genres, especially to the modern novelistic format of indisputably European origin. The critical framework and methodology must be reformulated (decolonised) in the future if the totality of the Maya literary production is to be adequately analysed in its original form. Non-indigenous readers should approach Maya textualities with an open mind, without preconceived notions of indigenous literature, and without the set aesthetic expectations associated with the Western literary canon. Only then the Maya voices will be truly heard.

BIBLIOGRAFÍA

ABREU GÓMEZ, Ermilo (2006). *Canek*. La Habana: Editorial Gente Nueva.

ARIAS, Arturo (2007). *Taking Their Word. Literature And The Signs of Central America*. Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press.

ARIAS, Arturo (2017). *Recovering Lost Footprints. Contemporary Maya Narratives, Volume 1*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

ARIAS, Arturo (2018). *Recovering Lost Footprints. Contemporary Maya Narratives, Volume 2*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

ASTURIAS, Miguel Ángel (1972). *Hombres de maíz*. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

ASTURIAS, Miguel Ángel (2011). *Legends of Guatemala*. Pittsburg: Latin American Literary Review Press.

BASTOS, Santiago; CAMUS, Manuela (2004). *El movimiento maya en perspectiva. Texto para reflexión y debate*. Guatemala: FLASCO, Editioral de Sciencias Sociales.

BASTOS, Santiago. "La construcción de la identidad maya en Guatemala. Historia e implicaciones de un proceso político". *Desacatos* 24 (2007): 97-214.

BEER, Gabriella de. "Ramón Rubín y El callado dolor de los tzotziles". *Revista Iberoamericana* L/ 127 (1984): 559-568.

CABALLERO MARISCAL, David. "La identidad maya-poqomchi' guatemalteca en sus manifestaciones espirituales y religiosas". *Revista de Estudios Sociales*. 53 (2015): 52-64.

CABALLERO MARISCAL, David. "The Guatemalan Genocide Through Indigeneous Mayan Literature Twenty Years After the Peace Accords: Rigoberta Menchú, Humberto Ak'abal and Victor Montejo". *European Journal of Language and Literature Studies* 7/1 (2017):31-39.

CAMPOS, Jeannet. "Visión ética de la naturaleza en la cultura maya". *Revista Herencia*, 21 (2008): 23-35.

CASTELLANOS, Rosario (2005). *Balún-Canán. Oficio de tinieblas. Obras reunidas*. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

CHATMAN, Seymour (1980). *Story and Discourse. Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. Ihaca and London: Cornell University Press.

CORNEJO POLAR, Antonio. "Sobre el «neoindigenismo» y las novelas de Manuel Scorza". *Revista Iberoamericana* (1984): 549-557.

FLORES, Ronald (2007). *El informante nativo*. Guatemala: F&G Editores.

FLORESCANO, Enrique (1999). *Memoria indígena*. Mexico: Taurus.

GALLEGOS VÁZQUEZ, Rafael (2003). "Los conceptos "indio" y "ladino": configuraciones histórico sociales definidas por sus relaciones»" Faculdad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales, Universidad Rafael Landívar.

GONZÁLEZ, Gaspar Pedro (1998). *La otra cara (la vida de un maya)*. Rancho Palos Verdes, CA: Fundación Yax Te'.

HERNÁNDEZ CASTILLO, Rosalva Aída. "En defensa de la pluralidad. El legado de Luis Villoro a las luchas de los pueblos indígenas". *Desacatos*, 51 (2016): 182-189.

HENDERSON, Sandra (2001). "Latin American Testimonio: Uncovering the Subaltern's Gender, Race, and Class", *Ex Post Facto. The History Journal*.. X, (2001): 83-84.

HUNT, Kevin T. (2007). *Beyond Indigenismo: Contemporary Mexican Literature of Indigenous Theme*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina.

LAW, Danny. "Mayan Historical Linguistics in a New Age». *Language and Linguistic Compass*, 7/3 (2013): 141-156.

LEAL FERNÁNDEZ, Pilar. "Entre la memoria y el olvido: el indígena en las letras de México". *Literatura mexicana* 7/ 2 (1996).

LIÓN, Luis de (2012). *Time commences in Xibalbá*. The University of Arizona Press.

MARIÁTEGUI, José Carlos (2017). *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform.

MEDIZ BOLIO, Antonio (1992). *La tierra del faisán y del venado*. Buenos Aires: Contreras y Sanz Editores.

MENCHÚ, Rigoberta; Burgos-Debray, Elisabeth (1984). *I, Rigoberta Menchú, An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. London/New York: Verso.

MONTEJO, Victor (1987). *Testimony: Death of a Guatemalan Village*. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press.

MONTEJO, Victor (1999). *Voices from Exile. Violence and Survival in Modern Maya History*. University of Oklahoma Press.

MONTEJO, Victor (2005). *Maya Intellectual Renaissance. Identity, Representation and Leadership*. University of Texas Press.

MORALES, Mario Roberto (1996). "Aldea oral/ciudad letrada: la apropiación vanguardiasta de lo popular en América Latina. El caso de Miguel Ángel Asturias y las Leyendas de Guatemala". *Revista Iberoamericana*. LXII/ 175 (1996): 405-420.

MUSSACK, Mariel E. (2013). *Literary Perspectives of Ethnic Identity in Contemporary Guatemala*. Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina.

MUYOLEMA-CALLE, Armando (2007). *Colonialismo y representación. Hacia una re-lectura del latinoamericanismo, del indigenismo y de los discursos etnia-clasa en los Andes del siglo XX*. University of Pittsburgh.

OLLÉ, Marie-Louise (2012). "El grito de Ak'abal". *Centroamericana,* 22.1/22.2 (2012) 297-311.

POPOL VUH, trans. Allen J. Christenson (2007). The University of Oklahoma Press.

POZAS, Ricardo A. (1959). *Juan Pérez Jolote*. Mexico/Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

RODAS NÚÑEZ, Isabel (2006). *Identidades y la construcción de la categoría oficial 'ladino' in Guatemala*. University of Oxford: Centre for Research of Inequality, Human Security and Ethinicity.

RUBÍN, Ramón (1990). *El callado dolor de los tzotziles*. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

SANZ JARA, Eva (2010). *La crisis del indigenismo mexicano: antropólogos críticos y asociaciones indígenas (1968-1994)*. Documentos de Trabajo IELAT, Universidad de Alcalá, Instituto de Estudios Latinoamericanos.

SALES SALVADOR, Dora. "Transculturación narrativa: posibilidades de un concepto latinoamericano para la teoría y la literatura comparada intercultural". *Exemplaria*. 5 (2001): 21-37.

TAYLOR, Analisa (2009). *Indigeneity in the Mexican Cultural Imagination. Thresholds of Belonging*. The University of Arizona Press.

TORRES, Vicente Francisco. "Del indianismo al indigenismo mexicano". *Temas y variaciones de literatura*. 32 (2009): 333-349.

VALLE ESCALANTE, Emilio del (2015a). "Nacionalismo maya y descolonización política: Luis de Lión y El tiempo principia en Xibalbá". *Cuadernos de literatura*. XIX/ 38 (2015a): 318-337.

VALLE ESCALANTE, Emilio del (2015b). *Teorizando las literaturas indígenas contemporáneas*. Raleigh, NC: Editorial a Contracorriente.

VILLORO, LUIS (1996). *Los grandes momentos del indigenismo en México*. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica.